

RBG (2018)

- Limited Released USA May 4, 2018
- 97 minutes
- Budget: N/A
- Directed by Betsy West, Julie Cohen
- Unrated

QUICK THOUGHTS

- Phil Svitek
- Juliet Vibert

DEVELOPMENT

- In January 2015, West and Cohen had the idea of making a feature documentary about Ruth Bader Ginsburg. They had both, separately, interviewed the Justice for projects in the past, and had both admired her trailblazing work for women's rights.
- January 2015 they wrote Ginsburg an email asking if they could make a film about her life. Her answer was basically "not yet"
 - West and Cohen, were disappointed but reached out to her again in a few months
- This time, Ginsburg gave them the go-ahead to begin filming but warned them that she wouldn't be able to be interviewed for the film for at least 2 years (a promise she made good on)
- West and Cohen sent her a list of people they wanted to interview including family members, former clients, colleagues and friends
- At that time, Ginsburg also gave permission for them to start filming her at events, such as the opera, her office and speaking engagements
- Then in 2017, they asked for more access. Ginsburg gave permission for them to begin filming her at home and at the gym

STORY/TOPICS

- RBG is a revelatory documentary exploring Ginsburg's exceptional life and career from Betsy West and Julie Cohen, and co-produced by Storyville Films and CNN Films
- Ginsburg was a pioneer for equality among men and women
- She is a brilliant lawyer and dedicated wife and mother that had to work incredibly hard for everything she has achieved
- Ginsburg is something of a pop culture icon now and role model for young people

ABOUT RBG

- Joan Ruth Bader was born on March 15, 1933 in Brooklyn, New York
- Ginsburg and her husband Marty married in 1954, they had two children together
- After the birth of their daughter, her husband was diagnosed with testicular cancer. During this period, Ginsburg attended class and took notes for both of them, typed her

husband's dictated papers and cared for their daughter and her sick husband—all while making the Harvard Law Review

- She graduated from Columbia Law School, tied for first in her class in 1959
- Ginsburg taught at Rutgers University Law School (1963–72) and at Columbia (1972–80), where she became the school's first female tenured professor
- As a lawyer, she went on to become a staunch advocate for the fair treatment of women
- One of the five cases she won before the Supreme Court involved a portion of the Social Security Act that favored women over men because it granted certain benefits to widows but not widowers. This landmark case proved that she believed in total gender equality and was willing to fight for it
- Ginsburg was appointed by President Carter to the U.S. Court of Appeals in 1980 and was appointed to the Supreme Court by President Clinton in 1993, only the second woman to be appointed to this position
- In 1999, Ginsburg was diagnosed with colon cancer; she underwent surgery that was followed by chemotherapy and radiation therapy. During the process, she did not miss a day on the bench
- In June 2010, Ginsburg's husband, Marty, died of cancer. She described Marty as her biggest booster and "the only young man I dated who cared that I had a brain." They had been married for 56 years at the time of his passing.
- A day after her husband's death, she was at work on the Court for the last day of the 2010 term
- When John Paul Stevens retired in 2010, Ginsburg became the oldest justice on the court at 77
- Despite rumors that she would retire because of advancing age, poor health and the death of her husband, she denied she was planning to step down

CAST:

Ruth Bader Ginsburg

- Ginsburg is an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States.
 - She was appointed by President Bill Clinton in 1993, becoming the second female justice on the U.S. Supreme Court
- She obtained her bachelor's degree from Cornell. Ginsburg was a wife and mother before starting law school at Harvard, where she was one of the few women in her class. She transferred to Columbia Law School, where she graduated tied for first in her class
- "Meeting RBG in person is a powerful experience. Her voice is soft, but her words are so clear and carefully chosen that you find yourself drawing closer, riveted," West and Cohen said
- "[Ruth is] the closest thing to a superhero I know," -Gloria Steinem, women's rights activist and friend of Ginsburg
- "I became a lawyer when women were not wanted by the legal profession," -Ginsburg, who enrolled in Harvard Law School in 1956

- Ginsburg has always been a champion for human rights, she worked at the American Civil Liberties Union in the 1970s and co-founded the Women’s Rights Project

Jane and James Ginsburg

- Daughter Jane is the Morton L. Janklow Professor of Literary and Artistic Property Law at the Columbia Law School
- She is married to George Spera and they have 2 children together
- Justice Ginsburg and Jane are the first mother–daughter pair ever to serve on the same law faculty in the United States
- Son James is a music producer. He is the founder and president of Cedille Records, a classical label, which was launched in 1989 when Ginsburg was a student at the University of Chicago.
- Even though James comes from a family of lawyers he only attended law school for one year

Clara Spera

- Ginsburg’s granddaughter, Clara, is following in her footsteps. She attended Harvard Law School where she focused on “gender discrimination, reproductive justice, and the legal issues surrounding the adjudication of campus and military sexual harassment”
- Spera is now a Law Clerk for the Southern District of New York
- “[M]y birthday party wasn’t held there to show off or because the Court’s such an impressive space; it was because she wanted me to know, from the age of three, that my grandmother, my Bubbie, worked there, and that I shouldn’t consider anything out of my reach.” -Clara Spera

Gloria Steinem

- Colleague in the women’s rights movement
- Known for *The First Wives Club*, *V for Vendetta* and *The Good Wife*

Nina Totenberg

- American legal affairs correspondent for National Public Radio
- Known for *Dave*, *The Distinguished Gentleman* and *Original Intent: The Battle for America*

Lilly Ledbetter

- RBG’s famous dissent in Ledbetter’s case led Congress to pass a law rectifying pay discrimination against women

Irin Carmon and Shana Knizhnik

- Authors of “Notorious RBG: The Life and Times of Ruth Bader Ginsburg”
- Law-student Shana Knizhnik was the creator of the Notorious R.B.G. Tumblr
- She teamed up with MSNBC reporter Irin Carmon to turn the blog into a book titled “Notorious RBG: The Life and Times of Ruth Bader Ginsburg.”

- It was released in October 2015, the book became a New York Times bestseller

Additional appearances:

Sharron Frontiero and Stephen Wiesenfeld, Clients from cases in the 1970s

Bill Clinton, President who appointed RBG to the Supreme Court

Ted Olson, Conservative lawyer who has argued numerous Supreme Court cases

Judge Harry Edwards, Former colleague on the U.S. Court of Appeals

Senator Orrin Hatch, Republican ranking member of Senate Judiciary Committee during RBG's confirmation hearings

Eugene Scalia, Son of close friend and fellow Associate Justice Antonin Scalia

Bryant Johnson, RBG's personal trainer

DIRECTING (Betsy West and Julie Cohen)

- “We took to heart Justice Ginsburg’s approach to sexism and adversity. When, after graduating at the top of her law school class, she could not get a job, she remembered her mother’s advice: anger is a waste of time. Eventually, she was able to use her formidable legal skills to fight for justice for women--a fight she has continued through five decades.”
- Betsy West is an award-winning filmmaker, journalist and educator.
- Julie Cohen is a producer and director, known for *The Sturgeon Queens* and *American Veteran*
- Betsy West is a producer and director, known for *MAKERS: Women Who Make America* Video Archive (2012), *The Lavender Scare* (2017) and *Constantine's Sword* (2007)
- West was a producer and executive for over two decades at ABC News
- West received 21 Emmy Awards and two duPont-Columbia Awards for her work on “Nightline” and “PrimeTimeLive” and the documentary program “Turning Point”
- As senior vice president at CBS News from 1998-2005, she oversaw “60 Minutes” and “48 Hours”
- West was executive in charge of the CBS documentary 9/11, winner of the Primetime Emmy Award in 2002
- In 2007, she joined the faculty at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, where she is the Fred W. Friendly Professor of Professional Practice in Media and Society

TRIVIA

- Ginsburg's profile began to rise after Justice Sandra Day O'Connor's retirement in 2006 left Ginsburg as the only serving female justice. Her increasingly fiery dissents led to the creation of the Notorious R.B.G. Tumblr and meme comparing the justice to rapper The Notorious B.I.G.
- Ginsburg's pop culture appeal has inspired nail art, Halloween costumes, a bobblehead doll, tattoos and a coloring book among other things.
- Since 2015, Ginsburg has been portrayed by Kate McKinnon on Saturday Night Live

- In the film *Deadpool 2*, a photo of her is shown as Deadpool considers her for his X-Force, a team of superheroes

PRODUCTION/CINEMATOGRAPHY Storyville Films and CNN Films

- Began filming in June of 2016
- Filmed Ginsburg in her office, on vacation with her family and working out with her personal trainer
- Additionally, the directors tracked down clients that Ginsburg represented as a young lawyer arguing before the Supreme Court in the 1970's
 - RBG's brilliant legal strategy resulted in five groundbreaking rulings that made great strides towards putting women and men on an equal footing before the law.
- Claudia Raschke was the Director of Photography
- Waiting until the very end of filming to finally interview Ginsburg proved to be the best decision
 - By the time Cohen and West finally sat down with Ginsburg, they had already learned so much about her through the eyes of her closest friends and family members

EDITING/VFX (Carla Gutierrez)

- Gutierrez is the editor of the Oscar-nominated documentary *La Corona*, and the Emmy-nominated *Reportero* and *Kingdom of Shadows*

SOUND/MUSIC (Miriam Cutler)

- Cutler is an Emmy-nominated composer
- Known from *The Hunting Ground*, *Ethel*, *Lost in La Mancha*, *Thin*, *Poster Girl*, *Vito*, *Kings Point*, *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, *A Plastic Ocean* and more
- The movie begins with sound clips about Ginsburg from some of her critics, this sets the stage for how much adversity she has faced and still faces today
- 'I'll Fight' performed by Jennifer Hudson, written by Diane Warren, is the anthem for RBG

PROMOTION

- Premiered at the 2018 Sundance Film Festival in January
 - Ginsburg appeared at the 2018 Sundance Film Festival to accompany the premiere of the documentary *RBG*
- The trailer came out on 3/7/18
- The film will be shown on CNN later this year
- Tagline: "Hero. Icon. Dissenter."

BOX OFFICE

- Distributed by Magnolia Pictures
- Limited release in the US on 5/4/18, limited release in Canada on 5/18/18
- Made \$578,470 its opening weekend in 34 theaters

- So far, has grossed \$8,127,946 in 432 theaters

RECEPTION

- RT: 94% Tatometer / 80% Audience
- IMDB: 7.5/10
- Cinemascore: Not scored
- Won Best Documentary at the Wisconsin Film Festival and Sarasota Film Festival
- Paul Dergarabedian, senior media analyst at the online measurement company ComScore, called the film “one of the greatest success stories of this summer”
- “What emerges is an intriguing portrait of a woman described as shy and retiring but with “a quiet magnetism,” a work horse and a master legal strategist.” -Bruce Demara, *Toronto Star*
- “BG's superficiality makes it good background material about the subject and the forces that guided her life's crusade but the blinders it willingly wears represent its greatest flaw.” -James Berardinelli, *ReelViews*
- “RBG is a very enjoyable piece of history that touches on the obscure fame one woman has earned, championing women's rights without using a single bad word or raising her voice.” -Stephan Boissonneault, *Vue Weekly* (Edmonton, Alberta)
- “We need all the role models we can get right now, and an octogenarian Supreme Court judge who's pissed off the proper people is more than deserving of a pop-vérité victory lap. You just wish the film itself was half as compelling as its subject; not defaulting to piano-tinkling sentimentality or old-people-sure-are-adorable cutesiness at every opportunity would have been a bonus as well. Still, this decent-enough doc is doing a service. If one young boy or girl see this and, instead of picking up arms, grasped a law book, grabbed a gavel and garnered the grit to know when a dissenting opinion doubled as a necessity, this movie will have more than justified its worship.” -David Fear, *Rolling Stone*

SEQUELS

- Although not affiliated, there will be another film about Ginsburg released later in 2018. *On the Basis of Sex*, will focus on Ginsburg's career struggles fighting for equal rights
 - Its screenplay was named to the Black List of best unproduced screenplays of 2014. English actress Felicity Jones will portray Ginsburg in the film, with Armie Hammer as her husband Marty