

**Nora Ngo Mitchell**

Booker High School, 10<sup>th</sup> Grade

Teacher: Dr. Tomi Tusia

2020 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Essay Contest

"When a justice is of the firm view that the majority got it wrong, she is free to say so in dissent. I take advantage of that prerogative when I think it is important" (Ruth Bader Ginsburg). In recent years, political polarization has increased dramatically, and respect in our political spheres has decreased drastically. Yet, the strength and respect that visionaries like Ruth Bader Ginsburg displayed when she provided dissenting opinions against her peers, showed that we all can fight for justice, but still be united as the people of this nation.

Ginsburg's landmark dissenting opinions have illustrated the importance of providing dissents with strength. For example, she was a vehement advocate for women's rights, and in her dissent for *Ledbetter v. Goodyear Employment Discrimination* (a case regarding gender-based pay discrimination), Ginsburg passionately declared, "The court does not comprehend or is indifferent to the insidious way in which women can be victims of pay discrimination" and called Congress to take action. Another example of her strong dissents includes her dissenting opinion for *Bush v. Gore*, where, while her colleagues said that they "respectfully" dissent, Ginsburg wrote simply, "I dissent." Ginsburg's lifelong work has shown the importance of believing in the strength of one's convictions and has inspired all people- but especially women- to fight passionately and unabashedly for what they believe in. Ginsburg illustrated that the fight for what is just

can be turbulent, painful, and unrewarding, but that it is essential. Her work has given so many of us who are marginalized the ability to fight for what we believe; she helped us gain our rights and amplified our voices in a fashion that continues to reverberate across our country.

However, Ginsburg has also illustrated the importance of coupling our strength with respect. She once stated, “Dissents speak to a future age. It’s not simply to say, ‘My colleagues are wrong and I would do it this way.’ But the greatest dissents do become court opinions and gradually over time, their views become the dominant view. So that’s the dissenter’s hope: that they are writing not for today, but for tomorrow.” This quote delineates the true purpose of a dissent: to promote change. Dissents are meant to advocate for one's beliefs- not to fight with one’s peers. Dissents are powerful because they can inspire others. Their purpose is not to distribute personal attacks.

Moreover, one must remember being respectful does not mean that one is meek. Respect is not weakness- it is strength. One’s beliefs are powerful enough to stand on their own merits- they do not need the aid of petty attacks. We do not need to be disrespectful to be heard.

In conclusion, the life and work of Ruth Bader Ginsburg have demonstrated the necessity of providing dissenting opinions with strength and respect. Ginsburg dedicated her life to fighting for justice; she understood the power of dissent and used it as a vehicle for promoting change, as well as inspiring the next generation of great dissenters.