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## Book Review of My Own Words

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Ginsburg, Ruth Bader, with Mary Hartnett and Wendy W. Williams. *My Own Words*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2016. 370p. \$30.

*Reviewed by Leslie A. Street\**

¶60 Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, affectionately known by her admirers as the Notorious RBG, has unambiguously left an indelible mark on women's rights, the law, and popular culture, even as her work on the U.S. Supreme Court continues. In *My Own Words*, Ginsburg, Mary Hartnett and Wendy W. Williams pull together some of her most salient and perceptive words over her long career to produce a work entirely relevant to the ongoing challenges of twenty-first century America.

¶61 *My Own Words* is but a small collection of the voluminous written record of Ginsburg's long and distinguished career. It predates completion of a more traditional biography, thought best to be deferred "until my Court years neared completion" (p.xiii) (which many of us hope may still be several years in the future). Because *My Own Words* is only a small selection of Ginsburg's written work, it is a fascinating and useful study of which words she personally selected to be included in the book, which is meant to partially define her career. The selection offers a glimpse behind the steely, distinguished façade most observe of Ginsburg as Supreme Court Justice (even as popular media has reimagined her in more approachable terms), as one section of the book covers her earlier years and "lighter side." Of course, Ginsburg also includes sections devoted to her work on gender equality and her views on judging and justice.

¶62 *My Own Words* brings together words written and spoken in a variety of venues and forums: from her eighth-grade school newspaper editorial championing the Charter of the United Nations, to her recent remarks at a memorial service recalling her friendship with her colleague Justice Antonin Scalia. Admirers of Ginsburg will savor this collection of her writings, in particular her remarkable ability to diagnose the ills of society while offering optimism and hope for overcoming them. Consider the words written by a thirteen-year-old Ruth in the Bulletin of the East Midwood Jewish Center:

We are part of a world whose unity has been almost completely shattered. No one can feel free from danger and destruction until the many torn threads of civilization are bound together again. . . . There can be a happy world and there will be once again, when men create a strong bond towards one another, a bond unbreakable by a studied prejudice or a passing circumstance. (p.16)

These words were written in response to the aftermath of World War II and the unspeakable tragedy of the Holocaust, but they are also shockingly prescient for our own time.

¶63 Ginsburg, only the second woman to be confirmed to the Supreme Court, devotes many pages to her speeches on prominent women in U.S. and legal history, as well as an entire section of the book to some of her speeches and written words dealing with issues of gender equality. She includes excerpts from her work on litigating issues of gender equality prior to her time on the bench. Considering the multitude of issues raised in regard to gender equality in the most recent presi-

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dential election, Ginsburg's words written in a reply brief to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1970 still are worth pondering:

Women who seek to break out of the traditional pattern face all of the prejudice and hostility encountered by members of a minority group . . . . For women who want to exercise options that do not fit within stereotypical notions of what is proper for a female, women who do not want to be "protected" but do want to develop their individual potential without artificial constraints, classifications reinforcing traditional male-female roles are hardly "benign" (p.136).

¶64 It is unsurprising that many writings and excerpts are chosen that call out the trailblazing nature of Ginsburg's work. Equally moving is Ginsburg's choice to include so many of her words that paid tribute to other great women who paved the way for her, including Belva Lockwood, Sandra Day O'Connor, and Gloria Steinem. Particularly moving is a lecture that Ginsburg included discussing the contributions and work of the wives of prior Supreme Court Justices. Ginsburg's lecture (and subsequent law review article) highlighted the work, wit, and intelligence of Supreme Court partners who were largely forgotten by others.

¶65 Lawyers, law students, law librarians, and others who enjoy discussions of judicial theory and reasoning will appreciate the section of the book devoted to Ginsburg's views on judging. Ginsburg, known for reading her dissents from the bench in the Roberts Court's years, includes a lecture about her views on the power and value of dissents, deemed particularly worthwhile in appealing to the wisdom of future audiences. She follows up her views on dissenting opinions with several of the bench dissents that she has written, highlighting her views on the value and power of dissents.

¶66 Although scholars and admirers of Ginsburg may already be familiar with the bulk of her individual writings included in *My Own Words*, the compilation and organization are an important addition to her distinguished career. The excerpts are preceded by biographical context and comments about each work, giving new context and information about how to view her work, contributions, and achievements. Not only is this a book that all law libraries will wish to have in their collections, it is a work that all students of legal history, all women who choose to make the law their career, and all people who celebrate the defense of civil rights and liberties will also wish to have for their home libraries.

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