

Shasta Conner

Mariposa Democrats Education Award

12 February 2024

What Does It Mean to Have a Democracy?

In a world filled with diverse opinions and beliefs, a concept such as democracy can be difficult to properly distill. However, in my eyes, democracy isn't solely based on political parties, but is dependent on core foundational concepts about one's ability to look beyond their ideas and incorporate others as well. One great democrat person who I believe held this idea close and improved our nation through her dedication was Ruth Bader Ginsberg.

Despite having the responsibilities of being a mother, Ruth Ginsburg profoundly made history, whether it was fighting for equality or battling sexism. Ginsburg was born on March 15, 1933, a time that was not the kindest to women, especially those who fought for equality. Though her parents had no means to go to college, Ruth was able to attend Cornell and Columbia Law School - with 500 men and only 10 women in her graduating class. However, she faced much discrimination in the workforce, because she was a Jewish woman with a four-year-old child. She, pushing against gender stereotypes, was nominated by Former President Bill Clinton and became a Justice of the Supreme Court. I find her story motivating, since what she accomplished marks not only the beginning of women being involved in law but also their inclusion in the Supreme Court.

Ruth Ginsburg was a determined and strong-minded woman, but she always made sure to treat others around her with respect even if they had differing opinions. Ruth Ginsburg was friends with one of her fellow justices, despite them both having different political views. Antonin Scalia and Ruth Ginsburg fostered a strong friendship that lasted for 23 terms until their

deaths. This aspect of Ginsberg is what I truly consider her a hero for, the ability to look past political opinions and see others as potential friends. In this society, most people consider those of a different party an enemy or assume that they do not understand them, a truth that harms the democracy of the United States.

Democracy, in my eyes, is where people of all backgrounds and cultures can come together and lead a nation that is built on trust and empathy. By empathy, I mean the ability to reflect on others' ideas and consider them despite disagreement. Though trust is not so easily built in a democracy separated by political parties, I believe that diversity of opinions is key to a strong foundation for our nation to be healthy. With political parties failing to acknowledge each other's valid opinions, it causes a rift in not just the court but the nation as a whole. If this continues, there won't be much of a democracy to work and build with. Therefore, it is necessary to incorporate diverse opinions which can help lead to new ideas and solutions for the challenges that our nation faces.

Not only is Ruth Bader Ginsberg a hero in my eyes, but she is also an embodiment of democracy itself. With her determination to bring equality into the Supreme Court and beyond, she fought for a fair democracy until her last breath. In *Obergefell v. Hodges*, Ginsberg fought in favor of the states to allow same-sex marriage across the country. In this act she validated the voices of a group who had struggled through discrimination for ages, supporting the inclusivity of a proper democracy. However, this is not the only time she fought for such equality. Ginsberg strongly advocated for the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act which enabled gender equality in the workplace and moved our society closer to equal pay regardless of gender. The act of recognizing people regardless of the political lens allowed her to enact impactful ideas that

helped develop a better sense of unity with the nation. If democracy could be represented by anyone, it would be the powerful woman known as Ruth Bader Ginsberg.