

DOCUMENTARY



RBG (2018)

Much like its subject, this documentary on the personal life and professional career of US Supreme Court Associate Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg is, in short, terrific.

From her birth in Brooklyn in 1933, to her college education (at Harvard Law school where she was one of nine female students in a class of 560), her academic appointments as law professor at Rutgers Law School and Columbia Law School, and her judicial appointments to the US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit and the US Supreme Court, Ginsburg AJ is best described as a trailblazer.

The film traces her successes in the US Supreme Court where she advocated for both men and women in landmark gender discrimination cases. Among the plaintiffs she successfully represented was a male single parent who had been denied social security benefits normally paid only to single mothers and a woman facing housing discrimination in the US Air Force. Ginsburg AJ argued these cases in the 1960s and '70s, when gender discrimination was rampant in US society and an all-male Supreme Court bench was generally sceptical of claims of bias, particularly - but not always - against women.

While tracing these professional successes, the film also pays tribute to her personal achievements, in particular, to her marriage to Martin Ginsburg, an international tax lawyer whose unfailing support, according to Ginsburg AJ, made her professional achievements possible. We learn that it was he who, almost on a daily basis, had to force her to stop working to eat and sleep and that, but for his supervision, she would probably have done neither. We also learn that it was his gregarious, light-hearted nature which offset her inherently serious, stoic one and brought laughter and fun into their family life.

If that all sounds a bit like every other biopic you have seen, think again. Because woven throughout this film is evidence of Ginsburg AJ's status as a pop culture icon, which began in around 2006 when, on the retirement of US Supreme Court Associate Justice Sandra O'Connor, she became the only serving female justice. Her increasingly strident dissents at the time led to a following which grew over time, culminating in a biography (a *New York Times* bestseller in 2015) and spawning everything from RBG emblazoned t-shirts, coffee mugs

and tattoos to internet memes.

This energetic documentary will appeal to both men and women of all political leanings, whether legally trained or not – anyone, in fact, who appreciates passion, intellect and purpose. See it if you can.

Reviewed by Sarah Woodland

MOVIE



The Insult (2018)

The Dalai Lama once said: 'Just as ripples spread out when a single pebble is dropped into water, the actions of individuals can have far-reaching effects'. In the case of *The Insult*, a gripping, socio-political, courtroom drama from Lebanese director Ziad Doueiri (who, incidentally, was Quentin Tarantino's camera operator in *Pulp Fiction*), that single pebble is a minor, personal insult between two men which escalates into an explosive jury trial that divides two communities.

Set in contemporary Beirut, the film opens with an urban scene which could take place anywhere in the world. Tony (Adel Karam), a brawny motor mechanic in his 40s is watering his plants on his apartment balcony when he inadvertently splashes a construction crew working on the street below. Yasser (Kamel El Basha), the foreman of the construction crew, is a stoic-looking Palestinian refugee in his 60s. Looking up to find the source of the water, Yasser notices an illegal drain pipe on Tony's balcony and offers to fix it free of charge. Tony, hearing the man's Palestinian accent, refuses the offer and slams the door in Yasser's face. Yasser has his team fix the pipe regardless. Tony is incensed by this and smashes the newly installed pipe, prompting an insult from Yasser, the effects of which reverberate throughout their families and their communities.

The film culminates in a highly publicised courtroom trial which exposes – in a plausible way - deep historical and personal wounds on both sides.

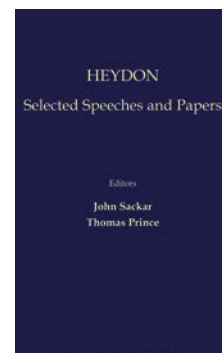
While *The Insult* undoubtedly delivers a crash course in the tension between two different ethnic and religious groups in Lebanon, it is captivating whether or not you have any

prior understanding of - or indeed any particular interest in - these things. This is because the conflict at the centre of it is so personal and its triggers are universally recognisable.

Winner of the Grand Jury Prize at the Venice Film Festival last year and Academy Award nominee for Best Foreign Language Film earlier this year, this tension-filled moral fable will stay with you long after the credits stop rolling.

Reviewed by Sarah Woodland

BOOK



Heydon: Selected Speeches and Papers

This is a genuinely important book. Any real barrister – one with an interest in the history, the philosophy and the development of the law – must acquire a copy of this book. This book will stand alongside Dyson Heydon's judicial work, textbook writing and other academic work, as a lasting tribute to a true Australian intellectual.

The breadth of issues dealt with is astonishing. The selected speeches and papers of Heydon touch upon the philosophy of the law, the foundations of common law and equity, methods of judicial decision-making, and substantive law. These are interspersed with poignant observations on the rule of law, the independence of the judiciary, and on the preservation of social and political freedoms.

It has been said of Sir Owen Dixon that, while his learning was deep, his field of intellectual endeavour was narrow. Not so Heydon. For those interested in history there is a close analysis of the juridical validity of the Tokyo War Trials; *Kulturkampf* – the struggles over religious freedoms in Germany under Bismarck and the Nazis; the creation of the European Union; a major piece of the life and work of Sir Samuel Griffith; related pieces on James Fitzjames Stephen and the origins and development of the Indian Evidence Act. For those interested in judicial theory and methods there are several important articles – of which the paper on the limits of the powers of ultimate appellate courts