GLORIA STEINEM INTERVIEW
GLORIA: IN HER OWN WORDS
KUNHARDT FILM FOUNDATION

GLORIA STEINEM
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Interviewed by Peter Kunhardt and Sheila Nevins

GLORIA: The Movement – Factions and Frictions

Betty Friedan

03:46:20;27

GLORIA STEINEM:

In the early '70s, Betty Friedan wrote an article in McCall's, I think, that included me. It wasn't totally about me. But it was about her disagreement with me, and others in the women's movement.

14:30:32;23

The-- the-- people assumed that Betty Freidan and I-- knew each other or worked together, but it was really quite rare. For one thing, she was-- almost a generation before me. So, she had started N.O.W.-- in 1963. And for another thing, it was a much more, I would say, conservative part of the movement, because the idea was that women should be able to leave the suburbs and come into the workforce, which I utterly agreed with. But I was already in the workforce and getting-- having a hard time. So, I didn't identify-- quite with The *Feminine Mystique*, though I certainly recognized the value of-- of that book. And-- and finally, it was just hard for her, I think, to-- accept-- other leaders regardless. I mean, she didn't get along with Bella either.

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So, mostly, we really didn't see each other that much. And mostly, she refused to speak to me or to shake hands. Or-- she once refused to shake my mother's hand. I mean, I think it was-- she really needed to feel that she was-- uniquely the head of a movement, which to me is counter to a movement. But on the other hand, you know, she wrote a book that was very important.

The ERA and Phyllis Schlafly

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GLORIA STEINEM:
The E.R.A. didn't come to a close because of Phyllis Schlafly. It came to a close because state legislatures are not very representative. Most people don't even know who their state legislators are. So, many of them are controlled by (CLEARS THROAT) the-- the businesses they regulate, say, by the liquor industry, the insurance industry, the real estate industry. And the insurance industry for the most part, not totally, but-- was dead set against the Equal Rights Amendment because it would mean equalizing the actuarial tables.

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So, I don't-- I don't think that-- I mean, Phyllis Schlafly was in many ways the only woman they could find who against (CHUCKLE) the Equal Rights Amendment. She was like a creation of the Fairness Doctrine. Somebody had to be on the opposite side. And she either chose herself or-- or was designated. But, the-- the networks frequently couldn't find anybody who was-- they would call me up and say, "Bring an anti with you," you know,

because they also didn't know anybody who was against it.

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Well, (CLEARS THROAT) many women couldn't afford to. I didn't mean that everybody-- should-- should-- give ten percent, obviously, only those who could afford it. But, I realized that the churches were powerful against (CHUCKLE) the Equal Rights Amendment because people tithed. And perhaps we should think of-- of tithing as well.

Bella Abzug

14:27:11;24

GLORIA STEINEM:
Bella Abzug-- such an extraordinarily valuable person, it's really hard to describe. She always knew that women could do anything, I think because her parents were immigrants, and they only had daughters. So, they gave her all the nurturing that they might have otherwise given a son. And she married a man who thought she should be president.

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She fought civil rights battles long before there was a real civil rights movement. She went to the South and slept in bus stations because no one would give her a place to sleep because she was defending a Black man. She was a pioneer of the peace movement-- and of the women's peace movement.

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She-- of course was a pioneer in Congress and so on. And she was wonderfully funny and outrageous. She loved to dance, she played the ukulele. (LAUGHS) She was a great poker player. And she didn't come to the public as a lady, which was very important. She broke the lady prison.

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I met her marching outside the Pentagon. I've forgotten the year, but it was one of the early anti-Vietnam marches. And in the beginning, she scared me. Because I'd never seen a woman be that forceful. We were meeting with-- a lot of Senators and she had come back I think from Vietnam with a piece of shrapnel that proved we were using weapons we said we weren't.

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And she was so forceful that she-- she really frightened me. And-- gradually, I realized that was a measure of my deficiency, not hers. So, she expanded all of us, and-- and she was wonderfully-- comforting in-- in strange ways. I mean, I don't know if-- this makes sense, but-- one of the things that happened that actually did get to me was that a pornographer put a-- big poster of me nude-- a drawing with my hair and my glasses, and he-- he put-- penises down the side of the page, and big sign that said pin the cock on the feminist.

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And it was hanging right outside the Ms. offices. And I sent a lawyer's letter, and he sent me back a box of chocolates with a note that said eat it. I mean, it was just awful. So, I was going to a benefit with Bella, and Bella said, "What's wrong," and I told her. And she was not impressed at all. You know, and I said, "But Bella, you know, you don't understand that there is-- you know, a drawing of me in full labial detail, and there are all these, you know, penises down the side of the road, and it has my hair, and my glasses." And she said, "And my labia." (LAUGHS) And somehow, she made me laugh so hard that it was okay after that. Now, who else on earth would say that.

Hostility of the Press

Esquire Magazine

02:34:37;09

In the early '70s, Esquire-- printed a piece that I think was just called 'Her.' And it was-- attacking me in the text of the piece, in a cartoon, too, I think-- in a comic strip. And the thesis of it was that I was utterly insincere and just-- ambitious and Machiavellian.

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GLORIA STEINEM:

You know, it's been a long time, now. But the-- there-- there was a kind of a-- "Let's get these crazy feminists" mood abroad in the land-- mostly at Playboy but-- somewhat at Esquire. (SIREN) And this-- this piece just seemed to take everything I'd ever done and make it seem as if it was all Machiavellian or about ambition or selfish, as-- as if I'd glommed onto-- to movements insincerely. I hadn't been written about that much at that point. (CHUCKLE) So, m-- maybe my skin was not as calloused, either. But I found it very hurtful.

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The Esquire article-- made me cry because it was just so wrong. And-- cruel really. And that author-- was later telling people he had pieces of my underwear and-- that he had photographs of me having an affair with Margaret Sloane. I mean, you know, it was really-- it was tough.

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I-- I remember that press conference of defense against the Esquire piece a little bit. I-- I especially remember Flo Kennedy-- who was a great defender

to have, funny and outrageous. It's mixed up in my mind with the press conference to defend Kate Millett (CHUCKLE) because Kate had been attacked by Time on-- they had done a cover story in which she was the symbol of a-- the new women's movement.

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And then when she publicly discussed the fact that she was bisexual, they then turned against her and said, "Well, she can't possibly be a leader if she's bisexual." And we all rallied around Kate. So I think that, you know, we were being attacked and trying to support each other.

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People say to me now-- "Are you not-- upset sometimes when the press is hostile?" And I always say to myself, "Well, hostility's a step forward from the ridicule that we started out with." It frequently was ridiculing. And it would be a commentary on-- our clothing or-- that liberation must mean you went to bed with everybody as opposed to (CHUCKLE) being able to say, "No," as well as, "Yes," or-- you know, "Well, this is going against nature or God or Freud or something." It was-- it was very-- I mean, ri-- ridicule is-- is even more difficult to deal with, I think, than serious opposition. And there was a lot of it in the beginning.