

PROFILE OF RESISTANCE

GLORIA STEINEM

activist, writer, innovator

“A movement is only composed of people moving. To feel its warmth and motion around us is the end as well as the means.”

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Background Information

Born: March 25, 1934

Gloria Steinem was born in Toledo, Ohio during the height of the Great Depression. She attended Smith College, and later earned the Chester Bowles Fellowship, which enabled her to spend two years studying and researching in India. Her time in India sparked an interest in grassroots activism, which later led to her work with the women’s liberation movement and push for the Equal Rights Amendment.ⁱ

Steinem’s Resistance

Steinem moved to New York City after her time in India and pursued a career in journalism. Her first major writing was for *Esquire* magazine. She wrote about birth control in the 1960s, which was controversial. She also did undercover reporting for *Show* magazine. She went to Hugh Hefner’s New York Playboy Club and saw how the women working there were exploited and sexually harassed.ⁱⁱ Steinem also wrote about abortion rights for *New York Magazine*. In 1972, Steinem co-founded the Ms. Foundation for Women with Dorothy Pittman Hughes. Steinem and Hughes recognized that race, class, and other identities compounded the oppression people face; she was well aware that the discrimination she felt as a White woman was nothing compared to the experiences of Black women, women of color, and women of the developing world.

Many conservatives criticized Steinem because they felt her political views were too radical. Some women felt that Steinem’s physical attractiveness gave her too much privilege, and she shouldn’t be the face of a feminist movement. Despite these critiques, she continued to make major contributions to the women’s rights movement, and she attended numerous protests and demonstrations.ⁱⁱⁱ

Achievements

Her legacy includes publications such as *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions*, and *Revolution from Within*. She co-founded the National Women’s Political Caucus, the Free to Be Foundation, and the Women’s Media Center. She also played a large role in founding Equality Now and Direct Impact Africa. She has received many awards, including the Medal of Freedom by President Barack Obama, the Freedom Award from the National Civil Rights Museum, the National Magazine Award, and the Lifetime Achievement in Journalism Award from the Society of Professional Journalists. She still writes and produces documentaries on violence against women around the world.

Essential Questions

1. Steinem has fought for improved access to birth control, equal pay for women, and sexual harassment protection, which are all issues still relevant today. What can you do to continue her fight for justice?

2. Steinem became a major symbol of the women's rights movement. Some felt her Whiteness gave her privilege and status not given to Black women. How can someone with privilege, use their privilege to support marginalized people?

3. ***"A movement is only composed of people moving. To feel its warmth and motion around us is the end as well as the means."***
 - a. What do you think she means by this?

ⁱ Editors, Office of Gloria Steinem (2019). "Gloria Steinem." Gloria Steinem. Retrieved from <http://www.gloriasteinem.com/about>.

ⁱⁱ Karbo, Karen (2019). "How Gloria Steinem Became the 'World's Most Famous Feminist.'" National Geographic. Retrieved from <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/2019/03/how-gloria-steinem-became-worlds-most-famous-feminist/#close>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Michals, Debra (2017). "Gloria Steinem." National Women's History Museum. Retrieved from <https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/gloria-steinem>.