

## If I Met Gloria Steinem, Should You Care?

by Amanda L. Maris

I met Gloria Steinem. I shook her hand, got a picture with her, and gave her my Smith ID from last year so that she'd remember who I was when I sent her a letter. Why did I do this? Why did my co-reporter, Joy, begin to laugh at me hysterically? Is Gloria Steinem a star, someone we should all want to meet and hear?

Well I can't decide that for everyone nor do I wish to do so. But I am glad to have heard her speak and know that she is more than just a name that almost everyone in the women's movement reveres. You want to know what's so damn special about the editor and founder of Ms. Magazine? Honestly there is just not a simple answer. What she represents is a great feminist leader in the women's movement.

In a world where women often feel restrained and don't always know why, where homemakers have the highest cases of violence and depression, some of us ask ourselves what is the source of this frustration and inner turmoil? Betty Friedan wrote a novel about this problem: the *Feminine Mystique*. So many have tackled women's issues, searching for answers and solutions or just trying to make them visible. It is my opinion that Gloria Steinem is one of the tacklers who is just trying to make us aware of the deceiving system that is dominating our lives and consciousness, the source of our social and political restrictions, whether we are aware of it or not: patriarchy.

Now we must take a step back, really clear our minds, because patriarchy in itself is a powerful word. When Steinem speaks about the problems that have arisen from it, she is NOT blaming men. She blames the system that she says has established a "sex and race caste system" that is "fairly universal." She refers to places around the world that shared similar statistics, portraying that in Saudi Arabia and Australia, "100% of the teachers in primary education were female and

only 20% in higher education." She mentions an opinion of some people that "because this country is so rich, we think somehow that our problems are solved." But this is not the case. Is having a nice home in suburbia with a doctor husband and two kids always heaven? Granted that some of America's problems are quite different than other places, we all share the same underlying force that dictates who is in the dominate and subordinate group without our consent, and for some of us, without our knowledge. Once again, I speak of my beloved patriarchal world, where the white male has no choice but to dominate over us all in the current system.

Now here is something very interesting that Steinem spoke of: back a long, long time ago, before the Europeans came along, many indigenous cultures lived in communities that were not easily divided into men dominate and women serve, so to speak. Steinem hypothesizes, "I think, the more I read, it (the idea of an equal society) came from the indigenous cultures." She suggests that the Europeans brought about patriarchy, and that "perhaps African women brought with them more traditions of Egalitarianism." Even the early suffragists were writing about the indigenous cultures.

Clues, clues, and do we have a clearer answer? Who knows. Steinem says, "to look to the past is helpful . . . if it wasn't always this way, it doesn't have to be this way." I think she's right. Why are we so scared, so damn afraid of taking back our lives? Maybe we just don't realize they're gone.

Before I conclude, I must say that this fight isn't just about women's rights. It's about all of us fighting for each other. Of course it's complicated, hard, frustrating . . . And while the ideal may be living together without social distinction, first we must "make the invisible visible to reach that goal." So scream if someone or something is restricting you unjustly. Don't be discouraged or disheartened. Gloria Steinem says to us, "Though it looks like a circle that you are moving in, it's in slightly different territory, it's a spiral, so we have moved a long distance." How many steps forward have you taken today?

*"It starts when you say WE and know who you mean and each day mean one more." Marge Piercy*

*(The last line of "Low Road," a poem Steinem read as she closed her speech here at UNC) λ*

