

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

GLORIA STEINEM

June 28, 2010

Interviewed by Peter Kunhardt and Sheila Nevins

GLORIA: The Movement – Goals, Tactics, and Strategies

Tactics

13:54:11;00

GLORIA STEINEM:

You know, it's very hard to see one's self, but I think if I were to try to describe the kind of thing I can do, it's to see a possibility. And-- state it in a way that makes it possible for other people, too. So, since that's a necessary part of change, if you can't see what could be, you can't move toward it, I think that's an important function. But it-- it still requires people to-- to figure out the steps from here to there.

13:52:57;27

I mean I'm a kind of smart, and I recognize the smarter kind of smart (LAUGHS) in other people. That is, I-- I'm a conceptual smart. I love to understand why. I love an "aha." But I'm not a procedural smart. It's hard for me to figure out the process to get from here to there. And I so value, you know, people who-- who understand how to do that.

02:14:40;21

I'm not sure I wasn't demonstrating against the press myself. I mean, we-- I demonstrated against the New York Times because for 15 years they

wouldn't use Ms. as a form of address. I was always-- Miss Steinem of Ms. Magazine. I demonstrated, you know, a lot. So I'm-- I'm not sure that I wouldn't have been there. But I do always try to think first of what would work with me.

02:15:08;19

You know, suppose I was saying something exclusionary or biased. I would want someone to tell me. And I would want to-- them to tell me in an-- in an empathetic way. And if that doesn't work, then, you know, you can escalate from there. But I do try to do first what I think I would like to have done if I were making an error myself.

Being "Mean"

01:49:00;14

GLORIA STEINEM:

I-- I think, you know, about revenge, and how to get even, and how this person is-- mean or-- or hurtful, and, you know-- but I'm too lazy to actually do it. But I do fantasize it.

01:49:24;20

And sometimes I say something and it-- it does-- you know, they totally miss it. You know, like-- it's so frustrating.

01:49:39;14

Some people who are really hostile, you know-- I-- I remember saying to some guy who was a terrible guy, and he kept saying, "I'm afraid I'll lose my soul." And I said, "You have nothing to worry about." And he didn't even get it. (LAUGHTER) So, I may out subtle myself.

02:09:47;09

KUNHARDT **FILM** FOUNDATION

It is hard for me to get angry in person, although I'm getting better at it and getting more honest, so I don't just, you know, repress it until it bursts out. But, I-- I do-- or have historically, anyway, gotten angry in letters.

(CHUCKLE) You know, so, I remember I wrote a review for the New York Times book review section and they made me rewrite it a lot because I had said-- in a complimentary way that the author didn't use light and dark as good and bad, you know, which-- actually is a form of racism, right?

02:10:29;12

And-- even though I kept rewriting it and trying to explain it, the editor finally wouldn't publish it. He said, "Well, that makes Blake a racist."

(CHUCKLE) You know, so he-- he wouldn't publish it. And I was so angry, you know, that he wouldn't make what seemed to me an important point about race and that he'd made me write it over, you know, three or four times, that I wrote him a letter that I-- I've-- I'm afraid began, "Have you always been a coward? Or is this something (CHUCKLE) that just came upon you?" (CHUCKLE)

02:11:00;10

And-- and I remember, of course, no-- hardly anybody saw these letters. But I do remember that once Evans and Novak in the Washington Post wrote an extremely hostile column to Bella Abzug when she was a member of Congress. It was ridiculing. It was humiliating. It was dismissive. And I wrote a long letter to them (CHUCKLE) in objections which started out, "Someone who still reads Evans and Novak (CHUCKLE) tells me that you wrote this--" (CHUCKLE) and the Post actually printed it. I was shocked. (CHUCKLE)

02:11:38;21

KUNHARDT **FILM** FOUNDATION

But I – it's true that I do, in writing, which maybe is true of a lot of writers, what I am unable to do in person.

14:10:01;04

No, I-- I do get angry. It's just that-- it takes me a while to show it. You know, because I'm a Midwesterner and-- (LAUGHS) you know, you have to be on LSD to know what we're feeling. So, I can say on Wednesday that I was angry on Monday. But it's hard for me to say at the time. But I'm getting better. I'm getting better. It's much-- much easier for me to say it.

14:10:25;25

And the other thing is, I-- I share with other women I think, which is that when I get angry, I cry. And it-- it-- you experience it, you know, as-- as a loss of control, or crying as you're not supposed to cry in public life. But I met a woman, an executive, a very high executive, who had the same experience and she said she had solved it by getting angry when she needed to with her mostly male colleagues, and saying, "You may think I am sad because I am crying. I am not sad. You know, I am angry. This is the way I show anger." And she just talked through her tears. And it worked. So, I'm planning to try that.

14:11:14;20

I'm better about-- about stating it. Stating how I feel, because it's important to do it because otherwise you-- it builds up in you and then it bursts forth out of control because you hadn't been honest along the way.

Ms. Magazine

03:31:10;14

GLORIA STEINEM:

KUNHARDT **FILM** / FOUNDATION

Ms. Magazine-- well, we were looking for a name. And we had a lot of ideas, as you can imagine. We were gonna call it Sojourner after Sojourner Truth. But that was perceived as a travel magazine. Then we were going to call it Sisters. But that was seen as a religious magazine. (CHUCKLE) We settled on-- on Ms., which was an old-- we didn't know how old at the time, but an old form of address for situations in which you didn't know whether someone was married or not-- because it was symbolic and also it was short, which is good for a logo. We had many meetings about starting the magazine here in this apartment. But the meeting at which-- John and Yoko were was at Brenda Feigen's apartment-- which was here in Manhattan but not in-- in these very rooms.

03:46:53;05

W-- when Ms. magazine was just getting started-- Betty Friedan I think gave a press conference or anyway gave a statement of some kind to the press saying that Ms. was profiteering off the women's movement. And this was extremely painful since all of us were working for nothing and (CHUCKLE) having a hard time raising money. So, we tried to, you know, give the real information.

Greatest Contribution

03:20:49;20

GLORIA STEINEM:

Honestly, if you ask me my greatest contribution (CHUCKLE) to the women's movement, I think I haven't made it yet. I mean, I-- 'cause I live in the future. (STOMACH GROWL) (CLEARS THROAT) So I think of what I wanna write, what I wanna do, what needs to be done, what-- and as for what it's been up

to know, that's not for me to judge. You know, I-- I think the truth is that we don't know which thing we do is important.

03:21:17;09

So, the imp-- the art of (CHUCKLE)-- of making change or-- or acting ethically or-- is to behave as if everything we do matters because actually we have no idea. Sometimes people will come up to me and t-- tell me something that was very important and changeful for them that-- I don't remember, was accidental, was-- seemed small to me. You know, I-- I-- I-- I just have no idea. So, if we behave as if everything we do is-- is important, even if it's very small, I think we have a chance of going in the direction we wanna go.

Plans for the Future

03:22:14;24

GLORIA STEINEM:

I-- I-- I have a-- a f-- a hope, you know, ho-- hope is a form of planning. So-- and I'm-- as I often say, a hope-aholic. I've recognized that I'm a (CHUCKLE) hope-aholic. So, I do feel-- I do, you know, get hooked on what could happen positively. And I do think that not only do the ends not justify the means, but the means but the means are the ends. So, we have to choose every day and means that are as close to what we want to achieve as we can manage and-- if-- if we're gonna get where we wanna go.

03:23:02;02

But I-- you know, even futurists, I-- I don't exactly trust, you know, because (CHUCKLE) I think it's a kind of authoritarian urge, you know, to tell you what is going to be in the future and how people are going to live in the future. The-- the-- the-- the only trustworthy futurist I ever read was Marge

Piercy, *Women on the Edge of Time*, brilliant novel of ideas in which she posits two alternative futures. One is the logical extension of the negative things that are going on. And the other is the logical extension of the positive.

What do you want to be remembered for?

03:23:56;29

GLORIA STEINEM:

You know, I always used to ask other people that question when I was interviewing them. I'm so sorry I did because (CHUCKLE) it's so hard to answer. What do I wanna be remembered for? Well, I-- I-- I don't know even how to phrase it, but I would say it's for-- saying what is possible in a way that-- makes it more possible and-- helping all of us come together to move toward it.

03:24:35;00

I think so-- some of what didn't continue from the '60s and '70s was due to the style in which it was done. It was a bit divisive, a bit judgmental. Who was it? I think Che Guevara, who said, "All revolutiona-- true revolutionaries are motivated by love." I think that's true. People wouldn't believe that Che Gu-- Guevara said it. But-- he did. And that's probably who he really was.

03:25:06;02

But I-- I ho-- I hope that-- it would be a sense of the possible based on not only on the future but also on what was true in the past. And we're only beginning to rediscover, you know, what the original cultures, the Native American cultures here, the Khoi and the San in Africa, the-- you know, the-- the-- I mean, the-- the-- the really original cultures that were-- seemed to have been powerful for 95 percent of human history, what they understood.

KUNHARDT **FILM** FOUNDATION

03:25:42;29

You know, the-- the paradigm was the circle, not the pyramid. The languages didn't even have gender. The idea was how you lived. So people readily adopted people from-- from other groups if-- you know, if you followed the way. There was often no word for nature because it wasn't separate from-- from human beings. There was a huge amount of sophistication about inner space. Now we're sophisticated about outer space.

03:26:21;00

I'm not tryin' to romanticize the past. And certainly we can't go back there. But, we can see that it wasn't always this way. I have-- a Cherokee friend who says, "Feminism is memory." Kind of sends chills up-- (CHUCKLE) up your spine, you know, that it was once about balance, you might say, between women and men, between people and nature and-- and-- and was there conflict? Yes, because there were very elaborate ways of solving conflict.

03:26:51;24

So, we know that th-- certainly there was conflict. But-- the very premises of-- of culture-- were different. And-- and they can be different again. But will they be? I don't know. It's like, you know, it's hanging in the balance, now.