

## Gloria Steinem Looks Back on 20 Years of Ms. Magazine

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### Description

"Ms." Magazine celebrates its 20th anniversary. Co-founder Gloria Steinem speaks about the magazine's impact on women over two decades.

### Keywords

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## CHICAGO MANUAL OF STYLE

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## Transcript

Gloria Steinem Looks Back on 20 Years of  
Ms.

Magazine

MARGARET LARSON, co-host:

Ms.

magazine celebrates its 20th anniversary today, giving its readers a chance to look back at what they were doing 20 years ago and what it meant to be a man or a woman then, and how we've changed over the past two decades.

Over the years

Ms.

magazine has been the popular voice of the women's movement. It's been on the cutting edge of many public and personal issues from equal pay, sexual harassment, and date rape, to battered women, displaced homemakers, and the superwoman syndrome, issues that didn't even have names 20 years ago.

Circulation jumped more than 50 percent following the Clarence Thomas hearings, and now the ad-free magazine is more successful than ever. And of course, its success is due in large part to Gloria Steinem, who co-founded

Ms.

magazine in 1972 and who remains at the controls of the magazine.

Good morning, and welcome.

Ms. GLORIA STEINEM: Good morning.

LARSON: So glad you're here. The 20th anniversary issue have these 20 years gone by quickly?

Ms. STEINEM: Oh yes, very quickly, except when I look back and see how far we've come, then--then it really feels like--like 20 years. But I think everybody watching should--at least those old enough, should kind of think about where they were 20 years ago because we're all a piece of history, and that's the only way we can really measure change.

LARSON: You talk about people who are old enough. In a sense the women's movement is about women who have gained some experience and maturity. The movement has often drawn on people who are not 18 or college students, but people who have had a chance to experience life. Is that still true?

Ms. STEINEM: Yes, it's less true. There are more younger women now than there ever have been before, but I think that sometimes what the press miss--misses or sociologists even miss is that women's pattern of activism has always been the reverse of men's. That is, we tend to get more activist as we get older, whereas some men, at least, tend to get conservative. So it's always been women who have been in the labor force or whatever long enough to know what the problems are.

LARSON: Let's go back to that first issue in 1972, the premiere issue. Several prominent American women came forth in that issue to say that they had had abortions while they were still illegal, and here we are at a time when we're perhaps on the verge of restricting or again making illegal abortion in this country. What are your thoughts about that process?

Ms. STEINEM: Well, it's--we've still come an enormously long distance because that was a very brave and unusual act for women to come forth and say that they had had abortions at that point. And now it is the premier national issue, it is the single most important issue in this presidential campaign. It's true that we've had a backlash in between precisely because the majority of Americans do support choice, then the folks who were in power before and don't support choice are worried about it. But if you ask the question the way it ought to be asked, which is, you know, who should make the decision, the government or a woman in her position, and up to 90 percent of everybody says it should be a woman in her position. And from--coming from an issue that wasn't even part of the public dialogue 20 years ago, that's a big distance.

LARSON: Hm. Also something that wasn't part of the public dialogue at that time appears in that issue, and that was the evaluation of candidates based on their stance on women's issues.

Ms. STEINEM: Yes, that was really a first.

LARSON: Right.

Ms. STEINEM: We--we even have a machismo factor, which was--which was our name for their willingness to use violence as a means of solving conflict.

LARSON: Well, let's talk about the candidates this year. How do they rate in terms of women's issues?

Ms. STEINEM: Well, I think we've never had a more clear choice because Bush represents the backlash. That's how he got into the White House and how Reagan got into the White House. And I can't think of an issue of equality, which he does not oppose, in fact. And Clinton, while not perfect, is so much better that, in fact, there will literally be women alive in the world in this country if Clinton is elected who will probably not be alive if Bush is elected.

LARSON: And though Perot did not decide to run, how does he rate?

Ms. STEINEM: Well, he was a very mixed bag. I mean, like everybody else, I was sort of interested in him at first. He was, for instance, pro choice, and then I realized that the reason he was pro choice was because it was cheaper. I mean it wasn't that he was treating reproduction freedom as a basic human right.

LARSON: Really?

Ms. STEINEM: He just said it was...

LARSON: He felt--as an economic issue?

Ms. STEINEM: Well, that's what he said. He said it's, you know--it's cheaper than to pay welfare. So suddenly I realized that if we--if—if he thought we needed more people to compete with the Japanese, then suddenly women would be forced to have children again and reproductive freedom would be taken away. So I'm not sorry he's gone, actually.

LARSON: In the grand scheme of things.

Ms. STEINEM: Right.

LARSON: Back in 1976

Ms.

was the first women's publication to feature domestic violence on its cover and to pay close attention to this subject. How do you feel about the progress that's been made in that area in the years since?

Ms. STEINEM: Well, I--I think we--we know it's a problem now. It's in the public arena. We have legislation to address it, but I still think that we are in the position of standing on the riverbank rescuing people who are drowning, and we have not yet gone to the head of the river to see why they're falling in. We badly need programs that--and—and education that challenges the idea that men are naturally more aggressive than women because it's this kind of drug that--that some men get addicted to, and they feel like they're not real people unless they're being dominant and even violent, and that's the fundamental problem.

LARSON: An idea that's bought into, in part, by women as well, in some cases.

Ms. STEINEM: Yes, sure, I mean we're all--we're all raised up with this; but after a certain number of bruises and black eyes and broken bones, you know, you begin out of sheer safety to realize that this is a life-and-death issue, and we have to challenge the idea of sex roles, which are the basis of almost all violence.

LARSON: There have been so many subjects--excuse me--that

Ms.

has been the first to tackle--sexual harassment, date rape, the sexual violence that we just talked about. What else is the magazine about to recognize, since you're ahead of your time, generally, in--in identifying these sexual issues that we call women's issues?

Ms. STEINEM: Mm-hmm.

LARSON: What's next?

Ms. STEINEM: Well, I think there are two things. One you can already see in the magazine very clearly now, which is an international emphasis because there are many, many more connections between and among women, especially on economic development, and there are--there's a whole wave of economic development in this country that is like that in a Third World country, and that learns--we learn from each other, and that has not yet surfaced in the press yet. And the most intimate thing, I think, is that though we now know that women can do what men can do, I think we have yet to learn that men can do what women can do. That is men can raise babies and little children, and until men are as important and active inside the house as women are, women can't be as important and active outside the house as--as men are. So we have to kill off superwoman, which was always...

LARSON: A myth?

Ms. STEINEM: ...the adversary--well, it was always--it was not invented by the women's movement. It was invented by the adversaries of the women's movement.