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# Testimony Before the Senate Hearings on the Equal Rights Amendment

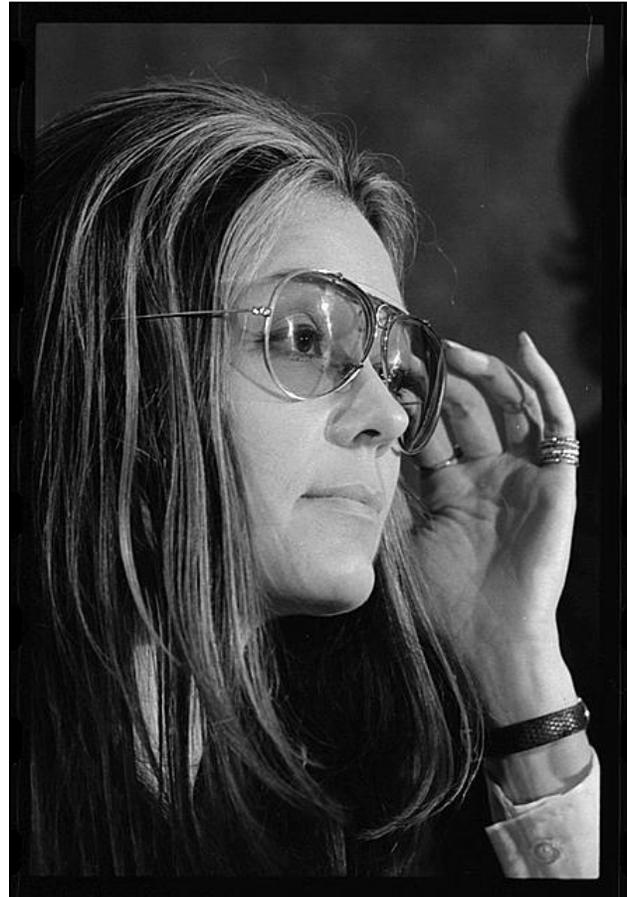
By Gloria Steinem

From United States Senate Ninety First Congress, Second Session, On S. J. Res. 61 5 7 • 1970

*Gloria Steinem (1934-present) is an American feminist, journalist, author, and social-political activist. She gained national recognition as a leader of the "Second Wave" feminist movement in the 1960s-1970s. On May 6th, 1970, Gloria Steinem stood before the Senate and delivered the following speech, advocating for the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA); this amendment, which has not been ratified, secures that one's rights "shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex." As you read, find evidence to answer this question: According to Steinem, what are the myths about women, and how are these myths harmful?*

[1] My name is Gloria Steinem. I am a writer and editor. I have worked in several political campaigns, and am currently a member of the Policy Council of the Democratic National Committee.

I am here in support of the Equal Rights Amendment. Before I get on with the statement I would like to point out that Mrs. Wolfgang<sup>1</sup> does not disavow<sup>2</sup> the principle of equality only disagrees on the matter of tactic. I believe that she is giving up a long-term gain for a short-term holding action. Some protective legislation is gradually proving to be unenforceable or contrary to title VII<sup>3</sup>. It gives poor women jobs but serves to keep them poor. Restrictions on working hours, for instance, may keep women in the assembly line from becoming foremen. No one is trying to say that there is no difference between men and women, only as I will discuss more in my statement that the differences between, the differences within the groups, male and female, are much, much greater than the differences between the two groups. Therefore, requirements can only be sensibly suited to the requirements of the job itself.



*"Gloria Steinem at News Conference, Women's Action Alliance" is licensed under No known restrictions on publication (via Library of Congress).*

1. A reference to Myra Wolfgang, who opposed the ERA. She and others believed the ERA would place additional responsibilities on women rather than liberating or protecting them.
2. **Disavow (verb):** to reject or deny
3. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 is a federal law that prohibits employers from discriminating against employees on the basis of sex, race, color, national origin, and religion. It generally applies to employers with 15 or more employees.

During twelve years of working for a living, I've experienced much of the legal and social discrimination<sup>4</sup> reserved for women in this country. I have been refused service in public restaurants, ordered out of public gathering places, and turned away from apartment rentals, all for the clearly-stated, sole reason that I am a woman. And all without the legal remedies available to blacks and other minorities. I have been excluded from professional groups, writing assignments on so-called "unfeminine" subjects such as politics, full participation in the Democratic Party, jury duty, and even from such small male privileges as discounts on airline fares. Most important to me, I have been denied a society in which women are encouraged, or even allowed, to think of themselves as first-class citizens and responsible human beings.

However, after two years of researching the status of American women, I have discovered that I am very, very lucky. Most women, both wage-earners and housewives, routinely suffer more humiliation and injustice than I do.

- [5] As a freelance writer, I don't work in the male-dominated hierarchy<sup>5</sup> of an office. (Women, like blacks and other visibly-different minorities, do better in individual professions such as the arts, sports, or domestic work; anything in which they don't have authority over white males.) I am not one of the millions of women who must support a family. Therefore, I haven't had to go on welfare because there are no day care centers for my children while I work, and I haven't had to submit to the humiliating welfare inquiries about my private and sexual life, inquiries from which men are exempt. I haven't had to brave the sex bias<sup>6</sup> of labor unions and employers, only to see my family subsist on a median salary 40% less than the male median salary.

I hope this committee will hear the personal, daily injustices suffered by many women—professionals and day laborers, women house-bound by welfare as well as suburbia. We have all been silent for too long. We won't be silent anymore.

The truth is that all our problems stem from the same sex<sup>7</sup>-based myths. We may appear before you as white radicals or the middle-aged middleclass or black soul sisters, but we are *all* sisters in fighting against these outdated myths. Like racial myths, they have been reflected in our laws. Let me list a few:

That women are biologically inferior to men. In fact, an equally good case can be made for the reverse. Women live longer than men, even when the men are not subject to business pressures. Women survived Nazi concentration camps better, keep cooler heads in emergencies currently studied by disaster-researchers, are protected against heart attacks by their female sex hormones, and are so much more durable at every stage of life that nature must conceive 20 to 50 percent more males in order to keep some balance going.

Man's hunting activities are forever being pointed to as tribal proof of superiority. But while he was hunting, women built houses, tilled the fields, developed animal husbandry<sup>8</sup>, and perfected language. Men, being all alone in the bush, often developed into a creature as strong as women, fleeter of foot, but not very bright.

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4. **Discrimination (noun):** the unjust or prejudicial treatment of different peoples, especially on the grounds of race, age, or sex
  5. **Hierarchy (noun):** a system in which people or groups are ranked according to status or authority
  6. **Bias (noun):** prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way considered unfair
  7. **Sex (noun):** the anatomy of an individual's reproductive system and secondary sex characteristics – as opposed to "gender," the identity and social roles of a person based on sex
  8. **Husbandry (noun):** the science of breeding and caring for fam animals (or plants/crops)

[10] However, I don't want to prove the superiority of one sex to another. That would only be repeating a male mistake. English scientists once definitively proved, after all, that the English were descended from the angels, while the Irish were descended from the apes: it was the rationale for England's domination<sup>9</sup> of Ireland for more than a century. The point is that science is used to support current myth and economics almost as much as the church was.

What we do know is that the difference *between* two races or two sexes is much smaller than the differences to be found *within* each group. Therefore, in spite of the slide show on female inferiorities that I understand was shown to you yesterday, the law makes much more sense when it treats individuals, not groups bundled together by some condition of birth.

A word should be said about Dr. Freud<sup>10</sup>, the great 19th century perpetuator of female inferiority. Many of the differences he assumed to be biological, and therefore changeless, have turned out to be societal, and have already changed. "Penis Envy," for instance, is clinically disappearing. Just as black people envied white skins, 19th Century women envied penises. A second-class group envies whatever it is that makes another group first class.

Another myth, that women are already treated equally in this society. I am sure there has been ample testimony to prove that equal pay for equal work, equal chance for advancement, and equal training or encouragement is obscenely<sup>11</sup> scarce<sup>12</sup> in every field, even those—like food and fashion industries—that are supposedly "feminine."

A deeper result of social and legal injustice, however, is what sociologists refer to as "Internalized Aggression." Victims of aggression absorb the myth of their own inferiority, and come to believe that their group is in fact second class. Even when they themselves realize they are not second class, they may still think their group is, thus the tendency to be the only Jew in the club, the only black woman on the block, the only woman in the office.

[15] Women suffer this second-class treatment from the moment they are born. They are expected to be rather than achieve, to function biologically rather than learn. A brother, whatever his intellect, is more likely to get the family's encouragement and education money, while girls are often pressured to conceal ambition and intelligence, to "Uncle Tom."<sup>13</sup>

I interviewed a New York public school teacher who told me about a black teenager's desire to be a doctor. With all the barriers in mind, she suggested he be a veterinarian instead.

The same day, a high school teacher mentioned a girl who wanted to be a doctor. The teacher said, "How about a nurse?"

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9. **Domination** (*noun*): supremacy or preeminence over another

10. Dr. Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) was an Austrian neurologist and psychologist famous for his development of psychoanalysis

11. **Obscenely** (*adverb*): repulsive to morality or virtue

12. **Scarce** (*adjective*): not plentiful or abundant; low in quantity

13. Uncle Tom is the title character of Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 novel, Uncle Tom's Cabin. The phrase "Uncle Tom" has also become an epithet for a person who is slavish and excessively subservient to perceived authority figures, particularly a black person who behaves in a subservient manner to white people, or any person perceived to be complicit in the oppression of their own group.

Teachers, parents, and the Supreme Court may exude<sup>14</sup> a protective, well-meaning rationale, but limiting the individual's ambition is doing no one a favor. Certainly not this country; it needs all the talent it can get.

Another myth, that American women hold great economic power. 51% of all shareholders in this country are women. That's a favorite male-chauvinist<sup>15</sup> statistic. However, the number of shares they hold is so small that the total is only 18% of all shares. Even those holdings are often controlled by men.

- [20] Similarly, only 5% of all the people in the country who receive \$10,000<sup>16</sup> a year or more, earned or otherwise, are women. And that includes all the famous rich widows.

The constantly-repeated myth of our economic power seems less testimony to our real power than to the resentment of what little power we do have.

Another myth, that children must have full-time mothers. American mothers spend more time with their homes and children than those of any other society we know about. In the past, joint families, servants, a prevalent system in which grandparents raised the children, or family field work in the agrarian<sup>17</sup> systems—all these factors contributed more to child care than the labor-saving devices of which we are so proud.

The truth is that most American children seem to be suffering from too much Mother, and too little Father. Part of the program of Women's Liberation is a return of fathers to their children. If laws permit women equal work and pay opportunities, men will then be relieved of their role as sole breadwinner. Fewer ulcers, fewer hours of meaningless work, equal responsibility for his own children: these are a few of the reasons that Women's Liberation is Men's Liberation, too.

As for the psychic health of the children, studies show that the quality of time spent by parents is more important than the quantity. The most damaged children were not those whose mothers worked, but those whose mothers preferred to work but stayed home out of role-playing desire to be a "good mother."

- [25] Another myth, that the women's movement is not political, won't last, or is somehow not "serious."

When black people leave their 19th century roles, they are feared. When women dare to leave theirs, they are ridiculed. We understand this, and accept the burden of ridicule. It won't keep us quiet anymore.

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14. **Exude** (*verb*): to discharge or display openly and steadily

15. **Chauvinist** (*noun*): an attitude, or one with said attitude, of superiority toward members of the opposite sex (notably towards women)

16. While this doesn't seem like a lot today, the national average wage in 1970 was roughly over 00; however, women in 1970 only earned a little over 00 in the national average wage.

17. **Agrarian** (*adjective*): of or relating to farming

Similarly, it shouldn't deceive male observers into thinking this is somehow a joke. We are 51% of the population, we are essentially united on these issues across boundaries of class or race or age, and we may well end by changing this society more than the civil rights movement. That is an apt<sup>18</sup> parallel. We, too, have our right wing and left wing, our separatists, gradualists, and Uncle Toms. But we are changing our own consciousness, and that of the country. Engels<sup>19</sup> noted the relationship of the authoritarian<sup>20</sup>, nuclear family<sup>21</sup> to capitalism: the father as capitalist, the mother as means of production, and the children as labor. He said the family would change as the economic system did, and that seems to have happened, whether we want to admit it or not. Women's bodies will no longer be owned by the state for the production of workers and soldiers: birth control and abortion are facts of everyday life. The new family is an egalitarian<sup>22</sup> family.

Gunnar Myrdal<sup>23</sup> noted thirty years ago the parallel between women and Negroes in this country. Both suffered from such restricting social myths as: smaller brains, passive natures, inability to govern themselves (and certainly not white men), sex objects only, childlike natures, special skills and the like. When evaluating a general statement about women, it might be valuable to substitute "black people" for "women"—just to test the prejudice at work.

And it might be valuable to do this constitutionally as well. Neither group is going to be content as a cheap labor pool anymore. And neither is going to be content without full constitutional rights.

[30] Finally, I would like to say one thing about this time in which I am testifying.

I had deep misgivings about discussing this topic when National Guardsmen are occupying our campuses<sup>24</sup>, the country is being turned against itself in a terrible polarization, and America is enlarging an already inhuman and unjustifiable war<sup>25</sup>. But it seems to me that much of the trouble this country is in has to do with the "masculine mystique"<sup>26</sup>; with the myth that masculinity somehow depends on the subjugation<sup>27</sup> of other people. It is a bi-partisan<sup>28</sup> problem: both our past and current Presidents seem to be victims of this myth, and to behave accordingly.

Women are not more moral than men. We are only uncorrupted by power. But we do not want to imitate men, to join this country as it is, and I think our very participation will change it. Perhaps women-elected leaders—and there will be many more of them—will not be so likely to dominate black people or yellow people or men; anybody who looks different from us.

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18. **Apt (adjective):** fitting or qualified

19. Friedrich Engels (1820-1895) was a German social scientist, author, political theorist, and father of Marxist Theory, alongside Karl Marx.

20. **Authoritarian (adjective):** relating to blind submission to authority; relating to a concentration of power in the head of a group (i.e. in this case, the father)

21. "Nuclear family" is a term used to refer to a type of family: married parents (one husband, one wife) and their child/children

22. **Egalitarian (adjective):** of, relating to, or believing in the principle that all people are equal and deserve equal rights and opportunities

23. Gunnar Myrdal (1898-1987) was a Swedish Nobel laureate economist, sociologist, and politician.

24. Gloria Steinem delivered this speech just two days after the Ohio National Guard opened fire on Kent State University demonstrators protesting the Cambodian Campaign and killed four people.

25. The Vietnam War

26. A play on The Feminine Mystique (1963) by Betty Friedan, an investigation into the lives and unhappiness of suburban housewives

27. **Subjugation (noun):** the domination of a group by taking away their freedom or rights

28. **Bi-partisan (adjective):** involving the agreement or cooperation of two parties that usually oppose each other's values

After all, we won't have our masculinity to prove.

*Testimony Before the Senate Hearings on the Equal Rights Amendment by Gloria Steinem is in the public domain.*

## Text-Dependent Questions

**Directions:** For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. Which of the following best describes the author’s purpose in this text? [RI.6]
  - A. To advocate for the Equal Rights Amendment
  - B. To prove women are equal, if not superior, to men
  - C. To condemn the acts of sexism and misogyny towards women in the U.S.
  - D. To represent both the Women’s Rights and Civil Rights movements
  
2. Which of the following best summarizes the argument against the ERA, which Steinem addresses in the beginning of the speech? [RI.8]
  - A. The counter-argument states that the ERA will discriminate against men, as it only protects women.
  - B. The counter-argument states that the ERA is redundant and unnecessary, as women are already equal to men.
  - C. The counter-argument believes all sexes are already protected under the law and thus ratifying the ERA is just a waste of time.
  - D. The counter-argument believes the ERA will force women to be more like men and thus void current individual gender privileges.
  
3. PART A: Steinem asserts that all of women’s issues in society stem from: [RI.3]
  - A. The patriarchy
  - B. Lack of constitutional protection
  - C. Sex-based myths
  - D. Sexist laws
  
4. PART B: Summarize one of the causes of women’s issues and how Steinem frames it. [RI.1]  
Cite your work.  

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5. PART A: What does the term “internalize” mean as used in paragraph 14? [RI.4]
  - A. To affect internally, not physically or outwardly
  - B. To absorb through observation and experience
  - C. To refuse to acknowledge; to bottle up
  - D. To learn directly

6. PART B: According to Steinem, how does “Internalized Aggression” affect certain groups? [RI.3]
- A. It perpetuates harmful stereotypes only within said groups.
  - B. Those on the receiving end contain their feelings and never speak out against this abuse, perpetuating the problem.
  - C. It causes certain marginalized groups to believe they are what society expects and nothing more, limiting their potential and ambition.
  - D. It causes poor self-esteem and high stress levels, afflicting their health.
7. PART A: Which of the following statements best describes the structure of Gloria Steinem’s address? [RI.5]
- A. Steinem introduces her support for the ERA, lists the harmful myths about women, provides evidence to disprove each myth, and concludes with the advocacy of full constitutional rights.
  - B. Steinem describes how the myths about women have personally affected her life.
  - C. Steinem makes a point about why the ERA is important and argues with anyone who disagrees with her (i.e. Mrs. Wolfgang).
  - D. Steinem introduces her support for the ERA, compares the marginalization of women to that of black men, and concludes with a call for both parties to receive full constitutional protection.
8. PART B: How does the structural style of the text contribute to its persuasiveness? [RI.8] [RI.5]

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## Discussion Questions

**Directions:** *Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.*

1. What was expected of women in the 1970s? How have these expectations changed since then? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.
2. Throughout the text, Steinem draws comparisons between women and African Americans. According to Steinem, how are the experiences of women and African Americans similar? How are they different?
3. This address was delivered in 1970. Do you still believe it is relevant today? Explain your answer.
4. In your opinion, does Steinem make a strong argument? Would you have supported the ERA? Why or why not?
5. According to Gloria Steinem, how do we define the roles of men and women? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.