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"WHAT DO WOMEN EXPECT"

by

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**EXCERPTS FROM SPEECH BY GLORIA STEINEM, EDITOR OF Ms. MAGAZINE,
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It is culturally inevitable that women, whose fate in a patriarchy is to be thought secondary to and somehow less serious than men, should be greeted with derision and ridicule when they form a social and political movement. That's why the first and most primitive reaction to all stages of the current Women's Movement has been to trivialize it -- to talk only about opening doors, lighting cigarettes and other such great civil rights issues, or to focus on the false claim that someone somewhere once burned a bra. (As far as I know, the only bras that ever got burned were by a California bra manufacturer trying to publicize his product, and by National General Films for staged shots in an ABC television "documentary" with the wonderful title of "Women Are Revolting.")

But this kind of ridicule can only temporarily conceal the truth about the Women's Movement. The truth is that it is the longest and deepest kind of revolution: a rejection of caste, of the visible difference of race and sex that have been used to organize us into the leaders and the led, into the powerful and the powerless, into the decision-makers and the cheap labor on which a variety of economic systems have run. Women of all races share this with minority men: whether we are in our own kitchens or someone else's, whether we are in offices or factories: we are still visibly, inescapably marked for supportive, underpaid, or unpaid jobs.

But there is one set of economic myths that women of all races face, and minority men do not; one that prolongs the problem for women by the very effective device of denying any problem exists. Women of all races are perceived as being already powerful - at least in relationship to men of our own racial group, and often in relationship to society at large.

Thus, black women are perceived by sociologists like Patrick Moynihan as being matriarchs, though the truth is only that racism has brought black women and men into closer and less patriarchal relationship within their own group. Black women still suffer from the double stigma of being black and female in a society that is both racist and sexist. Thus, for instance, a black woman with a B.A. degree who works fulltime still makes less than a black man with an eighth grade education who works fulltime. And black women are on the bottom of the economic ladder when it comes to median incomes: they make \$4,674 a year; white women make \$5,490 a year; minority men, contrary to myth, make more than white women, or \$6,598 a year; and guess who - white men, of course are on top with \$9,373 a year.

A still more popular myth affects white women: that we control the economy. In a group like this one which concentrates effort on the one area in which women do have statistical supremacy -- as consumers who make the purchase at point of sale - there may be even more belief in this false myth of our economic power.

To have the power of a point-of-sale consumer is somewhat like the power we all have as voters: we can choose between two detergents, just as we can choose

between the party of Richard Nixon and the party of Hubert Humphrey. But in neither case do we have the real power to determine the range of the choice, or to benefit in a social or economic way from even the choice that is made.

Let's look at the greatest area of misunderstanding first: that women are somehow existing off the fat of the land; that we are awash in unearned income.

As housewives: According to the Department of Labor, the average housewife in this country works 99.6 hours a week. In return, she is legally entitled only to minimal food and clothes - though the same Department of Labor has determined that it would cost at least \$9000 a year to replace her services.

Alimony is greatly misunderstood as well. In spite of all the stories of large settlements (sometimes I think the only men paying alimony must be those who work in the press), the truth is that, according to an American Bar Association study, only 10% of the women who get divorced in this country get any alimony at all. As for child support, the average payment is about half the amount necessary to support a child. Within one year after divorce, fewer than 38% of all fathers are paying even this amount - and compliance decreases at such a rate that, after ten years, 79% of all fathers are making no payment at all.

Women are slightly under half of all stockholders, it's true. But the percentage of total shares owned by women is only 38% - since we are much more likely than men to have small holdings, and even those shares may be in women's names only for technical reasons. A New York Stock Exchange study showed that 75% of

all securities transactions are carried out by men: in other words, even stock in our names may not be in our control. Finally, female stockholders are poorer and far more likely to have clerical or sales jobs than are male stockholders.

What about the much-resented notion that women, because we live longer, inherit all of men's hard-won wealth? Well, it's true that we are two-thirds of all beneficiaries to life insurance policies. But that doesn't indicate how big those policies are, and whether they have either lapsed or been borrowed against before the husband's death. Furthermore, the benefits are often far lower than a housewife might have saved had she been paid even her average worth of \$9000 a year throughout the marriage. And there are usually children to be supported from those benefits as well.

As for real estate, the latest IRS figures are that, among people with estates of \$60,000 and above, about 2 million men had over \$118 billion in real estate, while about 1 million women were dividing up about \$69 billion - and again, this does not reflect the women's responsibility for children and other heirs.

Perhaps the best indicator is this: Among all the people in the country who earn or receive \$10,000 a year or more, from whatever source (jobs, alimony, stock dividends, real estate, insurance, pensions, gifts; everything), less than 9% are women. And that includes all those famous rich widows and divorcees. And in terms of earned income, of all the jobs that pay \$15,000 a year or more, 94% are held by white males, with only 6% left over for all women and minority men. Now

that's a statistic that gives us some idea of what women power really is in this country.

When it comes to women and poverty, our economic situation is even more clear. Of all the people on welfare, more than 85% are women and dependent children. (Indeed, if you consider what would happen to a woman who was left with children and no savings, it's clear that most of us are only one man away from welfare.) 38.4% of all families headed by women are living below the poverty line as determined by the Federal government. Only 8.3% of families headed by men are in poverty. And women over 65 are the poorest group in the whole country.

What do women expect? We expect change and justice - but we are fighting for economic survival.

Perhaps the best way for men to understand what women expect - whether it is in the office or in marriage, in advertising or in the media - is to consider this: Suppose you were the same person with all the hopes and dreams and ambitions that you have now - but you had been born a woman. What would you want? What anger or impatience would you feel? Whatever the answer is, then that is what some individual woman - and, multiplied by millions, what women as a group - now expect.