

# Ms. Steinem's CIA Connection

By JOHN D. LOFTON JR.

With all the wild charges about the Central Intelligence Agency, it is understandable why feminist leader Gloria Steinem is a little touchy about her



Lofton points out the inconsistency of Ms. Steinem (above) in her statements regarding past dealings with the Central Intelligence Agency.

involvement with and defense of the Central Intelligence Agency over a decade ago.

As she puts it—in some pretty loose talk herself—“I don’t think it’s funny to be lumped with murderers and if the press is even half-right, that is what this group of governmental people are.” But, as the saying goes, methinks Ms. Steinem doth protest too much.

In a recent column quoting her on the Equal Rights Amendment, I referred in passing to Ms. Steinem as a former CIA

collaborator. Angered by this, Ms. Steinem called me, denied any relation with the CIA and very nicely threatened me with a lawsuit if I did not delete the allusion. Since she came on pretty strong and had caught me downtown away from my backup source material, I complied and eliminated the reference.

But after studying the evidence, having talked to one of the reporters who originally wrote a news story detailing her relationship with the CIA and having talked with her at length about the subject, I am convinced that what I originally wrote was fair comment.

The source for my reference was a Feb. 18, 1967, story in the *Washington Post* by Robert Kaiser reporting Ms. Steinem as acknowledging that she had worked closely with the CIA to organize groups of American youth to attend World Youth Festivals in Vienna and Helsinki in 1969 and 1962.

As director of the Independent Research Service, a group, according to Kaiser, financed in part by a foundation used as a conduit for CIA money, Ms. Steinem is quoted as saying of the CIA agents, “with whom she collaborated,” as Kaiser put it: “I found them liberal and farsighted and open to an exchange of ideas.”

“The CIA,” she declared, “was the only one with enough guts and foresight to see that youth and student affairs were important.”

A few days later, the *New York Times* carried a similar story quoting Ms. Steinem as saying of her CIA connection:

“Far from being shocked by this involvement, I was happy to find some liberals in government in those days who were farsighted and cared enough to get Americans of all political views to the festivals.”

But now, Ms. Steinem denies everything—and then again, she doesn’t. She says the newspaper accounts were mistaken and because of the “hysteria of the times,” used the letters “CIA” when they should have said “NSA,” which stands for the National Student Association. But what about the *Washington Post* story quoting you as using the letters CIA and praising the organization’s courage? Well, this might have been said “as a joke,” an “ironic comment,” you know what I mean, she asks?

When I press her, she admits that at the time, she had a good idea that the CIA was in part financing her organization, though “at extremely long-distance and with no control,” which she says is the “morally important thing.”

Furthermore, she concedes that NSA people had told her that their money was coming, in part, from CIA-funded foundations, which she says “seemed like a good use, better than buying planes and bombs.”

Reached by phone in North Carolina, where he is a visiting professor at Duke University, *Washington Post* reporter Kaiser told me he is “baffled” by Ms. Steinem’s denials of having collaborated with the CIA. He calls her denials “silly” and says he stands by his story.

In Washington, Gene Theroux, who succeeded Ms. Steinem as head of the Independent Research Service, is reluctant to talk about the CIA’s role in bankrolling the group. “Oh, brother,” he says when I ask. But he does say that the record shows that when Ms. Steinem headed the organization, it did get money from foundations funded by the CIA.

When I called Gloria Steinem back, after she found out that I had killed the CIA reference to her in my column, she was very pleased. She said she was just getting ready to call me to let me know “that everything was cool and it’s nice to know people check facts.”

Indeed it is. And a further checking of the facts has made me sorry that I ever knuckled under in the first place.

As for Ms. Steinem’s feeling that I am simply dredging something up from her distant past to exploit her because she’s famous, I would remind her that she was the one who chose to make an issue of this whole thing, not me.

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