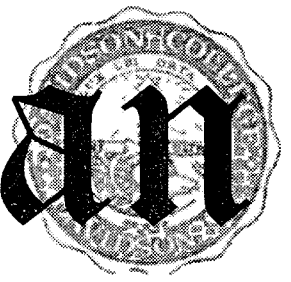


The Davidsonian

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Steinem speaks in honor of coeducation

Prominent feminist delivers 1998 Reynolds Lecture; addresses 'The Politics of Sexuality'

BY LAURA McCANDLISH
Staff Writer

On Thursday, Oct. 22, Gloria Steinem, the 1998 Reynolds' Lecturer, spoke to a sold-out audience at Love Auditorium. Her lecture addressed "The Politics of Sexuality."

Steinem began by informally asking the audience, "Are we going to have a good time or what?" She admitted to be nervous to follow in the footsteps of such distinguished past Reynolds' Lecturers as Eleanor Roosevelt, Maya Angelou, and Jane Goodall. In lieu of the celebration of coeducation at Davidson, Steinem mentioned that the presence of women at Davidson happened to coincide with the beginning of the modern women's movement.

Steinem talked about the general population's trouble with the word feminism, saying that "at the same time, we do and don't know what it means." She cited the definition of feminism from a dictionary: "The belief in the full social, political and economic equality of men and women." Steinem explained feminism as a term whose principles many might agree with, but still have trouble identifying with, due to society's preconceptions of what feminism is. The women's movement, she feels, has made progress but still has very far to go as she said, "Any social justice movement must have at least 100 years to make a real mark."

Steinem referred to her topic of "The Politics of Sexuality" as a particular part of where we are in this stage of the women's revolution. In reference to the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal, she explained her indifference to the case on the basis that the sexual relations were based on free will rather than harassment. Politics are found in sexuality in our culture, she said, by the fact that we often define sex for women "to be okay and moral only if it takes place within the bounds of patriarchal marriage."

"Our need to maintain a racist caste system in society," Steinem said, "is dependent on controlling women's for reproduction." Steinem continued, "It hasn't always been this way with sexuality" and mentioned ancient cultures who could separate sexuality and reproduction and didn't "demonize sexuality, but even honored homosexuals and bisexuals as having double the knowledge." Because "our culture is beginning to see sexuality as moral as long as no force is involved," Steinem said, "it's obviously not just for reproduction but is also a way we communicate, a form of expression, love, spirituality, and pleasure." With humor, she added that her talk was appropriately being given "in an auditorium called Love." If we don't separate sexuality from reproduction, Steinem believes, "it's like saying you have freedom of speech but only if you say one thing."

Steinem explained that the patriarchal structure has gotten men hooked on the idea that they need to have dominance over others in their lives. Stressing the importance of individualism over grouping by gender, Steinem stated, "We are all

human. The difference between two men or two women may be more than the difference between men and women as groups."

At the conclusion of her speech, Steinem encouraged the audience to "behave if everything we do matters." Building upon the saying that one flap of a butterfly's wing can affect the weather upstream, Steinem said, "Each of us has an incredible amount of power and all together, we make one hell of a butterfly."

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Steinem's lecture was followed by a question-and-answer period and then a reception in the 900 Room. A poignant moment was reached when Susan Greene, the first woman to run for Congress in North Carolina, said, "Thank you for what you have given my life, my sisters' lives, and our children's lives."

Steinem is a writer, editor, lecturer, social activist, and world renowned leader of the modern feminist movement. She serves as a writer and consulting editor for Ms. Magazine, which she co-founded in 1972, after she helped to start New York magazine in 1968. She has also written several books and has co-produced an Emmy award-winning TV documentary and a made-for-TV movie. The Women's Action Alliance, the National Women's Political Caucus, and the Coalition of Labor Union Women were all founded in part by Steinem's efforts. She is president of both Voters for Choice, a bipartisan committee for reproductive freedom, and the Ms. Foundation for Women, a national multiracial women's fund. Currently, she serves as one of ten International Working Group members of "Beyond Racism," an initiative that includes a two-year study of comparative racial relations in the United States, Brazil, and South Africa. Listed in The World Almanac's 25 Most Influential Women in America, Steinem was inducted into the Women's Hall of Fame in 1993.

Steinem's visit coincided with both the celebration week of 25 years of coeducation at Davidson and with President Vagt's recent approval of the creation of a gender resource center. Vagt introduced Steinem's lecture, saying, "She is recognized for the transforming power of her work." He referred to a comment Steinem made before her talk, in which she mentioned that it was "hard to imagine that growing up in the Midwest, she would be standing up at Davidson College to talk about sex."



Sallie McMurray

◆ Last Thursday, Gloria Steinem spoke in Love Auditorium. Tickets for the event sold out within an hour of opening to the public.

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