

# Gloria Steinem, the CIA, and the Cold War

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**G**LORIA Steinem is one of the best-known feminists of the US. Known mostly for the "Ms." magazine, most people forget her past before her famous undercover work as a Playboy bunny, but it seems that this wasn't the first time Steinem took part in espionage. In the following, we will discuss the unexpected connection between Gloria Steinem and a major CIA operation that targeted the youth of America during the cold war.

Before her more famous work, Steinem acted as the co-director of the Independent Research Service (IRS) together with a former president of the National Students Association (NSA) Dennis Shaul. With the IRS they funded students trips to the World Youth Festival [3].

The festival is an international event organized by the World Federation of Democratic Youth and the International Union of Students. It has been occasionally hosted since 1947 mainly in communist or formerly communist countries. It stands for global youth solidarity for democracy and against war and imperialism [1].

But where did such a small organisation get the money to send students to these games? The IRS was mainly funded by the NSA at least officially. Steinem herself confessed that, although they started without assistance, the CIA soon approached them to offer help [3].

"The CIA was the only one with enough guts and foresight to see that youth and student affairs were important."

(Gloria Steinem [3])

In collaboration with the CIA, the IRS send about one hundred American students to the Vienna Youth Festival of 1959, where they distributed anti-communist propaganda and disrupted the proceed-

ings of the event. Steinem fulfilled the CIA's expectations completely and went on to send a similar delegation to the Helsinki Youth Festival in 1962 [2].

Shaul later says to the *Washington post*

"I am not at all apologetic or ashamed of what I did. The Helsinki Festival was a disaster from their [the Communist world's] point of view, and I think we can take a good deal of credit for that." ([3])

While Steinem and Shaul were proudly aware of the collaboration with the CIA, almost no one else in the IRS knew about it. Especially the students were completely kept in the dark about the true purpose of their visit [3].

**A**s already mentionend, the NSA was one of the biggest funders of the IRS. After a board investigation, it was revealed that 80% of the NSA's funding came from the CIA. Samuel W. Brown, chairman of the investigation, revealed that over 20 foundations and individuals served as conduits for the CIA funds [5].

The CIA forced NSA staffers to gather information about foreign student leaders. Student leaders were forced to sign papers threatening 20 years of prison if the role of the CIA in the NSA was disclosed, effectively forcing them to collaborate. Some student leaders were receiving salaries up to 3,500\$ a year from the CIA to spy [5].

While it is illegal for the CIA to infiltrate domestic organizations, the operations with the IRS and NSA were justified as being needed to protect against foreign threats. The following scandal caused the NSA to dissolve, Not only do I think that they should've faced consequences for legal reasons, but I also be-



lieve that it is morally dispicable to decieve and trap young students.

One might now think again about Steinem's role in all of this. While you may think that Steinem was forced to work with the CIA. Steinem herself dismisses that idea and defends her relationship with the CIA.

"In my experience The Agency was completely dif-

ferent from its image; it was liberal, nonviolent and honorable."

(Steinem [4])

I think it's important that we don't forget this part of history. While Steinem played an essential role in the feminist movement, we need to keep in mind that she also was a CIA operative, who had no issue collaborating with the agency in semi-legal operations.

## References

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