

STEINEM'S WALL STREET OCCUPIED AS WOMAN ARE STILL EARNING LESS THAN MEN



For Gloria Steinem, the international conversation that the Occupy Wall Street protests sparked about the economic inequality is, at its heart, all about gender. Start with the thousands of dollars in student loans that saddle the normal US college graduate. Woman "are paid unequally-- so they are going to have a harder time paying back that debt," Steinem, who is the 77-year-old feminist who helped start the woman's right movements with the publication of Ms. Magazine nearly 40 years ago, said in an interview at the Bloomberg News' New York bureau. "It's outrageous because they are kind of indentured when they graduate." Steinem's comment repeated a common lament among young woman in the Occupy movement, which began on Sept. 17 as a demonstration against the widening wealth gap and an economic system that protesters say favors the rich. According to the Project on Student Debt, the unemployment rate for college graduates aged 20-24 rose to 9.1 percent last year from 8.7 percent in 2009, which is the highest record for that demographic. Add all of that to the burdens of student loans, and the young Americans say that they don't stand much of a chance. "I have \$93,000 in debt and I don't make enough to pay it off," said Adah Gorton, 23, who is a graphic designer and graduate of Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, as she marched with protesters across the Brooklyn Bridge on November 17. "Have you ever had something hanging over your head day, 24 hours a day? That's what it's like." Graduates owned an average \$25,250 in 2010, estimates the Project on Student Debt, which is a nonprofit research organization in Oakland, California. Woman that are entering the workforce with that liability are at a disadvantage: They earned 81 cents for every dollar their male counterparts did, on average, in 2010, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Nan Terrie, who is a Florida native who was home-schooled and at 18 is in her second year of law school at Nova Southeastern University in Fort Lauderdale, said that she already owes \$10,000. "I'm here fighting for equal pay for equal work," said Terrie. "I'm tired of woman being the backbone of society." She was seated on a plastic chair, near a sign calling for the return of bankruptcy protection for student loans, in Lower Manhattan's Zuccotti Park, the birthplace and physical symbol of the movement where protestors camped for about two months until police evicted them on November 15. The Occupy Wall Street protests that began in New York spread to cities on four continents, including London, Sydney, Rome and Tokyo. The demonstrators refer to themselves as "the 99 percent," which is a reference to Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz, whose study showing the richest 1 percent control 40 percent of US wealth. Steinem said that the Occupy protests have inspired her, and that they have enjoyed more support than the US civil rights and anti-war movements in the 1960s that took longer to reach a broad audience. "It's much more immediately international," said Steinem, who participated in the earlier causes.

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