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EXCLUSIVE Women's History Spotlight: Jeannette Rankin

Director Kamala Lopez's film tells the story of the first woman elected to the House of Representatives, one who bridged the s liberties, anti-war and women's movements of 20th century America.

Throughout her life, feminist and pacifist Jeannette Rankin made history. In 1916, the people of Montana elected her to repre Congress, the first woman in the legislature. Rankin co-founded the American Civil Liberties Union, voted against U.S. enti War I and was the only Congress member to vote against the entering World War II. Rankin remained active until her dea 92, leading a group of women in a protest against the Vietnam War and staying connected to the women's movement.



Director Lopez on the set with Jeanmarie Simpson as Jeannette Rankin. Photo by Sarah Gochrach.

When actress, activist and director Kamala one-woman show about Rankin in 200 Woman" by peace activist and theater arti Simpson-she couldn't believe she'd nev Rankin. The story so moved Lopez that she to get it to a broader audience.

"She's an amazing, incredible role model," "Women couldn't vote and she got herse change that. That is such out of the box more girls knew about this instead of all about Paris Hilton, we'd be getting somewhe Lopez said one of the things that impress Rankin was her bravery in standing up f believed. She held on to her anti-war sta became extremely unpopular.

"Every other person in Congress voted to go Pearl Harbor—it was just reactive," Lopez sa to hide in a phone booth in the Capitol unti her out. Then there was a smear campaign

as being anti-Semitic after she had been lobbying to let Jewish refugees into the country. She was so brave. She didn't give what anybody thought of her. She knew in her bones what she thought was right. It's a lonely road and people don't especially when you're female. You're a battle ax or a difficult broad, and we get intimidated by that.

Lopez said another thing she admired about Rankin was that she didn't take no for an answer.

"I really related to that," Lopez said. "That's been my pattern my whole life. I just don't do it. I was a Hispanic actress wher doing that. I had to play whores and maids and gang members, but I did it. The theater department at Yale kicked me out ev because the chair hated me, but I kept going back. I just went around him. This one guy isn't going to stop me. And that's was. She was like, 'How are we going to skin the cat because the cat is going to get skinned"

Lopez used her determination and drive to make a 90-minute movie about Rankin, also called "A Single Woman," on an extr. budget, Lopez didn't have the \$90,000 a week it cost to rent a soundstage in Los Angeles, so she convinced Mikel Elliott, Quixote Studios, to let her use it for free. That gave her only four days to shoot the movie, which starts near the end of Rar goes backwards.

"He said, 'If you want to do it over Thanksgiving weekend, I'll only charge you for the person who has to stay there and turn the air conditioning," Lopez said. "That meant we had to do 85 scenes in four days. The hardest thing was aging t storyboarded out every frame and we tried to do them in one shot or if absolutely necessary, two."

Lopez got famous friends involved such as Martin Sheen, who narrates; Judd Nelson, who plays a Jewish journalist asking R. by Simpson, about her stance against World War II; and Patricia Arguette, who narrates a story about Native Americans and was very important to Rankin. Lopez also convinced singer Joni Mitchell to let Lopez use her songs "The Circle Game" and "V

Lopez started her production company, Heroica Films, to make movies about and for women, and she does a lot of work gangs and inner city schools. Jeannette Rankin's spirit and story speaks to these girls, Lopez said.

"These are young women from the ghetto, and you think they will be bored or make fun of it, but they love it," Lopez said. "I away. That's always been my mission with these girls—to show them they can do it and give them a path to do it."

The views expressed in this commentary are those of the author alone and do not represent WMC. WMC is a 501(c)(3) org does not endorse candidates.

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This entry was written by Emily Wilson, posted on March 29, 2010 at 8:28 am, filed under Entertainment, Exclusives, Exclusives A Women in Film. Bookmark the permalink. Follow any comments here with the RSS feed for this post. Trackbacks are closed can post a comment.

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1. Hilly mouss Making Women Visible And Powerful In The Media Posted March 29, 2010 at 2707 pm | Permalink What a wonderful story about not one, but two incredible women...



Posted March 29, 2010 at 4:28 pm | Permalink

Kamy Lopez is so very interesting. She is an Equality Activist and a grand storyteller. Her movie about Jeannette Rankin gives me girls will learn about this fantastic Congresswoman who voted against war.



Posted March 29, 2010 at 4:55 pm | Permalink

I was moved about reading about Lopez's days at Yale and the making of the film. Wow. this is really a story within a story. One be hearing about the major accomplishments of Kamala Lopez.

4. Gini Sikes

Posted March 29, 2010 at 6:13 pm | Permalink

This is an inspiring story on two fronts. Of course there's Jeanette Rankin — why the hell don't we know of her from high school? taught about other "firsts," but not the first woman elected to the House of Representaives? But I also love Kamela's verve The b having the studio over thanksgiving is wonderful or obstinately attending classes after the chair of the theater department has kic Great to read about two strong women.

Dr. Achola O. Pala

Posted March 30, 2010 at 12:15 am | Permalink

This is a a story of incredible foresight and courage. It reminds me of a story my mother told me about their struggles as feminisl they did not call themselves feminists)in the early 1950s in colonial Kenya. They wanted to get scholarships for girls so they coulc girls into school. Now I so wish we could have filmed it. May be we'll get a young woman film maker to try her hand at it. It still of cease to amaze me that women have always been fighting for their rights but, like Jeannette Rankin, their acts of courage were v eclipsed and kept from the the heroic stories of change makers of their times. The were also women of courage born in 1908 and their acts of rebellion and courage remain outside the history of the struggle for independence. These stories deserve to be told $\mathfrak c$



6. Sonia Fuentez

Posted April 2, 2010 at 3:12 pm | Permalink

This is ridiculous!

First of all, the play was NOT a "one woman show," it was a two-person show. Jeanmarie Simpson played Jeannette Rankin and I husband played Everyman (over 80 parts!).

Second, it was Jeanmarie who did all of the research and work for the play and who traveled with it for years and hundreds of pe And THIRD - Kamala was not "friends" with Martin Sheen OR Joni Mitchell. Both of those artists thank Frank Dorrel, very well-kno Angeles Peace Activist, who repeatedly contacted them about the project and THEN they thank Jeannette Rankin for her compelli

SHAME ON Kamala Lopez for trying to take the credit for someone else's life's work!

Posted August 18, 2010 at 8:06 pm | Permalink

Thank you for that, Sonia.

The way this has all played out is extremely disorienting. It is not as disturbing to me that Kamala and her entourage want to give credit as much as it is so karmic-ly hurtful to herself that she is trying to maintain an entirely dishonest posture, leaving out of the Frank Dorrel who organized and hosted three fundraisers for the film project. The peace and justice community was so ready to 6 project and would have given it the wide distributive juice it needed. But to disrespect Frank Dorrel and to take credit for a peace life's work is simply not supportable.

I will continue working to ensure Jeannette's legacy is re-membered in this reprehensible climate.

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