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Hugh Hefner: Rebel with a cause

AT 84 years-old, *Playboy* founder Hugh Hefner embodies the lifestyle of sexual freedom that his men's magazine has espoused since it was founded in 1953, featuring a nude centre-fold of Marilyn Monroe.

Yet, there is another side to the pajama-loving man known around the world by his nickname, Hef. Along with sexual freedom, he has championed civil rights, published stories challenging McCarthyism and the Vietnam War, and backed gay causes and the legalisation of marijuana.

New documentary film, 'Hugh Hefner: Playboy, Activist and Rebel,' debut in theatres on Friday offering audiences this other side of Hefner. He sat down with Reuters in the Playboy mansion to talk about the film, today's political conservatism and how he wants to be remembered.

Q: Do you feel like this particular part of your life, the social activism, had been lost in the focus on your lifestyle?

A: No, I don't think it was lost. I think Ray Bradbury said it very well some time ago when he was talking about the magazine and he said, 'People don't see the forest because of the T's'. In other words, the lifestyle and the pretty girls, the centre-folds, etc. They simply are what gets the attention.

Q: The documentary addresses the irony of the two sides of you: the carefree life vs. the serious political activist. Where is the common ground between the two?

A: Aren't they exactly the same? In other words, aren't the sexual revolution and racial emancipation the same thing? I just think these are areas of our free society that have not been truly free and properly dealt with.

Q: A lot of people would say 'no,' and that your brand of sexual freedom is really just the objectifying of women.

A: Anybody who thinks we objectify women in a negative sense has a political agenda of their own. It comes right out of our Puritan heritage. The simple truth of the matter is we are two different sexes. We are attracted to one another. That is the basis of civilisation. That is what makes the world go around. The notion of the denying the fact that women, in a positive sense, are objects of sexual desire is to simply not deal with reality.

Q: What's the difference between young men in 1953 when the magazine began and young men today?

A: They were a little more sophisticated, then. They read more. The changing technology has changed reading habits. It's not the same getting information from the Internet. Is there a dumbing down of America? Yes, of course. There are a great many virtues to the Internet, but there's also a downside.

Q: You and *Playboy* helped start the sexual revolution, which liberalised our culture. Absent *Playboy*, would something or someone else have come along

to make the same change?

A: I think so. It's like any other invention or social change, etc. I think the major thing that liberated women was the birth control pill. That separated procreation from sex.

Q: In our culture today, we seem more liberal with laws supporting gay marriage and legal marijuana in some states. Yet, at the same time, the political landscape seems more conservative following the Reagan and Bush administrations. What are we, more conservative or liberal?

A: In the broadest sense, we are much more liberal. But there was a backlash to that more permissive society. In other words, the sexual revolution hit full-on in the middle 60s and throughout the 70s, and then there was a backlash in the 1980s, politically, the religious right helped get Reagan in the White House. AIDS arrived and there was a political correctness that set in, that also influenced sexuality.

Q: Then what is the disconnect today between politicians who are conservative and what seems to be going on among Americans in a more liberal society?

A: The problems we have today with conservatism don't have much to do with laws. When I was growing up, indeed, most sex behaviour outside marriage was illegal. Nice, middle-class moral kids could not live together before they got married in the 1950s. So in that sense we are

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obviously much more liberal. The conservatism comes in, in other kinds of ways. There is political correctness ... I think a part of the feminist movement also influenced the rest of society about the notion that, somehow or other, images of nudity and sexuality were somehow exploitative (and) created a negative attitude toward things that otherwise we thought were commonplace or beautiful.

Q: You've met many people over the years, from celebrities to sports stars and dignitaries. Many of them here in the Mansion. Who hasn't been here who you'd like?

A: (laughs) I have no idea. Obama would certainly be welcome, but I don't think about that.

Q: In the documentary, there are scenes of you and Sammy Davis, Jr. What would Sammy have said about Obama.

A: Probably the same thing I am saying, which is that I wish he would get on with it. We all had high hopes.

Q: Okay, a little advice for men like me. I'm 48. What's better for your sex life, Viagra or three girlfriends at the same time?

A: Three girlfriends (laughs). Because at 48, you don't need Viagra. Although with three girlfriends, it helps.

Q: Lastly, the title of the documentary is 'Hugh Hefner, Playboy, Activist and Rebel'.

That's one way to remember you, but how would you like to be remembered?

A: I would like to be remembered as somebody who had some positive impact on the changing of the social-sexual values of my time.

I'm pretty secure in that, I think.-
Reuters



PLAYBOY magazine founder Hugh Hefner poses for a portrait at his Playboy mansion in Los Angeles, California.