

coverstory
BY JAY BOBBIN



Tracey Ullman stars in "Mrs. America," premiering Wednesday on FX on Hulu.

'Mrs. America' recalls the roots of the feminist movement

Such names as Gloria Steinem, Betty Friedan and Phyllis Schlafly have very particular places in U.S. social history.

Those women played various roles in regard to the Equal Rights Amendment, which the famously conservative Schlafly opposed while making a bid for a House of Representatives seat as the 1970s began. She had a major opponent in author and activist Friedan, one of the principal feminists of the era – and that battleground is dramatized in "Mrs. America," which debuts by streaming the first three of its nine episodes Wednesday, April 15, on FX on Hulu.

Also an executive producer of the project, Oscar winner Cate Blanchett stars as Schlafly, with Emmy recipient Tracey Ullman and Rose Byrne respectively playing Friedan and Steinem. With Emmy winner Margo Martindale ("The Americans") and Uzo Aduba ("Orange Is the New Black") as politicians Bella Abzug and Shirley Chisholm, the cast of "Mrs. America" also includes Sarah Paulson, Elizabeth Banks, Jeanne Tripplehorn, Melanie Lynskey, Ari Graynor and John Slattery ("Mad Men").

"Phyllis herself didn't initially have an issue with the Equal Rights Amendment," Blanchett maintains. "She thought it was a piece of fairly innocuous political business, and her primary focus was defense. That was her passion; that was her area of research and her focus. It wasn't really until – as

described in our series – her friend Alice (played by Paulson) turned her on to what were called 'the dangers of the ERA' that meant that women could be drafted. I think it was through the concept of its impact it would have, from her perspective, on the military that she got involved."

As the piece's Friedan, Ullman reports that "it was really hard to get this role. I did really want to be a part of this. I started as a dramatic actress in theater and (since), of course, I have done lots of comedy shows – but I've always portrayed real people, real heart. I like the poignancy and reality and sadness of people, and I've been in America for 30 years. I know people like Betty Friedan. It struck me how incredible it was to write a book like (Friedan's) 'The Feminine Mystique' in 1963."

The makers of "Mrs. America" also include veteran studio executive Stacey Sher and "Captain Marvel" filmmaking partners Anna Boden and Ryan Fleck. The latter duo directed the limited series' first two episodes, and Boden reasons, "I don't think any of the actors in the cast did an impersonation. They did a lot of research, and they're all like the most studious actors I've ever worked with. They put us to shame ... in terms of how they tried to embody the characters and their complexities."

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