

A History of the United States, 2nd Ed., Gerald J. Goodwin, Richard N. Current, and Paula A. Franklin, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1985. [13-]
[836-838]

Feminism Revived

American women in general could hardly be called a minority, since 51 percent of the population was female. Yet they suffered inequities comparable to those imposed upon members of minority groups, and women of these groups bore a double burden of discrimination. Though more and more job opportunities were opening up, women were paid much less than men, even for comparable or identical work. Women still had far fewer chances than men for professional or managerial careers. In the mid-1960s women constituted only 7 percent of the nation's physicians and less than 4 percent of its lawyers. Women made up a smaller proportion of college students than they had in the 1920s. Those with higher education were especially resentful of the discrimination that women confronted in practically every aspect of life.

Educated women of the middle class, as had been the case in earlier feminist crusades, took the lead in the new "women's liberation" movement of the 1960s. One of the most influential leaders was Betty Friedan. In *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) she denounced the American home as a "comfortable concentration camp" and called upon its inmates to free themselves. (Source F, p. 850.) She helped to found, in 1966, the most inclusive and effective of the new women's rights organizations -- the National Organization for Women (NOW). "There is no civil rights movement to speak for women, as there has been for Negroes and other victims of discrimination," the founders of NOW declared. Thus they revealed that they, too -- like American Indians -- had been inspired, at least in part, by the example of the blacks.

The organization demanded an Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the Constitution. This read: "Equality of rights under the law shall not be abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex." Congress in 1972 approved the amendment and sent it to the states for ratification. NOW also insisted upon strict enforcement of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which prohibited discrimination in employment on the basis of sex as well as race. Soon "men wanted" and "women wanted" began to disappear from classified ads. Other NOW demands included maternity leave for working women, public child-care centers to enable mothers to compete more freely for jobs, absolute equality of educational opportunities at all levels, and the "right of women to control their own reproductive lives" through contraception and abortion. NOW disclaimed any enmity toward men and advocated a "self-respecting partnership" with them. Many liberationists, however, resisted "male chauvinism" and protested their treatment as mere "sex objects."

Opponents of abortion, including both Catholic and Protestant church groups, insisted that abortion was a form of murder. While a few states liberalized their laws to permit the termination of pregnancy under a wide range of conditions, most retained laws that made abortion difficult if not impossible, except through illegal and often dangerous procedures. In 1973 the Supreme Court struck down those state laws that prohibited abortion during the first three months of pregnancy.

Later the Court held that, under existing federal laws, the government was not obligated to pay for abortions for women on welfare. The result, critics contended, was to make abortion a luxury of the well-to-do; it could not be afforded by those least able to support large families. "Right-to-life" advocates not only opposed federal payments for abortion but also demanded an antiabortion constitutional amendment. In 1977 Congress agreed to make federal money available in certain cases, such as those involving rape, incest, or a childbirth that would endanger the life of the mother.

New state and federal laws prohibited various kinds of discrimination against women. The Equal Credit Opportunity Act of 1974, for example, banned sex bias in the granting of credit. But the Equal Rights Amendment ran into a highly emotional "Stop

ERA" campaign, which women also led. The opponents argued that the amendment would constitutionalize abortion and homosexual marriage and would undercut already existing protective laws. ERA advocates denied that it had anything to do with either abortion or lesbianism, and indeed it had the support of many who disliked both. Proponents maintained that the amendment was absolutely necessary to end the sex discrimination that piecemeal laws had not eradicated from most phases of American life.

The ERA forces won public opinion to their side. A 1976 poll showed that 55 percent of the women (and 59 percent of the men) favored ERA. But groups opposed to the amendment managed to mobilize many state legislators, and the amendment was defeated in 1982. It was soon reintroduced in Congress, however, and promised to be a continuing issue in American society.

(photo) Figure 28.5 New York Firefighters. The feminist movement as revived in the 1960s opened up many fields previously restricted to men, among them construction, police work, and mining. (The recruit shown here was in the first New York City firefighters' class to include women.) The percentage of women also increased significantly in such professions as law, medicine, politics, and engineering. After two decades of activism, however, women's earnings overall were only about 60 percent of men's, chiefly because most women continued to work in low-paying fields. (A. Tannenbaum/Sygma)

[850-853]

SOURCE F

To many Americans the women's movement of the sixties seemed to come out of nowhere. In fact, its history ran back through the campaign for woman suffrage to the feminist movement of the early nineteenth century. One of the central figures of the reborn movement was Betty Friedan. Having graduated from Smith College in 1942, she was the mother of three children and a suburbanite when she began to speak out on the role of women in American life. Her book, *The Feminine Mystique*, struck a responsive chord among many American women when it was published in 1963. In these selections from it, Friedan explains "The Problem That Has No Name," what created it, and what can be done about it.

As you read, keep these points in mind:

- * What is "the problem that has no name"?
- * What is the "feminine mystique" and how does it affect women?
- * How can women solve the problem of identity?

A New image for Women

The problem lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States. Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night -- she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question -- "Is this all?"...

The suburban housewife -- she was the dream image of the young American women and the envy, it was said, of women all over the world. The American housewife -- freed by science and labor -- saving appliances from the drudgery, the dangers of childbirth and the illnesses of her grandmother. She was healthy, beautiful, educated, concerned only about her husband, her children, her home. She had found true feminine fulfillment. As a housewife and mother, she was respected as a full and equal partner to man in his world. She was free to choose automobiles, clothes, appliances, supermarkets; she had everything that women ever dreamed of.

In the fifteen years after World War II, this mystique of feminine fulfillment became the cherished and self-perpetuating core of contemporary American culture. Millions of

women lived their lives in the image of those pretty pictures of the American suburban housewife, kissing their husbands goodbye in front of the picture window, depositing their stationwagonsful of children at school, and smiling as they ran the new electric waxer over the spotless kitchen floor....

[Friedan then writes of what she learns by reading through a typical woman's magazine of the time -- McCall's for July 1960.] The image of woman that emerges from this big, pretty magazine is young and frivolous, almost childlike; fluffy and feminine; passive; gaily content in a world of bedroom and kitchen, sex, babies, and home. The magazine surely does not leave out sex; the only passion, the only pursuit, the only goal a woman is permitted is the pursuit of a man. It is crammed full of food, clothing, cosmetics, furniture, and the physical bodies of young women, but where is the world of thought and ideas, the life of the mind and spirit? In the magazine image, women do no work except housework and work to keep their bodies beautiful and to get and keep a man.

This was the image of the American woman in the year Castro led a revolution in Cuba and men were trained to travel into outer space; the year that the African continent brought forth new nations, and a plane whose speed is greater than the speed of sound broke up a Summit Conference; the year artists picketed a great museum in protest against the hegemony of abstract art; physicists explored the concept of anti-matter; astronomers, because of new radio telescopes, had to alter their concepts of the expanding universe; biologists made a breakthrough in the fundamental chemistry of life; and Negro youth in Southern schools forced the United States, for the first time since the Civil War, to face a moment of democratic truth. But this magazine, published for over 5,000,000 American women, almost all of whom have been through high school and nearly half to college, contained almost no mention of the world beyond the home. In the second half of the twentieth century in America, woman's world was confined to her own body and beauty, the charming of man, the bearing of babies, and the physical care and serving of husband, children, and home. And this was no anomaly of a single issue of a single women's magazine....

The feminine mystique says that the highest value and the only commitment for women is the fulfillment of their own femininity. It says that the great mistake of Western culture, through most of its history, has been the undervaluation of this femininity. It says this femininity is so mysterious and intuitive and close to the creation and origin of life that man-made science may never be able to understand it. But however special and different, it is in no way inferior to the nature of man; it may even in certain respects be superior. The mistake, says the mystique, the root of women's troubles in the past is that women envied men, women tried to be like men, instead of accepting their own nature, which can find fulfillment only in sexual passivity, male domination, and nurturing maternal love....

It is my thesis that the core of the problem for women today is not sexual but a problem of identity -- a stunting or evasion of growth that is perpetuated by the feminine mystique. It is my thesis that as the Victorian culture did not permit women to accept or gratify their basic sexual needs, our culture does not permit women to accept or gratify their basic need to grow and fulfill their potentialities as human beings, a need which is not solely defined by their sexual role....

It would be quite wrong for me to offer any woman easy how-to answers to this problem. There are no easy answers, in America today; it is difficult, painful, and takes perhaps a long time for each woman to find her own answer. First, she must unequivocally say "no" to the housewife image. This does not mean, of course, that she must divorce her husband, abandon her children, give up her home. She does not have to choose between marriage and career; that was the mistaken choice of the feminine mystique. In actual fact, it is not as difficult as the feminine mystique implies, to combine marriage and motherhood and even the kind of lifelong personal purpose that

once was called "career." It merely takes a new life plan -- in terms of one's whole life as a woman.

The first step in that plan is to see housework for what it is -- not a career, but something that must be done as quickly and efficiently as possible....

The second step, and perhaps the most difficult for the products of sexdirected education, is to see marriage as it really is, brushing aside the veil of over-glorification imposed by the feminine mystique. Many women I talked to felt strangely discontented with their husbands, continually irritated with their children, when they saw marriage and motherhood as the final fulfillment of their lives. But when they began to use their various abilities with a purpose of their own in society, they not only spoke of a new feeling of "aliveness" or "completeness" in themselves, but of a new, though hard to define, difference in the way they felt about their husbands and children....

The only way for a woman, as for a man, to find herself, to know herself as a person, is by creative work of her own. There is no other way. But a job, any job, is not the answer -- in fact, it can be part of the trap....

If a job is to be the way out of the trap for a woman, it must be a job that she can take seriously as part of a life plan, work in which she can grow as part of society.

(Selection reprinted from *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan, pp. 15, 18, 36, 43-44, 77, 342, 344-345, with the permission of W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. Copyright 1974, 1963 by Betty Friedan.)