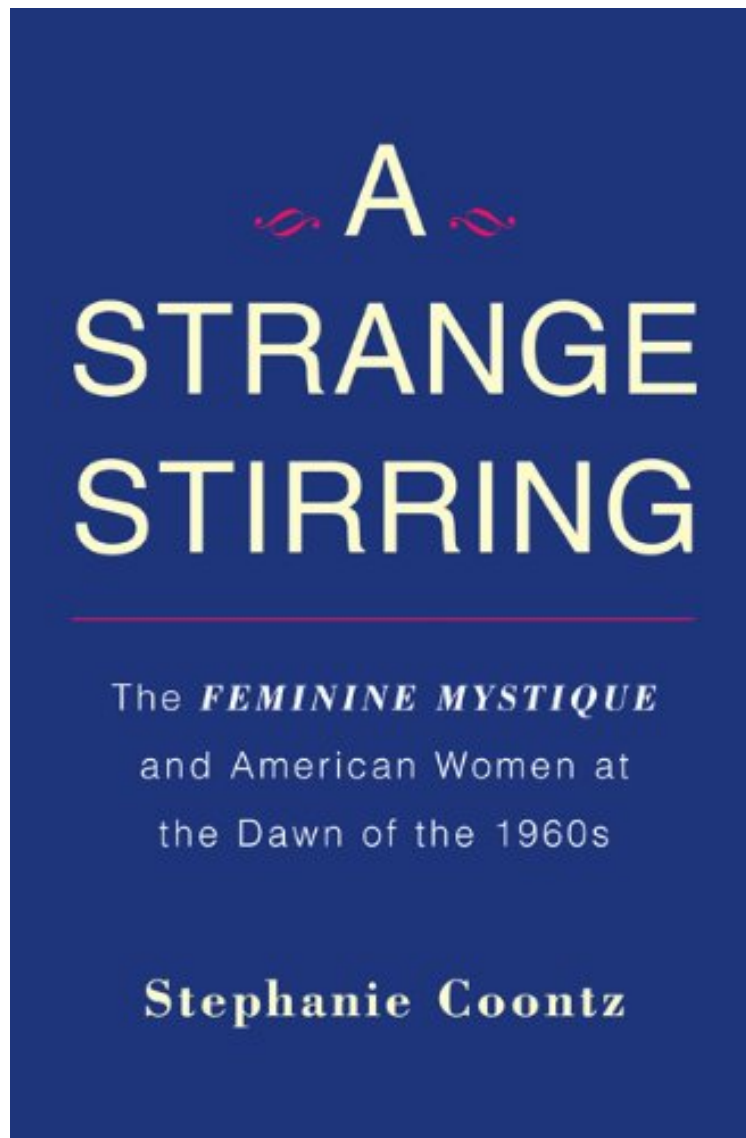


[Pdf free] A Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s

# A Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s

*Stephanie Coontz*

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**Stephanie Coontz : A Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. A Glimpse into Our Past - and our FutureBy JorWhen a book is

written at the perfect time, it exceeds the value of mere words on paper. Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* did just that, as it helped women to realize that their potential contributions to humanity were not limited by the warped social climate of their day. Stephanie Coontz has put all of this into perspective for us in an enjoyable read. "A Strange Stirring" is not only a brief history of feminism in America, it's a glimpse into what real life was like for the women whose worlds were changed by Friedan's book. If you're a baby boomer like me, you can relate to many of the personal stories shared in Ms. Coontz's book. If you're a young woman, you owe it to yourself and to your own mother, daughters and granddaughters to read it. While, yes, it is written in a somewhat academic format, Ms. Coontz's book is more than a historical narrative. She encourages all of us to step back and take a look at how life options have evolved for women in this country, on all levels. It provokes deep reflection on the value of each woman, each human being, in today's changing world.

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. A new book, published in 2011, and written by Stephanie Coontz, is called *A Strange Stirring*. The sub title is: *The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the dawn of the 1960s*. That book and recent statements on television by feminists Gloria Steinem and Marlo Thomas sent me back to re-read my copy of *The Feminine Mystique*, a book written in 1963 by Betty Friedan, one of the founding members of the National Women's Political Caucus. That mesmerizing book, about the problem that had no name, profoundly affected me, both intellectually and emotionally, when I first read it in 1969. In contrast, the book was slightly boring and dated when I re-read it this year, possibly because social changes have made the book seem somewhat obsolete.

**NOT JUST A DIAPER CHANGER?** The problem that had no name was the social expectation that women would be quiet, passive, and submissive. They were supposed to live their lives through the accomplishments of their husbands and children. A woman, for example, was known as Mrs. (plus husband's name) and was expected to darn socks, produce tasty casseroles, be physically attractive and available to serve her husband and children. Friedan exposed this unbridled sexism for what it was and let women know that they were not alone. Society had denigrated all of them, she said, and wasted their intellectual and creative capabilities. Cartoonists got the message across even more effectively. I remember seeing a cartoon which showed a man raising his pant leg to show his knee. The caption said, Hire him. He's got great legs. Some women held jobs outside the home because their families needed the money, mainly in low paying, low status jobs. Picture this scene: After working a double shift, a woman could go home to a husband sitting in a recliner waiting for her to cook dinner. If she objected, his question was: Don't you want to be a wife? What's wrong with you anyway? It's your duty. However, Friedan did not criticize husbands directly for their wives' unhappiness. Instead, she blamed the social expectation which limited women to paralyzing roles, then asked these women to deny what they were feeling.

**STATES HEAD AND MASTER LAW** Because of this social expectation and Oklahoma's laws, I was ready to embrace *The Feminine Mystique* when I first read it in 1969. For example, in the late 1960s my husband and I lived on a farm south of Shawnee and I taught English at nearby Oklahoma Baptist University. That's when I learned from the League of Women Voters that there were some laws on the books that seriously affected women in my situation---that is, women working with their husbands in small businesses and in farming operations. One of the laws said that the husband is head of the family. He would choose the place and the mode of residence and the wife would conform. Another law said that Oklahoma was a separate property state as opposed to a community property state. In a community property state, the wife has the right to half of the property acquired during marriage. But in a separate property state, the property belongs to the person who made the money to buy it. And since the husband was the head of the household, the automatic assumption was that the husband owned the property. So I got to thinking, If I died first, this property would belong to my husband free and clear with no questions asked. If he died first, I would have to prove that I had invested money or money's worth to own my very own property. So we got a will, and it's a good thing we did because a few years later, he died of cancer; and I would have been in a real mess without that will because of the laws on the Oklahoma books. About that time, the Equal Rights Amendment was beginning to come up before the Oklahoma Legislature, so I went to the Capitol to lobby for ERAs passage. It didn't pass, but that was the beginning of my political involvement; and some years later, I ended up as a member of the Legislature myself. That's when Representative Freddie Williams and I got that head of the household law off the books! So it was goodbye to the feminine mystique in my life, with appreciation for the awareness that it had brought. Today the media regularly portrays women as capable, gutsy, and smart. And, who knows, our next president might just be Hillary Rodham Clinton.

13 of 13 people found the following review helpful. *A Strange Stirring* By Shanti Miles-Kelley As a wife/mother of the 50's and 60's, this book really hits the mark! I found myself on so many pages, including my insistence on no monetary support when I divorced (after 20 years marriage) as it was "his" money!. I was too busy in the early 70's getting my master's degree to really soak in Betty Friedan's book, so Stephanie's book has really increased my understanding of that all-too-familiar "Strange Stirring" I had felt. It is beautifully written, and has increased my understanding of my perhaps "deviant" behaviors of that time. I am encouraging my daughters (now in their early 50's) to also read the book. Thank you so much.

In 1963, Betty Friedan unleashed a storm of controversy with her bestselling book, *The Feminine Mystique*. Hundreds of women wrote to her to say that the book had transformed, even saved, their lives. Nearly half a century later, many

women still recall where they were when they first read it. In *A Strange Stirring*, historian Stephanie Coontz examines the dawn of the 1960s, when the sexual revolution had barely begun, newspapers advertised for perky, attractive gal typists, but married women were told to stay home, and husbands controlled almost every aspect of family life. Based on exhaustive research and interviews, and challenging both conservative and liberal myths about Friedan, *A Strange Stirring* brilliantly illuminates how a generation of women came to realize that their dissatisfaction with domestic life didn't reflect their personal weakness but rather a social and political injustice.

From *Booklist*: Nearly 50 years after Betty Friedan transformed the lives of American housewives, Coontz (*Marriage, a History*, 2005) offers a biography of Friedan's seminal book, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). Coupling meticulous research with first-person interviews, Coontz challenges a number of Friedan's assumptions and exaggerations while also revisiting the climate in which the work appeared and giving voice to women for whom *The Feminine Mystique* was nothing short of a lifesaver. Though critical of the work on a number of fronts, including its omission of working-class and minority women, Coontz lauds other aspects of *The Feminine Mystique*, such as its condemnation of mainstream psychiatry, which promoted the notion that women had no need to search for meaning in their lives beyond their roles as wives and mothers. As women continue to struggle with the effort to balance life and work, Coontz argues that *The Feminine Mystique* remains as relevant today as it when it first appeared. In tracing the roots of current discontents, which Coontz dubs the *Supermom Mystique*, her book is no less required reading than Friedan's trailblazer. --Patty Wetli Kirkus's A sharp revisiting of the generation that was floored by Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), and how the book is still relevant today. A valuable education for women and men. Daniel Horowitz, author of *Betty Friedan and the Making of The Feminine Mystique*