

[FREE] The Feminine Mystique

The Feminine Mystique

Betty Friedan

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Betty
Friedan The
Feminine
Mystique

"Changed the world so comprehensively that it's hard to remember how much change was called for." —NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW

With an Introduction by

Anna Quindlen
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Betty Friedan : The Feminine Mystique before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Feminine Mystique:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. good then, completely outdated nonsense nowBy SF WriterYes, this was a groundbreaking work at the time, but I honestly don't understand how anyone can be reading it -- and rating it -- seriously these days, except as a purely nostalgic, obscenely outdated work. Friedan's assertions about the American housewife were definitely rooted in some real truths about society at the time, particularly the fact that at the end of World War II conquering the household domain became the holy grail for most women, many of whom abandoned their true selves -- their true life callings -- for the sake of keeping a perfect house and raising perfect children. I also think Friedan's claim that females "took over" their family's domestic lives to such an extent that men became pieces of furniture in their own homes -- an infliction that still exists today in many American households, to the detriment of

a couple's sex and intimacy. However, I feel that many of Friedan's other points should be viewed as condescending, offensive and completely inaccurate in the context of the 21st century. First of all, women are supposed to have choices -- the point of the feminist movement, no? -- and women are supposed to support one another; but in Friedan's view the choice to stay home is never quite the right one. Second, her assertions that overprotective women produce gay sons is over-the-top ridiculous -- never mind the fact that she laments a perceived surge in homosexuality as some sort of epidemic of the time. This book is pure outdated drivel, something we should be thankful was released into the world at the time, but should now be placed in a museum and looked upon wistfully, as a curious relic of an exciting yet still misguided period in feminine history.

4 of 5 people found the following review helpful. **THE BOOK THAT STARTED THE MODERN FEMINIST REVOLUTION** By Steven H Propp Betty Friedan (1921-2006) was an American writer, activist, and feminist, who became one of the leading figures of the feminist movement with the publication of this book. She was founder of, and first president of the National Organization for Women (NOW). She also wrote *Fountain of Age*, *Life So Far: A Memoir*, *It Changed My Life: Writings on the Women's Movement*, and *Beyond Gender: The New Politics of Work and Family*. [NOTE: page numbers below refer to the 420-page 1975 Dell paperback edition.] She wrote in the Preface to this 1963 book, Gradually I came to realize that something is very wrong with the way American women are trying to live their lives today. I sensed it first as a question mark in my own life, as a wife and mother of three children almost in spite of myself. It was this personal question mark that led me, in 1957, to spend a great deal of time doing an extensive questionnaire of my college classmates, fifteen years after our graduation from Smith. The answers given by 200 women made me realize that what was wrong could not be related to education. There was a strange discrepancy between the reality of our lives as women and the image to which we were trying to conform, the image that I came to call the feminine mystique. I wondered if other women faced this schizophrenic split. And so I began to hunt down the origins of the feminine mystique, and its effect on women who lived by it, or grew up under it. But the puzzle did not begin to fit together until I interviewed eighty women at certain crucial points in their life cycle. These women, some tortured, some serene, gave me the final clues, and the most damning indictment of the feminine mystique. She begins the first chapter [The Problem That Has No Name] with the statement, 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 housewife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Boy Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night---she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question, Is this all? (Pg. 11) She begins the third chapter with the statement, I discovered a strange thing, interviewing women of my own generation over the past ten years. When we were growing up, many of us could not see ourselves beyond the age of twenty-one. We had no image of our own future, of ourselves as women. (Pg. 62) Later, she adds, What if the terror a girl faces at twenty-one, when she must decide who she will be, is simply the terror of growing up as women were not permitted to grow before?... What if those who choose the path of feminine adjustment are simply refusing to face the question of their own identity? Mine was the first college generation to run head-on into the new mystique of feminine fulfillment. There was a sense that we would be New Women. Forty percent of my college class at Smith had career plans. But I remember how some of the seniors, suffering the pangs of that bleak fear of the future, envied the few who escaped it by getting married right away. (Pg. 68-69) She argues, Powerful forces in this nation must be served by those pretty domestic pictures that stare at us everywhere, forbidding a woman to use her own abilities in the world. The preservation of the feminine mystique could have implications that are not sexual at all. America depends rather heavily on women's passive dependence, their femininity. Femininity makes American women a target and a victim of the sexual sell. (Pg. 196) She asserts, The feminists fought for and won the rights to new, fully human identity for women. But how very few of their daughters and granddaughters have chosen to use their education and their abilities for any large creative purpose, for responsible work in society? How many of them have been deceived into clinging to the outgrown, childlike femininity of Occupation: housewife? If women do not put forth, finally, the effort to become all that they have in them to become, they will forfeit their own humanity. A woman today who has no goal, no purpose, no ambition patterning her days into the future is committing a kind of suicide. Only by such a personal commitment to the future can American women break out of the housewife trap and truly find fulfillment as wives and mothers---by fulfilling their own unique possibilities as separate human beings. (Pg. 324-325) In a rather more controversial section, she suggests, there is an uncanny, uncomfortable insight into why a woman can so easily lose her sense of self as a housewife in certain psychological observations made on the behavior of prisoners in Nazi concentration camps. Those who adjusted to the conditions of the camps surrendered their human identity and went almost indifferently to their deaths. Strangely enough, the conditions which destroyed the human identity of so many prisoners were conditions similar to those which destroy the identity of the American housewife. (Pg. 294) She continues, is her house in reality a comfortable concentration camp? Have not women who live in the image of the feminine mystique trapped themselves within the narrow walls of their homes? They have learned to adjust to their biological role. (Pg. 296) She concludes this chapter, The suburban house is not a German concentration camp, nor are American housewives on their way to the gas chamber. But they are in a trap, and to escape they must finally exercise their human freedom, and

recapture their sense of self. They must refuse to be nameless, depersonalized, manipulated, and live their own lives again according to a self-chosen purpose. They must begin to grow. (Pg. 298)She concludes, when women as well as men emerge from biological living to realize their human selves, those leftover halves of life may become their years of greatest fulfillment. Then the split in the image will be healed, and daughters will not face that humping-off point at twenty-one or forty-one. When their mothers fulfillment makes girls sure they want to be women, they will not have to beat themselves down to be feminine; they can stretch and stretch until their own efforts will tell them who they are. They will not need the regard or boy or man to feel alive. And when women do not need to live through their husbands and children, men will not fear the love and strength of women, nor need anothers weakness to prove their own masculinity. They can finally see each other as they are. And this may be the next step in human evolution. Who knows what women can be when they are finally free to become themselves? Who knows what womens intelligence will contribute when it can be nourished without denying love? Who knows of the possibilities of love when men and women share not only children, home, and garden, not only the fulfillment of their biological roles, but the responsibilities and passions of the work that creates the human future and the full human knowledge of who they are? It has barely begun, the search of women for themselves. But the time is at hand when the voice of the feminine mystique can no longer drown out the inner voice that is driving women on to become complete. (Pg. 363-364)Certainly, one can criticize Friedans book as being too culture-specific (i.e., upper-class white ivy league college-educated women); but everyone must appreciate that hers was a strong voice giving a name to a definite problem--- that has, of course, been much more exhaustively defined in the subsequent womens movement. (Friedan herself has greatly broadened her scope in her subsequent books, it should be noted.) Although some parts of the book may seem too genteel in these Third Wave and postfeminist days, other parts still blaze with the fiery truth they originally articulated. This book remains absolute must reading for anyone studying the womens movement, or the position of women in society.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Excellent book to read for upper division college courses where ...By E. HowardWhat a well argued position. Clarifies the feminist movement - what it is; what it is not. Covers Economics, Advertising, Sociology, Anthropology, Psychology, and History and reaches back to late 1800's and brings us forward to 1960's. I am not sure all her sources and all her interpretations are exactly on target, but KUDO's for being so thoughtful with sources and thoughtful with interpretations. Her initial survey which kicked of her effort and her knowledge of advertising and women's magazines is a solid basis for her arguments as explained in the initial chapters. Excellent book to read for upper division college courses where discussions are key; for book groups; for women of all ages who want to explore the journey of women in our culture last ~150 years. Bottom Line: Women should be supported to achieve their full potential in our society whether that is motherhood, career, wife, philanthropist, etc. Not all women are destined and optimized by being a wife, a mother, a secondary and support to their husband.

The book that changed the consciousness of a countryand the world. Landmark, groundbreaking, classicthese adjectives barely describe the earthshaking and long-lasting effects of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*. This is the book that defined "the problem that has no name," that launched the Second Wave of the feminist movement, and has been awakening women and men with its insights into social relations, which still remain fresh, ever since. A national bestseller, with over 1 million copies sold.

[A] bridge between conservative and radical elements in feminism, an ardent advocate of harmony and human values. - Marilyn French, *Esquire*The book that pulled the trigger on history. - Alvin Toffler, author of *Future Shock*One of those rare books we are endowed with only once in several decades. - Amitai Etzioni, author of *The Spirit of Community: The Reinvention of American Society*[*The Feminine Mystique*] now feels both revolutionary and utterly contemporary. . . . Four decades later, millions of individual transformations later, there is still so much to learn from this book. . . . Those who think of it as solely a feminist manifesto ought to revisit its pages to get a sense of the magnitude of the research and reporting Friedan undertook. - Anna QuindlenAbout the AuthorBetty Friedan (19212006), a transformational leader of the womens movement, founded the National Organization for Women (NOW) and authored many works, including *The Second Stage*, *The Fountain of Age*, and *Life So Far*.Anna Quindlen is an award-winning columnist and novelist. She left journalism in 1995 to write fiction full time and has published three bestsellers. She lives in New York City.