

old problems that have long been taken for granted among women: menstrual difficulties, sexual frigidity, promiscuity, pregnancy fears, childbirth depression, the high incidence of emotional breakdown and suicide among women in their twenties and thirties, the menopause crisis, the so-called passivity and immaturity of American men, the discrepancy between women's tested intellectual abilities in childhood and their adult achievement, the changing incidence of adult sexual orgasm in American women, and persistent problems in psychotherapy and in women's education.

If I am right, the problem that has no name stirring in the minds of so many American women today is not a matter of loss of femininity or too much education, or the demands of domesticity. It is far more important than anyone recognizes. It is the key to these other new and old problems which have been torturing women and their husbands and children, and puzzling their doctors and educators for years. It may well be the key to our future as a nation and a culture. We can no longer ignore that voice within women that says: "I want something more than my husband and my children and my home."

Betty Friedan: Feminist Icon and Founder of the National Organization for Women

| Manon Parry, MA, MSc

IN 1963, BETTY FRIEDAN (1921–2006) published *The Feminine Mystique*, a founding text of modern feminism that is considered one of the most influential books of the twentieth century.¹ She was born Bettye Goldstein in Peoria, Illinois, on February 4, 1921. Her father, Harry Goldstein, emigrated from Russia in the 1880s, and built a successful jewelry business in the United States. His wife, Miriam Horwitz, the daughter of Hungarian Jewish immigrants, had been prevented from attending Smith College by her parents. Miriam supported her daughter's education, and Bettye graduated summa cum laude from Smith College in 1942. The following year, she enrolled in a research fellowship in psychology at the University of California, Berkeley. From 1944, she worked as a journalist in Manhattan, writing for the Federated Press and the United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers of America under the name Betty Goldstein. She married Carl Friedman (later Friedan) in 1947, and the couple had 3 children before their divorce in 1969.²

Friedan was part of a broad movement of union supporters who campaigned against racism and supported women's rights during the 1940s and 1950s.³ She published numerous articles on women's issues while writing for *UE News*, including "UE Fights for Women Workers," a

pamphlet about discrimination and the double burden of racism and sexism faced by Black women. In 1950, while she was pregnant with her second child, she lost her job because of cutbacks at the paper and began working from home as a freelance writer for women's magazines. She found the work unrewarding and began to consider alternative projects. In 1957, Friedan attended the fifteenth reunion of her Smith College class, and asked her peers to complete a survey about their lives since graduation. She was unsettled by the degree of dissatisfaction they reported and began working on an article about women's experiences of giving up work or further education for motherhood. After rejection by several magazines, she secured a book advance and began the 5-year task of developing *The Feminine Mystique*, excerpted here.⁴

Drawing on her previous training in psychology, as well as history, economics, and sociology, Friedan documented the independence enjoyed by women in the 1920s and 1930s and noted how the 1950s had marked a significant shift away from such self-determination. She described the unhappiness of suburban "housewives," who felt unrewarded by the tasks of their daily lives and guilty for not feeling more fulfilled. While other writers complained that higher education

undermined women's abilities to undertake their traditional roles as wives and mothers, she argued instead that women were unfairly confined by the expectation that they should stay at home and focus all of their energies on family life. Friedan described the dissatisfaction they endured as "the problem with no name," and wrote of its terrible toll on the mental health of American women. Thousands of women recognized themselves in the pages of her study and were inspired to join the growing movement for women's rights.

In 1966, Friedan cofounded the National Organization for Women (NOW) to campaign for equality. In 1969 she helped launch the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws, later named NARAL Pro-Choice America. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s she was an outspoken advocate for women and a leading figure of the feminist movement. She served on the faculty of the University of Southern California, Queens College, Yale University, Columbia University, and Cornell University and published various follow-ups to her groundbreaking book including *It Changed My Life: Writings on the Women's Movement* in 1976 and *Beyond Gender: The New Politics of Family and Work* in 1998. Friedan served as a delegate to the United Nation's Decade for Women conferences in Mexico

City in 1975, in Copenhagen in 1980, and in Nairobi in 1985. She received the Eleanor Roosevelt Leadership Award in 1989 and was awarded honorary degrees by The State University of New York and Columbia University.⁵ She died at her home in Washington, DC, at 85, in 2006. ■

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