The FEMININE MYSTIQUE

"One of those rare books we are endowed with only once in several decades, a volume that launched a major social movement."
—Amitai Etzioni, Chairperson, Department of Sociology, Columbia University

CAN. $6.95

Betty Friedan

LAUREL

"THE WISEST, SANEST, SOUNDEST, MOST UNDERSTANDING AND COMPASSIONATE TREATMENT OF AMERICAN WOMAN'S GREATEST PROBLEM."

—Ashley Montagu

"Betty Friedan has been and remains a bridge between conservative and radical elements in feminism, and an ardent advocate of harmony and humane values."

—Marilyn French, *Esquire*

THE FEMININE MYSTIQUE
Betty Friedan

"A HIGHLY READABLE, PROVOCATIVE BOOK."

—*The New York Times Book Review*

"Written with a passionate drive . . . it will leave you with some haunting facts as well as a few hair-raising stories. That *The Feminine Mystique* is at the same time a scholarly work, appropriate for serious study, only adds to its usefulness."

—*Saturday Review*

"THE MOST IMPORTANT BOOK OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY . . . BETTY FRIEDAN IS TO WOMEN WHAT MARTIN LUTHER KING WAS TO BLACKS."

—Barbara Seaman, author of *Free and Female*

Twenty Years After

It is twenty years now since *The Feminine Mystique* was published. I am still awed by the revolution that book helped spark. It's a mystery to me that I was able to put it together, at the time it was needed, and that women, and men, even now stop me on the street, and remember where they were when they read it—"in the maternity ward, with my third kid, and then I decided to go to law school."

I keep being surprised as the changes which the women's movement set in motion continue to play themselves out in our lives—the enormous and mundane, subtle and not-so-subtle, delightful, painful, immediate, far-reaching, paradoxical, inexorable and probably irreversible changes in women's lives, and men's. Firewomen, chairpersons, housespouses, the gender gap, Ms., palimony, take-out food, woman priests, woman rabbis, woman prime ministers out-*macho*ing male dictators in miniwars, women's studies, women's history, double burden, dressing for success, more women now going to college than men, assertiveness training, male consciousness raising, role strain, role reversal, networking, sexism, displaced homemakers, equal pay for work of comparable value, marriage contracts, child custody for men, first babies at forty, the two-paycheck family, the single-parent family, Victor-Victoria, Tootsie . . . Who could have predicted some of these? Not I, certainly.

It's hard enough for me, both personally and politically, to cope with the realities of our revolution, as its daughters and sons take its terms for granted and face new problems, new pressures, new choices and conflicts, and the need for new dreams. It's hard to go on *evolving*, as we all must, just to keep up with a revolution as big as this, when some who now follow, or fight, or study it, or seek power through it, seem to want to lock it in place forever, as an unchanging ism.

Early last year, I fled to Harvard as a Fellow of the Institute of Politics of the Kennedy School of Government, pursuing with relief a new scholarly quest, retreating (or so I thought) from feminist power struggles, disheartened less by the attacks of our enemies—who are clearly losing even the political war they seemed temporarily to have won—than by the fury of some of my sister feminists because I said the women's movement had to move anew, was already moving into a second stage, which can't be seen in terms of women alone or women against men. We have transcended our necessary reaction against the feminine mystique, I said in my book *The Second Stage*, and we have come about as far as we can with a male model of equality. I said that we need a model of equality encompassing female experience, female values that men now begin to share. As our revolution coincides with larger economic upheavals, I said, we must come to new terms with family and with work. Some didn't like my saying that.

I've sometimes wondered how Karl Marx would have handled the reality of "thesis, antithesis, synthesis" as his revolution hardened into ism, and became the stuff of daily life. He wouldn't have been a Marxist? Well, I am not Karl Marx, and ours is not that kind of bloody revolution, and I am still a feminist. We are in the second stage now, whether or not anyone wants to admit it. But I am sick and tired of the new spate of media pronouncements claiming that the women's movement is finished and the revolution is lost because the "postfeminist generation" is moving from a different place.

Of course the postfeminist generation is in a different place. The women's movement put it there. I speak now as if of an-

cient history, lecturing to the young in schools from the University of New Hampshire to San Diego State about what it was like when women lived their lives—and were counseled, studied, treated, taught—according to that feminine mystique which defined woman only as husband's wife, children's mother, server of physical needs of husband, children, home, and never as person defining herself by her own actions in society. Their *mothers* were the ones who rejected the feminine mystique and went back to school and went to work and otherwise started to change their lives twenty years ago. I do not find it a cause for feminist grief that members of this new generation simply take the personhood of women for granted. If they take women's rights and the opportunities we fought for too much for granted—if they are worried now about jobs, difficult choices about having children, how to pay for a house with or without two incomes, and double burdens they can't refuse even if sometimes they'd like to—that's a mark of how far our revolution has come, and a summons to its own next stage.

As far as I'm concerned, the daughters have to move on; they don't have to say thank you—though it's nice when they do. It's also nice that so many now study women's history in college, even in high school. But I am impatient to get those "women's studies" integrated into history, and into every subject, as it's taught from grade school on. I still remember how surprised I was, taking the bus in from my suburban dream house in Rockland County to the New York Public Library when I was writing my book, twenty-odd years ago, to uncover the women's history that had been buried by the feminine mystique in the 1940's and 1950's, and to realize that Mary Wollstonecraft, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Margaret Fuller, Lucy Stone, Susan B. Anthony, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman—whom most educated women like myself had never studied then, even at Smith—had taken that passionate journey ahead of me. Will our memory be buried in another generation as theirs was? Will some future great-granddaughter have to invent feminism once more from scratch, starting over again? I doubt it. I think the consciousness of woman as person, the differences made already by the rights

and opportunities won—endangered, incomplete as they still are—go too broad and deep into life now, and are too buttressed by economic necessity, to be easily erased or reversed. Our daughters are busy now with living the new complexities we opened. But just let somebody seriously try to take those rights away!

Emily, my own daughter-the-doctor, went from taking it all for granted in college ("I'm not a feminist, I'm a person; it's not necessary to fight for women anymore") to fervent feminism after one year in medical school: "There are so many of us now, they don't dare do it openly the way they used to, so you think there's something wrong with you. It's worse, now that it's so subtle." But it's not worse that women are 30 per cent of the medical-school class, rather than 3 per cent.

After organizing the women in her medical school on the unfinished business of sex discrimination, my daughter began to concern herself with fundamental issues in the practice of medicine itself, and in her own life. She did not want to climb the professional ladder as a specialist or a research star. She wanted to go into family practice, to deal with the patient as a whole person in the concrete family setting, not as a specimen of isolated symptoms. Her current problem has to do with the eight hundred miles separating her hospital residency and his, and with how they can live together as they'd like when their equally rigid hospital schedules don't give either one of them more than thirty-six hours off, most weeks. Neither of them would consider asking the other to sacrifice his or her own goals for the sake of their relationship, which somehow survives those obstacles of distance and time. Trade-offs, second-stage flexibility, aren't easy to work out when the institutions themselves still gear their professional training in terms of men of the past whose wives took care of the details of life, and followed along. My daughter-the-doctor will not be, and will not have, such a wife.

My daughter-in-law, Helen, is technically, at the moment, mostly a housewife. The baby was not exactly planned. There were difficult choices to be made, since both she and Jonathan, my younger son, had just finished college, after having dropped out for some years. One day last summer, when they'd brought

the baby out to my house in Sag Harbor, Helen overheard me on the phone discussing how to stop new attacks on the Supreme Court decision asserting women's right to legal medical abortion. "The right to abortion is very important to me," said this post-feminist mother, nursing her baby. "It's important knowing that we had the baby because we chose to."

I relish their mutual joy, their new confident maturity and sense of themselves in their chosen parenthood—which Jonathan has truly shared from their first decision to use a nurse-midwife and a birthing center instead of a traditional hospital. Watching him skillfully maneuver Rafael into his snowsuit and throw him gleefully over his shoulder, into that snuggly backpack, I sense that he gets at least as much of his male identity from being a father as from being an engineer. But Helen is unmistakably the mother. She does not let any male doctor-as-God tell her what to do with her baby the way we let Dr. Spock tell us. She worked until the very end of pregnancy, switching from nursery-school teaching to word-processing to make more money, then concentrated on mothering for a year, and now has a flexible, part-time job where she can take the baby along. Being a feminist is to her something you don't need to think about very much, like being an American. The very language of her dreams, as she shares them with us at breakfast, is feminist. She knows who she is as a woman.

And I, as a grandmother at last, am the envy of my friends, whose doctor/lawyer/banker daughters are too caught up in their careers to yet carry on the gene pool. With my beautiful, incredible grandbaby—such a beaming, bright bundle of energy, smiling at me with his father's big ears and dimples and his own deep blue eyes, so familiar, so intensely alive, so awesome a miracle—I exult in the generation of life, though I have been too busy this year to baby-sit much.

This year, a number of my "family of friends" had their first babies at thirty-five, at forty, some undergoing rather scary, unexpected complications at birth. Other friends made me fear for their sanity as they suddenly became obsessed, in their mid-forties, after twenty years of brilliant career, with the wish to

have a child, and underwent surgical procedures, miscarried, eventually came to terms with the finality of the biological clock. The power of this desire to have a child—when women no longer need to have a child to define themselves as women, to have status, economic support, and identity in society—seems to be as great as or even greater than ever. Choice has liberated an exultant motherhood, beyond mystique. It has also liberated women to be generative in other ways, without at all now feeling like freaks. Gloria Steinem, for instance, and Germaine Greer have been fine role models for that pattern.

But there is unfinished business here, to make such choices real for many women. Now that economic necessity dictates that most women must continue to work after they become mothers (nearly half of the women with children under six now work, compared with less than one-fifth in 1960; and so do nearly two-thirds of the women with kids over six), someone is going to have to battle in a new and serious way for institutions that will help the new family. A new economic-political basis must be found for the maternity leave, paternity leave, parental sick leave, parental sabbaticals, reduced schedules, flextime, job sharing, and child-care supports that don't now exist. But who will take up this battle, and how will it be fought, in a time when jobs themselves are so scarce that people must take what they can get, when budgets for social programs that already exist are being cut down?

It is crucial for feminists to understand the power of that choice to have children, and to keep fighting for the right to abortion. But they must give new priority to a child-care crusade and to restructuring work. If these issues are not addressed soon, we can fear a new feminine mystique, invoked to send women home again to have babies instead of competing for dwindling jobs. During this time of deepening recession-depression, President Reagan, who has declared a new campaign against abortion, has also suggested that there wouldn't be any unemployment if women would stop looking for jobs.

It's necessary to think beyond the win/lose, zero-sum, black-and-white, either/or male model even to understand what really happened with ERA.

Until the final hours of June 30, 1982—when after sixty years of battle, after passage of the amendment by Congress and its ratification by thirty-five of the thirty-eight needed states, the legislatures of Illinois, Flordia, Oklahoma, North Carolina, Missouri, and Virginia, with the advice and consent of President Reagan and the Republican party in power, and no strong opposition from Democratic bosses, allowed the Equal Rights Amendment to die—American politicians must still have been blinded by the feminine mystique. They still thought women voted only as men's wives.

Because those involved were only women, the politicians didn't count it as politically *real* somehow that 450 organizations representing 50 million Americans stood united in support of ERA, with nearly 70 per cent of the adult population behind them, according to the polls. There was a larger national consensus for ERA, historians now say, than for any previous constitutional amendment. The politicians didn't take it in right away, that in the last months NOW alone was raising a million dollars a month from women giving fifteen, twenty-five, or fifty dollars from their paychecks or grocery money for that constitutional guarantee of equal rights which they now realized they needed, as unemployment and divorce rates rose, and Reagan gutted sex-discrimination laws. That was more money than the Democratic party was raising.

Not until the 1982 elections did political analysts begin to take seriously the "gender gap," which had in fact been building for some years. Month after month, women had been indicating their sharp disapproval of President Reagan. By 1982 the Gallup poll found that just 36 per cent of women approved of Reagan's job performance, as compared to 47 per cent of men. And, it was suddenly realized, women were now voting in higher proportions than men.

This new manifestation of women's political power goes be-

yond first-stage feminism, with its emphasis on electing women over men, and beyond women's rights, though it was surely that battle for our own rights that gave us, finally, the independence to use the vote as we ourselves defined our larger interests.

The gender gap was fueled, it seemed, not only by the outrage at Reagan and Republican enmity to ERA and abortion but by women's great outrage at Reaganomics and at a national budget that destroyed services essential to the health and life of the old, the poor, children, students, the handicapped, and the environment while diverting increasing billions into nuclear missiles and tax savings for the rich. The callousness to the human suffering of unemployment and to the danger to future life of nuclear build-up seems to have outraged women, above all. (Paradoxically, those years of serious feminist battle for equal rights brought traditional feminine values off the pedestal of the mystique into the political mainstream.)

And so it didn't matter that Ed Koch, in his race for the New York gubernatorial nomination, said the proper words about women's rights, when he'd been so opportunistic about Reaganomics. It didn't matter that Cong. Margaret Heckler (R., Mass.) and Cong. Millicent Fenwick (R., N.J.) were women and had been for ERA; they went along with Reagan's budget and missiles, and in 1982 they were defeated. Political analysts now agree that women were crucial to the election of Mario Cuomo as governor of New York, and to the defeat or near-defeat in Texas, New Jersey, Missouri, and elsewhere of favorites who had been insensitive to women's basic concerns. At any rate, it is clear now that women's rights and women's issues are no longer minor political sidenotes, worth a patronizing sentence on the sixth page of a political speech or tea and cookies in the White House rose garden. President Reagan has just named not one but two women to the Cabinet—Elizabeth Dole as secretary of transportation and Margaret Heckler as secretary of health and human services. Getting into position for 1984, Walter Mondale and other Democrats often begin their speeches with passionate pledges to equal rights. An extraordinary meeting of leaders of women's groups, church

groups, unions, and civil rights organizations was held in New York City to plan a child-care crusade for 1983.

ERA was reintroduced in Congress in 1983, and I say there will be an equal rights amendment in the Constitution by the end of the decade, after we get the government turned around.

A few months ago, I was invited to Rome by women leaders of the ruling Christian Democratic party. The idea was to speak to them, along with leading Italian feminist, socialist, and communist women, about the second stage. My book of that title had just come out in Italy, but I don't think they had really read it.

Evidently the Christian Democrats realized they had made a big political mistake by supporting a referendum that would have taken away Italian women's right to abortion. Despite orders from the pulpit from their priests, in the same week that someone tried to shoot the Pope, the women of Italy had voted in overwhelming numbers in that referendum that they would not give up the right to abortion. Up until then, the supposed conservatism of women had been taken for granted by right-wing politicians of Europe, whom it had helped keep in power. Now, it appeared, I was being brought over by the Christian Democrats in their effort to show a conciliatory position toward feminism. Someone must have told them I "believed in the family."

To my horror, I heard them introducing me as a "repentant feminist" (*femminista penitènte*). I had to clear that up, of course. I had to go back to the feminine mystique, and that necessary, wonderful first stage of women's liberation in Italy, when they had marched in the thousands and voted in the millions for women's rights to divorce and to abortion. In their country, as in mine, I said, reactionary forces were still trying to take those rights away, as the holding of the abortion referendum demonstrated.

Of course, I said, I respect those who, out of religious or other personal conviction, would not choose to use that right. "The value is life," I said, "the life of the woman, and the right of the

child to be wanted in life. Abortion is simply a necessity for some when birth control fails.

"But that issue is behind you now, as I hope it will be soon for us," I continued. "We must all move into the second stage, where we face new problems of economic survival, personal survival, and family survival. We must surmount the dangers of nuclear war, terrorism, and economic chaos, and continue to be able to choose to bear children."

I don't know if that's what the Christian Democrats quite expected. The other feminist leaders present, and the socialist and communist women, picked up my second-stage suggestions about the need for new child-care supports and for new kinds of communal housing for working parents and divorced or widowed men and women who now live too much alone. But the new complexities, transcending the feminine mystique and first-stage feminism, can't be contained within the doctrinaire positions of either Right or Left.

I went from Rome to Paris, where Yvette Roudy, who originally translated *The Feminine Mystique* into French, is now President Mitterrand's minister for women's rights. She is no token undersecretary, but holds a full cabinet ministry for women's affairs. Yvette told me of her ministry's efforts, in all the regions and departments of France, to protect women's rights in jobs, education, marriage, and divorce; to give them training for new, nontraditional work; and to help them start businesses. As unemployment mounts, she is fighting socialist and communist leaders for a six-hour day for everyone rather than part-time jobs which women alone would take—and which she feels would set them back. As we walked through the lofty arches of the splendid building that houses her offices, I was proudly shown a "gallery of honor," where after Colette and Susan B. Anthony there was a larger-than-life portrait that was supposed to be me. "That's not me!" I said. The artist had painted us all to be pretty. Like taking the warts off Napoleon's nose. Oh, well . . .

Is this new burst of women's power in France and Italy merely a belated epilogue to that same women's movement that they say has crested and is on its way out over here, or a preview of

greater power to come? The fact is, women are given credit for having put Mitterand in power in France, as we did Cuomo in New York State.

How are we going to maintain and express that new political power as women when the post-feminist generation moves from a different place? In Britain, under that arch-conservative female prime minister Margaret Thatcher and in socialist Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, early in 1983, I found my aging feminist friends seriously worried about the emergence of a new feminine mystique as unemployment mounts. When young women getting out of school can't find good jobs, it's easier to believe, once again, that just having babies will take care of their lives. Teenage pregnancy is on the rise again. I remember an earlier attempt by underground feminists in Czechoslovakia to get my help in warning against the feminine mystique reemerging under communism. After they had disbanded their feminist organizations, the commissars started complaining that there were too many women in office, hospital, and teaching jobs—their maternity leaves were disrupting production schedules and professional discipline. "Pay the men more, and let the women stay home and take care of the children." It would be dangerous now to relax the vigilance of feminist organization.

I'm worried now about the new polarizations hinted at by recent polls, cutting across the gender gap, as sharp differences emerge between the married and the unmarried, those with children and those with none, the young and the old, the ones with jobs and the unemployed.

While the new census shows that in the 1980's the great majority of young adult Americans (90 per cent) are continuing to marry, and remarry, and have children within marriage, they are having fewer children and having them later than they used to. But more people are living alone than ever before in history, a 75 per cent increase since 1970. There is now a significant new minority (10 per cent) who will never marry—a 100 per cent increase in a decade. There is also a 100 per cent increase in single-parent households, nine out of ten of which are headed by

women. A fourth of all households now contain no children.

"Non-family households" have risen by 89 per cent. But the divorce rate now seems to be leveling off, at about 50 per cent. The need, or the choice, to marry, or to remain married, takes on new existential and economic importance, for women as for men, for families in poverty today tend in overwhelming majority to be those headed by women, followed by those headed by men, where there is no second income. But the fact that in the United States today women earn an average of only fifty-nine cents for every dollar men earn still cuts through our illusion of equality. Most of those who use food stamps, welfare, aid for dependent children, and public housing, and receive minimal old-age Social Security payments, turn out to be women; women are also less likely than men to have a spouse to carry the burden if they are laid off the job.

Will the married be the new elite, and those living alone the underclass? Will men and women who make that cherished costly choice to have children become the permanent second class while the single-minded take power?

How can trade-offs within marriage be measured? He makes more than she does, but he feels less strain now because he's no longer carrying it all. She makes less but also feels less stress if she is just "helping"; does the job have to be as central to her identity as it is to his? She feels bitter if he is laid off and she has to carry the whole breadwinning burden, as well as take care of the house and kids, if he still just "helps." He certainly doesn't spend as much time on housework and the kids as she does; he doesn't feel that burden of responsibility for the kids that a mother never quite escapes. But how much of that power does she really want to give up?

Now that we've broken through those rigidly polarized male and female sex roles, will we settle for a diversity of patterns of sharing among women and men, which may change over time; will we cease to apply linear yardstick and time-clock measures of equality? As we are already coming to terms, in American life if not in the ideology of Right or Left, with a diversity of patterns that can be called family, changing over time for all of us,

instead of that single static image enshrined in the feminine mystique.

Am I wrong to try to redefine our concept of "family" to link the interests of the old and single with the interests of those in the child-bearing years—when both share a need for new kinds of housing and communal services, which neither group may have the power or numbers to obtain, struggling alone or at cross purposes. Aging suburbanites who now defeat school budgets might join with young parents if new uses of those underused buildings for elders' needs were linked to child-care needs. Those who can't afford to stop working at sixty or sixty-five might welcome jobs that wouldn't demand a rigid 9-to-5 schedule. The option of shorter hours for those who wish them would not solve the unemployment problem, but it would provide more jobs for more people.

The implications of all this go far beyond what we thought of as feminism or the women's movement. Many of those blue-collar jobs from which men are being laid off will not be restored. In our changing technological economy, most men in the future are going to be working at the same kind of service jobs most women hold now—notably jobs involving health, food, recreation, and computers and business machines. They are the only new jobs that have emerged in our economy in the last ten years. Up until now, service jobs have paid less because they were women's work. In Canada, not just the women's movement but the large labor unions are now raising the issue of equal pay for work of comparable value. If the unions do not organize the women and men doing this service work, and do not confront the "quality of work life" concerns—flextime, parental leave, child care—which are no longer just women's, they may lose their clout. And corporate management is being brought to these concerns in the interests of productivity, as in competition with Japan.

For competition itself is forcing American business and professions to evolve beyond the feminine mystique; capitalism somehow manages to adapt to, or co-opt, feminism. The sexual sell rages on, with men as sex objects now as well as women. Men

may not be doing as much housework as women, but women are now doing less; the latest studies show the total amount of time Americans spend on housework is going down. Housework is finally contracting to fill the time available; maybe advertisers can no longer make busy American women feel guilty if their sheets are not snowy white. But they may make more money selling time-saving appliances, take-out food—and "dress-for-success" clothes, cars, and magazines—to "working women," that new majority without whose purchasing power the American economy would now collapse.

And as women take control of their bodies, their selves, even as patients, male psychiatrists, obstetricians, and gynecologists are being forced off their godlike pedestals to treat women and other patients as people, or lose them to female therapists.

My friends now in their fifties and sixties who fought the battles—the first woman to have a seat on the Stock Exchange, the first female network vice-president, the first executive vice-president of a major agency, the nuns who became college presidents and doffed their meek habits, the housewives who survived their own divorces and became labor arbitrators, the invisible women passed over for corporate promotion, university tenure or union leadership, who brought and won class-action suits—are facing now the frontiers of age.

There are new questions to be asked, beyond success, beyond marriage and divorce, as we face husbands' strokes and retirement, and our years to come, living alone. Those are the questions that are now my personal and professional concern. Feelings of déjà vu wash over me as I hear geriatric experts talk about the aged with the same patronizing, "compassionate" denial of their personhood that I heard when the experts talked about women twenty years ago.

Much is being said among American women today about the strange dearth of vital men. I go into a town to lecture, and I hear about all the wonderful, dynamic women who have emerged in every field in that town. But frequently, whatever the age of the woman, she says, "There don't seem to be any men. The men

seem so dull and gray now. They're dreary, they're flat, they complain, they're tired." And if they're my age, they're dead.

It has more mysterious ramification than we've yet faced—the fact that women are living much longer and aging more vitally than men. The latest census figures show that American women have a life expectancy of 77.8 compared with 69.9 for American men, an eight-year difference compared with just two years in 1900 and five in 1950. Despite the vogue of "dressing for success" and the proliferation of courses teaching women how to get into the executive suite by becoming more like men, women don't seem to be falling into the "superwoman" trap so easily any more. Gloomy predictions notwithstanding, they are not alllowing themselves to be forced into Type A behavior patterns as they take on more demanding jobs in business and the professions. There are no hard data indicating that women succumb any earlier or any more often than formerly to heart attacks, stroke, ulcer, or other stress syndromes. (The one exception is lung cancer—women are smoking more, where men are cutting it out.)

On the contrary, data just published by Rosalind Barnett and Grace Baruch of the Wellesley Center for Research on Women show that women between the ages of thirty-five and fifty-five who combine work, marriage, and motherhood do the best of all women their age in general psychological well-being. They have more control over their lives, which now seems essential to health; they are able to satisfy their needs for achievement and mastery as well as for pleasure and intimacy; and they use the flexibility that comes with combining roles to slough off the dreary, most burdensome part of either role. They are thus less at risk than the housewife whose whole identity is tied up with life at home, which she can never completely control, or the man whose whole identity is tied up with success in the job, where he is not the boss. Most women who now work outside the home do not, it seems, look to the job for their whole identity, as men used to do. (Most women also don't have a "wife" to take care of the details of life.)

And these women do not show the depression, deterioration,