

FIRST PRINCIPLES

FOUNDATIONAL CONCEPTS TO GUIDE POLITICS AND POLICY

MAKERS OF AMERICAN POLITICAL THOUGHT

NO. 18 | OCTOBER 12, 2018

Betty Friedan and the Birth of Modern Feminism

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Betty Friedan launched modern feminism, arguably the most influential and successful intellectual movement of the 20th century. Indeed, feminism’s influence is so pervasive and successful that its impact is almost universally taken for granted. Even those who do not identify as feminists often unwittingly share its moral outlook.

Friedan’s influential 1963 book, *The Feminine Mystique*, laid the theoretical foundations and provided the rhetoric for feminists to alter American life. Friedan argued for *modern* feminism (or what came to be called second-wave feminism). Older, “first wave” feminists argued for the extension of basic rights to women, such as the right to own property, the right to vote, and the end of marital coverture—a legal term meaning government recognition of wives under the “cover” of their husbands.

Friedan worried that these legal reforms, successfully brought about by the early 20th century, did not alter women’s lives. For Friedan, contrary to appearances, women, who seemed to lead meaningful lives as mothers and wives, were miserable; they were sleepwalking through a meaningless life

they had really not chosen. A new kind of woman—one fulfilled by genuinely rewarding, independent, creative work outside the home—could emerge, she believed, if there was a new kind of education founded on her own teaching. Independent women of the future would be prepared for careers instead of domesticity.

After publishing *The Feminine Mystique*, which became one of the best-selling books of the 1960s, Friedan engaged in activism to reform American laws and culture. She helped found the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966 and was its first president. NOW won notable victories for feminism, including the decriminalization of abortion and gaining the enforcement of sex discrimination laws. She also fought for government-funded day care to relieve women of the burdens of motherhood. Parents and churches, she hoped, would fully imbibe her career-focused worldview, thereby altering their expectations as they raised girls to a new womanhood. She served four years before stepping down in 1970.

Once her *Feminine Mystique* had inspired a generation with dreams of liberation, Friedan led efforts to propagate its message of liberation and independence from the family. In Friedan, a moment of female promise and frustration met its poet. She gave the women’s movement a particular flavor, for good and for ill.

Later in life, Friedan came to have reservations about the radical turn in feminism.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at <http://report.heritage.org/MAPT18>

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Betty Friedan

Born

Betty Naomi Goldstein on February 4, 1921, in Peoria, Illinois.

Education

Smith College 1938-1941 (graduated *summa cum laude*); attended graduate school at University of California-Berkeley from 1942-1943.

Religion

Raised Jewish, but signed Humanist Manifesto proclaiming agnosticism.

Family

Married Carl Friedan (1947, divorced 1969). They had three children: Daniel (b. 1948); Jonathan (b. 1952); and Emily (b. 1956).

Highlights

- 1947-1953: Worked as Reporter for *U.E. News*, the official publication of the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America, covering topics from progressive reform to union organizing.
- 1963: *The Feminine Mystique* published.
- 1966: Co-founded the National Organization for Women (NOW). Named its first president.
- 1967-1968: Led efforts to get Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to focus on sex discrimination.
- 1970: Stepped down as President of NOW.
- 1970: Organized Women's March for Equality in New York City on the 50th Anniversary of the passage of the 19th Amendment granting women the right to vote.
- 1973: Co-founded the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws (NARAL), later renamed the National Abortion Rights Action League.
- 1975: Attended World Conference on Women in Mexico City to develop goals for the worldwide women's movement.
- 1976: *It Changed My Life: Writings on the Women's Movement* published.
- 1980: Attended World Conference on Women in Copenhagen, Denmark.
- 1986-1993: Taught at University of Southern California and helped establish the Institute for the Study of Women and Men in Society, one of the first gender-studies organizations in America.
- 1995: Attended United Nations conference on Women in Beijing.
- 2000: Memoir, *Life So Far*, published.

Died

February 4, 2006, in Washington, D.C.

Notable Quote

"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." (*The Feminine Mystique*, 1963)

She denied that its radicalism was traceable to her ideas. However, her initial principles paved the way for a more radical feminism that went beyond her thought. The triumph of a more radical feminism points to the limits of her late-life rethinking of feminism.

Life

Betty Naomi Goldstein was born in February 1921 in Peoria, Illinois, the quintessential middle-America town. Her father, an immigrant from Russia, owned and operated a jewelry store, while her mother, daughter of Hungarian Jews, minded the home. Friedan contends that her mother, who had been accepted at Smith College, an all-girls school, but whose parents prevented her from attending, was never satisfied with life as a housewife. “She made our life [sic] so miserable,” Friedan later wrote in her memoir, *Life So Far*, because absent a profession that absorbed her, “she was so miserable herself.”¹

Friedan was raised a secular Jew. As a Jew, she was excluded from the local country club and other “respectable” school activities. She fought through this discrimination and started a literary journal in her high school. Throughout high school, she focused on issues of social reform, promoting pacifism and socialist politics. Her mother encouraged her to attend Smith College after high school in 1938. Psychology interested Friedan, she later wrote, because it taught the powerful role of social forces in determining the habits of mind and self-image of each individual. She graduated from Smith *summa cum laude* in 1942.

Friedan headed to the University of California–Berkeley on a psychology fellowship. At that time, she had a “romantic vision of communism” and thought of herself “as a revolutionary.” She “wanted to become a member” of the Communist Party, but she did not take the action necessary to join since

she never felt that she was in “community with the actual communists she was living with.”² She adopted much of the communist critique of capitalism, including the idea that the American principles of “democracy, civil liberties and freedoms of conscience and speech” were just “a capitalist mask for oppression” and the view that wars were caused by munitions manufacturers out to make a profit.³

Quitting higher education, she tried to help the poor working class of her communist imagination through journalism from 1946–1952. She was a reporter and editor for *UE News*, the official publication of the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America, “one of the most progressive labor unions.”⁴ During that time, she wrote articles against sex and race discrimination in the workplace as well as more traditional stories supporting union organization.⁵ As she tells the story, Friedan soured on the labor movement and began to look for something more fulfilling.

While writing for the union in the late 1940s, Betty met and married Carl Friedan, a theater producer from New York. Her first child, Daniel, was born in 1948. *UE News* laid off Friedan when it cut back its press operations just as she was pregnant for a second time with her son, Jonathan. Friedan saw her layoff as an instance of sex discrimination.⁶ Emily, her only daughter, followed a few years later.

Friedan began freelance writing after she left *UE News*. She surveyed her classmates before attending her 15th college reunion in 1957. She discovered that many of her classmates had grown frustrated with their lives as mothers and regretted giving up career ambitions or ending their education. Friedan wrote an article about the survey, but no women’s magazine would publish it for fear (as she tells the story) that it would contradict the then-prevailing image of womanly contentment.⁷ Eventually, these ideas led

1. Betty Friedan, *Life So Far: A Memoir* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), pp. 15 and 30.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 57 and 62.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 66 and 40, and Daniel Horowitz, *Betty Friedan and the Making of the “Feminine Mystique”: The American Left, the Cold War, and Modern Feminism* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998).

4. Friedan, *Life So Far*, p. 64.

5. See Ashley Fetters, “4 Big Problems with the Feminine Mystique,” *The Atlantic*, February 12, 2013, <https://www.theatlantic.com/sexes/archive/2013/02/4-big-problems-with-the-feminine-mystique/273069/> (accessed June 14, 2013).

6. Friedan, *Life So Far*, p. 79.

7. Joanne Meyerowitz, “Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Re-assessment of Post-War Mass Culture” *Journal of American History*, Vol. 79 (March 1993), pp. 1946–1958, shows how magazines were hardly peddling the feminine mystique in their advertisements or articles in the period Friedan considers.

her in 1963 to write *The Feminine Mystique*, which sold 1.4 million copies in its first paperback printing.⁸

This success in winning a national audience allowed her to turn her arguments into action. Friedan helped to write NOW's charter and contributed to its lobbying efforts to get the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to take action against sex discrimination.

Friedan helped to spearhead NOW's efforts to eliminate legal prohibitions on access to contraception and abortion and was active more broadly in promoting the sexual revolution. Friedan also drew national attention to women's issues through a nationwide march in August 1970 called the Women's Strike for Equality and was instrumental in co-founding the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws (NARAL) in 1969.

Divorcing Carl Friedan in 1969 during this season of activism, Friedan claimed that her husband was jealous of her notoriety and that he beat her. He denied both charges, suggesting that she was not an easy woman to get along with.⁹

The women's movement became increasingly radical in the 1970s. Friedan worried about how some radical feminist writers hated men and motherhood, advocated lesbianism, and criticized man-woman sexual relations as a means of oppression.¹⁰

Friedan remained a leading voice on women's issues throughout the 1970s and 1980s, moving from activist to reflective elder during these times. She continued to write freelance and was an occasional visiting professor at universities across the United States during the 1980s and 1990s. She also served as a delegate to several United Nations conferences on women's rights.

Her later works included *The Second Wave* (1981), which aimed to establish more equal relationships between husbands and wives, and *Beyond Gender* (1997), which focused on expanding the welfare state to support women's opportunity. Her memoir, *Life So Far* (2000), was her last published book. She

died on February 4, 2006, in Washington, D.C., on her 85th birthday.

***The Feminine Mystique* and the New Womanhood**

The centerpiece of Friedan's career was *The Feminine Mystique*, an effort to convince society to rethink what it meant to be a woman. Her work begins with a dismissal of the previous understanding of womanhood. The ideal life as mother and wife toward which women had been educated was debilitating and false, Friedan argued, and women who lived such a life were not really happy or fulfilled, no matter what they thought. Genuinely free and fulfilled women should instead choose a different, more career-oriented destiny. This new path would encourage women to struggle for the first time and hence be free to build an identity for themselves.

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Women of the past had been educated under the "feminine mystique," which taught them that the "highest value" and commitment for them is the "fulfillment of their own femininity" as housewives and mothers.¹¹ Girls were educated with this destiny in mind. Women practiced sacrificial love and care for others instead of going out into the world and competing. They raised children to lives of virtue, faith, and honesty; made beautiful homes; and generally put familial concerns at the center of their lives. They were romantically and sexually passive, allowing men to take the initiative.

8. Stephanie Coontz, *A Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), pp. 145-149.

9. Margalit Fox, "Betty Friedan, Who Ignited Cause in 'Feminine Mystique,' Dies at 85," *The New York Times*, February 5, 2006, <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/05/us/betty-friedan-who-ignited-cause-in-feminine-mystique-dies-at-85.html> (accessed April 25, 2018).

10. Betty Friedan, "Critique of Sexual Politics," in Betty Friedan, *It Changed My Life: Writings in the Women's Movement* (New York: Random House, 1976), pp. 159, 161-162, and 164.

11. Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997) p. 43.

Such a life, Friedan argued, was incompatible with genuine female contentment. Women in her day, like the alumnae at Smith, suffered from what she called the “problem that had no name.” Women before 1960 or so, Friedan seems to think, were mind-numbingly content, with all of their human passions satisfied through being mothers and wives. Today’s women, for the first time, were restless, bored, and unfulfilled, even though they were living comfortable lives as involved mothers and wives amid great prosperity. A quiet nagging voice whispered, as if for the first time, in the ear of each woman: “I want something more than my husband and my children and my home.”¹²

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This suffering, she believed, endangered women and the future of Western civilization. As Friedan famously warned, “Women who ‘adjust’ as housewives, who grow up wanting to be ‘just a housewife,’ are in as much danger as the millions who walked to their own death in the concentration camps—and the millions more who refused to believe that the concentration camps existed.”¹³

Earlier feminist reformers like Susan B. Anthony, Margaret Fuller, and others had tried to disrupt women’s attachment to the home. They had won women the legal right to own property and to vote. Although they “destroyed the old image of woman,” they still “could not paint the new image of what woman might become,” because the feminine mystique was so powerful. The feminine mystique survived and returned: Women still “grew up under con-

ditions” that made them “inferior to men, dependent, passive, incapable of thought or decision.”¹⁴ Winning rights was necessary for women to progress further, but only a deeper revolution could disrupt the feminine mystique’s hold on the minds of women.

For Friedan, a fully chosen, self-made identity is the key to human happiness. “The core of the problem for women,” she wrote, is a “problem of identity—a stunting or evasion of growth that is perpetuated by the feminine mystique.”¹⁵ Friedan wanted each woman to solve her own “identity crisis” by finding “the work, or the cause, or the purpose that evokes... creativity.”¹⁶ Creative work fosters genuine struggle, and such struggle fosters personal growth. Through struggle and growth, women could reach the highest human achievement: “self-actualization,” a term Friedan borrowed from mid-century psychologist Abraham Maslow, whom she interviewed extensively for *The Feminine Mystique*. Unchosen aspects of one’s identity—one’s sex or religious conscience—should not compromise a person’s ability to choose, grow, and achieve.

Those on the way to forming healthy identities engage in projects that serve mankind, make the world a better place through social reform, and lose themselves in careers that they find meaningful and rewarding and that call forth all of their capacities.¹⁷ Careers held this promise for Friedan, not the home or a family. “The only kind of work which permits” a woman “to realize her abilities fully, to achieve identity in society,” Friedan wrote, is “the life-long commitment to an art or science, to politics or profession.”¹⁸ Educators, psychologists, and others in the learned professions would adopt this vision in the future and encourage women to conform to it in the name of freedom.

The future of our civilization, for Friedan, depended on women choosing this career-focused way of life. Education aimed at encouraging girls to be mothers and wives was part of the feminine mystique and hence created a false, debilitating identity

12. Ibid., p. 32.

13. Ibid., p. 305.

14. Ibid., p. 100.

15. Ibid., p. 77.

16. Ibid., p. 334.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid., p. 348.

for women raised under it. Female education would cultivate healthy, chosen, career-oriented identities. Women need the courage to pursue their purported need for independence instead of living family lives as dependents or loving mothers or heeding the calls of nature to reproduce. Under this scheme, women could still marry and raise children as long as these domestic concerns were subordinated to their careers.

Education aimed at encouraging girls to be mothers and wives was part of the feminine mystique and hence created a false, debilitating identity for women raised under it.

Implementing Friedan's Vision: The Women's Movement

Women would follow this new life plan if society paved the way for it. Friedan argued for such a society as president of NOW, as an abortion rights activist, and as a prominent activist/intellectual. The new ethos required, among other things, reforming marriage laws, assisting in the sexual liberation of women (and men), and changing schools and the workplace. Many of the long-range changes she sought have come to pass.

Divorce. New divorce laws led to the reformation of marriage. Old divorce laws required that either spouse prove fault and that women who had dedicated themselves to the family during marriage receive alimony payments to support them after the divorce. Friedan, by contrast, sought at-will, “no fault” divorce, where either party would be able to leave a marriage at any time. She also advocated for a one-time equal division of property in divorce because “as feminists . . . we didn’t believe women should ask for alimony” since alimony implies that

women might put themselves in a dependent position in marriage.¹⁹ Without alimony’s crutch, it was hoped, more women would pursue careers in case their marriages fell apart.²⁰ Unsettling the safety of marriage is an economic backbone of efforts to cultivate an ethos of independence among women: Education and careers would provide the safety that marriage no longer would.

Contraception and Abortion. On the sexual revolution, Friedan argued for legalizing contraception and abortion. Contraception, for Friedan, allowed women “to take control of their bodies” and “define themselves by their contribution to society, not just in terms of their reproductive role.”²¹ She joined forces with others in a coalition of abortion activists called the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws.²² Friedan thought the right to abortion was “a final essential right of full personhood.”²³ “Motherhood is a bane almost by definition,” she argued at a 1969 abortion convention. Only when women could prevent motherhood through abortion and put their ambitions before their biology would they achieve “self-determination and full dignity.”²⁴ The accompanying ethos of sexual revolution encouraged women to assert themselves sexually outside of marriage. This made it easier for women to delay marriage for their careers and made sex more widely available to men and women outside of marriage—thereby further unsettling the dependability of the marriage bond.

Sex Discrimination. Equally important to Friedan was the ending of sex discrimination in employment and higher education. The 1964 Civil Rights Act prohibited racial and sexual discrimination in employment and in public accommodations such as restaurants or hotels. That law established an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to investigate illegal discrimination. The EEOC was, from NOW’s perspective, more interested in racial discrimination than it was in sexual discrimination.

19. Friedan, *Life So Far*, p. 299.

20. Betty Friedan, “The Crises of Divorce,” in *It Changed My Life*, pp. 318 and 321.

21. Friedan, *Life So Far*, p. 269.

22. Later, after the repeal of abortion laws in the wake of *Roe v. Wade* (1973), the group kept the acronym and became known as the National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL).

23. Friedan, *Life So Far*, p. 215. See also *ibid.*, p. 213.

24. Friedan, “Abortion: A Woman’s Civil Right,” in *It Changed My Life*, pp. 126 and 127.

Under Friedan's leadership, NOW set out to change that. It complained that stewardesses were fired when they were no longer attractive, that newspaper advertisements asked for applications from only one sex, that companies prohibited women from performing dangerous or high-level work, and that men's clubs prohibited the entry of women. In each of these cases and in many others, NOW gained the EEOC's attention, and companies were required to change their practices under threat of legal penalty. All of this was accomplished so that women could, as the 1966 NOW manifesto read, have "full participation in the mainstream of American society" and "develop their fullest human potential."²⁵ Companies would soon have to take affirmative action to secure a sufficient number of women to ensure immunity from charges of discrimination.

NOW set up a task force on education that called for public instruction in family planning, the elimination of sex-specific school curricula, and the integration of student facilities such as dormitories on college campuses.²⁶ These institutions were based on the assumption that boys and girls had different needs and personalities and thus, NOW argued, formed the basis for male privilege and exclusivity. Education should instead be gender-neutral and treat boys and girls the same.

NOW also called for opening up the priesthood to women and the removal of sex segregation in religious organizations and church-sponsored schools in the hope that private organizations could be pressured to abandon their commitment to the feminine mystique. These efforts met with mixed success.

Government Child Care. Friedan and her fellow reformers thought their goals could not be achieved without government-provided child care. "Without child care," Friedan learned from Swedish feminists, "it's all just talk." In 1967, NOW demanded "paid maternity leave, federally mandated child care facilities, and a tax deduction for home and child care expenses for working parents."²⁷ Such programs would free women from

the burdens of motherhood so that they could pursue creative work outside the home and would inaugurate a society where both women and men could devote themselves to careers.

Gender-Neutral Society. Feminism's reform agenda would be complete only with the accomplishment of a gender-neutral society. Disparities between the sexes could always plausibly be traced to the lingering effects of the feminine mystique, so feminists would have to be vigilant, persistent, and nimble in pursuing their revolution. As Friedan wrote in the last triumphant preface to a new edition of *The Feminine Mystique* (1997), men and conservatives are always ready for a "last desperate attempt to turn the clock back."²⁸

The success of Friedan's feminist movement is seen in the pervasive influence of the sexual revolution, in the ways we take for granted the importance of higher education as a preparation for careers, in our embrace of a gender-neutral workplace, and in our inability to discuss the enduring differences between men and women. It can also be seen in the instability or fragility of marriage and family life.

Friedan's Seeming Embrace of Moderate Feminism

As the women's movement succeeded, Friedan objected to its excesses. The women's movement, she worried, was becoming "anti-love, anti-child." Should it go too far down that road, "we are not going to have the power of the women and the help of increasing numbers of men who can identify their liberation with women's liberation."²⁹

The emphasis that some feminists placed on sex skewed priorities. Friedan lamented that "the women's movement was not about sex, but about equal opportunity.... I suppose you have to say that freedom of sexual choice was part of that, but it should not be the main issue, the tail that wags the dog."³⁰ Lesbians—whom she called the Lavender Menace—were, Friedan worried, taking over the women's movement and alienating most women.

25. Friedan, "The National Organization for Women: Statement of Purpose," in *It Changed My Life*, p. 87.

26. Friedan, *Life So Far*, p. 205.

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 196 and 205.

28. Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, p. xi.

29. Friedan, "Critique of Sexual Politics," in *It Changed My Life*, pp. 163 and 164.

30. Friedan, *Life So Far*, pp. 223 and 249.

Friedan also disagreed with radical feminists on deeper grounds. She thought that the experiences of “love and sex are real,” that they are deeply woven into the human psyche, and that they are an expression of genuine human needs.³¹ Friedan would have feminism walk a line where women could still love a man and bear children, but neither experience would overly determine her life, and each experience would truly be freely chosen.

The full extent of Friedan’s departure from more radical feminists emerges in her 1975 dialogue with famous French feminist thinker Simone de Beauvoir, whose *The Second Sex* (1953) greatly influenced Friedan’s thinking. “No woman should be authorized to stay at home to raise her children,” Beauvoir contended, for fear that too many women would choose to do so. Beauvoir argued that “as long as the family and the myth of the family and the myth of maternity are not destroyed . . . women will still be oppressed.” In order for women to be free, the family would also have to be abolished: Either the law would proscribe families from forming or families would be viewed so shamefully in public opinion that people would not marry.³²

Friedan stopped short of endorsing Beauvoir’s proposal to require the separation of mothers from their children. She worried that “politically at the moment” it would be impossible to force women away from motherhood because “we have hardly any child-care centers in the United States.” Beauvoir’s proposal to force women away from motherhood also ran afoul of the “tradition of individual freedom in America.” As Friedan concluded, “I would never say that every woman must put her child in a child-care center.”³³

Friedan went further in her criticism of Beauvoir, contending that investing time and energy into motherhood could be a desirable choice as long as doing so did not come at the expense of a satisfying career. Maternity could be a part of a life well lived. “Maternity is more than a myth,” Friedan wrote, and it is “neither good nor necessarily desirable to

denounce all of the values of motherhood as long as one has a choice.”³⁴

The more radical the feminist movement grew, the more Friedan came to regret many of the things she wrote in *The Feminine Mystique*. She regretted comparing the suburban housewife to the concentration camp victim because, she claimed, this contradicted her own experience as a mother and the genuine good experienced in motherhood.³⁵ She also came to believe that women who made themselves beautiful in order to attract men were no longer pitiful sex seekers, but rather people expressing their very human needs for intimacy and love.³⁶

Later Reservations

Friedan’s late-life reservations contrast with her earlier radical principles. Her *Feminine Mystique* aimed to expose previous generations of women as unwittingly guided by a “mystique” or a set of myths that drew them to motherhood and domestic life. Friedan supposedly knew that these were myths because she knew the truth that the good life was one of radical individual independence and “self-actualization” best gained through participation in creative work. Later, she held that central elements of the old mystique—love, intimacy, maternity—were *more than myths*: Each could be a desirable human experience involving dependence on others and limits on human choice.

This raised several difficulties. First, Friedan’s criterion for distinguishing myth from reality is guided by her commitment to individual independence, choice, and self-actualization. The education she recommends, however, is meant to shape choice in a particular direction. Girls should not be prepared for motherhood, family life, or keeping house, and boys should not be prepared to be fathers and providers. All are pointed to fulfillment through careers. Under these circumstances, it seems disingenuous to defend one’s theory in terms of choice. Feminist education intentionally puts a thumb on the scale away from family life and toward careers.

31. Friedan, “Critique of Sexual Politics,” p. 163.

32. Friedan, “A Dialogue with Simone de Beauvoir,” in *It Changed My Life*, pp. 311–312.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 312.

34. *Ibid.*, pp. 312 and 314.

35. Friedan, *Life So Far*, p. 132.

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 223, 231–232.

This is its greatest, most long-lasting success—but it also causes social problems and personal unhappiness for many women. Second, this new womanhood is a leading edge of a *career mystique*—a set of ideas holding that careers present the path to fulfillment and growth for men and women. While many careers are indeed fulfilling, most jobs are not so existentially fulfilling. Investing great hope in a job while pointing people away from deep obligations in family life compromises the joy and contentment of most people. The victories of feminism have not made women happier or more fulfilled than women of the past.³⁷ They have contributed to the fragility of intimate relations, children’s lives, and marriage.

Feminist education intentionally puts a thumb on the scale away from family life and toward careers. This is its greatest, most long-lasting success—but it also causes social problems and personal unhappiness for many women.

Finally, Friedan never seems to have regretted her denigrating view that women of the past wanted nothing more out of life than merely being mothers and wives. Her late-life moderation should have

moved her to conclude that the “feminine mystique” itself was more than a myth. It is an education toward genuinely important human experiences. Her career, begun with a critique of the feminine mystique, was based at best on a partial truth. Her questioning should have led her to doubt her initial principles. The fact that she did not revisit her own thought is an indication of genuine commitment to radicalism. It explains why her radical principles were more influential and lasting than her moderation.

Conclusion

The Feminine Mystique inspired the women’s movement to advocate for a more independent, liberationist woman. Many Americans accept these principles as unqualified goods of our shared public life. The question of the place of women in society seems to be settled: Women can and should be everywhere in society that men are and in the same numbers as men. A more moderate feminism would have to reevaluate Friedan’s starting point about the goodness of independence for human life. Her thought points to such a need but does not provide it.

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37. See, for example, Betsey Stevenson and Justin Wolfers, “The Paradox of Declining Female Happiness,” *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (August 2009), pp. 190–225, <http://users.nber.org/~jwolfers/Papers/WomensHappiness.pdf> (accessed September 19, 2018).