

Women's Liberation

In the years leading up to the 1960s, the role of women in American society was that of the traditional housewife and stay-at-home mother. Several television programs reflected these views. *I Love Lucy*, *Ozzie and Harriet*, and *Leave It to Beaver*, for example, depicted happy households where Mom was content to take care of her family. Writer Betty Friedan questioned this traditionalist view of women, and during the early sixties she investigated women's true feelings. Friedan found that many of them were unhappy and dissatisfied with the limitations of being housewives. As these women began seeking ways to change their lives, the women's liberation movement gathered momentum.

Born Betty Goldstein in Peoria, Illinois, to a wealthy family, she was a bright, outgoing child. After graduating from high school as valedictorian she went on to study psychology at Smith College. There she became editor of the college newspaper.

This experience helped her in her job as a labor journalist. However, it did not prepare her for the discrimination she and other women faced in the work force. Her marriage and motherhood only reinforced the limited roles available to women in the sixties. Then she was asked to conduct a poll of her college classmates about their life experiences. Friedan was amazed to find that the 200 women who responded were as dissatisfied with their places in society as she was. Friedan wrote an article about her survey results, but no magazine would publish it. One publisher, however, was interested in a book. After five years of interviews and researching, *The Feminine Mystique* was published in 1963. Enormously popular, the book pointed out that American females received educations that opened their minds yet left them facing closed doors to all but a few career choices. As more and more women were drawn to feminism, Friedan founded a group in 1966 called NOW, the National Organization of Women. NOW worked to achieve equal rights for women and is still an active force in society and politics. Betty Friedan served as its president until 1970 and today continues to promote women's equality.



Betty Friedan

Suggested Activity

Discussion Conduct a class discussion about women's roles in society today. Do women have equal rights? Are they paid the same as men for equal work? Are the same career opportunities available to women as to men?

The Problem In *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan called it "the problem that has no name." Ask students to identify and discuss the problem. Does it still exist?

Excerpts Read excerpts from *The Feminine Mystique* aloud to students. Discuss the content with the class.