

NATIONAL  
**Women's**  
HISTORY MONTH

At 75, feminist leader Friedan takes on a new battle:  
Corporate greed and downsizing's impact on families

# She's Not Done Yet

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PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER

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**C**arolyn Forche had to talk herself into it and have a friend accompany her. Only then did she walk up to the small, gray-haired woman in black with the brown-patterned velvet jacket.

"You're my heroine," the English professor at George Mason University gushed. "I just had to come and meet you."

The moment of homage went unnoticed. The others at the party — novelists, poets, patrons of the arts — made little fuss. Neither did the object of Forche's attention. She accepted the adulation with a small smile and a quiet, practiced thank you.

"It happens all the time," says Betty Friedan.

The most prominent leader of the women's movement celebrated her 75th birthday in February. Parties in two cities. (She loves parties.) Silkscreen from an old friend — Kurt Vonnegut. Made it himself.

Thirty-three years ago, Friedan wrote "The Feminine Mystique." Thirty years ago, she helped start, and was president of, a fledgling women's group called the National Organization for Women. She also helped begin the National Women's Political Caucus and National Abortion Rights Action League. Three other books and scads of articles bear her name. Taught everywhere, from Temple University to the University of Southern California to Mount Vernon College in Washington. Fellowships, classes and speeches from Beijing to Brazil. Currently guest scholar and seminar leader at the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars in Washington.

Wherever she went, the greeting was "Thank you, you changed my life." Waitresses and college professors, it didn't matter. Everyone has heard of Betty Friedan.

The proud mother of three — a pediatrician, an engineer and a physicist — wants you to know that the physicist, Daniel, of Princeton, N.J., won a MacArthur Foundation genius grant, and Jonathan, the Philadelphia engineer, well, his wife just became a rabbi. Friedan is the grandmother of eight.

"I'm not the grandmother of the movement. I shouldn't be called that. If I'm the grandmother, then there's a mother. People say I'm the mother. I'm a mother."

Not entirely at ease being called a mother of any movement. It's not a question of ego, but "there's just so much mother-bashing," she says.

So call her the author of the Old Testament and understand that she has more to write. Betty Friedan is not done.



RON TARVER / KRT

**Speaking out on concerns of the '90s:** People losing jobs and earning less money, Betty Friedan says, causes family stress and "a backlash against women."

She is great-looking. Not good-looking great, but distinguished-from-everyone-else-great. Large lids hood her eyes and the nose is prominent, but the parts fit.

Her voice is a rush of gravel and attitude. It can be menacing, it can be matter of fact.

"Why are you asking that? Didn't you read anything about me?"

"My mother was not happy. No, I didn't want to be like my mother."

She is thought of as a writer and as a feminist; both descriptions are accurate. But neither is enough. Friedan is an independent mind, a debunker who has put her fingers in the chinks and crevices of society's norms and scraped. And she's not content to scrape away at the same crevices or to avoid her own chinks.

Today, her attention is focused on corporate greed and downsizing, and what Newt Gingrich called the Contract With America, but what she says is the Contract "On" America. She expects to join a speak-out in Washington this summer against downsizing and greed.

People losing jobs and earning less money, and government turning its back on the poor, causes family stress, she says, and "a backlash against women. Look at what people are saying about women on welfare."

In a Smithsonian Institution building, about 50 union leaders, policymakers, organization leaders, historians and academics sat and listened as Betty Friedan said:

"We have to get beyond sexual politics, beyond identity politics."

"What do we mean by family values? How do we go about preserving family values in light of recent technical, social and political developments?"

The discussion was titled "The New Paradigm: Reframing Family Values," and Friedan has been convening the seminars at the Wilson Center since November.

"Some people mean by family values a return to the old nuclear values," Friedan says. She says that is not possible. Too much has changed. "We do seem to agree that we want families to go back to nurturing."

How to do that?

"My sense is that we need new institutions," Friedan says, "institutions beyond the home."

Friedan talks about child-care centers that are "vital community organizations. There is a real need and a yearning for community. Workers are working longer and longer hours. The toll on families. . ."

Betty Friedan is not done yet.

## FILE ON FRIEDAN

■ **Born:** Betty Naomi Goldstein in Peoria, Ill.

■ **Graduated:** Smith College, summa cum laude.

■ **Married:** Carl Friedan in 1947.

### Milestones:

■ **She was fired** from a Long Island newspaper when she was pregnant with her second child. Her union was no help. "There was no word for sex discrimination then," she says.

■ **In the mid-1950s,** she wrote an article rebutting a story that said too much education caused women problems. She couldn't get it published. In 1963, that article became "The Feminine Mystique."

■ **She divorced** Carl Friedan in 1969. The divorce was kept quiet. No need to embarrass the movement.

■ **She fought** for stewardesses who were fired at age 35 and against newspapers that published help-wanted ads by gender.

■ **She wrote** "It Changed My Life" in the mid '70s, a book of memoirs and selections from her own writing.

■ **She later wrote** "The Second Stage" and "The Fountain of Age."

## JUST THE FACTS

■ **She never** burned a bra or knew anyone who did.

■ **She received** less hostility from men than she did from women about "The Feminine Mystique."

■ **She never set** out to change the world. She just wanted to write a magazine article; when no one would publish it, she decided to make it a book.

■ **She may be** a lioness of liberation, but it was not until age 50 that she felt liberated enough to "dance in public."

Coming Wednesday  
Five metro Atlanta pioneers who have helped change the lives of other women. **In Living.**