Betty Friedan, Who Ignited a Movement
With 'The Feminine Mystique,' Dies at 85

By MARGALIT FOX

Betty Friedan, the feminist crusader whose landmark book, "The Feminine Mystique," ignited the contemporary women's movement, died on Jan. 31, 2006, at her home in Walpole, Mass. She was 85.

The cause was congestive heart failure, said Emily Bannister, a family spokeswoman.

With her impassioned yet clear-sighted analysis of the issues that women's liberation and feminism confronted, Betty Friedan's death on Jan. 31 marks the end of an era. Friedan had been a central figure in the American feminist movement for more than 40 years, and her work has had a profound impact on the lives of millions of women around the world.

Friedan was born in 1921 in Peoria, Ill., the daughter of a World War I veteran and a homemaker. She grew up in a middle-class family and attended the University of Minnesota, where she met her future husband, Joe B. Friedan. After graduating, the couple moved to New York City, where Friedan worked as a reporter for the Women's Bureau of the Federal Government.

In 1963, Friedan helped found the National Organization for Women (NOW), which grew into a powerful force in the women's liberation movement. She was a driving force behind the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution and was a vocal advocate for women's rights in the workplace.

Over the course of her career, Friedan authored several books, including "The Feminine Mystique," which was published in 1963. The book challenged the prevailing notion that women's primary role was as mothers and homemakers, and it became a bestseller, selling more than a million copies in its first year. Friedan's work helped to inspire a generation of women to fight for their rights.

Friedan was also a founding member of the National Organization for Women (NOW), a group she helped to create in 1966. NOW worked to advance women's rights and to promote equal opportunities for women in all areas of life.

Friedan's influence extended beyond her own work. She was a mentor to many young women and inspired a generation of women to become involved in the feminist movement. She was also a role model for women who sought to challenge traditional gender roles and to fight for women's rights.

Friedan's legacy lives on today, as women continue to fight for equality and to push against the barriers that have held them back. Her work inspired millions of women to take action and to fight for their rights, and she will be remembered as one of the most influential women of her time.

In conclusion, Betty Friedan was a trailblazer who challenged the status quo and fought for women's rights. Her legacy will continue to inspire women for generations to come, as they continue to work towards a world where all women are equal and free to reach their full potential.
In the 1970s and afterward, some feminists criticized Ms. Friedan for focusing almost exclusively on the concerns of middle-class married white women and ignoring those of minorities, lesbians and the poor. Some called her retrograde for insisting that women could and should live in collaborative partnership with men.

Ms. Friedan's private life was also famously stormy. In her recent memoir, "Life So Far" (Simon & Schuster, 2000), she accused her husband of being physically abusive during their marriage, writing that he sometimes gave her black eyes, which she concealed with make-up at public events and on television.

Mr. Friedan, who died in December, repeatedly denied the accusations. In an interview with Time magazine in 2000, shortly after the memoir's publication, he called Ms. Friedan's account a "complete fabrication." He added: "I am the innocent victim of a drive-by shooting by a reckless driver savagely aiming at the whole male gender."

Ms. Friedan's other books include "If Changed My Life: Writings on the Women's Movement" (Random House, 1976); "The Second Stage" (Summit, 1981); and "The Fountain of Age" (Simon & Schuster, 1983).

The recipient of many awards and honorary degrees, she was a visiting professor at universities around the country, among them Columbia, Temple and the University of Southern California. In recent years, Ms. Friedan was associated with the Institute for Women and Work at Cornell University.

Despite all of her later achievements, Ms. Friedan would be forever known as the suburban housewife who started a revolution with "The Feminine Mystique." Rarely has a single book been responsible for such sweeping, tumultuous and continuing social transformation.

The new society Ms. Friedan proposed, founded on the notion that men and women were created equal, represented such a drastic upending of the prevailing social norms that over the years to come, she would be forced to explain her position again and again.

"Some people think I'm saying, 'Women of the world unite — you have nothing to lose but your men,'" she told Life magazine in 1963. "It's not true. You have nothing to lose but your vacuum cleaners."

Over and over women heard in voices of tradition and of Feminian sophistication that they could desire no greater destiny than to glory in their own femininity: Experts told them how to catch a man and keep him, how to breastfeed children and handle their toilet training, how to cope with sibling rivalry and adolescent rebellion; how to buy a dishwasher, bake bread, cook gourmet snails, and build a swimming pool with their own hands; how to dress, look, and act more feminine and make marriage more exciting; how to keep their husbands from dying young and their sons from growing into delinquents.

In the fifteen years after World War II, this mystique of feminine fulfillment became the cherished and self-perpetuating core of contemporary American culture. Millions of women lived their lives in the image of those pretty pictures of the American suburban housewife, kissing their husbands goodbye in front of the picture window, depositing their stationwagons full of children at school, and smiling as they ran the new electric waver over the spotless kitchen floor. They baked their own bread, sewed their own and their children's clothes, kept their new washing machines and dryers running all day. They changed the sheets on the beds twice a week instead of once, took the rug-hooking class in adult education, and pitied their poor frustrated mothers, who had dreamed of having a career. Their only dream was to be perfect wives and mothers; their highest ambition to have five children; and if they could not get a house, their own beautiful house, their only light to get and keep their husbands. They had no thought for the unfeminine problems of the world outside the home; they wanted the men to make the major decisions. They gloried in their role as women, and wrote proudly on the census blank: "Occupation: housewife."