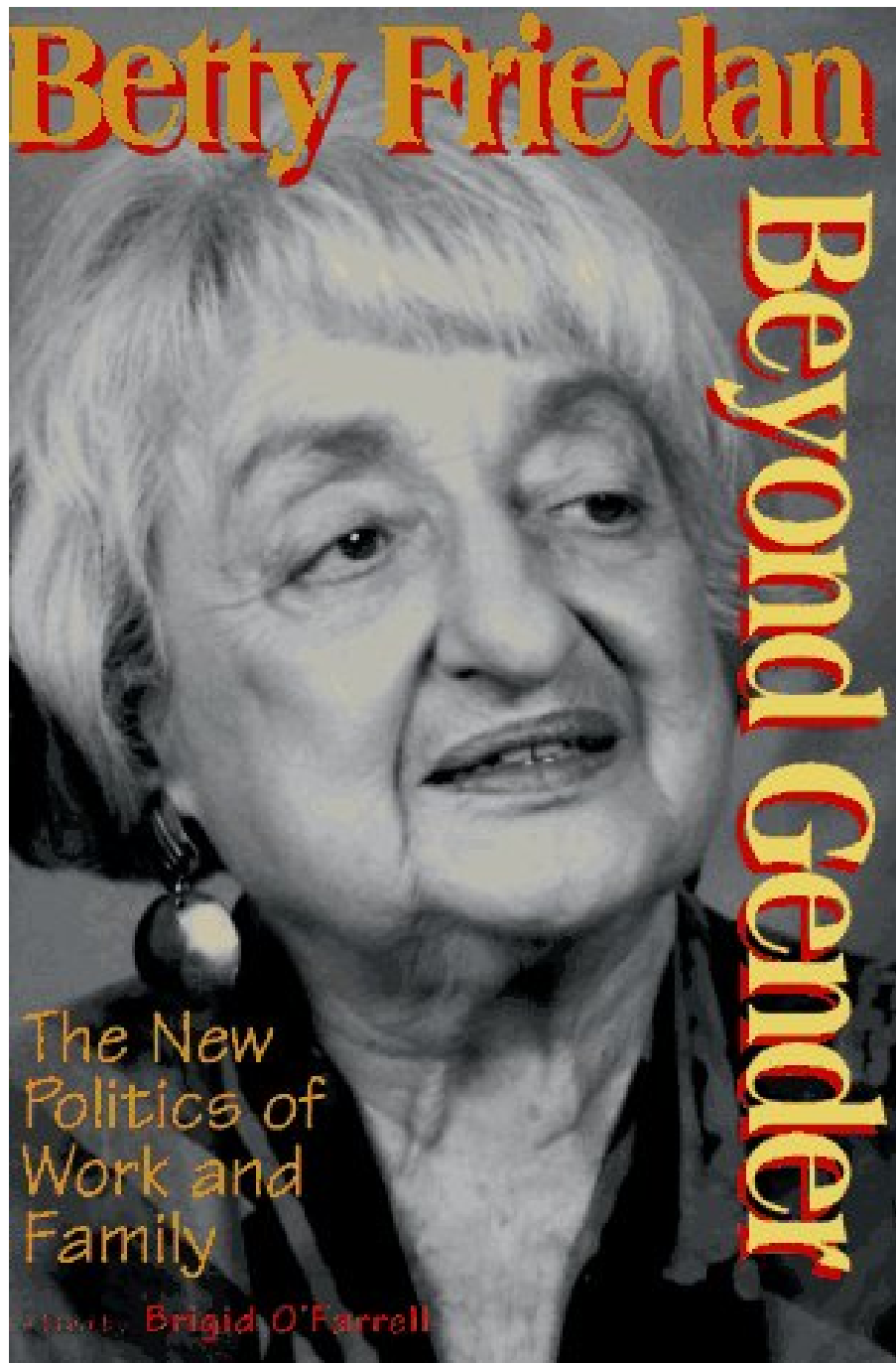


BEYOND GENDER: THE NEW POLITICS OF WORK AND FAMILY BY BETTY FRIEDAN



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"A basic restructuring of our economy is needed now," writes Betty Friedan in her latest book, *Beyond Gender*. "And this restructuring can't be accomplished in terms of women versus men, black versus white, old versus young, conservative versus liberal. We need a new political movement in America that puts the lives and interests of people first. It can't be done by separate, single-issue movements now, and it has to be political to protect and translate our new empowerment with a new vision of community, with new structures of community that open the doors again to real equality of opportunity."

As the author of *The Feminine Mystique* and head of the National Organization for Women, Betty Friedan helped spark a movement that revolutionized the fight for equal rights and opportunities for women. Now, in *Beyond Gender*, Friedan argues that the old solutions no longer work. The time has come, she contends, for women and men to move forward from identity politics and gender-based, single-issue political activism. Without yielding on particular women's issues, she calls for a "paradigm shift"—a transformation of the intellectual and political structure within which those issues are viewed.

Friedan's "new paradigm" embraces the entire world of work, family, and community, where some of the most crucial questions of 1990s America have been raised. To explore them, Friedan initiated a conversation among policy experts, scholars, corporate and labor leaders, journalists, and political thinkers. Guiding their conversation with her own reflections, Friedan explores the social anxiety caused by corporate downsizing and displacement of middle-aged male employees—including the impact on working wives who suddenly become their family's sole provider. She confronts the expansion of part-time and temporary work due to outsourcing, which disproportionately affects women workers. She describes the loss of community life and community space in the fast-paced, consumption-oriented suburbs. And she discusses the breakdown of family structure in many parts of American society.

Beyond Gender combines enthusiasm, curiosity, scholarship, and practical expertise as it revisits the relations among jobs, home, and society. Once again, Betty Friedan has challenged her readers to rethink the context within which they view both the relations of the sexes and the relations of the marketplace.

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THE AUTHOR OF "THE FEMININE MYSTIQUE" AND "THE SECOND STAGE" CONTINUES HER GROWTH

By Steven H Propp

Betty Friedan (1921-2006) was an American writer, activist, and feminist, who became one of the leading figures of the feminist movement with the publication of her 1963 book *The Feminine Mystique*. She was founder of, and first president of the National Organization for Women (NOW). She also wrote *Life So Far: A Memoir*, *Fountain of Age*, *The Second Stage*, and *It Changed My Life: Writings on the Women's Movement*.

She explains in the first chapter of this 1997 book, "What I sense here is something ... that cannot be evaded or handled at all in the usual feminist terms. What I sense is the need for a paradigm shift beyond feminism, beyond sexual politics, beyond identity politics altogether. A new paradigm for women and men... a lot of other people ... are moving in the same direction. There's a mounting sense that the crises we are now facing, or denying, cannot be solved in the same terms we use to conduct our personal or political or business or family lives. They can no longer be seen in terms of gender. The old paradigm still shaping our thinking may keep us from seeing these problems for what they are, much less solving them." (Pg. 2-3)

She continues, "were we somehow letting those who opposed all our rights... define the terms of our unfinished battle too narrowly? Year after year we spent all our organizational energy and funds fighting for the right to abortion, the battle we had already won in Congress and the courts and public opinion. Ought not at least as much energy go into breaking down the remaining barriers to women's earning and advancing in our economy to equality with men? Key to that... would be to change the structures that make it very difficult for American women to combine childbearing and advancing in business and the professions." (Pg. 9)

She acknowledges, "In 'The Second Stage' ... I proposed coming to new terms with family, with motherhood, with men, with careers, going beyond the impossible dilemmas of the old paradigm, the male

model or its sexual obverse. My views were bitterly attacked by Ms. [magazine] and other voices of what was becoming 'politically correct' feminism, as if I was betraying the women's movement. I was deeply hurt by those attacks but had no desire to mount a counterfeminist movement. In my writing, I took on a new frontier instead, the denial of age... I bowed out of feminist organizational politics altogether, except when asked for help." (Pg. 7)

She observes, "Now I see the impossible paradox for women: women are achieving what begins to look like equality because the men are doing worse. Is their loss really our gain? Women are benefitting from changes in the economy, with more control over their lives than their mothers ever dreamed of. The great majority work at jobs that may not be the greatest but give them a life in their forties and fifties, after the kids are off, though the juggling of children and job in the thirties is tough. Many women are doing as well or better than those downsized men." (Pg. 12)

She explains, "I decide to use my berth at the Woodrow Wilson Center to organize the New Paradigm Seminar for policy makers to look beyond identity politics and toward a new paradigm of women, men, and community. I call some new leaders of women's organizations I have come to respect... [plus] economists and political scientists, to attempt a new kind of thinking about the economic problems basic to our lives--- problems that can no longer be seen in terms of women alone, or women versus men." (Pg. 13-14)

At the first meeting of the group, she suggests, "Might this not be the time for a shorter workweek as an alternative to downsizing? This would meet the needs of women and men in the childbearing years and people throughout life as they continue further training, education, and work. This would help older people who shouldn't be pushed out altogether and who would welcome a less rigid schedule. Could it also meet the needs of employers who prefer today to hire temporary or part-time workers if we fight to have such work covered by pro-rated benefits?" (Pg. 18-19) Later, she adds, "Either you can go the route of focusing on what women make compared with men or you can go the route that something has to be done in terms of the whole society and the whole economy. Trying to come to a new paradigm, we have to be very careful that we see it all... People in our society want a new vision of community." (Pg. 34)

She wonders, "is the feminist focus on gender issues adequate to today's problems?... Do we of the middle class... get some relief from our own fears and frustrations by scapegoating welfare mothers, racial minorities, women, older people? Focusing on our own special issues, do we ignore at our peril deeper economic causes and political dangers? Do we lock ourselves into no-win dilemmas by sticking to this narrow single-issue focus, blinding ourselves to the larger power to create alternatives if we held a common vision, a new dream of American possibility, a new paradigm?" (Pg. 67-68)

She asserts, "Yet when I say that there has to be a new vision of family and community some of my feminist friends are resistant to the discussion of family. They say we have been defined too long in terms of family and we have to think of ourselves first, of women first... As a mother of three and grandmother of six, I'm one feminist who is a passionate believer in the value and the importance of families. To turn our back on the values that have rightly been associated with women or what some might call family values would be something I as a feminist would strongly object to and so would many others... We need to talk about what we all mean by family values and how these values can be dealt with, strengthened, and affirmed in terms of today's realities." (Pg. 83-84)

She comments, "we come back again and again to the growing numbers of single-parent families and the absence of fathers in vastly increasing numbers of families as a major cause of economic and social stress and perhaps a generational cycle of poverty and pathology... It makes me uneasy that this development is always discussed in terms that demonize the mother, the welfare mother, the single-parent mother, the

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(Susan Bianchi-Sand, Executive Director, National Committee on Pay Equity, Chair of the Council of Presidents of National Women's Organizations)

About the Author

Betty Friedan, a leading advocate for women's rights and author of *The Feminine Mystique*, and, most recently, of *The Fountain of Age*, is currently Distinguished Professor of Social Evolution and Director of the Center for Women, Men, and Social Evolution at Mount Vernon College in Washington, D.C., and is an Adjunct Scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. Brigid O'Farrell, a sociologist, is a Visiting Fellow at the Center for Women, Men, and Social Evolution; her most recent book is *Rocking the Boat: Union Women's Voices, 1915-1975*, written with Joyce Kornbluh.

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