Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963)

*Source: Fred Palumbo, World Telegram*

**Introduction**

Betty Friedan (1921-2006) was a homemaker, writer, and feminist whose influential book *The Feminine Mystique*, published in 1963, helped launch the Women’s Rights movement of the 1960s. In the book, Friedan asserted that educated middle-class women found their traditional roles as housewives and mothers frustrating and unfulfilling. As she wrote in the opening chapter of the book:

*The problem lay buried, unspoken for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States. Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night – she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question – “Is this all?” . . .

*We can no longer ignore that voice within women that says: “I want something more than my husband and my children and my home.”*
Excerpt from Chapter 1

By the end of the nineteen-fifties, the average marriage age of women in America dropped to 20, and was still dropping, into the teens. Fourteen million girls were engaged by 17. The proportion of women attending college in comparison with men dropped from 47 per cent in 1920 to 35 per cent in 1958. A century earlier, women had fought for higher education; now girls went to college to get a husband. By the mid-fifties, 60 per cent dropped out of college to marry, or because they were afraid too much education would be a marriage bar. Colleges built dormitories for “married students,” but the students were almost always the husbands. A new degree was instituted for the wives — “Ph. T” (Putting Husband Through).

Then American girls began getting married in high school. And the women’s magazines, deploiring the unhappy statistics about these young marriages, urged that courses on marriage, and marriage counselors, be installed in the high schools. Girls started going steady at twelve and thirteen, in junior high. Manufacturers put out brassieres with false bosoms of foam rubber for little girls of ten. And an advertisement for a child’s dress, sizes 3–6x, in the New York Times in the fall of 1960, said: “She Too Can Join the Man-Trap Set.”

-- Betty Friedan, The Feminine Mystique (1963)