The post–World War II period was marked by a resurgent domesticity. The average age at marriage of women dropped sharply—by the end of the 1950s it was twenty. Men and women who married in the 1950s were usually younger than their parents had been when they had married in the 1930s and 1940s. Women’s age at the birth of their first child also decreased precipitously and family sizes mushroomed. After World War II, the proportion of women in college fell in comparison to that of men; many women dropped out of college to marry or because they saw no advantage to obtaining a college degree.

In 1963 Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique*, a searing indictment of the triviality and frustrations of postwar domesticity. She wrote in the voice of an author who located herself in the middle-class suburbs and whose ethnicity was unmarked. But as Daniel Horowitz explains in the essay that follows, Friedan’s analysis emerged not only from her experience of suburban life, but also from her work in left-wing politics and in the labor movement—experiences she did not mention in *The Feminine Mystique*. Consider why she may have hidden her past work with progressive groups: in 1952, Ethel and Julius Rosenberg were executed for spying. This frightened many Jewish Americans with ties to progressive organizations because they feared (correctly) that they would be accused of being communist sympathizers. Can you identify other elements of Cold War politics and culture that may have contributed to the choices Friedan made as she developed her voice?

In 1951, a labor journalist with a decade’s experience in protest movements described a trade union meeting where rank-and-file women talked and men listened. Out of these conversations, she reported, emerged the realization that the women were “fighters—that they refuse any longer to be paid or treated as some inferior species by their bosses, or by any male workers who have swallowed the bosses’ thinking.”[1](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-1) The union was the UE, the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America, the most radical American union in the postwar period and in the 1940s what historian Ronald Schatz… has called “the largest communist-led institution of any kind in the United States.”[2](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-2) In 1952 that same journalist wrote a pamphlet, *UE Fights for Women Workers*, that the historian Lisa Kannenberg, unaware of the identity of its author, has called “a remarkable manual for fighting wage discrimination that is, ironically, as relevant today as it was in 1952.” At the time, the pamphlet helped raise the consciousness of Eleanor Flexner, who in 1959 would publish *Century of Struggle*, the first scholarly history of American women. In 1953–54, Flexner relied extensively on the pamphlet when she taught a course at the Jefferson School of Social Science in New York on “The Woman Question.” Flexner’s participation in courses at the school, she later said, “marked the beginning of my real involvement in the issues of women’s rights, my realization that leftist organizations—parties, unions—were also riddled with male supremacist prejudice and discrimination.”[3](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-3) The labor journalist and pamphlet writer was Betty Friedan.

In 1973 Friedan remarked that until she started writing *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), “I wasn’t even conscious of the woman problem.” In 1976 she commented that in the early 1950s she was “still in the embrace of the feminine mystique.”[4](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-4) Although in 1974 she revealed some potentially controversial elements of her past, even then she left the impression that her landmark book emerged only from her own captivity by the very forces she described. Friedan’s portrayal of herself as so totally trapped by the feminine mystique was part of a reinvention of herself as she wrote and promoted *The Feminine Mystique*. Her story made it possible for readers to identify with its author and its author to enhance the book’s appeal. However, it hid from view the connection between the union activity in which Friedan participated in the 1940s and early 1950s and the feminism she inspired in the 1960s. In the short term, her misery in the suburbs may have prompted her to write *The Feminine Mystique*; a longer term perspective makes clear that the book’s origins lie much earlier—in her college education and in her experiences with labor unions in the 1940s and early 1950s.[5](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-5)… Friedan’s life provides evidence of… continuity… between the struggle for justice for working women in the 1940s and the feminism of the 1960s. This connection gives feminism and Friedan, both long under attack for a lack of interest in working class and African American women, a past of which they should be proud.… Moreover, a new reading of *The Feminine Mystique* sheds light on the remaking of progressive forces in America, the process by which a focus on women and the professional middle and upper middle classes supplemented, in some ways replaced a focus on unions. Finally, an examination of *The Feminine Mystique* reminds us of important shifts in the ideology of the left: from an earlier economic analysis based on Marxism to one developed in the 1950s that also rested on humanistic psychology, and from a focus on the impact of conditions of production on the working class to an emphasis on the effect of consumption on the middle class.

In print and in interviews, Friedan has offered a narrative of her life that she popularized after she became famous in 1963.[6](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-6) A full biography might begin in Peoria, where Bettye Naomi Goldstein was born February 4, 1921 and grew up with her siblings and their parents: a father who owned a jewelry store and a mother who had given up her position as a society editor of the local paper to raise a family.[7](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-7) My analysis of Friedan’s political journey starts with her years at Smith College, although it is important to recognize Friedan’s earlier sense of herself as someone whose identity as a Jew, a reader, and a brainy girl made her feel freakish and lonely.[8](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-8)

As an undergraduate, she has suggested, her lonely life took a turn for the better. “For the first time,” she later remarked of her years in college, “I wasn’t a freak for having brains.” Friedan has acknowledged that she flourished at Smith, with her editorship of the student newspaper, her election to Phi Beta Kappa in her junior year, and her graduation *summa cum laude* among her most prominent achievements. She has told the story of how Gestalt psychology and Kurt Koffka (one of its three founders) were critical in her intellectual development.[9](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-9)

Friedan has described the years between her graduation from Smith in 1942 and the publication of her book twenty-one years later as a time when the feminine mystique increasingly trapped her. In her book and in dozens of speeches, articles, and interviews beginning in 1963, she mentioned a pivotal moment in her life, one that she felt marked the beginning of the process by which she succumbed. She told how, while in graduate school at Berkeley in the year after her graduation from college, the university’s offer of a prestigious fellowship forced her to make a painful choice. Her first serious boyfriend, a graduate student who had not earned a similarly generous award, threatened to break off the relationship unless she turned down her fellowship. “I never could explain, hardly knew myself, why” she turned away from a career in psychology, she wrote in 1963. She decided to reject the fellowship because she saw herself ending up as an “old maid college teacher” in part because at Smith, she said, there were so few female professors who had husbands and children.[10](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-10) The feminine mystique, she insisted, had claimed one of its first victims.[11](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-11)

After leaving Berkeley, the copy on the dust jacket of *The Feminine Mystique* noted, Friedan did some “applied social-science research” and freelance writing for magazines. Friedan’s biography in a standard reference book quotes her as saying that in the 1940s, “for conscious or unconscious reasons,” she worked at “the usual kinds of boring jobs that lead nowhere.”[12](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-12) This story continues in 1947 with her marriage to Carl Friedan, a returning vet who would eventually switch careers from theater to advertising and public relations. She has told of how she gave birth to three children between 1948 and 1956 and the family moved to the suburbs, with these experiences making her feel trapped. Friedan’s picture of her years in the suburbs is not one of contentment and conformity.[13](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-13) Though she acknowledged her role in creating and directing a program that brought together teenagers and adult professionals, Friedan portrayed herself as someone who felt “freakish having a career, worried that she was neglecting her children.”[14](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-14) In an oft-repeated story whose punch line varied, Friedan recounted her response to the census form. In the space where it asked for her occupation, she put down “housewife” but remained guilty, hesitant, and conflicted about such a designation, sometimes pausing and then adding “writer.”[15](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-15)

Friedan laced *The Feminine Mystique* with suggestions of how much she shared with her suburban sisters. In the opening paragraph, she said that she realized something was wrong in women’s lives when she “sensed it first as a question mark in my own life, as a wife and mother of three small children, half-guiltily, and therefore half-heartedly, almost in spite of myself, using my abilities and education in work that took me away from home.” Toward the end of the paragraph, when she referred to “a strange discrepancy between the reality of our lives as women and the image to which we were trying to conform,” she suggested that she experienced the feminine mystique as keenly and in the same way as her readers. Using the second person plural, she wrote that “all of us went back into the warm brightness of home” and “lowered our eyes from the horizon, and steadily contemplated our own navels.” Her work on newspapers, she wrote in *The Feminine Mystique*, proceeded “with no particular plan.” Indeed, she claimed that she had participated as a writer in the creation of the image of the happy housewife.[16](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-16)

Friedan asserted she embarked on a path that would lead to *The Feminine Mystique* only when, as she read over the responses of her college classmates to a questionnaire in anticipation of their fifteenth reunion in 1957, she discovered what she called “The Problem That Has No Name,” the dissatisfaction her suburban peers felt but could not fully articulate. When she submitted articles to women’s magazines, Friedan said, editors changed the meaning of what she had written or rejected outright her suggestions for pieces on controversial subjects. Then at a meeting of the Society of Magazine Writers, she heard Vance Packard recount how he had written *The Hidden Persuaders* (1957) after *Reader’s Digest* turned down an article critical of advertising. Friedan decided to write her book.[17](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-17)

In *”It Changed My Life”: Writings on the Women’s Movement* (1976), a book that included a 1974 autobiographical article, Friedan suggested some of what she had omitted from earlier versions of her life.[18](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-18) Perhaps responding to attacks on her for not being sufficiently radical, she acknowledged that before her marriage and for several years after she participated in radical activities and worked for union publications.[19](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-19) She and the friends with whom she lived before marrying considered themselves in “the vanguard of the working-class revolution,” participating in “Marxist discussion groups,” going to political rallies, and having “only contempt for dreary bourgeois capitalists like our fathers.” Without getting much more specific, Friedan noted that right after the war she was “very involved, consciously radical. Not about women, for heaven’s sake!” but about African Americans, workers, the threat of war, anti-communism, and “communist splits and schisms.” This was a time, Friedan reported briefly, when, working as a labor journalist, she discovered “the grubby economic underside of American reality.”[20](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-20)

“I was certainly not a feminist then—none of us,” she remarked in the mid-1970s, “were a bit interested in women’s rights.” She remembered one incident, whose implications she said she only understood much later. Covering a strike, she could not interest anyone in the fact that the company and the union discriminated against women. In 1952, she later claimed, pregnant with her second child, she was fired from her job on a union publication and told that her second pregnancy was her fault. The Newspaper Guild, she asserted, was unwilling to honor its commitment to grant pregnancy leaves. This was, Friedan later remembered, as she mentioned her efforts to call a meeting in protest, “the first personal stirring of my own feminism, I guess. But the other women were just embarrassed, and the men uncomprehending. It was my own fault, getting pregnant again, a *personal* matter, not something you should take to the union. There was no word in 1949 for ‘sex discrimination.’”[21](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-21)

Though in the 1970s Friedan suggested this more interesting version of her life in the 1940s and 1950s, she distracted the reader from what she had said. She began and ended the 1974 piece with images of domestic life. Even as she mentioned participation in Marxist discussion groups, she talked of how she and her friends read fashion magazines and spent much of their earnings on elegant clothes. Describing what she offered as a major turning point in her life, she told of how, after campaigning for Henry Wallace in 1948, all of a sudden she lost interest in political activity. The 1940s and 1950s were a period, she later asserted, when she was fully exposed to what she would label the feminine mystique as she learned that motherhood took the place of career and politics. She gave the impression of herself in the late 1940s as a woman who embraced domesticity, motherhood, and housework, even as she admitted that not everything at the time resulted from the feminine mystique.[22](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-22)

In her 1974 article Friedan filled her descriptions of the late 1940s and 1950s with a sense of the conflicts she felt over her new roles, as she surrendered to the feminine mystique with mixed emotions. She reported how wonderful was the time in Parkway Village, Queens, a period when she experienced the pleasure of a spacious apartment, edited the community newspaper, and enjoyed the camaraderie of young marrieds. Yet, having read Benjamin Spock’s *Child and Baby Care*, she felt guilty when she returned to work after a maternity leave. With her move to a traditional suburb, she said, the conflicts intensified. She spoke of driving her children to school and lessons, participating in the PTA, and then, when neighbors came by, hiding “like secret drinking in the morning” the book she was working on.[23](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-23)

Accomplishing practical, specific tasks around the house and in local politics was “somehow more real and secure than the schizophrenic and even dangerous politics of the world revolution whose vanguard we used to fancy ourselves.” Friedan remarked that by 1949 she realized that the revolution was not going to happen in the United States as she anticipated, in part because workers, like others, wanted kitchen gadgets. She reported that she found herself disillusioned with what was happening in unions, in Czechoslovakia, and in the Soviet Union, despite the fact that cries about the spread of Communism merely provided the pretext for attacks on suspected subversives. In those days, she continued, “McCarthyism, the danger of war against Russia and of fascism in America, and the reality of U.S. imperial, corporate wealth and power” combined to make those who once dreamed of “making the whole world over uncomfortable with the Old Left rhetoric of revolution.” Using the first person plural as she referred to Margaret Mead’s picture in *Male and Female* (1949) of women fulfilled through motherhood and domesticity, Friedan wrote, “we were suckers for that apple.” It hardly occurred to any of those in her circle, who themselves now wanted new gadgets, that large corporations profited from marketing household appliances by “overselling us on the bliss of domesticity.”[24](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-24)

The new information Friedan offered in 1974 did not dislodge the accepted understanding of how she became a feminist… [Yet] what the written record reveals of Friedan’s life from her arrival at Smith in the fall of 1938 until the publication of *The Feminine Mystique* makes possible a story different from the one she has told. To begin with, usually missing from her narrative is full and specific information about how at college she first developed a sense of herself as a radical.[25](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-25) Courses she took, friendships she established with peers and professors, events in the United States and abroad, and her campus leadership all turned Friedan from a provincial outsider into a determined advocate of trade unions as the herald of progressive social change, a healthy skeptic about the authority and rhetorical claims of those in power, a staunch opponent of fascism, a defender of free speech, and a fierce questioner of social privilege expressed by the conspicuous consumption of some of her peers.[26](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-26)

What and with whom she studied points well beyond Gestalt psychology and Koffka.[27](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-27) Though Friedan acknowledged the importance of James Gibson, she did not mention his activity as an advocate of trade unions.[28](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-28) Moreover, her statement that at Smith there were few role models is hard to reconcile with the fact that the college had a number of them; indeed she took courses from both James Gibson and Eleanor Gibson, husband and wife and parents of two children, the first of them born in 1940.[29](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-29) As a women’s college, and especially one with an adversarial tradition, Smith may well have fostered in Friedan a feminism that was at least implicit—by enabling her to assume leadership positions and by encouraging her to take herself seriously as a writer and thinker.

In the fall of her junior year, Friedan took an economics course taught by Dorothy W. Douglas, Theories and Movements for Social Reconstruction. Douglas was well known at the time for her radicalism.[30](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-30) In what she wrote for Douglas, and with youthful enthusiasm characteristic of many members of her generation, Friedan sympathetically responded to the Marxist critique of capitalism as a cultural, economic, and political force.[31](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-31)

Friedan also gained an education as a radical in the summer of 1941 when, following Douglas’s suggestion, she participated in a writers’ workshop at the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee, an institution active in helping the CIO organize in the South. The school offered a series of summer institutes for fledgling journalists which, for 1939 and 1940 (but not 1941), the communist-led League of American Writers helped sponsor. For three years beginning in the fall of 1939, opponents of Highlander had sustained a vicious redbaiting attack, but a FBI investigator found no evidence of subversive activity.[32](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-32) In good Popular Front language, Friedan praised Highlander as a truly American institution that was attempting to help America to fulfill its democratic ideals. She explored the contradictions of her social position as a Jewish girl from a well-to-do family who had grown up in a class-divided Peoria, gave evidence of her hostility to the way her parents fought over issues of debt and extravagance, and described the baneful influence of the mass media on American life. Though she also acknowledged that her Smith education did “not lead to much action,” she portrayed herself as someone whose radical consciousness relied on the American labor movement as the bulwark against fascism.[33](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-33)

At Smith Friedan linked her journalism to political activism. She served as editor-in-chief of the campus newspaper for a year beginning in the spring of 1941. The campaigns she undertook and the editorials she wrote reveal a good deal of her politics. Under Friedan’s leadership, the newspaper’s reputation for protest was so strong that in a skit a fellow student portrayed an editor, perhaps Friedan herself, as “a strident voice haranguing from a perpetual soap-box.”[34](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-34) While at Smith, a Peoria paper reported in 1943, Friedan helped organize college building and grounds workers into a union.[35](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-35) Under her leadership, the student paper took on the student government for holding closed meetings, fought successfully to challenge the administration’s right to control what the newspaper printed, campaigned for the relaxation of restrictions on student social life, censured social clubs for their secrecy, and published critiques of professors’ teaching.[36](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-36) In response to an article in a campus humor magazine that belittled female employees who cleaned the students’ rooms and served them food, an editorial supported the administration’s censorship of the publication on the grounds that such action upheld “the liberal democratic tradition of the college.”[37](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-37)

The editorials written on her watch reveal a young woman who believed that what was involved with almost every issue—at Smith, in the United States and abroad—was the struggle for democracy, freedom, and social justice. Under Friedan’s leadership the editors supported American workers and their labor unions in their struggles to organize and improve their conditions.… The inequality of power in America, the editorial argued in good social democratic terms, “has to be admitted and dealt with if democracy is to have meaning for 95% of the citizens of this country.”[38](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-38)

Above all, what haunted the editorials was the spread of fascism and questions about America’s involvement in a world war. In April of 1941, the editors made it clear that the defeat of fascism was their primary goal and one that determined their position on questions of war or peace. In the fall of 1941, after the German invasion of the Soviet Union during the preceding summer, the editors increasingly accepted the inevitability of war even as they made it clear that they believed “fighting fascists is only one part of fighting fascism.”[39](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-39) Some Smith students responded with redbaiting to the newspaper’s anti-fascism and reluctance to support intervention wholeheartedly, accusing the editorial board of being dominated by communists, at a time when the Party reached its greatest membership in the years after Pearl Harbor while the United States and the Soviet Union were allies. Though one editor denied the charge of communist influence, like many newspapers at American colleges in these years, on the paper’s staff were students attracted to the political analysis offered by radical groups. In the fall of 1940 one columnist argued against lumping communists and Nazis together, remarking that communism was not a “dark terror” but “a precarious scheme worked out by millions of civilized men and women.”[40](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-40)

When America entered the war in December of 1941, the editors accepted the nation’s new role loyally, albeit soberly. The central issue for them was how American students, especially female ones, could “contribute actively to the American cause.”…

Friedan’s experiences at Smith cast a different light on her decision to leave Berkeley after a year of graduate school. The editorials she and her peers had written immediately after Pearl Harbor revealed an impatience to be near the action. A 1943 article in the Peoria paper reported that Friedan turned down the fellowship because “she decided she wanted to work in the labor movement—on the labor press.”[41](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-41)… Off and on from October 1943 until July 1946 she was a staff writer for the Federated Press, a left-wing news service that provided stories for newspapers, especially union ones, across the nation.[42](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-42) Here Friedan wrote articles that supported the aspirations of African Americans and union members. She also criticized reactionary forces that, she believed, were working secretly to undermine progressive social advances.[43](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-43) As early as 1943, she pictured efforts by businesses, coordinated by the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM), to develop plans that would enhance profits, diminish the power of unions, reverse the New Deal, and allow businesses to operate as they pleased.[44](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-44)

At Federated Press, Friedan also paid attention to women’s problems. Right after she began to work there, she interviewed UE official Ruth Young, one of the clearest voices in the labor movement articulating women’s issues. In the resulting article, Friedan noted that the government could not solve the problem of turnover “merely by pinning up thousands of glamorous posters designed to lure more women into industry.” Neither women, unions, nor management, she quoted Young as saying, could solve problems of escalating prices or inadequate child care that were made even more difficult by the fact that “women still have two jobs to do.” Action of the federal government, Friedan reported, was needed to solve the problems working women faced.[45](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-45)

She paid special attention to stories about protecting the jobs and improving the situation of working women, including married ones with children.

For about six years beginning in July, 1946, precisely at the moment when the wartime Popular Front came under intense attack, Friedan was a reporter for the union’s paper *UE News*.[46](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-46) At least as early as 1943, when she quoted Young, Friedan was well aware of the UE’s commitments to equity for women.[47](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-47)

… In 1949–50, union activists who followed the recommendations of the Communist Party… advocated the automatic granting of several years of seniority to all African Americans as compensation for their years of exclusion from the electrical industry. If the UE pioneered in articulating what we might call affirmative action for African Americans, then before and during World War II it advocated what a later generation would label comparable worth. Against considerable resistance from within its ranks, the UE also worked to improve the conditions of working-class women in part by countering a seniority system which gave advantage to men.[48](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-48) After 1949, with the UE out of the CIO and many of the more conservative union members out of the UE, women’s issues and women’s leadership resumed the importance they had in the UE during World War II, when it had developed, Ruth Milkman has written, a “strong ideological commitment to gender equality.”[49](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-49)

Beginning in 1946, Friedan [also] witnessed the efforts by federal agencies, congressional committees, major corporations, the Roman Catholic Church, and the CIO to break the hold of what they saw as the domination of the UE by communists. The inclusion of a clause in the Taft–Hartley Act of 1947, requiring union officers to sign an anticommunist affidavit if they wished to do business with the National Labor Relations Board, helped encourage other unions to challenge the UE, whose leaders refused to sign.[50](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-50) Internecine fights took place within the UE, part of a longer term fight between radicals and anticommunists in its ranks.… Before long,… the UE was greatly weakened: in 1949, its connection with the CIO was severed and the newly-formed and CIO-backed IUE recruited many of its members. Membership in UE, numbering more than 600,000 in 1946, fell to 203,000 in 1953 and to 71,000 four years later.[51](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-51)

At *UE News*, from her position as a middle-class woman interested in the lives of the working class, Friedan continued to articulate a progressive position on a wide range of issues. She again pointed to concerted efforts, led by big corporations under the leadership of the NAM, to increase profits, exploit labor, and break labor unions.[52](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-52) In 1951, she contrasted the extravagant expenditures of the wealthy with the family of a worker who could afford neither fresh vegetables nor new clothes.[53](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-53) Friedan also told the story of how valiant union members helped build political coalitions to fight Congressional and corporate efforts to roll back gains workers made during the New Deal and World War II.[54](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-54) She drew parallels between the United States in the 1940s and Nazi Germany in the 1930s as she exposed the way HUAC [the House Committee on Un-American Activities, U.S. Congress] and big business were using every tactic they could to destroy the UE. Friedan hailed the launching of the Progressive Party in 1948.[55](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-55) She exposed the existence of racism and discrimination, even when they appeared among union officials and especially when directed against Jews and African Americans. Praising heroic workers who struggled against great odds as they fought monopolies, Friedan, probably expressing her hopes for herself, extolled the skills of a writer “who is able to describe with sincerity and passion the hopes, the struggle and the romance of the working people who make up most of America.”[56](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-56)

Throughout her years at *UE News*, Friedan participated in discussions on women’s issues, including the issue of corporations’ systematic discrimination against women. Going to factories to interview those whose stories she was covering, she also wrote about working women, including African Americans and Latinas.[57](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-57) In the worlds Friedan inhabited in the decade beginning in 1943, as the historian Kathleen Weigand has shown, people often discussed the cultural and economic sources of women’s oppression, the nature of discrimination based on sex, the special difficulties African American women faced, and the dynamics of discrimination against women in a variety of institutions, including the family.[58](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-58) Moreover, for the people around Friedan and doubtlessly for Friedan herself, the fight for justice for women was inseparable from the more general struggle to secure rights for African Americans and workers.[59](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-59) As she had done at the Federated Press, at *UE News* in the late 1940s and early 1950s she reported on how working women struggled as producers and consumers to make sure their families had enough to live on.[60](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-60)

Friedan’s focus on working women’s issues resulted in her writing the pamphlet, *UE Fights for Women Workers*, published by the UE in June of 1952.[61](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-61) She began by suggesting the contradiction in industry’s treatment of women as consumers and as producers. “In advertisements across the land,” Friedan remarked, “industry glorifies the American woman—in her gleaming GE kitchen, at her Westinghouse laundromat, before her Sylvania television set. Nothing,” she announced as she insightfully explored a central contradiction women faced in the postwar world, “is too good for her—unless” she worked for corporations, including GE, or Westinghouse, or Sylvania.[62](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-62)

The central theme of the piece was how, in an effort to improve the pay and conditions of working women, the UE fought valiantly against greedy corporations that sought to increase their profits by exploiting women. Friedan discussed a landmark 1945 National War Labor Board decision on sex-based wage discrimination in favor of the UE. Remarking that “*fighting the exploitation of women is men’s business too*,” she emphasized how discriminatory practices corporations used against women hurt men as well by exerting downward pressure on wages of all workers. To back up the call for equal pay for equal work and to fight against segregation and discrimination of women, she countered stereotypes justifying lower pay for women: they were physically weaker, entered the work force only temporarily, had no families to support, and worked only for pin money. She highlighted the “even more shocking” situation African American women faced, having to deal as they did with the “double bars” of being female and African American.[63](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-63) Friedan set forth a program that was, Lisa Kannenberg has noted, “a prescription for a gender-blind workplace.”[64](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-64)

The conditions under which she left Federated Press and *UE News* are not entirely clear. In May of 1946, during her second stint at Federated Press, she filed a grievance with the Newspaper Guild, saying she had lost her job in June of 1945 to a man she had replaced during the war. Later she claimed she was “bumped” from her position “by a returning veteran.” There is evidence, however, that Friedan had to give up her position to a man who returned to the paper after two years in prison because he refused to serve in the military during what he considered a capitalists’ war.[65](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-65) Friedan later claimed that she lost her job at the UE during her second pregnancy because the labor movement failed to honor its commitment to maternity leaves. Yet a knowledgeable observer has written that when the union had to cut the staff because of the dramatic drop in its membership, something that resulted from McCarthyite attacks, Friedan “offered to quit so another reporter,” a man with more seniority, could remain at *UE News*.[66](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-66) Although her experience with unions may have provided a negative spur to her feminism, it also served as a positive inspiration. Friedan was indebted to the UE for major elements of her education about gender equity, sex discrimination, and women’s issues.

The reason Friedan left out these years in her life story is now clear. Her stint at the *UE News* took place at the height of the anticommunist crusade, which she experienced at close quarters. When she emerged into the limelight in 1963, the issue of affiliation with communists was wracking SANE, SDS, and the civil rights movement. In the same years, HUAC was still holding hearings, the United States was pursuing an anti-communist war in Vietnam, and J. Edgar Hoover’s FBI was wiretapping Martin Luther King, Jr., ostensibly to protect the nation against communist influence. Had Friedan revealed all in the mid-1960s, she would have undercut her book’s impact, subjected herself to palpable dangers, and jeopardized the feminist movement, including the National Organization for Women (NOW), an institution she was instrumental in launching. Perhaps instead of emphasizing continuities in her life, she told the story of her conversion in order to heighten the impact of her book and appeal to white middle-class women. Or… Friedan may have come to believe a narrative that outlived the needs it originally fulfilled.

Until 1952, almost everything Friedan published as a labor journalist appeared under the name Betty Goldstein, though she had married in 1947. When she emerged as a writer for women’s magazines in 1955, it was as Betty Friedan. Aside from indicating her marital status, the change in name was significant. It signaled a shift from an employee for a union paper who wrote highly political articles on the working class to a free-lance writer for mass circulation magazines who concentrated on the suburban middle class in more muted tones [and in the 1950s became a suburbanite herself. In 1957, the Friedans moved into an] eleven-room Victorian house, which they bought with the help of the GI Bill and some money Friedan inherited from her father.[67](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-67)

What Friedan wrote for mass circulation women’s magazines [during those years] belies her claim that she had contributed to what she later attacked in *The Feminine Mystique*.

Sylvie Murray has demonstrated that Friedan drafted, but was unable to get into print, articles that fully celebrated women’s political activism, expressed skepticism about male expertise, and described blue collar and lower middle-class families, not generic middle-class ones. Yet Friedan was able to sell articles that went against the grain of the Cold War celebration by criticizing middle-class conformity.… Friedan critiqued suburban life by drawing a dismal picture of those who conformed, by offering alternatives to conventional choices, and by exploring the strength of cooperative communities.[68](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-68) She drew portraits of American women that opposed the picture of the happy, suburban housewife who turned her back on a career in order to find satisfaction at home.[69](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-69) Friedan also portrayed women accomplishing important tasks as they took on traditionally feminine civic roles, thus implicitly undercutting the ideal of the apolitical suburban housewife and mother.[70](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-70)

In one particularly revealing piece, Friedan prefigured some of the issues she later claimed she only began to discover when she started to work on *The Feminine Mystique*. In “I Went Back to Work,” published in *Charm* in April 1955, she wrote that initially she did not think highly of housework or of housewives and was guilty about what she was doing. Eventually she decided that her commitment to being a good mother was not “going to interfere with what I regarded as my ‘real’ life.” Finding it necessary to be away from home for nine hours a day in order to work, she solved the problem of child care by hiring “a really good mother-substitute—a housekeeper-nurse.” In the end, Friedan had no regrets about her decision or apparently about her privileged position. She believed her work outside the home improved her family’s situation and acknowledged that her “whole life had always been geared around creative, intellectual work” and “a professional career.”[71](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-71)

In what ways, then, was Friedan a captive of the feminine mystique? There is no question but that she was miserable in the suburbs. Her emphasis on her captivity may have expressed one part of her ambivalence. Yet, though she claimed that she shared so much with her suburban, white, middle-class sisters in the postwar world, during much of the two decades beginning in 1943 Friedan was participating in left-wing union activity, writing articles that went against the grain of Cold War ideology, and living in a cosmopolitan, racially integrated community. During most of the time between her marriage in 1947 and the publication of *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan combined career and family life. As a woman who worked with her at Federated Press later noted, at the time Friedan and her female colleagues expected to have professional careers.[72](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-72) Caution about the predominantly suburban origins of her book is also in order because Friedan’s move to suburban Rockland County in 1956 preceded by only a few months her initial work on the survey for her reunion that was so critical to *The Feminine Mystique*.[73](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-73)

To be sure, in the postwar world Friedan experienced at first hand the trials of a woman who fought against considerable odds to combine marriage, motherhood, and a career.[74](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-74) Yet in critical ways her difficulties did not stem from the dilemmas she described in her book: lack of career and ambition, a securely affluent household, and absence of a political sensibility. Friedan experienced psychological conflicts over issues of creativity in writing and motherhood.[75](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-75) Researching and writing her free-lance articles was a laborious process.[76](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-76) She had three young children, hardly felt comfortable in the suburbs, had no local institutions to provide a supportive environment for an aspiring writer, and continually faced financial difficulties. Her income from writing articles was unpredictable, a situation exacerbated by the pressure she was under to help support the household and justify the expenses for child care. Tension persisted between the Friedans over a wide range of issues, including who was responsible for earning and spending the family’s income. Moreover, she was in a marriage apparently marked by violence.[77](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett" \l "en74-77)

Friedan was largely right when she said “all the pieces of my own life came together for the first time in the writing” of *The Feminine Mystique*. The skills as a journalist she had developed beginning as a teenager stood her in good stead as she worked to make what she had to say accessible to a wide audience. Her identity as a Jew and an outsider gave her a distinctive perspective on American and suburban life. Her years at Smith boosted her confidence and enhanced her political education. Her life as a wife and mother sensitized her to the conflicts millions of others experienced but could not articulate. Her education as a psychologist led her to understand the gestalt, the wholeness of a situation, and to advocate self-fulfillment based on humanistic psychology. Above all, her work as a labor journalist and activist provided her with the intellectual depth, ideological commitments, and practical experiences crucial to her emergence as a leading feminist in the 1960s.

Why did a woman who had spent so much energy advocating political solutions focus in *The Feminine Mystique* largely on adult education and self-realization and turn social problems into psychological ones? How did a woman who had fought to improve the lives of African Americans, Latinas, and working-class women end up writing a book that saw the problems of America in terms of the lives of affluent, suburban white women?

Even at the time, at least one observer, Gerda Lerner, raised questions about what Friedan emphasized and neglected. Active in the trade union movement in the 1940s, present at the founding meeting of NOW, and after the mid-1960s one of the nation’s leading historians of women, in February 1963 Lerner wrote Friedan. “I have just finished reading your splendid book and want to tell you how excited and delighted I am with it.… You have done for women,” she remarked as she referred to the author who had warned about the destruction of the environment, “what Rachel Carson did for birds and trees.” Yet, Lerner continued:

I have one reservation about your treatment of your subject: you address yourself solely to the problems of middle class, college-educated women. This approach was one of the shortcomings of the suffrage movement for many years and has, I believe, retarded the general advance of women. Working women, especially Negro women, labor not only under the disadvantages imposed by the feminine mystique, but under the more pressing disadvantages of economic discrimination. To leave them out of consideration of the problem or to ignore the contributions they can make toward its solution, is something we simply cannot afford to do. By their desperate need, by their numbers, by their organizational experience (if trade union members), working women are most important in reaching *institutional* solutions to the problems of women.[78](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en74-78)

The dynamics of Friedan’s shifts in attention from working-class to middle-class women are not entirely clear. At some point after May 1953, when she followed the proceedings at the UE conference on the problems of women workers, Friedan turned away from working-class and African American women, something that undercut the power of *The Feminine Mystique*. An important question is whether the shift from her UE radicalism and focus on working-class women was a rhetorical strategy designed for the specific situation of *The Feminine Mystique* or part of a longer-term deradicalization. Until her personal papers are fully open and extensive interviewing is carried out, and perhaps not even then, we may not know the dynamics of this change.

Excerpted from “Rethinking Betty Friedan and *The Feminine Mystique*: Labor Union Radicalism and Feminism in Cold War America” by Daniel Horowitz, in *American Quarterly* 48 (March 1996): 1–42. Copyright © The American Studies Association. Reprinted with permission of the author and Johns Hopkins University Press. Notes have been renumbered and edited.

[**MICHELLE M. NICKERSON**](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Contents.xhtml#ts75)

[Politically Desperate Housewives](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Contents.xhtml#ts75)

Betty Friedan became a feminist in reaction to her life as a middle-class housewife who sought to be a journalist in 1950s America. Other housewives experienced a different sort of political awakening and emerged as energetic foot soldiers (or, shall we say mothers?) of conservatism.

Michelle Nickerson examines greater Los Angeles, with its spreading freeway system and booming economy, to ask what features of the Cold War era motivated middle-class white women to become energetic political actors, whether in women’s clubs of the Republican Party or in homegrown groups, such as the Tuesday Morning Study Club and the Minute Women of the U.S.A. Publishing newsletters, attending lectures, gathering in reading groups, mobilizing voters, and protesting curriculum in the public schools they saw as dangerous, these women embraced the domestic as well as the political, and they poured their talents and skill into their volunteerism. A sense of divine mission, and a conviction that they “spoke the truth” to combat communism and other ills, united Catholic and Protestant women. “All politics is local” is a slogan that these historical subjects would heartily endorse. These activists saw their distinctive insights and effectiveness as stemming from their community watchfulness, common sense, and antielitism. And they would have agreed they were the “conservative sex” because the men in their lives, with salaried jobs, had far less time for political work.

How do you think the geographical location of these female activists shaped their politics? Be sure to check out the author’s concluding question: is there such a thing as a “conservative feminist identity”?

Weary of war and relieved to be free of the Great Depression, Americans embraced family life with zeal in the 1950s. Women occupied a revered place in this revived domesticity that valorized homemaking and motherhood through television programming, film, and advertisements for appliances. Although the iconic 1950s housewife offers an abundance of insight into the ideals of the postwar generation, she obscures the countless ways that actual women attempted to live out those ideals. Operating among the legions of self-identified housewives who did not stay home in those years [was] a grassroots subculture of women that emerged mostly behind the scenes of the nascent conservative movement. These female activists on the right made the domestic ideology guiding their family, social, and civic lives into political careers by translating widespread cultural assumptions about female intuition into a basis for asserting authority in local affairs.… [This was an] animated, combative, and perfumed world of metropolitan politics.…

Important origins of the postwar right took root in such settings, where women shaped the conservative ascendancy with concerns, ideas, and issues that were drawn from the fabric of their everyday lives. Capitalizing upon cultural assumptions about women and motherhood, they put themselves forward as representatives of local interests who battled bureaucrats for the sake of family, community, and God. Armed with a strong collective sense of where they and their local crusades fit into the global struggles against communism, they successfully overpowered school administrators, boards of education, and teachers in the name of local control and protection of parental authority. Female activists forced their priorities onto the larger agenda of the movement by anointing themselves spokespeople for parents, children, and local communities against the predatory interventionist state.…

[The back story lies in] the Great Depression.… The severe economic crisis invigorated the nation’s appreciation for no-nonsense women with the wits to carry their families through the hard times. The new political woman of the 1930s was not the “angel of her home” housewife who volunteered to Americanize immigrants, rescue prostitutes, or save the nation from demon alcohol. She was an everywoman housewife, [often working-class,] who worked to keep her family and neighborhood intact—to maintain as much normalcy and security as possible.… Historian Temma Kaplan… sees “female consciousness,” which relies upon assumptions about the “maternal duty to preserve life,” as distinct from “feminist consciousness,” which demands that women be given rights based on basic principles of equality.[1](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en75-1)…

… As the Depression wore on and World War II engulfed Europe and threatened to involve the United States, rage against Wall Street and landlords turned toward Washington as if financial and government leaders operated as one, centralized cabal. Indignation against economic elites shaded into anticommunist and anti-Semitic protest, attributing the nation’s woes to New Deal bureaucrats as well as international Jewish bankers, eventually inflecting protests against U.S. entry into World War II with isolationist overtones. Feminine ideals contributed to a conservative political consciousness in formation. To be a “moral guardian” of society, in the minds of many women, meant to protect the nation from aliens, internationalism, and power-hungry bureaucrats in Washington.… Isolationist women found common cause in shared feelings of marginality, along with a sense of duty to family and community. Postwar women then updated its political styles and culture for the conservatism of a new era.

Not until the early 1960s did American conservatism become a recognizable and self-conscious “movement,” though its major ideological components, institutions, and political actors had been aligning since the end of World War II. While the Cold War and red scare of the 1950s revived anticommunism, critics of the New Deal welfare state… articulated economic arguments against centralized government. As the word “liberal,” once associated with laissez-faire economic principles and small government as the means of realizing American egalitarianism, became linked during the Depression to federal growth and intervention on behalf of economic equality, proponents of small government formerly known as liberals claimed the designation “libertarian.”… [Others] argued for a revival of faith and moral absolutes as the necessary antidotes for confronting recent scourges on the Western world, like genocide and totalitarianism. Anticommunism… gave conservatism the characteristics of a crusade around which adherents who disagreed about some things could rally. Conservatives gradually seized control of the GOP through important state battles, nominated conservative Barry Goldwater for president in 1964, and launched the political career of Ronald Reagan, who would complete the conservative revolution as president in the 1980s.[2](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en75-2)…

This study of women and conservatism examines how the anticommunist protest that scorched Southern California politics in the 1950s fueled a local conservative movement with broad national importance. [While] Orange County tends to win recognition as the epicenter of California conservatism,… [I focus on the] more politically, racially, ethnically, and economically, diverse Los Angeles County, [which] figured centrally in this movement.… The growth of the defense industries, influx of migrants, rapidly changing demographics, expanded highway system, proliferation of suburbs, industrialization of those suburbs, and court rulings that chipped away at segregation fueled the metropolitan-based conservative movement. The sense of political community that made conservatism feel like a crusade in Southern California enveloped activists across greater Los Angeles. Southland activists built a movement that took advantage of their multinodal cityscape. Housewives who lived in Pasadena drove cars over the hills to meetings in Encino and speaking engagements downtown. While living rooms in the newer suburbs proved comfortable for study groups, old Los Angeles venues like the First Congregational Church and Ambassador Hotel provided room, grandeur, and centralized locations appropriate for prominent lecturers. The new freeways made it easy for activists to attend each other’s events and haul the cartons of the mimeographed literature they printed in their garages. The thirty-six different right-wing bookstores that opened across Southern California in the 1960s assisted each other like branches of the same regional bank, rather than competitors.[3](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en75-3)…

… [In] Southern California, community battles against school integration actually preceded the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision that mandated desegregation nationwide in 1954. California had been experimenting with integration and parents had been expressing their defiance of it for several years before the Warren Court handed down *Brown*. After the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit in California upheld the *Mendez v. Westminster* ruling of 1946 that “segregation of Mexican youngsters found no justification in the laws of California,” the [legislature] repealed segregationist statutes. School administrators then slowly crafted policies to bring their districts in line with the new mandates.… Conservative activists in greater Los Angeles worked in concert with activists all over the country, mainly in the South, to protect segregation in the public education system, an institution they recognized for its importance in maintaining racial order, [and] to forge a common anticommunist discourse of protest against the civil rights movement.[4](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en75-4)

Conservative women fought desegregation with the belief that their communities were under siege by political elites inciting turmoil that they, as women, needed to repel as housewives—the humblest, most self-sacrificial, and least pretentious members of American society. Women activists thus cultivated a gender consciousness, already in formation on the right, that valorized the local community as the fountainhead of American democracy. The links they made between feminine powerlessness and community powerlessness in the age of federal welfare and intervention isolated an amorphously defined centralized state as the most dangerous threat to freedom. Convinced that progressive educators, civil rights activists, UNESCO [United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization], and the Supreme Court constituted a unified assault on community sovereignty…, they conflated problems of racial and bureaucratic outsiders.

Claiming a stake in these battles as representatives of the family—mothers and housewives protecting children, home life, and neighborhoods—women drew power from their class position and from [anticommunist] anxiety.… These female activists, in dialectic with conservative men, also cultivated an essentialist interpretation of women’s political talents and duties, asserting that housewives and mothers were better suited than men to the work of anticommunist vigilance. Emphasizing that their flexible schedules gave them time to study communism, they argued that women were more politically aware than men, since husbands necessarily focused on the economic well-being of the family. [Indeed,] the economic status of female activists [was] vitally important, since a higher family income translated into political connections, an automobile, and funds for events, travel, or child care.

Los Angeles established a new paradigm of urban growth in the post–World War II era that facilitated transmission of conservative thought and activist culture. The region thrived over the 1950s from the billions of dollars of Pentagon defense contracts, which employed hundreds of thousands of workers in aircraft or missile manufacturing. Northrup, Lockheed, Douglas, and other companies… dispers[ed] their plants within and outside Los Angeles city limits. Manufacturers also built acres of single-family home communities for workers close to facilities. Long Beach to the south, Lakewood to the west, and the San Fernando Valley to the north bled urban and industrial sectors of the city into each other, creating new metropolitan economic and community relationships. Migrants, meanwhile, streamed in to fill jobs. Japanese and Mexican Americans arrived, but southerners represented the largest percentage of newcomers.… Millions of African Americans [went] to Los Angeles from the South during and after World War II.… [Another] exodus of white workers mainly from Texas, Arkansas, and Oklahoma start[ed] in the 1940s [and] infused the region with its own brand of religious culture and conservative politics.[5](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en75-5)



*Map of Los Angeles County, 1963*.

Mid-century Los Angeles also became a thought center for a Christian-inflected form of libertarianism. At the heart of these developments stood Spiritual Mobilization (SM), a nonprofit religious organization that endeavored to rescue God’s relationship with the individual. SM intercepted ideas and money streaming between East Coast and West Coast libertarians. Launched by a cadre of economic thinkers in Europe and the United States, libertarianism advocated minimal or no government intervention in economic affairs.… A spate of books published between 1943 and 1944 revived conservatives… with fresh inspiration. *The Road to Serfdom* by London School of Economics professor Friedrich Hayek, [a powerfully articulated polemic against governmental planning,] became the signature tome of the libertarian revival.… More popular than Hayek, however, Russian Jewish immigrant Ayn Rand published her ground-breaking utopian capitalist novel, *The Fountainhead*, in 1943.[6](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en75-6)…

… [By the 1950s] in the greater Los Angeles area, the political “right” [was] becoming a vast subculture with its own literature, radio broadcasts, workshops, home-based study groups, speaking circuits, and, by 1961, bookstores. Anybody with enough time and money could rent a P.O. box, publish a newsletter, and circulate self-made leaflets, thus disseminating whatever literature they wished. A mother with two school-age children could do this as easily as a dentist or a clothing salesman, as long as she had the means. A mishmash discourse combining anticommunist, libertarian, and Christian ideas erupted on the local political scene.… Wealthy backers assisted with the proliferation of the materials, and not uncommon were partnerships between corporate leaders—men with money—and housewives—middle-class women with the time.…

… As conservative magazines, books, and speaking events proliferated in the mid-1950s, the ranks of conservative female activists grew. While ink dried on the first issues of the *National Review*, mimeograph machines across Los Angeles County spat out newsletters, many of them composed and printed by teams of housewives. When not clipping newspapers or poring over the political literature stacked on their credenzas, women attended lectures or gave their own prepared talks to audiences. They squeezed meetings, study, writing, and printing into daytime and nighttime hours between trips to the grocery store, meal preparation, and help with homework. Conservative women approached political work like other forms of civic work—as an extension of their household duties that fulfilled feminine responsibilities to the family and community.

Many activists developed their earliest feelings of political community and identity in Republican women’s clubs. Since the 1920s, the GOP had been recruiting female voters by appealing to popular beliefs about the inherent differences between men and women.… [In earlier decades party leaders had fashioned] an “outsider” political style that emphasized women’s moral superiority.[7](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en75-7) Officers framed involvement with the Republican Party in moralistic terms and conducted party work in settings familiar to women—homes, churches, and libraries. GOP women’s clubs thus functioned as a feminine outlet to the traditionally masculine world of partisan politics. Democratic women’s clubs offered the same menu of activities and relied on the similar politics of difference, but did not adhere to sex-segregated institutions in the party nearly as long,… pushing… for integration into the party’s male-dominated power structure.… [In] the post–World War II era, Republican women’s club literature emphasize[d] women’s influence in the community, [and] stressed the importance of the warmth, sparkling personality, and overall positive attitude that it believed women could contribute to politics.

Reflecting the broader culture’s celebration of domesticity, Republican clubwomen discourse of the 1950s and early 1960s also celebrated the American housewife. Literature, rituals, and speeches exhibited an optimistic view of how the nation’s wives and mothers could harness their compassion, warmth, and femininity for the good of the party. The so-called “natural” political virtues of women, like moral superiority and mothering instincts, still found their way into the rhetoric of Republican leaders, yet its emphasis shifted to other attributes, namely feminine cheeriness and hospitality. “Organize your enthusiasm,” commanded the president of the National Federation of Republican Women, “if you want to elect the nominee of the Republican national convention.…” Catherine Gibson assumed the office in the late fifties, stressing “neighbor-to-neighbor contacts.”[8](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en75-8) Club leaders added new symbols to their campaign slogans, like the Republican “saleswomen,” which invoked both the growing importance of women to the retail industry as well as traits assumed to be intrinsically feminine, namely good manners and friendliness. Events designed for fun and sociability—teas, bridge games, fashion shows, and garden parties—became especially popular in this period. Club leaders extolled graciousness and affability as natural female qualities that could be marshaled for the benefit of the party.[9](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en75-9)

Though the ideal American housewife… ventured forth as a social and charitable community-builder, she also remained symbolically and spatially linked to the home. Activists opted increasingly to utilize their Formica kitchen tables, polyester living-room sectionals, and outdoor patio furniture for organizing–entertaining. These domestic settings provided a warm and nonintimidating atmosphere meant to promote the overlapping goals of political discussion and sociability. The National Federation of Republican Women encouraged women to use their homes through a variety of campaigns, including “Operation Coffee Cup.” Launched during the 1956 Presidential campaign, the television broadcast presented Eisenhower and Nixon in conversation with different women’s groups. The NFRW encouraged club leaders to watch alongside women guests to initiate discussion.[10](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en75-10) Indeed, study groups thrived in the home-centered atmosphere of postwar Republican women’s clubs, especially as leaders took greater interest in promoting community relations skills among volunteers. One Republican women’s study group met near the San Fernando Valley house of Jean Ward Fuller, who became president of the California Federation of Republican Women.… Her spacious abode, with housekeeper, in Encino helped to accommodate the sizeable number of clubwomen who hauled their bridge tables over to do mailings for political candidates. Her group, Fuller claimed, could turn out 60,000 pieces of mail within three days. “Everybody would bring their sandwiches,” she recalled later, “and I’d have coffee for them and everybody would just work like beavers.”[11](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en75-11)

Southern California became a hub of Republican clubwomen activism in the 1950s. Indeed, GOP women’s clubs in California experienced their highest rate of growth in these years. In 1949, at 12,000, the California Federation of Republican Women became the sixth largest state federation in the nation, and by 1957 its ranks had swelled to 50,000 women. The Southern Division, always the strongest, included 123 clubs.… The San Fernando Valley, Glendale, San Marino, and Long Beach clubs represented its largest units. And in 1958 the National Federation of Republican Women boasted half a million members, while the Democratic National Committee counted only 100,000 women in female clubs.[12](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en75-12)

While the Republican women’s clubs that met throughout Southern California’s valleys politicized women, the Freedom Club, located in downtown Los Angeles, further encouraged militancy on the right. James Fifield’s Freedom Club became a gathering place for conservatives, where like-minded suburbanites connected with each other as they eagerly imbibed the orations of speakers they admired. Established in 1950, the monthly series offered dinner, lectures, and discussion. With their hands busy with plates of jellied cranberry salad or turkey with gravy, participants listened and chatted about the evils of the income tax or mental health legislation. While Fifield’s Spiritual Mobilization politicized clergymen, his Freedom Club politicized activists, especially female activists. Fifield attracted women to his ministry by appealing to both their sense of patriotism and their piety. Reared in a preacher’s family, he acted on his familiarity with the ways that churches had historically relied on women to show spiritual devotion, inculcate religious values in children, and arrange church functions. Forceful women speakers like activist Phyllis Schlafly and foreign correspondent Freda Utley inspired housewives in the audience to shake off their timidity and push the boundaries of politeness on behalf of their families and the nation.[13](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en75-13)

A female right became visible and militant starting in 1950, as conservative women discovered and connected with each other in Republican women’s clubs, the Freedom Club, and school board meetings. Indeed, debates about public education especially animated mothers after conservative parents successfully pressured school board members to fire the superintendent in one of the nation’s finest school districts, Pasadena. Anticommunist attacks against the progressive education agenda of Superintendent Willard Goslin caused many mothers to look with new skepticism at the pedagogy employed by schoolteachers, making them wonder if leftist educators were trying to indoctrinate their children. A concerted campaign against UNESCO fueled such concerns, as critics of “internationalism” fought to ban educational materials published by the agency from Los Angeles schools.[14](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en75-14) The controversies surrounding Pasadena’s superintendent and UNESCO inspired the formation of numerous organizations by women who came to see communist subversion as a grave problem and themselves and values they associated with femininity—vigilance, selflessness, carefulness, patience, and spirituality—as the solution. “Politically desperate” to have their voices heard, they were by no means hysterical or pathological but rather approached their activist work with fervor and urgency. American Public Relations Forum, Pro-America, the Tuesday Morning Study Club, and Minute Women of the U.S.A., Incorporated, became the most active groups in the region.

A housewife in Burbank by the name of Stephanie Williams founded American Public Relations Forum. Williams, a devout and fervent Catholic, joined a swelling number of parishioners who expanded the Los Angeles Catholic community after World War II with scores of churches that added hundreds of thousands of new members. As the church prospered and grew, the archdiocese exerted a conservative force on the political landscape mainly through Archbishop James McIntyre and its newspaper organ, *The Tidings*. Ordained the first Catholic cardinal from the American West in 1953, McIntyre sent priests to attend conservative political meetings, barred the sisters of the Immaculate Heart from teaching in the archdiocese after they stopped wearing the habit, and reformed other rules of discipline.[15](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en75-15)…

With the blessing of McIntyre, Williams formed the American Public Relations Forum, which gathered monthly in a few different locations. Forum meetings opened with a prayer, often featured a guest lecturer, and followed with a discussion. The organization coordinated correspondence campaigns by mailing its members bulletins regarding bills before Congress and by making cards available at gatherings so those present could write to their representatives together.[16](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en75-16)…

Minute Women of the U.S.A., which also operated from the San Fernando Valley, represented another popular choice for women who felt somewhat shy but wanted to do something about communism. The Southern California unit worked in concert with the national organization, founded in 1949.… Minute Women were white, middle- and upper-class, between the ages of thirty and sixty, with school-age or grown children. In 1952 the organization boasted 50,000 members in forty-seven states.… Southern California claimed some of the strongest units, though the Minute Women’s secrecy policy has kept their exact numbers unknown.… Newsletters represented the organization’s lifeblood. Members rarely met but received mailings from the California chapter chairman and from the national leadership.[17](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en75-17)…

The Minute Women’s anonymity might also have provided members with a sense of security or power at a time when secrecy yielded rewards. This was [after all] the McCarthy era; your cat could have been spying on you. Government officials, including J. Edgar Hoover,… encouraged women to look hard for communists in their midst… [because] the government was ill equipped to do so. Without enough agents in the FBI to find and thwart the red menace, Hoover asserted, private citizens needed to be eternally watchful.… Female activists took it upon themselves to adopt vigilance as their job, one they could do better than anyone else.[18](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en75-18)

[At the same time] they knew that leftist opponents were infiltrating their ranks. The Community Relations Committee (CRC), a moderate civil rights organization affiliated with the Jewish National Committee, spied on conservatives.… Concerned about the threat posed by groups on the right like the Forum, the CRC regularly monitored their meetings and labeled typed manuscripts of minutes… “spy reports.”… The culture of fear, mistrust, and secrecy touched activists across the political spectrum.[19](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en75-19)

The Tuesday Morning Study Club (TMSC) was formed a few years after the Forum and Minute Women in the rolling Linda Vista neighborhood of Pasadena.… Some Pasadena mothers, not content to play bridge, gathered instead in a backyard recreational space behind the lovely home of activist Marjorie Jensen. One Tuesday a month, in the Jensen “playhouse,” as they called the small, simply crafted structure, TMSC meetings started with a guest speaker and ended with discussion. Early on, the gatherings tended to be small, sometimes including only seven women, but at the height of TMSC popularity in the late 1950s, attendance regularly reached 50 women or more. When 130 people arrived one day, filling the playhouse, yard, and back room of Jensen’s house, the club began renting larger spaces. On those occasions when the TMSC invited prominent speakers to Pasadena, they reserved a conference room at the Huntington Hotel, where they could accommodate larger mixed-sex crowds for evening events. Almost all of the Tuesday Morning Study Club programs focused on education. Topics ranged from UNESCO to “State Curriculum and the ‘New’ Education,” from “Civic Groups, Educating Toward World Citizenship,” to “Indoctrination Through Literature.”[20](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en75-20)

A mix of international, national, and local affairs filled the meeting agendas of the different conservative women’s organizations. It was never necessary for any of these groups to announce that they were for women; the format, presentations, and rituals made that announcement. Men, in fact, attended meetings sometimes—they were generally welcome—but only rarely.… The ways in which group members talked about God [also] made these organizations female.… Most conservative women were Christian, though organizations did not tend to identify with particular churches or intensity of religious devotion. In Los Angeles, Catholic and Protestant women mixed quite comfortably in the conservative movement while antagonism characterized relations between the groups in the rest of the country.[21](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en75-21)… In Southern California, Catholic and Protestant women… cultivated political camaraderie not only from the fight against atheistic communism, but also from their common need to develop spiritual interpretations of the changing world around them. Activists from both faiths lamented the secularization of American society as well as numerous social problems that they attributed to that trend, from rising crime rates to juvenile delinquency to loosening sexual norms.

Conservative women contributed to the developing unity between Catholics and Protestants, not only by making all Christian women welcome in their meetings, but by cultivating a cross-denominational political style and culture. The American Public Relations Forum officially started its institutional life as a Catholic women’s organization, but by the late 1950s the group listed two officers who were Protestant.… The Minute Women’s membership policy welcomed women of all “faiths.” The language of its literature suggests, though, that non-Christian women need not apply. From the rhetoric and practices of both groups emerged pan-Christian ideals of political femininity.

The American Public Relations Forum and Minute Women of the U.S.A. especially promulgated the idea that women had a divinely mandated role to fulfill in the defense of freedom. The Forum encouraged its members, first and foremost, to think about God with every political action they undertook, whether it involved the stroke of a pen or an uncomfortable confrontation with local school administrators. For God you could and should act unladylike. Though it was “nonsectarian” and included non-Catholic members, the group operated under the auspices of the Catholic Church.… Forum president Stephanie Williams reminded her members that while they toiled at their political tasks they must submit to God and pray. “We must place God as the senior of the family.”[22](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en75-22)…

… The Forum and Minute Women fixat[ed] on a scripturally-defined understanding of the truth. “Speak the truth and shame the devil,” declared the Minute Woman national president.[23](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en75-23) Her organization recognized, as one of its duties, protection of God’s pronouncements—as well as those made by founding fathers—from the treachery of artful wordsmiths. Subversion, in their minds, stood for cunning.… Clipping newspapers and writing letters did not win glory, but did rescue facts from the chicanery of subversives.…

In oral history interviews with five women [active in the 1950s in the greater Los Angeles area], a common theme… was [their political] awakening. The activists tend[ed] to emphasize distinct moments when someone or a series of events made them alert, as they often put it, to how communism menaced their freedom. The process of becoming aware, in recollections, frequently followed a something-not-feeling-right period. Awakenings discourse thus presupposed that the political subjects lived for some time in the dark, and that most other Americans at the time continued to be oblivious.… Activists equated the acquisition of *vision* with political transformation. Indeed, this power of *sight*—to conquer one’s enemy by shining light on his or her activities—became a powerful way for women to understand their unique political effectiveness. What others would describe as red-baiting, they interpreted as exposure of the truth.[24](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en75-24)…

The emphasis on awakenings resonated with the ways in which women talked about the political work that came to fill their days. Never referring to conservatism as a “movement,” activists instead remembered “patriotic” Americans rousing each other from a stupor and devoting themselves to saving the country. Subjects describe their involvement as if they had no serious interest in politics until the light had been turned on for them.… Although activists betrayed a shared love for the movement’s labor in their oral histories, they almost never said outright that they joined organizations for any fulfillment of a personal need.… [They] instead privileged the gravity of dangers that created the political work for them. Activists, in other words, liked to talk about work—hard work—without calling it “work.”… The vigor of the conservative movement owes much to this labor of middle- and upper-class women who might have enjoyed professional “careers” given their backgrounds, but would not likely legitimize professional “career” employment as a choice for women.…

In their relentless defense of community-level decision making, [conservative] women [of the Cold War era] stoked populist outrage.… In campaigns against progressive educators, programs, and federal funding, they denounced administrators as elitist outsiders who aimed to use children for social experiments designed at far-away Ivy League institutions. To stem the problems they associated with social decline in the United States, they advocated for stronger parental and clerical influence in the lives of children. Although many of the women involved in these battles were born, raised, and college-educated in other parts of the country, [in Southern California] they developed an insider–outsider dichotomy—a sharp community boundary line between them on the inside and their opponents on the outside. This housewife populism contributed to the conservative movement’s identification with the everyman, real people, and middle America. Women on the right also spoke out as taxpayers, linking the interests of property holders and families in an alliance against state intervention.

Among the most important lessons to be drawn from this history of conservative women concerns their ability to manage ideological ambiguity. [We find such ambiguity in many social and political movements. For example, women’s] right to vote was won in the 1910s with a careful balance between seemingly contradictory arguments for sameness and difference. Women demanded the ballot on the basis of universal, democratic, egalitarian ideals stemming from the Enlightenment—on the principle that they should have the same rights as men. Yet they also argued that womanly virtues made them worthy of the vote, that their feminine instincts for morality, spirituality, and purity would uplift the corrupt world of politics.… [In the 1970s] Equal Rights Amendment opponents… valorized full-time motherhood, yet worked as full-time activists. [A third example are] religious conservatives who decry every form of state intervention except those that serve to enforce their Christian ideals. [All] exhibit what [some]… describe as “cognitive dissonance.” [The most interesting question to ask of conservative Southern California women activists, as of other political actors, is:] How did [they] resolve and deploy such dissonance for their own political purposes?

The endurance of housewife populism stands as a testament to the power of this ambiguity. A distinguishing characteristic of the post-1970 “new right” was the vehemence of its attacks against “women libbers.” Make no mistake: this “backlash” was real.… Like the feminists they attacked, conservative women participated in an organic process of reviving, reformulating, and building upon traditions started by political foremothers. The “pro-family” agenda of the late twentieth century included familiar advocacy on behalf of parental authority over the state. Bridging multiple generations of women, housewife populism coursed through the defensive, maternal, communitarian rhetoric of these new-right women. In campaigns against abortion and the Equal Rights Amendment, activists represented themselves as champions of real, ordinary people battling a rarified class of secular elites so entombed in the trappings of their privilege that they lost touch with the most basic principles of morality. They also introduced stronger Christian elements into the feminine political styles of earlier generations.

A driving theme of the anti-ERA campaign… was the danger of “losing of one’s children” to educators and government officials who meddled in the relationships between parents, sons, and daughters. Critiques of “forced equality” adapted female traditions of antistatist protest for the new battles, equating the ERA with other unwanted state interventions into the family, including government-sponsored desegregation. One woman accused ERA ratificationists of trying to “desexegrate” society.… Phyllis Schlafly, whose *Eagle Forum* established a long and continuing pattern of attacking the United Nations, World Health Organization, and other international organizations for threatening U.S. sovereignty, now targets “globalism,” described by Schlafly as socialism enforced through global regulatory structures like the World Trade Organization. Housewife populism marshals women against globalism today much as it did to mobilize them against communism in the 1950s and 1960s.[25](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en75-25)

Opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment also assumed the populist inflections that Cold War conservatives added to political discourse. Antiratificationists represented themselves as “the people in arms.”…[26](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en75-26) The fearsome and deeply entrenched antielitism in conservative political culture of the Cold War era endured, fueling the popular notion that feminist demands for “rights” and “equality” would improve the lives of privileged women only. Regular wives and mothers, on the other hand, needed the armor of patriarchy and sex-based protectionist legislation that, opponents believed, the Equal Rights Amendment would undo.…

After Barack Obama won election in 2008, [conservative] populist style carried over into the Tea Party movement, an alliance of organizations and bloggers that emerged in opposition to government-sponsored economic stimulus, health-care reform, and numerous other grievances.… The movement has served as a conduit for [new versions of] housewife populist outrage.… [In 2010] polls indicated that women represented 45 to 55 percent of the membership and an even greater share of the leadership positions. Six of the eight Tea Party Patriots board members who also serve as national coordinators for the movement [were] women; [and so were] fifteen of the twenty-five state coordinators. At a summer 2010 gathering of the abortion-opposing organization Susan B. Anthony List, [Sarah] Palin identified the women’s empowerment trend on the right as a “conservative feminist identity.”[27](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9780190945763/epub/OEBPS/Chap18.xhtml?favre=brett#en75-27)

Conservative feminists?… As oxymoronic as the expression… appears, its logic lies in the tribute that conservative women should properly pay [to a wide variety of self-identified feminists, such as Alice Paul, bell hooks, and Kate Millett.] Conservative women have been able to hold public office because of feminist pressure for antidiscrimination legislation that opened doors for women in education, the professions, the business world, and politics—legislation that antifeminist women opposed vigorously. The Susan B. Anthony List illustrates how the process of creating a conservative feminist consciousness is, indeed, a project of cognitive dissonance, selective memory, and mythmaking.