Betty Friedan, born Bettye Naomi Goldstein on February 4, 1921, in Peoria, Illinois, emerged as one of the most influential women of the 20th century. Her Jewish parents, Harry and Miriam Goldstein, provided a middle-class upbringing where education and intellectual discussion were highly valued. Friedan's early experiences with anti-Semitism and gender inequality shaped her worldview. She excelled academically and was involved in activist circles even during her time at Smith College, where she edited the college newspaper and graduated summa cum laude with a degree in psychology in 1942. Her college thesis explored the topic of women's attitudes towards their own identities, foreshadowing her later work. After college, Betty Friedan trained as a psychologist at the University of California, Berkeley, but left academia to pursue a career in journalism. She worked for leftist and union publications, including the Federated Press and the United Electrical Workers' UE News. During this time, Friedan's writing began to reflect her growing interest in women's issues, and she developed a critical eye for the way American society treated women. Her marriage to Carl Friedan in 1947, and subsequent role as a housewife and mother, provided her with a personal perspective on the challenges women faced in balancing family and personal aspirations, which later became a central theme of her activism. Betty Friedan's seminal work, 'The Feminine Mystique,' published in 1963, is often credited with sparking the second wave of feminism in the United States. The book arose from a survey she conducted for her 15th college reunion at Smith College, which revealed widespread dissatisfaction among women with their roles as housewives. 'The Feminine Mystique' criticized the idealized image of womanhood prevalent in the media, which she termed 'the problem that has no name,' and it called for women to seek fulfillment beyond traditional roles. The book's success was both a reflection of and catalyst for the growing women's movement. Following the success of 'The Feminine Mystique,' Betty Friedan helped to found the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966, serving as its first president. NOW aimed to bring women into the mainstream of American society in full equality with men. Under her leadership, the organization advocated for legislative changes, including the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's enforcement of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, which prohibited sex discrimination in employment. Friedan's vision for NOW was to build a humanistic society where men and women could both participate fully in all aspects of life. Betty Friedan was also instrumental in organizing the Women's Strike for Equality on August 26, 1970, the 50th anniversary of the 19th Amendment, which granted women the right to vote. This nationwide demonstration, with its largest event in New York City, drew attention to women's ongoing struggles for equal opportunities in employment, education, and 24-hour childcare centers. The strike was a pivotal moment in the women's liberation movement and demonstrated the growing political power of women. In addition to her activism, Friedan continued to write about gender inequality. Her later works include 'It Changed My Life: Writings on the Women's Movement' (1976), 'The Second Stage' (1981), and 'The Fountain of Age' (1993). In 'The Second Stage,' Friedan argued for a more balanced approach to gender equality, recognizing the value of family and the need for societal structures to support caregiving roles. 'The Fountain of Age' focused on aging, challenging the negative perceptions of the elderly and advocating for a richer, more productive view of the later stages of life. Betty Friedan's impact extended beyond the borders of the United States. She was a founding member of the National Women's Political Caucus in 1971, an organization dedicated to increasing women's participation in all areas of political and public life. This organization helped women run for political office and worked to ensure that women's issues were addressed in political platforms. Friedan's influence was also felt internationally as she spoke and advocated for women's rights around the world, helping to shape global discourse on gender equality. Throughout her life, Betty Friedan faced criticism from various fronts. Some feminists thought her work did not go far enough in challenging the status quo, while others believed she focused too much on middle-class, white women's issues. Friedan herself was critical of what she saw as the excesses of the feminist movement, particularly when it came to debates over sexuality and pornography, which she felt could detract from more pressing issues of economic and political equality. Her willingness to engage in self-criticism and critique the movement she helped build was a testament to her commitment to its underlying goals. Betty Friedan's legacy is not only in her written works and activism but also in her role as a mentor and inspiration to younger generations of feminists. She taught at several universities, including New York University and the University of Southern California, where she shared her experiences and insights. Friedan's influence can be seen in the continued fight for women's rights and the ongoing discourse on gender roles in society. Her work laid the groundwork for future feminist scholarship and activism, and she remains a towering figure in the history of the women's movement. On February 4, 2006, Betty Friedan passed away on her 85th birthday in Washington, D.C. Her death marked the end of an era for the feminist movement, but her ideas continue to resonate. Friedan's work forever changed the conversation about women's roles in society and contributed to significant societal shifts. Her vision of a society in which women and men could both reach their full potential remains a guiding principle for those still working towards gender equality. Friedan's contributions to feminism and her role in shaping modern American society have secured her place in history as one of its most influential figures.