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Daniel Horowitz. *Betty Friedan and the Making of The Feminine Mystique: The American Left, The Cold War, and Modern Feminism.* Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998. 354 pp. $30.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-55849-168-7.

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A Jewish girl leaves Peoria, Illinois, for Smith College. Upon her 1942 graduation she goes to grad school, works in New York, then marries. A move to the suburbs and three children complete the conformist cycle. But middle-class housewifery becomes a "gilded cage," devoid of self-worth, identity, and purpose. The realization that other educated women share "the problem that has no name" prompts the writing of *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), the seminal text during the rebirth of American feminism in the 1960s.

Sound familiar? Betty Goldstein Friedan's transformation from nave Illinois schoolgirl and bored housewife to feminist firebrand is a popular culture staple of mythic proportion. According to Smith College American Studies professor Daniel Horowitz, that's precisely the problem. Most mythic odysseys, includng Friedan's, are equal parts reality and fancy. Like other social historians in the wake of E.P. Thompson, Horowitz turns his attention to the "making" of Betty Friedan, and the private drama behind the public persona.

During Goldstein's childhood, Peoria was Illinois's second-largest city, and witnessed clashes between capital and labor. Labor conflict was discussed freely in the Goldstein household, as was anti-semitism, the rise of fascism, free-thought, and literature. By the time Goldstein graduated from high school, she already enjoyed a reputation as a budding intellectual.

Goldstein's mind blossomed at Smith. Horowitz draws on Goldstein's undergraduate papers and editorials in the campus newspaper she edited, to show that Goldstein was also an activist. He does a masterful job of linking Goldstein to Smith professors who shaped her thought. Goldstein's capacious mind led her to write on topics like pacifism, student rights, fascism, and socialism. Many articles were spirited defenses of labor unions and, at the urging of a professor, Goldstein visited Tennessee's Highlander Folk School, a hotbed of union activism.

As a graduate student at Berkeley (1942-43), Goldstein immersed herself as much in the Popular Front as in psychology labs. She moved to New York, where from 1943 through 1946, she reported on labor and women's issues for the Federated Press. When she lost her job – partly due to sexism – Goldstein began writing for the UE News, the official journal of the United Electrical Workers, a radical union with a relatively progressive record on women. She continued to write for the News into 1952. Horowitz notes that her 1949 marriage to Carl Friedan did not silence Friedan's union radicalism, McCarthyism did. The UE's communist organizers led to right-wing attacks that so decimated UE membership that Friedan fell victim to staff cutbacks.

Retreat to the suburbs failed to stifle Friedan. First in Queens, then in Rockland County, Friedan edited a community newsletter and immersed herself in grassroots organizing on multi-cultural housing, racism, rents, and education. She also commuted into New York City to teach college writing and conduct research for her burgeoning freelance writing career.

So why did *The Feminine Mystique* represent Betty Friedan as a naive housewife awaiting revelation? It is here that Horowitz makes his most important analytical contribution. As a Jew, a radical, and a woman, Friedan was particularly vulnerable to right-wing persecution. Horowitz chronicles the Red Scare nightmares and concludes that Friedan realized that neither her writings nor feminist thought would gain currency if tainted with Old Left radicalism. The myth of the trapped housewife was a necessary fiction.

Horowitz speculates that Friedan repeated her own myth so often she came to believe parts of it, and that as an intellectual she has been overly protective of her turf. Friedan refused to talk with Horowitz and has leveled an indefensible charge of red-baiting. If anything, Horowitz places more stock in what historian David Caute dubbed "the great fear" than Friedan, and sees her as a right-wing

victim. Horowitz argues that McCarthyism was so fearful and damaging that it continues to compel Friedan to repudiate her roots and intellect in order to protect herself against enemies that can no longer harm her.

It's a great pity. If Friedan read Horowitz's book she'd find that he takes her more seriously as a thinker than any other scholar to date. His is a nuanced account that traces Friedan's intellectual development and shows her deftly developing her views, skillfully negotiating slippery political terrain, and evolving strategies that kept her one step ahead of right-wingers.

This is a work of first-rate scholarship that reads like a complex mystery novel. There are limitations. Horowitz admits he should have spent more time interviewing Carl Friedan, whom Betty divorced in 1969, but the chief shortcomings appear when Horowitz is forced to speculate on areas where Friedan would not cooperate. Judith Hennessee's official biography corrects several small errors, though her book lacks the intellectual wallop of Horowitz's and repeats myths that he demolishes.

Small problems detract little from a masterful work. Students of popular culture can read this work on many levels. It shows how "truth" is relativized by historical forces, and adds to a growing body of literature on the use of fear as a political weapon, a tactic whose currency is sadly all-too-relevant. Horowitz's findings raise questions about how ideas are appropriated by various groups who stamp them with their own political agendas. There is also a fascinating lesson in the controversy surrounding this book. What happens when scholars challenge sacred ideals? But on a more prosaic level, Horowitz's book is simply a fascinating story of what lies behind ideas that change the world.

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