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**NOT JUNE CLEAVER**  
*Women and Gender in  
Postwar America,  
1945–1960*

Edited by  
*Joanne Meyerowitz*

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 Contents
 

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9. Gender and Civic Activism in Mexican American Barrios in California  
*The Community Service Organization, 1947-1962*  
Margaret Rose 177
10. "Our Skirts Gave Them Courage"  
*The Civil Defense Protest Movement in New York City, 1955-1961*  
Dee Garrison 201
- PART III. CONSTRUCTIONS OF WOMANHOOD
11. Beyond the Feminine Mystique  
*A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946-1958*  
Joanne Meyerowitz 229
12. "I Wanted the Whole World to See"  
*Race, Gender, and Constructions of Motherhood in the Death of Emmett Till*  
Ruth Feldstein 263
13. White Neurosis, Black Pathology  
*Constructing Out-of-Wedlock Pregnancy in the Wartime and Postwar United States*  
Regina G. Kunzel 304
- PART IV. SEXUAL OUTLAWS AND CULTURAL REBELS
14. Extreme Danger  
*Women Abortionists and Their Clients before Roe v. Wade*  
Rickie Solinger 335
15. The Sexualized Woman  
*The Lesbian, the Prostitute, and the Containment of Female Sexuality in Postwar America*  
Donna Penn 358
16. The "Other" Fifties  
*Beats and Bad Girls*  
Wini Breines 382
- ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS 409
1. Introduction  
*Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*  
Joanne Meyerowitz 1
- PART I. WOMEN AND WAGE LABOR
2. When Women Arrived  
*The Transformation of New York's Chinatown*  
Xiaolan Bao 19
3. An "Obligation to Participate"  
*Married Nurses' Labor Force Participation in the 1950s*  
Susan Rimby Leighow 37
4. Recapturing Working-Class Feminism  
*Union Women in the Postwar Era*  
Dorothy Sue Cobble 57
5. Women's Employment and the Domestic Ideal  
in the Early Cold War Years  
Susan M. Hartmann 84
- PART II. ACTIVIST WOMEN AND THEIR ORGANIZATIONS
6. Gender and Progressive Politics  
*A Bridge to Social Activism of the 1960s*  
Susan Lynn 103
7. Mayhem and Moderation  
*Women Peace Activists during the McCarthy Era*  
Harriet Hyman Alonso 128
8. "Is Family Devotion Now Subversive?"  
*Familialism against McCarthyism*  
Deborah A. Gerson 151

Joanne Meyerowitz

## INTRODUCTION

*Women and Gender in**Postwar America,**1945–1960*

Most of us are familiar with a well-entrenched stereotype of American women in the post-World War II years. Domestic and quiescent, they moved to the suburbs, created the baby boom, and forged family togetherness. Popular since the 1950s, this tenacious stereotype conjures mythic images of cultural icons—June Cleaver, Donna Reed, Harriet Nelson—the quintessential white middle-class housewives who stayed at home to rear children, clean house, and bake cookies.<sup>1</sup> The stereotype persists today in television reruns of situation comedies, in popular movies, and sometimes in scholarly historical accounts of the postwar years. My students come to class with this image of womanhood set squarely in their vision. And college textbooks often reinforce it by placing postwar women, if they include them at all, under such subheadings as “The Suburban Family,” “Life in the Suburbs,” “Domesticity,” and “Back to the Kitchen.”<sup>2</sup> For some, this postwar story is a romance steeped in nostalgic longing for an allegedly simpler, happier, and more prosperous time. For others, it is an ironic story of declension, in which the housewife finds herself trapped in a domestic cage after spreading her wings

during World War II. In either case, it flattens the history of women, reducing the multidimensional complexity of the past to a snapshot of middle-class women in suburban homes.

While some women fit the stereotype, many others did not. To state the obvious, in the years following World War II, many women were not white, middle-class, married, and suburban; and many white, middle-class, married, suburban women were neither wholly domestic nor quiescent. In recent scholarship, these other women have begun to take center stage. A revisionist approach places the domestic stereotype in historical context and questions both its novelty and pervasiveness in the postwar years. It attempts to complicate our stories of the past; it reminds us that during this era, most American women lived, in one way or more, outside the boundaries of the middle-class suburban home.

This volume is part of this ongoing revisionist endeavor. Each of the fifteen essays explores a different piece of postwar U.S. women's history. Several of the essays focus on women in the labor force and in activist organizations. Others examine cultural constructions of gender and subcultural challenges to them. Taken together, the essays point first to the diversity among women and the multifarious activities in which they engaged. The essays demonstrate that women's sense of themselves included not only gender identity—their sense of themselves as women—but also their interrelated class, racial, ethnic, sexual, religious, occupational, and political identities. The essays also suggest that the postwar public discourse on women was more complex than often portrayed. They address the postwar domestic stereotype and its meanings, how and where it was produced, and the manifold ways that women appropriated, transformed, and challenged it. They investigate the competing voices within the public discourse on women and the internal contradictions that undermined and destabilized the domestic stereotype even as it was constructed.

#### *Historians and Women of the Postwar Era*

Until recently, U.S. women's historians paid less attention to the years from 1945 to 1960 than they did to the years before and after them. For historians, women of the postwar era, it seems, were less captivating than women workers during World War II or political activists of the 1960s. Postwar women provided a coda to the saga of Rosie the Riveter or a prelude to the story of 1960s feminists. But as the subjects of serious study in their own right, they were, until recently, relatively neglected.

If any historical approach has prevailed thus far, it is one that focuses on the conservatism of the postwar era and the formidable ideological and institutional

constraints faced by women. Historical accounts stress the postwar domestic ideal, the reassertion of a traditional sexual division of labor, and the formal and informal barriers that prevented women from fully participating in the public realm. In this historical narrative, postwar conservatism shaped women's identities, weakened their limited protests, and contained their activities within traditional bounds.

An early and influential formulation of this position appeared in journalist Betty Friedan's bestselling liberal feminist polemic, *The Feminine Mystique*, published in 1963. In the postwar era, Friedan argued, social scientists, educators, advertisers, and magazine editors promoted a conservative ideal, "the feminine mystique," that portrayed women as happy housewives whose fulfillment derived solely from marriage, motherhood, and family. This ideal, Friedan claimed, damaged American women and trapped them in the suburban home.<sup>3</sup> With *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan gave a name and a voice to housewives' discontent, but she also homogenized American women and simplified postwar ideology; she reinforced the stereotype that portrayed all postwar women as middle-class, domestic, and suburban, and she caricatured the popular ideology that she said had suppressed them.<sup>4</sup>

In the mid-1970s and after, more sophisticated variants of this approach appeared in numerous accounts of World War II and the immediate postwar years. These works often focused on wage-earning women, but they joined Friedan in emphasizing the conservatism and constraints of the postwar era. Studies of postwar culture found that government propaganda, popular magazines, and films reinforced traditional concepts of femininity and instructed women to subordinate their interests to those of returning male veterans. Studies of war industries explored the sexist and racist discriminatory practices that resulted in postwar layoffs of women, women's unsuccessful efforts to resist the loss of their wartime positions, and the processes by which employers reestablished the prewar sexual division of labor. As the last chapter of World War II, the late 1940s looked bleak indeed.<sup>5</sup>

The conservatism-and-constraints approach reached its apex in works on the 1950s. To give the most prominent example, Elaine Tyler May's *Homeward Bound*, a study of families in the 1950s, found that white middle-class Americans, in search of security, turned to an idealized vision of home and family that domesticated and subordinated women. May linked the containment of communism in Cold War politics with the containment of women in the postwar domestic ideal. In the midst of Cold War anxiety, "the family seemed to offer a psychological fortress," a buffer against both internal and foreign threats. In this ideological climate, independent women threatened the social order. Under cultural pressure and with limited options for work outside the home, women, contained and constrained, "donned their domestic harnesses."<sup>6</sup>

While no serious historian can deny the conservatism of the postwar era or the myriad constraints that women encountered, an unremitting focus on women's subordination erases much of the history of the postwar years. It tends to downplay women's agency and to portray women primarily as victims.<sup>7</sup> It obscures the complexity of postwar culture and the significant social and economic changes of the postwar era. Sometimes it also inadvertently bolsters the domestic stereotype. Especially in works on the 1950s, the sustained focus on a white middle-class domestic ideal and on suburban middle-class housewives sometimes renders other ideals and other women invisible.

From early on, some historians have challenged the conservatism-and-constraints approach. Historians have long acknowledged that increasing numbers of women sought and found wage work, albeit in traditionally female jobs, in the postwar era. As early as 1972, William Chafe argued that "the most striking feature of the 1950's was the degree to which women continued to enter the job market and expand their sphere."<sup>8</sup> In other accounts of World War II and its aftermath, postwar social and cultural changes received at least some recognition. Various studies noted women war workers' enhanced self-confidence in the postwar era, a "nascent feminist consciousness" in Hollywood films of the late 1940s, more egalitarian relations between postwar husbands and wives, and new state laws that strengthened women's rights. These social and cultural transformations suggested that the immediate postwar years should not be dismissed simply as years of retrenchment.<sup>9</sup> Eugenia Kaledin's *Mothers and More*, published in 1984, brought a variant of this approach to the 1950s. Through the sheer number of prominent women authors, activists, and artists she listed, Kaledin made a case against "the dominant myth of [women's] victimization" in the 1950s. As a compendium of women's public accomplishments, the book slighted the vast majority of women who did not achieve fame or fortune, but it gave readers a fresh view of the variegated ways in which some women moved beyond the domestic ideal.<sup>10</sup>

Most influential, though, were case studies that by the mid-1980s began to transform the history of postwar women. Recent works have explored the public campaigns and private networks of postwar feminists, women in politics, and women labor, peace, and civil rights activists.<sup>11</sup> Others have investigated the varied subcultural challenges posed by lesbians, communist women, and white rebellious teens.<sup>12</sup> Taken together, these works point to pockets of resistance, to significant groups of women who questioned and loosened postwar constraints. At the same time, studies of books, films, and television shows, reading against the grain, discovered subtle expressions of ambivalence, contradiction, and self-parody in postwar gender ideals.<sup>13</sup> And cultural histories investigated how deeply postwar concepts of gender were informed by issues of race, ethnicity, and class.<sup>14</sup> Bit by bit, the historical evidence

mounted until our image of the postwar era was irrevocably fractured; the quiet housewives were joined by a wide array of women workers, community activists, politicians, and rebels, and the domestic ideal, with internal contradictions, was conjoined with other cultural constructions of women. Despite the conservatism and constraints, the postwar era now seems a time of notable social change and cultural complexity.<sup>15</sup>

#### A Collective Reinterpretation

This anthology is a sampler of current work on postwar U.S. women's history, a first attempt to bring new pieces of scholarship into one volume. Rather than posit one overarching history of women or one gender ideology, it relates multiple histories of women and multiple constructions of gender. The authors of the essays do not speak with one voice, and readers will notice differences in interpretation and method. Some authors emphasize the conservatism of the postwar era, while others stress the undercurrents of change. Some point to the impact of the domestic ideal, while others question its strength. Two essays fuse personal narrative with historical analysis in what Wini Breines labels "sociological memoir." Others engage in the thick description of social history or the discourse analysis of cultural studies.

Nonetheless, despite such differences, several themes emerge from these essays, suggesting the contours of a new and multifaceted history of women and gender in the postwar United States. First and foremost, these essays displace the domestic stereotype, the June Cleavers and Donna Reeds, from the center of historical study. To give just one example, Xiaolan Bao's essay on Chinese women garment workers in New York City reminds us that postwar women included immigrants fresh off the boat, newcomers to the city. As federal immigration policy changed, a massive influx of Chinese women transformed a predominantly male Chinese American community. Despite the postwar growth of suburbs and the service sector, the new immigrants moved into and revitalized an urban ethnic neighborhood and an urban industry. Along with other essays in this volume, Bao's study demonstrates what should be obvious: that American women were culturally and ethnically diverse during the postwar years, just as they were during other historical eras.

The essays on wage workers move us beyond the decline of war industry, away from aggregate statistics on labor force participation, and toward close historical case studies of economic change in specific communities and female-dominated occupations. The shift in focus invites us to ask questions about the postwar years that historians have long asked about earlier eras in American history. How, for example, did the increase in married women workers affect family relations? In one community, Xiaolan Bao finds that wives' eco-

conomic contribution challenged the patriarchal prerogatives of their husbands and shifted the balance of power within Chinese American working-class families.

Women who entered the labor force in the postwar era did not simply comply with the invisible hand of supply and demand; at least some of them engaged in conscious debates and struggles that altered the workplace. Susan Rimby Leighow's study of registered nurses shows how, in a period of labor shortage, the expressed needs of married nurses reshaped the occupation. Married nurses demanded and won part-time work, better pay, maternity leaves, and employer-sponsored child care. As Dorothy Sue Cobble illustrates, women union leaders in other occupations fought for some of the same benefits. Women workers of the postwar era have a history of union activism, not only in industrial workplaces, but also in the more rapidly growing service sector. Women labor leaders negotiated for better contracts and lobbied for new state and federal policies on behalf of women workers. They did not offer any serious challenge to the entrenched sexual division of labor, but they sustained the activism of the war years in vocal campaigns for workplace equity and reform.

In fact, the activism of postwar women was wide-ranging. The essays in this volume alone portray women of varied backgrounds participating in trade unions, the peace movement, the civil rights movement, and civic reform. Despite the conservatism of the era, women in voluntary associations carried on the tradition of female association work from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the postwar era, women worked at both national and local levels in all-female associations and increasingly in mixed-sex groups. As in earlier eras, though, as several essays testify, women rarely achieved the highest positions of leadership in organizations in which they worked alongside men.

Central to women's postwar voluntarism was a revitalized conception of maternalist politics. The postwar domestic ideal not only offered justifications for women to stay at home; as in the early twentieth century, it also authorized maternal activities in the public realm.<sup>16</sup> In their essays on women pacifists, Harriet Hyman Alonso and Dee Garrison trace the maternalist language of postwar women reformers. Garrison, in particular, explores how housewives in New York City used their role as maternal protectors to join with veteran radicals, such as Dorothy Day, in a little-known late-1950s mass-protest anti-nuclear movement.<sup>17</sup> But maternalist politics also appeared in other unlikely places. Women in the Communist Party, as Deborah Gerson's essay shows, adopted postwar familial rhetoric when they organized to defend their husbands and protect their children from the ravages of the Red Scare. Likewise, in Ruth Feldstein's analysis of the Emmett Till case, Mamie Till Bradley emerged as a spokesperson for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) because she spoke with a mother's voice. In each of these

instances, women used their culturally sanctioned authority as mothers, as caretakers for children, to legitimate their public demands for social justice. But as Feldstein demonstrates, the maternalist argument, by portraying women primarily as mothers, also restricted them: A mother's authority was limited in scope, and women portrayed as "bad mothers" had no authority at all.<sup>18</sup>

Postwar women reformers, Susan Lynn explains, showed a concerted interest in issues of race. As the civil rights movement blossomed, black and white women worked together, not without difficulty, to battle racism. They employed the traditional pressure-group tactics of earlier women's organizations, but they also emphasized the transformative power of interpersonal relations. In this way, they foreshadowed the "personal politics" and consciousness raising of the 1960s. To some extent, the rising interest of white women reformers in issues of racial justice replaced their earlier interest in white working-class women and children. For these postwar reformers, race relations replaced class relations as the primary form of social injustice. On the national level, for example, the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) gradually shifted its work from efforts with women industrial workers to campaigns for racial desegregation. For white women reformers, race became a new and compelling terrain for social reconciliation.

The fight for racial equality extended across the nation. In the South, Septima Clark, Rosa Parks, Jo Ann Gibson Robinson, Daisy Bates, and Ella Baker joined hundreds of lesser-known women in launching the massive protests of the civil rights movement.<sup>19</sup> Just as black women engaged in community organizing and protest in the African American South, so Chicanas engaged in community organizing and protest in the Mexican American West. In the Community Service Organization (CSO), Margaret Rose reports, women and men, predominantly Mexican American and working class, forged a coalition of local organizations in which "women's issues"—neighborhood safety, education, health care—moved to the center of civic activism. While a few of these women rose to positions of prominence in the CSO and the labor movement, many others worked anonymously, hosting fund-raising parties, teaching citizenship classes, and organizing their neighbors. Thus, women brought their traditionally female issues and traditionally female skills to a mixed-sex voluntary association. Here, as in the workplace, they rarely questioned the sexual division of labor. But they laid the organizational groundwork, and in some cases trained the leaders, for the better-known national activism of the 1960s and 1970s, including Chicana feminist protest.<sup>20</sup>

This is not to imply that feminism as such vanished during the postwar era. The small band of self-avowed feminists in the National Woman's Party (NWP) survived the postwar era despite the marked hostility to their efforts.<sup>21</sup> Other activists expanded the spectrum of feminist activity, broadly defined, even as

they distanced themselves from the NWP, which monopolized the feminist label. Numerous women's organizations lobbied for "women in policy-making positions," and some women's organizations, such as the YWCA, pushed for gender equity on other fronts as well.<sup>22</sup> Some prominent black women, including novelist Ann Petry and lawyer Pauli Murray, made their concerns for gender justice abundantly clear in the postwar African American press, and through the 1950s, women unionists and their allies pressed for equal-pay legislation and "sex-blind" treatment in male-dominated industry.<sup>23</sup> In Dorothy Sue Cobble's formulation, working-class trade union women also put forth a distinctive feminist defense of women workers in female-dominated jobs. This was not the liberal individualist feminism of the National Woman's Party; it embraced a version of working-class feminism that recognized gender difference, acknowledged the existing sexual division of labor, and devised collective demands for workplace equity, including equal pay for comparable work, maternity leaves, and revised minimum-wage laws. This form of feminism, Cobble finds, did not simply survive the postwar years; it grew and flourished.

If some women activists flourished during the postwar era, others did not. The Cold War and the attendant Red Scare severely damaged women's organizations, especially those associated in any way with the left. "Left feminists" founded the short-lived Congress of American Women (CAW), but, as Harriet Hyman Alonso shows, they could not sustain an openly leftist organization in the repressive climate of the postwar era.<sup>24</sup> After the Justice Department ordered the CAW's board to register as "foreign agents," the CAW disbanded, and a later attempt to reorganize it foundered. Other women's organizations endured cutthroat internal strife and self-censorship. The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, for example, suffered from dissension as members red-baited each other. In the meantime, women in the Communist Party were forced to devote their energies to fending off harassment.<sup>25</sup>

Beyond its direct and repressive impact on individual women, their organizations, and political expression, the Cold War had other meanings. In some instances, Cold War rhetoric bolstered the domestic ideal.<sup>26</sup> But in other cases, women (and men) used Cold War rhetoric to promote women's public participation. Some mainstream women's organizations adopted the language of the Cold War to strengthen their public mission in the postwar era.<sup>27</sup> Quasi-official policy groups, as Susan Hartmann shows, supported women's wage work and education by depicting women as crucial and underused national resources in the Cold War competition.<sup>28</sup> And popular magazines, my own essay suggests, used Cold War rhetoric to encourage women to enter politics. As a political ideology adopted by a broad range of liberals and conservatives, the Cold War had no fixed association with the domestic ideal.

More generally, it seems, postwar culture was not as inextricably tied to

the domestic ideal as Betty Friedan and some historians have implied. Susan Hartmann's essay reveals how policy planners promoted women's employment and attempted to sway public opinion toward support for women's wage work. My essay contends that postwar magazines contradicted the domestic ideal with numerous articles that validated women's public participation and celebrated the public accomplishments of "successful" women. And Susan Rimby Leighow's essay finds that married women nurses repeatedly defended their labor force participation, not only as a source of family income, but also as a needed public service. In short, despite the domestic ideal, women were recognized, and recognized themselves, as legitimate public actors.

Postwar concepts of womanhood were deeply imbued with racist assumptions. In the mainstream popular culture, to give the most blatant example, women were almost always pictured as white. The burgeoning African American press, in particular, countered this racially biased imagery with an insistent focus on black women as mothers, workers, activists, entertainers, and beauties.<sup>29</sup> But, in the postwar era as earlier, black women encountered racist stereotypes that portrayed them as servile mummies, as sexually loose women, and increasingly as damaging matriarchs.<sup>30</sup> Ruth Feldstein's essay on Mamie Till Bradley reconstructs the cultural tightrope that African American women walked. A woman who sought public authority had to dispel racist stereotypes and assert her respectability, which others might easily contest. Regina Kunzel's essay on unwed mothers outlines the origins of the postwar racial bifurcation that depicted white unwed mothers as individual "neurotics" and black unwed mothers as symbols of "cultural pathology."<sup>31</sup> Just as some postwar white women reformers turned their attention from issues of class to issues of race, so some social workers and sociologists gradually shifted the etiology of unwed pregnancy from an emphasis on class (working-class "sex delinquency") to an emphasis on racial difference (white "neurosis" and black "pathology"). Here, too, concepts of race, portrayed as black and white, were increasingly salient in middle-class constructions of gender, with issues of class decidedly muted. But in this instance, the focus on race had a different meaning: Concepts of racial difference prevented black women from receiving the social services available to whites.

In the postwar prescriptive literature, women who defied sexual convention were vilified as deviants.<sup>32</sup> Not only unwed mothers, but also women who performed abortions, women who sought abortions, prostitutes, and lesbians challenged the dominant sexual order. As Rickie Solinger and Donna Penn attest, both women abortionists and lesbians encountered new and hostile public exposure in the postwar era. Popular and expert observers defined "normal" heterosexual marital relations through surveillance, regulation, and sometimes conflation of various forms of deviant behavior. Patrolling the borders of sexual

propriety, they studied, recorded, and broadcast their own peculiar renditions of the increasingly visible enclaves where abortionists met their clients and where lesbians met each other. Marked as dangerous sexual outcasts, as uncontained women in need of control, as social threats, and even as demons, abortionists and lesbians, like prostitutes, faced public derogation and criminal prosecution. Still, despite the attacks, the various sexual subcultures survived. In different ways, abortionists and lesbians reworked the public discourse, redefined the sexual order, and defended themselves against the cultural onslaught.<sup>33</sup> Their sustained public presence reveals a thriving sexual underworld that included more than the demimonde of prostitution.

Self-conscious defiance of middle-class culture also appeared among the Beat generation bohemians discussed by Wini Breines. While the stereotypic Beat was a young male poet, young women too were attracted to this cultural rebellion.<sup>34</sup> Women who joined the Beats and women who admired them from afar often shared a sense of alienation from bourgeois conventions. White middle-class women bohemians protested the restrictions of the domestic ideal and pursued "authenticity" in the Beat subculture, even though they did not openly attack its sexism. Their attraction to working-class men, African American men, and male rebels, Breines claims, revealed their search for a new identity for themselves, a subdued precursor to the overtly feminist quest of the 1960s.

The other women in this volume also engaged in active construction of their own identities. They drew their sense of themselves not simply from their familial roles or from the domestic ideal. In the pages that follow, various women portray themselves as garment workers, nurses, unionists, public servants, citizens, political activists, community organizers, pacifists, communists, victims of harassment, immigrants, Chinese Americans, African Americans, Mexican Americans, white women, unwed mothers, abortionists, lesbians, butches, femmes, and Beat bohemians. The ways they portray themselves demonstrate that women in the postwar era saw themselves as more than women or wives or mothers. These essays begin to explore how women forged these identities, mediated among competing and contradictory ideals, and grappled with the conservatism of the era and the constraints they encountered.

Most of the essays in this collection question historical accounts that portray the postwar era as somehow anomalous; instead, they draw historical links between the wartime and postwar eras and between the postwar era and the 1960s. As various essays illustrate, the postwar employment of married women, women's activism, maternalist politics, domestic ideals, and racialized constructions of gender all had distinct roots in the prewar and wartime eras. Similarly, social change in the 1960s and 1970s—women's employment,

racial justice movements, antiwar activism, feminism, gay and lesbian liberation movements, youth rebellion, personal and confrontational politics—all have clear ties to the postwar years. The postwar era can no longer serve as a foil, as either the good old days, set in contrast to an allegedly turbulent, violent, and amoral present, or as the bad old days, set in contrast to the triumphant rebirth of social change in the 1960s. It provides a not-so-hidden missing link, what Susan Lynn calls a "bridge," that connects the transformations of the 1960s with transformations earlier in the twentieth century.<sup>35</sup>

This anthology is only a beginning. It marks the rise of new approaches to postwar U.S. women's history, but it presents only fragments of the larger history yet to be written. The postwar history of working-class women, ethnic women, and women of color, including housewives, has only begun to emerge, and the postwar history of women on the right, sexual violence, and women, consumerism, and glamour, to name just a few topics, are not addressed at all. This volume makes no attempt to provide a comprehensive history. It aims instead to showcase new directions in postwar women's history, to subvert the persistent stereotype of domestic, quiescent, suburban womanhood, and to generate new histories of a complicated era.

## NOTES

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1. June Cleaver was the fictional mother and wife, played by actress Barbara Billingsly, in television's "Leave It to Beaver." Actresses Donna Reed and Harriet Nelson played housewives in the television comedies "The Donna Reed Show" and "The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet."
2. Alan Brinkley et al., *American History: A Survey*, 8th ed. (New York: Knopf, 1991), 862; Robert A. Divine et al., *America: Past and Present*, 3rd ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 859; Paul Boyer et al., *The Enduring Vision: A History of the American People* (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath, 1990), 1025; Gary B. Nash et al., *The American People: Creating a Nation and a Society*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1990), 935. For texts that do not include discussions of postwar women, see John M. Blum et al., *The National Experience: A History of the United States*, 7th ed. (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989); Winthrop D. Jordan et al., *The United States*, 6th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1987).
3. Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Norton, 1963).
4. For other critiques of Friedan, see Ruth Schwartz Cowan, "Two Washes in the



Morning and a Bridge Party at Night: The American Housewife between the Wars," *Women's Studies*, no. 2 (1976): Rachel Bowlby, "The Problem with No Name: Rereading Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*," *Feminist Review*, September 1987.

5. For studies that focus on postwar culture, see Leila J. Rupp, *Mobilizing Women for War: German and American Propaganda, 1939-1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978); Susan M. Hartmann, "Prescriptions for Penelope: Literature on Women's Obligations to Returning World War II Veterans," *Women's Studies*, no. 3 (1978): 223-239; Maureen Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda during World War II* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984); Sonya Michel, "Danger on the Home Front: Motherhood, Sexuality, and Disabled Veterans in American Postwar Films," *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, July 1992, 109-128. For studies of war industry, see Joan Ellen Trey, "Women in the War Economy: World War II," *Review of Radical Political Economics*, July 1972, 50-53; Lisa Anderson and Sheila Tobias, "What Really Happened to Rosie the Riveter? Demobilization and the Female Labor Force, 1944-47," Module 9 (New York: MSS Module Publications, 1974); Lynn Goldfarb, with Julie Boddy and Nancy Wiegiersma, *Separated and Unequal: Discrimination Against Women Workers After World War II* (The U.A.W., 1944-1954) (Silver Spring, Md.: Women's Work Project, Union for Radical Political Economics, 1976); Alan Clive, "Women Workers in World War II: Michigan as a Test Case," *Labor History*, Winter 1979, 46-71; Karen Beck Skold, "The Job He Left Behind: American Women in the Shipyards during World War II," in *Women, War, and Revolution*, ed. Carol Berkin and Clara Lovett (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1980), 55-72; Karen Tucker Anderson, "Last Hired and First Fired: Black Women Workers during World War II," *Journal of American History*, June 1982, 82-97; Ruth Milkman, *Gender at Work: The Dynamics of Job Segregation by Sex during World War II* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987); Amy Kesselman, *Fleeting Opportunities: Women Shipyard Workers in Portland and Vancouver during World War II and Reconversion* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990). The more general works on women and World War II are less monolithically focused on conservatism and constraints, but they too tend to emphasize postwar conservatism. See Karen Anderson, *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations, and the Status of Women during World War II* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981); Susan M. Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s* (Boston: Twayne, 1982); D'Ann Campbell, *Women at War with America: Private Lives in a Patriotic Era* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984). Within this voluminous literature, there are a number of areas of disagreement, including whether women chose to leave war jobs, reluctantly acquiesced, or actively resisted; to what extent unions were to blame for postwar labor practices; and whether African American women's position in the labor market improved or deteriorated in the postwar era.

6. Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), II, 113. For other works on the 1950s that emphasize conservatism and constraints, see Benita Eisler, *Private Lives: Men and Women of the Fifties* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1986); Carol A. B. Warren, *Madwives: Schizophrenic Women in the 1950s* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1987); Myra Dinnerstein, *Women between Two Worlds: Midlife Reflections on Work and Family* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992); Brett Harvey, *The Fifties: A Women's Oral History* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993).

7. From the mid-1960s on, various historians have made forceful arguments against

histories that portray African Americans, workers, and women solely as victims. While these arguments were highly influential in U.S. women's history generally, they had less impact on the history of women of the postwar era.

8. William H. Chafé, *The American Woman: Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Roles, 1920-1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 218; for an updated version of this work, see William H. Chafé, *The Paradox of Change: American Women in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). For other accounts that emphasize postwar labor force participation, see Paddy Quick, "Rosie the Riveter: Myths and Realities," *Radical America*, July-August 1975, 115-131; Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 300.

9. Sherna Berger Gluck, *Rosie the Riveter Revisited: Women, the War, and Social Change* (Boston: Twayne, 1987); Andrea S. Walsh, *Women's Film and Female Experience, 1940-1950* (New York: Praeger, 1984), 197; Campbell, *Women at War with America*; Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond*. Hartmann, in particular, offers a carefully balanced account that addresses both continuity and change in the late 1940s.

10. Eugenia Kaledin, *Mothers and More: American Women in the 1950s* (Boston: Twayne, 1984), xii.

11. Leila J. Rupp and Verta Taylor, *Survival in the Doldrums: The American Women's Rights Movement, 1945 to the 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Cynthia Harrison, *On Account of Sex: The Politics of Women's Issues, 1945-1968* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Susan Ware, "American Women in the 1950s: Nonpartisan Politics and Women's Politicization," in *Women, Politics, and Change*, eds. Louise A. Tilly and Patricia Gurin (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1990), 281-299; Nancy F. Gabin, *Feminism in the Labor Movement: Women and the United Auto Workers, 1935-1975* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); David J. Garrow, ed., *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It: The Memoir of Jo Ann Gibson Robinson* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1987); Vicki L. Crawford, Jacqueline Anne Rouse, and Barbara Woods, eds., *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, 1990); Susan Lynn, *Progressive Women in Conservative Times: Racial Justice, Peace, and Feminism, 1945 to the 1960s* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992).

12. John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Donna Penn, "The Meanings of Lesbianism in Post-War America," *Gender and History*, Summer 1991, 190-203; Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 130-187; Kate Weigand, "The Red Menace, the Feminine Mystique, and the Ohio Union: American Activities Commission: Gender and Anti-Communism in Ohio, 1951-1954," *Journal of Women's History*, Winter 1992, 70-94; Wini Breines, *Young, White, and Miserable: Growing Up Female in the Fifties* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992).

13. For early examples, see Paul Boyer, "Minister's Wife, Widow, Reluctant Feminist: Catherine Marshall in the 1950s," *American Quarterly*, Winter 1978, 703-721; Brandon French, *On the Verge of Revolt: Women in American Films of the Fifties* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1978); Janey Place, "Women in Film Noir," in *Women in Film*

Noir, ed. E. Ann Kaplan (London: British Film Institute, 1980), 35-54. For more recent examples, see Nancy Walker, "Humor and Gender Roles: The 'Funny' Feminism of the Post-World War II Suburbs," *American Quarterly*, Spring 1985, 98-113; Janet Walker, "Hollywood, Freud and the Representation of Women: Regulation and Contradictions, 1945-Early 60s," in *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, ed. Christine Gledhill (London: British Film Institute, 1987), 197-214; James West Davidson and Mark Hamilton Lytle, *After the Fact: The Art of Historical Detection*, 2nd ed. (New York: Knopf, 1986), 2:364-92; George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 77-96; Jackie Byars, *All That Hollywood Allows: Re-Reading Gender in 1950s Melodrama* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

14. Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 268-274; Judith E. Smith, "The Marrying Kind: Working Class Courtship and Marriage in Post-war Popular Culture," paper, 1990; Byars, *All That Hollywood Allows*, 210-258; Rickie Solinger, *Wake Up Little Susie: Single Pregnancy and Race Before Roe v. Wade* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

15. For a brief overview of the postwar era that includes some of this revisionist literature, see Sara M. Evans, *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America* (New York: Free Press, 1989), 243-262.

16. On maternalist politics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Sonya Michel and Seth Koven, "Womanly Duties: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States in France, Germany, Great Britain, and the United States, 1880-1920," *American Historical Review*, October 1990. On maternalist politics in the early 1960s, see Amy Swerdlow, "Ladies' Day at the Capitol: Women Strike for Peace versus HUAC," *Feminist Studies*, Fall 1982.

17. On women pacifists, see also Lynn, *Progressive Women in Conservative Times*. Lynn acknowledges the maternalist arguments of some postwar women pacifists, but she sees these arguments as weaker and less prevalent than in the post-World War I pacifist movement; see p. 97.

18. In fact, the postwar outcry over domineering "moms" and "matriarchs" may well have been part of a cultural challenge to resurgent maternal power.

19. See Garrow ed., *The Montgomery Bus Boycott*; Crawford et al., eds., *Women in the Civil Rights Movement*; Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: Bantam Books, 1985), 261-275; Daisy Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock: A Memoir* (New York: McKay, 1962); Cynthia Stokes Brown, ed., *Ready from Within: Septima Clark and the Civil Rights Movement* (Navarro, Calif.: Wild Trees Press, 1986).

20. On postwar protest among working-class Mexican American women, see also Michael Wilson and Deborah Silverton Rosenfelt, *Salt of the Earth* (Old Westbury, N.Y.: Feminist Press, 1978).

21. See Rupp and Taylor, *Survival in the Doldrums*.

22. Harrison, *On Account of Sex*, 53; Lynn, *Progressive Women in Conservative Times*, 111-140.

23. See Ann Petry, "What's Wrong with Negro Men?," *Negro Digest*, March 1947, 4-7; Pauli Murray, "Why Negro Girls Stay Single," *Negro Digest*, July 1947, 4-8; Alice Kessler-Harris, *A Woman's Wage: Historical Manings and Social Consequences*

(Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1990), 101-109; Gabbin, *Feminism in the Labor Movement*, 144.

24. In her essay on historian Eleanor Flexner, Ellen DuBois writes of a postwar "left feminist" perspective that "fused a sense of women's systematic oppression with a larger understanding of social inequality," Ellen DuBois, "Eleanor Flexner and the History of American Feminism," *Gender and History*, Spring 1991, 84-85.

25. On the impact of the Cold War on women's organizations, see also Rupp and Taylor, *Survival in the Doldrums*, 136-144.

26. See May, *Homeward Bound*.

27. Twelve national organizations of women formed the Assembly of Women's Organizations for National Security in 1951. By 1954, five more organizations had joined. The assembly favored "maximum participation and use of womanpower in national security." The member organizations included the American Association of University Women, General Federation of Women's Clubs, National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs, National Association of Negro Business and Professional Women's Clubs, National Federation of Republican Women, and Women's Division of the Democratic National Committee. See Dorothy G. Stackhouse, "Assembly of Women's Organizations for National Security," *General Federation Clubwoman*, January 1954, 10-11, 26-29. On anticommunist feminists in the National Woman's Party, see Rupp and Taylor, *Survival in the Doldrums*, 136-137.

28. See also Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 304.

29. Jones, *Labor of Love*, 268-274. The postwar publications of other racial and ethnic groups also included images of women. Further study is needed to determine how these subcultural presses corroborated, reworked, or challenged dominant gender ideals. Further study is also needed to investigate the meanings of the middle-class domestic ideal to women who were not white and middle class; see Lynn, *Progressive Women in Conservative Times*, 12.

30. Patricia Morton, *Disfigured Images: The Historical Assault on Afro-American Women* (New York: Praeger, 1991).

31. See also Solinger, *Wake Up Little Susie*.

32. See May, *Homeward Bound*.

33. On abortionists, see also Carol Joffe, "Portraits of Three 'Physicians of Conscience': Abortion before Legalization in the United States," *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, July 1991; on lesbians, see also D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics*; Kennedy and Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold*; Audre Lorde, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (Trumansburg, N.Y.: Crossing Press, 1982); Joan Nestle, *A Restricted Country* (Ithaca: Firebrand Books, 1987).

34. See Diane Di Prima, *Memoirs of a Beatnik* (San Francisco: Last Gasp Press, 1988); Joyce Johnson, *Minor Characters* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983); Hettie Jones, *How I Became Hettie Jones* (New York: Dutton, 1990).

35. In her study of the League of Women Voters, Susan Ware makes a similar point when she writes of "previously overlooked continuities in women's postwar political behavior. It is too simplistic to contrast the doldrums of the 1950s," 294. Other recent of the 1960s and 1970s." Ware, "American Women in the 1950s," 294. Other recent works that point to neglected continuities between the postwar era and the 1960s include Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor/Doubleday, 1983); Maurice Isserman, *If I*

*Had a Hammer . . . The Death of the Old Left and the Birth of the New Left* (New York: Basic Books, 1987); Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam, 1987); W. T. Lhamon, Jr., *Deliberate Speed: The Origins of a Cultural Style in the American 1950s* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990); Ellen Herman, "Being and Doing: Humanistic Psychology and the Spirit of the 1960s," in *Sights on the Sixties*, ed. Barbara Tischler (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 87-101, 250-252.

## PART I

Women and  
Wage Labor