



Mass Media and the Shaping of American Feminism, 1963-1975

By Patricia Bradley

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Beginning in 1963 with the publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* and reaching a high pitch ten years later with the televised mega-event of the "Battle of the Sexes"-the tennis match between Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs-the mass media were intimately involved with both the distribution and the understanding of the feminist message.

This mass media promotion of the feminist profile, however, proved to be a double-edged sword, according to Patricia Bradley, author of *Mass Media and the Shaping of American Feminism, 1963-1975*. Although millions of women learned about feminism by way of the mass media, detrimental stereotypes emerged overnight. Often the events mounted by feminists to catch the media eye crystalized the negative image. All feminists soon came to be portrayed in the popular culture as "bra burners" and "strident women." Such depictions not only demeaned the achievements of their movement but also limited discussion of feminism to those subjects the media considered worthy, primarily equal pay for equal work.

Bradley's book examines the media traditions that served to curtail understandings of feminism. Journalists, following the craft formulas of their trade, equated feminism with the bizarre and the unusual. Even women journalists could not overcome the rules of "What Makes News." By the time Billie Jean King confronted Bobby Riggs on the tennis court, feminism had become a commodity to be shaped to attract audiences. Finally, in mass media's pursuit of the new, counter-feminist messages came to replace feminism on the news agenda and helped set in place the conservative revolution of the 1980s.

Bradley offers insight into how mass media constructs images and why such images have the kind of ongoing strength that discourages young women of today from calling themselves "feminist." The author also asks how public issues are to be raised when those who ask the questions are negatively defined before the issues can even be discussed.

Mass Media and the Shaping of American Feminism, 1963-1975 examines the

media's role in creating the images of feminism that continue today. And it poses the dilemma of a call for systematic change in a mass media industry that does not have a place for systematic change in its agenda.

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Editorial Review

Review

“This is an important, original, and smart book that focuses on a topic of considerable significance—the interplay between the media and Second Wave feminism. Professor Bradley shows how adept she is at researching, conceptualizing, and writing at the juncture of women’s history and communications. She has a very strong command of how the world works—the worlds of both communications and social movements.”

—Daniel Horowitz, author of *Betty Friedan and the Making of The Feminist Mystique: The American Left, the Cold War, and Modern Feminism*

From the Publisher

This alarming look at how the media curtailed feminism

---is the first book-length examination of mass media and the second wave of feminism

---is the only book to analyze how media's interactions with feminism were predictable, given the media's business underpinnings

---sheds light on how the process of reporting news helped to establish disparaging, long-lasting images of feminism

From the Inside Flap

An incisive look at how the media curtailed feminism

Users Review

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