

## Contrasting Trends in Women's Employment in the Twentieth Century: Race, Gender, Class and *The Feminine Mystique*

S. Jay Kleinberg and Rachel Ritchie

*In The Feminine Mystique (1963), Betty Friedan highlighted the anomie experienced by women whose sole focus was their husbands, children and homes. She also presented a solution to this 'problem that has no name', arguing that women's lives could be more fulfilling if they combined marriage and motherhood with paid employment, and more particularly with a professional occupation. Using evidence from the U.S. Census, this article demonstrates that apart from the white upper- and upper-middle-class women upon whom Friedan concentrated, rising numbers of American women from all backgrounds already undertook paid work by 1960. As well as examining long terms trends in women's employment in the U.S., the article disaggregates the overall figures by key variables such as age, race, marital status and age of children. By doing so, it reveals that the pattern of economic activity among elite white women, the cohort Friedan focused upon, changed in the twenty years following The Feminine Mystique's publication, coming to more closely resemble that of working-class and non-white women. Furthermore, as the century progressed, professional and white collar employment increasingly became the norm. This seemingly vanquished 'the problem that has no name' although not the obstacles and difficulties that continue to face all women in the labour force.*

**Keywords:** Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, employment, women, race, class

Published in 1963, *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan sought to understand the 'strange discrepancy between the reality of our lives as women and the image to which we were trying to conform'.<sup>1</sup> Central to the book is her critique of 'happy housewife heroine' images prevalent in U.S. culture and media during the post-war period. In contrast, Friedan regarded full-time domesticity as detrimental to women's mental, psychological and emotional well-being. She highlighted what she called 'the problem that has no name', the anomie experienced by women whose sole focus was their husbands, children and homes.<sup>2</sup> She also presented a solution to this problem, an alternative vision of women's lives. Throughout *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan asserted that mid-twentieth-century women's lives could be more fulfilling if they pursued a combination of marriage, motherhood and paid employment. 'It is not as difficult as the Feminine Mystique implies', she

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S. Jay Kleinberg, Brunel University London, [jay.kleinberg@brunel.ac.uk](mailto:jay.kleinberg@brunel.ac.uk), and Rachel Ritchie, Brunel University London, [Rachel.Ritchie@brunel.ac.uk](mailto:Rachel.Ritchie@brunel.ac.uk).

<sup>1</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Norton, 1963), 7.

<sup>2</sup> Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 17.

wrote, 'to combine marriage and motherhood and even the kind of lifelong personal purpose that was once called "career"'.<sup>3</sup>

However, whilst positing employment as the answer to 'the problem that has no name', Friedan failed to acknowledge that many women in the U.S. already engaged in paid work. Nor did she recognise that her solution resembled the distinctive family economy that characterised many African American women's lives.<sup>4</sup> During the 1950s and 60s, increasing numbers of women from all backgrounds joined the labour force. These findings, drawn from the U.S. Census, provide an important supplement and counterpoint to the account of post-war femininity in *The Feminine Mystique*. Friedan used a range of evidence to support her claims, but a survey of her Smith College classmates undertaken fifteen years after their graduation from the elite eastern women's college was central to, and greatly informed, her arguments. From this starting point, she added further examples and case studies, returning to Smith College to interview current female undergraduates. These cohorts represent a small, select group within U.S. society. Although the success of *The Feminine Mystique* clearly indicated that their experiences resonated with a wider stratum of women, they hardly typified the range of U.S. women's lifestyles.

These upper- and upper-middle-class white women had lower employment levels than middle- and working-class women and women of colour. The evidence in this article shows that although domesticity shaped the lives of many U.S. women throughout the twentieth century, a growing number of married women engaged in paid employment as the twentieth century progressed. This was especially the case amongst women of colour, a group that Friedan neglected. Nevertheless, in the decades that Friedan wrote about, employment outside the home increasingly became the norm for white wives too, with the exception of the elite demographic on which Friedan focused in her book. In 1963, only 24.8 percent of married women with husbands earning an upper-middle or upper-class income of over \$10,000 per annum undertook paid employment. In contrast, the proportion of employed married women whose husband's wages fell in the lower income brackets ranged from 31.2 percent (for both the \$1,000-\$1,999 and \$7,000-\$9,999 cohorts, lower working- and middle-class, respectively) up to 39.1 percent (the \$3,000-\$4,999 group, working- and lower-middle class).<sup>5</sup>

After a brief exploration of *The Feminine Mystique*, this article provides a detailed analysis of married women's labour force participation in the twentieth century. The statistics presented here demonstrate that apart from the white upper- and upper-middle class women upon whom Friedan

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<sup>3</sup> Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 330.

<sup>4</sup> Bart Landry, *Black Working Wives: Pioneers of the American Family Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 31.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics: Special Labor Force Report No. 50 from *Handbook on Women Workers* (Washington, D.C., 1965) 29.

concentrated, rising numbers of women from all backgrounds already undertook paid work by 1960. As well as examining long term trends in women's employment, this article disaggregates the overall figures since women were not and are not a unitary group. They are divided by a variety of demographic characteristics. Thus it is important to consider how the key variables of age, race, class, marital status and age of children affected women's labour force participation, even though the inclusion of so many variables complicates the arguments and the statistics. This analysis raises issues that remain pertinent today, with continued debates in the U.S. and elsewhere about whether mothers ought to be part of the workplace and if so, under what conditions and for whose benefit – their own or society's?<sup>6</sup>

Such questions were central to *The Feminine Mystique*, with Friedan articulating a clear standpoint on the subject: in her view, women as wives were the problem, women as workers were the solution. She argued this to great effect, writing an impassioned and convincing polemic that drew readers into her vision of women's world. It is a testament to her skills as a journalist that *The Feminine Mystique* became a best-seller, not just in the U.S. but around the world. The book exemplified partisan journalism, both engaging and persuading. In the decades since its publication, it has also generated a great deal of analysis and commentary, with academics from a variety of disciplines exploring the book, its arguments and its impact, as well as other aspects of Friedan's life and work. Much of this scholarship appeared during the mid-1980s and 1990s.<sup>7</sup> There has also been more recent academic engagement with Friedan and her writing, predominantly, but not exclusively, by scholars in the U.S. and U.K.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For a recent exploration of such issues, see Brigid Schulte, *Overwhelmed: Work, Love and Play When No One Has the Time* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Rachel Bowlby, "'The Problem with No Name': Rereading Friedan's 'The Feminine Mystique,'" *Feminist Review* 27 (1987): 61-75; Judith Hennessee, *Betty Friedan: Her Life* (New York: Random House, 1999); 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); Daniel Horowitz, "Rethinking Betty Friedan and the Feminine Mystique: Labor Union Radicalism and Feminism in Cold War America," *American Quarterly* 48 (1996): 1-42; Joanne Meyerowitz, "Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946-1958," *Journal of American History* 79 (1993): 1455-1482 [reprinted as 'Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946-1958', in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, ed. Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 229-262].

<sup>8</sup> For example: Joanne Boucher and Cecilia Olivares, "Betty Friedan y el pasado radical del feminismo liberal," *Debate Feminista* 35 (2007): 277-294; Dorothy Chansky, "Usable Performance Feminism for Our Time: Reconsidering Betty Friedan," *Theatre Journal* 60 (2008): 341-364; Stephanie Coontz, *A Strange Stirring: "The Feminine Mystique" and American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s* (New York: Basic Books, 2011); Hasia R. Diner, Shira Kohn and Rachel Kranson (eds.), *A Jewish Feminine Mystique?: Jewish Women in Postwar America* (London: Rutgers University Press, 2010); Lisa Frederiksen Bohannon, *Woman's Work: the Story of Betty Friedan* (Greensboro, North Carolina: Morgan Reynolds, 2004); Natalie Fuehrer Taylor, "The Personal Is Political: Women's Magazines for the 'I'm-Not-a-Feminist-But' Generation," in *You've Come a Long Way, Baby: Women, Politics and Popular Culture*, ed. Lilly J. Goren (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky,

Some of these scholars have directly challenged Friedan's use of evidence. Historian Joanne Meyerowitz's influential article, for instance, reveals how selective the journalist was in her reading of women's magazines, providing only a partial account of post-war women's periodicals in order to support her claim that these publications were vital in perpetuating the Feminine Mystique.<sup>9</sup> The printing of articles by Friedan about the Feminine Mystique in best-selling mainstream women's magazines such as *Good Housekeeping* (1960), *Mademoiselle* (1962) and *Ladies' Home Journal* (1963) demonstrates that women's magazines were not as monolithic as she claimed. Moreover, her piece was not an anomaly on their pages. Polemical articles, including a column by Eleanor Roosevelt in *Ladies' Home Journal*, indicate that women's magazines were no strangers to controversy. Alongside advice on how to behave on a first date and how to entertain overnight guests, other *Ladies' Home Journal* features written in the early 1960s included the pressures women faced about breast feeding, a Bryn Mawr student's account of her flight from conventional femininity to live as a nomad in Afghanistan, studies of divorce and delinquency and numerous references to married women's paid employment.<sup>10</sup> Depictions of combining domesticity with work were neither straightforward nor unquestioningly positive, but their inclusion is not surprising considering the growing rate of married women's labour force participation in the 1950s and 60s.

### Problems and Solutions

Friedan was not alone in believing that U.S. women were in crisis. Contemporary writers and broadcasters discussed similar issues.<sup>11</sup> Media commentators, politicians, and educationalists

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2009), 215-232; Jo Gill, "'Quite the Opposite of a Feminist': Phyllis McGinley, Betty Friedan and Discourses of Gender in Mid-Century American Culture," *Women's History Review* 22 (2013): 422-439; Daniel Horowitz, *The Anxieties of Affluence: Critiques of American Consumer Culture, 1939-1979* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004); Rebecca Isaacs, "The Feminine Mystake: Betty Friedan and the Dogma of Domesticity in 1950s America" (M.Phil., Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 2011); Susan Oliver, *Betty Friedan: the Personal is Political* (London: Pearson Longman, 2008); Jessica Weiss, "'Fraud of Femininity': Domesticity, Selflessness, and Individualism in Responses to Betty Friedan," in *Liberty and Justice for All?: Rethinking Politics in Cold War America*, ed. Kathleen G. Donohue (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), 124-154.

<sup>9</sup> Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 32-61; Meyerowitz, "Beyond the Feminine Mystique," 229-262.

<sup>10</sup> Betty Friedan, "Have American Housewives Traded Brains for Brooms?," *Ladies Home Journal* June 1963, 224. See for example: "Dr. Spock Talks with Mothers: Should Mothers Work?," *Ladies Home Journal* January-February 1963, 14; "What Makes Southern Girls Different?," *Ladies Home Journal* March 1963, 16; Letters page, *Ladies Home Journal* June 1963, 12; "Dr. Spock Speaks to Mothers: The Whys and Why Nots of Breast Feeding," Phyllis McGinley, "Profession: Housewife," Dorothy Cameron Disney, "Making Marriage Work: A Son's Delinquency Helps Rebuild a Marriage," James Michener, "Caravans," Glenn White, "Pappy Takes Over the House," *Ladies Home Journal* July-August 1963; Betty Hannah Hoffman, "I'm Going to Get a Job!," *Ladies Home Journal* September 1963, 107.

<sup>11</sup> Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 11-27; Horowitz, *Betty Friedan*, 197-223.

valourised the mid-twentieth century nuclear family, consisting of breadwinning father, stay-at-home mother and dependent children, as the ideal (and idealised) social unit. Television serials such as *Father Knows Best* and *Leave it to Beaver* epitomised these supposedly model families – safely middle class, white and suburban.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, as well as anxieties about those whose familial arrangements did not fit this mould, concern grew about issues within these units. Amongst his various targets for vilification in the 1942 book, *Generation of Vipers*, Phillip Wylie criticised ‘Momism’ and the effects supposedly overbearing mothers had on their children.<sup>13</sup> Discussions of the apparent ‘woman problem’ formed part of this discourse and a distinct sphere of debate within it. However, Friedan rejected many widely-adopted solutions to family issues and ‘the problem that has no name’. Whereas others put forward psychiatry or consumption as the panacea, Friedan regarded these as part of the problem and instead presented paid employment as the answer.

The level of attention paid to the family and women’s roles within it constituted a significant part of the climate in which Friedan researched and wrote *The Feminine Mystique*. During the Cold War decades, the nuclear family assumed enormous cultural symbolism as a bastion against Communism. It formed a key part of the countervailing ideology to the U.S.S.R.’s collectivism and women’s labour outside the home. Famously, Vice President Richard Nixon entered into a heated debate with Premier Nikita Khrushchev in the model suburban kitchen of an American home transported to an exhibition in Moscow in 1959. This kitchen embodied the American way of life, according to Nixon, and symbolised women’s place in the home rather than working in a factory or driving a tractor. He gave no recognition that many women in the U.S. already did work outside the home. The American government argued on the world stage that domesticity promoted stable families and minimised threats to its stability such as those brought by Communism and women’s employment.<sup>14</sup>

Psychiatric arguments about men’s and women’s ‘natural’ roles and allegedly inherent characteristics buttressed this promotion of women’s place in the home. Simultaneously, commentators, big businesses and the government supported a drive to push women out of the workforce in the years after World War II. The purpose of federal legislation guaranteeing re-employment of members of the armed services was to create jobs for veterans and avoid mass unemployment similar to that occurring after World War I.<sup>15</sup> Measures such as this reinforced the

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<sup>12</sup> Joanne Meyerowitz, ed., *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994) analyses the gender during Cold War milieu. The book takes its title from the mother in *Leave It to Beaver*.

<sup>13</sup> Philip Wylie, *Generation of Vipers* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1942).

<sup>14</sup> “Nixon and Khrushchev argue in public as U.S. exhibit opens; accuse each other of threats,” *New York Times*, 24 July 1959, 1, <http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/big/0724.html> (accessed 10 March 2015).

<sup>15</sup> E. Jay Howenstine, Jr., “Lessons of World War I: Post War Jobs for Veteran,” *American Annals of Political and Social Sciences* 238 (1945): 180-187; David H. Onkst, “‘First a Negro...Incidentally a Veteran’: Black World War Two Veterans and the G. I. Bill of Rights in the Deep South, 1944-1948,” *Journal of Social History* 31 (1998): 517-543. The federal government and many state governments gave veterans added points on Civil Service exams, which meant that they inevitably came at the top of the results and therefore had boosted access to public jobs. This seriously undermined women’s employment prospects at a time when few women had served

attitude that women (or at least white women) constituted a surplus labour force who should work only if a national emergency required their economic participation. Encouraging men into the workplace and women out of it underpinned the promotion of the nuclear family with its domestically-focused mother.<sup>16</sup>

The contemporary emphasis upon psychiatry, combined with Friedan's own background as a psychology major, explains its close examination in *The Feminine Mystique*.<sup>17</sup> Friedan posited that psychiatry and its diagnoses demeaned women by accentuating their need to 'adjust' to their so-called natural roles rather than questioning if the roles themselves caused their difficulties. She quoted from Ferdinand Lundberg and Marynia F. Farnham's post-war polemic, *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex*:

It is not in the capacity of the female organism to attain feelings of well-being by the route of male achievement...It was the error of the feminists that they attempted to put women on the essentially male road of exploit, off the female road of nurture...The more educated the woman is, the greater chance there is of sexual disorder, more or less severe.<sup>18</sup>

Such views relied on a misogynistic interpretation of psychiatric theory to justify the condemnation of women who contravened their supposedly 'natural' roles. Friedan claimed that magazines as well as marriage and family courses at American universities paraphrased this text extensively 'until most of its statements became a part of the conventional, accepted truth of our time'.<sup>19</sup>

She also argued that instead of resolving these dilemmas, psychiatry combined with a range of forces including mass consumption and big business to perpetuate the anomie of many housewives. The post-war world of commerce and manufacturing deployed advertising to promote idealised images of domesticity and happy housewives to which women should aspire and compare themselves. The advertised products purportedly enabled women to live up to these imaginary representations. Commercials deliberately exacerbated women's insecurities and then claimed to resolve their problems with more goods and products.<sup>20</sup> Like psychiatry, consumer society claimed to help women adjust to and cope with being a wife and mother rather than acknowledging that the narrow focus of those roles themselves helped cause women's unhappiness.

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in the armed forces. "Women in Industry: Women in the Government Service," *Monthly Labor Review* 10 (1920): 208-217, found that women were excluded from 60 percent of Civil Service positions at the start of World War I.

<sup>16</sup> Amongst the many analyses of motherhood in this era are Jodi Vandenberg-Daves, *Modern Motherhood: An American History* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2014); Maxine L. Margolis, *Mothers and Such: Views of American Women and Why They Changed* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Eugenia Kaledin, *Mothers and More: American Women in the 1950s* (Boston: Twayne, 1984).

<sup>17</sup> Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 95-141.

<sup>18</sup> Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 111.

<sup>19</sup> Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 111.

<sup>20</sup> Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 197-223.

Friedan's critique reflected wider concerns at the time of *The Feminine Mystique's* publication about how the consumer society and big business shaped both media depictions of women's roles and the solutions to their discontent. Growing affluence during the Cold War led to the concomitant rise of a consumerist society. Real incomes doubled between 1947 and 1963, albeit with significant disparities due to gender, race and educational attainment.<sup>21</sup> As this happened, cultural commentators questioned the pervasive influence of commercialism on U.S. society. Vance Packard's *The Hidden Persuaders* and David Riesman, Nathan Glazer and Reuel Denney's *The Lonely Crowd* published in the 1950s critically reappraised American capitalism.<sup>22</sup> They focused on the apparently negative influence of big business on manliness and concepts central to U.S. notions of masculinity. Friedan was amongst the first to challenge and interrogate how the consumer society affected women.<sup>23</sup>

Friedan presented advertising and those behind it as infantilising female consumers. The theme of immaturity featured repeatedly in *The Feminine Mystique*. She argued that societal forces conspired to keep women in a childlike state whilst also claiming that women chose to not push themselves forward in the difficult process of self-actualisation.<sup>24</sup> In particular, she believed that the young brides of the post-war U.S. had not grown up sufficiently to be considered mature adults. Although Friedan maintained that the *Feminine Mystique* influenced all women, she highlighted generational differences by comparing the attitude of her generation to that of younger women.<sup>25</sup> She remarked on the overt frustrations expressed by her contemporaries. These women came of age during the Great Depression and World War II, worked outside the home, then married and became mothers. Typically Friedan's generation had children in school at the time she wrote. Friedan asserted that (elite white) women had time on their hands, given the mechanisation of housework and growing reliance upon store-bought goods. Many of her contemporaries felt undervalued, particularly if they were wistful about the careers they renounced or were forced to leave after World War II.<sup>26</sup> In contrast, many younger women went straight into marriage and motherhood from college or, in many cases, high school. They were less likely to have committed to a career even momentarily. Influenced by the pervasive imagery of female domesticity in commercials, on television and in

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<sup>21</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census: *Consumer Income: Income of Families and Persons in the United States, 1963* Current Population Series P-60 No. 43 (1964).

<sup>22</sup> Vince Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders* (New York: D. McKay Co., 1957); David Riesman, Reuel Denney and Nathan Glazer, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950).

<sup>23</sup> See also Margaret L. Helfrich, *The Social Role of the Executive's Wife* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University, 1965), for another view of women's place in corporate America.

<sup>24</sup> In particular, see Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 310-315.

<sup>25</sup> See for example Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 145.

<sup>26</sup> Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 11-27.

magazines, they believed that marriage and motherhood were women's greatest – and only – achievement.<sup>27</sup>

Along with psychiatry and the consumer society, Friedan regarded mid-twentieth century education as exacerbating 'the problem that has no name'. She identified a transformation in the attitude of educators, which in turn further encouraged a shift towards domesticity amongst younger women. Previous strides in women's education, she argued, had challenged narrow visions of women's roles. Yet, the proportion of female undergraduates was lower in 1950 than at any point since the 1870s, as was the percentage studying for professional qualifications.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, the median age at first marriage declined by two years from twenty-two at the end of the nineteenth century to twenty at mid-century.<sup>29</sup> In the 1950s, from kindergarten through to college, educational institutions depicted marriage as the highest female achievement. They no longer encouraged women to have aspirations or dreams beyond that of wife- and motherhood. In a classic Catch-22 scenario, educators believed they responded to a demand from girls and women to have an education pertinent to their domestic and familial roles. Hence the more teachers, college professors and university presidents met this presumed demand, the more entrenched the emphasis on domesticity as the only desirable goal for women became.<sup>30</sup>

So if Friedan rejected psychiatry, consumer society and education as perpetuating 'the problem that has no name' rather than diminishing it, what was the solution? In her view, women needed to get jobs. She did not believe that women of the 1950s and 60s could find fulfilment in the voluntary and club activities that absorbed their mothers and grandmothers.<sup>31</sup> Instead, women needed paid employment. More specifically, women should have professional occupations, engaging with qualified work and committing to a career.<sup>32</sup> Friedan felt such employment would counteract the core of the problem, namely the narrow focus of women's roles on domesticity and motherhood. She posited her response in terms of what might be labeled 'the self-made woman', a female version of the well-known American self-made man trope. This subverted the status quo by encouraging

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<sup>27</sup> See for example Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 142.

<sup>28</sup> Mabel Newcomer, *A Century of Higher Education for American Women* (New York: Harper, 1959).

<sup>29</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov), (accessed 24 February 2015).

<sup>30</sup> Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 142-173.

<sup>31</sup> Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 333-336. This was partially because the professionalisation of social work and community welfare activities left few openings for the interested amateur. Furthermore, according to her analysis, women's participation in the P.T.A. and the League of Women Voters stopped at the point where they needed to make the serious commitment by running for the school board or public office. Friedan's assessment ignores several aspects of women's political activity. For example, African American women, although not Friedan's 'suburban housewives', were a mainstay of the 1950s Civil Rights Movement. In addition, gender-specific organizations such as Women Strike for Peace continued to play an important role in the lives and identities of their members throughout the post-war decades. For a discussion of this, see Gwen Jordan's Jonathan Coburn's articles in this special issue as well as Amy Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace: Traditional Motherhood and Radical Politics in the 1960s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

<sup>32</sup> Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 326-364.

women to strive towards their own individual achievements rather than achieving happiness indirectly by marrying a man who successfully pursued the American Dream.<sup>33</sup>

Whilst Friedan offered professional careers as the answer to women's anomie, she did not address the fundamental problems that working women encountered around housework and the provision of childcare – the so-called second shift.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, her emphasis on professional work as the panacea highlighted her class bias. She had a distinctly upper-middle-class worldview and offered an affluent resolution to the issues experienced by the middle- and upper-class women at the heart of her book. Her references to women having domestic servants and her advice that they should employ domestic help reinforced the extent to which she concentrated on an elite demographic. She overlooked the working-class servant who might also be a working mother and ignored the problems they might have combining paid work and family responsibilities.<sup>35</sup>

Friedan assumed that domestic chores could be completed quickly and easily using machines or delegated to a woman of lower social status. Although housewives from the middle classes and higher might be surrounded by a multiplicity of ever-more specialised domestic equipment, working-class homemakers still found housework a time-consuming and onerous physical burden.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, whilst many white women moved into new, easy-to-care-for suburban homes after World War II, many women of colour lived in rented, older and sometimes dilapidated dwellings. They were trapped in rundown urban and rural slums by lower incomes and racial discrimination in the housing market.<sup>37</sup> Despite writing at a time of great awareness around racial issues, including her own, Friedan paid little attention to race and ethnicity in the published volume, save for a few valourised (and inaccurate) stereotypes of European immigrant women.<sup>38</sup> One of Friedan's

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<sup>33</sup> Irvin G. Wiley explored this theme from a man's point of view in *The Self-Made Man in America: The Myth of Rags to Riches* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1954). For an exploration of the class and gender bias of this ideology, see: S. Jay Kleinberg, "Success and the Working Class," *Journal of American Culture* 2 (1979), 123-138, reprinted in *Onward and Upward: Essays on the Self-Made American*, ed. Thomas D. Clark (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1979), 122-138.

<sup>34</sup> For more on this, see Arlie Hochschild with Anne Machung, *The Second Shift: Working Families and the Revolution at Home* (Viking: New York, 1989).

<sup>35</sup> Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 337-338.

<sup>36</sup> Lee Rainwater, Richard P. Coleman and Gerald Handel, *Workingman's Wife: Her Personality, World and Life Style* (New York: Macfadden, 1962), 185-190, details the widely varying levels of domestic appliance ownership and the physical burden of housework for those without such machines. For an example of Friedan referring to appliance ownership, see *The Feminine Mystique*, 13. On the dispersion of domestic technology generally see Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (Basic Books: New York, 1983) and S. J. Kleinberg, "Escalating Standards: Women, Housework, and Household Technology in the Twentieth Century," *Technology in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Frank J. Coppa and Richard Hammond (Kendall Hunt Publishing Company: Dubuque, Iowa, 1983), 1-29.

<sup>37</sup> The widespread practice of 'red-lining' made it difficult obtain mortgages in non-white sectors of most cities, and racial segregation was rife in post-war suburbs.

<sup>38</sup> Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 323. By the time of *The Feminine Mystique's* publication, the Civil Rights Movement had featured on the nightly news for nearly a decade. Stephanie Coontz points out that as Friedan

biographers, Daniel Horowitz, claimed that despite her access to working-class, African and Latina Americans during her career as a labour journalist, hers was a 'lily-white' book.<sup>39</sup> Such an approach was not unique to Friedan. With a few exceptions it typified academic and popular writing in this period.<sup>40</sup> However, in reality, the experiences of non-white women, working-class and lower-middle-class women greatly complicate the presentation of womanhood found on the pages of *The Feminine Mystique*. Whilst Friedan encouraged elite white women to enter the labour force, large numbers of other women already had.

### Women as Wives and Workers

The rising presence of married women in the American workforce did not go entirely unobserved in *The Feminine Mystique*. Although Friedan acknowledged this phenomenon, she dismissed the trend because it did not conform to the particular employment-as-a-solution model that she envisioned:

A third of American women now worked, but most were no longer young and very few were pursuing careers. They were married women who held part-time jobs, selling or secretarial, to put their husbands through school, their sons through college, or to help pay the mortgage. Or they were widows supporting families. Fewer and fewer women were entering professional work.<sup>41</sup>

Her distinction between different kinds of employment belied her class bias, allying her with the affluent servant-keeper instead of the working-class servant. Concentrating on the relatively few professional career women rather than the larger pool of female workers obscured the wider changes taking place in women's employment. Disaggregating women's labour force participation by age, race, marital status and presence of young children within the household indicates that overall female employment increased at different rates for subsets of women and not at all for certain groups at key points in time. Analysing these variations gives a more nuanced depiction of married women's employment at mid-century than overall female labour force participation statistics, popular memory or the account detailed in *The Feminine Mystique*.

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revised *The Feminine Mystique* through various drafts she watered down her the parallels drawn between anti-woman and anti-black and anti-Jewish prejudice. Coontz offers a nuanced analysis of how or whether the *Feminine Mystique* affected African American and Latina, as well as working-class, women. Coontz, *A Strange Stirring*, 121-138, 204.

<sup>39</sup> Horowitz, *Betty Friedan*, 208.

<sup>40</sup> For example, Rainwater et al's *Workingman's Wife* omits African Americans entirely.

<sup>41</sup> Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 13.

**Table 1: Women in the Labour Force, 1890–1965**

Year	Number employed	As a percentage of the female population
1890	3,704,000	18.2
1900	4,999,000	20.0
1920	8,229,000	22.7
1930	10,396,000	23.6
Pre-World War II (1940)	13,840,000	27.6
World War II (1945)	19,570,000	37.0
Post-World War II (1947)	16,320,000	30.1
Pre-Korean conflict (1950)	18,063,000	32.1
1955	20,154,000	33.8
1960	23,239,000	36.3
1965	26,108,000	37.3

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Women's Bureau Bulletin No. 290, *1965 Handbook on Women Worker* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1965), 6.

In the post-war period, married women still faced legal and economic discrimination in a variety of situations, including the workplace. Employers might ask female job applicants how they would combine career with motherhood and routinely segregated job advertisements by sex.<sup>42</sup> Despite such impediments and the prevalence of gender prejudice, the employment of women of all races and ages increased throughout the twentieth century. Looking at women's labour force participation as a whole [Table 1] indicates a seemingly steady rise in the proportion of women workers in the labour force with the exception of short, sharp decrease between 1945 and 1947. The proportion of employed women dropped from the peak of 37 percent down to 30 percent as the troops came back from the war and the baby boom got underway in newly-formed or reunited families.

Despite the immediate post-war reduction in the number of women workers, a greater proportion of women were economically active in 1950 (32.1 percent) than before the war started, when only 27.6 percent had jobs. Overall female employment levels climbed during the 1950s and matched the wartime high of 37 percent by the early 1960s. In other words, women as a group quickly asserted their right, desire and/or need to work outside the home within a few years of the war ending. Indeed female employment levels were such that the Census Bureau credited increased labour force participation by wives in the post-war era as 'a major factor in moving families up the

<sup>42</sup> Leo Kanowitz, *Women and the Law: The Unfinished Revolution* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1969) provides the first systematic study of women's legal status through the 1960s. The *New York Times* only desegregated its 'Help Wanted' columns in 1967 after an active campaign by the National Organization for Women (NOW) and hearings by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. NOW Highlights, <http://now.org/about/history/highlights/>, (accessed 20 February 2015).

income scale'.<sup>43</sup> This rationale prevailed amongst working- and middle-class women, although it had less salience for those from the upper class.<sup>44</sup>

A consideration of female employment levels by race, age, marital and maternal status demonstrates the distinctive but coalescing patterns of economic activity between various groups of women. Race was the single best indicator of women's employment in the early- and mid-twentieth century, though it had much less influence by the end of the century. In 1880, non-white women were more than three times as likely as white women to have jobs [Table 2].<sup>45</sup> Approximately four out of every ten women of colour worked in 1880 and 1900. The sharp increase in 1910 to 58 percent resulted from new instructions to Census enumerators regarding the definition of employment on family farms. The more inclusive classification primarily affected non-white rural women, particularly sharecroppers and tenant farmers, at a time when most African Americans lived in the countryside and worked land owned by white people.<sup>46</sup> Between 1920 and 1950, overall labour force participation rates for women of colour actually declined slightly, although those of white women increased. Not until 1960 did non-white women's employment level surpass pre-World War I figures. In contrast, the work rates of white women, whilst remaining lower than those of women of colour, rose steadily through these years, despite the purported pressures of domesticity upon their lives.<sup>47</sup>

Several inter-related factors account for the differing racial trajectories in women's employment. The Great Migration of African Americans out of the South from the 1910s onwards gave black men access to better paying jobs in the North, reducing the need and perhaps the vacancies for their wives to enter paid employment.<sup>48</sup> It also opened up educational opportunities for young women of

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<sup>43</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census: Consumer Income Report Series P-60 No. 43 (1964), 8. During the same interval, men's employment rates declined, no doubt due to higher rates of education in the late teenage years and early twenties and due to retirement based upon Social Security provisions.

<sup>44</sup> Helfrich, *The Social Role of the Executive's Wife*, 18-22. Mirra Komarovsky, *Women in the Modern World* (Boston: Little Brown, 1953) also investigated women's motivation for economic activity in the early 1950s.

<sup>45</sup> The vast majority of non-white women in these tables were African Americans. Census figures for Hispanic women's labour force participation are only available from 1930 onwards, when rates were much lower than for African American women. They were also lower than for white women throughout the later twentieth century. For example, in 1980, 70 percent of African American women, 51 percent of white women and 47 percent of Hispanic women had jobs. *Historical Statistics of the United States* Millennial Edition Volume 2: Work and Welfare, 2-92. For a detailed analysis of differences in African American and Hispanic women's levels of labour force participation, see Teresa Amott and Julie Matthaei, *Race, Gender, and Work: A Multicultural Economic History of Women in the United States* (Boston: South End Press, 1991).

<sup>46</sup> Matthew Sobek, "New Statistics on the U.S. Labor Force, 1850-1990," *Historical Methods* 34 (2001): 80.

<sup>47</sup> Although outside the primary focus of this article it is noticeable that men's labour force participation declined dramatically in the second half of the twentieth century, with that of non-white males sinking faster and farther than was the case for white men. Sustained analysis of this phenomenon would enhance our understanding of the complexities around race and paid employment.

<sup>48</sup> Joe William Trotter, Jr., *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915-45* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007); Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (New York: Random House, 2010).

colour. These prospects continued to expand in the post-war decades. Increased attendance in high school and college lowered young non-white women's employment levels as Hispanic and African American women had an opportunity for secondary, and to a lesser extent, tertiary education in the North and increasingly in the South and Southwest.<sup>49</sup> Greater educational attainment and Civil Rights' legislation subsequently facilitated the entrance of women of colour into white collar and professional jobs in the 1960s and onwards, as later tables in this article indicate.

**Table 2: Labour Force Participation by Race and Sex**

	Males		Females	
	White	Non-white	White	Non-white
Year	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent
1880	91.7	95.4	13.4	42.0
1900	91.5	93.7	19.4	43.7
1910	91.7	96.0	22.1	58.1
1920	90.1	93.0	21.9	42.9
1940	84.5	86.6	25.7	39.8
1950	83.3	82.5	29.3	38.6
1960	81.7	78.1	35.1	44.0
1970	77.7	71.4	41.2	47.7
1980	76.7	69.3	50.0	53.8
1990	76.0	70.6	57.1	59.7

Source: Susan B. Carter et al., eds., *Historical Statistics of the United States Millennial Edition Volume 2: Work and Welfare*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 2-80.

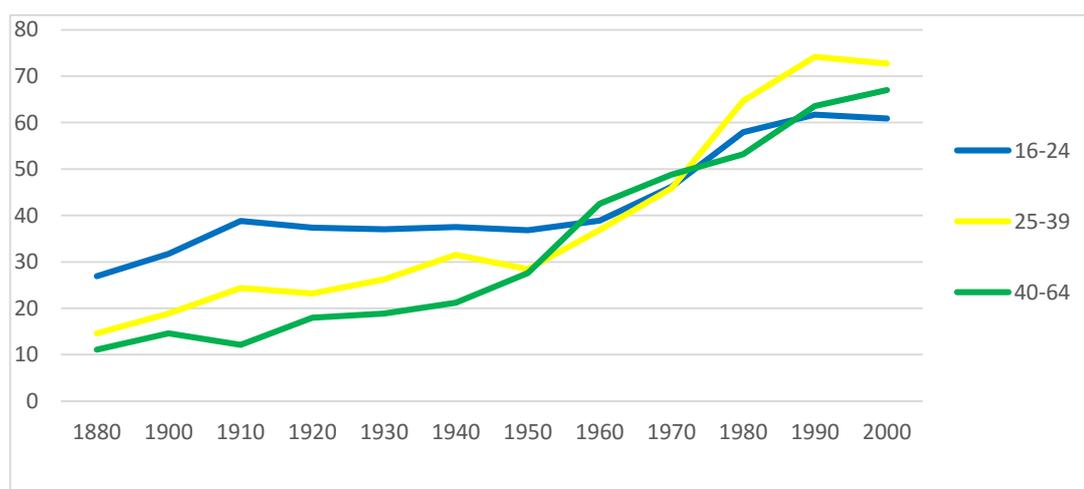
Race was not the only significant variable in terms of the dynamics surrounding women's labour force participation. Graphing the relationship between women's age and paid employment [Figure 1] indicates that employment rates of different age groups of women converged for the first time in 1960. This marked a significant turning point in women's place in the U.S. economy. Middle-aged women, aged forty to sixty-four, became a prominent and permanent segment of the labour market at that time. Once again, upper- and upper-middle-class white wives varied from the norm, with those in older middle age less likely to be economically active than the comparable younger cohort.<sup>50</sup> Overall, however, middle-aged women's employment levels rose four-fold in the first six

<sup>49</sup> Not until the Supreme Court decision in *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* in 1954 were separate facilities ruled unequal and unlawful. It took the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s-1960s to actually integrate high schools and colleges. Many northern and western states also maintained separate schools and colleges for people of colour. For an analysis of school desegregation of Mexican Americans in the Southwest, see: Vicki L. Ruiz, "Moirena/o, Blanca/o y Café con Leche," in *The Practice of U.S. Women's History: Narratives, Intersections, and Dialogues*, eds. S. Jay Kleinberg, Eileen Boris and Vicki L. Ruiz (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 230-2.

<sup>50</sup> Helfrich, *The Social Role of the Executive's Wife*, 19, 22, found that top level executives' wives were considerably older than other executive wives and much less likely to be in the labour force.

decades of the twentieth century.<sup>51</sup> Middle-aged and elderly women had been the least likely of all age groups to have jobs at the beginning of the twentieth century, with domesticity occupying most of their time. Those aged over forty typically had co-resident older children who served as ancillary wage-earners and thus spared their mothers the need to hold a job outside the home.<sup>52</sup> The steady rise in middle-aged women's employment levels co-varied with a range of factors, including smaller families, the desire for their children to get more education, women's own better education, their own and their family's perceived need for additional income, the availability of labour saving devices, marital breakdown and divorce.<sup>53</sup>

**Figure 1: Proportion of Women in Labour Force by Age Category (%)**



Source: Sample drawn from IPUMS database. Steven Ruggles, J. Trent Alexander, Katie Genadek, Ronald Goeken, Matthew B. Schroeder, and Matthew Sobek, *Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 5.0* [Machine-readable database] (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2010).

The proportion of economically active twenty-five to thirty-nine year old women grew substantially, doubling between 1900 and 1960. Although their employment level declined from 1940 to 1950, due to an upsurge in childcare responsibilities during the baby boom, it bounced back to match the other age groups by 1960. It continued to increase, finally exceeding the employment levels of other groups in 1980 as women began to delay marriage and child bearing whilst also working when they had young children. Younger women also developed their careers based on the education and training gained in their teens and early twenties and thus had a greater incentive to work – a trend in line with Friedan's recommended solution to 'the problem that has no name'.

<sup>51</sup> We have not included women over sixty-five in this analysis because of the much lower and stable level of employment, especially in the early and middle part of the century.

<sup>52</sup> Susan B. Carter et al., eds., *Historical Statistics of the United States* Millennial Edition Volume 1: Population, 1-670-1-672.

<sup>53</sup> S. J. Kleinberg, "Inventing the Matron: American Women Re-define Middle Age," *America's Americans: Population Issues in U.S. Society and Politics*, eds. Philip Davies and Iwan Morgan (London: Institute for the Study of the Americas, 2007), 50-73.

A greater proportion of women in all three age categories engaged in paid work during the post-war decades because the structure and priorities of the family economy changed, and employment suited their redefined needs. Broader changes in society facilitated women's work outside the home, such as the resurgence of feminism in the late 1960s and 70s and legislation that supported women's presence in the workplace.<sup>54</sup> The overall trajectory of employment levels continued to rise across all age groups for the rest of the century, signalling that women of all ages had become major participants in the U.S. economy rather than a reserve labour force. Both the age-employment convergence and the long-term upward trend occurred despite the widespread rhetoric promoting domesticity, as detailed in *The Feminine Mystique* and visible in a broad variety of contemporary sources.<sup>55</sup>

**Table 3: Women's Labour Force Participation by Race and Marital Status**

	White			Non-white		
	Never Married	Married	Separated, Widowed & Divorced	Never Married	Married	Separated, Widowed & Divorced
Year	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent
1880	34.4	2.4	17.4	64.5	29.1	53.7
1900	46.6	3.4	32.2	65.9	25.6	65.8
1910	53.2	6.3	28.6	73.0	47.9	72.5
1920	57.1	6.6	28.6	57.9	32.0	66.7
1940	56.3	13.8	27.8	52.1	32.9	49.1
1950	58.4	21.1	35.1	44.7	32.4	48.1
1960	55.1	30.1	38.3	45.3	41.0	49.1
1970	53.0	38.5	39.6	44.8	49.9	46.4
1980	63.1	48.1	43.0	51.6	59.0	48.5
1990	68.7	57.6	46.2	60.6	64.9	51.6

Source: Susan B. Carter et al., eds., *Historical Statistics of the United States Millennial Edition Volume 2: Work and Welfare*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 2-80.

Marriage, especially when combined with race, had an important influence on labour force participation, especially for white women. Employment figures disaggregated by marital status confirm this [Table 3]. They show a clear contrast between the statistics for married and non-married women (never married; separated, widowed or divorced) but with distinctive racial

<sup>54</sup> The Women's Liberation Movement of the 1960s-1970s reflected and encouraged women's increased participation in the labour force. Affirmative Action legislation facilitated women's access to more desirable jobs and more equal wages. Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2004) amongst others analyses the class and race dimensions of women's employment struggles in the second half of the twentieth century.

<sup>55</sup> Avital H. Blach and Lauri Umansky, eds., *Impossible to Hold: Women and Culture in the 1960s* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).

patterns. For example, married white women became increasingly likely to work as the century wore on, in contrast to non-married white women. The employment levels of never-married white women stagnated between 1910 and 1970. In contrast, formerly married white women's economic activity actually decreased in the early twentieth century, with a slight (approximately 3 percent) decade on decade increase from mid-century. This reflected the introduction of widespread public assistance via widows' pensions and Social Security in the early decades of the twentieth century followed by further changes to welfare provision in later decades.<sup>56</sup>

The non-white women's employment trajectory according to marital status contrasted considerably with that of whites. Unlike never-married white women, single women of colour withdrew from the labour force between 1900 and 1970, as did their separated, widowed and divorced counterparts. For both groups, the levels of employment declined from about two-thirds to less than half. Factors such as increased access to education for younger women influenced this trend, as did the widening access to welfare and retirement benefits for non-married mothers and the elderly respectively.<sup>57</sup> Economic activity rates of non-white wives nearly doubled between 1900 and 1970. However, the rates stagnated between 1920 and 1950 – the years of the Great Migration, Great Depression and World War II. This indicates a very distinctive relationship to economic change between married women from different races. In 1960, marital status remained a relatively strong indicator of whether a white woman worked outside the home, but this was not the case for women of colour. By 1970, married women of colour were somewhat more likely to have jobs than their never- or formerly-married sisters, although the reverse pertained amongst white women.

Married white and non-white women, then, had very different relationships to economic activity for much of the twentieth century. As Table 3 shows, marriage enabled white women to leave the labour force in the early part of the century to a far greater extent than it did for wives of colour. However, the gap between employment levels of married white and non-white married women diminished as the century progressed. Both groups experienced an upward curve from the post-World War II period onwards, despite the renewed emphasis on stay-at-home motherhood for white women during the Cold War. The evidence here shows that whilst domesticity clearly defined the lived experiences of many women throughout the twentieth century, large numbers of married women engaged in paid employment. This was especially the case amongst married women of colour, but in the decades that Friedan wrote about it became increasingly true for white wives as well. A similar pattern of both increasing labour force participation rates and a narrowing gap between white and non-white women is also evident in the figures for married mothers' employment [Figure 2].

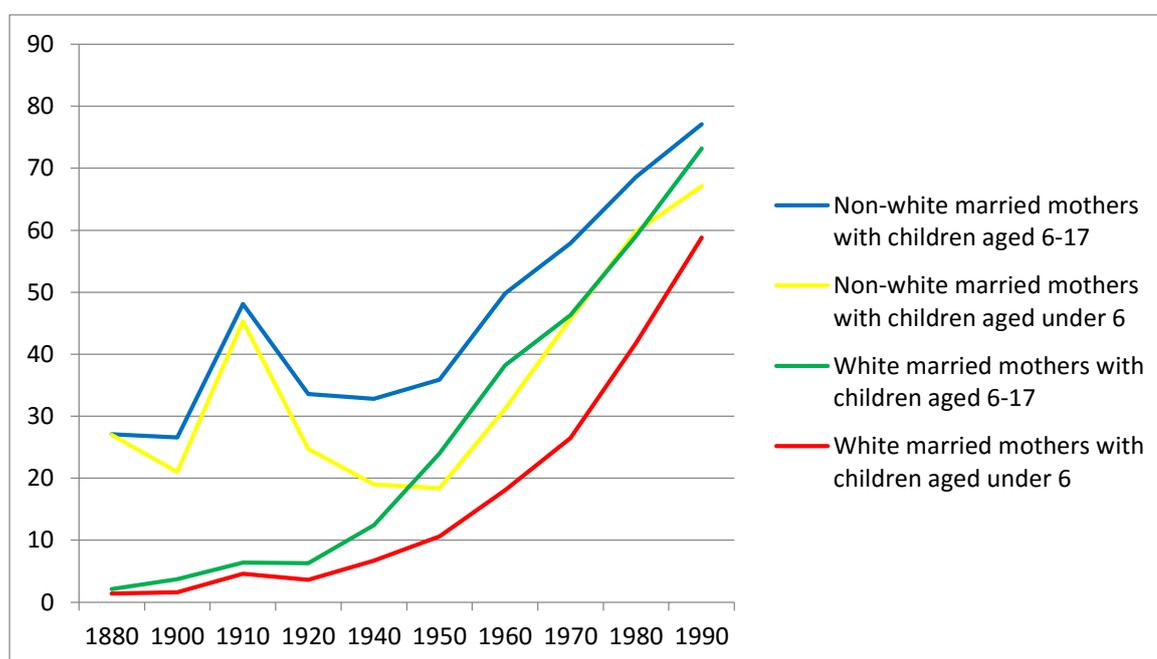
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<sup>56</sup> S. J. Kleinberg, *Widows and Orphans First: the Family Economy and Social Welfare Policy, 1880-1939* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

<sup>57</sup> Linda Gordon, ed., *Women, the State and Welfare* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990); Kleinberg, *Widows and Orphans First*.

Motherhood shaped women's labour force participation rates, although its influence varied between the races and declined across the century. At the turn of the twentieth century, the officially recorded employment levels of married white mothers hovered between 2-4 percent, compared with about one-fifth of married non-white mothers.<sup>58</sup> The Census tabulations ignored many white working-class women who brought cash into the household either by working sporadically outside the home or toiling within it. At the beginning of the twentieth century, urban working-class women combined childcare with income generation by taking in boarders and lodgers. Boarding declined in prevalence by the 1920s and 1930s as closing the door to immigration curtailed the sex ratio imbalances that left men without wives to look after their domestic needs.<sup>59</sup> Whereas between one-fifth and one-fourth of urban households took in boarders in 1900, the proportion declined to 11 percent by 1930 and was only 3 percent in 1960.<sup>60</sup>

**Figure 2: Percentage of Married Mothers in the Labour Force by Race and Age of Children**



Source: Susan B. Carter et al., eds., *Historical Statistics of the United States Millennial Edition Volume 2: Work and Welfare*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 2-81.

<sup>58</sup> We use the term 'official' because a considerable number of white women produced an income through working at home or taking in boarders. On homeworking, see Eileen Boris, *Home to Work: Motherhood and the Politics of Industrial Homework in the United States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). On taking in boarders see Barbara Laslett, "The Family as a Public and Private Institution: An Historical Perspective," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* (1973): 480-492.

<sup>59</sup> S. J. Kleinberg, *The Shadow of the Mills: Working-Class Families in Pittsburgh, 1870-1907* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991), 209.

<sup>60</sup> John Modell, "Strangers in the Family: Boarding and Lodging in Industrial America" (paper presented at the National Conference on the Family, Social Structure and Social Change, Worcester, M.A., U.S., 27-29 April 1972).

The employment levels of white married mothers with pre-school and school age children accelerated from 1920 onwards, especially for those with older children, as child labour legislation and mandatory school attendance laws restricted the use of children as ancillary wage earners.<sup>61</sup> Mothers, in effect, replaced their children in the labour force and the family economy. At the same time, economic activity amongst non-white married mothers declined, especially for those with younger children, influenced by factors such as the move northwards, growing education levels and shifts away from traditional employment sectors, notably agriculture.

From the 1950s onwards, the economic activity of white and non-white mothers of young children climbed sharply, even though a gap remained. However, there was almost no difference in the employment levels between white and non-white mothers of older children as the century drew to a close. As is clear from Figure 2, rising employment levels amongst married white women with pre-school and school age children were long-term trends; their labour force participation rates did not climb specially in reaction to World War II nor did they decline more than briefly in the post-war decades. These statistics also reinforce the significance of race and marital status influencing labour force participation profiles and trajectories.<sup>62</sup>

Table 4 likewise demonstrates the importance of race in terms of the types of jobs that women undertook. The occupational distribution of women from different racial and ethnic groups highlights similarities and variations in their employment patterns across the twentieth century. At the same time, the slight decrease between 1930 and 1960 of the proportion of European American women in the professional sector may account for Friedan's frustration that the (white) women of her era, especially the suburban housewives and her Smith College contemporaries, had not 'chosen to use their education and their abilities for any large creative purpose, for responsible work in society' – namely professional employment.<sup>63</sup>

Long-term shifts in the economy, such as the mechanisation of agriculture and the advancement of a paper- and consumption-based economy, explain some of the changes in women's occupations. Racial and gender discrimination account for others, with the interaction between the economic change and prejudice funnelling women of different racial groups into specific occupations.<sup>64</sup> For example, the proportion of women working on the land halved for all racial groups between 1900 and 1930, although this was from a very low base for European American and Chinese women.

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<sup>61</sup> Kleinberg, *Widows and Orphans First*, 27.

<sup>62</sup> Landry, *Black Working Wives*, 48-50 considers how racial prejudice gave rise to jobs that black women could combine with motherhood such as taking in laundry.

<sup>63</sup> Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 324. There are numerous other passages that reiterate this point.

<sup>64</sup> This a vast and complex topic, compounded by the tendency of many historians to employed a binary approach, i.e., African American and white women, with little mention of other women of colour. For accounts of other immigrant groups, see for example various contributions to Kleinberg, Boris and Ruiz, eds., *The Practice of U.S. Women's History*.

**Table Four: Percentage of Employed Women in Each Occupational Sector by Race, 1900-1980**

	1900						1930					
	European American	African American	Latina	Native American	Chinese	Japanese	European American	African American	Latina	Native American	Chinese	Japanese
Agriculture	9.8	44.2	n/a	47.2	7.3	58.1	4.1	24.7	21.2	26.1	2.5	22.9
Service – private	29.8	43.5	n/a	13.4	35.6	28.6	12.0	53.5	33.1	22.5	20.8	29.9
Service – not private	3.8	7.9	n/a	12.1	8.7	3.8	8.1	7.5	3.8	2.9	8.8	10.1
Manufacturing	32.6	2.6	n/a	24.9	41.1	7.7	21.2	8.4	24.7	37.6	20.8	12.2
Clerical	6.9	0.1	n/a	0.1	0.5	0.1	25.3	0.6	2.8	3.3	11.7	3.7
Sales	4.1	0.1	n/a	0.2	1.0	0.2	9.3	0.6	7.7	1.7	12.0	7.6
Professional	13.1	1.7	n/a	2.3	5.8	1.3	19.8	4.6	6.8	5.8	32.0	13.6
	1960						1980					
	European American	African American	Latina	Native American	Chinese	Japanese	European American	African American	Latina	Native American	Chinese	Japanese
Agriculture	1.5	3.7	4.3	10.5	0.7	6.7	1.0	0.5	2.9	1.2	0.3	1.3
Service – private	4.4	39.3	11.5	16.8	8.2	8.2	0.8	5.0	2.4	1.4	0.8	1.4
Service – not private	13.2	23.0	16.5	25.8	12.9	12.9	15.3	24.2	20.4	23.9	13.0	15.8
Manufacturing	18.5	15.5	29.1	18.1	24.0	19.0	12.6	18.4	26.0	17.0	20.8	12.5
Clerical	34.5	8.0	21.8	14.2	32.1	30.5	32.3	25.8	26.2	27.4	24.7	31.8
Sales	9.2	1.6	8.1	3.6	8.3	6.7	12.1	6.1	9.5	8.0	9.7	11.3
Professional	18.9	8.9	8.6	11.1	23.7	16.1	25.9	19.9	12.6	21.1	30.8	26.1

Source: Teresa L. Amott and Julie A. Matthaei, *Race, Gender and Work: A Multicultural Economic History of Women in the United States* (Boston: South End Press, 1999), 48, 76, 125, 158, 207, 220. Not all columns add to 100 percent due to rounding.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Professional integrates two of their categories: Professional and Technical along with Managerial, Administrative and Official.

However, racial prejudice shaped the occupational sectors that former agricultural workers moved into as much or even more than personal inclination and education. Thus almost all African American women who left agriculture discovered limited options beyond private household service and self-employment as laundrywomen.<sup>66</sup> Despite the Great Migration out of the South, few obtained non-household service jobs or employment in manufacturing, clerical, sales or professional occupations by the start of the Great Depression. Latinas, Native American and Asian American women had lower levels of service jobs and much higher rates of employment in manufacturing and craft work in 1930. Some even managed to move into white collar and professional occupations, as did Chinese and Japanese American women in Hawaii and other areas where they had large population concentrations.<sup>67</sup>

In 1900, the employment profile of European American women, although dominated by manufacturing and service jobs, indicated the wave of the future as nearly one out of every four wore a white blouse to work. By 1930, clerical work replaced manufacturing as the single largest sector of white women's employment (25 percent), and 20 percent held professional jobs. After World War II, clerical work continued to dominate white women's employment. At the same time, the proportion occupied in sales and professional jobs stagnated. Moreover, women in both of these job sectors tended to labour at the lower ends of the spectrum, selling for fixed wages rather than on commission which was more lucrative, or working as teachers and nurses, but not principals or doctors.<sup>68</sup>

Friedan's frustrations over the failure of middle-class white women to make consistent inroads into professional jobs obscured the racial complexity of the labour market and how it changed over time. The decades following *The Feminine Mystique's* publication witnessed a significant increase in professional employment as Friedan desired. The number of European American women working in this sector increased from 19 to 26 percent between 1960 and 1980. It is also notable that the professional employment levels of women from other racial and ethnic groups grew considerably in those two decades, ranging from a four percentage point rise for Latinas up to an eleven percentage point increase for African American women. However, there remained considerable variation between racial and ethnic groups in terms of professional and clerical employment. A higher proportion of Chinese and Japanese-heritage women held professional jobs in comparison with women of European extraction, yet African American and Hispanic women still lagged behind.

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<sup>66</sup> Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997) examines the ways in which African American women created autonomous employment for themselves.

<sup>67</sup> Amott and Matthaei, *Race, Gender and Work*, 207.

<sup>68</sup> For example, see the *Equal Employment Opportunity Commission vs. Sears* case. Katherine Jellison, "History in the Courtroom: The Sears Case in Perspective," *The Public Historian* 9 (1987): 9-19. See also Alice Kessler Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity: Women, Men and the Quest for Economic Citizenship in Twentieth Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 290-5.

Myriad factors paved the way for the shifts in women's economic activity documented here, many of which (such as the Great Migration) have already been noted. Not least of these, though, was women's desire for financial independence. As the white, middle-class, middle-aged mother of two teenage children said in the early 1950s when her daughter queried why she took a job selling chocolates in a shop in downtown Rochester, New York, 'I just want to have my own money and not have to ask your father whenever I want to buy something'.<sup>69</sup> This New Yorker and many women like her equated work with independence and joined the labour market, albeit as the older, part time, non-professional employees that Friedan disdained.

The growing racial and class convergence in employment patterns both reflected and also influenced changes in women's perceptions of their gender roles and how they wanted to live their lives. Identification with *The Feminine Mystique* and Friedan's arguments helped speed up these changes for some women, as did the broader resurgence of feminism of which the book was a part. Nevertheless, the story of married women's employment, and women's roles generally, was more complex than Friedan depicted because she neglected crucial variables that affected women's economic activities, particularly class and race. Whilst *The Feminine Mystique* articulated 'the problem that has no name' and presented professional work as the answer, women had already begun to find solutions for themselves via increased education and employment throughout their life cycle, regardless of marital status. The pattern of economic activity among elite white women, the cohort Friedan focused upon, changed in the twenty years following the book's publication, coming to more closely resemble that of working-class and non-white women. As the century progressed, professional and white collar employment became the norm, a widespread experience for women regardless of social class, race, age, marital or maternal status. This seemingly vanquished 'the problem that has no name' although not the obstacles and difficulties that continue to face all women in the labour force.

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<sup>69</sup> Marcia Momtchiloff, conversation with one of the authors about why her mother, Mrs. Dorothy Van De Carr, took this job despite having a college education, 15 February 2015.