

was his one source of freedom, his way of escaping the public image forced on him by the television show. Ironically, his success as a teen musical idol lent additional vitality to the show; it should have been slowing down by the late fifties, but because of his new success as a rocker, the show was renewed in 1959 for five more years. He, who had wanted to escape it, had carried it forward with his means of escape.

He became rich (he made a lot of money from the television show, and now he was making much more from records and appearances—all of which was put aside for him), successful, attractive, and incomplete. As such he grew up in a kind of covert rebellion; he and Ozzie worked out an unacknowledged quid pro quo, Ozzie indulged him, offered him extra privileges, and limited Ricky's rebellion; Ricky in turn stayed on the show and remained dependent on Ozzie. He had grown up as a teen idol, but he had not had a real boyhood and now he was passing through adolescence still unsure of himself, his professional career with almost all of his major decisions still dominated by his father.

His adult life was, not surprisingly, unhappy—a marriage that seemed perfect on paper soon went sour; excessive drug use followed. Finally, the harshest truth could not be suppressed: Ricky Nelson, the charming, handsome all-American boy was, to all intents and purposes, the unhappy product of a dysfunctional family.

## THIRTY-FIVE

**A**mong those who were extremely ambivalent about their pursuit of the American dream were Tom and Betsy Rath. In 1955, when they first appeared on the scene, they should have been, by all rights, the quintessential upwardly mobile modern American family. But in this society of consumption, they were always in debt—not heavily, but consistently so; every month there was a stack of unpaid bills, which Betsy had to juggle skillfully in order not to have their credit cut off. Worse still, the house in which they had lived for seven years was too small and seemed to be disintegrating beneath them. The front door had been badly scratched by a dog; the hot-water faucet in the bathroom dripped. One of their three children had gotten ink all over a wall. Almost all of the furniture needed to be refinished, reupholstered, or cleaned. The neighbors who monitored such things whispered about

the poorly kept yard and that the Rathes could not afford a gardener.

For the Rathes the house had come to symbolize all their frustrations and tensions. In the living room, a dent on a wall marked a bitter argument that had occurred when Betsy spent \$40 on a cut-glass vase on the same day that, by chance, Tom spent \$70 on a new suit he badly needed for business. Tom had dented the wall by throwing the vase against it. Even their 1939 Ford, a car they had driven for too long, marked them, if not exactly as failures, then as people who were not keeping up with the neighbors.

Tom and Betsy Rath were not real people, although there were plenty of young men and women who could readily identify with them. They were fictional characters, the heroes, or antiheroes, of Sloan Wilson's novel *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, one of the most influential American novels of the fifties. Its theme was the struggle of young Americans against the pressures of conformity and imprisonment in suburban life. "Without talking about it much they both began to think of the house as a trap, and they no more enjoyed refurbishing it than a prisoner would delight in shining up the bars of his cell," Wilson wrote. For the Rathes were victims of this modern malaise: What should have made them happy did not. "I don't know what's the matter with us," Betsy Rath said to Tom one night. "Your job is plenty good enough. We've got three nice kids and lots of people would be glad to have a house like this. We shouldn't be so *discontented* all the time."

They lived in a community of people very much like themselves; their neighbors, though pleasant and friendly, were, truth to tell, strangers, bonded by status and ambition rather than true friendship. "Few people considered Greentree Avenue a permanent stop—the place was just a crossroads where families waited until they could afford to move on to something better. The finances of almost every household were an open book. Budgets were frankly discussed, and the public celebration of increases in salary was common. The biggest parties of all were moving out parties, given by those who finally were able to buy a bigger house. . . . On Greentree Avenue contentment was an object of contempt," Wilson wrote.

It was not a bad world, Betsy Rath thought when she pondered their situation—the people around them were good and decent but they were dreamers and most of their dreams seemed to be about material progress. Sometimes she thought their lives were too dull and then she would ponder their condition a bit more and decide that it was not so much a dull world as a frantic one. But there was, she knew, a narrowness to it. Nor were they the only ones restless with

their lives. When the neighbors gathered for one of their instant parties, late in the night, the dreams for the future were revealed: "usually the men and the women just sat talking about the modern houses they would like to build, or the old barns they would like to convert into dwellings. The price the small houses on Greentree Avenue were currently bringing and the question of how big a mortgage the local banks were offering on larger places were constantly discussed. As the evening wore on, the men generally fell to divulging dreams of escaping to an entirely different sort of life—to a dairy farm in Vermont, or to the management of a motel in Florida."

Tom Rath, whose biography was strikingly similar to that of Sloan Wilson, was thirty-three years old and made \$7,000 a year, a seemingly substantial salary for a young man in those days, one that placed him squarely in the new middle class. He worked in Manhattan for a foundation that had been established by a millionaire for scientific research. He seemed neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with his job; to the degree that he was discontented, it was with his salary, not with what he did. His restlessness was revealed one day at lunch with some of his friends when he heard of an opening in public relations at the United Broadcasting Corporation. It paid between \$8,000 and \$12,000. Try for \$15,000, one of his friends who worked there said: "I'd like to see somebody stick the bastards good." Ten thousand, he thought, might get them a new house. It was not a job he particularly wanted, nor was it a company he admired. When he mentioned to Betsy the possibilities of a life in public relations, she told him that she had never thought of him as a public relations man. "Would you like it?" she asked. "I'd like the money," he answered. Then she sighed. "It would be wonderful to get out of this house."

"When you come right down to it a man with three children has no damn right to say that money doesn't matter," Tom thought to himself. Naturally, he applied for the job. The last question on the application was intriguing: "The most significant thing about me is . . ." For a moment he thought of writing about his wartime stint as a paratrooper, during which time he killed seventeen men. "For four and a half years my profession was jumping out of airplanes with a gun, and now I want to go into public relations," he wanted to write. He pondered it, though. He could also have written: "The most significant fact about me is that I detest the United Broadcasting Corporation, with all its soap operas, commercials and yammering studio audiences, and the only reason I'm willing to spend my life in such a ridiculous enterprise is that I want to buy a more expensive house and a better brand of gin."

Whatever frustrations he felt with his current life were minor compared with those harbored by Betsy. She wanted a more civilized life, one where they would eat a real breakfast in the morning and talk to each other like real people, and eat, instead of hot dogs and hamburgers for dinner, something more substantial, a roast or a casserole. And above all there would be no more television. Instead, the family would read more, and perhaps they would read aloud to each other.

Eventually, in Wilson's novel, all the Rath's problems were resolved. Tom took the new job, and despite the treacherous politics of the organization, he discovered that his boss (a character based on Roy Larsen, one of the founders of Time-Life) was a superior man seriously pledged to a better world. In time Tom Rath confronted his demons (including fathering a child during World War Two with an Italian mother), simplified his life, and found that despite his earlier cynicism he could achieve both honor and a better salary in his new job (in addition, his grandmother left him a large tract of extremely valuable land, which could be developed). He and Betsy were able to hold on to their beliefs and their marriage while becoming part of the best of the new suburban world.

The novel was almost completely autobiographical. The book reflected, Sloan Wilson later said, his own frustrations with civilian life after serving as a young officer with the Coast Guard in World War Two. His wartime job had been rich, full of challenge and responsibility. He had commanded his own ship at twenty-three and dealt daily with the great danger involved in running high-octane fuel into combat areas. Every day in that exciting time of his life he had a feeling that what he did mattered. Civilian life, to his surprise, was infinitely more difficult. He had always wanted to be a reporter, and he had worked for a time on the *Providence Journal* at a job he loved. But with a wife and two children, the fifty-dollar-a-week salary was woefully inadequate.

"What we all talked about in those days was selling out," he said years later. "Selling out was doing something you did not want to do for a good deal more money than you got for doing what you loved to do." Though he wanted to write fiction, he took a job at Time-Life. Even as he joined the Luce publications, Wilson was appalled by his own decision because he hated everything Time-Life stood for—he viewed it as an institution that offered talented, liberal young men handsome salaries to dress up its own conservative politics. At first he had worked for *FYI*, the Time house organ, but that seemed beneath his dignity and he decided to quit. Somehow, his

personnel file was sent to Roy Larsen, one of the company's founders and the top person on the business side. Larsen was about to head a major campaign on behalf of the nation's public schools and decided to hire Wilson as a special assistant to do publicity. The pay was good, and he would soon make \$10,000 a year.

If Wilson did not like the political slant of Time-Life, he liked the internal politics among the managerial ranks even less. Another bright young man, who was his immediate superior, threw his first article on the floor with contempt. Later, the young man confessed that he always operated this way, believing that new employees did not work well unless they were frightened. But to Wilson's surprise, he had immediately liked Roy Larsen, a graceful, kind, and intelligent man, albeit a world-class workaholic. Best of all, he found that he could write short stories for *The New Yorker* on the side. But if there were advantages to the job, they still paled when compared with his exhilarating experiences during the war. He was somehow, for all of Roy Larsen's personal kindness and the handsome paycheck, something of a glorified flunky. He decided to quit the day that he accompanied Larsen to have his photo taken along with the head of the outdoor advertising council. Their photo was to be part of the announcement at the beginning of a billboard campaign to promote the nation's public schools.

It was a rainy day, and both executives arrived wearing handsome overcoats and bowler hats. Each was respectfully accompanied by his bright, up-and-coming young assistant. No executive was worth his salt unless he had his own up-and-coming young man, Wilson thought. Wilson looked at his opposite number from the outdoor advertising council and saw how eager and sycophantish he was—and wondered if he looked that way to other people. Because of the rain, both men had kept their bowler hats on, but since the photographer could not see their faces, he asked that the hats come off. Unlike Wilson, the other bright young man seemed to have anticipated the photographer's request, and in a second he not only had his own boss's hat but Roy Larsen's as well. Sloan Wilson realized he had been outthrustled, in a competition he wanted no part of in the first place.

With that, he decided to write full-time. Eventually, he returned to New Canaan, Connecticut, and took a long, hard look at it. It was, he thought, a world he had come to hate. In fact, all the other men in publishing and advertising he knew who lived there hated it, too: three hours a day on the commuter trains; working in corporations where the internal politics seemed endless and where everyone

was obsessed with playing up to his immediate superior. Talent, all too often, was pressed into service for pure commercial gain without regard to the larger consequences. Almost everyone he knew in New Canaan was trying to get out; it was a rat race, and all the participants dreamed of hitting the jackpot by writing the great American novel and selling the rights to Hollywood. If they did that, they would never have to get on a commuter train again. One friend came to symbolize this entire world to Wilson: He had only recently flown forty combat missions, and his uniform had been bedecked with World War Two medals. Now he worked for an advertising firm. One of his accounts was a cereal company and the question he was working on was whether the people who bought the cereal would prefer to find a tin frog or a rubber spider inside the box as the surprise.

Ironically, the greater one's success in this world, the harder it was to escape. Salaries would go up, and newly minted executives would merely find themselves paying more taxes, burdened by a more expensive life-style, and inhabiting ever larger houses. "For a time," he remembered years later, "I was insatiable myself—I wanted ever bigger houses and more cars." In New Canaan, Wilson thought people changed houses the way other Americans changed cars. The worst thing was that these fancy jobs were supposed to offer some sort of security, but in fact they did not. The more successful you were, the deeper you were in debt and the more exposed and more perilous your position often became at work. The process was the reverse of what it was supposed to be: Ostensibly, a young man would work hard to gain some measure of success; the better he did, the more secure he and his family should have been. Instead, the higher you went, the more people there were who were after your job—so work became more stressful.

When *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* appeared in 1955, it hit a vital nerve. "I wasn't thinking about what was happening to the country when I wrote it. The only thing I was thinking about was what was happening to me," Wilson said thirty years later. It was a major best-seller and soon became a movie starring Gregory Peck—an ideal choice, with just the right amount of decency and moral ambivalence. Even the title, *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, suggested someone who was sacrificing his individuality to become a part of the new more faceless middle class. As it turned out, the book was published just as a major intellectual debate was forming on the issue of conformity in American life, particularly as the modern corporation became ever bigger and became an increasingly impor-

tant force in American life. The debate seemed to focus on the question of whether, despite the significant and dramatic increase in the standard of living for many Americans, the new white-collar life was turning into something of a trap and whether the greater material benefits it promised and delivered were being exchanged for freedom and individuality. Was this what the new definition of success meant? More of everything except individuality? Were we as a nation already well on our way to becoming faceless drones, performing bland tasks that demanded no real skill save managerial obedience? Was America losing its entrepreneurial class to cautious, gray managers, men afraid to make mistakes and take chances? At the center of the debate were the writings of one of the most important intellectual figures of the period: C. Wright Mills. Though he was on the faculty of Columbia University and nominally a sociologist, he cut across many disciplines—philosophy, history, economics, journalism.

A man of fierce physical and intellectual presence, Mills was remembered by his friends (who more often than not ended up as his adversaries) first and foremost for his energy and combativeness. Academics were expected to be genteel and solicitous of their colleagues; most professors at Columbia wore the academic uniform of tweed jacket, flannel slacks, and bow ties. But Mills seemed determined to provoke and antagonize his colleagues. He dressed as a lumberjack—in khaki pants, flannel shirts, and combat boots—and would arrive for class from his house in the country (which he had built himself) astride his BMW motorcycle. His style, body language, and pronouncements seemed calculated to rebuke the more polished world around him; he was from the real world, his manner seemed to say, as the others in academe were not. Brilliant and egocentric, Mills was the classic loner. He had few close friends. "I have never known," he once wrote, "what others call 'fraternity' with any group . . . neither academic nor political. With a few individuals, yes, but with groups, however small, no." His writing was as incisive a post-Marxist critique of America's new managerial capitalism as existed in the country at the time, even if on occasion he painted with too broad a brush and was prone to exaggerate. Mills's work was important, the historian Stanley Katz later noted, because it told important truths about America's new class strata and about the development of capitalism after the war and yet could not be attacked for being Marxist.

Mills eventually became the critical link between the old left, Communist and Socialist, which had flourished during the Depres-

sion, and the New Left, which sprang up in the sixties to protest the blandness of American life. He found hope not in the grim rigidity and authoritarianism of the Soviet Union and its satellite nations in Eastern Europe, but in the underdeveloped world, which had been victimized by European colonialism and American imperialism. Cuba, as Castro came to power, fascinated him as Poland and Czechoslovakia did not. The old left had been born of the injustices of capitalism during the Great Depression and thrived because the Communists' voice in Europe, and the United States had been the first to warn of the rise of Nazism. But the movement had been badly undermined by a number of things: the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact; the domestic crimes of Joseph Stalin and his concentration camps, which only the most slavish Marxist could ignore; the imperialism of the Soviet Union as it brutally crushed its satellite states and left those countries with repressive, totalitarian regimes; and of course, the stunning success of postwar capitalism in the United States. Mills's books were hailed in the Communist world as brilliant critiques of American society, but he was hardly enthusiastic about this often unwanted praise. At one point late in his career he visited the Soviet Union and was toasted at a dinner as the foremost critic of contemporary American life. When it was his turn to respond to the toast, he rose and said, "To the day when the complete works of Leon Trotsky are published in the Soviet Union!"

The combination of the grimness of Communism as it now existed in Europe and the success of American capitalism had essentially devastated the traditional left. By the mid-1950s, only J. Edgar Hoover seemed to think Marxism was a powerful force in postwar America. With the triumph of capitalism and the threat of the Cold War, traditional American politics had, if anything, narrowed; the differences between the Republican party and the Democratic party were seen as marginal by many serious social critics of the time. Yet the success of capitalism did not mean the end of alienation; it simply meant a different kind of alienation. Alienation, Mills and others were suggesting, could be just as powerful in a comfortable white-collar existence as it was in a harsh working-class one. The battlefield was shifting: Instead of criticizing capitalism for its failures, a new kind of left, far more idiosyncratic and less predictable, was essentially criticizing America for its successes, or at least for the downside of its successes.

This new threat to the human spirit came not from poverty but from affluence, bigness, and corporate indifference from bland jobs

through which the corporation subtly and often unconsciously subdued and corrupted the human spirit. As they moved into white-collar jobs, more and more people felt as Sloan Wilson had when he portrayed Tom Rath—that they had less control over their lives. Here was a world where individuality seemed to be threatened and the price of success might well be ever greater conformity.

Much of the old left's agenda had been imported from Europe and had been shaped by historical and social circumstances, which did not necessarily fit the postwar American condition, where workers had become consumers and beneficiaries of the economic system and thought of themselves as capitalists. As that happened, not only did more working people enter the middle class, but there was a vast new reevaluation of what being on the left meant. By the mid-fifties one of the great new growth industries in Wall Street was investing the pension funds of labor unions. Those who had been a critical part of the left in the past were now being incorporated into the system, not merely politically but economically; as that happened, a new left was beginning to form around very different issues. Mills was the perfect radical iconoclast to examine the new American condition. He was unmistakably American, a rough, untamed son of the Southwest, where the clash of economic forces was still raw. Alienation came naturally to him: He was raised as a Catholic in a small town in Texas, whose culture was, he liked to say, "one man, one rifle." His parents forced him to sing in a Catholic choir in Waco and that had produced, as Irving Horowitz noted, "a lifelong resentment of Christianity." It also helped guarantee, given the prejudices of the region against Catholics, that he felt a "painful sense of isolation from his peers." Certainly, he had always felt like an outsider. There was no taint of Marxism to his work. He once wrote the sociologist Kurt Wolff that people always had come to him and told him that he wrote "as if I were a European about this country. . . . I am an outlander, not only regionally but down bone deep and for good. In Orwell's phrase: I am just outside the whale and always have been. I did not really earn it; I just was it without intending to be and without doing anything about it except what I had to do from day to day."

Eventually, the family moved from West Texas to Dallas, where Mills graduated from Dallas Technical High in 1934. After an unhappy start at Texas A & M (years later he told his friend Harvey Swados, the writer, that the hazing he had received as an Aggie had turned him into a rebel), he transferred to the University of Texas at Austin. The university and the city had been an oasis of intellectual

and political ferment in Texas, and that was true more than ever during the Depression. Among his professors and fellow students there was a sense from the start that Mills was different from the start, a young man whose physical and intellectual force and passion were remarkable. His energy was always ferocious: Every topic, as far as he was concerned, was to be argued, and every argument was to be won. Clarence Ayres, a professor at the University of Texas, wrote of him at the time: "He isn't a pale, precocious bookworm. He is a big strapping fellow with an athlete's energy. He looks much older than he is. For several years he has been reading everything within his reach, and he really is prodigiously learned for his years and situation. He also has acumen and the result of this combination of qualities has not been altogether to his advantage." In this letter written about Mills when he was twenty-three, Ayres continued prophetically: "The prevailing legend about him is to the effect that he takes people up and pursues them furiously until they get so tired of it they rebuff him (or until he has milked them dry and drops them). There is something in it both ways. Mills is tremendously eager and incredibly energetic. If he gets the idea that somebody has something, he goes after it like the three furies. I think he may have worn his welcome to shreds in some quarters. . . . The picture which emerges . . . is of an unusually strong student who may become a headliner. I think any department would be lucky to have him among its advanced students."

Mills acknowledged his own rough edges. Indeed, he felt as if they gave him a psychological advantage. He was often tactless in dealing with colleagues and surprised when his words wounded them; he was also thin-skinned, and when others ventured even mild criticism of his work, a new feud was often born. He did graduate work at Texas in sociology but no Ph.D. program was offered there, so in the fall of 1939 he entered the graduate program in sociology at the University of Wisconsin. There he made important intellectual connections and broadened his studies. In Madison, he seemed to make much the same impression he had in Austin: Hans Gerth, an immigrant intellectual, remembered him "with Thorstein Veblen in one hand and John Dewey in the other. He was a tall burly young man of Herculean build. He was no man with a pale cast of the intellect given to self mortification . . ." (Later when they had a squabble over whether Mills had taken too much credit for some of Gerth's work, Gerth was not so enthusiastic. Mills, he said, was "an excellent operator, whippersnapper, promising young man on the make, and Texas cowboy à la ride and shoot.")

While he was at Madison, Mills failed his Army physical because of hypertension (he suffered from chronic heart and circulatory problems). If anything, this heightened his alienation from the American political mainstream, for it put him on the sidelines at what was the defining moment for most members of his generation. He was big, powerful, and robust, yet he could not join what most of his contemporaries judged to be the nation's finest hour. Inevitably, as he had not participated in that great democratic cause, he rebelled and did not accept the propaganda and rationales that were used to justify it. He saw parallels, observed by few other contemporary intellectuals, between the corporate capitalism of Germany, which had allowed Nazism to rise, and the corporate capitalism of America. In Madison he married his first wife, Freya (the first of three, each of whom had one child with him). It was becoming clear that the pull of contemporary events was at least as powerful on him as that of academia, and some of his friends worried that he would become a pamphleteer rather than a scholar. "Hold your chin up, young man," wrote one of his few friends, Eliseo Vivas, a philosopher at Wisconsin who worried over the pull of journalism on Mills. He told Mills to "stick to the major guns with the 'long range' and don't allow your ambition to do something right now with you in the field of the freelancer and journalist. Write for decades, not for the week. Concentrate on the thesis and don't look right or left until it is done."

After Madison, he moved to the University of Maryland, which brought him nearer the nation's capital. He was taking politics more seriously now, and he wrote to his mother: "You ought to see me clipping *The New York Times* now." At a time when, because of World War Two, most young men were asking fewer political questions, he was on a very different path. His attitude, as Irving Horowitz pointed out, was something like a plague on both your houses.

He seemed to be saying that the horror of modern Nazism could not be blamed merely on an odd combination of circumstances: frenzied nationalism, the post-World War One depression, and the complete collapse of existing values and German currency and the social anarchy that followed. By his lights, the excesses of Germany were the excesses of capitalism. He saw Germany as the prototype for the modern corporate garrison state. The only thing that might stop it, he wrote, was the powerful force of organized labor. Not everyone agreed: Some thought that labor was just as readily seduced by exaggerated nationalism as any other class. (Some fifteen years later, one of his political descendants in the New Left, Abbie

Hoffman, was told to work on organizing blue-collar workers. "Organize the workers?" he exclaimed. "The workers want to beat the shit out of me!")

If nothing else, Mills helped reinvigorate the left, which was in decline after the war. Victory in World War Two, the growing awareness of Stalin's crimes, and the success of postwar capitalism had brought much of the intelligentsia back to the liberal center because fascist Germany and the Communist Soviet Union were so much worse than the United States. Other intellectuals found that America, in comparison with the rest of the world, now seemed less flawed; but Mills was not interested in a comparison with the rest of the world. He was a home-grown radical, bristling with his own native passions and his own very rugged, very American sense of independence.

The enemy, for him and many young leftists who came after him, was the liberalism of the era, so bland and corrupting, so comfortable, that it was essentially endorsed by both major political parties. People did not have to make difficult moral choices anymore. The liberalism of the society of abundance was "without coherent content; that in the process of its banalization, its goals have been so formalized as to provide no clear moral optic. The crisis of liberalism (and of American political reflection) is due to liberalism's success in becoming the official language for all public statement."

Maryland was not a particularly congenial place for him. He admired the exceptional group of young historians there—Frank Friedel, Kenneth Stampp, and Richard Hofstadter—but he was hungry as ever for greater intellectual growth (on his terms), so he moved now into history, while writing more and more for national magazines, such as the *New Republic*. All of this helped enhance his reputation. Years later he told Dan Wakefield, a student of his at Columbia, that he had used his journalistic skills to escape the University of Maryland, which he found rather stultifying. "I wrote my way out of there!" he said. In 1944 he arrived at Columbia, where he had probably always wanted to be in the first place—a great Ivy League university in a great city, with access to a large and influential audience. "Mills," wrote Horowitz, "was caught in a cul-de-sac: antiprofessional in public utterances, quite professional in private desire. He coveted the status and glory of elite institutions while despising their snobbery and style." Mills would later say of *White Collar*, the first of his defining books, that it was "the story of a Texas boy who came to New York." At Columbia he managed to remain an outsider, with a series of tenuous friendships and shifting allegiances. Dwight MacDonald, the writer, became his first great

friend—they were both, MacDonald pointed out, radicals at a time when it was not fashionable to be so. "We were both congenital rebels, passionately contemptuous of every received idea and established institution . . ." Mills, noted MacDonald, could argue with just about anyone on almost anything—and he could do it longer and louder than anyone else. They both had, he noted, a "mixture of innocence, and cynicism, optimism and skepticism. We were ever hopeful, ever disillusioned."

On campus, he was a memorable figure. In his office was a hot plate to warm soup and an electric espresso machine. He was, thought Wakefield, who eventually became a prominent journalist, "an exhilarating teacher. He stalked the room or pounded his fist on the table to emphasize a point, surprising us with ideas that seem utopian, except that he was so convinced of their practicality you couldn't dismiss them as mere theory." In the Columbia catalog he was listed as a sociologist, but he preferred to think of himself as a journalist—by which he meant someone like James Agee. That was real journalism—graceful and highly intellectual reportage.

He published *White Collar* in 1951 and *The Power Elite* in 1956. In these books he saw the new middle class as affluent but without purpose and cut off from its Calvinist past, from taking pride in craftsmanship. In *White Collar*, he seemed to bemoan the decline of the rugged American individualist and the growing frustration of the new America. He viewed history as a constant collision between competing forces that vied for power.

As an analyst of the stratification within the democratic society, Mills was without peer. Certainly, there were others writing about some of the same changes taking place in American society. David Riesman and Nathan Glazer published their important book *The Lonely Crowd*, about the inner-directed and the outer-directed new Americans, who increasingly seemed to take their signals, their values, and even their ambitions not from their own desires and beliefs but from a received value system around them. These people wanted to be a part of the larger community so much they would adjust their morality and ethics to those of the community almost unconsciously; in the end, they seemed to take on the coloration of their institutions and neighborhoods with frightening ease. Was it possible, Riesman and Glazer wondered, that America was producing a class whose sudden economic advancement, coming as it did within a generation, had outstripped the social and psychological preparations that might normally precede it? Had the very speed overwhelmed the capacity to enjoy and fully understand such affluence? Riesman himself

clearly thought that Mills had touched on something important, but he was also dubious that the new white-collar class was as alienated as Mills suggested.

*White Collar* was, in general, favorably reviewed. As Horowitz noted, it hit on a powerful new theme that seemed to beguile American society: the growth of ever greater American power externally, alongside a feeling of a decrease in personal power among its citizens. Certainly, the new white-collar men in Mills's book seemed to be carried along by forces outside their control. They were voraciously ambitious without entirely knowing why. They never carefully considered their goals but simply plunged ahead to the next benchmark.

Yet Riesman felt Mills had a tendency to generalize and create pat, if convincing, stereotypes. From the outside, white-collar workers might indeed appear largely banal, frustrated with their lives as Mills might have been frustrated had he been forced to live similarly. Riesman thought there was a danger for someone like Mills in transferring his own need for intellectual stimulation into the minds and aspirations of people whose needs might be considerably different. Riesman pointed out that one should not underestimate, for example, the satisfaction generated by the pride of people who always had been blue-collar workers but who had finally moved up into the white-collar managerial world. Similar reservations were voiced in a letter that Richard Hofstadter wrote to Mills about *White Collar*. There was, he said, a lot of human ugliness in the book, which he said was caught up in the jacket description of the book as a "merciless portrayal" of a whole class. There might be, Hofstadter said, some people and perhaps even some classes "that may call for merciless treatment, but why be so merciless with all these little people? . . . Why no pity, no warmth? Why condemn—to paraphrase Burke—a whole class?"

In *The Power Elite* Mills went further, spotting early some of the forces that were coming together to create America the superpower. He pointed out the growing connection between the military and the industrial sectors—the military-industrial state that Eisenhower himself would warn of a few short years later. In addition, Mills had a strong intuitive sense of the dangers that might come, politically and socially, from a nation suddenly wielding so much power and affluence. But even here some critics thought he undermined his own work by being too simplistic. Yes, there were groups wielding considerable power in America, but American politics was so pluralistic that even as one group became too powerful, others came together to limit that power. Indeed some groups, supposedly with common

interests, might in fact be bitterly opposed to each other; others that were supposed to be adversarial might get on well. For example, corporations and labor unions, traditional antagonists, might well want the same thing in the new power structure, and indeed labor unions, which Mills had once seen as the savior from domination of American life by the corporations, might in fact be a willing partner in the growth of too large a defense economy. But as Daniel Bell pointed out, there was not a clear community of interests in the power elite, as Mills would seem to have it. Often there were surprising conflicts. In Korea, Bell pointed out, the military, Wall Street, and the federal government were often at cross-purposes. The sands of American power shifted constantly: As soon as any one group began to overreach its place, it automatically came into conflict with some other group. Bell's criticism stung the sensitive Mills, who at one point wrote a friend, "Dan Bell is here now with *Fortune*. I've seen him only once or twice and don't look forward to meeting him again. He's full of gossip about how he met Luce for lunch and what Luce said. [Bell is a] little corkscrew drawn by power magnets; really pretty vulgar stuff."

One of the ironies of postwar American capitalism was that most owners of companies were making more money than ever before, expanding their size constantly, but that even as their wealth and their seeming influence increased, the leaders felt themselves less powerful in terms of their control of their own factory floor. As such they became ever more resentful of the society around them. They found a largely unsympathetic view of themselves in the mainstream media, which was, of course, owned by large corporations. What made America's power structure so interesting in the years after World War Two were its contradictions, most of which defied the traditional dogma of either the left or the right. Where Mills was most effective was in his journalism; where he was least effective was in his judgments and his occasionally simplistic projections of how different groups would in fact behave.

By the end of the decade, the gap had widened between him and most of the traditional academic community. He was appalled by the way altogether too many intellectuals, including many liberals, had enlisted in the Cold War and failed to criticize their own country for its excesses. The rise of Fidel Castro and the Eisenhower administration's hostile and clumsy attempts to deal with him only convinced Mills of the rightness of his vision. If its behavior toward Cuba turned out to be an appalling stereotype of the worst of American foreign policy, it was a perfect fit for Mills's view. America, he



thought, was on its way to becoming something of a garrison state with the concurrence of what he called, with great contempt, "the NATO intellectuals." More and more, as the decade ended, he was drawn to the issue of Cuba and his radicalism deepened.

Late in the decade, Mills's health began to fail him. In 1958 he suffered the first of at least three heart attacks. He continued to smoke and drink heavily; he liked to boast that he had more women in one month than Don Juan had had in a lifetime.

His work had always been passionate, but now it was downright evangelical. *Listen Yankee!* was the title of his last book—on Cuba. He wrote his parents in 1961, after one heart attack, "Lying here all these weeks and having damn near died, because this thing was pretty damned close, well it's made me much stronger, and made me think about myself which I'd not had the chance to do before. I know that I have not the slightest fear of death. I know also that I have a big responsibility to thousands of people all over the world to tell the truth as I see it and tell it exactly and with drama and quit this horsing around with sociological bullshit."

In March 1962 he died, at the age of forty-five, of a heart attack. He was at the height of his powers, his audiences steadily expanding. "Mills," as Irving Horowitz wrote of him, "began to think of himself as the social bearer of mass beliefs; he became a movement unto himself. Armed with an Enlightenment faith that truth will out, he also became convinced that he was the bearer of the truth." When he died, he had already become something of a mythic figure to a new generation of young American radicals and it would turn out that his posthumous influence was to be even greater.

# THREE

spend money freely; at the same time she stopped writing. Years later George Metalious referred to that period in her life as "the tinsel years." Driven mostly by Hollywood producer Jerry Wald, she eventually wrote a listless sequel she was not proud of, called *Return to Peyton Place*. At the last minute a writer named Warren Miller was brought in to doctor it into a readable book. Nonetheless *Return* also sold well, though not as well as its predecessor.

For all of her fame and the attention, Metalious's emotional needs did not abate. "Our mother had to be told with the consistency of a flowing brook that echoes, 'I love you, I love you, I love you,'" her daughter Marsha remembered. "We did love her strongly, but after a while 'I love you' became a ludicrous expression—worn to its nap like a rug traveled on day after day, night after night."

Her work habits continued to deteriorate. When T. J. Martin, the disc jockey whom she had married, tried to get her to work, she would yell at him, "Who the hell are you? Who appointed you my guiding light?" Soon she was always seen with a glass in her hand, usually with Canadian Club and Seven-Up in it.

By 1960, George Metalious had come back into her life, and she published *The Tight White Collar*, which became her favorite book. It sold well, but not nearly as well as *Peyton Place*. To shrewd editors, it was obvious that her audience was beginning to slip away. Soon she had serious financial problems. When *Peyton Place* had been a success, she had worked out an agreement with her lawyer to place her and her family on a budget of \$18,000 a year, a good deal of money then. But she never lived by the agreement and had paid almost nothing in taxes; she was said to owe the government \$163,400, plus 6 percent interest. Now, ever more fearful of the government, she tried to return to writing. She finished *No Adam in Eden*, a book about her French Canadian family, which was published in September 1963. Messner passed on it, albeit selling the rights to Pocket Books for \$50,000, and the movie rights went for \$150,000. Her unhappiness, indeed her increasing lack of self-esteem, one shrewd critic noted, now showed in her work. "It would seem that the writer hates women, individually and en masse. If she had anything kind or understanding to say about them, I confess to having forgotten what it was, so weighed down are all the female characters under a load of sin, lechery, selfishness and cruelty." The remaining year of her life was sad. Metalious left her again in the fall of 1963, and a few months later, in February 1964, she died of chronic liver disease.

## THIRTY-NINE

It was all part of a vast national phenomenon. The number of families moving into the middle class—that is, families with more than five thousand dollars in annual earnings after taxes—was increasing at the rate of 1.1 million a year, *Fortune* noted. By the end of 1956 there were 16.6 million such families in the country, and by 1959, in the rather cautious projections of *Fortune's* editors, there would be 20 million such families—virtually half the families in America. *Fortune* hailed "an economy of abundance" never seen before in any country in the world. It reflected a world of "optimistic philoprogenitive [the word means that Americans were having a lot of children] high spending, debt-happy, bargain-conscious, upgrading, American consumers."

In all of this no one was paying very close attention to what the new home-oriented, seemingly drudgery-free life was doing to the

psyche and outlook of American women. The pictures of them in magazines showed them as relentlessly happy, liberated from endless household tasks by wondrous new machines they had just bought. Since the photos showed them happy, and since there was no doubt that there were more and better household appliances every year, it was presumed that they were in fact happy. That was one of the more interesting questions of the era, for the great migration to the suburbs reflected a number of profound trends taking place in the society, not the least important of which was the changing role of women, particularly middle-class women. Up until then during this century women had made fairly constant progress in the spheres of politics, education, and employment opportunities. Much of their early struggle focused on the right of married women to work (and therefore to take jobs away from men who might be the heads of families). In the thirties a majority of states, twenty-six of forty-eight, still had laws prohibiting the employment of married women. In addition, a majority of the nation's public schools, 43 percent of its public utilities, and 13 percent of its department stores enforced rules on not hiring of wives. A poll of both men and women in the thirties that asked "Do you approve of a married woman earning money in business or industry if she has a husband capable of supporting her?" showed that 82 percent of the men and women polled disapproved.

During the Depression, large numbers of women went to work because their homes needed every bit of cash they could bring home. In addition women were always welcome in those parts of industry that offered poorer-paying jobs. At the beginning of the New Deal in the garment district of New York, where traditionally workers were the wives of immigrants, women worked forty-eight hours a week for 15 cents an hour, which meant that after a long, exhausting work week they brought home \$7.20.

But in general there was an assumption that as society began to change and more and more women were better educated, there would be more women working in the professions for better wages. World War Two dramatically (if only temporarily) changed how the nation regarded the employment of women. Overnight, that which had been perceived as distinctly unfeminine—holding heavy-duty industrial jobs—became a patriotic necessity. Four million additional workers were needed in industry and in the armed forces and a great many of them had to be women. The *Ladies' Home Journal* even put a woman combat pilot on its cover. Suddenly, where women had not gone before they were very welcome indeed; some 8 million women entered the work force during the war.

That trend came to a stunning halt in the years after the war. Part of it was the traditional tilt of the society toward men—if there were good, well-paying jobs, then the jobs obviously belonged to men as they came home from the war to head families. Within two months after the end of the war, some 800,000 women had been fired from jobs in the aircraft industry; the same thing was happening in the auto industry and elsewhere. In the two years after the war, some 2 million women had lost their jobs.

In the postwar years the sheer affluence of the country meant that many families could now live a middle-class existence on only one income. In addition, the migration to the suburbs physically separated women from the workplace. The new culture of consumerism told women they should be homemakers and saw them merely as potential buyers for all the new washers and dryers, freezers, floor waxers, pressure cookers, and blenders.

There was in all this a retreat from the earlier part of the century. Now, there was little encouragement for women seeking professional careers, and in fact there was a good deal of quite deliberate discouraging of it. Not only were women now reared in homes where their mothers had no careers, but male siblings were from the start put on a very different track: The boys in the family were to learn the skills critical to supporting a family, while daughters were to be educated to get married. If they went to college at all they might spend a junior year abroad studying art or literature. Upon graduation, if they still had ideas of a professional career, the real world did not give them much to be optimistic about.

The laws about married women working might have changed, but the cultural attitudes had not. The range of what women were allowed to do professionally in those days was limited, and even in those professions where they were welcome, they were put on a lower, slower track. Gender, not talent, was the most important qualification. Men and women who graduated at the same time from the same colleges and who had received the same grades (in many cases the women received better grades), then arrived at the same publishing or journalistic companies only to be treated very differently.

Men were taken seriously. Women, by contrast, were doomed to serve as support troops. Often they worked harder and longer for less pay with lesser titles, usually with the unspoken assumption that if they were at all attractive, they would soon get married, become pregnant, and leave the company. Only someone a bit off-center emotionally would stay the course. It was a vicious circle: Because young women were well aware of this situation, there was little

incentive to commit an entire life to fighting it and becoming what was then perceived of as a hard and brittle career woman. ("Nearly Half the Women in Who's Who Are Single," went one magazine title in that period trying to warn young women of the pitfalls of careerism.) If there were short stories in womens' magazines about career women, then it turned out they, by and large, portrayed women who were unhappy and felt themselves emotionally empty. Instead, the magazines and the new television sitcoms glorified dutiful mothers and wives.

Even allegedly serious books of the era (for instance, an influential book of pop sociology by a man named Ferdinand Lundberg and his psychoanalyst collaborator Marynia Farnham, entitled *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex*) attacked the idea of women with careers. "The independent woman is a contradiction in terms," Lundberg and Farnham had written. Feminism itself, in their words, "was a deep illness." "The psychosocial rule that takes form, then, is this: the more educated a woman is, the greater chance there is of sexual disorder, more or less severe. The greater the disordered sexuality in a given group of women, the fewer children they have," they wrote. They also suggested that the federal government give rewards to women for each child they bore after the first.

A postwar definition of femininity evolved. To be feminine, the American woman first and foremost did not work. If she did, that made her competitive with men, which made her hard and aggressive and almost surely doomed to loneliness. Instead, she devotedly raised her family, supported her husband, kept her house spotless and efficient, got dinner ready on time, and remained attractive and optimistic; each hair was in place. According to studies, she was prettier than her mother, she was slimmer, and she even smelled better than her mother.

At this particular moment, it was impossible to underestimate the importance and influence of the women's magazines—the *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Redbook*, *McCall's*, and *Mademoiselle*—on middle-class young woman. Isolated in the suburbs they felt uneasy and lonely and largely without guidance. More often than not, they were newly separated from their original families and the people they had grown up with. They were living new lives, different from those of their parents, with new and quite different expectations on the part of their husbands. Everything had to be learned.

In an age before the coming of midday television talk shows largely designed for housewives, womens' magazines comprised the core reading material for the new young suburban wives. If the

magazines' staffs at the lower rungs were comprised mostly of women, the magazines were almost always edited by men; in addition, editorial content much more than in most general-circulation magazines, echoed the thrust of the advertising. Research showed, or seemed to show, that husbands made the critical decisions in terms of which political candidate a family might support, but the wives made the decisions on which refrigerator and which clothes washer to buy. If the advertising was designed to let women know what the newest appliances were and how to use them, then the accompanying articles were designed to show they could not live up to their destinies without them.

This was not done deliberately. There were no editorial meetings where male editors sat around and killed ideas that showed the brave new suburban world as populated with a significant percentage of tense, anxious female college graduates who wondered if they were squandering the best years of their lives. But there was an instinctive bias about what women needed to hear and that it should all be upbeat, and that any larger doubts were unworthy.

The magazines explained their new lives to them: how to live, how to dress, what to eat, why they should feel good about themselves and their husbands and their children. Their sacrifices, the women's magazines emphasized, were not really sacrifices, they were about fulfillment. All doubts were to be conquered.

The ideal fifties women were to strive for was articulated by *McCall's* in 1954: togetherness. A family was as one, its ambitions were twined. The husband was designated leader and hero, out there every day braving the treacherous corporate world to win a better life for his family; the wife was his mainstay on the domestic side, duly appreciative of the immense sacrifices being made for her and her children. There was no divergence within. A family was a single perfect universe—instead of a complicated, fragile mechanism of conflicting political and emotional pulls. Families portrayed in women's magazines exhibited no conflicts or contradictions or unfulfilled ambitions. Thanks, probably, to the drive for togetherness, the new homes all seemed to have what was called a family room. Here the family came together, ate, watched television, and possibly even talked. "When Jim comes home," said a wife in a 1954 advertisement for prefabricated homes, "our family room seems to draw us closer together." And who was responsible ultimately for togetherness if not the wife?

"The two big steps that women must take are to help their husbands decide where they are going and use their pretty heads to

help them get there," wrote Mrs. Dale Carnegie, wife of one of the nation's leading experts on how to be likable, in the April 1955 *Better Homes and Gardens*. "Let's face it, girls. That wonderful guy in your house—and in mine—is building your house, your happiness and the opportunities that will come to your children." Split-level houses, Mrs. Carnegie added, were fine for the family, "but there is simply no room for split-level thinking—or doing—when Mr. and Mrs. set their sights on a happy home, a host of friends and a bright future through success in HIS job."

Those women who were not happy and did not feel fulfilled were encouraged to think that the fault was theirs and that they were the exception to blissful normality. That being the case, women of the period rarely shared their doubts, even with each other. If anything, they tended to feel guilty about any qualms they had: Here they were living better than ever—their husbands were making more money than ever, and there were ever bigger, more beautiful cars in the garage and appliances in the kitchen. Who were they to be unhappy?

One of the first women to challenge the fallacy of universal contentment among young suburban wives was a young woman from the heartland of the country. Born and reared in Peoria, Illinois, she did well enough in school to be admitted to an elite Eastern women's college, one of the Seven Sister schools. She entered Smith College in 1939, finding everything that she had longed for as a small-town girl in Peoria: a world where women were rewarded for being smart and different instead of being punished for it. She graduated in 1942, summa cum laude, full of optimism about the future even though the war was still going on. Several scholarships were offered her. Ambitious, admired by her classmates, Betty Goldstein was certain that she would lead a life dramatically different from her mother's. Miriam Goldstein had been a society-page writer for the Peoria, Illinois, paper, before marrying a local storeowner and becoming a housewife. In her daughter's eyes, she took out her own frustrated ambitions by pushing her children to achieve. But at graduation time, Betty Goldstein turned down the fellowships because she was interested in a young man; since he had not been offered a comparable scholarship, she was afraid it would tear their relationship apart if she accepted hers. That decision, she later wrote, turned her instantly into a cliché. Looking back on her life, Betty Goldstein Friedan, one of the first voices of the feminist movement, noted the young man's face was more quickly forgotten than the terms of the scholarship itself.

Instead of getting married, she moved to the exciting intellectual world of Greenwich Village and became part of a group of liberal young people involved in labor issues and civil rights before it was fashionable. The women all seemed to be graduates of Smith, Vassar, and Radcliffe; they were bright and optimistic, eager to take on a static society. Betty Goldstein worked as a reporter for a left-wing labor paper. As a journalist, she had got a reputation of knowing her way around and having lots of contacts. She became the person designated to arrange illegal abortions for involuntarily pregnant friends. This, she found, she was able to do with a few discreet phone calls. The going price was a thousand dollars. Once it was also her job to find a minister for two Protestant friends who wanted to marry. Because the groom was a divorced man, she noted with some irony, it was harder to find a willing minister than an abortionist.

When the war was over, the men returned from Europe and the South Pacific, and the women were gradually squeezed out of their jobs. Betty Goldstein, unsure of her role and her future, not liking the idea of a life alone (she had, she noted, "a pathological fear of being alone"), met a young veteran named Carl Friedan, who seemed funny and charming, and in 1947, two years after the war had ended, they were married. In 1949 they had their first child. When she was pregnant with her second child she was fired from the labor paper, whose radicalism, it appeared, did not yet extend to women's rights. When she took her grievance to the newspaper guild, she was told that the second pregnancy, which had cost her job, was her fault. There was, she later realized, no union term for sex discrimination.

Ms. Friedan soon found herself part of the great suburban migration as she moved further and further away from the Village, which had been the center of her professional and intellectual world. There, ideas had always seemed important. As she and her husband moved to larger and larger living quarters, first to Queens, where the Friedans lived in a pleasant apartment, and then to houses in the suburbs, her time was gradually more and more taken by children and family. As that happened, she was cut off, first physically, from what she had been, and then increasingly intellectually and socially as well. Betty Friedan now poured her energy into being a housewife and mother, into furnishing the apartment and houses and shopping, cooking, and cleaning for her family.

The Friedan family, she later realized, had been almost unconsciously caught up in the postwar migration to the suburbs. It was an ascent to an ever better style of living; but she also began to see it as a retreat as well from her earlier ambitions and standards. She liked doing the domestic things that Americans now did in their new,

ever more informal social lives—grilling hamburgers on the outdoor barbecue, attending spur-of-the-moment cocktail parties, sharing summer rentals on Fire Island with friends. Finally, the Friedans bought an old house, worthy of Charles Addams, in Rockland County for \$25,000 (with \$2,500 down), where Betty Friedan, Smith summa cum laude and future feminist leader, spent her time, scraping eight layers of paint off a fireplace (“I quite liked it”), chauffeuring children to and from school, helping to run the PTA, and coming as close as someone as fiercely independent as she was could to being a good housewife, as portrayed in the women’s magazines of that day. In some ways her life was full, she would later decide, and in some ways it was quite empty. She liked being a mother, and she liked her friends, but she missed the world of social and political involvement back in New York. She also worried that she had not lived up to her potential. By the time they were living in Rockland County, she had begun to write free-lance for various women’s magazines. It was a clear sign, she realized later, that while the domestic side of her life was rich, it was not rich enough.

The deal she made with herself then was a revealing one. It was her job as a writer to make more money than she and Carl spent on a maid—otherwise her writing would be considered counterproductive and would be viewed as subtracting from rather than adding to the greater good of the family. Her early articles, “Millionaire’s Wife” (*Cosmopolitan*, September 1956); “Now They’re Proud of Peoria” (*Reader’s Digest*, August 1955); “Two Are an Island” (*Made-moiselle*) July 1955; and “Day Camp in the Driveways” (*Parents’ Magazine*, May 1957) were not exactly the achievements she had had in mind when she left Smith.

She was also very quickly finding out the limits of what could be done in writing for women’s magazines at that time. In 1956, when she was pregnant with her third child, she read in a newspaper about Julie Harris, the actress, then starring in a play called *The Lark*. Ms. Harris had had natural childbirth, something that Betty Friedan, who had undergone two cesareans, admired and even envied. She decided, with the ready agreement of the magazines, to do a piece on Ms. Harris and her childbirth. She had a glorious time interviewing the actress and was completely captivated by her. She wrote what she thought was one of her best articles on the joys of natural childbirth. To her surprise, the article was turned down at first because it was too graphic.

That was hardly her only defeat with the magazines. When she suggested an article about Beverly Pepper, just beginning to experi-

ence considerable success as a painter and sculptor, and who was also raising a family, the editors of one magazine were scornful. American women, they told her, were not interested in someone like this and would not identify with her. Their market research, of which they were extremely confident, showed that women would only read articles that explained their own roles as wives and mothers. Not many American women out there had families and were successful as artists—therefore it would have no appeal. Perhaps, one editor said, they might do the article with a photograph of Mrs. Pepper painting the family crib.

At the time one of her children was in a play group with the child of a neighboring woman scientist. Ms. Friedan and the woman talked on occasion and her friend said she believed that a new ice age was approaching. The subject had interested Friedan, not normally a science writer, and she had suggested an article for *Harper’s*. The resulting article, “The Coming Ice Age” was a considerable success and won a number of prizes. In New York George Brockway, a book editor at Norton, saw the piece and liked it. He called to ask if she was interested in writing a book. She was excited by his interest but had no desire to expand the piece into a book; the scientific work was not really hers, in the sense that it did not reflect her true interests and feelings. It was, she later said, as if she had served as a ghost-writer for another person on it.

Then something happened that changed her life. She and two friends were asked to do a report on what had happened to the members of the Smith class of ’42 as they returned for their fifteenth reunion in 1957. She made up a questionnaire and got an assignment from *McCall’s* to pay for her time. The piece was supposed to be called “The Togetherness Woman.” The questions were: “What difficulties have you found in working out your role as a woman?” “What are the chief satisfactions and frustrations of your life today?” “How do you feel about getting older?” “How have you changed inside?” “What do you wish you had done differently?” The answers stunned her: She had tapped into a great reservoir of doubt, frustration, anxiety, and resentment. The women felt unfulfilled and isolated with their children; they often viewed their husbands as visitors from a far more exciting world.

The project also emphasized Friedan’s own frustrations. All those years trying to be a good wife and mother suddenly seemed wasted; it had been wrong to suppress her feelings rather than to deal with them. The surprise was that there were thousands of women like her out there. As she wrote later in *The Feminine Mystique*: “It was

a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States. Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slip cover materials, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night, she was afraid to ask of herself the silent question—'Is this all?'"

As she had walked around the Smith campus during her reunion, she was struck by the passivity of the young women of the class of 1957. Upon graduation, her generation had been filled with excitement about the issues of the day: When Ms. Friedan asked these young women about their futures, they regarded her with blank looks. They were going to get engaged and married and have children, of course. She thought: This is happening at Smith, a place where I found nothing but intellectual excitement when I was their age. Something had gotten deep into the bloodstream of this generation, she decided.

She left and started to write the piece for *McCall's*, but it turned out very different from the one that she had intended to write. It reflected the despair and depression she had found among her contemporaries, and it was critical of women who lived through their husbands and children. *McCall's*, the inventor of "togetherness"—not surprisingly—turned it down. She heard that all the women editors there wanted to run it but that they had been overruled by their male superiors. That did not entirely surprise her, but she was sure someone else would want it. So she sent it to the *Ladies' Home Journal*, where it was accepted. There, to her amazement, it was rewritten so completely that it seemed to make the opposite points, so she pulled it. That left *Redbook*, where Bob Stein, an old friend, worked. He suggested that she do more interviews, particularly with younger women. She did, and sent the piece back to him. He was stunned by it. How could Betty Friedan write a piece so out of sync with what his magazine wanted? Why was she so angry? What in God's name had come over her? he wondered. He turned it down and called her agent. "Look," he said over the phone. "Only the most neurotic housewife would identify with this."

She was, she realized later, challenging the magazines themselves. She was saying that it was wrong to mislead women to think they should feel one way when in fact they often felt quite differently. She had discovered a crisis of considerable proportions, and these magazines would only deny it.

She was angry. It was censorship, she believed. Women's maga-

zines had a single purpose, she decided—to sell a vast array of new products to American housewives—and anything that worked against that, that cast doubt about the happiness of the housewives using such products, was not going to be printed. No one from the advertising department sat in on editorial meetings saying which articles could run and which could not, she knew, but the very purpose of the magazine was to see women first and foremost as consumers, not as people.

At about that time she went to New York to attend a speech by Vance Packard, the writer. He had just finished his book *The Hidden Persuaders*, about subliminal tactics in advertising. His efforts to write about this phenomenon in magazines had been completely unsuccessful, he said, so he turned it into a book, which had become a major best-seller. The parallels between his problems and hers were obvious. Suddenly, she envisioned "The Togetherness Woman" as a book. She called George Brockway at Norton, and he seemed delighted with the idea.

The economics of publishing were significantly different from those of magazines. Books were not dependent upon ads, they were dependent upon ideas; and the more provocative the idea, the more attention and, often, the better the sales. Brockway knew there had already been a number of attacks on conformity in American society, particularly as it affected men. Here was an attack that would talk about its effect on women, who were, of course, the principal buyers of books. He was impressed by Ms. Friedan. She was focused and, to his mind, wildly ambitious.

She told Brockway she would finish it in a year; instead, it took five years. Later she wrote that no one, not her husband, her editor, or anyone who knew her, thought she would ever finish it. She did so while taking care of three children. She later described herself as being like all the other mothers in suburbia, where she "hid, like secret drinking in the morning, the book I was writing when my suburban neighbors came for coffee . . ."

Her research was prodigious. Three days a week she went to the New York City Public Library for research. The chief villains, she decided, were the women's magazines. What stunned her was the fact that this had not always been true. In the same magazines in the late thirties and forties, there had been a sense of women moving steadily into the male professional world; then women's magazines had created a very different kind of role model, of a career woman who knew how to take care of herself and who could make it on her own.

But starting around 1949, these magazines changed dramati-

cally. It was as if someone had thrown a giant switch. The new woman did not exist on her own. She was seen only in the light of supporting her husband and his career and taking care of the children.

The more Ms. Friedan investigated, the more she found that the world created in the magazines and the television sitcoms was, for many women at least, a fantasy world. Despite all the confidence and happiness among women portrayed in the magazines, there was underneath it all a crisis in the suburbs. It was the crisis of a generation of women who had left college with high idealism and who had come to feel increasingly frustrated and who had less and less a sense of self-esteem.

Nor, she found, did all the marvelous new appliances truly lighten the load of the housewife. If anything they seemed to extend it—there was some kind of Gresham's law at work here: The more time-saving machines there were, the more things there were to do with them. She had stumbled across something that a number of others, primarily psychiatrists, had noticed: a certain emotional malaise, bordering on depression, among many women of the era. One psychiatrist called it "the housewife's syndrome," another referred to it as "the housewife's blight." No one wrote about it in popular magazines, certainly not in the monthly women's magazines.

So, gathering material over several years, she began to write a book that would come out in 1963, not as *The Togetherness Woman*, but as *The Feminine Mystique*. She was approaching forty as she began, but she was regenerated by the importance of the project; it seemed to give her her own life back. The result was a seminal book on what had happened to women in America. It started selling slowly but word of it grew and grew, and eventually, with 3 million copies in print, it became a handbook for the new feminist movement that was gradually beginning to come together.

## F O R T Y

**A**t the Worcester Foundation, the search for an oral contraceptive pill was beginning to go surprisingly well. The breakthrough of synthetic progesterone had given them all an immense lift. Word of how well they were doing spread throughout the scientific community and eventually reached the general public; an article had even appeared in *Look* predicting that Pincus would soon succeed in his quest.

The next stage was reached when Searle passed on to Worcester a progesterone steroid called norethynodrel, which, Chang reported back to Pincus, was more powerful than natural progesterone by a factor of at least ten to one. Goody Pincus knew at that point that it was time to bring on board a distinguished medical doctor as a collaborator—for soon the Pill would have to be tried on human subjects. At first he considered Alan Guttmacher and Abraham