

Feminism in post-war united states

[Countries](#), [United States](#)



The construction of a just and humane society, just like other social and institutional facts is a long and tedious process, nevertheless, the task needs to be done. Within the United States, the construction of such a society stands as a result of the various historical changes within the country, an example of which can be seen in the changes within the country after its participation in the Second World War. The country's participation in Second World War proved to be beneficial for its citizens on certain aspects as it enabled what Reinhold Niebuhr would state as the emergence of the 'children of light'.

In line with Niebuhr's argument in his book *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, the 'children of light' emerged within the post-World War II United States as the conditions within the country enabled the development of a society which opted for unity within the conditions of freedom and order (20-21). An example of this is evident in the development of the feminist movement in post-World War II United States. The feminist movement in the United States stands as a result of the nationalist and cultural movements in post-World War II United States.

Feminist movements within the United States during this period took the form of either socialist feminism, radical feminism, or liberal feminism. Each of these strands of feminism focuses on issues pertaining to women's exclusion from the political sphere; they differ however in their view as to what enables such an exclusion. Socialist feminists argue that such an exclusion stands as a result of the moral order of social organizations.

Radical feminists, on the other hand, argue that such an exclusion stands as a result of the prevalent sex or gender system in society. Finally, liberal

feminists argue that such an exclusion stands as a result of the inequality amongst the sexes. Despite the differences of these three strands of feminism mentioned above, the development of these three strands shows the manner in which post-World War II United States opted for the development of equality between the sexes through the ascription not only of rationality but also agency upon women.

Amongst the strands of feminism mentioned above, it is the initial strand [radical feminism] which proved to be significant for the development of the feminist movement during the initial period of post-World War II America as it highlighted the development of the second wave of feminism in the United States. Betty Friedan (1968), in her book *The Feminine Mystique*, specifies the difference between the first and second wave of feminism.

She argues that as opposed to the first wave of feminism which was characterized by the creation of the 'feminine mystique' which enabled the discovery of women's selves within the context of their initial roles in their careers, families, and relationships; the second wave of feminism was characterized by the deconstruction of the 'feminine mystique' as a result of women's recognition of the continuously oppressive character of their initial 'freed' position in society (33-34). Since the second wave was influenced by the civil-rights protests and peace protests, it became more activist in character.

An example of this activist character of the second wave of feminism is apparent in Kate Millet's radical strand of feminism in her book *Sexual Politics*. Kate Millet (2000), in her book *Sexual Politics*, discusses one of the main issues of the feminist movement in post-World War II United States.

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Within her book, Millet argues that inequality between the sexes stands as a result of the unequal distribution of power amongst the sexes in society. She argues that women's subordination stands as a result of the ideological indoctrination of women by a patriarchal society.

She states that the "essence of politics" as power involves seeking to prove that "however muted its present appearance may be, sexual dominion obtains nevertheless as perhaps the most pervasive ideology of our culture and provides its most fundamental concepts of power" (Millet 25). The title of her book *Sexual Politics* thereby aims to present her view of how women's subordination stands as a result of the continuation of patriarchal politics within both the private and public spheres of life.

Millet divides her book into three parts. The first part entitled "Sexual Politics" presents Millet's thesis regarding the nature of power relations between the sexes. The second part entitled "Historical Background" presents a survey of the feminist struggle within the United States during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Finally, the third part entitled "The Literary Reflection" presents Millet's views as to how the power relations between the sexes are visible in the literary works of D.

H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, Norman Mailer, and Jean Genet. Millet's argument that the content of literary works mirrors the power relations between the sexes is based on the assumption that literature has a mimetic character. In other words, for Millet the content of literary works mirror reality and hence the content of literary works may be used as a means of gauging how women have been continuously subordinated by men through their indoctrination of a patriarchal ideology.

Within this context, the importance of Millet's aforementioned book may thereby be ascribed to its existence as a socio-historical text which takes literature as a source material for a hypothesis about the relationships between men and women in the non-literary world from the late nineteenth century to the present time. In addition to this, Millet's book stands as the first text which uses a feminist approach in reading or interpreting literary works.

In line with Niehbur's claim regarding the emergence of the ' children of light', one may note that the development of the feminist movement in post-World War II United States showed an example of the emergence of the ' children of light' since the movement enabled the development of a United States which opted for the equality between the sexes thereby creating a free and orderly society through the emergence of works that not only subverted the predominant ideology in society during that period but also created a new perspective in understanding reality.

In the case of Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics*, this is evident in her creation of a feminist standpoint for assessing literary works.