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SINCE 1945

The Contemporary United States

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*With love
to my parents
Selma and Gabriel Baumgarten
and to my best friend
Ward*

Editors' Preface

Mention the United States and few people respond with feelings of neutrality. Discussions about the role of the United States in the contemporary world typically evoke a sense of admiration or a shudder of dislike. Pundits and politicians alike make sweeping references to attributes of modern society deemed 'characteristically American'. Yet qualifications are in order, especially regarding the distinctiveness of American society and the uniqueness of American culture. True, American society has been shaped by the size of the country, the migratory habits of the people and the federal system of government. Certainly, American culture cannot be understood apart from its multi-cultural character, its irreverence for tradition and its worship of technological imagery. It is equally true, however, that life in the United States has been profoundly shaped by the dynamics of American capitalism and by the penetration of capitalist market imperatives into all aspects of daily life.

The series is designed to take advantage of the growth of specialised research about post-war America in order to foster understanding of the period as a whole as well as to offer a critical assessment of the leading developments of the post-war years. Coming to terms with the United States since 1945 requires a willingness to accept complexity and ambiguity, for the history encompasses conflict as well as consensus, hope as well as despair, progress as well as stagnation. Each book in the series offers an interpretation designed to spark discussion rather than a definite account intended to close debate. The series as a whole is meant to offer students, teachers and the general public fresh perspectives and new insights about the contemporary United States.

CHRISTOPHER BROOKEMAN

WILLIAM ISSEL

Preface

As an adolescent in the late 1950s, I briefly exchanged my parents' liberal Jewish politics and trade union values for the prevailing ideology of Cold War anti-communism. In a much-applauded high school speech, I claimed that American democracy was like a sturdy tree, except that its roots were being eaten away by an insidious blight called Soviet Communism. I would like both to reclaim the tree as analogue, symbol and metaphor, and to thank my parents, Selma and Gabriel Baumgarten, for their love, patience and progressive politics.

Although women have been the majority of Americans since 1950, it was not their numbers but the Women's Movement, which made many of them, including myself, aware of their exclusion from studies of American history, politics, society and literature. The Women's Movement, and especially one woman, are responsible for this book.

In 1968, I was teaching my first US history class, and a student asked why there were no books about women on my lengthy supplementary reading list. Although I, unfortunately, cannot remember her name, her question became the seed for my (re)education. The various branches and fruits of the Women's Movement also began as personal and social seeds. Feminist theories and practices have grown from the roots of women's and men's progressive values and actions, past and present. At the same time, the 'women's tree' must continue to adapt to changing, diverse and sometimes hostile political, economic and social elements. Located in a larger landscape, the growth and development of the Women's Movement is neither the complete story of American women since the Second World War nor does it represent the entire 'forest' of women's values and experiences today.

This book begins with a brief introduction on women and the

Second World War. It then traces not only the rise, composition, achievements and limitations of the Women's Movement, but also more than forty years of women's paid and unpaid work, political activity and education. I both describe and assess the relationship between cultural stereotypes of women and the thoughts and activities of women themselves. However, I do not claim that shared gender transcends women's racial, cultural and class diversity, or that women's history and experience can be abstracted from the larger context of American post-war society.

I have many people to thank in addition to the student in my first class and the hundreds of others from whom I learned in history, women's studies and social science courses. Without Bill Issel, dear friend, colleague and editor, this book would have been neither attempted nor finished. Bill provided me with the initial opportunity, worked with me for six years in trimming and shaping each chapter, and supplied the essential nourishment of encouragement and praise. I also wish to thank Chris Brookeman for his careful reading of the entire manuscript, suggestions for improving its readability, and his personal kindness. At Macmillan, first Sarah Mahaffy and then Vanessa Couchman supplied helpful guidance and understanding, along with a willingness to extend deadlines more than once.

Deborah Gerson carefully read and criticised the first six chapters; Irène Coustel of Université de Toulouse both suggested stylistic improvements in Chapter 6 and gave me fresh perspectives on American feminism. I first tried out the ideas in Chapter 5 on a thoughtful audience during Women's History Week at California State University, Sacramento. Chapter 11 owes much to Elizabeth Campbell, Jody Timms and the students in a graduate course on global feminism offered at the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS), San Francisco. Ofer Zur, Chellis Glendinning, Joanna Macy and Patricia Ellsberg contributed valuable material and insights for that chapter. Many others at CIIS provided a variety of support, ranging from just the right article to just the right word or act of encouragement. I especially wish to thank Vic Campbell, Ted Ciesinski, Tom Courtney, Lisa Faithorn, Michael Flanagan, Barbara Geisler, Jeff Gold, Ralph Metzner, Karen Roberts and Chris Wilson. Above all, I am grateful to Ron Silliman for his wit and compassion, as well as his feminist-socialist practice.

My brother Elias Baumgarten has been a true friend. Along with

his keen mind, empathy and wisdom, his generosity made it possible for me to have that essential room of my own. My love and thanks to Jan Wilson, Paul Fortino, Cheryl Thompson, Paul Hudson, Batya Podos, Carol Roland, Clare Fischer, Judy Stamps – and especially to Ward Hoalton, who first presented me with Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* in 1962 and since then has given more than words, or whole books, can ever say.

ROCHELLE GATLIN

San Francisco

15 August 1986