

Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960 (Critical Perspectives on the Past)

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In the popular stereotype of post-World War II America, women abandoned their wartime jobs and contentedly retreated to the home. These mythical women were like the 1950s TV character June Cleaver, white, middle-class, suburban housewives. *Not June Cleaver* unveils the diversity of postwar women, showing how far women departed form this one-dimensional image.

This collection of fifteen revisionist essays charts new directions in American women's history and provides connections to scholarship that, until recently, has focused primarily on the years before 1945 and after 1960. The contributors explore the work and activism of postwar American women and also point to the contradictions and ambiguities in postwar concepts of gender.

Including examinations of such aspects of postwar women's history as the arrival of Chinese women immigrants in New York City; women's changing presence in the labor force and in union organization; and the precarious lives of women abortionists, lesbians, and single mothers, the authors effectively demonstrate how postwar women's identities were not only an expression of their gender but also of their class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, occupation, and politics.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly
Women's history is being rewritten, deconstructed and reconfigured daily. Existing scholarship has tended to reinforce the perception that the women's movement retreated in the years between WW II and the '60s. Not June Cleaver , reconsiders the roles of women as mothers, workers, activists, unionists and pacifists and read together these fine essays signify a systematic devaluation of women that eventually manifested itself in the coming of age of the women's movement. Of particular interest are the chapters, ``Is Family Devotion Now Subversive?" by Deborah A. Gerson and ``I Wanted the Whole World to See" by Ruth Feldstein. The former chronicles the efforts of the Families Committee of Smith Act Victims in defying McCarthyism, while the latter recounts the trial of Emmett Till, focusing on how motherhood was defined along class and racial lines. Other chapters recognize the contributions of Chinese and Mexican-American women to the union movement; recount the sexual demonization of lesbians; and reveal how mothers became the surprise ``weapon" of the Civil Defense protest movement. Meyerowitz has pulled together a collection that smartly argues that for women the 15 years following WW II were not a time for reflection and analysis, rather a period of re-massing and struggle.

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Review

*"*Not June Cleaver *reconsiders the roles of women as mothers, workers, activists, unionists and pacifists and read together these fine essays signify a systematic devaluation of women that eventually manifested itself in the coming of age of the women's movement."*
*—**Publishers Weekly***

"An astonishingly successful effort to rewrite the history of American women in the postwar era... [that] challenges well-established interpretations of postwar gender ideology, shows how gender politics were integral to Cold War politics, and complicates and deepens our understanding of postwar women...—working and middle-class, Chicana, white, black, and Asian...and essential text for historians of the Cold War and postwar gender politics"
—**George Chauncey**, University of Chicago

From the Publisher
A denouncement of the housewife stereotype imposed on post-Warld War II women

Users Review

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