

UPDATED WITH A NEW AFTERWORD

THE  
HOW THE MODERN  
WORLD  
WOMEN'S MOVEMENT  
SPLIT  
CHANGED AMERICA  
OPEN



**RUTH ROSEN**

"An invaluable record of an unforgettable time"  
—San Francisco Chronicle

## The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America

*Ruth Rosen*

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# **The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America**

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## **The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America** Ruth Rosen **The Newly Revised and Updated Edition**

In this enthralling narrative—the first of its kind—historian and journalist Ruth Rosen chronicles the history of the American women's movement from its beginnings in the 1960s to the present. Interweaving the personal with the political, she vividly evokes the events and people who participated in our era's most far-reaching social revolution. Rosen's fresh look at the recent past reveals fascinating but little-known information including how the FBI hired hundreds of women to infiltrate the movement. Using extensive archival research and interviews, Rosen challenges readers to understand the impact of the women's movement and to see why the revolution is far from over.

## **The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America** **Details**

Date : Published December 26th 2006 by Penguin Books (first published 2000)

ISBN : 9780140097191

Author : Ruth Rosen

Format : Paperback 544 pages

Genre : Feminism, History, Nonfiction, Gender, Politics



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## **From Reader Review The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America for online ebook**

### **Alessandra says**

“ARMED AND DANGEROUS-EXTREME” is just one of many accusations lodged at the women’s movement of the later 20th century (243). The unearthed FBI files Ruth Rosen cited above recall a legacy of the women’s movement as radical, anti-male, and extremist. The World Split Open enlarges such limited perceptions of Second Wave feminism, while also accounting for its radical factions. This engaging monograph presents a thorough analysis of Second Wave feminism from a woman actively engaged in the movement.

Rosen commanded a variety of sources to tell her story, from key national organizations, to letters from women in Muncie, Indiana. Yet, despite its relative depth and breadth, The World Split Open doesn’t completely outline the crevices of this revolutionary split. Race and class consciousness were key elements in the formation of the movement, yet this monograph fell short in the examination of the movement from a race and class viewpoint. White, leftist, and educated feminists largely obscured what subtle recounts of race and class perspectives emerge. Structurally, the topical organization often marred the cohesive chronological understanding of the movement as it ebbed and flowed through various socio-political environments. Despite the chronological confusion and analytical gaps, The World Split Open still provides a relatively holistic understanding of the complexities of Second Wave feminism, from its successes to its unfinished business. For Rosen, it is the Second Wave’s unfinished business that embodies the torch to be carried by the next generation of revolutionaries.

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### **Elizabeth says**

The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America (Paperback) from the library

how the women's movt learned from the black rights movt

Contents:

pt. 1. Refugees from the fifties -- Dawn of discontent -- Female generation gap -- pt. 2. Rebirth of feminism - - Limits of liberalism -- Leaving the left -- pt. 3. Through the eyes of women -- Hidden injuries of sex -- Passion and politics -- The politics of paranoia -- pt. 4. No end in sight -- The proliferation of feminism -- Sisterhood to superwoman.

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### **David Bates says**

In The World Split Open Ruth Rosen provides an overview of second wave feminism from the early sixties

to the nineteen eighties, charting the rise of the Women's Movement and its impact on American society. "Activists didn't hurl tear gas canisters at the police, burn down buildings, or fight in the street," Rosen notes, but it left a transformed world in which women had far more individual choices and collective prominence in government, law, business, medicine and culture. A veteran of the movement herself, Rosen's narrative reflects the experiences and preoccupations of the middle and upper class women who were at its center. For these women, a key experience of the movement was one of awakening, as personal experiences and political views were recontextualized within a critique of the subordinate place of women in society. With *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan set the tone for an initial wave of activism when she asked middle class housewives to face "the problem that has no name," a gnawing discontent arising from being confined to the claustrophobic dimensions a homemaker's career and identity. Instead of accepting a life of endless housework and childrearing, Friedan urged women to embrace personal ambitions for self-fulfillment and equality in the workplace. Individual acts in defiance to women's assigned social role, and collective political action to open up opportunities for women and enforce full social equality, would eventually be pithily summed up by Carol Hanisch in a saying that became synonymous with second wave feminism, "the personal is political."

Frustrated by the unresponsiveness toward women's issues of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, created by the 1964 Civil Rights Act, Friedan and other women's activists created the National Organization for Women in 1966 to advocate for greater equality. "By creating a feminist civil rights organization, NOW members did more than assert their independence from male-dominated liberal politics," Rosen tells us, "they also freed themselves to consider the question of women's rights from a more radical perspective." As Friedan put it, "Everything was different . . . The problems looked different, the definition of the problems, the solutions sought, once we dared to judge our conditions as women by that simple standard, the hallmark of American democracy – equality, no more, no less." Both an initial survey by Rosen of the position of women in society and a concluding tally of the achievements of the movement reveal the staying power of middle class preoccupations, focusing on college enrollment and education, and the number women working as doctors, lawyers, politicians and judges.

Nevertheless, Rosen's account is largely defined by the growing diversity of viewpoints and issues embraced by the expanding Women's Movement. For many African American women "who had spent the last century holding together families, churches, and communities" learned helplessness was not a primary problem. For working class women who were already trying to pull along families financially, Friedan's advice to find a meaningful career was obtuse.

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### **Stephanie says**

Very good history and the book I'd recommend to someone who knows little about the women's movement. If you are familiar with the history of second wave this won't tell you much that's new, but it's a good, readable and important book.

I'm looking for information about feminism and the women's movement in rural areas (states like Maine, Iowa, Arkansas, etc). If anyone can recommend books/websites/articles I'd appreciate it.

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### **Jela says**

The World Spilt Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed American, written by Professor of history at U. C. Berkeley, celebrated journalist and feminist, Ruth Rosen is not only a thoroughly researched and well written documentation of the modern women's movement. However, it also stands as a personal record of the author's own experiences as well as those of many other women, whose personal accounts fill the book, bringing the reader closer to the history. Rosen sets out to accomplish a mammoth task in adding a comprehensive history of the modern American women's movement to the growing gender studies literature. Rosen asserts, "American political culture shaped feminism, and the women's movement, in its turn, has transformed that culture." She also goes on to explain that although as most readers know that American feminism bore out of the political culture of the 1950's and 1960's, it also is rooted in class politics, evolution of religious traditions and changing feelings towards centralized government (xiv). By using relying heavily on primary sources and oral interviews, Rosen succeeds in giving the reader an inside view of the women who experienced, felt, responded and created the movement and the opportunities that women today have available to them.

Rosen begins her book with a lengthy timeline that traces the American women's movement from 1848, when married woman gained the right to own property to 2006 and the death of author of the Feminine Mystique Betty Friedan; however, for the rest of the book she focuses on the post- World War II period. Rosen begins by demonstrating the importance that Betty Friedan's Feminine Mystique was in influencing American housewives to speak out about the "quiet desperation" that they felt as they spent their lives devoted to home and hearth and little else. Many of these suburban housewives felt pressured to stay home by the social rules, their husbands and even to combat Communism and the Feminine Mystique showed them they were not alone in their isolation.

Rosen goes on to demonstrate the problems that women faced in their quest to utilize their higher education, the opposition they experienced in the workplace and confusion they felt in the bedroom. All of these experiences along with the shackles of the Feminine Mystique laid the groundwork for future challenges to the status quo, which would later ignite the fires of activism, especially in their daughters, who did not want to grow up to live the lives their mothers had.

The author goes on to describe each victory and set back women faced during this turbulent time. For instance, the addition of the word "sex" to Title VII and the subsequent "Bunny Law" backlash it created, the founding of the National Organization of Women (NOW) by nervous but courageous women, including its first president, Mystique author Freidan and how NOW was not radical enough for the young women participating in the women's liberation movement. Rosen does an excellent job of letting the reader peer into the lives of the activists and the juxtaposition of their activist life versus the life they lead when they came home and "slept with the men they had just criticized in front of other women" (133). Even as activists, women faced opposition even within their own movement, experiencing harassment, jeering and threats, which encouraged them to branch out into other political arenas, making a change from organizations such as the New Left to ones that supported their need for equality.

Her strongest section is the section on the role sex played within activist culture. Rosen demonstrates sex within activist culture contradicted the feelings of value the women placed on themselves and the ideals for which they were fighting. Even further, some women who had once believed in the common creed, "Make Love, Not War" found that in it laid another sexual pressure, the pressure to say, "Yes" (147). This section also illuminates subjects as the Hidden Injury of Sex, such as "the faked orgasm," lesbianism, birth control, rape and pornography.

Rosen's technique makes for an interesting and deeply personal read. Her use of personal accounts, excerpts from oral interviews and a veritable reading list of books and articles is a recipe for understanding feminism

and the American women's movement. She does a good job of showing the reader their plight affected many women of this period and how they turned it into victories they could relish, using their own words, in turn making the history tangible to the reader. However, Rosen relies too heavily on Betty Freidan as the catalyst for changes made in the American women's movement. Surely, other women had just as much of an influence on the women of this period. In addition, her small section on 1996 Welfare Reform is deceiving, as many of the TANF programs are accomplishing their goals, as countless poverty level women owe their success to these programs and subsidies (including education, housing, childcare and healthcare) they provide low-income families. Despite this criticism, the book is exhaustive in its aim is an easy read and its use would be welcomed in both undergraduate and graduate Gender Studies or American history courses and would be an excellent choice for those wishing to foray into the studies of the modern American women's movement.

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### **Tope says**

This is a very good introduction to second wave feminism from a historical perspective - that is, if one is willing to overlook its significant limitations. Rosen focuses almost exclusively on white, middle-class feminism and has very little to say about black or Chicana women's movements. Minority women's experiences and movements are relegated to a few cursory paragraphs inserted (in what at times seems a random fashion) into a narrative mainly concerned with white feminism.

To be honest, I didn't really expect Rosen to say much of substance about minority women's movements, but it would have been nice to see her acknowledge in a more explicit fashion that she is approaching the history of the second wave from a particular angle. More troubling was the fact that, in the one chapter in which Rosen does discuss race at length, she does so from an overwhelmingly white perspective. This is particularly odd given that she is discussing white women's experiences of sexism as members SNCC, a mostly black student activist organization. To discuss black male sexism in a black organization only from the perspective of white women, without giving much of a voice to black female members of the organization, and without giving any voice at all to the black male members, seems to me to be an odd and problematic approach.

Long story short, if you're interested in learning more about minority women's movements in the sixties and seventies, this is not the book for you. In other respects, however, this is an excellent book. Rosen does a fantastic job of explaining the severe cultural anxieties and tensions over gender roles that characterized white middle class society in the fifties and sixties, the generational gap between baby boomers and their parents which led to the rise of the New Left, women's increasing disillusionment with men in the New Left and the formation of a separate women's movement, and the impact of the women's movement in American homes and workplaces. If nothing else it is a compelling account of how the women's movement dramatically changed American culture to the degree that subsequent generations of women find it difficult to imagine just how restrictive life before the movement was for their mothers and grandmothers. So I would recommend this book for anyone interested in learning more about the women's movement, with the caveat that it offers a limited perspective on the movement.

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### **Jonathan says**

Full of detail but deeply flawed. Rosen embraces a single-track concept of progress and evidently cannot

fathom other models of social reform or regeneration. To be sure, she does depict the contradictions of the women's liberation movement. In fact, her model actually makes these contradictions appear fatal because she assumes that all forms of feminism fall along a single trajectory and belong to a single tradition. Yet she dismisses out of hand any suggestion that this movement could have been counterproductive. For someone who evidently admires pioneering leftist women, she never considers the implications of the socialists' idea that bourgeois liberty and self-fulfillment mask exploitation and degradation. She captures a variety of voices within the movement pretty well, but has a terrible tin ear for any voices critical of it. Sometimes she just gets her facts wrong; she writes, for example, that Christopher Lasch was a critic of feminism but not consumerism, which is something one could say only if one slept through everything Lasch ever published or said. She also tries to pass off tendentious interpretations as facts; the timeline at the beginning of the book, for instance, labels the Meese Commission's report on pornography -- a report praised by some leading feminists -- as an expression of "backlash." (So, apparently, was the invasion of Iraq. I'm still puzzling over that one.) With so much interpretive weirdness in the sections concerning things I know, I simply don't trust Rosen to be right about things I don't know.

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### **Sarah says**

I feel like this is a good book for a basic history, but it tends to ignore or insufficiently cover issues related to trans people and women of color. They feel more like afterthoughts and get less than a quarter of the space that the white feminists get.

The work also has some structural/organizational problems.

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### **Harley says**

I had to read this for my Recent American History class. If it wasn't for this class I never would have picked this book up. For the most part I more or less skimmed this. The subject matter of the book is not one that interests me, I'm more of an American Revolution kind of person. I did like how this book was easy to read and understand. It flew by fairly quickly. That being said I don't ever see myself picking this book up just for fun, or to even fully read it properly. This is just not something I am interested in reading.

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### **Paul says**

Very comprehensive and thoughtful look at the full array of second-wave feminism. Includes everything from working-class women's activism in the Midwest to very personal discussions about how much sex and romance changed (and didn't change) in the post-war period.

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### **Adam says**

Key quote: "Nonetheless, the growing New Right and social critics like Christopher Lasch blamed feminism - not consumer culture - for the loss of 'traditional values' and the unraveling of the family."<sup>1</sup> The only source given for this claim is an endnote citing an unpublished "Interview with Christopher Lasch, May 17, 1989,

Berkeley, California."

<sup>1</sup>Rosen, p. 330.

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### **Pri Srinivasa says**

One of the best feminist history books I have ever read. Rosen clearly describes second wave. A beginner's must-read to understanding historical feminist discourses in the west.

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### **Joy H. says**

RE: *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* by Ruth Rosen

Added 3/18/10.

READ A SAMPLE HERE: <https://play.google.com/books/reader?...>

I first heard about this book at our local library's book group when someone mentioned it in passing while we were discussing the book *Mudbound*. As our group leader has said: "Our conversation evolved to explore the issue of oppression in general - from the roots of racism to the foundations of feminism."

Below is an excerpt from the GR description:

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*Ruth Rosen introduces her book by reminding readers of discriminatory practices that were common in pre-1960s America: "Harvard's Lamont Library was off-limits to women for fear they would distract male students. Newspaper ads separated jobs by sex; bars often refused to serve women; some states even excluded women from jury duty; no women ran big corporations or universities, worked as firefighters or police officers."*

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Them's fighting words! :)

#### **ADDENDUM: 4/1/13**

#### **The World Split Open :**

The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America  
by Ruth Rosen

I wondered about the origin of the above title: "**The World Split Open**".

The title comes from the following quote:

***"What would happen if one woman told the truth about her life?***

***The world would split open."***

-line from a poem\* by Muriel Rukeyser (1913-1980)

\*NOTE: The above lines are from a poem by Muriel Rukeyser. My research indicates that the poem is entitled: "**Kathe Kollwitz**" and that it can be found in the book: Out of Silence: Selected Poems (first published 1992) by Muriel Rukeyser, Kate Daniels (Editor).

SEE THE POEM HERE: [http://iambecauseweare.wordpress.com/...](http://iambecauseweare.wordpress.com/)

[Käthe Kollwitz (1867-1945) was a German painter, printmaker, and sculptor whose work offered an eloquent and often searing account of the human condition, and the tragedy of war, in the first half of the 20th century.]-wiki

ABOUT THE BOOK OF POEMS MENTIONED ABOVE:

<http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/75...>

<http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0810...>

MORE about Ruth Rosen's book, The World Split Open:

<https://play.google.com/store/books/d...>

READ A SAMPLE HERE: <https://play.google.com/books/reader?...>

See this same info at my topic at my Goodreads group:

<http://www.goodreads.com/topic/show/3...> [MESSAGE #37]

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### **Heather says**

My professor wrote this book and she was fabulous! I was actually in her very last class ever; she job changed to be a newspaper editor and I felt very lucky to have her. I didn't want to take a "woman" class but she taught me about so much in my life that I take for granted that for my mom's generation were new things (think birth control pill, etc.). Highly recommend this book!!

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### **Jane says**

"The young women of today, free to study, to speak to write, to choose their occupation, should remember that every inch of their freedom was bought for them at a great price. It is for them to show their gratitude by helping onward the reforms of their own times, by spreading the light of freedom and truth still wider. The debt that each generation owes to the past it must pay to the future." (19th century suffragette Abigail Scott Duniway)

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