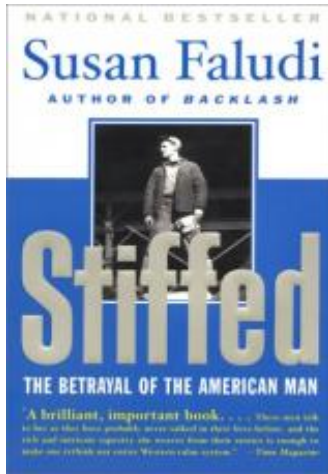


Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man

by Susan Faludi



About the Book

One of the most talked-about books of last year, the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Backlash* now explores the collapse of traditional masculinity that has left men feeling betrayed. With *Backlash* in 1991, Susan Faludi broke new ground when she put her finger directly on the problem bedeviling women, and the light of recognition dawned on millions of her readers: what's making women miserable isn't something they're doing to themselves in the name of independence. It's something our society is doing to women. The book was nothing less than a landmark. Now in *Stiffed*, the author turns her attention to the masculinity crisis plaguing our culture at the end of the '90s, an era of massive layoffs, "Angry White Male" politics, and Million Man marches. As much as the culture wants to proclaim that men are made miserable--or brutal or violent or irresponsible--by their inner nature and their hormones, Faludi finds that even in the world they supposedly own and run, men are at the mercy of cultural forces that disfigure their lives and destroy their chance at happiness. As traditional masculinity continues to collapse, the once-valued male attributes of craft, loyalty, and social utility are no longer honored, much less rewarded. Faludi's journey through the modern masculine landscape takes her into the lives of individual men whose accounts reveal the heart of the male dilemma. *Stiffed* brings us into the world of industrial workers, sports fans, combat veterans, evangelical husbands, militiamen, astronauts, and troubled "bad" boys--whose sense that they've lost their skills, jobs, civic roles, wives, teams, and a secure future is only one symptom of a larger and historic betrayal.

Discussion Guide

1. Faludi writes that she began her research with the assumption that the "male crisis in America was caused by something men were doing unrelated to something being done to them" (p. 7). With what assumptions did you approach this book? In what ways did Susan Faludi's research undermine your preconceptions? Confirm them?

2. What solutions do you see for reconstructing our culture's prescriptions for manhood?
3. Discuss the ways in which shame has been instilled in American men.
4. Why has it been so difficult to pinpoint the root of the masculinity crisis? Why has feminism been perceived as such an emasculating force?
5. Throughout Faludi's research, men make reference to their inability to recognize themselves in their own reflections. What is it about themselves that men are unable to recognize?
6. Faludi observes that for the men she interviewed, "Beyond all the public double crosses . . . lay their fathers' desertion" (p. 596). How did postwar American men desert their sons and why? Where else can men look to find role models and heroes that represent and give meaning to manhood?
7. Faludi writes that "for some men . . . there was no winning for losing in a world where they had been taught that winning was all and losing less than nothing" (p. 580). Who is the opponent? Where does this paradigm come from? How is this taught?
8. Does the fact that this book is written by a woman color your reading of the text?
9. Discuss which man's story or profile you found particularly resonant. Which most surprised you?
10. Faludi asserts that men and women need to work together "to wage a battle against no enemy, to own a frontier of human liberty, to act in the service of a brotherhood that includes us all" (p. 608). How do you think men's and women's needs would differ in this enlightened brotherhood?
11. How do you think the plight of today's boys differs from that of today's men?
12. Why do you think Susan Faludi chose *Stiffed* as a title for this book? What have men been cheated out of? What is every person owed? Who owes it to us?

Author Bio

Susan Faludi is a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and the author of *THE TERROR DREAM*, *STIFFED*, and *BACKLASH*, which won the National Book Critics Circle Award for Nonfiction. A former reporter for *The Wall Street Journal*, she has written for *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, *Harper's* and *The Baffler*, among other publications.

Critical Praise

"Susan Faludi's *Backlash* . . . [is] the most important book on women in recent decades . . . *Stiffed* is even better than *Backlash*. It is a significant and serious work. "

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