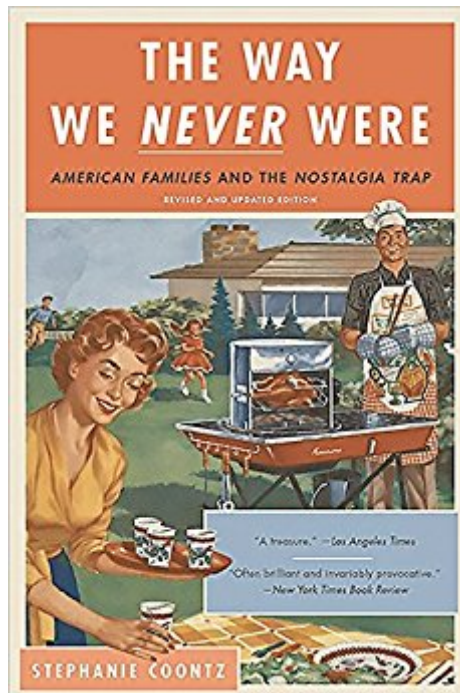




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# The Way We Never Were: American Families And The Nostalgia Trap



## Synopsis

"Often brilliant and invariably provocative." --New York Times Book Review  
Leave It to Beaver was not a documentary, a man's home has never been his castle, the 'male breadwinner marriage' is the least traditional family in history, and rape and sexual assault were far higher in the 1970s than they are today. In *The Way We Never Were*, acclaimed historian Stephanie Coontz provides a myth-shattering examination of two centuries of the American family, sweeping away misconceptions about the past that cloud current debates about domestic life. The 1950s do not present a workable model of how to conduct our personal lives today, Coontz argues, and neither does any other era from our cultural past. This revised edition includes a new introduction and epilogue, looking at what has and has not changed since the original publication in 1992, and exploring how the clash between growing gender equality and growing economic inequality is reshaping family life, marriage, and male-female relationships in our modern era. Now more relevant than ever, *The Way We Never Were* continues to be a potent corrective to dangerous nostalgia for an American tradition that never really existed.

## Customer Reviews

Jonathan Yardley, *Washington Post Book World*: "[Coontz] approaches the subject of what we now insist up on calling 'family values' with what is, in the current atmosphere, a refreshing lack of partisan cant. The National Memo: Stephanie Coontz's 1992 book was a work of first-rate history, and it undermined a slew of common misperceptions of family life in America, but it was also a plea to take off the rose-colored glasses that cause us to get so many political issues wrong. Fittingly, Coontz's publisher, Basic Books, has released a revised edition just as the moralizing we've come to expect from presidential campaigns kicks into overdrive. The Society Pages: The latest edition of Stephanie Coontz's *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* is an essential read for policymakers; Coontz's book makes for an absorbing, sometimes shocking, often wryly funny read. Both comprehensive and comprehensible, it's a veritable one-stop shop for reliable research on how public policy and culture affect families. Linda Burton, Dean of Social Sciences and James B. Duke Professor of Sociology, Duke University: There is no better commentary on the status and processes of American families than *The Way We Never Were*. Stephanie Coontz writes about the realities of family life in an uncompromising way that integrates evidence-based research with the souls and everyday lives of kin within and across generations and across time and space. In my family sociology courses a spontaneous awakening

occurs for students who read this book for the first time. They never look at families the same way, which is a game changer as they consider family life in their futures and question the meaning of families in their present lives. Stephanie Coontz has given the field a true gift that guides us in a journey of understanding the evolution of family life in real time and under real circumstances. Illuminating, provocative, and a must read for all! — Los Angeles Times; A treasure.... Coontz's ample evidence exposes the falseness, sentimentality and self-righteousness of most public statements about the family. — New York Times Book Review; Often brilliant and invariably provocative. — Minneapolis Star Tribune; [The Way We Never Were is] one of the few books I've carried with me through years and moves because it's a welcome and hopeful reminder that families always have faced, and overcome, transitions and challenges. In the revised book, Coontz offers an equally honest and upbeat review of the way things really are, despite dire predictions of a culture in crisis. — Entertainment Weekly; Coontz reminds us that the 'good old days' were never quite that in her excellent history of the American family. — The Oklahoman

Stephanie Coontz is a member of the faculty of Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington, where she is a historian and an expert on American culture.

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