



Stiffed

By Susan Faludi
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Synopsis

In this landmark book, Susan Faludi, the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Backlash*, explores the masculinity crisis plaguing our culture at the end of the millennium. As much as the culture proclaims that men are made miserable or brutal or useless by their own inner nature and design, Faludi finds that even in the world they supposedly own and control -- men are at the mercy of cultural forces. In a culture driven by entertainment, technology, and consumerism, in an era of massive downsizing, fractured militia groups, and Promise Keepers, American men have watched as the culture has stripped their lives of power and identity.

Faludi's journey into the modern male landscape takes her into the lives of men whose accounts reveal the heart of the male crisis. Bringing us into the world of Vietnam veterans, astronauts, porn stars, sports fans, industrial workers, gang members, and transvestites, Susan Faludi exposes the loss of something more fundamental even than men's skills or wives or teams or ability to provide: they have been robbed of their sense of themselves as men.

Discussion Points

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?