

The History of Magazines

Articles had been published in periodical format in England since the turn of the eighteenth century. Daniel Defoe started the first English magazine, *The Review*, in 1704 during or just after his imprisonment for criticizing the Church of England. His purpose was to offer his comment, criticism and satire to influence public taste. The form of the *Review* set the form for British journals: four small pages, dense print, few illustrations (except some engraved borders and lettering) and most of the compelling force contained in the acerbic, airborne sarcasm of the text.

Joseph Addison, a high bred moralist and social critic, followed the form in his essays for his friend Richard Steele's *Tatler*. When the *Tatler* folded Addison created *The Spectator*, the most famous of the early British journals. It looked just like newspapers of the time: a daily 8 x 12-1/2, one-page paper, printed on both sides. It had tiny print, no illustrations, and, maybe, half a column of classified ads. It is considered a magazine because instead of news, it printed comment. Each issue was written by entirely by Addison or Steele; occasionally by a friend.

Addison introduced the short informal essay and the short fiction story to English literature in his magazine. *The Spectator* lasted three years, but hundreds of others appeared to replace it.

In 1731, Edward Cave published the first issue of *The Gentleman's Magazine*, the first periodical to feature a mix of informative and entertaining genres, and the first to call itself a "magazine."

Ten years later, the first magazines in the American colonies appeared, following the British formats, published by Benjamin Franklin and Andrew Bradford. Franklin came up with the idea first, but Bradford beat

him to press by three days. Franklin's *General Magazine* lasted longer, primarily because he exploited his role as Postmaster General for the colonies.

England did not have a general post office until 1657. In 1691, Thomas Neale was granted unique authority to create a post office system in the American colonies. At the time, the colonies were physically isolated, with little trade or travel between colonies, so transporting letters and packages was difficult. Franklin's appointment as postmaster in Philadelphia and subsequently as Postmaster General for the colonies gave him a significant advantage over his rival: he was able to distribute his magazines with no postage charge, and even forbid post riders from carrying his rival's magazine.

Following the ratification of the First Amendment, guaranteeing freedom of the press, Congress fixed postal rates in 1792, which proved prohibitive for magazines. A revision two years later lowered rates on magazines, but production and distribution rates remained high and magazines were still a luxury for a privileged, literate elite. A circulation of 500 would have been high.

In the nineteenth century, increased literacy, a larger middle class, and westward expansion led to a greater demand for magazines that could transmit information to the frontier. In 1863, postage

rates were streamlined into first-, second-, and third-class rates, and then in 1879, the three classes of mail were reorganized so that magazines now enjoyed the same low postage cost as newspapers. Improved techniques in paper manufacturing and printing machinery, including color printing beginning in the 1860s, lowered production costs. As a result, the number of magazines



boomed, and the highest magazine circulations climbed from 40,000 before the Civil War to 100,000 by the end of the century.

Ads slowly began to be integrated into the same pages as articles in the 1890s. By the 1910s, stories and articles were interspersed with ads, now printed in four colors, and split across separate pages to create the look of the modern magazine form we're familiar with. For the first time, magazine distribution from coast to coast, with extensive rural delivery, and single-copy newsstand copies became mainstream. But the increased revenue came with a political cost; Congress finally found the courage to brave the onslaught of a hostile press, raising the cost of second-class postage in 1917 for the first time, buried in legislation for funding the Great War. Magazine postage was assigned a flat rate for editorial while ad rates varied by zone, continuing a trend of increasingly complex postal regulations.

The first really successful magazine in the United States was the *Saturday Evening Post*, first published in 1821. It lasted as a weekly publication until 1969, after which it appeared somewhat sporadically.

Magazines Find An Audience

In 1825, there were fewer than 100 magazines in the country; by 1850 the number had swelled to 600, and magazines were well established as a mass medium. At that time, many magazines also took a "viewpoint" on issues. For example, during the Civil War, which was primarily fought over the issue of slavery, northern magazines often espoused antislavery views, and southern magazines typically attacked these views.

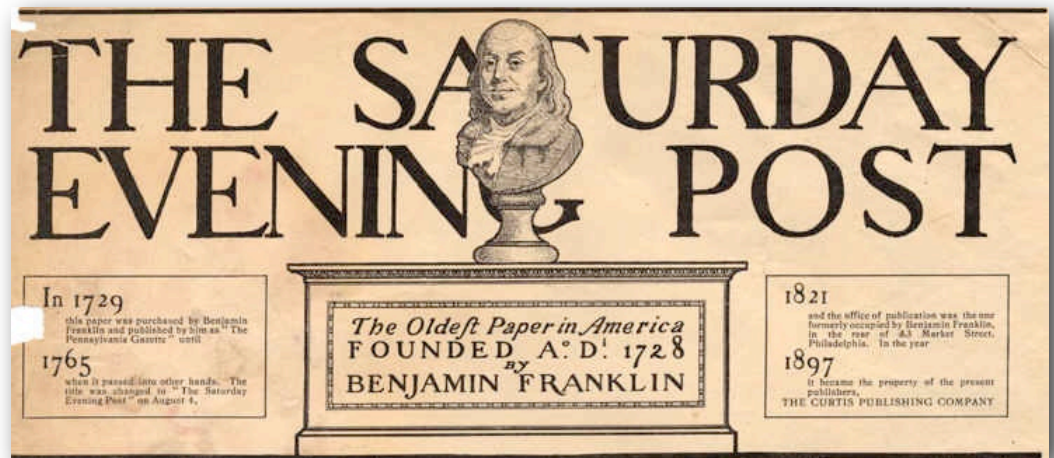
Thus, magazines served to strengthen the opposing views and reinforce divisions of thought—which in large measure fueled the war. Harriet Beecher Stowe's book, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which also fueled the Civil War, was first serialized in a magazine.

Technological developments in typology, printing, and distribution also meant that the price of magazines dropped dramatically during this era. For example, the *Saturday Evening Post* sold for five-cents a copy. Further spurring the popularity of magazines was compulsory education, which meant that more and more people learned to read. Consequently, by 1900, there were more than 5,000 magazines in the United States.

The Muckrakers

By the 1900s there were hundreds of thousands of European immigrants living in the United States. They had in large measure been attracted to the U.S. because many new jobs were being created by industrialization. But, these workers were paid abysmally low wages, their working conditions were deplorable, and they often wound up living in slums. At the same time, the owners of the companies lived in luxurious homes and pursued lavish lifestyles. Not surprisingly, major animosity developed between the classes.

Seeing the great injustice, magazine writers began to do exposés on the conditions. In the process they uncovered major corporate and political corruption, which in part had been blocking needed reform. Of course, the



journalists who exposed these injustices weren't popular with business or political leaders. This not only made their jobs harder (magazines obviously depend on advertising), but it even made their work dangerous.

President Theodore Roosevelt coined the term muckraker to express his dislike for this form of journalism—a term that could be considered an insult or a compliment, depending on which side of the tracks you lived on.

Upton Sinclair, one of the most famous muckrakers, tackled another issue: the unsanitary conditions in Chicago's meat packing houses. Because of resulting political pressure, President Roosevelt sponsored the Pure Food and Drug Act and the Meat Inspection Act, and things were cleaned up.

Other muckraking articles exposed the corrupt and illegal business practices of John D. Rockefeller and the widespread corruption in the labor unions. Magazines did exposés on the tens of thousands of workers that were injured or made ill by the working conditions, and the many woman who had to turn to prostitution just to feed their families. Thus, early magazines emerged as a major,

albeit controversial, force in society and found a solid place with the working class.

The National Geographic

One of the most influential magazines to appear during the early years of magazine history was *National Geographic*, in 1899. Largely through the high-quality photo essays it pioneered, this publication opened up new vistas of cultural awareness and understanding.

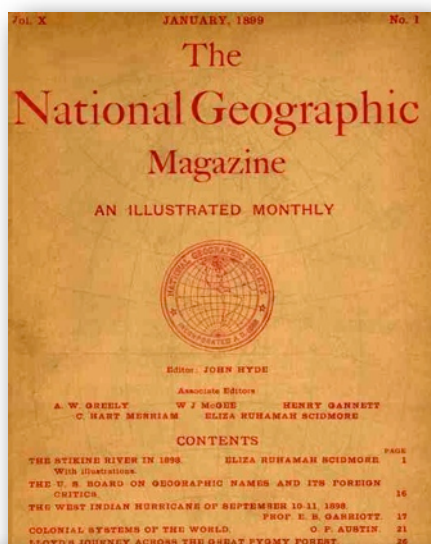
Some of the cultural awareness was not deemed acceptable by certain segments of U.S. society, however. When bare-breasted African and Filipino women were shown as they normally appeared in their villages, the *Geographic* got a flood of complaints.

Even so, the *Geographic* maintained that their mission was to accurately depict the world in which different cultures lived and that censoring commonplace elements in these cultures would violate that principle.

Life magazine also ran into problems with Victorian sensibilities when it documented the birth of a baby in 1939. That issue was banned in 33 cities.

National Geographic is a sponsored publication, like *Modern Maturity*, *American Legion*, and numerous publications that would appear later. The magazine is “free” as part of an organizational membership. The National Geographic Society uses proceeds from the magazine to pursue cultural and wildlife research, and to produce their famous documentary films.

Over the years, the *Graphic* has had notable “firsts.” In 1911 it featured a 17-page, eight-foot foldout panorama of the Canadian Rockies. To mark the magazine’s 100th anniversary the cover featured a three-dimensional photograph (hologram), the first ever published in a mass-audience magazine. Unlike most of the early magazines, the *National Geographic* still remains one of the top U.S. magazines.



The first covers of *National Geographic* and *Time* magazine

Newsmagazines

With the approach of international conflict in Europe and the beginning of World War I, magazines started featuring articles on international issues.

Facing threats from Germany, the British conducted an open campaign to lure the United States into the looming war—going so far as to plant stories of German atrocities in magazines (that they knew that U.S. magazines had a habit of copying). Many of the stories were false, but they still

had the effect of starting to inflame U.S. attitudes against Germany. Even so, there was considerable opposition in the United States to becoming embroiled in a world war. President Woodrow Wilson, who reportedly regularly read English magazines, was convinced that the United States should enter the war.

Eventually he was able to win over a major part of the U.S. population. As the implications of the situation become more evident, people in the United States started relying more and more on newspapers and magazines for information on the worsening conditions. With the heightened interest in world events, another opportunity presented itself—an entire magazine devoted to news.

In 1923, Henry Luce, who had just graduated from Yale, begged and borrowed \$86,000 from friends and relatives to start *Time* magazine. The first edition is shown here. It was four years before *Time* saw a profit, but once it got rolling, it moved on to make magazine history.

Among other things, *Time* established a distinct style of reporting and writing. The term “timespeak” was coined to cover the magazine’s “cut-to-the-chase,” sometimes irreverent, but always authoritative approach. A decade or so later, two other newsmagazines appeared: *U.S. News* (later to be known as *U.S. News and World Report*) and *Newsweek*.

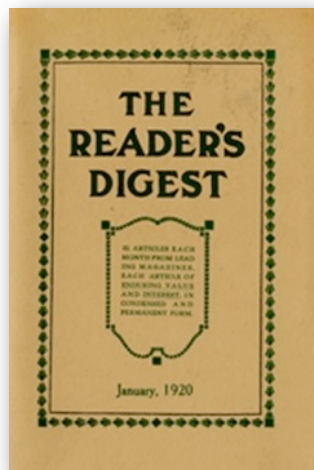
By 2002, a trend was seen in newsmagazines to move away from hard news and shift their focus toward more

feature (soft news) articles. By the time people get these magazines they are already familiar with news events from watching cable news channels. Although the news channels may be able to provide more up-to-the-minute information, they do not provide the depth and perspective associated with newsmagazines.

The Reader's Digest

Although most general interest magazines (magazines with internal specialization) have ceased publication, a noteworthy exception is the *Reader's Digest*. Founded in 1922 by DeWitt and Lila Wallace, the Digest has tried throughout the years to offer something to everyone by condensing (digesting) articles from a wide variety of publications.

The *Digest* publishes several foreign language editions. The version represented on the left above is in Tai and one on the right is in Russian. A large part of this magazine's subscription success in the United States has been based on extensive use of contests and targeted mail.



Housekeeper, but she dropped the last three words in 1886. It rapidly became the leading American magazine of its type, reaching a circulation of more than one million copies in ten years. At the turn of the 20th century, the magazine published the work of muckrakers and social reformers such as Jane Addams.

During World War II, it was a particularly favored venue of the government for messages intended for housewives.

The *Journal*, along with its major rivals, were long known as the "seven sisters" — *Better Homes & Gardens*, *Family Circle*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, *McCall's*, *Redbook*, and *Woman's' Day*. For decades, the *Journal* had the greatest circulation of this group, but it fell behind *McCall's* in 1961. In 1968, its circulation was

6.8 million compared to *McCall's* 8.5 million.

Reaching much younger female demographics today are magazines such as *Cosmopolitan*, *Seventeen*, and *YM*. *Cosmopolitan* started out as a general interest magazine, even featuring many noteworthy muckraking investigative pieces. However, when TV came along and spelled the demise of most of the general interest

magazines, "*Cosmo*" had a new birth as a magazine for young woman with an interest in men, sex, and personal success.



Women's Magazines

Women's magazines represent the largest and most financially successful magazine category. Advertisers are fond of these publications because they target the segment of the population that buys the most consumer products.

One of the longest published women's magazines is *Ladies' Home Journal*. It first appeared on February 16, 1883, and eventually became one of the leading women's magazines of the 20th century in the United States.

The Ladies' Home Journal arose from a popular single-page supplement in the American magazine *Tribune and Farmer* titled *Women at Home*. *Women at Home* was written by Louisa Knapp Curtis, wife of the magazine's publisher Cyrus H. K. Curtis. After a year it became an independent publication with Knapp as editor for the first six years. Its original name was *The Ladies Home Journal and Practical*



Men's Magazines

The first major "glossy" men's magazine was *Esquire*, which was founded in 1933. *Esquire* featured pinups and impressive literary features.

In 1953, Hugh Hefner, who was originally on the staff of *Esquire*, founded *Playboy*. The first edition contained nude photos of Marilyn Monroe—before she became something of a superstar. Hefner didn't put a date on the magazine because he didn't know if there would ever

be a second edition. However, it sold out as soon as it hit the newsstands. Subscriptions to *Playboy* soon surpassed those of *Esquire*.

The magazine developed a history of publishing short stories by such notable writers as Arthur C. Clarke, Ian Fleming, Vladimir Nabokov, and Margaret Atwood. Like *Readers' Digest*, *Playboy* has several international editions.

Playboy sales suffered when moralists such as Attorney General Edward Meese branded the publication “pornographic,” and was able to get it banned (at least for a time) in stores such as the 7-Eleven. Meese, whose anti-pornography views were well known, was put in charge of a government commission to determine if pornography was harmful. The previous government studies had found that it wasn't, and for political reasons the conservative Republican administration wanted a major study to prove otherwise. But, even this extensive study was something of a disappointment to the administration.

Like so many magazines, the future of *Playboy* is uncertain. Although the magazine, itself, only constitutes about 25% of the income of Playboy Enterprises, due to a major dip in advertising, rising production and distribution costs, the Internet, and the shifting demographics of readers, the magazine was losing millions of dollars.

Not all men's magazine dwell on sex, of course. Other popular magazines include *Popular Science* and *Field & Stream*. And there are numerous magazines devoted to cars, motorcycles and computers that have large male readerships.

Highbrow Magazines

Magazines such as *Harper's*, *The New Yorker*, and *Atlantic* appeal to the so-called intelligentsia. These magazines, which date back to the 1850s, typically go into depth on cultural and political issues. But, they have a limited audience, and, as a result, they have had a hard time surviving.

At the same time, their influence among selected audiences can be significant. *The New Republic*, *Nation*, and *Progressive* have liberal traditions.

Others, such as William Buckley's *National Review* appeal to conservatives. The latter publication, which in some ways, is much more impressive than its liberal counterparts, loses more than \$100,000 a year. It is kept afloat

largely by donations from conservative factions.

Television TV news channels such as MSNBC and Fox News have in large measure taken over as sources of information for the liberal and conservative viewpoints.

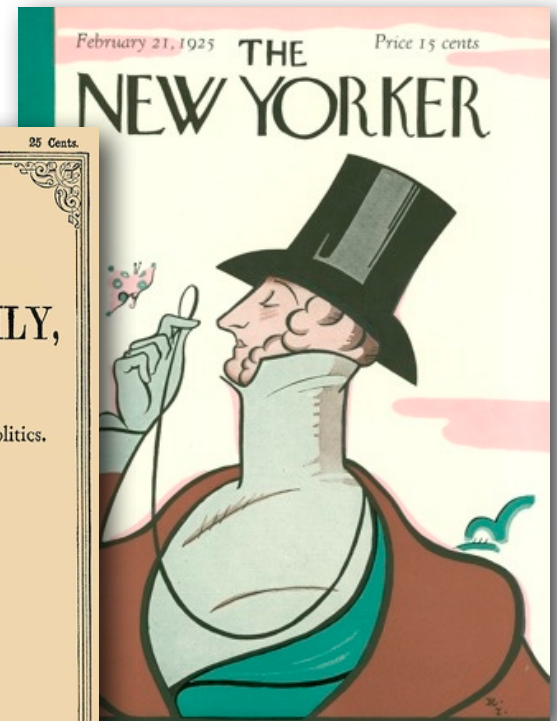
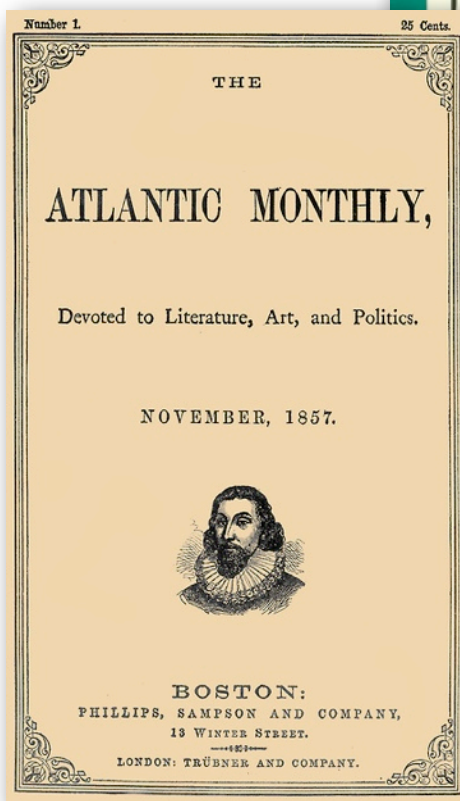
Trade Publications

The “trades” are limited circulation magazines designed to serve professionals working in specialized areas. Some, especially those that derive most of their income from paid subscriptions, serve their professions with timely, accurate, and unbiased articles.

Along with the Internet and professional conferences, these publications are relied upon by a wide variety of professionals to stay current with developments in their fields.

In particular, the trade publications of McGraw-Hill and Crain are noted for their honest, hard-hitting reporting of the industries they cover.

Other trades—primarily those that depend heavily on advertising for their survival—feature “reviews” of products and services that are simply puff pieces designed to support the views of advertisers. Rather than present ob-



An early cover of the *Atlantic* and the first cover of the *New Yorker*

jective articles, these publications carefully avoid anything that would hurt their advertisers and do little more than expand on the concepts put forth in their paid advertising. It's often a tip-off, if you note that a trade publication with large ad for a product also features a positive article on the same product.

The Television "Magazine"

In recent years, television has partially usurped the traditional role of the magazine by producing "news magazine" programs following on the tradition of muckraking journalism.

Originally, the networks used the documentary form to expose issues they felt were relevant to their audiences. In more recent times, most 30- or 60-minute documentary programs have basically disappeared. (Although other countries, such as Canada and Britain, regularly broadcast many excellent documentaries.) In the United States, full-length, hard-hitting documentaries, such as "Harvest of Shame," have all but disappeared (with the exception of public television shows like Frontline). "Shame," which focused on the exploitation of migrant workers, not only garnered many awards, but also put the spotlight on a major social problem.

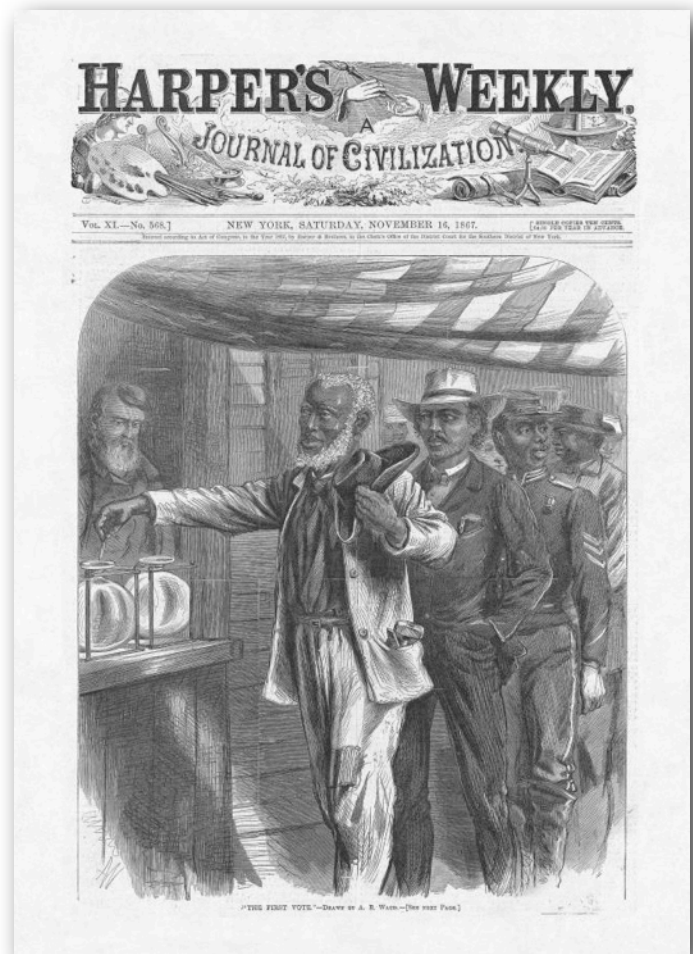
Documentaries are less attractive to networks because they can be expensive to produce. They generally require considerable research and production time. In addition, documentaries that tackle important topics often "step on the toes" of influential individuals and corporations. Regardless of truth, this can spark expensive lawsuits. Today, the full-length documentary void has been partially filled by highly rated news magazine programs such as *60 Minutes* and *Dateline*.

As defined by *60 Minutes*, one of the longest-running and most successful programs in television history, news magazine shows "strive to present an in-depth, objective, interview-based perspective on current political and/or social issues, or on a significant personality." The formula, first established by Panorama on the BBC in 1953 has proved successful around the world. Television news magazines provide several stories not seen on regular newscasts, including celebrity profiles, coverage of big businesses, hidden camera techniques, better international coverage, exposing and correcting injustices, in-depth coverage of a headline story, and hot topic interviews.

60 Minutes went so far as to introduce each of its three featured stories with a giant backdrop that looked like a magazine opened to a cover story. Though news shows changed over the years—often to a more tabloid-influenced style of journalism—this has remained a reliable way for winning over viewers and creating familiar-

ity with a small group of compelling reporter personalities.

In the United States, television news magazines were very popular in the 1990s, since they were a cheap and easy way to better utilize the investment in network news departments. In addition to *60 Minutes*, some of the most prominent of the programs are/were *Dateline NBC*, *20/20*, and *48 hours*. Television news magazines once aired five nights a week on most television networks. However, with the success of reality shows, news magazines have largely been supplanted. Reality shows cost slightly less to produce and attain a younger and more loyal audience than the news magazines they replaced. Thus, the audience once attracted to news magazine shows have largely drifted to cable television, where common news magazine topics such as nature, science, celebrities, and politics all have their own channels.



A post-Civil War cover of *Harper's Weekly* showing blacks voting for the first time. The publication later became *Harper's Magazine*.

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