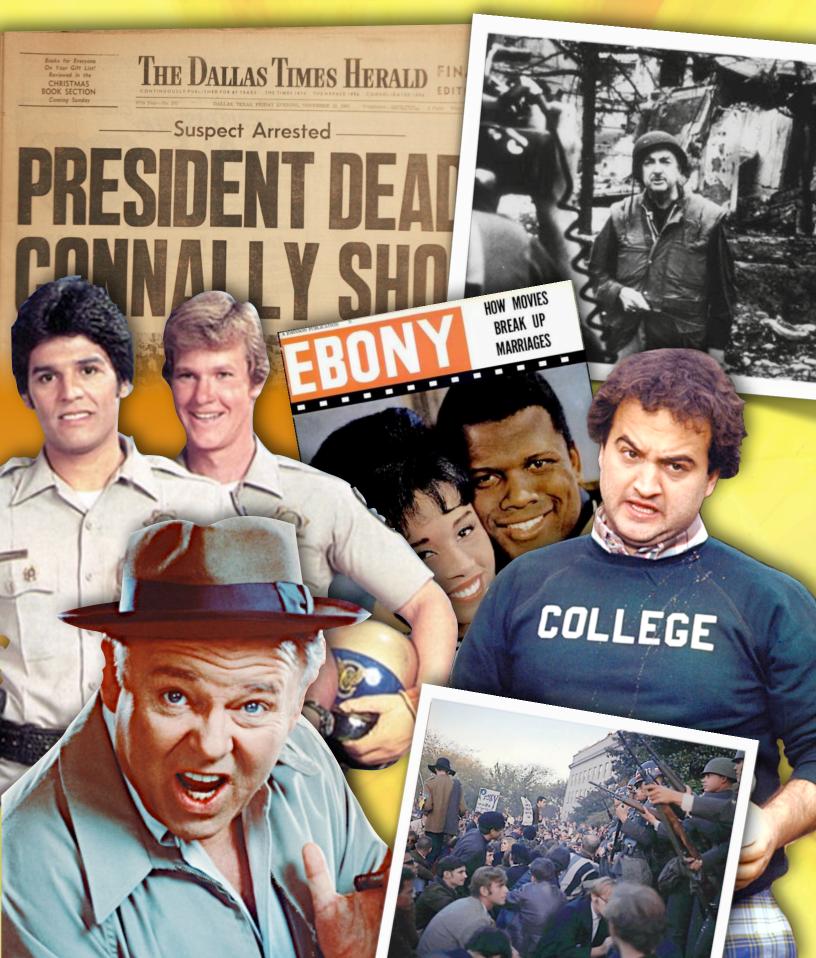
# Media in the 1960s & 1970s



# The 1960s: Media: Overview

#### Not a Revolution

In the media, if not in other segments of American life, the 1960s were a decade of consolidation, not revolution. After the radical change brought about by television in the 1950s, the next decade was consumed with evolutionary change as television and radio broadcasters, newspaper and magazine publishers, and the general public attempted to come to terms with the revolution they had made in the previous decade.

#### **Technical Problems**

The television industry saw two new technological wrinkles come into widespread use, but neither was a new idea. By the end of the decade the majority of programs were broadcast in color, even if in 1967 only 15 percent of American homes were equipped with color television. UHF-band broadcasting was also given the regulatory go-ahead, though it was still looked down upon as a poor substitute for VHF broadcasting.



A magazine ad for an RCA color TV featuring the NBC peacock logo developed especially for its full-color program lineup.

#### Content, or the Lack Thereof

Whatever the technical format of the broadcasting, the content of the programs being shown became a center of controversy during the decade. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) chairman Newton Minow came into office in 1961 with a strong condemnation of the poor quality of most television programs. Network officials responded that they only gave the audience what it wanted. And it apparently did not want the level of cultural broadcasting that Minow and other critics desired.



FCC chairman, Newton Mino, who called television "a vast wasteland."

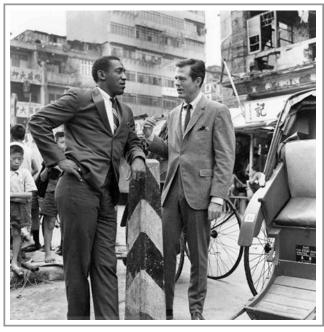
#### **Public Television**

One solution, if not the one Minow advocated, was the formation of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) and the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) in 1967. Up and running by 1969, PBS and the programs funded by the CPB gave viewers alternatives to network broadcasting that were not otherwise available until the rise of cable in the 1980s. Children's television was one of the prime concerns of the CPB, one of its first programs being Sesame Street. The woeful level of children's programming on the networks was a topic late in the decade, but not until the 1970s was it seriously addressed.

#### **Social Issues**

With the social turmoil of the 1960s—the assassinations, the civil rights movement, the anti-Vietnam War protests, the youth culture—television was compelled to address the issues facing the American public. Black

Americans gained a more prominent position on television during the decade, as did young people. Most critics pointed out that television did a poor job in its attempts at investigating and explaining social problems but that the society at large did not do a good job either. Nonetheless, the goal of bringing more segments of the American public into the world of television was a new and laudable one, however imperfectly realized.



Bill Cosby in one of his first TV roles as a tennis-playing international spy. "I Spy" also stared Robert Culp as his partner and was the first drama to feature an African-American in a lead role.

#### Rise of Television News

The 1960s were the decade of television news. Beginning with President John F. Kennedy, presidential press

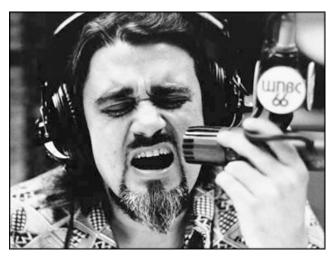


Walter Cronkite announcing the death of President Kennedy, live on CBS. The breaking story interrrupted CBS's usual soap opera lineup.

conferences began to be held according to the needs of television, a change that did not enthrall the print journalists. But even they had to recognize the superiority of television's coverage of the 1963 assassination of Kennedy. The five days of almost-continuous coverage given by the networks to the events surrounding Kennedy's death, the killing of Lee Harvey Oswald, and the Kennedy funeral had a drama and immediacy that other media could not come close to matching.

#### Radio

Other big news events throughout the decade—the Vietnam War, the Apollo moon landings—played to the strengths of television and reduced the relative stature that other media had historically enjoyed. Radio, which had for decades been the medium of immediacy, found itself becoming what Newton Minow called "publicly franchised jukeboxes." Helped by the development of the transistor and the truly portable radio set, most radio programmers adapted well to the medium's changed role of providing musical entertainment to young people and automobile drivers.



Popular disc-jockey Wolfman Jack, whose gravelly voiced delivery made him a favorate for over two decades.

# The Plight of Newspapers

Newspapers, however, were still struggling both with their mission in a world with television and the economics of their changing business. Faced with an audience which now had many more choices for news and entertainment, newspapers also were hit with rising production costs, stubborn unions, and a changing newspaper market. Newspapers found that they were outclassed by television as immediate news outlets and

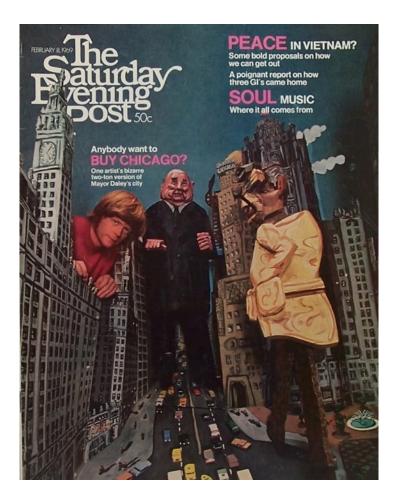
by radio and television as entertainment and as advertising outlets. During the decade most newspaper markets underwent severe rationalization; in New York the number of major daily newspapers shrank from seven in 1959 to three in 1967. Total newspaper circulation in the city was reduced during the same period from 5.1 million to 3.5 million. Total circulation for all newspapers in the United States rose slightly to 62.1 million by 1971 but remained stagnant thereafter. Small-town newspapers were responsible for much of this growth, so larger newspapers were left with a smaller slice of the circulation pie.

### **Magazines**

Magazines faced many of the same troubles as newspapers. By the 1950s and 1960s general-interest magazines were no longer thought of as a major source of entertainment for the general public, despite the fact that circulations had remained steady. As a result, advertising became harder to attract in competition with television and radio. Magazines were also troubled with rising costs at a time when revenues were stagnant. One of the best-known American magazines, the Saturday Evening Post, disappeared in 1969, a victim not of a lack of quality but of the public's and advertisers' lack of interest. The great age of the generalinterest magazine was over; successful publications were either those which serviced niche markets—such as Penthouse, the English soft pornography magazine—or those, like the news-magazines, which served more utilitarian purposes. The major newsmagazines—Time and Newsweek—continued to flourish, both part of media empires: Time, part of Henry Luce's Time-Life; and Newsweek, since 1961 part of Katherine and Philip Graham's Washington Post Company.

## The World to Come

Change is constant, though the nature of that change is variable. Just as the revolutionary change of the 1950s had its origins in developments in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, events in the 1960s would not have their full impact until the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. The



The last cover of the the Saturday Evening Post, February 8, 1969

launch of the Telstar and Early Bird satellites affected the media in the 1960s, but it would be the 1970s and 1980s before opportunities for global broadcasting would be more fully realized. The regulatory mess with UHF broadcasting would affect the development of cable television in the 1980s. The ultimate effects of media changes in the 1960s have yet to be felt fully.

"The 1960s: Media: Overview." American Decades. 2001. Encyclopedia.com. (August 30, 2013). http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-3468302373.html

# The 1970s: Media: Overview

# The Worst of Times, the Best of Times

After the social and cultural upheavals of the 1960s, the 1970s in general seemed a less exciting decade. In the media, however, things were definitely exciting, particularly as the concerns of the preceding decade affected everyday practice in newspapers, magazines, radio, and television. The media helped to uncover military abuses during the Vietnam War and exposed a corrupt presidential administration; magazines promoted social reforms with a vigor they had lacked for several years; and even television adopted a more socially responsible standpoint. The United States as a whole may have seemed to linger in a cultural and political malaise during the 1970s, but the media were more active than ever.

#### Relevance

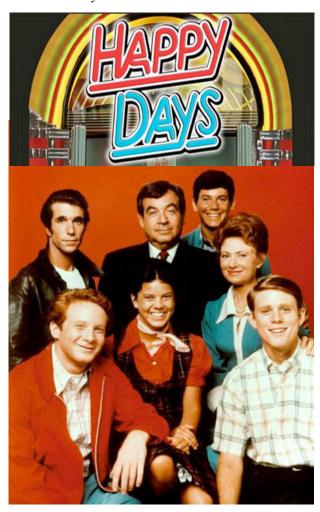
Because of the political malaise of the decade, many social problems were addressed in the media and entertainment rather than in more practical arenas. Much of the entertainment media was simply commercial, but even popular situation comedies and television dramas addressed social issues. Norman Lear's situation comedies, particularly *All in the Family*, dealt with controversial issues television usually avoided, such as race relations, feminism, sexuality, and abortion. Likewise, M\*A\*S\*H mixed the humor of the sitcom with the horror of a war drama. A new wave of minority comedies, such as *Stanford and Son, Good Times*, *Chico and the Man*, and *The Jeffersons*, employed

(Above right) M\*A\*S\*H was one of the most-watched shows on TV for 11 years. (Right) The cast of Good TImes, one of a number of sticoms during the 1970s featuring a predominently African-American Cast. stereotypes occasionally—in fact, actor John Amos left *Good Times* in 1976 over a dispute with producer Lear about how the character of J. J. revived traditional caricatures of blacks—but such shows changed the nature of American television. On Saturday mornings kids could learn about the dangers of drugs and of strangers from a wide range of characters. Television was not alone in such matters: comic books violated their own content codes to promote antidrug messages, while new magazines such as *Ms*. and *Mother Jones* devoted themselves to progressive causes.



#### **Escape from Hard Times**

While the media entertained viewers, listeners, and readers, the serious issues kept piling up. The 1970s were depressing in many respects: Americans witnessed the fall of a president, defeat in Vietnam, recessions and energy crises, and fellow Americans held hostage. Given such a context, many Americans sought escapism instead of relevance. Programs with nostalgic themes, suggesting more innocent and less troubled times, were popular. Shows such as Laverne and Shirley and the show from which it was a spin-off, the tellingly titled *Happy Days*, painted a glowing portrait of a 1950s devoid of red-baiting or Cold War fears; Little House on the Prairie took Americans back to seemingly heroic pioneer days; and *The Waltons* even made the Depression look appealing. In an era of economic downturn, these shows emphasized family instead of prosperity—even if one's "family" was to be found at the workplace, as in *The Mary Tyler Moore* Show or Barney Miller.



Happy Days, like M\*A\*S\*H, was set in the 1950s, but was full of nostalgia for a seemingly simpler time.





Family-oriented programs playing to the national interest in nostalgia for simpler times included the much loved Little House on the Prairie (Top) and The Waltons. Both ran for nearly 10 seasons and were set in rurual America.

# **Television Reigns**

During the 1970s television, popular since its introduction in the late 1940s, dominated the media. Several television genres, such as the sitcom and the detective show, were especially popular, and many of them were critically acclaimed. Television also continued to threaten the viability of motion pictures, which were forced to go where television could not go and increasingly depended upon large doses of sex, violence, and expensive special effects. Not that television respected its established limitations: as the decade progressed the medium included more sex, violence, and high-tech wizardry than ever before. Television was also aided by improvements in technology that reached even more people. Advances in satellite technology and cable allowed the television news media direct coverage of international events, while the increased availability of color television sets made the medium even more popular than before.

# The Splintering of the Market

Another technique that assisted television in its domination of the media during the 1970s was an increased emphasis on targeting more-specific markets. Children could be watching a program directed at their age group in one room while parents watched an adult program in another room. The popularity of cable television, which began to blossom in the late 1970s and burgeoned during the 1980s, carried this trend even further. This target-audience approach was not limited to television, however. Radio stations and magazines continued to cater to more narrowly defined audiences, while newspapers added features and whole sections designed to appeal to specific interests. Older, generalinterest magazines such as Look and Life fell by the wayside, overshadowed by special-interest periodicals such as the restructured Cosmopolitan.

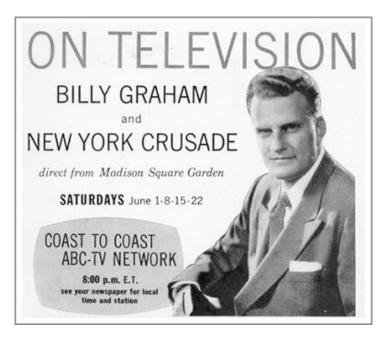
# The Restructuring of Radio

In the 1970s radio changed less than television or print media, but it changed nonetheless. Most radios in 1970 carried only one band, AM or FM. AM was more popular and more commercial: in 1970, 95 percent of American households owned an AM radio, in contrast to the 74 percent of homes owning an FM radio. That year there were more than four thousand commercial AM stations and only about two thousand commercial FM stations. AM signals carried farther than FM, but FM signals were clearer and could be broadcast in stereo. FM accordingly catered originally to those who sought high-fidelity broadcasts. Classical-music stations dominated the band, but beginning in the 1970s more and more FM stations adopted a format known as album-oriented rock (AOR), which originally meant that they played entire albums uninterrupted by commercials or talk and later came to mean any format playing songs from albums rather than individually released singles. In addition, FM in general tended to be more alternative—influenced in large part by college radio stations of the late 1960s and early 1970s and led the way in the assimilation of alternative culture into the mainstream during the decade. By the end of the 1970s the disparity between the popularity of AM and FM was nearly reversed, with FM stations,

which adopted popular music as their mainstay, practically dominating the radio market.

# **Going Conservative**

The so-called counterculture was not the only cultural movement to take advantage of new media technology and approaches; the growing conservative movement also made use of it. Christian broadcasting made use of cable and satellite television, extending influence beyond the South. Christian broadcasters also seized hold of less profitable, older technologies. Many conservatives bought AM radio stations or ultrahigh frequency (UHF) television channels. As the newspaper and magazine businesses restructured, conservatives gained news organs for their political and social perspectives. For instance, the Washington Times was bought by conservative Rev. Sun Myung Moon. Whereas the counterculture was assimilated by mainstream media and made to serve preestablished commercial purposes, conservatives took a less commercial, more ideological approach to the media business. After 1978 conservatives would become increasingly influential in American politics, contributing significantly to the 1980 conservative electoral victory.



Evangelist Billy Grahams's popularity rose during the 70s. He was a frequent visitor to the Nixon Whitehouse and was once offered the U.S. ambassadorship to Israel, which he declined.