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## Playboy

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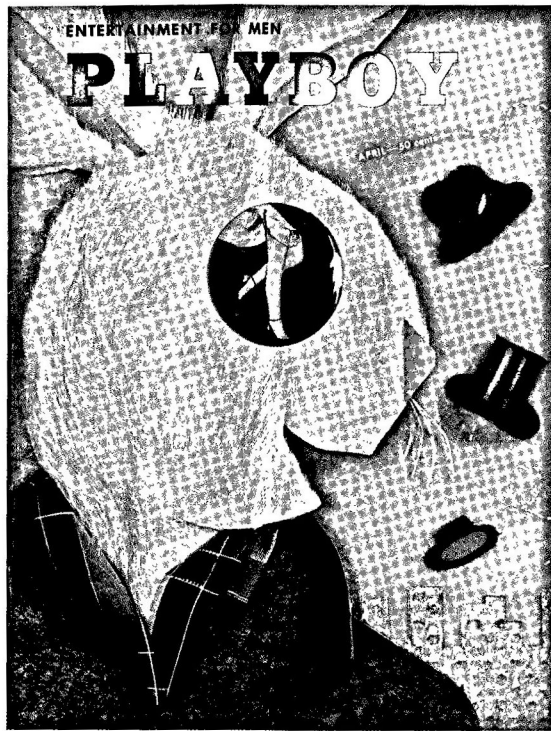
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# 77

## Playboy

CHICAGO: HMH PUBLISHING COMPANY,  
1953–PRESENT

**Timothy J. Gilfoyle**



*Playboy* magazine's inaugural issue appeared in December 1953 with Marilyn Monroe on the cover. During the ensuing half-century *Playboy* was an iconic publication in the pantheon of American magazines. The Chicago-based monthly has published works by many of the twentieth century's leading writers: Margaret Atwood, Arthur C. Clarke, Allen Ginsberg, LeRoi Jones, Gabriel García Márquez, Marshall McLuhan, Arthur Miller, Isaac Bashevis Singer, John Updike, Garry Wills, and others.<sup>1</sup> An extensive interview with a well-known public figure has been a common *Playboy* feature, including ones with President Jimmy Carter, Miles Davis, Martin Luther King Jr., John Lennon, and Vladimir Nabokov. Art by the likes of Art Spiegelman, Alberto Vargas, and Weegee has illustrated the pages. The magazine, however, has been best known for the provocative photo spreads of young women in various states of undress. *Playboy* came to symbolize sexual revolution, generated feminist outrage, and evoked new urban lifestyles.

The overt purpose of founding editor Hugh Hefner (1926–2017) was to feature “the girl next door” and promote “the Playboy lifestyle” for male readers. *Playboy* challenged the postwar domestic norms of early marriage, sexual fidelity, large families, and traditional concepts of masculinity.

Hefner, in both the magazine and life, glorified everything about bachelorhood: the city over the suburb, the apartment over the single-family home, urban adventure over suburban security, and heterosexual promiscuity over heterosexual monogamy. The *Playboy* ideal valorized unrestrained male heterosexuality, equating it with economic success and upward mobility. Hefner and his editors envisioned themselves as purveyors of sophisticated taste and expensive consumer behavior.<sup>2</sup>

Observers initially classified Hefner and *Playboy* as embodiments of a postwar sexual revolution. More accurately *Playboy* represented male rebellion. Hefner's resistance to Cold War cultural conservatism more often allied him with Beat writers Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac and rock-and-roll stars such as Elvis Presley. While *Playboy* never fully endorsed the alternative sexualities, aggressive anticapitalism, and recreational drug use that pervaded much of Beat and rock-and-roll culture, the latter's rejection of the white-collar "organization man," the female-controlled family, and the suburban ethos, however, revealed how much they shared.<sup>3</sup>

*Playboy* influenced the generations that came of age after World War II. By the 1970s, 20 percent of American men reportedly read it. Circulation peaked at 7.2 million in 1972. The magazine's success enabled Hefner to open Playboy Clubs in more than forty-five American and foreign cities, launch a television program, and purchase a property on Chicago's Gold Coast, which he named the Playboy Mansion.<sup>4</sup> The magazine served as a launching pad for numerous entertainers, including former Playmates Bettie Page and Anna Nicole Smith. Other celebrities appeared in the buff in *Playboy* to promote their careers: Drew Barrymore, Cindy Crawford, Bo Derek, Jayne Mansfield, and Sharon Stone. Pamela Anderson posed for fourteen different issues.<sup>5</sup>

*Playboy* also shaped other media. *Cosmopolitan* magazine aped *Playboy* in 1972 with a centerfold of the semiclad actor Burt Reynolds. In 1973 a counterpart for female audiences, *Playgirl* magazine, appeared. Hardcore pornographic competitors challenged *Playboy*, most notably Bob Guccione's *Penthouse* (1965) and Larry Flynt's *Hustler* (1974). The later magazines *FHM* (1985), *Maxim* (1995), and *Stuff* (1996) claimed to represent the new male lifestyle. These later competitors, along with internet-based publications and pornography, broke *Playboy*'s cultural dominance. In 2011 the magazine's circulation had dropped to 1.5 million, and by 2015, it was only eight hundred thousand.<sup>6</sup> The decline in circulation, however, did not hinder *Playboy*'s visibility. The *Playboy* logo—a rabbit head wearing a tuxedo bow tie—remains among the most recognized global brands into the twenty-first century. In 2016 the magazine decided to remove all nudity from the print edition. The experiment was short lived. In 2017 nudity returned.<sup>7</sup>

FACING In addition to the Playmate of the Month and a three-page spread of photographs of an unnamed nude female model, the April 1954 issue of *Playboy*'s contents included an installment of Ray Bradbury's science-fiction novel *Fahrenheit 451*; an article about jazz greats Benny Goodman, Count Basie, Gene Krupa, and others; and an essay by Benjamin Franklin, "Advice on the Choice of a Mistress."