



The American Magazine

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Commissioned by the Magazine Publishers of America and the American Society of Magazine Editors, this gorgeous book documents the rich variety of American magazines over a period of 250 years. As John Mack Carter acknowledges in his introduction, the book is “more celebration than history.” In fact, readers would be well-advised to avoid the snippets of text altogether; the forays into analysis by various hands are generally banal, glib, and irritating. For those who want to reflect on the images that intrigue, seduce, amuse, and anger us, there is plenty of raw material in this volume to follow the brilliant example set by Marshall McLuhan’s pioneering effort *THE MECHANICAL BRIDE* (1951).

No, there’s no *PLAYBOY* centerfold here (perhaps in deference to political correctness), an absence made more conspicuous by inclusion of a “data sheet” on a Playmate named Fawna MacLaren. There is, however, a full-page reproduction of the *ROLLING STONE* cover featuring a nude John Lennon acrobatically embracing Yoko Ono, not to mention a four-page spread devoted to the evolving portrayal of Richard Nixon.

It’s instructive to compare *THE AMERICAN MAGAZINE* with a similarly titled book published earlier in 1991 by Oxford University Press, *THE MAGAZINE IN AMERICA 1741-1990*. The Oxford volume, written by John Tebbel and Mary Ellen Zuckerman, is a strange hybrid of textbook and popular history, marred by numerous errors. Most important, though, it contains not a single illustration. The futility of such an enterprise is made evident by one look at its lavishly illustrated counterpart.

It would be nice to have a history of the American magazine that combined the visual splendors of this volume with a more substantial text. Meanwhile, coming at a time when the magazine industry has been hard-hit economically, publication of *THE AMERICAN MAGAZINE* gives magazine-lovers a bit of good news.

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