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Rejecting the Eloquence of Hate: 1972 Magazine Letters to the Editor

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Abstract

This article examines all the letters to the editor published in eight general interest magazines in 1972. The purpose is to sample public discussion of major events of the year. Some scholars have asserted that 1972 was the heyday of “the movement,” a time when the radical left was in full blossom. The popular legend maintains that the country moved so far to the left during this time that returning Vietnam veterans were spit upon—and the populace supported this. So how was the political, social, and cultural upheaval of the year reflected in letters to the editor in magazines across the United States? This research offers primary source material—the voice of the people themselves—that indicates public opinion was much more complicated than much of popular culture indicates. Many letter writers, for instance, said they had little tolerance for radicals, either left or right, and disavowed those who advocated any violence.

Keywords: letters to the editor, magazines, radicals, 1972

Introduction

If you asked magazine letters-to-the-editor writers to sum up their feelings about the year they had just survived, they could probably do it best by quoting from the popular folk song “Wasn’t That a Time”—“a terrible time, a time to try the soul of man.”¹ The consensus in letters to the editor published in eight popular magazines in 1972 was how difficult it was to cope with a collapsing economy, crazed terrorists routinely seizing commercial airplanes,² a potential Arab-Israeli war, skyrocketing tax rates, and an out-of-touch president overwhelmed by a foreign war. One letter writer described the mood of the country this way: “Crime is up, the economy’s down. The war goes on. Hordes of unemployed walk the streets. White and black are farther [sic] apart than ever. Our elderly find it impossible to exist.”³ Another letter writer said: “The U.S. taxpayer is shocked by how tax money is spent. The amount of money wasted and misspent is appalling.”⁴ Another letter complained that high taxes were driving hard-working average Americans to ruin.⁵ Still another letter writer described himself as “a Middle American taxpayer running out of patience.” He wrote, “My outrage is over the fantastic and ever-increasing demands of the federal government for more and more tax dollars. Congress continues to spend as though there were no bottom to the taxpayers pocket.”⁶

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If these readers' comments sound reminiscent of modern Tea Party rhetoric espoused by Sarah Palin aficionados and others, it might be interesting to note that these letter writers were not describing 2010 but rather 1972.

The research in this article examined all the letters to the editor, a total of 2,565, published in eight general interest magazines—*The Atlantic*,⁷ *Forbes*,⁸ *Harper's*,⁹ *The Nation*,¹⁰ *The New Republic*,¹¹ *Newsweek*,¹² *The Progressive*,¹³ and *Time*¹⁴—from January through December 1972. The goal was to gather public discussion of major events that year to see what a group of magazine readers said was important. These national magazines, representing small, medium, and large readership publications, were selected because of their broad reach across the U.S. They also appealed to a largely mainstream and middle-of-the-road audience.

Historian Carolyn Kitch says popular magazines play an important role as public historians. In publications such as *Newsweek* and *Time*, journalism creates collective memories and identity for Americans, Kitch argues. Editorial perspectives, visual and narrative content, and the tangibility and keepsake qualities of magazines make them key repositories of American memory, Kitch maintains.¹⁵ What this means is that magazines can create both a memory and generational identity. For instance, when *Life* covered the 1969 Woodstock music festival, a whole baby boomer generation began to think it was there. This research in part builds on Kitch's work by looking at how some magazine readers described their reactions to the news and cultural events of 1972.

Several researchers, including David Paul Nord¹⁶ and Karin Wahl-Jorgensen,¹⁷ have urged historians to capture reader response to journalism, especially during important transitional periods of history. This research builds on Nord's and Wahl-Jorgensen's theoretical and conceptual framework by examining 1972 letter-to-the-editor writers' reactions to the events they lived through. In this way, letters to the editor reflect history from the bottom up, a method that differs sharply from great man/woman history or history from the top down. The powerful do not need letters to the editor. They can issue press releases to get their views expressed, write memoirs, commission films, or run for president. In contrast, letter writers are rarely in the public eye. Their one claim to fame may be a letter to the editor.

There is already a glut of material available about powerful publishers and editors, politicians and tycoons from 1972. But very little material expresses the point of view of the common workers—the people Richard Nixon called the silent majority—the nurses, teachers, police officers, and firefighters who voiced their opinions in letters to the editor.¹⁸ Thus, in providing their viewpoint, this work helps fill a gap in the scholarly literature.

Moreover, this research compares first-person accounts from those who lived through the events of 1972 with our collective memory of that year. Cultural studies professor Barbie Zelizer writes that "Collective memory is not necessarily linear, logical, or rational"¹⁹ nor even factually accurate. The sociologist Michael Schudson notes that the unpredictable and

changeable nature of collective memory makes it difficult to grasp because studies are unable to foresee which facts and myths of the past will become a part of the collective recollection.²⁰

Wahl-Jorgensen writes that the letters-to-the-editor section is one of the few places where society fashions a knowledge of itself. She explains that it is a place where diverse groups gather for a shared conversation that concerns them all. Wahl-Jorgensen further argues that letters to the editor can reveal how “we, as a society, think about public issues, public debate, the press and democracy.”²¹ It is not that the bottom-up view of history provided by letters to the editor is necessarily better. Nevertheless, it is distinctly different and certainly rounds out the collective picture of how it felt to live through tumultuous times.

The year 1972 was studied in this research for three main reasons. First, it was a presidential election year (the beginning of Watergate) and thus a logical choice for letter writer comments that might reveal thoughts of the body politic. Further, 1972 fit into a larger ongoing study of letters published every ten years from 1952 through 1992. In addition, an estimated 76 million baby boomers born between 1946 and 1964 were coming of age in 1972. These boomers made up roughly 29 percent of the population. They have been described variously as a shockwave and as the pig in the python. They formed a demographic bulge that remodeled society. Those born at the early end of the boomer continuum were in their early 20s by 1972, perhaps working at their first jobs after college, starting families, paying taxes, subscribing to and reading serious magazines for “grown-ups,” such as *Time* and *Newsweek*, and attempting to participate in what President Lyndon Johnson called the Great Society.

How did these boomers—and perhaps more tellingly their “straight” or square parents, unused to nationwide draft card burnings and public discussion of *Deep Throat* porn movies—respond to the whirlwind of change around them? Did they write letters to the editor about it?

Finally, as is explained in more detail below, 1972 was a particularly momentous year worthy of study. There were great shifts in politics, religion, the arts, culture, and everyday life. Some have said it was the apex of the American culture war, which *New York Times* critic A.O. Scott says is still going on. Scott describes it as “that combustible, stupefying cocktail of religion, sex, politics, and everything else that gets people hot and bothered.”²²

One collective and troubling memory myth that persists from this time frame is that the country was so radicalized on the left that Vietnam veterans were regularly spat upon in 1972 as they returned from the war, with the general populace supporting this behavior. Historian Jerry Lembcke argues that this claim persists despite the fact he has not been able to find a single documented report to support the claims of spitting, even after pouring over thousands of news stories from 1971 and 1972. He theorizes that the reported “spitting on soldiers” scenario was a mythical projection by those who felt spat upon—that is, ignored

and unappreciated. Lembcke says he finally discovered a December 27, 1971, *CBS Evening News* report on veteran Delmar Pickett, who claimed he was spat at in a Seattle airport, but there was no evidence the incident actually happened.²³

Chicago columnist Bob Greene's 1989 book *Homecoming* deals with the same issue, with dozens of veterans telling him they were spit on either late in 1971 or early in 1972. "There were many letters, going into great detail," Greene reports.²⁴ Lembcke concludes that the "spitting myth" fits many people's narrative of how alienating and alienated the early 1970s were—gone so far left that cherished American values were lost. This research can help gauge the political temperature of the letters-to-the-editor writers from 1972 to see if any readers supported those who might spit at soldiers.

Background of 1972

Many prominent scholars assert that 1972 was indeed a time of great upheaval. It has been called the heyday of the counter-culture.²⁵ It was a time when the radical left was in full blossom,²⁶ along with long hair, love beads, and platform shoes.²⁷ The Summer of Love happened in 1967. That is when the media focused on an estimated 100,000 hippies tuning in, turning on, and dropping out in such places as San Francisco. Historian Bruce Schulman says this boisterous 1967 minority had blossomed into a "garden of millions of flower people in the U.S. by the early 1970s."²⁸

Scholars Robert Hariman and John Lucaites write that in 1972, U.S. citizens were recognizing that "their government was waging war without purpose, without legitimacy, without end." The authors assert that this revulsion with the war started a whole chain of alienation and distrust of government and the entire establishment. It seemed as if the entire U.S. society was "coming apart at the seams."²⁹

British journalist David Lister argues in a 2010 column in the London newspaper *The Independent* that 1972 was not simply "the beginning of the Seventies. It was also the last year of the Sixties." He explains that in 1972, many characteristics of the 1960s were still in vogue. For example, the popular campus look was frayed jeans, tie-dye tunics, and hip huggers with bell bottoms. Moreover, 1972 marked a border line between the 1960s and 1970s. The 1960s was marked by experiments with "hallucinogenics and alternative lifestyles, a period of affluence, casual sex and hippie idealistic and flaky politics." The 1970s, by contrast, was a time of inflation, unemployment, women's liberation, radicalization, and terrorism. "It was 1972, perhaps as much as any year in the Sixties, that felt revolutionary, optimistic and egalitarian, all at once," Lister writes.³⁰

Feminist author Ruth Rosen describes the early 1970s as "arguably the most intellectually vital and exciting era for American women," producing an amazing array of "changes in social, political and public thought and policy."³¹ She writes that women experienced liberating 1960s-style changes in the early 1970s, freeing them from their kitchens and apron strings. Historian Schulman writes that in 1972, clothing was

outrageous, sexual behavior was less restrained, and personal liberation trumped civility, decency, and restraint. He argues that the changes were not simply cosmetic; they fundamentally “made over” the United States.³²

Rosen, Schulman, and Lister are not alone in their assessments of the early 1970s as being more like the 1960s than the 1970s—and 1972, in particular, being an important period when the culture was in flux. Historian Dominic Sandbrook writes:

When conservatives rail against the legacy of the 1960s, complaining about the collapse of discipline and the family, the rise of crime, and the spread of pornography, they are often talking about things that actually peaked in the early 1970s.³³

Sociologist Todd Gitlin describes the late 1960s and early 1970s as “a cyclone in a wind tunnel,” when a whirling dervish swept the country.³⁴ An example of that whirl, for instance, was that in 1972 *Deep Throat* became the first porn movie to ever earn \$1 million.³⁵ It was viewed unashamedly by millions of Middle Americans.³⁶ Not to be left behind, *Playboy* decided in 1972 to show nudes with pubic hair—and subsequently kicked its monthly sales up to 7 million per issue.³⁷ But there was more to changing attitudes about sex than simple acceptance of porn movies and more graphic girlie magazines. A 1972 Gallup poll showed that only 48 percent of Americans thought sex before marriage was wrong³⁸—a dramatic decline from 68 percent just four years earlier.³⁹

Another major event from 1972 was passage of the Equal Rights Amendment by the U.S. Senate. It was expected to become law within months. At the same time, air travel was a nightmare, with 31 airplane hijackings by terrorists reported in the U.S. alone. In January 1972 nearly two plane hijackings were attempted in the country each week.⁴⁰

A major international news event of the year was the Munich massacre, in which eight members of the radical Palestinian group Black September murdered 11 Israeli athletes participating in the Summer Olympics.

Back in the U.S., the notorious segregationist and former Alabama governor George Wallace was making a second run for the White House in 1972 when a would-be assassin shot him. Wallace was left paralyzed from the waist down. A different kind of crime was making headlines that summer in Washington, D.C., after five operatives of President Richard Nixon were arrested in June 1972 for burglarizing the Democratic National Committee headquarters at the Watergate office complex. Nixon’s spokesperson dismissed the break-in as a “meaningless third-rate burglary attempt.”⁴¹

How was all this political, social, and cultural upheaval reflected in letters to the editor in magazines across the U.S? Did *Newsweek* readers endorse, reject, or ignore the dramatic changes of the time? What were letters focused on in *Time*? Did *Progressive* magazine readers demand revolution, for instance, as one might guess from the publication’s title and political tilt? Overall, is the collective memory of 1972 as the height of the power of

the left reflected in readers' comments? Were many letters writers against the Vietnam War, for example? Did they advocate spitting on returning troops? Were letter writers rabidly anti-Nixon and demanding political revolution, as some would insist?

Limitations of Letters to the Editor

Historical studies of letters to the editor have inherent limitations.⁴² First, people generally write letters most often to express displeasure. This means letters skew toward the disgruntled. Furthermore, educated, affluent people write letters more than the poor do. Specifically, men write more than women, suburbanites write more than city residents, and doctors, lawyers, and university professors write most frequently.⁴³ And, finally, letters are filtered through editors who select which letters to publish. That means conservative editors could, in theory, publish only conservative letters.⁴⁴ There is no definitive solution to this problem of perceived bias on the part of editors as gatekeepers. Editors of mainstream magazines, such as *Time*, have written that they get as many as 50,000 letters a year from readers. They must decide which handful to publish, especially since the magazines usually set aside only a few pages each issue for the letters section.⁴⁵ There is no minimum quota for letters, but there is limited space.⁴⁶

However, research indicates that most editors with a sense of fairness or professionalism in 1972, as they do today, would likely seek to balance liberal views with conservative ones and vice versa. Most editors also take great care to print letters that criticize their publication as well as praise it. In 2006 the historian Karin Wahl-Jorgensen interviewed those who edit letters-to-the-editor pages in a variety of newspapers. She writes: "The letters to the editor section, in the view of the editors who work with them, is based on the principle that citizens deserve a public forum in which their voices are privileged."⁴⁷ For at least the past 50 years, she continues, the letters page has been seen by editors as "the fixed place, inside the publication," where opinionated letter writers are free to dissent and criticize and to attack the very publication where their remarks are being published.⁴⁸ Thus, it would violate the whole concept of the letters page if a conservative editor were to only publish conservative letters, squelching dissent. But it could still happen. And because of these flaws, some critics insist that the historical study of letters to the editor is meaningless.

This is a shortsighted view. Despite their limits, letters to the editor offer important historical insights. They reveal the thoughts of at least some educated, if disgruntled, readers at a given point in time. Simply by being published, letters to the editor help set the agenda for public discussion.⁴⁹ Historian Nord says letters to the editor are useful historical texts. They reveal some readers speaking directly to editors.⁵⁰ Nord is among a small but steadily growing group of researchers, including Wahl-Jorgensen⁵¹ and Brian Thornton,⁵² who recognize letters as useful historical texts. Most historical research on letters to the editor, however, can be divided into three categories: 1) discussion of the hazards of trying to ascertain public opinion with certainty through letters to the editor; 2) conjecture about who writes letters; and 3) analysis of why people write letters to the editor.⁵³

Method

The goal in selecting the eight magazines for this qualitative study was to analyze some better-known and more successful general-interest consumer magazines of the era that reached people of varying educational achievement and income levels. Consumer magazines, to quote magazine historian Dave Sumner, are publications anyone can subscribe to or buy at newsstands, as opposed to trade publications.⁵⁴ The intent of this research was to capture a snapshot of various general-interest and middle-of-the-road magazines in the U.S. in 1972. Another researcher could study more radical left or right magazines and find a different audience and different responses. Inevitably, creating any list of magazines to examine from any time frame involves subjective decisions. A reader's favorite publication, such as *Ramparts* or *Rolling Stone*, might be overlooked.

A more detailed explanation follows for why each magazine was chosen.

The Atlantic monthly, which started in 1857 as a liberal, literary publication, has been described as "attractive, informative, with high standards for quality fiction and nonfiction."⁵⁵ In 1972, under editor Robert Manning, *The Atlantic* offered intelligent news, fiction, poetry, and essays.⁵⁶

Forbes is a politically conservative business magazine. The editor in 1972 was James Michaels.⁵⁷ *Forbes* offers both a business and conservative perspective.

In 1972 *Harper's* had a reputation as a high-quality liberal publication "focused on public affairs and current events."⁵⁸

The Nation's readers were independent, intellectual, and left leaning. The magazine's circulation remained around 30,000 for most of the decade. In 1972 *The Nation*, under editor Carey McWilliams, was "pro-labor, a foe of racial discrimination, collectivist, and strongly critical of the free enterprise system."⁵⁹

Under editor and publisher Gilbert A. Harrison, *The New Republic*, described as left of center politically, focused on national politics in 1972 but also covered arts and both highbrow and lowbrow culture.⁶⁰

The Progressive was at the cutting left edge of the liberal intellectual movement of the 1970s.⁶¹

Henry Luce created *Time* in 1923. By 1972 *Time* described itself as the most widely read newsmagazine in the country, focusing on national and international politics.⁶² About 4.2 million Americans read *Time* in 1972. In 1964 editor Hedley Donovan had the unenviable task of replacing Luce after his retirement.⁶³ *Time's* popularity and appeal to a wide-ranging audience from many walks of life made it a good place to look for the reactions of some ordinary Americans in 1972.⁶⁴

Newsweek, with 2.6 million paid subscribers, was the second most popular national newsmagazine in 1972, trailing *Time*. *Newsweek* was known for “outstanding articles and reports and striking photography.”⁶⁵

A total of 2,565 letters were collected from these eight magazines and analyzed independently by the author and two students. All three readers initially read the letters. They then independently made lists of what they perceived as major recurrent themes.

After initial discussion, ten possible themes were then winnowed down by consensus to six. These themes were 1) against radicals, 2) pro-women’s liberation, 3) anti-taxes, 4) support for Nixon, 5) support for the Vietnam War, and 6) anti-big government. There were differences about minor themes, but without a consensus of at least two readers on a given theme, letters in these categories were simply labeled “other.” Thus, roughly half the letters were labeled “other.”

Surprisingly, there was little disagreement about the major theme found repeatedly in many letters: Letter writers voiced opposition to radicals. Before consulting each other, the three researchers independently listed this theme as a major focus. And according to all three researchers, many letters fit this description. The anti-radicalism theme emerged repeatedly throughout the year in response to different events, such as Jane Fonda’s going to Hanoi in July, the Munich massacre of 11 Israeli athletes, and arguments about racial and economic divisions in the presidential race.

Findings: Major Themes

<p><i>Table 1</i> <i>Major Themes of Letters to the Editor Published in Eight Magazines, 1972</i></p>								
	Anti-Radicals	Women’s Lib	Anti-Taxes	Pro-Nixon	Pro-War	Anti-Govt.	Other	Total
<i>Atlantic</i>	56	22	8	16	3	7	11	123
<i>Forbes</i>	68	2	59	18	7	21	39	214
<i>Harper’s</i>	21	16	10	9	11	10	16	93
<i>The Nation</i>	9	11	10	15	12	10	50	117
<i>New Republic</i>	26	13	10	15	2	6	20	92
<i>Newsweek</i>	247	41	28	22	43	22	417	820
<i>Progressive</i>	35	12	11	4	8	10	62	142
<i>Time</i>	147	46	13	42	18	6	692	964
Total	609 (23.0%)	163 (6.3%)	149 (5.8%)	141 (5.4%)	104 (4.0%)	92 (3.5%)	1,306 (50.9%)	2,565

* All percentages are rounded off.

Against radicals

After one student researcher waded through all the letters to the editor published in the eight magazines in 1972, he could hardly disguise his surprise when he said, "I was expecting to read the views of radical flag burners and bomb throwers on every page who wanted to dynamite the entire system. Where are they?" The impression he had about the early 1970s, gleaned from popular movies, TV shows, and books, led the student to expect angry screeds in nearly every letter to the editor demanding revolution and insisting that everyone take to the streets.

But the strongest message expressed in 609 (23 percent) letters to the editor was distaste for radicals of any stripe, especially those advocating violence and armed revolution. For instance, Alan Levy of Forest Hills Gardens, New York, wrote in *The Atlantic* that strident demands for conflict are counter-productive. Levy said he was writing in response to political rhetoric that demonizes opponents. He explained that demonizing leads to radicalism and civil war. Instead, what we need is a world where "old, young, black, white, and middle-in-between people can comfortably live, listen, and talk with each other."⁶⁶

In a similar vein, William Weddell of Pinehaven, New Zealand, wrote in a letter to *Time* that Aristotle was correct when he insisted that the rational intellect is man's greatest possession. And with that intellect, Weddell argued, humans can find better ways to work out their differences rather than screaming at each other, fighting in the streets, and name-calling. Ranting, railing, and shouting can only lead to a return to the "throne of rule by intimidation, guilt, fear and superstition," Weddell asserted.⁶⁷

Franklin Adams of Baltimore expressed a similar theme. Writing to *Newsweek* in July, Adams said that too often in current discussions, especially those between blacks and whites, left and right, "reason is sacrificed to an eloquence of hate." But that eloquence of hate must be rejected, despite its seductive qualities. Anyone who disagrees with the zealots is quickly accused of being "bought and paid for" by the powers that be, Adams continued. This charge does us all a great disservice, he concluded.⁶⁸

Gary Orfield of Princeton, New Jersey, wrote in the *New Republic* that those in society who are "pushing for important changes, such as racial justice, and protection for powerless migrant workers" need to develop tactical and persuasive skills and learn how to quietly win over people's hearts and minds "with a sense of timing and an ability to count votes." Unfortunately, such skill and wisdom is in short supply, Orfield wrote.⁶⁹

"It is very sad that the middle class is held in contempt by radicals," wrote Cora Chase of Vaughn, Washington, in a letter to *The Progressive*. But middle-class Americans are "the backbone of the nation, so it is vital they become involved in any changes. Since they are being taxed more and more to maintain a military-industrial complex that poisons not only the environment, but also the minds of those caught in its toils, they can become more amenable to the need for change," Chase added.⁷⁰

Sheldon Vanauken of Lynchburg, Virginia, wrote a letter in that same issue of *The Progressive* saying such groups as the radical Students for a Democratic Society are ruining chances for progress by “playing the silly game of ‘I am more shockingly left than you are.’” They insist on “babbling” about Chairman Mao, Marx, Lenin, and Che Guevara instead of connecting with the common masses of people and stressing the Anglo-American heritage of freedom as expressed in the Bill of Rights. “And that’s why SDS is where it is today—nowhere,” Vanauken wrote. “It is the function of the leadership to lead,” but only where the people are willing to follow. “The ruin of the movement came about because so many leaders, already hidden in a cloud of jargon, split from the troops, that is, the common people, all together, on their ways to goals no one else could see or care about,” Vanauken concluded.⁷¹

Too many in society try to set one group in the country mindlessly warring against another, wrote Leonti H. Thompson, a physician from Napa, California. This is particularly true in regard to race, Thompson explained in a letter to *Harper’s*. Frequently, when light-skinned blacks are set against black-skinned blacks, and poor blacks against rich blacks, “we forget that ‘All of We Is One,’” Thompson continued. “There is a need for the black middle class and upper class to develop a sense of unity with lower-class blacks. In this unity, a program for achievement of social and political advancement can be implemented.” Thompson added that only by understanding that these schisms deliberately and falsely keep people apart could progress be made. Only if blacks transcend the social, political, economic, and psychological differences between them will they achieve “an unequaled period of self-improvement and advancement as they strive toward the light.” Throughout history, sweeping social change has been based on this universal theme: “Forget the difference and emphasize the consensus,” Thompson wrote. He said we would all eventually figure out that most social differences are based on equally irrelevant distinctions, such as skin pigmentation.⁷²

Bill Darnell of Vancouver, British Columbia, wrote in a May letter to the editor of *The Nation* that he not only rejects radicals who seek to set one race against the other or divide the poor and rich, but he also stands firmly against those who pit one country against another. Darnell explained that rabble-rousers like to blame another country for their woes and depict people of that “other” country as devils and boogiemens. But he said it is clear that the only way to stop “criminal acts of environmental anarchy,” such as the testing of hydrogen bombs in the Pacific, is to start an international campaign of brotherhood. All people need to protest united is a common understanding that testing nuclear weapons anywhere pollutes the air and water we all need to survive, he added.⁷³

Finally, and not surprisingly, business-oriented and conservative *Forbes* magazine readers also rejected radicalism in many letters to the editor—a total of 68 in 1972. Roger Berensohn of Waimanalo, Hawaii, for example, wrote that many radical critics of the U.S. insist the country’s “prestige is at an all-time low.” They claim the world hates America because of its exploitive capitalistic system, and the only solution is immediate revolution.

But he warned that those who demand revolution should study how reckless change often works out very badly in such places as Argentina or Venezuela.⁷⁴

While 609 letter-to-the-editor writers in all eight magazines, or nearly a quarter of the letters, shared the message of anti-radicalism, few other major themes emerged in common. A total of 163 letter writers endorsed women's liberation, for instance, but that represented only 6.3 percent of the readers' comments in the magazines. Although small, it was the second most common theme. The third most frequent comment was a complaint against high taxes, with 149 (5.8 percent) letters voicing that theme. In addition, there was support for Nixon, with 141 letter writers (5.4 percent) saying the president was getting a raw deal. Finally, the last two themes in common among the letters was support for the Vietnam War, expressed in 104 letters (4.0 percent), and a complaint against big government, voiced by 92 letters (3.5 percent). Each theme is now examined in more detail.

Support for women's liberation

Dissatisfaction with the status quo for women was reflected in 163 letters to the editor. Elaine Thompson of Philadelphia, for instance, wrote to *Harper's* in December 1972 that it was "futile for women to seek freedom in ideas and political systems so obscenely male and obviously bankrupt." She claimed that the 1972 Democratic Party convention was a good example: Women were not listened to, granted true power, or even considered for vice president. She concluded that women must learn to nurture themselves and find ways to interact that are cooperative rather than competitive.⁷⁵

In the same issue of *Harper's*, Patricia Wild from Mount Vernon, New York, wrote that women had been relegated to co-chairperson positions at the recent Democratic Party convention, never to be chairs on their own. Her major disappointment with the convention was that "the feminists should have helped to stem the tide of conservatism that was washing out the McGovern delegates' positions on a whole range of issues directly affecting women, including abortion reform," the need for better health care for women, and an education plank that would help women gain easier entry to college and other training to allow them to compete for better jobs.⁷⁶

Earlier in the year, Sue Hestor of San Francisco also complained in a *New Republic* letter about the "the political fact of life—that the core of most campaign organizations are [sic] only men. It is only when you go outside the inner circle that you find any women." Hestor explained that in 1968 she served on Eugene McCarthy's campaign staff and was willing then to fill the "subservient roles given to me." But no more. "I could never again work in a campaign where the women do all the work behind the scenes and the men are in front, making all the important decisions—occasionally patting the women on the head. Women will no longer tolerate the chauvinism of the past," she concluded.⁷⁷

A group of five women from Cuba signed a letter together to *The Progressive* in October, warning the magazine's readers that if any liberals think a leftist revolutionary such

as Fidel Castro treated women as equals in his so-called attempts to liberate Cuba, they are sadly mistaken. “The Revolution [in Cuba] has meant repression for the Cuban girl who grows up feeling disillusioned and bitter from an early age,” the letter explained. “She has no future.” The average Cuban girl is excluded from any career and even a chance of college, the letter writers added. “Fidel Castro has not liberated anyone but has deprived many women of the freedom they have enjoyed previously You would be shocked at the number of young girls—even children—classified as political prisoners for trying to achieve a pleasant future where men and women are equal.”⁷⁸

The future of women can only be improved, however, by showing different images on TV and in the news, wrote Pat K. Lynch of New York City. In a January letter Lynch said *Time* magazine was at fault, for instance, for showing the “usual sexist stereotypes” in its December 1971 pictures of the year. There were pictures of woman as “bride, wife, and helper, woman as victim (in Ireland), woman as prostitute and temptress (Mary Magdalene in *Jesus Christ, Superstar*), and finally woman as sex object and clotheshorse (in the U.S.), cavorting in hot pants,” Lynch wrote. But what about woman as head of state, such as Indira Gandhi? Or maybe doctor and/or lawyer?⁷⁹

Against high taxes

The issue of high taxes was discussed in both complex and simple ways by 149 letter writers (5.8 percent). There was the simple and direct complaint from Sylvia Schuman of New York City, for instance, who wrote to *Time* in April 1972. She said the household budget of the average American taxpayer was being stretched to the limit to pay incredibly high federal taxes. And that would be bad enough, except John Q. Public then “sees huge sums of tax money misappropriated and stolen each year by public officials. He sees more and more of his taxes being spent on criminals and drug addicts, more money than he can afford to spend on his own family.”⁸⁰

In that same issue of *Time*, Ben Calderone of Levittown, New York, repeated Schuman’s argument that taxes are too high. But the solution is easy, Calderone wrote. There simply needs to be a “reordering of government tax-spending priorities, schools before bombers, houses before missiles, hospitals before napalm. The multi-billion dollar defense budget is what’s killing us. With defense spending of our tax money like this, who needs enemies?”⁸¹

Another letter writer echoed Calderone’s point in a letter published in *Newsweek* in June. Rising taxes cannot be stemmed “while the federal government exercises no fiscal constraint whatsoever and spends money like water,” wrote Clyde T. Bates of Georgetown, Kentucky. The government desperately needs “appropriate monetary and fiscal policy. As we approach the limits of what we can pay in taxes, it is time to place strict controls on spending,” especially in costly foreign wars, Bates concluded.⁸²

William Kiem of Wilmington, Delaware, provided a more complex critique of taxes. He offered a seven-point plan to overhaul both federal and state taxes in a June letter to *The Progressive*. Kiem insisted that the tax system is corrupt. He gave specific examples, such as the country's wealthiest families paying taxes based on less than "10 percent of their property market value, while the average person in a place like Delaware pays on property assessed five times as high." Delaware's top rate for income tax is 11 percent, Kiem continued, "only four percent higher than that paid by a guy with a taxable income of only \$7,000 a year. As a result of all this, is it any wonder that the nation is in financial trouble and the poor and middle class feel hard pressed as they pay more than their fair share of taxes?" Kiem said state and federal governments respond by pointlessly trying to "cut out the tiny amount of money spent on welfare chiselers and cut off the schools, but don't touch the wealthy."⁸³

Support for Nixon

There is a wealth of evidence to argue that Nixon was an extremely popular man in 1972, especially at the start of the year. One clear sign of that popularity is that Nixon easily won re-election in a landslide, winning 49 of 50 states.⁸⁴ In addition, *Time* named Nixon man of the year for 1972, along with Henry Kissinger. In explaining the choice, a *Time* cover article said that in just one year, Nixon and Kissinger had opened gates to China, initiated detente with Russia, pressed for strategic arms reduction talks, and opened dozens of other avenues of communication between East and West.⁸⁵ Historian Schulman says Nixon adopted a campaign strategy in 1971 to win over the archetypal Dayton housewife and her machinist husband who were fed up with liberals, bureaucracy, and big government.⁸⁶ In January 1972 Nixon told his chief of staff that "we've had enough social programs: forced integration, education, housing. The people don't want to spend more on welfare. They don't want to help the working poor, and our mood has to be harder on this."⁸⁷

Given his popularity, it should not be surprising to find that 141 letters to the editor (5.4 percent) spread across all eight magazines supported Nixon. George Barnes of Detroit wrote a letter to *The Atlantic* in April, for instance, that starts off decrying "the chaos and confusion" of the "fuzzy-headed" Democrats in the last decade. He continued: "I would rather take my chance with Nixon than with any Democrat." Barnes concluded with a poem: "The Democrats march in disarray, their banners tattered and grey, they shout all the time, which is surely a sign, they haven't a damn thing to say."⁸⁸ Richard Cain of Portland, Oregon, echoed this same sentiment in a letter to *The Nation* in October: "I'll vote against George McGovern and for Richard Nixon because of McGovern's guaranteed income proposal. I still believe this is a land of opportunity and I'm against welfare."⁸⁹

"Your cover story asked: Who can beat Nixon? The answer is no one." That is how Kathy Kendelhardt of Holbrook, New York, began a January letter to the editor of *Newsweek*. "Mr. Nixon and his Administration have proven themselves competent and qualified, to say the least," she continued. "The president isn't trying to win a popularity contest; only to do what he should—intelligently, diligently and successfully solve our nation's problems."⁹⁰

That same month, several other letters supported Nixon in *Newsweek's* main competitor—*Time* magazine. Glenn Goodrich of Washington, D.C., for example, wrote:

This country isn't perfect and neither is Mr. Nixon. But his undying concern and faithful help lead me to believe that someone finally turned the lights on. Things look brighter. This man has filled American minds with hope, replacing the despair that lived there for so long.⁹¹

Support for Vietnam War

Many histories of the Vietnam War argue that by 1972 the country was disillusioned and anti-war sentiment was sweeping the nation.⁹² And there is compelling evidence to back that up, including public opinion polls that reported that only 28 percent of Americans supported the war by December 1971.⁹³ There were a series of increasingly militant protests against the war. On March 29, 1972, for example, 166 people, many seminarians, were arrested in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, for encircling the federal courthouse with a chain to protest the trial of the so-called Harrisburg Seven. In April, after the president escalated bombings in Vietnam, hundreds, if not thousands, of students at universities across the country rioted, took over campuses, broke into administration office, and staged strikes. By May such anti-war protests stretched from New York to Los Angeles and many spots in between. It is easy to get the impression from all this anti-war protest that no one still supported the war in 1972. That impression would be wrong. A total of 104 letters to the editor (4.0 percent) in the eight magazines studied here defended the war.

There was Col. Leroy Lutes, for instance, of Alexandria, Virginia. Identifying himself as a retired military officers, he slammed *Time* in January in a letter that said the magazine had given a “scurrilous” account of the war and of the president running it, and “given aid and comfort to the enemy. You have taken a series of cheap shots,” Lutes concluded.⁹⁴

After Nixon's re-election a woman who identified herself as Mrs. Bonnie Bryant of Springfield, Virginia, wrote to *Newsweek*, saying the president's overwhelming victory should be proof enough that “the news media, sympathetic to radicals and peace at any cost groups, did not truly represent the American people. In my opinion these appeasers are responsible for prolonging the war,” she added. “I hope now they will shut up and let the president get on with peace negotiations.”⁹⁵

Against big government

Some younger people might think Ronald Reagan created the argument he so famously quoted in an election speech, stating that big government is not the solution to the nation's problems but rather the cause.⁹⁶ But those who believe that would be surprised to see that very notion was quite popular in 1972 letters to the editor. Specifically, 92 magazine letter writers (3.5 percent) railed against the way big government was creating problems by

getting larger and branching into areas where it did not belong. “McGovern wants to create a welfare state a la Sweden, where everyone is guaranteed a job by the government, where the government takes care of you from cradle to the grave, providing health care, housing and food,” complained Salvatore Kluzewski of Chicago in a letter to *Forbes* in July. But McGovern “doesn’t realize it takes more than a printing press to create wealth,” Kluzewski wrote, and the best way to create jobs in the private sector is to leave the private sector alone. It is time for government to stop intruding into the business world, he concluded.⁹⁷

William Henkell of Flagstaff, Arizona, argued in a letter in February in *Time* that we need “a cry of sanity in a forest of lunatics.” He said that “in a day of mega-government and increasing restrictions on personal freedom,” it is time for someone to say enough is enough and that the government has no business meddling in our personal lives.⁹⁸

What Does It Mean?

If one studies the chaos and political, social, and cultural tumult that occurred in the U.S. between 1968 and 1972, it makes sense that many magazine readers were fed up with radicals and violence by 1972. Why? Because the previous four years had seen far too many radicals and accompanying violence. Magazine readers’ collective psyches could be described as scarred and suffering from what we would call today post-traumatic stress disorder. Some of this stress started back in 1968, a particularly turbulent year. The year started with the well-respected, solidly middle-class baby doctor Benjamin Spock being indicted in January for conspiring to violate draft laws and facing a possible lifetime in prison. By February the Vietnam War had intensified, and more than 500 U.S. troops were dying each week.⁹⁹ In April, Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated. Riots exploded across the country, including Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Detroit, Kansas City, Newark, and Washington, D.C. Just as things started to settle down, Democratic presidential candidate Robert Kennedy was shot and killed in San Francisco in June. And just a few months later the Democratic National Convention in Chicago was invaded by hundreds of representatives of the Youth International Party, or yippies. Chicago police responded by rioting and beating dozens of protestors. That was all in just the span of 12 months. The accumulation of cataclysmic events in 1968 was so intense, in fact, that the term “’68ism” was coined to describe it.¹⁰⁰

Protests, marching, and talk of revolution continued unabated between 1969 and 1972, although not quite as dramatically. There was the notable exception of Kent State University on May 4, 1970, when National Guardsmen fired 67 rounds of live ammunition at unarmed, peaceful student protestors. Four students were killed instantly, and nine others were wounded.

The 1970s was the period when Americans became “mad as hell,” author Dominick Sandbrook argues in a book of the same title. He says many people decided they “weren’t going to take it anymore.” Sandbrook suggests this anger, much of it a “backlash in response to multiculturalism, feminism, and postmodernism,”¹⁰¹ was triggered by economic depression, political corruption, military defeat, and cultural introspection. But this research

into letters to the editor of 1972 suggests that anger was not evident yet or at least had not made its way into the pages of the eight largely mainstream national magazines studied here. Instead of being mad as hell in 1972, this research discovered surprising voices of calm from letter writers such as Franklin Adams, who rejected “the eloquence of hate” from would-be revolutionaries on either the left or the right. There was also Leonti H. Thompson urging readers to remember “All of We Is One.”

But the feedback from readers in letters to the editor in 1972 was not mere hippy rhetoric about peace, love, and understanding. There were also strident right wing views supporting Nixon and his policies and insisting that the Vietnam War was worthwhile and winnable. In fact, one of the more interesting findings here is that *Newsweek*, labeled a “leftist magazine” by its critics, printed the largest number of conservative letters of all the magazines surveyed. There were 247 letters in *Newsweek* against radicals, 43 supporting the Vietnam War, and 22 praising Nixon. This should provide further strong evidence that editors of so-called liberal publications in 1972 did not publish letters that only agreed with their point of view. These conservative letters also lend credence to historian Philip Jenkins’ notion that in the early 1970s “conservatives were already re-organizing and mobilizing their voices.” Jenkins argues that even in the midst of draft card and flag burnings, “conservatism certainly commanded popular support” in the late 1960s and early 1970s, “considerably more support than many historians and media outlets might lead us to believe.”¹⁰² Thomas and Mary Edsall’s 1991 book *Chain Reaction* argues much the same thing. It asserts there was a shift that began in the late 1960s and early 1970s away from the liberal hegemony of the 1960s toward the conservative dominance of the 1980s.¹⁰³

But just when one might start to argue there was a predominantly right wing, or conservative, mood in America in 1972, there were also 163 contrasting left-leaning letters, even in so-called right wing magazines such as *Forbes* and *Time*, saying women must be liberated. In some respects the task of a historian can seem uncomplicated—in this situation, gathering letters to the editor published in one year and finding out what readers said. The complications arise when seeking to explain with certainty why certain views were expressed. Why, for instance, were liberal letters printed in conservative magazines and vice versa? This phenomenon provides still more proof that good editors in 1972 did not censor letters to the editor that disagreed with them. In fact, they seemed to go out of their way to print views that challenged them. The publication of so-called leftist letters could also indicate just how much the basic power structure of society was changing. Even battered editors and bone-weary readers who were exhausted by protests in 1972 and against most radicals realized that basic fairness required a radical change in society to loosen the social, political, and economic constrictions that kept women in metaphorical chains.

As if to confound those who would see a generalizable pattern in the 1972 letters to the editor, however, there were also 149 saying the government was “extorting” too much in taxes. Predictably, letter writers in *Forbes*, with its fiscally conservative readers, made that complaint. A total of 59 letters focused on the need to reduce taxes. But 28 letter writers in

Newsweek agreed. They were joined in that argument by 11 *Progressive* readers, 10 in *The Nation*, and 10 in *The New Republic*. Why? It seems that even though the U.S. economy in 1972 was enjoying a good spurt of prosperity, marked by stable prices, a high growth rate (6.4 percent), and relatively low unemployment (5.1 percent in December 1972), many average people were still feeling the effects of a 1970 economic downturn when inflation was high and unemployment spiked to 9 percent.¹⁰⁴ Perhaps people from both ends of the political spectrum could come together, even in a time of relative economic prosperity, to find they shared resentment of giving a big chunk of their paycheck to the government.

Finally there were another 92 letters in the eight magazines warning that the federal government was growing too big and intruding into too many areas of people's lives. Is this a left wing or right wing view? Many average people today might see this as a crucial part of the Tea Party platform, so it makes sense that 21 readers of the right-leaning *Forbes* made this charge. But once again the so-called liberal magazines studied here printed many letters in 1972 espousing this point of view as well—22 letters focused on this theme in *Newsweek*, 11 in *The Progressive*, and 10 each in *The Nation* and *Harper's*. These anti-government themes continue to reverberate in today's political debates.

Conclusion

This research offers primary source material from magazine readers who commented publicly through letters to the editor, both on the mood of the country in 1972 and on reaction to specific events of the year. Their published words indicate the year was more complicated than much of popular culture indicates. Confounding those who want to neatly pigeonhole the American mood, the letters indicate that America was a complicated and contrary creature in 1972—neither hippy nor hard hat, to use the vernacular of the time. There certainly were no letter writers who supported spitting on troops. If anything, many letters stated that the last thing the country needed was radicals of any persuasion spitting on anyone.

When journalism historian Joseph Campbell wrote a book about 1897, called *The Year That Defined Journalism*, he urged other journalism historians to undertake similar year-study approaches, and this current research is the result. "Until now journalism scholars have neither tested nor adopted the year-study approach—a methodological deficit," Campbell writes. He explains that in the larger field of general history, there is a flourishing genre that examines decisive and important years. Such work, he writes, can yield "intriguing and relevant insights into the forces of society"¹⁰⁵ that helped reshape the U.S.

The current research provides some of those insights and helps fill a gap in knowledge about the history of the content of letters to the editor in mainstream magazines, particularly during a year of national crisis. It is tempting to focus on the editors of the eight magazines researched here and try to decide, for example, if Hedley Donovan's politics led him to publish letters in *Time* that echoed his own opinions. Such a classic misdirect can lead one down a rabbit hole where no conclusive answers can be found. Instead, the focus

should be on the letter writers and their comments. Historians should not worry about the gatekeeping process by which a letter to the editor was published. Instead, the spotlight should shine on what the letters said and who wrote them. What has been missing altogether from the historical record until now is the recognition of letter-to-the-editor writers, such as Alan Levy of New York, Gary Orfield of Princeton, and Cora Chase of Washington, to name a few. All these letter writers provided voices of calm and reason at a time when it has been argued that sanity and good will were in short supply. These people would probably bristle if they were called unsung heroes, but their contributions helped smooth the roiling waters of 1972, and their stories have not been sung until now.

This research offers a modest step toward understanding the content and history of letters to the editor in mainstream U.S. magazines at a particular point in history. This research focuses on ordinary letter writers of 1972 who used their own language to express their fears and frustrations, to make necessary changes to liberate women, for instance, but at the same time not to foment revolution. Then, as now, letters indicate change was simultaneously both desired and feared.

Notes

- ¹ Lee Hays and Walter Lowenfels, *Wasn't That a Time* (New York: Vanguard Records, 1957).
- ² In 1972 there were 137 hijacking attempts by terrorists who boarded flights in the United States, or one such attempt in the U.S. every 13.3 days. David J. Haas, "Electronic Security Screening: Its Origin with Aviation Security 1968-1973," *Journal of Applied Security Research* 5, no. 4 (2010): 460.
- ³ Nan Tolen, Stamford, Conn., "Letters," *Time*, 17 January 1972, 4.
- ⁴ Sylvia Schuman, New York, "Letters," *Time*, 3 April 1972, 6.
- ⁵ Francis T. West, Martinsville, Va., "Letters," "Wallace's Business," *Time*, 24 April 1972, 7.
- ⁶ Paul R. Graves, South Burlington, Vt., "Letters," "Outrage Over Taxes," *Time*, 15 May 1972, 4.
- ⁷ *The Atlantic* editor listed on the masthead in 1972 was Robert Manning. *Ayer Directory of Newspapers and Periodicals* (Philadelphia: Ayer Press, 1973) listed *The Atlantic's* circulation as 364,709 in 1972, as also cited in the Audit Bureau of Circulations' 1973 report.
- ⁸ The *Forbes* masthead listed Malcolm S. Forbes as editor in 1972. The circulation that year was listed as 628,491, according to the 1973 *Ayer Directory*, 585.
- ⁹ *Harper's* masthead listed Robert Shrayerson as editor in 1972. The circulation that year was listed as 364,304, according to the Audit Bureau of Circulations' 1973 report and the 1973 *Ayer Directory*, 587.

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- ¹⁰ *The Nation's* editor in 1972 was listed in the masthead as Carey McWilliams. The magazine had a reported circulation of 25,981, according to the Audit Bureau of Circulations' 1973 report and the 1973 *Ayer Directory*, 595.
- ¹¹ Gilbert A. Harrison was listed in the masthead as the *New Republic's* editor in 1972. The magazine had a circulation of 143,402, according to the Audit Bureau of Circulations' 1973 report and the 1973 *Ayer Directory*, 223.
- ¹² *Newsweek's* editor in 1972 was listed in the masthead as Kermit Lansner from January through June 1972, then Osborn Elliott from June 7 through December 1972. The magazine's circulation was 2.6 million in 1972, according to the Audit Bureau of Circulations' 1973 report and the 1973 *Ayer Directory*, 596.
- ¹³ *The Progressive's* editor in 1972 was listed in the masthead as Morris H. Rubin. The magazine's circulation was 45,500 in 1972, according to the Audit Bureau of Circulations' 1973 report and the 1973 *Ayer Directory*, 843.
- ¹⁴ *Time's* editor-in-chief in 1972 was listed in the masthead as Hedley Donovan. The managing editor was Henry A. Grunwald. He was the only editor listed in the 1973 *Ayer Directory*, which did not mention Donovan. The magazine's circulation was 4.26 million in 1972, according to the Audit Bureau of Circulations' 1973 report and the 1973 *Ayer Directory*, 607.
- ¹⁵ Carolyn Kitch, *Pages from the Past: History and Memory in American Magazines* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 5.
- ¹⁶ David Paul Nord, "Reading the Newspaper: Strategies and Politics of Reader Response: Chicago, 1912-1917," *Journal of Communication* 45, no. 3 (Summer 1995): 66-93.
- ¹⁷ Karin Wahl-Jorgensen, *Journalists and the Public: Newsroom Culture, Letters to the Editor and Democracy* (Cresskill, N.J.: Hampton Press, 2007), 4, 5.
- ¹⁸ Tom Wicker, *One of Us: Richard Nixon and the American Dream* (New York: Random House, 1991), 12.
- ¹⁹ Barbie Zelizer, *Covering the Body: The Kennedy Assassination, the Media, and the Shaping of Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 13.
- ²⁰ Michael Schudson, *Watergate in American Memory: How We Remember, Forget, and Reconstruct the Past* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 5.
- ²¹ Wahl-Jorgensen, *Journalists*, 4, 5.
- ²² A.O. Scott, "An Evangelist, an Atheist, and a Murder That Tests Faith," *The New York Times*, 15 July 2011, C9.
- ²³ Jerry Lembcke, *The Spitting Image: Myth, Memory, and the Legacy of Vietnam* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 5.
- ²⁴ Bob Greene, *Homecoming: When the Soldiers Returned from Vietnam* (New York: Putnam, 1989), 18.

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- ²⁵ See Mark Ray Schmidt, ed., *The 1970s* (San Diego: Green Haven Press, 2000), 241.
- ²⁶ Peter N. Carroll, *It Seemed Like Nothing Happened: America in the 1970s* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1982), x.
- ²⁷ Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York: Free Press, 2001), 16. The terms liberal, conservative, left, and right are used throughout this piece to reflect the time period. In 1972 many in the media labeled someone a liberal or a conservative without much nuance—that is, if you were against the Vietnam War, you were often considered liberal. Letter writers used similar labels to describe themselves and others. There was a tendency to label politics as an either/or situation. It becomes problematic to try not to use these words now because this is the language that was prevalent in 1972.
- ²⁸ Schulman, *The Seventies*, 14.
- ²⁹ Robert Hariman and John Lucaites, “Public Identity and Collective Memory in U.S. Iconic Photography: The Image of Accidental Napalm,” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 20, no. 1 (March 2003): 35–66.
- ³⁰ David Lister, “The end of the age of innocence,” *The Independent*, 16 June 2010, 8.
- ³¹ Edward D. Berkowitz, *Something Happened: A Political and Cultural Overview of the Seventies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 5, 6.
- ³² Schulman, *The Seventies*, xvi.
- ³³ Dominick Sandbrook, *Mad As Hell: The Crisis of the 1970s and the Rise of the Populist Right* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), xi.
- ³⁴ Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam, 1993), 242.
- ³⁵ Ralph Blumenthal, “Porno Chic: ‘Hard-core’ Grows Fashionable—and Very Profitable,” *The New York Times*, 21 January 1973, C1.
- ³⁶ Legs McNeil, Jennifer Osborne, and Peter Pavia, *The Other Hollywood: The Uncensored Oral History of the Porn Film Industry* (New York: Regan Books, 2005), 12.
- ³⁷ Sandbrook, *Mad*, 76.
- ³⁸ William G. Mayer, *The Changing American Mind: How and Why American Public Opinion Changed* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 36–38.
- ³⁹ Daniel Yankelovich, *New Rules: Searching for Self-Fulfillment in a World Turned Upside Down* (New York: Random House, 1981), 99.
- ⁴⁰ James E. Landry, “The Role of Government in Limiting Aircraft Hijacking,” *Syracuse Journal of International Law & Commerce*, 307 (1972-1973), 2.
- ⁴¹ Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, *The Final Days* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1976), 12. Also Theodore H. White, *Breach of Faith: The Fall of Richard Nixon* (New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1975), 7.

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- ⁴² Public opinion and its tenuous connection to letters to the editor is discussed by Paula Cozort Renfro, "Bias in Selection of Letters to the Editor," *Journalism Quarterly* 56 (Winter 1979): 822–826. The demographics of letter writers is pursued by David B. Hill, "Letter Opinion on ERA," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 45 (Fall 1981): 384–392.
- ⁴³ For some recent studies of the demographics of letter-to-the-editor writers, see Bill Reader, Guido H. Stempel III, and Douglass K. Daniel, "Age, Wealth, Education Predict Letters to the Editor," *Newspaper Research Journal* 25, no. 4 (Fall 2004): 55. The demographics of letter writers are also mentioned by Karin Wahl-Jorgensen, "Letters to the Editor as a Forum for Public Deliberation: Modes of Publicity and Democratic Debate," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 18, no. 3 (September 2001): 303–320.
- ⁴⁴ One critic of an early draft of this paper requested that the editors of the eight magazines be questioned to find out how they chose which letters to publish in 1972 and to discover how many letters were not published. This is a daunting if not impossible task. Even if all the editors could be interviewed and the reliability of their remarks determined, such work is beyond the scope of this research.
- ⁴⁵ *Time* usually publishes an annual letter to the readers in February listing the total number of letters to the editor received during the previous year. In 1972 the magazine reported receiving about 50,000 letters a year and said that figure had remained steady for more than a decade. *Time*, 14 February 1972, 18.
- ⁴⁶ Some questions about letters to the editor have never been definitively answered and probably never will be, such as "Do editors choose letters to balance editorial content or create a dialogue?" or "Do editors have a quota for how many letters they print?" (Most say they don't, but they have limited space set aside for letters.) The answer to these questions would likely vary among the 5,500-plus general interest magazines currently published in the U.S. Most magazines today probably try to be ethical in how they select letters, but interpretations of what is ethical vary widely. Most magazines in 1972 had a letter-to-the-editor policy that simply limited the length of letters and insisted that no letter be printed without an accompanying name and address to verify the identity of the author. This was an attempt to avoid fakery. But beyond that, there was no discussion of possible bias on the part of editors in choosing which letters to publish from among the hundreds, if not thousands received weekly. The best answer is to admit that letters, like any historical documents, are flawed. Magazines have gatekeepers, but so do news stories on TV and in newspapers. For more discussion of the methodology involved in the historical study of letters to the editor, see Brian Thornton, "Pleading Their Own Cause: Letters to the Editor and Editorials in 10 African-American Newspapers in 1929-1930," *Journalism History* 32, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 168–179; Brian Thornton, "Published Reaction When Murrow Battled McCarthy," *Journalism History* 29, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 133–146; Brian Thornton, "Heroic Editors in Short Supply During Japanese Internment," *Newspaper Research Journal* 23, no. 2/3 (Spring/Summer 2002): 99–113; Brian Thornton, "When a Newspaper Was Accused of

Killing a President,” *Journalism History* 26, no. 3 (Autumn 2000): 108–116; and Brian Thornton, “The Moon Hoax: Debates about Journalistic Ethics in Four New York Newspapers in 1835,” *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 15, no. 2 (Fall 2000): 89–110.

⁴⁷ Wahl-Jorgensen, *Journalists*, 62, 63.

⁴⁸ Wahl-Jorgensen, *Journalists*, 63.

⁴⁹ Numerous studies have looked at agenda setting, starting with Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw, “The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (1972): 176–187. McCombs and Shaw have updated their work, along with co-author David Weaver, in *Communication and Democracy: Exploring the Intellectual Frontiers in Agenda-Setting Theory* (Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1997). Another relevant discussion of agenda setting was written by Michael Bruce MacKuen, “Social Communication and the Mass Policy Agenda,” in Michael Bruce MacKuen and Steven Lane Coombs, *More Than News: Media Power in Public Affairs* (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1981), 17–44.

⁵⁰ Nord, “Reading,” 67.

⁵¹ Wahl-Jorgensen, *Journalists*, 2007.

⁵² Brian Thornton, “The Murder of Emmett Till: Myth, Memory and How 10 Magazines Responded,” *Journalism History* 35, no. 11 (July 2010): 96–104; Brian Thornton, “Black Newspapers in 1968 Offer Panthers Little Support,” *Newspaper Research Journal* 29, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 303–320; and Brian Thornton, “Subterranean Days of Rage: How Magazine Letters to the Editor in 1952 Foretold a Generation of Revolution,” *American Journalism* 24, no. 1 (Winter 2006): 59–88.

⁵³ Emmett Buell, Jr., “Eccentrics or Gladiators? People Who Write About Politics in Letters to the Editor,” *Social Science Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (December 1975): 440–449. The question of why people write letters is studied by John Andrew Klempner, “People Who Write In: Communication Aspects of Opinion Letter Writing,” (Ph.D. diss., Michigan State University, 1966); Byron G. Lander, “Functions of Letters to the Editor—A Re-Examination,” *Journalism Quarterly* 49, no. 1 (Spring 1972): 142; Steve Pasternak and Suraj Kapoor, “The Letters Boom,” *The Masthead* 28 (Fall 1976): 17; and David Pritchard and Dan Berkowitz, “How Readers’ Letters May Influence Editors and News Emphasis: A Content Analysis of 10 Newspapers, 1948-1978,” *Journalism Quarterly* 68, no. 3 (Fall 1991): 388–395.

⁵⁴ David Sumner, *The Magazine Century: American Magazines Since 1900* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), vii.

⁵⁵ Alan and Barbara Nourie, eds., *American Mass-Market Magazines* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1990), 37.

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- ⁵⁶ Nourie and Nourie, *American Mass-Market*, 37. Also see a description of Manning's tenure as editor in "Press: Sea Change," *Time*, 6 October 1980, 35. Manning was editor from 1966 until 1980.
- ⁵⁷ *Forbes* circulation in 1972 was 628,491. Subscriptions generated \$4.5 million for *Forbes* in 1972, and advertising brought in another \$20 million, according to Robert F. Gorman, ed., "September 15, 1917: *Forbes* Magazine Is Founded," in *The Twentieth Century*, 1901-1940 (Pasadena, Calif.: Salem Press, 2007), 1374-1376. Also see Howard Kurtz, *The Fortune Tellers: Inside Wall Street's Game of Money, Media, and Manipulation* (New York: Free Press, 2000), 12.
- ⁵⁸ James Playsted Wood, *Magazines in the United States* (New York: Ronald Press, 1971), 390.
- ⁵⁹ In 1972 *The Nation* was a fierce critic of the Vietnam War. McWilliams also fought to make *The Nation* a committed muckraking publication, featuring investigative reporting and not just opinions and essays. He gave many young muckraker writers their start, including Ralph Nader, Howard Zinn, and Hunter S. Thompson. Thus, *The Nation* was a good vehicle to attempt to capture opinions of some 1972 leftists. *Ibid.*, 189.
- ⁶⁰ Harrison bought the magazine in 1953 and worked as editor/owner/publisher for 20 years. In the early 1970s, with noted journalists such as Walter Pincus writing about Watergate and Stanley Karnow analyzing foreign affairs, *The New Republic's* circulation rose to about 100,000. As a result, the magazine found itself in the unexpected position of actually turning a profit in 1972. Nourie and Nourie, *American Mass-Market*, 305.
- ⁶¹ Morris H. Rubin was editor of *The Progressive* in 1972. The magazine's 45,000 circulation in 1972 meant that it remained a "magazine for cultural minorities." Theodore Peterson, *Magazines in the 20th Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1964), 404.
- ⁶² Nourie and Nourie, *American Mass-Market*, 498.
- ⁶³ Donovan was doing quite well by 1972. He was described as a thoughtful editor who wanted the magazine to have "warmth without sloppiness; sharpness and snap without cruelty; worldliness without vulgarity." Donovan was a hawk about Vietnam long after most of his staff had turned against the war. But despite his conservatism, he admitted that Nixon's abuse of power shocked him during Watergate. As a result, he wrote the first and only editorial in the magazine's history, urging Nixon to resign. "Press," *Time*, 27.
- ⁶⁴ Wood, *Magazines*, 390.
- ⁶⁵ *Newsweek* editor Osborn Elliott guided his magazine in the early 1970s to be more adventurous than *Time* and devote more energy and enterprise to exploring the problems of blacks, the counterculture, and other tumultuous events. *Newsweek* was also ahead of *Time* in describing how Vietnam was tearing the country apart. John Tebbel

and Mary Ellen Zuckerman, *The Magazine in America 1741-1990* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 242.

- ⁶⁶ Alan J. Levy, Forest Hills Garden, N.Y., "The Mail," *The Atlantic*, September 1972, 40.
- ⁶⁷ William Weddell, Pinehaven, New Zealand, "Letters," *Time*, 3 April 1972, 6.
- ⁶⁸ T. Franklin Adams, Baltimore, "Letters," *Newsweek*, 24 July 1972, 4.
- ⁶⁹ Gary Orfield, Princeton, N.J., "Correspondence," *The New Republic*, 5 February 1972, 32.
- ⁷⁰ Cora G. Chase, Vaughn, Wash., "The People's Forum," *The Progressive*, January 1972, 48.
- ⁷¹ He signed his letter simply Vanauken, Lynchburg, Va., "The People's Forum," *The Progressive*, January 1972, 47, 48.
- ⁷² Leonti H. Thompson, M.D., Napa, Calif., "Letters," *Harper's*, March 1972, 6, 8.
- ⁷³ Bill Darnell, West Vancouver, British Columbia, "Letters," *The Nation*, 29 May 1972, 674.
- ⁷⁴ Roger Berensohn, Waimanalo, Hawaii, "Readers Say," *Forbes*, 1 December 1972, 90.
- ⁷⁵ B. Elaine Thompson, Philadelphia, "Letters," *Harper's*, December 1972, 4.
- ⁷⁶ Patricia Wild, Mount Vernon, N.Y., "Letters," *Harper's*, December 1972, 6, 7.
- ⁷⁷ Sue Hestor, San Francisco, "Letters," *Harper's*, April 1972, 33.
- ⁷⁸ The letter was signed by Agrupacion Abdala, Alina M. Rodriguez, Iris Hernandez, Isa Menendez, and Ada Pazo de Hernandez. They all said they were from Havana but now live in Delaware. "The People's Forum," *The Progressive*, October 1972, 49.
- ⁷⁹ Pat K. Lynch, New York, "Missing Image," "Letters," *Time*, 24 January 1972, 6.
- ⁸⁰ Sylvia Schuman, New York, "Letters," *Time*, 3 April 1972, 6.
- ⁸¹ Ben Calderone, Levittown, N.Y., "Letters," *Time*, 3 April 1972, 6.
- ⁸² Clyde T. Bates, Georgetown, Ky., "Letters," *Newsweek*, 12 June 1972, 7, 8.
- ⁸³ William P. Kiem, Wilmington, Del., "The People's Forum," *The Progressive*, June 1972, 46-47.
- ⁸⁴ Conrad Black, *Richard M. Nixon: A Life in Full* (New York: Public Affairs Books, 2007), 12.
- ⁸⁵ "Nixon and Kissinger, Men of the Year," *Time*, 1 January 1973, 25-28.
- ⁸⁶ Schulman, *The Seventies*, 40.
- ⁸⁷ H.R. Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries: Inside The Nixon White House* (New York: Putnam, 1994), 506-507.
- ⁸⁸ George B. Barnes, Detroit, Mich., "The Mail," *The Atlantic*, April 1972, 35.
- ⁸⁹ Richard Cain, Portland, Oreg., "Letters," *The Nation*, 9 October 1972, 8.

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- ⁹⁰ Kathy Kendelhardt, Holbrook, N.Y., "Letters," *Newsweek*, 31 January 1972, 6.
- ⁹¹ Glenn M. Goodrich, Washington, D.C., "Letters," *Time*, 17 January 1972, 4.
- ⁹² See, for example, Christian G. Appy, *Patriots: The Vietnam War Remembered from All Sides* (New York: Viking, 2003); George Esper, *The Eyewitness History of the Vietnam War, 1961-1975* (New York: Ballantine, 1983); George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975* (New York: Wiley, 1979); Tom Wells, *The War Within: America's Battle Over Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); and Marilyn Blatt Young, *The Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991).
- ⁹³ William Lunch and Peter Sperlich, "American Public Opinion and the War in Vietnam," *Political Research Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (March 1979): 21-44.
- ⁹⁴ Col. Leroy Lutes, Alexandria, Va., "Man of the Year," *Time*, 24 January 1972, 4.
- ⁹⁵ Mrs. Bonnie Bryant, Springfield, Va., "Letters," *Newsweek*, 4 December 1972, 7.
- ⁹⁶ Richard Reeves, *President Reagan: The Triumph of Imagination* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 8.
- ⁹⁷ Salvatore Kluzewski, Chicago, "Readers Say," *Forbes*, 15 July 1972, 10.
- ⁹⁸ William R. Henkell, Jr., Flagstaff, Ariz., "Letters," *Time*, 28 February 1972, E2.
- ⁹⁹ Gregory A. Daddis, *No Sure Victory: Measuring U.S. Army Effectiveness and Progress in the Vietnam War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 8.
- ¹⁰⁰ Philip Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares: The End of the Sixties and the Making of Eighties America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 3.
- ¹⁰¹ Sandbrook, *Mad*, xii.
- ¹⁰² Jenkins, *Decade*, 8.
- ¹⁰³ Thomas Byrne Edsall and Mary D. Edsall, *Chain Reaction* (New York: Norton, 1991), 3.
- ¹⁰⁴ William J. Baumol, "What Marshall Didn't know: On the Twentieth Century's Contributions to Economics," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* CXV, no. 1 (February 2000): 2.
- ¹⁰⁵ W. Joseph Campbell, *The Year That Defined American Journalism: 1897 and the Clash of Paradigms* (New York: Routledge, 2006), xix.