



Life and Popular Culture in the 1940s

The media shape—and are shaped by—popular culture and opinion.

In the 1940s, there were four major sources of information on current events, popular culture, and national trends. One was radio. A second was represented by theater of various kinds and, especially, movies. The third consisted of fiction and nonfiction books. The fourth source was newspapers and magazines. Most newspapers focused on issues of local interest, although they also published stories carried by national news services such as the Associated Press. National newsmagazines—Life, the Saturday Evening Post, Reader's Digest, Time, and others—provided in-depth coverage of events and issues of interest to a national audience. Articles published in these magazines carried much more weight then than they do today.

In the 1940s and 50s, especially, Life Magazine was a popular and widely read weekly magazine. Life covered national and international events, celebrity events, and everyday life in America. What made Life stand out from most other magazines and media sources was its extensive use of photographs that gave readers a look of people, places, and things they could only have imagined beforehand.

Network television became popular in the 1950s and 60s. We can still see re-runs of TV programs from that era.

We live in a different world today. Information and entertainment are available from many more sources. We have cable TV, access to the Internet—web sites, chat rooms, e-mail, web casts, instant messaging, and discussion groups—and the ability to subscribe to newsletters, magazines, newspapers, and journals in e-format. Plus, we still have the old sources of information and entertainment.

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