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How Times, and Time, Changed

By: Ben W. Heineman Jr.
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Henry Luce's titanic magazines -- *Time*, *Life*, *Fortune* and *Sports Illustrated* -- started to decline about 20 years after his death, in 1967. And this downward trajectory was punctuated with the recent announcement that Time-Warner would [spin off the remaining Time Inc magazines](#) to survive on their own in the internet era.

Yet the power and prestige of the magazines in the middle decades of the 20th century was unparalleled. For those who lived through their domination or want to engage in a bit of media archaeology, a good place to start to understand their remarkable place in U.S. culture is Alan Brinkley's [The Publisher: Henry Luce and His American Century](#).

On the slightly lighter and shorter side is Maureen Dowd's recent [column](#), "As Time Goes Bye," reminiscing about working in *Time's* Washington and New York offices in the early 1980s. These were still "glory days," when *Time* was a posh place to work, money flowed like wine, and it had "a *Mad Men* aura of whiskey, cigarettes, four-hour sodden lunches," and limos would drive you to the moon. Being a reporter was like being a member of a Yale secret society (unless you were a woman). Says Dowd: "a plummy time."

For many years, as Dowd suggests, the symbol of Time Inc's power in the journalism profession was the uninhibited spending by its writers and executives. No ink-stained wretches there. My initiation into these rites of excess was in 1966, when I was a summer intern in the London office headed by bureau chief Henry Luce III, son of the founder. I had worked on the college newspaper (no money) and was studying in England (subsistence stipend above tuition).

It was the era of Swinging London, with film stars like Vanessa Redgrave, Julie Christie, David Hemmings, Terence Stamp; designers and models like Mary Quant, Twiggy, Jean Shrimpton and Veruschka; youthful British musicians like the Beatles, the Stones,

the Kinks, the Who. *Private Eye*, the satirical magazine, was just gaining momentum. Carnaby Street was ground zero for the new sensibility. I watched, somewhat wide-eyed, as the "correspondents" of Time-Life (they weren't called reporters) engaged with all the stars of the London firmament.

About halfway through the summer, the bureau chief called me to his office. The nice and benevolent Mr. Luce III said: "You are doing a good job of reporting and writing." In those days, "correspondents," even of the junior birdman variety like me, sent extensive "files" to New York where they were "rewritten" by the mysterious "desk."

"But," he went on, "we have one problem with your work so far, something you will have to fix if you want a career with Time-Life." My chest tightened. I forced a bright, inquisitive smile.

"Yes sir?"

"Your expense accounts are abysmal," he said sternly.

"Yes, sir."

He smiled slightly. "They are way too low. Here you are in Swinging London. We just did a [cover](#) on this very subject. You are young. You understand this world better than I do."

"Yes, sir."

"You should be going out for expensive lunches and dinners with sources every day, including, in fact especially, on week-ends."

"Yes, sir, but I'm really just a student, an intern." I couldn't bring myself to think of myself as a "summer correspondent." I had no idea how to mix it up with the London "in crowd."

"Shh, shh," he smiled again. "Listen to what I say."

I have worked for many organizations, but I have never had any person give me advice like that.

It was a swinging time for the premier magazines in America.

It was also a long time ago.

<http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2013/03/how-times-and-i-time-i-changed/273888/>

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