



Playboy and the Making of the Good Life in Modern America

Elizabeth Fraterrigo

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Launched by Hugh Hefner in 1953, *Playboy* promoted an image of the young, affluent, single male—the man about town ensconced in a plush bachelor pad, in constant pursuit of female companionship and a good time. Spectacularly successful, this high-gloss portrait of glamorous living and sexual adventure would eventually draw some one million readers each month.

Exploring the world created in the pages of America's most widely read and influential men's magazine, Elizabeth Fraterrigo sets *Playboy's* history in the context of a society in transition. Sexual mores, gender roles, family life, notions of consumption and national purpose—all were in flux as Americans adjusted to the prosperity that followed World War II. Initially, *Playboy* promised only "entertainment for men," but Fraterrigo reveals that its vision of abundance, pleasure, and individual freedom soon placed the magazine at the center of mainstream debates about sex and freedom, politics and pleasure in postwar America. She shows that for Hugh Hefner, the "good life" meant the "playboy life," in which expensive goods and sexually available women were plentiful, obligations were few, and if one worked hard enough, one could enjoy abundant leisure and consumption. In support of this view, *Playboy* attacked early marriage, traditional gender arrangements, and sanctions against premarital sex. The magazine also promoted private consumption as a key to economic growth and national well-being, offering tips from "The Playboy Advisor" on everything from high-end stereos and cuff-links to caviar and wine.

If we want to understand post-war America, Fraterrigo shows, we must pay close attention to *Playboy*, its messages about pleasure and freedom, the debates it inspired, and the criticism it drew—all of which has been bound up in the popular culture and consumer society that surround us.

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