

# Anniversary Journalism, Collective Memory, and the Cultural Authority to Tell the Story of the American Past

Carolyn Kitch

“*Life* looked searchingly at America, and in its pages Americans saw themselves . . . Many of you can recollect the moment of discovering a special picture—when a teacher pinned *Life*’s pages on a bulletin board; while sharing a copy in an Army barracks; during a quiet time at home. Several of *Life*’s photographs have become a part of the national memory, and we hope that some of your own fondly remembered images appear here . . .” (*Life*, 50th anniversary issue, 5)

“[These] collected notes and observations bear comparison to the snapshots in a family album . . . add[ing] to the sum of what is meant by the American character and turn of mind . . . the distinguishing tone of voice is that of a practical people interested in what they can see and make of the world, the voice of travelers in an always new country, optimistic and energetic, seeking to work the soil of the American experience into a cash crop, a grand hotel, a dream of heaven.” (*Harper’s*, 150th anniversary issue, 57)

“As Jimi Hendrix importuned: Please, remember, got to remember, yeah, got to remember, oh Lord . . . let’s honor his advice and consider anew the things of our past . . . the heroes and villains, feats and blunders that have defined our world for the last 20 years . . .” (*Outside*, 20th anniversary issue, 45)

Today, mass media are central to Americans’ understanding of the past. Marking anniversaries of events—from Pearl Harbor to Woodstock to the debut of the *I Love Lucy* show—films, mass-market books, and television specials reinterpret their lasting meaning for the country, using these stories to discuss American

ideals and identity. Media also celebrate their own longevity, making institutional anniversaries occasions to sum up “history.” The ubiquity of retrospective media programs and products confirms that “we are forging through the media a common recollection of the national past” (Nerone and Wartella 85).

Such productions are, of course, works of memory as much as they are works of history, and they are frequently self-reflexive. Fred Davis (1979) notes that not only are the media the primary forum for public reminiscence, “but the very objects of collective nostalgia are in themselves media creations from the recent past . . . the popular media have come increasingly to serve as their own repository for the nostalgic use of the past” (122, 131). Davis refers to entertainment media, but his point is equally true of journalism, a profession at the forefront of creating and recalling American collective memory. Moreover, as Jill Edy notes, “[t]he documentary style of journalists’ work gives them a unique authority in telling the story of the past” (73).

This article considers how American journalistic media celebrate their own anniversaries in ways that allow them to define national memory and to position themselves as public historians. Its evidence includes 25 national consumer magazines representing a wide variety of subjects and interests. While a number of scholars have studied the cultural-memory functions of television news (for instance, Dayan and Katz; Fiske; Zelizer, 1992), little attention has been given to magazines<sup>1</sup>—despite the fact that their national reach, their narrative style, and their physical permanence make them important sites of meaning-making, community-building, and reminiscence.

Magazines offer a blend of authority and interpretation that allows them to explain what American life means. In the anniversary issues studied here, *Time* claimed that the magazine had held true to its founding editor’s mission to “[s]ort the world into stories’ that create ‘wonder, entertainment, cautionary experience, useful memory,’” (Morrow 87) while *Life*’s editors wrote that “[t]he magazine imparted a feeling that a vast nation could be brought together as a community” (“Celebrating” 5). Among the most savable forms of media, magazines perform what Barbie Zelizer (1995) terms the “warehouse” function of media in collective memory (233). For many readers, anniversary issues serve as what folklorists call “memory objects,” allowing their owners to recall “the context of which they were once a part” (Radley 54). In

this sense, magazines that are bought and kept for memory reasons are material culture as well as journalistic text; they are artifacts.

The artifacts discussed here are anniversary issues of national consumer magazines (i.e., not regional or trade magazines, which are not available to the entire American public) that have chronicled various aspects of American life for as little as five years or for longer than a century. The study includes three examples each of milestone anniversaries (25th, 50th, 75th, and 100th) and two examples each of other anniversaries (5th, 10th, 20th, 30th, 40th, and 60th), plus one magazine that has celebrated its 150th anniversary. Although several of the older magazines in this study published earlier anniversary editions as well, the issues examined here are recent ones (two-thirds of them appearing in the last five years), providing evidence of how common this sort of journalism has become. The magazines are: the 5th anniversary issues of *Fast Company* and *Yahoo! Internet Life*; the 10th anniversary issues of *Entertainment Weekly* and the *Utne Reader*; the 20th anniversary issues of *Outside* and *Discover*; the 25th anniversary issues of *Rolling Stone*, *Ms.*, and *People Weekly*; the 30th anniversary issues of *Black Enterprise* and *Jazz Times*; the 40th anniversary issues of *TV Guide* and *Sports Illustrated*; the 50th anniversary issues of *Newsweek*, *Life*, and *Esquire*;<sup>2</sup> the 60th anniversary issues of *Gourmet* and *Glamour*; the 75th anniversary issues of *Reader's Digest*, *Time*, and the *New Yorker*<sup>3</sup>; the 100th anniversary issues of *Good Housekeeping*, *National Geographic*, and *House and Garden*; and the 150th anniversary issue of *Harper's*.<sup>4</sup> Despite the differing nature of the editorial content and audiences of these magazines, and despite the difference in their ages (and therefore the amount of time each one reviewed), these issues reveal striking similarities in how the past is presented in popular journalism.

In the oldest magazine in this study, *Harper's*' editor Lewis Lapham summed up the techniques by which this reviewing process is accomplished:

The editorial pages run to nearly twice the normal number; the copy has been set in somewhat showier forms of the customary typefaces; and the authors assembled under the anniversary rubrics count among their company some of the most prominent figures to be found anywhere . . . among the issue's several added attractions the reader will find not only a collection of dispatches from the year 1850 . . . but also . . . projections of the future . . . (5)

The editor imagined the issue as an exchange between the current staff and its audience, and as a conversation among writers, together creating a story spanning a century and a half: “The magazine owes its longevity to their collective sense of an historical narrative as closely bound to time future as to time past, the successive generations appearing on different stages but in the same repertory company, all of them caught up in the making of maps or metaphors with which to find the spirit of an age that they could recognize as their own” (57).

Such grand language was not limited to a literary magazine celebrating its sesquicentennial in the year 2000; it has characterized magazine anniversary issues of all types and all ages, from *Rolling Stone* to *Good Housekeeping* and from *Outside* to *House & Garden*. All of these magazines used similar language, article types, structures, and themes to tell more than just individual institutional stories. Based on these examples, this article identifies and discusses four rhetorical strategies through which anniversary media conflate their own past with the American past—and in so doing, create national memory and extend the cultural authority of journalism.

### *The Theoretical Context for this Study*

This analysis is rooted in the theoretical notion that journalism is a form of both cultural production and communal ritual. In James Carey’s ritual view of communication, news media work toward “the maintenance of society . . . the creation, representation, and celebration of shared even if illusory beliefs” (43). Such a model for understanding journalism blurs the line between producers and receivers, since “[a] ritual is not something one is audience to but something one is participant in” (Rothenbuhler 125). In this view, reminiscent journalism is a dialogic creation of journalists and audiences, who together construct collective memory and a shared, national identity based on the passage of time—what David Lowenthal calls “a unifying web of retrospection” (198).

This process requires repetition: “In order not to forget [its] past,” writes Robert Bellah, a social group must “retell its story, its constitutive narrative” (153). Yet with each retelling, an account “from the past” takes on new form and meaning. French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, who first articulated the notion of collective memory, explained that “a remembrance is in very large measure a reconstruction of the past achieved with data borrowed from

the present, a reconstruction prepared, furthermore, by reconstructions of earlier periods wherein past images had already been altered” (69). He compared this memory work to retouching a portrait, a process in which “[n]ew images overlay the old” (72).

Journalistic media are themselves archives on which editors and writers can draw, republishing previous photographs or texts and explaining them in terms of their lasting significance. In doing so, they reshape as well as merely “revisit” the past. The newer story they tell contextualizes the past within the present and the present (and future) within the past, creating a narrative trajectory with national meaning. Journalism thus serves as one framework within which social groups can construct their own sense of public time, “that dimension of collective life through which human communities come to have what is assumed to be a patterned and perceptually shared past, present, and future” (Molotch and Lester 102).

This also, notes Susan Davis, “is what anniversaries do. They assert the sense of time as passing and human life as ephemeral, but make a counter assertion: human institutions within the flow of time are permanent” (134). They are occasions to remind us—journalists and audiences alike—that we are part of something, in terms of place and time, greater than ourselves; they also are occasions to assess our “progress.” Michael Kammen argues that “[a]ny evaluation of the relative roles of memory and amnesia in American culture must ultimately acknowledge that we increasingly tend to measure how we are doing (in terms of collective knowledge) by how well we commemorate anniversaries” (667). An anniversary is a ritual celebration of the community who observes it, serving to strengthen its identity and values through the remembrance of an event. In the case of a magazine’s anniversary of its own founding, the community is its audience as well as its staff—although the event of the anniversary allows this group to speak not just for itself, but also on behalf of “society.”

A magazine does so by telling the stories of individuals and occurrences that are connected to its specific identity and yet that also represent broader American values. As many scholars have documented (for example, Barkin; Darnton; Fisher; Lule), journalistic media routinely use the techniques of narrative and personalization to find “lessons” in the news, and they are even more likely to do so when making sense of the events and personalities of the past. What historian David Lowenthal claims about writing in his own profession—that “[h]istorical facts are timeless and discontin-

uous until woven together in stories” (219-20)—applies to journalism as well. Because of their editorial style and longer articles, and because they are often overtly interpretive, magazines specialize in narrative. In anniversary issues, they revisit earlier narratives that originated in their pages and combine them in new forms to create a broader and grander narrative. This reuse of content to tell a bigger story, and to claim both journalistic authority and historical significance, is the first of the four rhetorical strategies these issues employ.

### *Reusing Past Content as Historical Evidence*

The documentary and storage functions of journalism can be seen in magazine anniversary issues, which reuse their own content as historical “evidence” of the American past, and of their own importance in defining and explaining that past. Most of the issues in this study reprinted previous covers, with *National Geographic* providing a 12-page foldout section containing 360 of them (in thumbnail size) and *Gourmet* reprinting its editors’ “favorite” cover from each of its 60 years. The much younger *People Weekly* and *Fast Company* reprinted all of their covers, while *Entertainment Weekly* listed all of its cover celebrities, in order of how often they had appeared.<sup>5</sup> *Sports Illustrated* actually recreated its first cover by using the same baseball-action photograph on its 40th anniversary cover. These images provided textual and visual references that served as contrasts to the present, illustrating changes in American life. In *Good Housekeeping*, for instance, old covers with similar themes were inset into modern-day service features on subjects such as cooking, home decorating, sewing, and beauty. The same issue contained a feature titled “Pages from Our Past,” which showed readers “how we used to be” by reprinting pages of articles and advertisements from the first five decades of the twentieth century (including the opening spread of the magazine’s special section in its 1935 50th anniversary issue).

More than half of the magazines in this study explained previous eras by reprinting or excerpting their own articles from those eras. Several presented the “best” of their past content as a way of defining the magazine: *Gourmet* chose not only recipes, but also the editors’ favorite food-related essays and fiction for each of its six decades; *Reader’s Digest* filled its regular humor departments<sup>6</sup> with favorite items from past years; and throughout its anniversary year, *Sports Illustrated* reprinted “40 classic *Sports Illustrated* sto-

ries to be presented during 1994 as a special bonus to our readers in celebration of *SI*'s 40th anniversary" (O'Neil 30). *Esquire* made double use of the act of looking back through time by reprinting essays by distinguished writers about particular decades or phenomena of American life—articles that had themselves been reminiscent reflections in previous issues (for instance, it "remembered" the 1930s with pieces by historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., and novelist John Steinbeck that first had been published in, respectively, the magazine's April 1957 and June 1960 issues). The *New Yorker* and *Life* drew on the authority of famous writers who had been published in those magazines over the years, presenting their work in sidebars titled "Takes" and "Voices from *Life*."

The latter magazine explained to its readers: "To pick up any copy of *Life* is to savor a bit of the world's history. In this issue we have tried to sample that history . . . We have excerpted portions of memorable texts and presented here and there throughout the issue short pieces just as they originally appeared" ("Celebrating" 5). This recycling of material seems to turn an anniversary issue into a scrapbook in which the past is simply "recalled." It also redirects the focus from the magazine's history to history itself. Because their anniversaries occurred at or close to the end of a century (and a millennium), both *Time* and *Harper's* explained their own content as documentation of the 20th century, even though *Time* had not begun publishing until 1923. *Good Housekeeping* did the same—despite the fact that its centennial occurred 15 years before the end of the century—by celebrating "100 Women of the Century." *Rolling Stone* announced its 25th anniversary as a milestone in the history of rock:

Over the years, the *Rolling Stone* interviews have become . . . the most authoritative nonmusical communication between a performer and his audience . . . *Rolling Stone's* mission, from the outset, was to compile enough interviews with musicians—both seminal and contemporary—to create the primary oral record and historical archive of this art. The collection of excerpts presented here . . . is a small sample of a large historical treasure. (Wenner, 15 October 1992: 37)

In the explanatory text accompanying its pullout pages of reprinted covers, *National Geographic's* editor explained that "these covers mark a century of holding up to the world our uniquely objective publishing mirror" (Garrett 270). Yet what these magazines offered was a new picture, in which particular pieces of

the past were resurrected and presented in a particular order and context—an enactment of Raymond Williams’s definition of culture “as a continual selection and re-selection of ancestors” (53). This selective and narrative process was accomplished in many of the magazines by the organization of past material into themes that summed up aspects of American life. Explaining that “[t]hese pictures of the champions and the villains, the news and the trends come straight from the pages of *Life*” (“Year by Year” 33), that magazine used seven categories (with titles such as “Big Events,” “Bad News,” and “Heroes”) to describe the news and popular culture of each of its 50 years of publication, arranging these lists into an evolutionary timeline.

*Time* and *Newsweek* labeled slices of time in similar trajectories. In *Newsweek*, which used families in one town as a way of telling American history, the eras were defined in terms of Depression, war, prosperity, and disillusionment (with the editors unsure how to label the post-Vietnam period leading up to 1983, the magazine’s 50th anniversary publication date). *Time* divided its longer past, spanning 1923 to 1998, into periods called “Exuberance” (1923-29), “Despair” (1929-39), “War” (1939-48), “Affluence” (1948-60), “Revolution” (1960-73), “Limits” (1973-80), “Comeback” (1980-89), and “Transformation” (1989-98). Fred Davis (1984) notes that such constructions of time “are linked thematically in certain patterns of inversion, complementarity or negation,” creating “narrative linkages” between decades and eras in order to tell a larger story that is cohesive (16).

*TV Guide*, *Gourmet*, and *Esquire* similarly revisited the American past decade by decade, with the latter titling its special issue “How We Lived, 1933-1983: An Extraordinary Chronicle of American Life.” This “chronicle” opened with an essay on “Life in the Last Fifty Years” that was not a summary of *Esquire*’s past, but rather a survey of American technological, political, and social change; it ended with a quote from former President John F. Kennedy, affirming his “unshakable faith in the future” (Steel 24). Even at only five years old, *Yahoo! Internet Life* also offered a “chronicle” of time since “the dawn of the Web” and called the Internet “a 21st-century Algonquin Round Table . . . we’ve assembled this collection of quotes, excerpts, and images from our raucous first half-decade . . . Add to those voices our own commentary on some watershed events, and you have a scrapbook that even Algonquin regulars Dorothy Parker or Robert Benchley

would envy” (Golson 18; “This Was Our Y-Life” 110). At age 10, *Entertainment Weekly* “look[ed] back” at how the 1990s had “changed the way we talk, watch, listen and think” (“Our First Decade” 25); it also included a humorous back page of illustrations showing covers the magazine might have run had it existed in previous decades (“Encore” 176).<sup>7</sup> Both *Jazz Times* and *TV Guide* chose the “best” recordings and shows by genre, with *TV Guide* earnestly explaining its criteria (“We weighed such factors as the influence and impact of the series, both on the medium of television and on American culture; the show’s quality; and whether it has held up over the years” [“*TV Guide Presents*” 5]).

Other magazines suggested that their own existence was the result of historical currents. *Sports Illustrated* noted that “[s]ome-time in the second half of this century, sports became an axis on which the world turns” (Rushin 36). The politically liberal *Utne Reader* explained that the magazine was “a cultural artifact, the inevitable consequence of strange forces that were swirling around this country at the time of its founding in February 1984. Given what was going on when the magazine was started, *Utne Reader* seems fated to have happened—it was simply an idea that fit the times” (“Our Story” 51).<sup>8</sup> *Gourmet* offered a similar explanation: “Contrary to later opinion, January of 1941—the tail end of the Great Depression, the eve of America’s entry into World War II—was a fine moment to launch a magazine that celebrated civilized and even luxurious dining. Hardship (and later the war) fostered a taste for images of a happier past and perhaps a happier future . . . The time was ripe for what *Gourmet* represented . . .” (Mendelson 71).

*House & Garden*—which claimed that “design is social history, telling us who we are and where we’ve been” (“A Century of Passions” 51)—made one of the heaviest historical gestures, linking the year 2001 with both World War II and the Civil War. On the final page of its centennial issue, it reprinted the magazine’s February 1944 cover, a text cover containing a quote from Abraham Lincoln (“I like to see a man proud of the place in which he lives. I like to see a man live so that his place will be proud of him”) with this explanation: “No article accompanied this remarkable cover by Irving Penn: the editors of *House & Garden* simply found in Abraham Lincoln’s straightforward statement an ‘ideal slogan’—and we can proudly stand by it now” (308).

### *Marking the Magazine as a Memory Object*

Such content was part of the magazines' implication that these were not merely regular installments to be discarded, but definitive documents that would serve as records of the readers' past and as treasured keepsakes—as “memory objects.” That message was delivered structurally through the themes and visually through consistent design devices.

*People Weekly*, *Black Enterprise*, and *Time* announced their themed sections inside colored banners that ran across the tops of pages; in *Time*'s case, that color was its signature cover-border red, uniting not only the various eras with each other, but also the anniversary issue with all *Time* issues. *Newsweek*'s 50th anniversary issue was actually golden, the color of the cover and of the borders around every page inside. Though it was the magazine's 100th, not 50th, anniversary, *Good Housekeeping* also used a gold cover; *Esquire*'s 50th anniversary cover was solid silver; *Jazz Times*'s 30th anniversary cover was a clean and glossy white; and the solid background cover of *National Geographic*'s centennial issue was that magazine's border-signature yellow, behind the coverline “100 Years: Reporting on ‘the world and all that is in it.’”<sup>9</sup> Elsewhere in the magazine, “the yellow border” was used as a rectangular icon at the tops of pages, the opening page of every article was framed by yellow, and one feature, in which past covers were reprinted, was actually titled “Within the Yellow Border” (Garrett).

*Harper's*' sole coverline—“Celebrating 150 Years of Literature, 1850-2000”—was backed by royal blue over photos of Mark Twain and Tom Wolfe (to represent the opposite ends of its literary timeline), with a gatefold “second cover” folding out to reveal the names of distinguished contributors to the special issue. *House & Garden* used a celebratory background of multicolored balloons behind its large number “100” on its centennial-anniversary cover. And on the cover of the *New Yorker* was the image of “Eustace Tilley,” the puffed-chested, high-hatted, society snob peering through his monocle who was drawn for the magazine's first cover in 1925 and has resurfaced in slightly altered illustrated forms every year since (“Cover Stories” 2). Indeed, the cover of the 75th anniversary issue contained no text at all, merely the Tilley figure (with a dog's face), a presumption that readers would understand the reference and simply know that this was a special issue.<sup>10</sup>

Other consistent cover devices were the founding and current dates, the labels “Special Anniversary Issue” or “Collector’s Edition,” and a large use of the anniversary-year number. Such numbers often appeared over images that signalled the essence of the magazine’s editorial mission: for instance, a large number 25 appeared over the unidentified faces of women (representing feminism as a social and political force) on the cover of *Ms.*; *People Weekly* and *Entertainment Weekly* surrounded their “25” and “10” with the faces of celebrities; *Time* framed its “75” with thumbnail-sized images of its own covers; and *Life*’s large “50” appeared over a montage of iconic 20th century photographs (from the Statue of Liberty and the moon landing to Shirley Temple and the Beatles). The plain-silver back cover of *Esquire* bore its 50th anniversary logo and the magazine’s ongoing tagline, “Man at His Best,” with a statement declaring that “*Esquire*’s original spirit thrives because its original vision remains intact. What it sought when it came into being half a century ago it seeks today: in a word, quality . . .”

If such cues did not make it clear that these magazines were meant to be saved, their sheer size did. The anniversary issues of *National Geographic*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Life*, and *Esquire* each weighed in at more than 400 pages; *People Weekly*, the *New Yorker*, and *House and Garden* each topped 300 pages. *People Weekly* and *Rolling Stone* published multiple anniversary issues.

Some of the magazines repackaged their anniversary material for presentation beyond the magazine itself. During their centennial years, both *National Geographic* and *House & Garden* mounted photography exhibitions, the former at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, and the latter (whose show was titled “The Well-Lived Life: 100 Years of *House & Garden*”) in New York and Los Angeles (Livingston 324; Advertisement, *House & Garden*, 189). Some magazines also published anniversary books with different content than that of their anniversary issues. *Outside* published a collection of the magazine’s best photography, while *Gourmet* issued an anthology of favorite articles from past issues (Advertisement, *Outside*, 211 and Reichl 26). *Esquire* published a book profiling “The 50 Who Made the Difference: A Celebration of Fifty American Originals,” describing its subjects as “men and women who charted the course of American life over the last half-century” (Advertisement, *Esquire*, 51). *Time*, *Life*, and *Harper’s* republished their anniversary issues themselves as books.

The book form of *Harper's*' 150th anniversary issue took on a different title, *An American Album*, and, with a new foreword by historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., even weightier historical nature; an advertisement explained that the volume was meant to be “a window on life in this country and an essential heirloom addition to any library.” *Harper's* also announced a web site containing the complete archives of the magazine's contents, a chance to “search and browse through 150 years of American culture . . . It's a trip through America you won't want to miss” (Advertisements, *Harper's*, 179, 182). The importance of the sesquicentennial issue of *Harper's* as an “heirloom” was underscored by its inclusion of facsimiles of congratulatory letters from then-New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and then-U.S. President Bill Clinton. The President opened the issue by equating the magazine's history and future with the history and future of America:

When its first issue appeared in June of 1850, *Harper's* was embraced by a young America—a restless, energetic, optimistic nation, still living in a predominantly rural society and years away from the horrors of the Civil War and the upheaval of the Industrial Revolution. In the ensuing decades, our country experienced great challenges and changes—some tragic, some confounding, many exhilarating—and *Harper's* illuminated those years with invaluable information, perspective, insight, and analysis. . . Now, at the beginning of a new millennium, we are still seeking to achieve American ideals and to make their meaning clear not only at home, but also around the world. I am confident that, in this new age, *Harper's Magazine* will continue to capture the American quest . . . (1)

#### *Personalizing the Past*

Presidential proclamations appeared only in *Harper's* and *Good Housekeeping* (which ran a letter from then-U.S. President Ronald Reagan in its 1985 centennial issue), but each of the anniversary issues contained a letter or message from the magazine's editor-in-chief, publisher, or company president. Addressing readers directly, each of these essays explained how and why the issue's content had been chosen or created, and invited readers to (as *People's* editor put it) “look back with us on our history, and your own” (Wallace 6).

Such conversational gestures were used throughout the various anniversary issues, including the reader in the act of reminiscence and making that survey a personal journey. The editors of *Reader's Digest* and the *Utne Reader* (which, though politically

different, are the same editorial concept) thanked their readers directly, and in similar language: the former noted that founder DeWitt Wallace “never saw readers as some vast mass, but as distinct individuals with whom he wished to build a strong bond. That’s why the apostrophe is before the ‘s’ in our name” (“How a Little Magazine” 14), while founder Eric Utne wrote, “we’d like to thank you, our reader (the most important part of our name) . . . We’ve come to think of you as family” (Utne 2). In its 50th anniversary issue, the editors of *Life* claimed that “[o]ver the years a rich and reciprocal affect grew between magazine and reader” (“Celebrating” 5) and used the words “you” and “we” in inviting its readers to “remember” how its photographs had inspired or moved them.

*Ms.*, *Good Housekeeping*, and *Reader’s Digest* solicited letters on how the magazine had changed readers’ lives and then printed them in their anniversary editions. *Sports Illustrated* ran letters from charter subscribers: “I was 37 when the first copy of *SI* arrived in mail . . . Now I’m 77”; “[I] have saved every copy of the magazine for the last 40 years. I have also made wooden boxes for all the volumes to keep them in mint condition” (“Letters” 4). *Gourmet*, *People Weekly* and *Time* reprinted reader letters that had run in the magazines in earlier decades, using them to sum up important events and phenomena of the past. The latter two magazines published lists of their best- and worst-selling issues; *Time* also reported on the cover stories that had drawn the most reader mail.

Including the readers—by addressing them directly, anticipating their opinions, and including their voices in the content—was one way the magazines personalized the past. They also defined and celebrated their own identities in terms of representative individuals. In 1986, *Life* closed its 50th anniversary issue with a photograph of George Story, whose photo as a squalling newborn had opened its first issue in 1936, leaning over a cake adorned by flaming candles and the icing inscription “Happy 50th Birthday” (“Just One More” 415).<sup>11</sup> In sidebars titled “Dramatis Personae” scattered throughout its anniversary issue, *Outside* profiled activists and athletes of the previous 20 years. *Sports Illustrated’s* main essay in its 40th anniversary issue was a set of profiles of four individuals, each representing “an essential aspect of sports in America” (Mulvoy 1). *Black Enterprise* revisited businesspeople it had profiled in its 30 years and showcased “The 10 Most

Important Black Business Luminaries”—chosen by readers—whose stories went well beyond the magazine’s history (including, for instance, Booker T. Washington and Marcus Garvey) (71-78).

*Rolling Stone* took a somewhat different tack, reviewing its greatest articles by asking the writers of those stories to create new articles recalling what their lives had been like at the time (period photographs of the writers accompanied these essays) and recounting the reporting of the original pieces. The result was a collection its editor called “true tales of journalism—how it really happens, out on the road” (Wenner, 11 June 1992: 31). For obvious reasons, *People Weekly* reviewed the past through famous people, though so did *Ms.* and *Good Housekeeping*, both of which explained women’s history by printing round-up features of profiles or quotes from accomplished American women. Both magazines also showcased ordinary women. *Good Housekeeping* published a photo essay titled “A Century of Great American Faces,” showing ordinary women in various symbolic life situations (in wedding gowns, at work, with children, etc.), while an article in *Ms.* captured “the voices of our century” (despite the fact that it was only the magazine’s 25th anniversary), featuring “women of all ages, from all walks of life . . . [who] offer vivid testimony of how our lives have, and have not, changed” (“Generations” 81).

Indeed, it was ordinary people who most powerfully embodied the American past in anniversary issues. *Life* revisited individuals whose stories had originally been told in the magazine as emblematic of human nature, as suggested by the titles (of both the original and followup articles): “Country Doctor,” “Steelworker,” “Wounded Soldier,” “Career Girl,” “Nurse Midwife,” “80-Hour-Week Housewife,” “Adopted Boy,” “Dropout Wife,” “Runaway Kids” (“Revisiting” 140-62). The same issue included a photo essay titled “American Anthem: A Recollection of the Way We Were,” including present-day photographs inset into larger, nostalgic photos from “a bygone era” of “hometowns.” The latter images showed a little boy joyfully running out of a rural New England schoolhouse on a winter afternoon, a Depression-era Iowa farm family eating dinner, a Saturday night on the main street of a 1940s Indiana small town, women on the World War II homefront hanging laundry, and two images from the 1950s, a mother reading to her children from the Bible and a teenage dance party (278-95).

While small-town life has long been at the heart of *Life* magazine’s nostalgic vision (even in regular issues),<sup>12</sup> the anniversary issue that most dramatically used the symbolic inhabitants of a

prototypical American town was *Newsweek*. The cover blurb of its 50th anniversary issue—set against the gold backdrop and underneath the title “The American Dream”—explained this approach: “For fifty years *Newsweek* has covered the people who make news. Our anniversary issue celebrates the men and women who live the news, the unsung people who make our country. This extraordinary saga of five heartland families is richer and more compelling than fiction. It is the true story of America.” Those families lived in Springfield, Ohio and represented a range of identities and experiences: a socially-prominent family descended from a 19th century industrialist; an Italian immigrant family; an African American family who had come north out of slavery; a white working-class family; and a farm family. The editor’s letter opening the special issue explained that Springfield

has been a town of tinkerers and inventors, of farmers and their ties to the land, of immigrants and black Americans with their visions of a better life, of entrepreneurs and executives and union men. . . . It is its own place, different from every other. But at another level it is every American town, and the people who come to life in this narrative are connected by circumstance and character to all of us. Their joys and pains, their fears and victories are ours. (Broyles 3)

By explaining the historical climates of previous eras through the tensions and triumphs of family life, and by weaving together the individual stories into a larger narrative about America, this issue spoke for “us” (all Americans). Its opening article—titled “Our Town,” borrowed from Thornton Wilder’s play about small-town life—explained, of all of the families: “Their hometown is one of those American cities that grew almost at random from the wilderness, thriving because its people didn’t know when they were licked. It was built on a dream of progress and the faith that inventiveness and industry were bound to succeed . . . the dream and the faith still endure” (McNamee 10).

#### *Envisioning the Future*

This idealistic vision was as forward-looking as it was reminiscent. As Barbie Zelizer (1995) notes, “the study of collective memory . . . is much more than the unidimensional study of the past. It represents a graphing of the past as it is used for present aims, a vision in bold relief of the past as it is woven into the pre-

sent and the future” (217). Fittingly, the *Newsweek* special issue ended by introducing a sixth family of Cambodian refugees newly arrived in Springfield.

The other magazines also used their understanding of the past as a way of—and their anniversaries as an occasion for—imagining and assessing the future. *Reader’s Digest’s* editor explained to readers that the magazine had “asked some prominent Americans to think about our country and its future” as a way of marking the magazine’s 75th anniversary (Willcox 8). The editor of *National Geographic* wrote that “we’re looking ahead to the next 100 years,” noting that other issues published during the centennial year would “deal with the life-and-death environmental and population problems that will affect all of us in the century ahead, and introduce people who are doing something about them . . .” (Garrett 270).

As the last letter suggests, personalization was the editorial lens through which editors looked forward as well as backward. The 25th anniversary issue of *Ms.* contained an essay in which founding editor Gloria Steinem listed the issues that would be important to women over the next 25 years and concluded with an article profiling “21 of the most accomplished, promising young feminists age 30 and under . . . women who will remain leaders in troublemaking and risk-taking and changing our world in the twenty-first century” (“21 for the 21st” 102). In its 100th anniversary issue, *Good Housekeeping* profiled “100 Young Women of Promise,” “the new leaders who are making their mark now and will change our world in the years to come” (124), just as *Glamour* saluted rising stars in “Maverick Mamas for the Millennium” in its 60th anniversary issue (“Watchworthy Women” 222) and *Outside* ran a piece on “young go-getters who’ll soon be making headlines” (Wetzler 66). In addition to telling readers “What You’ll Need to Know in Twenty Years that You Don’t Know Now,” *Discover* named “20 Young Scientists to Watch in the Next Twenty Years” (58-61, 68-73). *Black Enterprise* profiled “30 for the Next 30,” people it identified as “the movers, shakers, and decision makers poised to dominate the pages of *Black Enterprise* in the decades to come” (179), and “Generation XCeptional,” who were “30-and-under overachievers” providing “their take on the world they are poised to inherit” (193).

The idea of a future based on the past was the theme of *Black Enterprise’s* entire anniversary issue, and the magazine presented its articles in three sections representing the past, present, and

future of black American business. Its publisher's letter explained that the special issue "honors where we've been, and celebrates where we are. But the lasting message of this issue is our rededication and passionate commitment to where we're going—toward the creation of the better world to which you and your children are heir" (Graves 14). Other opening letters contained similar vows to the reader: *Discover's* editor's letter promised "to boldly look ahead and prepare you for what lies ahead during the next 20 years" ("Letter from *Discover*" 49), while *Fast Company's* editors reaffirmed the magazine's original mission statement, declaring, "We will continue traveling into the future with you, making sense of this epic journey, charting the changes as they come" ("Letter from the Editors" 20).

*Time* also explained time as a trajectory in which the magazine played a pivotal role. Calling the year of its 75th anniversary (1998) "the vestibule of this new millennium," its managing editor explained that founder Henry Luce had wanted the magazine to celebrate independence, freedom, and opportunity, and that these themes would take the country—not just the magazine, but America—into the future. "As the American Century draws to an end, these values are now ascendant," he concluded. "The main, albeit unfinished, story line of the century is the triumph of freedom . . . To the extent that America remains an avatar of freedom, the Global Century about to dawn will be, in Luce's terminology, another American Century" (Isaacson 195-96).

### *Discussion*

Much as *Harper's*' 150th anniversary issue offered "an historical narrative" reporting "the tumult of new fortunes coincident with the rise and fall of seven generations" (Lapham 57), *Time's* 75th anniversary issue was a chronicle of American life. By reusing "documents" of the past and by packaging them as keepsakes and collector's items, anniversary issues not only invoke but also create national memory. By enlisting readers' participation in the act of looking back and by showcasing "real" people, the magazines seem to speak for "everyone." And by explaining the country's history as the story of representative individuals profiled in their pages, the magazines define American values that are presumably definitive and timeless. Such a definition is both socially affirming and limiting, as Susan Davis notes: "On one hand, anniversaries can present a deeply reassuring rhetoric about the

meaning of life (we live for a reason; things, ideas, people live on after us), but on the other hand, they can argue for a powerfully static view of the way the world works (things have always been the same, and imagining different arrangements isn't possible)" (134).

Though the stories told in anniversary journalism are presented as historical truth, they are actually narrative visions, pictures that are prescriptive as well as descriptive, mythology as much as reporting. The story of the American past in anniversary journalism is ideal in a way that the past itself was not; it is cohesive and orderly and progressive in a way that the past itself was not. Yet neither is it fiction; as Barry Schwartz notes, "[t]he materials of the 'constructed' past, after all, include facts as well as biases and interests" (491). And because this tale is "remembered" by audiences and journalists together in a collaborative process, resulting in a "documentary" product, it has collective meaning that is—as an ideal—in a sense real.

The magazine issues studied here were meant to express and preserve the identities of particular magazines and their respective audiences. They also expressed ideas about the meaning of America's past and future, notions based on the shared identity of audiences and journalists as "society" itself. This function—the "celebration of shared even if illusory beliefs" that journalism accomplishes, in James Carey's view (43)—is repeated throughout time, as publications continue to mark anniversaries, revisiting symbolic events and personalities not just once but frequently, and providing a layered interpretation of the past that becomes collective memory. In achieving this broader mission, journalists take on the roles of cultural leaders and historians.

Anniversary journalism (including but not limited to that done in magazines) is worth scholarly attention for a number of reasons. It underscores the importance of studying journalistic products not only as text, but also as material culture, as treasured objects in which memory and identity are inscribed. It connects the study of journalism history (including not only the journalism of the past, but also the ways in which present-day journalists describe their own past) with the study of current practice. Finally, it stands at the intersection of journalism and what Fred Davis (1984) calls "a people's living sense of history" (18), confirming George Lipsitz's contention that, "[f]or some populations at some times, commercial culture is history, a repository of collective memory that places immediate experience in the context of change over time"

(148). Anniversary journalism is thus an illustration of the role of journalism in collective memory and the role of collective memory in journalism. It provides a lens through which we may consider how, with the passage of time, journalists gain the cultural authority to tell “the true story of America.”

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>One exception is a study of the decade- and century-summary issues of American newsmagazines (Kitch). Newspapers also have received almost no attention from scholars studying collective identity and memory, though perhaps this is because of the local rather than national nature of most American newspapers.

<sup>2</sup>All three of these magazines later issued 60th anniversary issues as well, but their 50th anniversary issues were chosen for this study because they were much grander productions and more overt acts of reviewing the American past.

<sup>3</sup>Given its national distribution, the *New Yorker* is considered a national magazine for the purposes of this study.

<sup>4</sup>*Harper's* (launched in 1850) is one of only two surviving American consumer magazines more than 150 years old. The other, *Scientific American* (launched in 1845), did not publish a 150th anniversary issue (per author's phone conversation with the magazine's research department, 31 August 2000). The *Atlantic Monthly* will be 150 in 2007.

<sup>5</sup>Julia Roberts was first, at 39 times (“The EW Index” 172).

<sup>6</sup>These regular departments include “Life in These United States,” “Laughter, the Best Medicine,” “All in a Day's Work,” “Campus Comedy,” and “Quotable Quotes.”

<sup>7</sup>Showing, for instance, Lucille Ball for the '50s, the Monkees for the '60s, the cast of *Welcome Back, Kotter* for the '70s, and Judd Nelson for the '80s.

<sup>8</sup>The magazine defined those “forces”—which it called “the biggest news stories of the past decade”—as including the AIDS crisis, the fall of communism, the environmental movement of the late '80s and early '90s, Reaganism, and globalism (“10 Events that Shook the World” 58-74).

<sup>9</sup>The quote within the coverline—“the world and all that is in it”—was attributed (in smaller type on the cover) to Alexander Graham Bell, who was the first president of the National Geographic Society.

<sup>10</sup>The history of Eustace Tilley, in the magazine itself and in spoofs

of it, was reviewed inside the anniversary issue in an article that also explained the Weimaraner dog face as the work of photographer William Wegman (Mouly 79).

<sup>11</sup>*Life* folded as a weekly in 1972, was revived as a monthly in 1978, and folded again in the spring of 2000. George Story also appeared on the back page of the magazine's 60th anniversary issue published in 1996. In the spring of 2000, just after the magazine announced its most recent closing, George Story died.

<sup>12</sup>This vision has been the subject of a good deal of scholarship on *Life* magazine, including two books (Kozol; Doss).

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**Carolyn Kitch** is an assistant professor of journalism at Temple University, where she serves as director of the magazine sequence as well as director of the intercollegiate American Culture and Media Arts Program. She is the author of *The Girl on the Magazine Cover: The Origins of Visual Stereotypes in American Mass Media* (U of North Carolina P, 2001), and her research on media history, collective memory, and gender studies has appeared in several scholarly journals. She is a former editor for *Good Housekeeping* and *McCall's*.