

## **American Celebrity Culture Magazines in the Bill Douglas Centre by Nick Hall**

Nick Hall is a volunteer at the Bill Douglas Centre. He is studying for a PhD at the University of Exeter – his thesis examines the development and the influence of the Zoom lens in Hollywood.

A number of American celebrity culture magazines dating from the 1960s and early 1970s have recently been added to the catalogue of the Bill Douglas Centre.

Coverage for each individual title is incomplete but taken together as a group the magazines provide a substantial insight into the ways in which American film and television were discussed in the gossip press during the mid-1960s.

The years 1965-7 are most strongly represented, with sparser coverage for 1961-4 and 1968-73.

### **Newly catalogued items include:**

- 28 issues of ***Motion Picture*** from between August 1962 and February 1969. These complement earlier issues of Motion Picture magazine dating from the mid-1920s. In addition, 7 issues of ***Movie Screen Yearbook*** for various years between 1959 and 1972.
- 24 issues of ***Modern Screen*** from between January 1965 and May. This broken run complements a selection of copies of the same magazine dating from the late 1940s and early 1950s.
- 14 issues of ***Screen Stories*** from December 1964 to August 1972.
- 10 issues of ***Movies Illustrated*** from March 1964 to March 1966.
- 4 issues of ***Movieland and TV Time*** from 1962-6.
- 4 issues of ***Movie Stars*** from June 1965 to February 1966.
- ***Movie Screen Yearbook*** for 1957, 1962, and 1964.
- ***Hollywood Secrets Yearbook*** for 1961 and 1962.
- ***Silver Screen Yearbook*** for 1962 and 1969.
- Assorted single issues: ***Silver Screen*** (Oct 1963), ***TV and Movie Screen*** (Feb 1965), ***Movie Mirror*** (Sep 1965), ***Screen Album*** (Oct 1965), ***Hollywood Screen Parade*** (Oct 1965), ***Movie World*** (Mar 1966), ***Photo Screen*** (Jun 1966), ***Modern Movies*** (Jul 1969), ***Rona Barrett's Hollywood*** (Oct 1974).

- Assorted single yearbooks: **Hollywood Life Stories** (1962), **Movie Stars Annual** (1963), **Movie Mirror Yearbook** (1964), and **Who's Who in Hollywood** (1965).

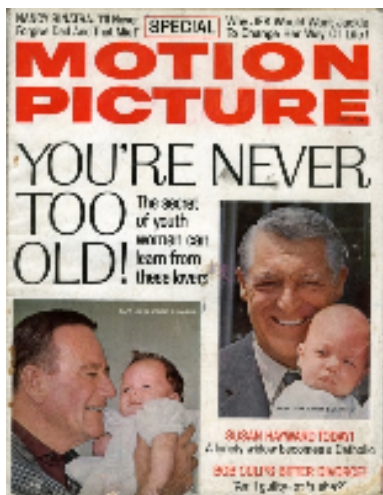
### Overview

The major stars of the mid-1960s are very strongly represented in this collection of magazines and periodicals bequeathed by an individual collector. Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton are favourites, followed closely by Mia Farrow and Frank Sinatra.

Beyond Hollywood, the magazines form a partial chronicle of Jackie Kennedy's tumultuous (public) personal life, from first lady, to grieving widow, to single mother, to second marriage. After President Kennedy's assassination, there some is interest in President Johnson's family, though it is clear at times that the magazines are rather frustrated with Johnson's comparatively unflashy wife and children.

In the second half of the 1960s much attention is paid to the on- and off-screen romances of the cast of the ABC soap opera *Peyton Place*. There is a fair amount of attention given to the Beatles, but when the name 'Lennon' appears on a front cover it is far more likely to be a reference to the American singing group The Lennon Sisters than to Beatle John.

The magazines' preoccupations are highly personal. At times the magazines paint a rather depressing picture of a world in which everybody – especially women – seems to be close to death (or tears) or in excruciating pain. The September 1965 issue of *Movie Stars* ( EXE BD 47774) speculates about "the next star who'll commit suicide!"



There is also a good deal of rather intrusive coverage of the miscarriages and infertility of various female stars, but men's procreational abilities are never called into question: the October 1966 issue of *Motion Picture* (left EXE BD 47784) is dominated by snapshots of John Wayne and Cary Grant with their baby daughters. The large accompanying headline reads: "You're never too old! The secret of youth women can learn from these lovers".

Other recurring subjects include things that male stars' wives won't let them do (and what the male stars do anyway), stories of personalities whose lives have been 'saved' – or at least changed – by love, and those whose lives could have been saved by love – especially Marilyn Monroe, who haunts covers

throughout the 1960s.

## Stars and 'Scandals'

As might be expected of a collection of gossip and celebrity culture magazines, these titles are uniformly brightly coloured, with gaudy headlines promising scandalous revelations. Exclamation marks are used liberally. A selection of covers from *Modern Screen* promise to reveal “why the communists are out to get Rock Hudson” (May 1965 EXE BD 47749) and “why David McCallum leaves his wife at night” (December 1967 EXE BD 47740).



Unfortunately, the inside pages rarely live up to the promise of the covers. In reality, there appears to be very little real scandal that the magazines are willing to cover. Rock Hudson turns out to be under threat of a “vicious attack by a small, secret group of West Coast Communists” (48) who, offended by his movies, wish to “convince American teen-agers that the natural intimacies of married love as suggested in our movies are either ludicrous or immoral” and David McCallum leaves his wife at night because he suffers from insomnia, which he treats with night-owl trips to the movies.

Despite the front-cover bluster, the magazines occasionally recognise the rather unreliable nature of their gossip. Under the headline “Do I look like a girl who’s been pregnant 19 times?” (*Motion Picture*, February 1965 EXE BD 47798), Connie Stevens is allowed to laughingly complain that the press:

had us divorced ... *destroyed* ... on at least *three* separate occasions. There were 19 predictions of my pregnancy ... including supposedly accurate dates that the infant could be expected. And for exactly 365 days of the past year, I have reportedly started *each morning on the verge of tears!*



**Advertisements**

Advertisements for products related to menstruation and 'intimate marriage problems' – seemingly a euphemism for any taboo aspect of feminine health – predominate. There are numerous ads for various contraceptive foams, though none for the new combined oral contraceptive, "the pill". There are also advertisements for weight-gain tablets for women who, like Raquel Welch, 'can't afford to be skinny', remedies for psoriasis, 'Housewife Headache', sagging bosoms, and various other non-life-threatening ailments.

Self-improvement is a key theme for some of the most prominent advertisers. Advertisements for various correspondence courses offer readers the opportunity to develop skills in order to secure more interesting and lucrative employment. Once employed in their new jobs, readers could refer to the back pages of the magazines for ideas about how to spend their money. Options include an illustrated encyclopaedia of sex, tiny parcels of land on Hawaii, and mail-order squirrel monkeys – "live delivery guaranteed".

**"If You Want To Be Popular... YOU CAN'T AFFORD TO BE SKINNY!"**

Beautiful Hollywood Actress LINDA PECK... appears in Ernest Lehman's Production of "HELLO, DOLLY!" Released by 20th Century Fox, Tells How To Gain Welcome Weight and Keep It.

"I love the fascinating excitement of Hollywood Movie making. But the long nervous hours, exhausting rehearsals, fatiguing re-takes, sleep-robbing personal appearances and above all the poor eating habits can make you thin, skinny and underweight. That's why I and so many other Hollywood actresses depend on Wate-On to help keep shapes shapely. It figures! So don't be skinny. Try Wate-On and who knows... you may become the most popular girl in town!"

*Linda Peck*

**PUTS POUNDS AND INCHES OF WELCOME WEIGHT ON SKINNY FIGURES Without Pads, Exercise, Fish Oils or Dangerous Sugary Diets**

**You'd never know she had PSORIASIS**

Like thousands of men and women, medicated SIROIL is her secret. SIROIL removes embarrassing scaly scales and crusts. SIROIL relieves tormenting itching and helps control new scales and crusts from forming when used at first sign of reappearance. Guaranteed relief or money back. Let SIROIL be your secret too.

Available at all Drug stores.

**WRITE FOR FREE BOOKLET:**  
"What You Should Know About Psoriasis"  
Siroil Laboratories, Shawford, Conn. 06934

**\$18.95**

**DARLING PET MONKEY**

FREE shipping, color and health. FREE tax and instructions. Includes with each monkey. Leads of fun and amusement.

This Scimitar Monkey makes an adorable pet and companion. A small monkey with its warm eyes, your family will love it. This SIRENE monkey grows about 150 grams high. Cute name food no run, one liter milk only; simple to care for and train. Unconditional guarantee. Only \$18.95 express collect. Mail check or money order for \$18.95 to: DARLING MONKEY, Dept. 010, Box 3342 Miami Beach 33, Fla.

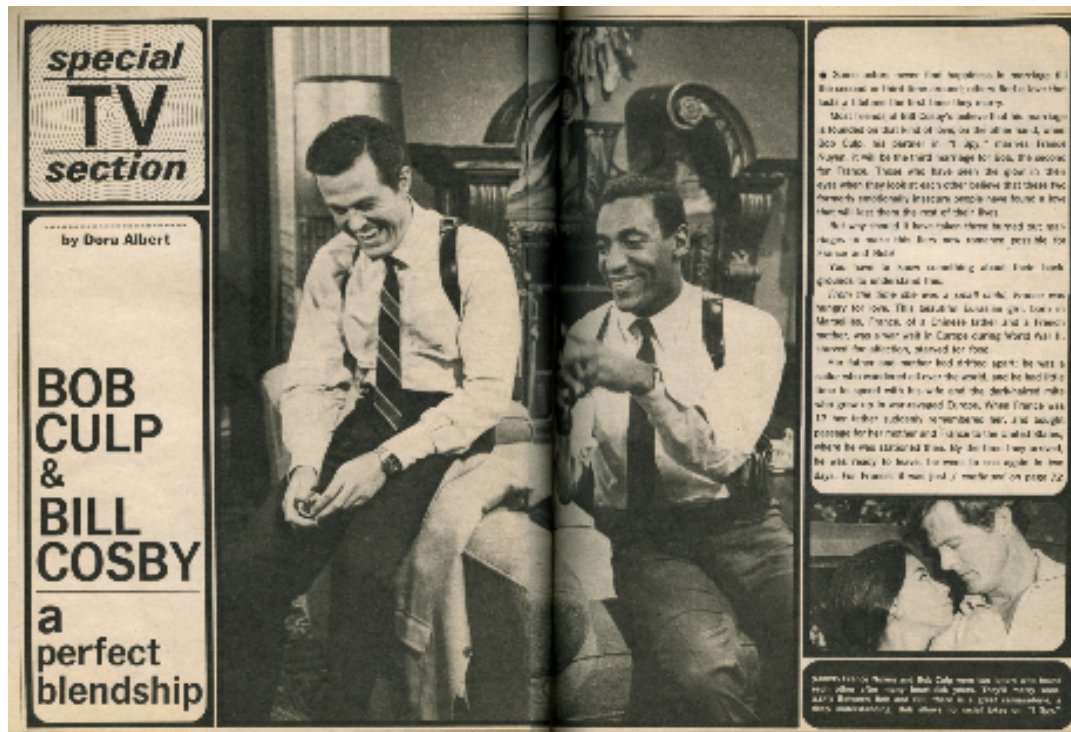
## Race Relations

In August 1968, just a few months after interracial marriage had been legalised in the 17 US states where it had still been illegal, *Motion Picture's* cover (EXE BD 47779) featured a picture of Sidney Poitier and Katherine Houghton alongside the stark headline "Would you let your daughter marry outside her race?". The picture and story are inspired by the hit film *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?*, in which they play an interracial couple. Inside the magazine, "42 Negro and White celebrities dare to answer" the question.



Many of the celebrities say that they would, with those who are more hesitant claiming that their reservations are based on the social challenges that might be faced by a mixed-race couple. Illustrated with numerous pictures of Hollywood couples reaching across the racial divide, the article itself is essentially a plea for tolerance and an articulation of the challenges faced by mixed-race couples in the United States in the late 1960s – despite the stark and apparently prejudiced front cover.

There are also a number of articles about the NBC comedy-drama series *I Spy*, which starred Bob Culp and Bill Cosby (Illustration shows *Screen Stars* July 1967 EXE BD 47763). *I Spy* was one of the first major series to give equal billing to a black and a white star, and much has been written about the significance of the show's supposed avoidance of all issues surrounding race. However, this silence was the show's address to racial discourse, and an insight into that discourse can be gained through articles such as the one pictured below.



## Censorship and Morality

Questions of censorship and morality are a frequent concern for these magazines – though usually as a rather thin excuse to put the words ‘nude’ or ‘sex’ on the front cover and include spreads of mildly titillating photographs on the inside pages – such as in this issue of *Screen Stories* (September 1971 EXE BD 47760).

*Movies Illustrated* (June 1964 EXE BD 47723) doesn't seem able to toe its own coversine (“A Nude Girl In Every Movie”). Though the article claims that “the flesh fad is creeping into classics too” it then quotes “the National Legion for Decency [...] which advises forty million Catholics on moral acceptability of movies, certified that 85% of last year's films were acceptable by some segment of the audience, and that's not bad!” (42)

*Movies Illustrated's* definition of nude is perplexing: the article worries about Audrey Hepburn ‘nude’ except for a thick covering of bath bubbles, and about Paul Newman ‘nude’ except for a substantial bath towel. The article's conclusion is that there's little to worry about, as ‘hot’ scenes are not shown in the USA: “Hollywood producers cannot be condemned for trying to cash in on the nude dollar awaiting their products from the flesh-oriented movie public of Europe, but U.S. movie-goers must be broken in gradually” (p42).

There's even more confusion about morality in an article the following month. “Hollywood Movies: Nuder and Lewder” describes a film industry in which

scantly clad and naked females skip capriciously across the neighbourhood screens, and the act of love, consummated or unconsummated, seems to dominate the movie industry. In some cases, implication of sex have replaced story value, and even star attraction, both in the film and as exploitation methods in selling it. (p47)

But the article rather undermines its own point by describing how the US screening of a Danish film in which “a sexual act is depicted via close-ups on the faces of the individuals” was banned on the basis of its ribaldry. The definition of nudity is again stretched to its limits, in an article which disapproves of the “bobbling of nearly-bare breasts”.

In May 1964, *Motion Picture* (EXE BD 47800) describes a stinging attack by Ohio congressman Michael Feighan, who urged Attorney General Robert F Kennedy to ban Richard Burton from entering the United States on the basis that “the conduct of Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor is a public outrage and highly detrimental to the youth of our Nation” (p86).

Feighan claimed to have received mail from citizens concerned that Burton wished to turn the United States into a “happy hunting ground for those who capitalize on the public



flaunting of immorality” and drew a parallel between Burton’s affair with Taylor and the role of Christine Keeler and Mandy Rice-Davis in the Profumo scandal of 1963.

October 1965’s *Movies Illustrated* (Exe BD 47726) promises to reveal “Homosexuals in Hollywood: Who they are! How they influence movies!”. The article consists of an interview with an un-named Hollywood movie director, who claims that “at least seventy-five percent of the 'young hopefuls' living in Hollywood, young men who have come from all over the world to break into films, have homosexual tendencies” (p16).

However, despite the attempts of the *Movies Illustrated* interviewer to goad the director into describing homosexuality as a perversion, or to decry the effect of gay men on the movie industry, the director treads a very careful line – and even goes as far as to say that

homosexuals employed by the industry are gifted individuals. [...] A gargantuan amount of the beauty and sensitivity of motion pictures would be lost if their talents were made unavailable. What they may lack in masculinity, they make up for in talent and creativity (p17)

In fact, so ‘politically correct’ (given the context) and so mysteriously anonymous is the interview – that it must be asked whether the article is a contrived attempt to enlighten a bigoted readership suckered in by the inflammatory headline.



