



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on September 28, 2017

# Sexual Revolutionary Hugh Hefner, Playboy Founder, Dead at 91

His image was defined by silk pajamas and a smoking jacket — and the objectification of women. Hugh Hefner, the playboy who in 1953 founded Playboy magazine, died yesterday at age 91. He passed away at his home, the Playboy Mansion, reportedly of natural causes, Playboy Enterprises has announced.



The publisher is being remembered as a bold cultural revolutionary and savvy businessman, but the reaction to his death, as that to his life, tells us more about the masses and media than the man.

The reportage on his passing is rife with subtle fake news: Hefner is portrayed as helping unshackle us from “repressed,” conformist, priggish 1950s norms, with that decade’s characterization presented as assumed fact. Yet in a land of Lilliputians, a dwarf appears a giant; in a perverted time, proper morals appear prudishness.

Moreover, sexual morality wasn’t a ‘50s phenomenon. Philosopher C.S. Lewis once noted, “Sex is not messed up because it was put in the closet; it was put in the closet because it was messed up.” Sex had been, quite properly, put in the closet by Christendom ages ago, with the Middle Ages being the high-water mark. By the time the 1950s rolled around, there’d already been a noticeable loosening of sexual mores (ever hear of the Roaring ‘20s?). This was evident in many of the decade’s movies, especially the B ones; in the popularity of Elvis Presley, whose pelvic movements were described by the *New York Times*’ Jack Gould as reflecting a “burlesque runway”; and, of course, in the rise of *Playboy* itself. The ‘50s were a transitional phase. Or did you think the ‘60s spontaneously generated out of nothing?

There’s no doubt Hefner was an astute businessman. As the *New York Times* [wrote](#) Wednesday, “Long after other publishers made the nude ‘Playmate’ centerfold look more sugary than daring, Playboy remained the most successful men’s magazine in the world. Mr. Hefner’s company branched into movie, cable and digital production, sold its own line of clothing and jewelry, and opened clubs, resorts and casinos.”

Yet Hefner also helped mainstream sin. As early *Playboy* contributor Jules Feiffer [put it](#), referencing the ‘50s, “You couldn’t talk politically [not sure what that even means].... You couldn’t use obscenities. What Playboy represented was the beginning of a break from all that.” So creating a vulgar, coarse society is a good thing?

Not everyone agrees that Hefner was so significant, however. *American Thinker*’s Rick Moran [writes](#) that the publisher “was a lot less impactful than certainly Hefner would have us and the media believe. He did not initiate the sexual revolution. We can thank The Pill for that. Rather, Hefner rode the wave of changing morals and mores.”



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In reality, though, Hefner was both a cause and an effect. As to the latter, he was likely as deceived as he was decadent, having been influenced by scientific fraud and pedophile (this is now established fact. Read [here](#)) Alfred Kinsey. As I [wrote](#) in 2009, “Hefner founded *Playboy* magazine ... the same year that Kinsey published *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*. Was this a coincidence? Well, Hefner read *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* when he was young and wrote about it in a college publication, and the work convinced him that he had been lied to by the wider society.... [Hefner said] ‘I refer to it [Kinsey’s *Human Female* book] in the introduction to the first [*Playboy*] issue; I called it ‘the other great book that was coming out in 1953.’”

Yet he’d been lied to by Kinsey, whose scientific data — purporting to show that sexual depravity prevailed in America — [was fraudulent](#). It’s unlikely Hefner knew this at the time; I don’t think anyone did.

Of course, *Playboy*’s success is now yesterday’s news. In fact, Hefner was a victim of his own dark success: His magazine stopped publishing nude photos at one time because, as Playboy Enterprises’ chief executive, Scott Flanders, put it, “You’re now one [Internet] click away from every sex act imaginable for free,” reported the *Times*.

Again, though, society was a victim of his (and others’) dark success, too. The causes he championed — such as prenatal infanticide, sexual libertinism, homosexuality, and the repeal of anti-sodomy laws — are now embedded in the culture. As Columbia University sociologist and author of *The Sixties* Todd Gitlin [put it](#), “The prevailing values in the country now, for all the conservative backlash, are essentially libertarian, and that basically was what the Playboy Philosophy was.”

Gitlin makes two mistakes in that one sentence. There is today little “conservative” backlash; conservatives, those great defenders of the “status quo” who ever embrace yesterday’s liberals’ social victories, have largely accepted modern sexual mores (the backlash is from people such as me). Second, our country’s prevailing “values” (we long ago forgot about virtues) are more libertine than libertarian.

When hearing about greater personal freedom, we ought to ask: to do what? You certainly are free today to curse or publicly proclaim your cohabiting status or homosexuality, but are Christian bakers or florists free to refuse to service a faux (“gay”) marriage? They’re being persecuted for such, you know. Are we free to condemn homosexual behavior, the “transgender” agenda, or honestly discuss group differences without losing our jobs? Are schoolchildren free to draw pictures of guns without being punished?

The point here isn’t to discuss what our freedoms should be but is this: Every society has social codes and uses social pressure, stigmatization, to enforce them. So it’s not a question of whether we’ll have “freedom” but of what those freedoms will be. And with there being infinitely more laws now than in the “stifling” ’50s — and with most every law, by definition, being the governmental removal of a liberty — do you really think we’re freer today?

Of course, the above doesn’t occur to people such as Gitlin because of personal bias: They don’t notice removals of freedom of which they approve.

At the end of the day, Hefner sold empty, and emptying, pleasures. For is there pleasure in sin for more than a season? As liberal film critic Roger Ebert [put it](#) in 1997 while reviewing *The Ice Storm*, a movie about a decadent family, the people’s “natural sources of pleasure have been replaced with higher-octane substitutes, which have burnt out the ability to feel joy. Going through the motions of what once gave them escape, they feel curiously trapped.”



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And trapped we are, in a world of sin that doesn't satisfy and a holy path to happiness that, in most quarters, has been long forgotten.

*Photo of Hugh Hefner: [Luke Ford](#)*



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