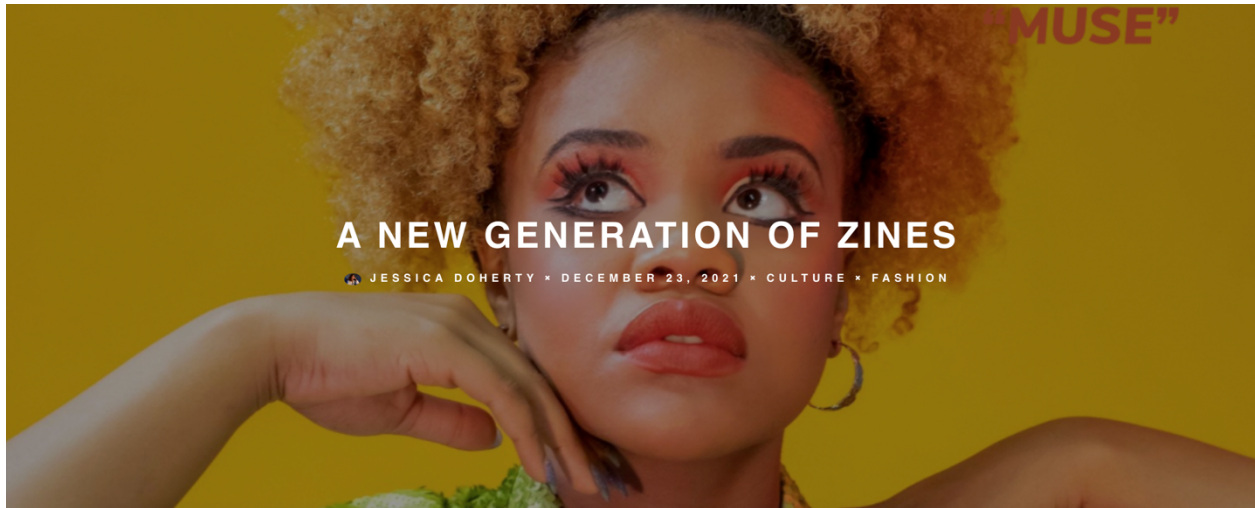


AMPERSAND



While most of the online world was at the zenith of “[Blog Culture](#)” in 2010, 14-year-old style blogger Tavi Gevinson [announced](#) she would be creating a digital magazine. Paired with Jane Pratt, the editor-in-chief of *Sassy Magazine*, a teen magazine that went defunct in 1996, the two would create, “Something that will use *Sassy* as a point of reference for the whole teen-magazine-that-doesn’t-suck thing, and something in which Jane Pratt will take part, but something that is not trying to recreate the other something a bunch of us love and don’t want to see copied.”

And so *Rookie Magazine* was born, to wide success. It accepted teen submissions of photography, visual art, and articles around monthly themes and soon led to high-profile interviews, podcasts, and physical editions, known as yearbooks.

Gevinson announced the [end of *Rookie Magazine* in 2018](#), but its impact has lived on. As more teenagers and young adults spend time online and on social media, they have also been sharing and creating their own work representing their generation, values, and identity.

“I own like every *Rookie Yearbook*,” said Lucy Ivey, the (then newly) 17-year-old editor-in-chief of *Our Era Magazine*.

She and Managing Editor Lily Boyd began *Our Era Magazine* as a passion project in 2020 during the pandemic. Ivey mentioned that she had pitched her writing to around 30 mainstream publications and applied to multiple internships with no response, and was eager to publish her own work.

Our Era is “a youth-led digital and print magazine that discusses fashion, politics, music, social justice, mental health, and identity,” according to its website.

By the magazine’s one-year anniversary, it had amassed around 6,000 followers on Instagram.

Boyd’s parents were active in the punk scene and she finds a similar spirit in zine work.

“A lot of zine work and ideology is just a giant middle finger to the world,” Boyd said.

Zines often serve as a way to write for and about groups typically underrepresented in mainstream media. From helping [create fandom](#) and participatory culture as we know it to being [acts of rebellion, communication, and preservation](#) for queer, feminist, and punk communities, among others, zines are *by* specific communities *for* specific communities.

In the early 1940s and 1950s, comic book and sci-fi fans created fanzines about their interests, circulating them at conventions and fostering fandoms. These fanzines still exist and have morphed into different mediums and forms—from [doujinshi artists](#) to entire fan-driven collectives like [The Wakanda Project](#) that want to use [art and fandom](#) to pave the way for activism and Black liberation.

Zines have also prioritized communities underrepresented in mainstream media. In the 1950s, it was common for “men’s” and “women’s” magazines to function as covert queer publications. Others, like *One Magazine*, were out and proud spaces. Zines were important to the queer community throughout the second half of the 20th century and still are today.

There are many efforts to preserve physical zines, like the Queer Zine Archive and Printed Matter’s archival collection. Zines are also a part of the University of Southern California’s [ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives](#), which is the largest queer material archive in the world and whose foundation is [the oldest LGBTQ+ organization](#) in the United States.

With the rise of the internet, the next generation of zines is already more preserved than their predecessors.

Aesthetics from the pre-social media eras of the [90s and early 00s](#) have made a return in the past few years. With an ever-evolving and quickening trend cycle based on fast fashion, it is interesting to see the particular hold this time period has on young millennials and Gen Z. But perhaps it was because there was so much media about the teenage experience to draw from. Like Gevinson’s inspiration, magazines were wildly popular at this time. Publications like *Teen Beat* and *J-14* catered specifically to teenagers with much ‘younger’ demographics and content than that of magazines like *Teen Vogue* today. There’s an innocence to these tabloids, of Disney stars “kissing and telling” and the inclusion of posters and quizzes. There were also many iconic movies about being a teenager and young adult in the mid-90s and early 00s that have remained a part of Gen Z’s collective consciousness—*Mean Girls*, *Clueless*, *Legally Blonde*, to name just

a few—that pop stars [still play upon](#). There’s still a wealth of inspiration younger generations can draw from, especially if they were too young to really live it.

While inspired by the past, Boyd emphasized that she and Ivey want to remain true to the *Our Era* name by representing their entire generation’s present experience—from many different perspectives.

“Lucy and I are both white, and it is very noticeable that POC and LGBTQ+ youth are not given the same space that we are as white people,” Boyd said. “I, myself, am queer, so I’ve experienced that kind of situation, but a really big part of [Our Era] is giving equal opportunities and recognizing our privilege as white youth who get more opportunities because of that and trying to dismantle it.”

“What does *Our Era* mean? It means all of us,” Ivey added.

Sisters Carolina and Joana Murkens are also providing more opportunities for creatives of color. They, alongside mutual friend Kimber Tai Monroe, founded [Mixed Mag](#), “an online multimedia publication dedicated to promoting creatives of color and celebrating our multiethnic/multicultural voices.” They cover a wide range of topics with an artistic and creative focus.

The idea to start *Mixed Mag* came to Carolina Murkens in the shower. At the time, the three women were unemployed with extra time on their hands. And in the wake of the Black Lives Matter protests during [the summer of 2020](#), the sisters and Tai Monroe wondered where their biracial identity fit into the conversation.

“The publishing world is very white-centered,” Carolina Murkens said. “We wanted to create a platform for ourselves and for other people...to share whatever it is [they want].”

From politics to poetry, the magazine covers “every single topic, except maybe math,” from the perspective of mixed-race individuals and people of color.



“[I like] seeing why people make such intentional choices, because every stitch is intentional, every detail,” Fonte said of her interest in fashion. “The precision and the detail of doing everything intentionally it’s like a piece...of fine art.”

“Other industries prioritize white people to tell stories of other people,” Joana Murkens said. “Like Hollywood, right, we’re going to tell the stories of your Black ancestors, of people from around the world, but it’s always going to be white people in charge of that narrative and that perspective and how it gets told. Just because they’re more open to being realistic about the narrative does not mean [the same thing] as coming from the source.”

Mixed Mag prioritizes not only stories about the many experiences of people of color, but also making sure their contributors and staff reflect them as well. “Our staff represents our community. We’re not trying to have a staff represent a different community,” Tai Monroe said.

This adds nuance to their coverage and content. “How can you fully read a piece [as an editor] about Palestine and you don’t have the intricacies of the situations?” Tai Monroe said. “And if our politics editor is half-Palestinian, half-Syrian, she understands that experience. It is important that when you submit your work it goes to spaces that have a bit more understanding [of your background].”

Tai Monroe points out that even if legacy publications like *Teen Vogue* are more diverse in their models and editorial work, their staffing isn’t. “You see them doing this huge rebranding where they are like, ‘We are going to be the voice of Gen Z, we are going to be this major publication that talks about the real things other publications don’t want to talk about,’ but then they hire people who [make racist remarks](#).”

Mixed Mag is looking for ad partners to ensure they can stay self-funded and eventually support themselves and their staff. They have found some success in collaborations with restaurants, organizations and other magazines. The process of finding the right partners has been slow and steady.

“We want to make sure the people who work with us are on the same board as us,” Tai Monroe said. “We are intentional about who we let into our space,” Carolina added.

Mixed Mag is also starting a crowdsourced contributor fund for people interested in sponsoring their volunteers, which is common practice with many freelance writers and creatives. From Substack to Kofi to Patreon, there are many freelance artists and writers offering independent subscriptions to their work.

“As young people, we’re used to getting everything for free,” Joana Murkens said. “We want to challenge them about how they consume media and what they’re putting their money towards.”

Our Era is also self-funded, with some sponsorships, but with no direct ads.

The independence of zines allows readers an ad-free space, something Ivey feels is hard to come by in mainstream media.

“I have noticed that there [are] probably like 20 times more advertising pages and there are actual article pages,” Ivey said. “It’s getting to the point where I’m like, ‘Are they doing this for money, or are they doing this because they want to put in actual content [and] written pieces out there?’”

Haute Magazine, meanwhile, featured over three hundred pages of content in their 2020 issue—without any ads.

Launched by co-founders Diana Fonte and Jason Cerin in 2019, *Haute Magazine* showcases the work of USC creatives in their art, fashion, and culture magazine.

“We modeled it after more art-driven magazines and art books,” Fonte said. “We didn’t really focus on imitating a *Vogue* or *Vanity Fair*, we really focused on creating an experience through the issue.”

Cerin pulled a physical copy of *Haute* down from a shelf and showed it on camera. It was tome-like, sturdier and larger than the softer and slimmer aforementioned magazines.

“When we were deciding what the visual identity of the magazine would be, I knew that we wanted it to be something that could stand almost at the same level as big-name publications, something that was timeless and sophisticated and innovative,” Cerin said.

Haute Magazine releases an issue once a semester around a certain theme. One of their most recent themes is [Dream State](#), “The amalgamation of these dreams, these desires to reimagine oppressive systems and societies wrought by devastation.”



Awo Jama, *Haute*’s Editor in Chief, is also interested in fashion journalism, particularly in “how certain groups adopt certain styles, how trends change as different world events occur, and...learning about subcultures.” While initially drawn to the beat by runway shows, they hope to continue their work with an emphasis on the cultural aspect of fashion reporting.

This attention to detail trickles down into the work of *Haute*, with decadent editorial shoots and well-designed pages.

“I think that there is such a power in print media now when you hold that when you hold a magazine in your hands and you’re flipping through the pages and reading it, it feels so much different than when you’re scrolling through an article online,” Boyd said.

All three magazines, *Our Era*, *Haute*, and *Mixed Mag*, accept submissions through their websites and social media.

“People from all over the world send us work, at this point it is mindblowing and inspiring to see the different art, essays, and pieces people come up with,” Carolina Murkens said.

For *Mixed Mag*, social media, Instagram in particular, benefits both contributors and the magazine alike.

“[Social media is] mutually beneficial, [the submitted] work is beautiful, and the more content we receive, the more amazing our Instagram feed looks. But we are also uplifting [our contributors’] work and giving them followers,” Carolina Murkens said.

“It’s a space created for the community, but Instagram and Twitter are where they find [it],” Tai Monroe said.

Tai Monroe also feels the freedom of the internet makes it possible for anyone to build an audience. “You can create a massive audience for yourself and for your business without knowing people, without nepotism, without having privileges from wealth or status,” she said. This was also apparent to Tai Monroe in the summer of 2020, with the ways people connected and conducted mutual aid work over social media for the Black Lives Matter movement. She finds this level of connection is especially strong during the pandemic when it is hard to connect to people offline.

“If someone fits into our magazine, they’re adding to that kaleidoscope of experiences and voices [we have],” Carolina Murkens said. “Anyone who is a creative of color can submit and has an opportunity to have their work out there.”

“We are able to integrate all different kinds of art and different personalities into this space, this real, tangible thing,” Joana Murkens said.

“It’s kinda funny how we all aligned,” Boyd said. “You can see every little piece of Lucy and I and our entire team just fits into it, it’s just all of our personalities coming together.”

Our Era has been able to cover people with big followings like Emmy Hartman and Vienna Skye. Ivey said it has helped them build connections and their resume.



“It’s frustrating...when you apply for a job and you get rejected and [they’re] like, ‘Oh, it’s because you don’t have enough experience,’ but how am I supposed to gain the experience without getting opportunities?” Ivey said.

These magazines allow young people to build out their resumes and portfolios, discover their interests, and gain experience while still in school. But it can also be frustrating to have volunteers work for a few weeks just for the experience when Ivey said she spends almost 35 to 40 hours a week (“more than on school”) working on the magazine. She also has experienced some negative comments about the work she does.

“[Some people] are like ‘Oh, they’re just teenagers, this isn’t gonna do anything,” Ivey said. “I don’t like bringing it up to every person I meet because sometimes I’ll get a very confused look or they’ll say ‘Oh, that’s cool’ out of politeness.”

Mixed Mag eventually wants to be able to pay their staff and “set the standard for the work environment they want to see” in the industry.

They have a 10-person staff of volunteers and received some backlash for not paying writers. Carolina Murkens noted that the commitment level looks very different from that of a full-time job at a full-time publication, but that comes with compensation *Mixed Mag* cannot provide yet.

“There is a commitment, a want to be a part of something,” Carolina Murkens said.

Boyd said people are often surprised to hear that she is friends with other zine teams and creators who appear to be “competitors,” but is happy for a sense of community and to be building up and supporting other zines and creators.

Ivey, on the other hand, hopes to become a part of the fashion industry as a celebrity fashion stylist. Her work with *Our Era*, alongside a fashion internship, helped cement that role. It has also helped her find her aesthetic and sense of style. “The way I style a photoshoot is drastically

different from how I dress myself, like so, so different,” Ivey said. “I’m usually wearing a pair of baggy jeans and some random t-shirt I found in my dad’s drawer and what I put people in is just wacky patterns, like very editorial. I want to change that, I don’t have the balls to wear what I put other people that I’m working on in.”

It seems that the format and style of zines popularized by smaller and younger creators are inspiring mainstream outlet coverage as well.

The Los Angeles Times [relaunched *Image*](#) with a more creative bent in 2021. And more publications for younger readers are treating their audiences with respect by centering adult topics like politics, identity, and sexuality. But at the same time, they are also inspired by some mainstream publications. *Haute*, *Our Era*, and *Mixed Mag* all cited *Vice’s i-D Magazine* as inspirations for their work.

No matter the changes or inspiration in the mainstream, zines provide a space for young people to speak their minds and collaborate with each other.

“We ask ourselves, ‘How are we going to be that catalyst for change in the publication world?’” Carolina Murkens said.

“We want to create work that will be respected,” Joana Murkens said. “It matters again that we are setting up the space and we are putting out kindness and respect, even to people we don’t necessarily align with, it’s important to set those standards as a magazine, as people.”

<https://www.ampersandla.com/gen-z-zines/>