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# That's Not Funny, That's Sick: The National Lampoon And The Comedy Insurgents Who Captured The Mainstream

**THAT'S NOT FUNNY,  
THAT'S SICK**



## Synopsis

The untold story behind a revolution in American comedy *Labor Day, 1969*: Two recent college graduates move to New York to edit a new magazine called the *National Lampoon*. Over the next decade, Henry Beard and Doug Kenney, along with a loose amalgamation of fellow satirists such as Michael O'Donoghue and P. J. O'Rourke, popularized a smart, caustic, ironic brand of humor that has become the dominant voice of American comedy. Ranging from sophisticated political satire to broad raunchy jokes, the *National Lampoon* introduced iconoclasm to the mainstream, selling millions of copies to an audience both large and devoted. Its excursions into live shows, records, and radio helped shape the anarchic earthiness of John Belushi, the suave slapstick of Chevy Chase, and the deadpan wit of Bill Murray and brought them together with other talents such as Harold Ramis, Christopher Guest, and Gilda Radner. A new generation of humorists emerged from the crucible of the *Lampoon* to help create *Saturday Night Live* and the influential film *Animal House*, among many other notable comedy landmarks. Journalist Ellin Stein, an observer of the scene since the early 1970s, draws on a wealth of revealing firsthand interviews with the architects and impresarios of this comedy explosion to offer crucial insight into a raucous cultural transformation that still echoes today. Brimming with insider stories and set against the roiling political and cultural landscape of the 1970s, *That's Not Funny, That's Sick* goes behind the jokes to witness the fights, the parties, the collaborations - and the competition - among this fraternity of the self-consciously disenchanted. Decades later, their brand of subversive humor that provokes, offends, and often illuminates is as relevant and necessary as ever.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Other reviewers, in particular Mark Simonson, have expressed the best reasons to read this history of America's greatest humor magazine: while other authors have traced the history of the "Lampoon" within the context of a biography of one of its major talents (Doug Kenney, Michael O'Donoghue), this book is about the magazine itself, which had a fascinating history fraught with the kind of turmoil you only get when you bring a dozen or so brilliantly funny and intelligent men and women together and watch them try to agree on anything. (Thankfully, at least often enough to create a magazine's worth of satire, they occasionally did). The author had the advantage of having interviewed principals such as Kenney in the magazine's formative years, and so her account contains quotes which do not appear in any recent book or article on the subject (trust me, I've read everything published about the "Lampoon" or anyone remotely connected with it since at least nineteen-eighty-whatever year "Going Too Far" was published). Because of my fanatical reading, I was actually uncertain whether or not I'd learn anything new here, but I did, not all of it pleasant: e.g., I had been completely unaware of one editor's evidently well-known but little-discussed anti-Semitism. The author also goes into greater detail about the magazine's side projects - its stage shows and especially its albums, which were the first "Lampoon" works I ever bought - than any one else.

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