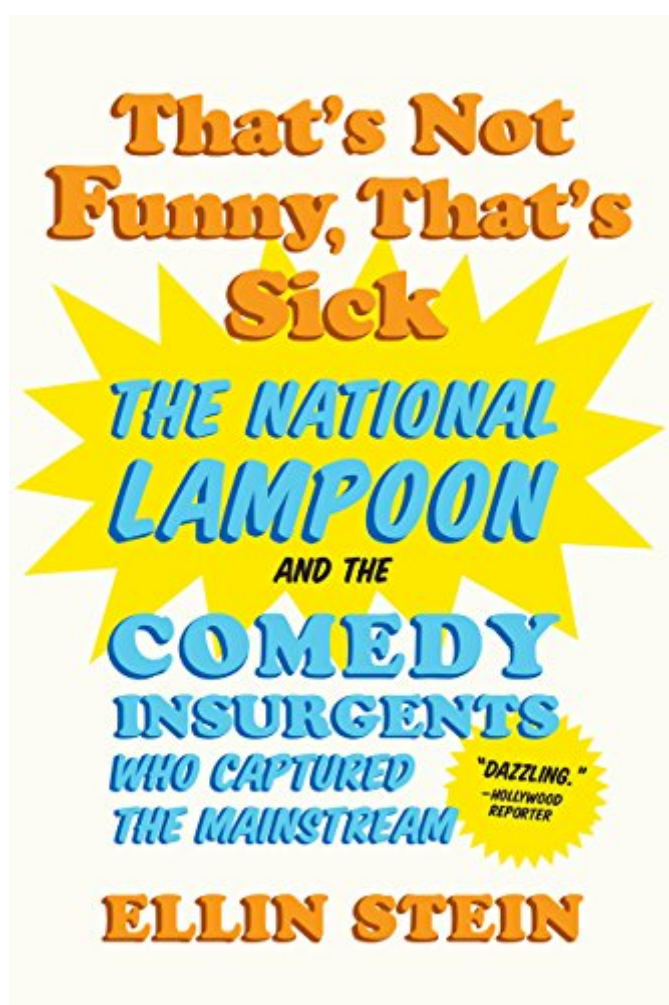




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# That's Not Funny, That's Sick: The National Lampoon And The Comedy Insurgents Who Captured The Mainstream



## Synopsis

"Smart, knowing, and deeply reported, the definitive history of one of modern American humor's wellsprings." —Kurt Andersen, author of *Fantasyland*, host of NPR's *Studio 360*

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 including 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 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

This book is great in describing the origin of National Lampoon and how it set the stage for Saturday Night Live and all cutting edge humor today.

I love this book

Excellent history of The National Lampoon.

Great book.

Hilarious!!!!

Book arrived in good shape. Well pleased with shipping speed and with book itself. Nice job!

There have been more than a few books written about National Lampoon and the people who worked there. As proprietor of Mark's Very Large National Lampoon Site, I've read them all, but none of them puts the history of the magazine and its spin-offs in context the way this book does. If you think of the Lampoon phenomenon as a big tree, with the magazine as the trunk, other books have drawn more detailed pictures of certain parts of the tree, or even from a point of view inside the tree. Stein's book is the first to step back and draw a full picture of the tree, from its roots in the Harvard Lampoon to the many branches and twigs that have grown from it over the years, including many branches that barely get mentioned in other books. The book has clearly been in the works for a long time--some of the people interviewed are no longer with us. It includes quite a bit of material I've never seen before. If you want to know about some particular aspect of National

Lampoon--the life of Doug Kenney, the life of Michael O'Donoghue, Tony Hendra's take on it all, Rick Meyerowitz's favorite stuff from the magazine, or Chris Miller's history of Animal House--there are other good books to choose from. But for anyone who is interested in the big picture of National Lampoon's history and cultural influence, Ellin Stein's *That's Not Funny, That's Sick* is the one to get.

Ellin Stein's smart, well-written history of the National Lampoon and Saturday Night Live is full of hilarious quotes and sensitive portraits that offer fresh insight into familiar figures such as Chevy Chase and Gilda Radner. But the book is more than a collection of one-liners. In hindsight, it seems obvious that satire would be a vehicle for exploring the changes in society: satire, unlike broader forms of humor, is so tied to the quirks and follies of a particular era. This is a very funny book, but it is also both poignant and important. From the glory days of the National Lampoon, a brilliant humor magazine founded on a whim at a time when overhead was low and energy was high, to the present day, when spontaneousness, creativity, and subversiveness are losing out to "key players" and "thought leaders," terms that the NatLamp's editors would surely have skewered, this book reminds us that it's 4 a.m. in America, with a bad hangover. Nobody has brought this news home in quite the way Stein does, and I found myself very moved by the book's ending, which I won't give away here. Here's hoping the book functions as a blueprint for creative subversion. Life in the U.S. may not be fun anymore, but at least we have Ellin Stein and the whole cast of characters from satire's heyday to remind us of when it was.

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