



Candidates must complete this page and then give this cover and their final version of the extended essay to their supervisor.

Candidate session number			
Candidate name			
School name			
Examination session (May or November)	May	Year	2015

Diploma Programme subject in which this extended essay is registered: \_\_\_\_\_

(For an extended essay in the area of languages, state the language and whether it is group 1 or group 2.)

Title of the extended essay: Animal House: To What Extent did  
Animal House change social expectations of an American  
Film Comedy?

**Candidate's declaration**

*This declaration must be signed by the candidate; otherwise a mark of zero will be issued.*

The extended essay I am submitting is my own work (apart from guidance allowed by the International Baccalaureate).

I have acknowledged each use of the words, graphics or ideas of another person, whether written, oral or visual.

I am aware that the word limit for all extended essays is 4000 words and that examiners are not required to read beyond this limit.

This is the final version of my extended essay.

Candidate's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: 9<sup>th</sup> Jan 2015

### Supervisor's report and declaration

The supervisor must complete this report, sign the declaration and then give the final version of the extended essay, with this cover attached, to the Diploma Programme coordinator.

Name of supervisor (CAPITAL letters) \_

Please comment, as appropriate, on the candidate's performance, the context in which the candidate undertook the research for the extended essay, any difficulties encountered and how these were overcome (see page 13 of the extended essay guide). The concluding interview (viva voce) may provide useful information. These comments can help the examiner award a level for criterion K (holistic judgment). Do not comment on any adverse personal circumstances that may have affected the candidate. If the amount of time spent with the candidate was zero, you must explain this, in particular how it was then possible to authenticate the essay as the candidate's own work. You may attach an additional sheet if there is insufficient space here.

Overall, I think this paper is overambitious in its scope for the page length allowed. I believe it requires further editing, as the "making of" portion takes up too large a portion of the essay leaving inadequate page space for reflections on theory and social relevance. The section on the male gaze or the section on race relations in comedy could have served as complete paper topics on their own (although I do appreciate that they are there).

The student is a strong writer and researcher, however greater attention could have been paid to organizational and critical approaches. I appreciated the anecdotes sourced from different materials as I found they created a nice bridge between rigid academic investigation and entertainment.

Overall, the student enjoyed the experience, and the freedom to choose the subject matter of his choice.

✓  
Haley Paul  
reports

*This declaration must be signed by the supervisor; otherwise a mark of zero will be issued.*

I have read the final version of the extended essay that will be submitted to the examiner.

To the best of my knowledge, the extended essay is the authentic work of the candidate.

*As per the section entitled "Responsibilities of the Supervisor" in the EE guide, the recommended number of hours spent with candidates is between 3 and 5 hours. Schools will be contacted when the number of hours is left blank, or where 0 hours are stated and there lacks an explanation. Schools will also be contacted in the event that number of hours spent is significantly excessive compared to the recommendation.*

I spent  hours with the candidate discussing the progress of the extended essay.

Supervisor's signature:

Date: 2/27/15

**Assessment form (for examiner use only)**

Candidate session number	
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**Achievement level**

Criteria	Examiner 1 maximum	Examiner 2 maximum	Examiner 3
A research question	2	2	2
B introduction	2	2	2
C investigation	3	4	4
D knowledge and understanding	3	4	4
E reasoned argument	2	4	4
F analysis and evaluation	2	4	4
G use of subject language	3	4	4
H conclusion	1	2	2
I formal presentation	3	4	4
J abstract	2	2	2
K holistic judgment	2	4	4
Total out of 36	25		

Name of examiner 1: \_\_\_\_\_ Examiner number: \_\_\_\_\_  
(CAPITAL letters)

Name of examiner 2: \_\_\_\_\_ Examiner number: \_\_\_\_\_  
(CAPITAL letters)

Name of examiner 3: \_\_\_\_\_ Examiner number: \_\_\_\_\_  
(CAPITAL letters)

IB Assessment Centre use only: B: \_\_\_\_\_

IB Assessment Centre use only: A: \_\_\_\_\_

*Animal House*: To What Extent did *Animal House* change social expectations of an American Film Comedy?

Film Studies

Word Count: 3,999

Potentially a really good essay - it is a pity that it was not sufficiently focused. The earlier described elements do not allow for depth or detail discussion.

I agree with the supervisor's comments that the section on male rage or race would have been a complete topic - of the essay would have been better for it.

## Research Question: How did *Animal House* create a new sub-genre in American comedy?

Abstract:

This essay examines the question, "How did *Animal House* create a new sub-genre in American film comedy?" It begins by introducing the comedy genre prior to the 1978 release of *Animal House* and how the film successfully forged a new sub-genre of comedy: gross-out comedy. The essay will proceed to dissect the *Animal House*'s internal qualities, exploring how its raunchy comedic elements were such an instant success and gave the movie its iconic status. From there, it will investigate how the film's conventions served as the blueprint for future American comedies; specifically, it will look at the emphasis on physical comedy, utter disdain for authority or civility, wild and energetic storytelling, all the while delivering important social undertones about race, gender, and political motives. After, it will demonstrate how *Animal House* created a formula that is now widely mimicked by American blockbuster comedies such as *Neighbors* and *Old School*, further solidifying the film's legacy. In conclusion, the essay illustrates that as a result of its controversial material, such as nudity and potty humor, while employing socially conscious messages, *Animal House* changed the social expectations in an American comedy.

Word Count: 188

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## Introduction:

In 1978, the release of Harold Ramis' film, *Animal House*, forever changed the social expectations of American comedy. Prior to the release of *Animal House*, classic Hollywood comedy generally relied on narrative to dissect the context of the humor. It was nearly unheard of to attend a respectable theater and watch a film containing bad "toilet" humor and nudity, alongside high-quality performances, and counter-culture connotations. Although the film was made on a budget of \$2.7 million, *Animal House* was a box office hit, earning more than \$141 million in the United States. It was, "the highest grossing comedy ever made at the time of its release,"<sup>1</sup>. Ramis, sensing a social change in America, decided to capitalize on it. Accordingly, instead of remaining within the confines of traditional Hollywood comedy, Ramis' film embraced the spirit of the baby boomer culture which had established itself as one of pushing boundaries and defying authority and tradition. The film was so iconic and revolutionary in its cinematic elements that future Hollywood comedies like *Neighbors* and *Old School* use the *Animal House* blueprint. Furthermore, it generated most of the conventions that we now associate with American comedies, such as the heavy reliance on the 'male gaze' to provide heterosexual entertainment. The methods used in *Animal House* are still present in high-budget films and have set a standard for the social expectation of American comedy as raunchy yet delivering inspiringly powerful messages.

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<sup>1</sup> Evans, Bradford. "The Lost Roles of Animal House | Splitsider." *Splitsider*. N.p., 10 Nov. 2011. Web. 18 Sept. 2014. <<http://splitsider.com/2011/11/the-lost-roles-of-animal-house/>>.



## Body Paragraphs:

When *Animal House* was released in 1978 it was an immediate box office success that completely altered the cinematic landscape of Hollywood comedy. American comedy prior to 1978 was maintained by a traditional sense of boundaries and was drastically different from present day comedies. Then, comedies tended to consist of timid and tasteful humor that rather  
we-  
revealed refrained from humiliating or objectifying any person or group. In-as-much, these films were a reflection of society at the time; a conservative value based society that had been the cornerstone for much of America's history. In order to discuss the impact of *Animal House* in comedy film genre, it is essential to understand how genre is defined in cinema. In the book "Genre and Hollywood," Tom Ryall, a professor of genre, offers his take: "genres may be defined as patterns/forms/styles/structures which transcend individual films, and which supervise both their construction by the filmmaker, and their reading by an audience"<sup>2</sup>. However, one cannot discuss genre without also defining 'sub-genre', "the term 'sub-genre' has also been used, generally to refer to specific traditions or groupings within these genres,"<sup>3</sup>. With these definitions in mind, as well as the cinematic landscape leading up to the release of *Animal House* in 1978, it is not difficult to see how the film was unprecedented in the film industry, its debut accomplishing what no other movie had before.

The nascent moments of the film are found in the year 1975, when a 23-year-old named Thom Mount arrived for his first day of work at Universal Studios. He was to be the assistant to Ned Tanen, a hot-tempered production chief. His first assignment was to find and fire an

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<sup>2</sup> Neale, Stephen. *Genre and Hollywood*. London: Routledge, 2000. Print.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*





executive named Jerry Miller, only to find out what Miller had been working on.<sup>4</sup> While skimming through a stack of scripts, treatments, and projects, he stumbled upon a treatment for a project entitled *The Night of Seven Fires*. Mount described the treatment as "...all over the map, It was essentially about frat parties, initiations and a lot of throwing up at Dartmouth College,"<sup>5</sup>.

Although the text lacked a clear story line, he felt that it contained certain basic elements for a captivating film. Mount claimed "there was a renegade fraternity bent on fun and destruction in equal parts; an overbearing almost Nixonian administration with a creep dictatorial Dean; and an unchecked desire of the characters to have an unfettered, uncensored good time."<sup>6</sup>

At this time, *National Lampoon Magazine* was thriving both culturally and economically, with a man named Matty Simmons acting as the moneyman and Doug Kenney as an editor.

Fearful of Kenney leaving *National Lampoon*, Simmons needed to make him stay.<sup>7</sup> He was able to convince him by promising that they would get into the film business. Simmons introduced Kenney to Harold Ramis, who at the time was working with the well-established Chicago comedy improv troupe Second City, and gave them the job of writing a film treatment and script based on the 1964 High School Yearbook Parody. Initially, they used the high school setting, however moved onto college after deciding that sex and drugs did not go well with teenagers.<sup>8</sup> Yet they still struggled, and Kenney suggested employing the help of Chris Miller, a Dartmouth grad and real-life Delta, who had composed pieces for the *Lampoon* regarding his real life fraternity escapades.

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<sup>4</sup> Neumer, Chris. "Animal House: The Movie that Changed Comedy." *Stumped Magazine RSS*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 Sept. 2014. <<http://www.stumpedmagazine.com/articles/animal-house/>>.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*

All three of them worked together to create a treatment, based on Miller's Dartmouth memoir, "The Night of the Seven Fires." After recounting all of their favorite college stories, Kenney, Miller and Ramis came to one important conclusion, "at the heart of any great animal house, there is a great animal".<sup>9</sup> This resulted in a 114-page treatment composed by all three of them. Interestingly enough, Miller, Kenney and Ramis had never attempted to write a feature length screenplay prior to *Animal House*.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, they decided upon an unusual system for writing; Miller would write the first ten pages, then Ramis would write ten, followed by Kenney. They would then trade what they wrote and critique each other until they all agreed. "The system worked because we all had a lot of subversive sensibilities in common... We didn't like authority and thought it was more important to have fun than to worry about your permanent record,"<sup>11</sup>

Miller stated. Their unconventional style was a result of their relative inexperience in

Hollywood as Miller recounts, "we weren't operating within normal parameters at all. [*Animal House*] is now referred to as a brilliantly structured movie – which was a total accident,"<sup>12</sup>. This speaks to the brilliance of these three men, and their ability to look to the future for inspiration rather than the past. Despite this, they all felt that they were portraying the attitude and artistic nuances of their generation and its similarities in a manner that Hollywood had never captured<sup>13</sup>. Harold Ramis was aware of the uncharted territory they were exploring and later recounted, "I remember having this grandiose feeling that we might be writing the biggest film comedy of all time,"<sup>14</sup>. After completing the script, Simmons contacted several studios about

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<sup>9</sup> Neumer, Chris. "Animal House: The Movie that Changed Comedy." *Stumped Magazine RSS*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 Sept. 2014. <<http://www.stumpedmagazine.com/articles/animal-house/>>.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*

making *Animal House*.<sup>15</sup> It was rejected by every studio he took it to, until he came across Mount, by then, an executive at Universal.<sup>16</sup> Mount saw the script's potential. With the help of his assistant Sean Daniel, Mount persuaded Tanen to take on the project and from there he instructed them to make a deal with Simmons.

At the time, *Saturday Night Live* was entering its first season. It quickly became a cultural phenomenon that signaled a new ethos among the youth market. "It was aggressive, political, raw and very funny,"<sup>17</sup> Miller, Mount, Kenney and Ramis collectively understood that there was a wave of cultural change on the horizon and if done correctly, their film would be able to profit from the same new wave of comedy.<sup>18</sup>

When it came time to find a director, Mount perused through some of Hollywood's less renowned directors. He stumbled upon an independent production called *Kentucky Fried Movie*, a film that comprised of a series of blackout sketches into a feature length movie.<sup>19</sup> It was essentially a spoof on television, commercials and movies. Its director was a high school dropout named John Landis. After watching a few minutes of his film, Mount and Simmons knew immediately they had found the director who could translate *Animal House* onto the screen.<sup>20</sup> It took a little convincing, but Mount and Daniel were able to convince Tanen to hire Landis; however it was on the grounds that Landis must make the movie for less than \$2,500,000. Once onboard, Landis made it known that he wanted to use character actors rather than comedian

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<sup>15</sup> Neumer, Chris. "Animal House: The Movie that Changed Comedy." *Stumped Magazine RSS*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 Sept. 2014. <<http://www.stumpedmagazine.com/articles/animal-house/>>.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*

actors.<sup>21</sup> "I wanted to use serious actors. I wanted people to believe the parts,"<sup>22</sup> Landis claimed . As the casting was conducted, Universal executives had the fear that the film lacked a star actor.<sup>23</sup> In an effort to appease the studios' fear, Landis approached Donald Sutherland. Sutherland agreed to take on a small role as the Jennings, the pot smoking English professor. His decision to take on the project was essential, as the studio was no longer worried about the lack of star talent. As Landis later recounted, "It was Donald Sutherland who essentially got the movie made,"<sup>24</sup> .

Following the completion of casting, the production team was tasked with finding a location and preceded to send out their script to colleges across the country.<sup>25</sup> However, they were met by total rejection. That is until the dean of students at University of Oregon proposed his campus.

*Animal House* was shot during a 32-day shoot in Eugene on an obviously low-budget. Everyone was forced to make sacrifices unheard on a Hollywood film set today. Director Landis had no trailer, no office, and couldn't see the dailies for three weeks. The majority of the costumes were purchases at local thrift stores and the togas for the renowned party scene were made by Landis' and Belushi's wives.<sup>26</sup> In addition, the film was considered so low on the totem pole for Universal that Landis was given only two days to use a crane for shooting.<sup>27</sup> Landis proved to be perfect for the job, as he had worked on almost every film set imaginable after dropping out of high school.<sup>28</sup> He was well aware of his boundaries. One of the bigger obstacles

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<sup>21</sup> Neumer, Chris. "Animal House: The Movie that Changed Comedy." *Stumped Magazine RSS*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 Sept. 2014. <<http://www.stumpedmagazine.com/articles/animal-house/>>.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*

was how to effectively direct Belushi's character, Bluto. "We had to be careful with Bluto because he was the least realistic character," said Landis, "He's a cartoon. He is appetite,"<sup>29</sup>.

The thought and effort that went into Bluto is an indicator at the definitive set of goals Landis, Miller, Ramis and Kenney had in mind. Belushi was instructed to play Bluto as a cross between Harpo Marx and Sesame Street's Cookie Monster. While both characters have insatiable and greedy appetites, they are sweet at heart. If Belushi were unable to perfect the sweetness for Bluto's character, Landis would have merely a rowdy animal in no possession of any redeeming qualities. Fortunately enough, Belushi understood this perfectly and put on the film's most unforgettable performance. Following the shooting, Landis returned to Los Angeles and proceeded to hire the renowned Elmer Bernstein to compile a straight-laced score for the movie.

Under the same premise used to cast, Landis wanted the score to be serious and professional in order to make the movie more believable and its satire more effective. With the score composed, Landis showed the film to Tanen, Mount, and Daniel. After the scene where Otter is beaten up at a local motel, Tanen stated that the movie was not funny.<sup>30</sup> Landis replied, "It's not suppose to be funny,"<sup>31</sup>. The inability for some to look past the traditional pillars of comedy was a hurdle

that Landis encountered multiple times during the making of *Animal House* and ultimately speaks to the social expectation upheaval in American film comedy that occurred following its release.

All this background takes 100 mind space.

What made *Animal House* such a groundbreaking film was its complete disregard for traditional notions of film comedy, instead opting to openly discuss, attack, and poke fun of

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<sup>29</sup> Neumer, Chris. "Animal House: The Movie that Changed Comedy." *Stumped Magazine RSS*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 Sept. 2014. <<http://www.stumpedmagazine.com/articles/animal-house/>>.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*

✓ traditional/conservative sexuality, generational politics, and race through gross-out tactics that in effect altered the expectations of audiences to come. At the time of its release, sexuality was a topic rarely presented in a vulgar manner. *Animal House* portrayed sexuality in a raw and seemingly innocent way, through its gross-out methods. An example would be the scene where Bluto sneaks over to the Omega House to catch a glimpse of the girls undressing. He climbs a ladder, where he stumbles upon a group of girls having a pillow fight in their underwear. After observing them in awe, he loudly makes his way to Bab's window to watch her undress. She is presented in all white and appears directly in front of the window. As he observes her, Belushi turns around and breaks the fourth wall, looking at the screen with a raised eyebrow, reassuringly letting the audience know that it's okay to look. This idea of masculinity/raunchy scene dominating a scene speaks to Laura Mulvey's paper *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, where she coins the term 'male gaze'. Referring to the idea that Hollywood cinema creates a space where sexual objectification and exploitation of the female occurs through the patriarchal order of society and that 'looking' as a pleasurable act of voyeurism in itself.<sup>32</sup> In addition, Mulvey states in her essay that, "the cinema satisfies a primordial wish for pleasurable looking."<sup>33</sup> The scene ends with the ladder and Bluto falling from the house at the height of the action. Such an act as peeping in a girl's window was considered outlandish to society at the time, yet it is a perfect example of gross-out comedy. The fact that Bluto has climbed a ladder to watch the girls is shocking, but to have girls pillow fighting topless and sensually undressing alone in a room truly stands out. In a time when sex was considered a taboo topic to delve into, *Animal House* signaled the ultimate shift in perception of sexuality. The Delta brothers symbolize free

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<sup>32</sup> Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen* 16.3 (1975): 6-18. Web.

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*

spirits and utilize sex as a way to defy authority. Otter's seduction of Mrs. Wormer, wife of the Dean, at the Toga party typifies this use of sexuality as a means to defy authority. This happens again when Pinto deflowers a 13-year old girl, who happens to be the mayor's daughter.

Although the characters in the film never make it apparent that they use sex as a means of changing the balance of power, it is evident that these raunchy acts are a symbol of the new culture at the time. The objectification of women for both the performer's and audience's pleasure speaks to how *Animal House* successfully influenced the cinematic legacy of fulfilling heterosexual male fantasies while maintaining a comedic element. The use of women as erotic objects is almost synonymous with raunchy American comedies. In *Old School*, a 2003 American Comedy about a group of young men seeking to re-live their college days, women are used as erotic elements solely for the pleasure of the performers and audience. In the infamous KY-Jelly fight scene, two women take their tops to fight one of the older fraternity brothers. However, they do not serve a meaningful function, further solidifying Mulvey's belief that, "her visual presence tends to work against the development of a storyline, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation"<sup>34</sup>.

more  
clear  
analysis  
reader

✓ Another aspect of *Animal House* that made it so groundbreaking was its reference to the generational politics at the time. While on the surface it is nothing more than a group of college kids acting like idiots and disobeying authoritative figures, it has direct ties to the youth in America at the time. Set in 1962, but released in 1978, the film is structured around tension with traditional authority. An example of this takes place when Delta is at a campus disciplinary trial regarding their charter status. The smooth-talking leader, Otter, offers his stance by stating, "You

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<sup>34</sup> Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen* 16.3 (1975): 6-18. Web.

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can't hold a whole fraternity responsible for the behavior of a few sick, perverted individuals!"<sup>35</sup>

✓ Otter then proceeds to say that if the judge, Greg, does place the blame on the fraternity, he is ultimately blaming the whole fraternity system. Otter goes on to place the blame on the educational system and finally the United States of America in a masterfully funny speech which leaves the room in awe. While this scene is extremely entertaining, it reference generational politics as it exhibits a clear demonstration of the youth standing up to and essentially rebelling against traditional authority. *Animal House* laid the foundation for American Comedies to employ the stigma of the youth against the "man". Films such as *Neighbors* exemplify such ideals, albeit with the roles reversed; there is a clear divide between Zach Efron, the leader of the fraternity, as the antagonist and Seth Rogan, the adult, as the protagonist. Although it's filled with gross-out elements, the film delivers a message about the responsibilities of young, new parents. This inclusion of social commentary as part of the formula for the American comedy was brought to the public at large by way of *Animal House*. They set the model wherein it is now expected that American film comedies deliver a form of social commentary to an extent, regardless of the humor content.

this is the scene?

The last element that *Animal House* used gross-out methods to explore was race. During the famous toga party, we are introduced to the all-black band, Otis Day and the Knights who give a performance, quintessential of that era, to the joy of the all-white crowd. In the scene everyone is dancing happily and the band is all smiles; the issue of race seems to be a non-factor. However that notion is soon dismissed as the Delta brothers pull into an all-black club after seeing that their supposed pals, Otis Day and the Knights, are performing. Before walking into

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<sup>35</sup> *National Lampoon's Animal House*. Dir. John Landis. Perf. John Belushi and Tim Matheson. Universal Pictures, 1978. Film.

the club, Doug proclaims, "What till Otis see's us, he loves us!"<sup>36</sup>. Upon walking in, the band is playing soulfully. As everyone stops and notices the Delta brothers, the band actually alters the tune of their music to a sound that was considered stereotypically 'black' and more what white people expected. It is clear that the apparent lack of racial tension from the toga party is nothing more than a pipedream. Otter even chimes in that, "we are all going to die".<sup>37</sup> Even though this scene is clearly an example of the race issue, it's presented in a such a way that you can't help but view the Delta situation as comedic. The boys are eventually forced to leave, an ode to the fact that in that era, it was blacks who were forced to leave establishments. While this is not a gross-out moment so to speak, it does carry a deeper meaning that highlights the effectiveness of these new comedic tactics. By incorporating the social issue of race into a raunchy comedy, *Animal House* set the precedent for a more substantial comedic expectation. The effectiveness of how it was able to maintain its humor while delivering socially conscious messages highlights the depth and sophistication of *Animal House*.

On July 26, 1978, *Animal House* premiered at New York City's Astor Theater. Even then, Mount was chastised for his refusal to take out the Dexter Lake Club scene (in which the Deltas end up in an all-black nightclub) by Tanen who feared it would cause African Americans to riot. This reflected the feeling at the time, which further highlights just how bold a movie it was.

The public reception to the 1978 release of *Animal House*, was immensely and undeniably positive. It ended up earning more than \$141 million in the U.S. alone, and was, at the time of its release, the highest grossing comedy ever. One cannot overlook its R rating, which

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<sup>36</sup> *National Lampoon's Animal House*. Dir. John Landis. Perf. John Belushi and Tim Matheson. Universal Pictures, 1978. Film.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*

did not hinder its rise to fame or contain its popularity, “*Animal House* was a hit R-rated comedy, which was a rarity at the time,”<sup>38</sup>. Throughout the 1970’s, *Animal House* was the seventh highest grossing film released. Yet one cannot merely look at the box office numbers. “It’s difficult to put into perspective how huge a pop cultural event the release of *National Lampoon’s Animal House* was in the summer of 1978,”<sup>39</sup>. Following the release, there were those who labeled the film negatively, “it was accused by large sections of the press of being mean spirited,”<sup>40</sup>. However that claim holds little merit as the film has spanned generations due to the heart it has, “we have genuine affection for the characters even at their most outrageous, and we have a stake in their actions because we are always rooting for the underdogs,”<sup>41</sup>. *Animal House* captured the minds of young America and refused to let go.

The impact of *Animal House* with regards to American comedy was instrumental for Hollywood. It signaled a changing of the guard and ultimately altered the course of Hollywood comedy, “In a recent *New Yorker* magazine profile, one of the film’s writers, Harold Ramis was lauded as a key force in creating movies that ‘attack the smugness of institutional life’, thereby rescuing Hollywood comedy from its ‘smooth, polite perfection,’”<sup>42</sup>. Its impact was so profound that it led to the creation of a new template for which the majority of American comedy blockbusters now follow. “*Animal House* also marked a new era in American comedy, bringing together the anarchic Ivy League sensibilities of the *Harvard Lampoon* and the freewheeling,

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<sup>38</sup> Evans, Bradford. "The Lost Roles of Animal House | Splitsider." *Splitsider*. N.p., 10 Nov. 2011. Web. 18 Sept. 2014. <<http://splitsider.com/2011/11/the-lost-roles-of-animal-house/>>.

<sup>39</sup> Evans, Bradford. "The Lost Roles of Animal House | Splitsider." *Splitsider*. N.p., 10 Nov. 2011. Web. 18 Sept. 2014. <<http://splitsider.com/2011/11/the-lost-roles-of-animal-house/>>.

<sup>40</sup> Mumby, Daniel. "GROSS-OUT: National Lampoon's Animal House (1978) ~ Mumby at the Movies." *Mumby at the Movies*. N.p., 12 June 2012. Web. 18 Sept. 2014.

<sup>41</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>42</sup> Nixon, Rob. "National Lampoon's Animal House." *Turner Classic Movies*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 Sept. 2014.

✓ sketch driven style of Chicago's legendary Second City improv troupe. It was a match that would come to define and dominate the approach to modern comedy,"<sup>43</sup> . It was one of the first studio comedies specifically aimed at the college demographic and is responsible for the toga party phenomenon being associated with American college life.<sup>44</sup> . To this day, *Animal House* serves as the blueprint for blockbuster comedy, "Landis set the tone for future film comedy, by using serious actors, backed by a traditional soundtrack, to underscore the inherent comedy and to make the film believable,"<sup>45</sup> . This is apparent in the countless number of films that have been made based on the same cinematic structure as *Animal House*. "It's a formula that has been copied so many times that now it's the traditional method of creating such a film,"<sup>46</sup> . One would be hard pressed to find a contemporary R-rated comedy that is not directly influenced or the result of *Animal House*, "Movies like *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, *Porky's*, *American Pie*, *Hangover*, and the entire Judd Apatow canon wouldn't be possible if it weren't for *Animal House*,"<sup>47</sup> . The recently released film, *Neighbors* is evidence that the legacy of *Animal House* is ever present, "Efron's character in *Neighbors* is equal parts Otter and Bluto, while Dave Franco's character is like the more straight-laced Boon,"<sup>48</sup> . It is known as the inspiration for many famous filmmakers of our generation, "The movie is credited with heavily influencing the current kings of high-concept gross-out comedy, the Farrelly Brothers,"<sup>49</sup> . Without *Animal House*, these

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<sup>43</sup> Nixon, Rob. "National Lampoon's Animal House." *Turner Classic Movies*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 Sept. 2014.

<sup>44</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>45</sup> Neumer, Chris. "Animal House: The Movie that Changed Comedy." *Stumped Magazine RSS*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 Sept. 2014.

<sup>46</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>47</sup> Evans, Bradford. "The Lost Roles of Animal House | Splitsider." *Splitsider*. N.p., 10 Nov. 2011. Web. 18 Sept. 2014.

<sup>48</sup> Wickman, Forrest. "Why Neighbors Is the Anti-Animal House." *Slate Magazine*. N.p., 8 May 2014. Web. 18 Sept. 2014.

<sup>49</sup> Nixon, Rob. "National Lampoon's Animal House." *Turner Classic Movies*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 Sept. 2014.

movies would not be around and it is because of its cinematic elements that it remains so revered.



## Conclusion:

The release of *Animal House* in 1978 marked the end of traditional Hollywood comedy and the beginning of a new era in the genre. At a time when Hollywood comedy was stringent and polite, *Animal House* succeeded in changing its social expectation by introducing a new brand of comedy that was anarchic, dirty, and full of energy while at the same time employing social and political undercurrents. It succeeded in its aim to shock the audience with controversial material such “toilet” humor and nudity, while delivering deeper messages on socially conscious topics . This manner of comedy was unheard of prior to *Animal House* and considered extremely taboo. By creating a raunchy experience on the surface, yet also containing deeper messages, *Animal House* established a social expectation that has come to last. The gross-out movement spawned directly by the film’s cultural success and ultimately became a mainstay in Hollywood. *Animal House* created a new sub-genre in American comedy by breaking the barriers of traditional Hollywood and setting the standard of casting serious actors, along with a traditional soundtrack to downplay the comedy and make it relatable. It incorporated underlying social messages into humor to deliver an enjoyable yet thought-provoking experience for the audience. Its relevance has been profound as is seen through the large number of American comedies that attempt to balance a heavy flow of toilet-humor, incorporating a ‘male gaze’ through the objectification of women, while tip-toeing around a socially relevant message.

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