

# The Harvard Lampoon

From the *Lampoon's* website



The first volume of the *Lampoon* appeared in February, 1876. Written by seven undergraduates and modeled on *Punch*, the British humor magazine, the debut issue took the Harvard campus by storm. “Our success was immediate,” wrote founder John Tyler Wheelwright. “Our first edition of twelve hundred was sold at once.” United States President Ulysses S. Grant was advised not to read the magazine, as he would be too much “in stitches” to run the government.

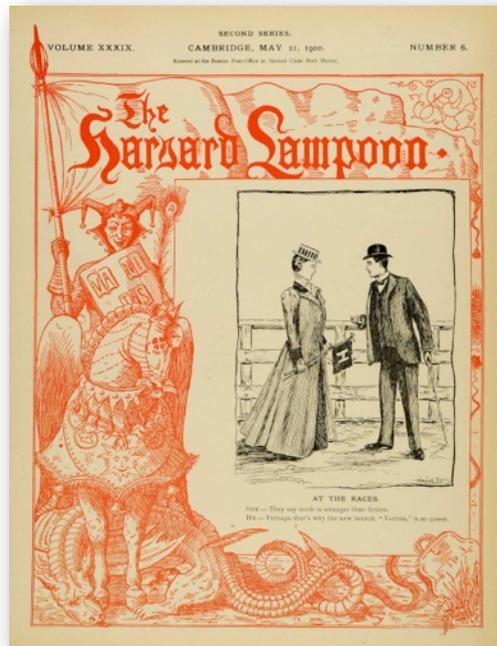
The early issues of the *Lampoon* set the pattern for its success: strong emphasis on illustrations, written satire in a variety of formats, and the wild adventures of Jester, the magazine’s natural mascot. Before the turn of the century, *Lampoon* writers penned several jokes that have become standards in the lexicon of comedy, including “Have you taken a bath?” “No, is one missing?” and “Barber – Have a hair cut, sir? Gentleman – Thank you, thought of having several of them cut.”

While no human was safe from jests within the magazine, the *Lampoon* soon branched out, supplementing its regular issues with parodies of other publications. The first target was *Life*, which the *Lampoon* parodied in 1896. But from the beginning, the *Lampoon* found its richest source of parodies and fake-issues in the *Harvard Crimson*, the daily newspaper that seems so bad as to be inimitable.

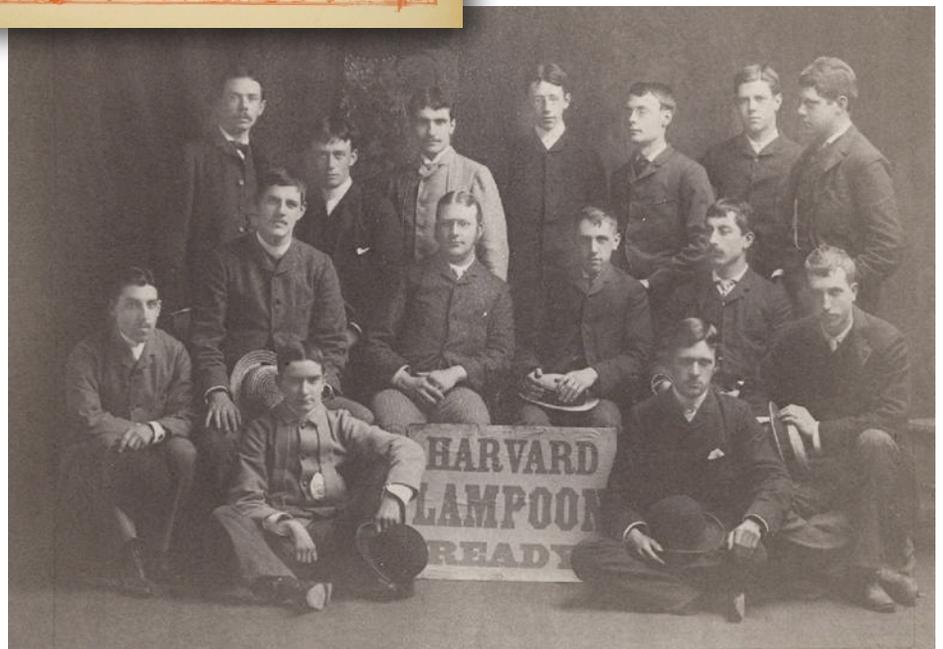
The *Lampoon's* “Golden Period” began in the first quarter of the 20th century, and was led by such figures as humorist Robert Benchley ‘12, nov-

elist John Marquand ‘15, poet David McCord ‘21, and communist agitator John Reed ‘10. Under Reed’s term as president, the *Lampoon* evolved from salacious puns and localized “Harvard humor” to highly literate, scathing social commentary.

This newfound maturity in *Lampoon* writing developed from 1926-1945, in what has come to be called the magazine’s “Golden Period.” Influenced heavily by *The New Yorker*, *Lampoon* editors developed a knack for short fiction, punchy cartoons, cutting-edge layout, and jet-set cocktail-party success. When local authorities banned a bawdy par-



A *Lampoon* cover from 1900 showing their early jester-as-knight on a horse logo. The shield bears the motto “*vanitas*” (foolishness) which is a satirical play on Harvard’s motto “*veritas*” (truth).

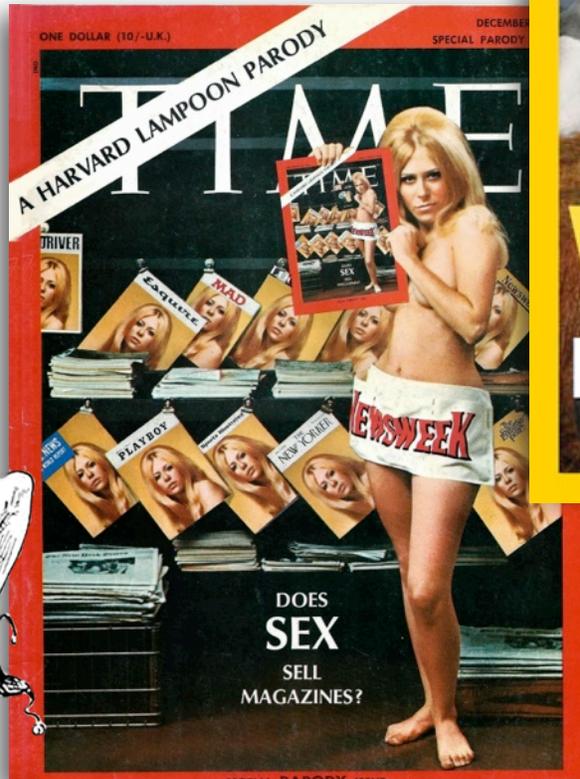
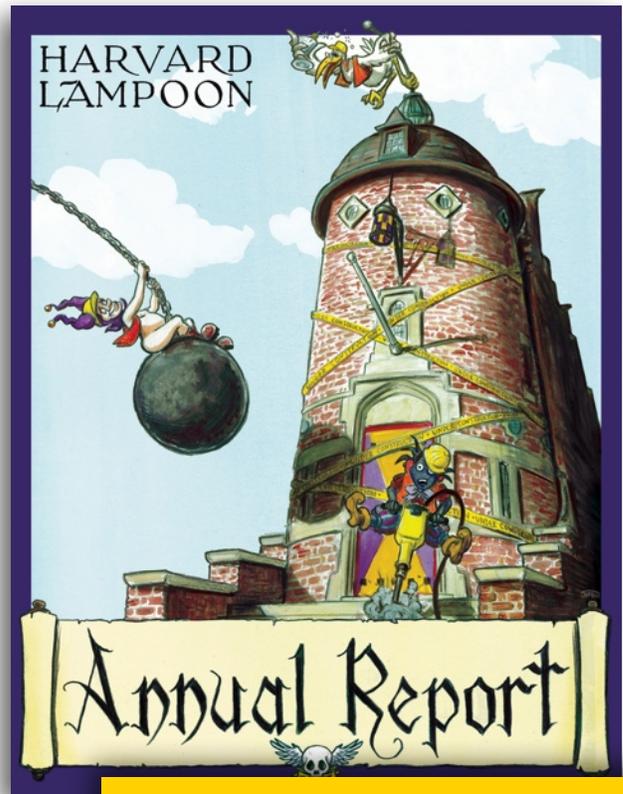


The 1885 *Lampoon* staff includes several notables, such as philosopher G. Santayana (top row, third from left) and newspaperman W.R. Hearst (bottom row, second from right).

ody of Esquire in 1935, *Lampoon* members pretended to burn issues in a bonfire outside the Castle while selling the parody out the side door. During this period, the *Lampoon* also invented the word “pizzazz” and began its annual “Movie Worst” issue, a tradition that held until the mid-1990s, when people stopped going to movies.

In the *Lampoon*’s “Golden Period,” 1946-1961, the magazine took its parodies to the national level, consensually distributing fake issues of *Mademoiselle* alongside the actual issues. Three notable alumni – George Plimpton ‘48, actor Fred Gwynne ‘50, and John Updike ‘54 – flashed comedy chops during this time, as all three men served as *Lampoon* presidents. During this time the *Lampoon* also began to induct honorary members, who have come to include Winston Churchill, Bill Cosby, Billy Crystal, Robin Williams, Jay Leno, Kurt Vonnegut and David Foster Wallace. (Paris Hilton stopped by to ask for directions in 2008.)

Following the “Shit Period” (1962-1975), the *Lampoon* entered a “Golden Period” from 1975 to the present day. The lengthy stories in older issues have been eliminated in the modern *Lampoon*, which boasts lightning-quick, joke-heavy “kind-of-stories” that are so hilarious as to be a medical risk for some. Also gone from the modern *Lampoon* are pieces about Harvard (which would be lost on our now-national audience), whimsical anecdotes (which grew tedious), and the columns of George Will (which have never appeared in the magazine).



The *Lampoon*’s editorial offices (the castle) memorialized on the cover of its “Annual Report” (top). The *Lampoon* is also known for its numerous parodies of other, establishment publications such as *National Geographic* and *Time* magazine.