

Cognitive:

Legally Blonde 2, directed by Charles Herman-Wurmfeld and starring Reese Witherspoon, is a film that follows a young, Harvard law school graduate who sets her sights on Washington D.C. to create a bill to fight animal testing in the cosmetic industry after she finds out the mother of her dog, Bruiser, is being used for it. This comedy is portrayed as a story involving legislation being made by a very abnormal example of a lawyer. This fact ties in with the comedy genre as it takes what is normally a serious situation and puts a comedic spin on it. The obvious ridiculousness of Elle Woods's outfits and the events that transpired that led her to want to make legislation are also absurd but click in the minds of the audience as something very different from normal lawyer attire and motivations. As the legislation was inspired by Bruiser's mom, the initial search for her dog's mom was conducted by Elle and a sort of detective discovered her. Then, mistaking the building she went to as a corporate building for Versace, that is when Elle discovered Bruiser's mom was being mistreated. Elle's discovery itself was not comedic, but if one were to tell any of the other people in D.C. that this all started from Elle hiring a detective to find Bruiser's mom as some missing person case, they would probably laugh. This film was not created before or after a certain event, but it is worth noting that animal testing in the cosmetic industry was a growing concern. Animal rights campaigns began around 1980 and this movie was released in 2003. So, this would certainly still be during a growing sentiment for mistreated animals. Elle's bright attire and posh lifestyle as well as her way of conducting situations are comedic as well. The faces and coining the term of Elle as "Capitol Barbie" by the staff members of the Congresswoman in D.C. are about the same reaction an audience member would have. This is what is so comedic and ironic about this film, however. The very high contrast of her clothes from those of normal lawyers and legislators are funny to think about. Imagining that in real life is almost impossible as it would seem improper or absurd. Her conflict resolution with the staff members is also unique. She uses what she calls the "snap cup" which requires everyone to write something nice about another person in the room. This differs greatly from D.C. staff members who most likely never really reach peace. Although this film follows the storyline of making legislation in D.C., this film is definitely not a political drama or anything close to it. This film, at its surface, follows many tropes from other comedy movies. Examples of these tropes include the main character having a sort of rivalry or conflict that gets concluded as if it was an Adam Sandler film, the main character having a ditsy friend like Elle's friend Paulette, or the main character being put in awkward situations and encounters such as when she discovers her dog is gay. The situation in which the bill is supported by a conservative Congressman all because his dog and Elle's dog are gay and have a relationship at a dog spa is honestly ironic but very comedic. For a better cause and for something much larger than himself, the legislation is supported by that Congressman despite what he may have been biased towards. When analyzing this film, one subgenre comes to mind. This film can also be seen as a political drama as it intersects politics and comedy. As stated, this film is not a political drama or a general drama, but it melds both comedic and political elements together. This film involves many comedic elements while also putting the main character in the epicenter of American politics. Elle is creating and attempting to pass legislation, a very politically charged idea in the middle of a comedy. As she is doing so however, the support and overall creation of the legislation is done with those comedic elements in mind and executed to put the two together.

Communal:

As a comedy, *Legally Blonde 2* serves to make the audience feel good while they are watching and after they leave the theater. It is filled with silly characters and situations that are simply there to make the audience laugh and enjoy themselves. This film is therapeutic in a way because it allows the audience to relax and laugh at the absurdity of the situations the characters get themselves into. On top of the comedic moments, this film also has a positive message to women which is appealing to a lot of audience members. The film shows Elle Woods, a seemingly stereotypical sorority blonde who happens to also be a graduate of Harvard law school. Despite having already proven herself as a smart and successful lawyer, she is underestimated by almost everyone she meets. They take one look at her “in your face” fashion and large personality and assume she is just some dumb blonde. Women’s fight for equality has been an ongoing battle for years. At the time this film was made, 2003, women were not exactly fighting for equal rights, the right to vote, or anything like that, but they were still facing sexism. This film was made during the third wave of feminism which started in the early 1990s into the 2010s. The main focus of these thirdwave feminists was to focus on individuality and diversity in women. One part of this is allowing women to embrace their femininity if that was what a woman wanted to. One point they emphasized was that women do not need to act a certain way to be respected, and that extremely feminine women are also deserving of respect and can be feminists. There is a stereotype that “girly” women are not as smart or are giving into gender roles, but this film shows an example of a strong and feminine woman who is just as capable as her coworkers. This movie also shows the difficulty of women in the workplace. In 2000, women's participation in the workforce had hit an all-time high at the time with about 60%. A lot of these women still had difficulty gaining leadership positions and were passed over for promotions despite having the same qualifications as men. Elle encountered difficulties while working to pass a bill in Washington DC. Interestingly, she is put down more by other women than she is by men in this. Many audience members would have been able to relate to her struggles in gaining respect as a feminine woman in a male dominated workplace. This film sends the empowering message to women that they do not need to dial down their feminine interests to be successful. Elle does not change anything about herself to fit in, but instead uses her specific skills to reach her goals. It also shows everyone that they are capable of anything they put their mind to. Elle Woods is just an ordinary person who works hard to reach her goals. At the beginning of her journey, she was just a sorority girl, but this did not stop her from pursuing a degree at Harvard law school and becoming a successful lawyer. Even though she was fired from her first job as a lawyer, she was not discouraged and went on to pursue another difficult goal of passing a bill to protect animals. Elle never gave up and always believed in herself. Because of her determination and confidence, she is able to accomplish everything she sets out to do. She does not let her setbacks hold her down. The therapeutic feeling of letting go and laughing mixed with the empowering message in this film allows the audience to leave the theater feeling good and with a slightly more positive outlook.

Commercial:

Legally Blonde 2 is part of the *Legally Blonde* Franchise which started in 2001 with *Legally Blonde*, a film about a sorority girl who goes to Harvard Law school. The franchise includes three movies, *Legally Blonde* (2001), *Legally Blonde 2* (2003), and *Legally Blondes* (2009), and a Broadway musical which was first performed in 2007. The original 2001 film grossed about \$96 million dollars in North America and about \$142 million worldwide. The success of the first film, and the way it inspired young women, lead to the making of the second film *Legally Blonde 2* and later movies/shows in the franchise. *Legally*

Blonde 2 was also considered a success and grossed about \$90 million in the US. All of the movies in this franchise have a few main characteristics in common. They are all comedies about young women who accomplish their goals by believing in themselves. The influence Legally Blonde and the movies/shows that followed had can be seen in other films that came out around the same time or some years after. Legally Blonde could be considered the precursor for these types of films where a strong female lead is in the spotlight and gets herself into abnormal situations but prevails through any rough patch and shows the power of women. Examples of these include The House Bunny (2008), a film in which a strong female lead is seen trading her comfortable life as a playboy bunny for the real world and She's the Man (2006), a film involving another strong female lead who proves she's more than just her outward appearance. Some films that came out in the same year as Legally Blonde 2 are Freaky Friday and Down With Love (both 2003). These films are also comedies involving strong female leads and had their own fair share of commercial success. There are other films that fall into the same subgenre of political comedy like Legally Blonde 2. Some examples include The Distinguished Gentleman (1992) and Head of State (2003). These films follow the same theme of putting the main characters into comedic situations in United States politics. The film The Distinguished Gentleman was a relatively critical and commercial success gaining good reviews from critics and grossing roughly \$83 million world wide. The 1995 film The American President is a political/romantic comedy which also lines up slightly with this film because of the comedy aspect taking place in a political setting. This film was also seen as a success at the time.

Listed below are links to the trailers of these films: • The House Bunny:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i-RmuzppVuM> • She's the Man:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jf67WlthWXk> • Freaky Friday:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UShtvCen6So> • Down With Love:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2wzS37O7m-E> • The Distinguished Gentleman:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z4bzzfEernw> • Head of State:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SfOSA34yjul>

[Cognitive] There is a part inside each of us that is constantly seeking excitement. It's the reason we go to amusement parks and get on the tallest, fastest roller coasters. We want to feel the adrenaline pumping through our veins. Action movies also provide that excitement. On IMDb, National Treasure is labeled as an action, adventure, and mystery film. Part of what makes action films so exciting is the chase. The thrill of wondering if they're going to make it to the other side of the ridge or in this case, if they're going to find the treasure. As mentioned before, action films "make us feel truly alive" (Week #10, Barrenechea). Similar to the way we enjoy heist movies, action films thrill and excite the adrenaline junkie inside each of us. Action movies are focused around a series of big loud events. Events that are full of explosions, car chases, epic fights, and even incredible feats. They are generally filled with story lines that seem unrealistic. The protagonists have the odds stacked against them and have to go through great lengths to achieve the impossible. Whenever the heroes or protagonists solve their issue, we feel complete because throughout the movie, you are usually rooting for them. That is why so many fans were upset at the end of Avengers: Infinity War. The heroes lost and left the audience without any console. However, with National Treasure, we are not left with that same empty feeling, but rather, excitement and joy about how they divided the treasure and what they were left with. The adventure and mystery aspect of the genre works the gears in our minds. We enjoy mystery films because like the

characters on screen, we too tend to try to solve the puzzle ourselves, thus making it more interactive. The mystery engages the audience and then when it all comes together, it's just as fascinating. Not only that, but as mentioned previously, the chase of the film is also what makes it worth watching and why movies such as National Treasure and even heist movies like the Oceans franchise, are so popular. They cause our minds to really think and try to piece together all the moving parts and figure out exactly what is going on before the movie is over. At the end of the day, it's the chase. The chase is exciting. It's wondering if they'll find the treasure or if they're going to get caught by the FBI before they do. And because mystery movies engage us in a different way than say a comedy or horror film, we tend to sympathize with the characters a little more. Whenever they get stuck on a clue, we also get stuck, because again, you're trying to also solve the issue. Then there's that sense of relief when they get to the next part and figure out what they were missing before. Like in most films, there are various scenes that offer comedic relief which is typically portrayed through Riley. He is the one who is often confused or does not always see what Abigail and Ben see right away. In a way, Riley is us, the audience, because we can be just as behind as he is. At the same time, it's really satisfying and funny to see him ahead of Ben and Abigail when he remembers the detail about daylight savings. In that moment, it is really funny to see how dramatic he's being about such a small detail. In summation, National Treasure is an action, adventure, mystery film that fulfills the thrill chaser inside of us. It also allows for our brains to work harder because you want to try to pick up on the clues the characters are coming across as well. You could argue that the main genre here is action, however we believe that the main genre is really adventure since the actionpacked scenes are not as grand as seen in other action movies. Adventure movies on the other hand, focus more on getting the clues that lead to big treasure at the end.

[Communal] National Treasure (2004) was released during a time of heightened patriotism and the George W. Bush administration (2001-2009) played a crucial role in how the country would attempt to recover from the unforeseen national tragedy that occurred on September 11th, 2001. He spoke on uniting, but most importantly, pride; which in turn drove the entertainment industry to pump out content for the hurting, fearful and confused, post-9/11 America. Going through a bonding experience as a nation, such as the attacks on the Twin Towers, there was an increased need for not only stories rooted in escapism, but ones that painted a positive view of America and its history. National Treasure, in particular, is a direct response to Lee Greenwood's "God Bless the U.S.A." brand of patriotism that was being pushed in pop culture. Patriotic films typically reflect the place that America was at the time of its inception and films such as National Treasure contrast Americana films made in eras of protest and political activism such as the Vietnam War era. In 2004, America was in an interesting limbo period between the political climate of the 1990s and the Obama presidency, this film reflects the desire for positive portrayals of American history and ultimately contemporary culture from the eyes of a major studio corporation such as Walt Disney Pictures. Around the time this film was released, the company was also producing escapist films for families and the general public. This film isn't attempting to make any radical claims about American History or the media and politics of the time, it is a fluffy, uniquely Disney film that doesn't reach beyond the surface level, allowing it to be enjoyed by all audiences, or at least the intentions were broad market appeal. This film also reflects the landscape of the early 2000s and the story of escapism that National Treasure as a film offers, celebrities like Paris Hilton that were known for their lifestyle of excess and wealth were incredibly impactful on pop culture. A film centered around not only highlighting America's seemingly greatest achievements, but also a search for material wealth and treasures can be seen as a response to the 2000s era of materialism and commercialism. A story that incorporates American pride, material wealth, and escapist cinema such as the

action/adventure genre couldn't be more a product of the ostentatious landscape of this era. It's also important to note that this film had a sizable budget and earned \$11 million on its opening day in the United States, this is important information the communal understanding of this film, it was created for wide consumption, therefore, its content and the overall viewer experience is curated to make the blockbuster bank as it can be assumed that the budget craves. This film also features well-known actors and situates itself among other blockbusters of this era and especially during the 80s and 90s when adventure films with white, male leads such as Nicolas Cage covered the screens of cinemas across the nation. This film doesn't explore complex topics or even delve remotely into the polarizing political issues of the day, it is a colorful, cartoon-esque at times, dreamland of altering histories and family-safe plotlines. The mystery itself doesn't require much knowledge of American history to grasp, it isn't a violent reimagining like the tales of Quentin Tarantino, but the re-imagining that takes place does more for American pride than catharsis or activism. This is not a story of redistributing wealth to Indigenous or Black Americans. This is not a story of uncovering the dark underbelly of America's past. This is an easily digestible, whimsical tale that is popcorn entertainment at its finest. A story that paints America in a positive light, while also completely dismissing our troubled, violent history. A sugar-coated, stereotypical and archetypical film that not only follows genre conventions, but intentionally or not, mocks them all together. The concept for this story in general is quite outlandish and absurd, it allows the viewer to sit back and enjoy Nicolas Cage and all his Cageisms, comedic and light, his outrageous acting is suitable for children and parents alike. [Commercial] National Treasure (2004) was a financial success upon release, grossing \$347.5 million of its \$100 million budget. It was among the many action/adventure treasure hunt movies that were released during the string of the late nineties and 2000s, following the success of movies like The Mummy (1999), Lara Croft: Tomb Raider (2001), and Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl (2003). While this type of world-scaling, bombastic, campy action flick that tried to invoke the style of Indiana Jones tended to yield mixed results among both audiences and critics—many of Indy's more blatant imitators proved to be box office poison that effectively killed the genre for a brief period in the mid to late eighties, and even films that saw favorable appeal such as Romancing the Stone (1984) had their franchises killed in the crib—there was a sudden renaissance of this niche genre that was kicked off with the release of 1999 remake of The Mummy; a film that, although, light on plot, was praised for its fun and wild action set pieces and charismatic leads, and it paid off in being a massive hit with audiences. However, just as quickly as it arose, the genre's appeal was dwindling by the mid-2000s; films such as Sahara (2005) were box office failures, among other hits or misses. Even Walt Disney Studios suffered huge losses with Atlantis: The Lost Empire (2001) and Treasure Planet (2002)—two of the few, unsuccessful, attempts at bringing the genre to animation—being devastating box office bombs, prior to them finding unexpected gold with the Pirates of the Caribbean franchise. While interest in historical action-adventure wasn't fully dead, the decline in interest in the genre was evident by the time of National Treasure's release, and this was reflected in the box office numbers. Amongst its contemporaries, National Treasure stands out, and most of its success can be attributed to its blending of genres that appealed to audiences at the time. While the film does invoke the wonder of stories like Indiana Jones, its advertising makes clear that this film is also a heist film—another genre that saw a prominent boom in the 2000s with films like Ocean's Eleven (2001) and The Italian Job (2003). This made National Treasure stand out against the rest—instead of trying to avoid booby traps and explosions in ancient tombs, our hero engages in rooftop chases and shootouts across modern-day Washington, with rival treasure hunters and the government itself hot on his tail. Likewise, its story of an ancient treasure hidden in plain sight and conspiracy also

invokes Dan Brown's controversial 2003 novel *The Da Vinci Code*. Brown's novel proved to be as intriguing as offensive for audiences at the time, many who were hooked on its intricately detailed mystery and conspiracies. *National Treasure* treads lightly in this area, not going so far to alienate audiences, and mostly keeps to a familiar formula throughout the genre: lead Nicolas Cage brings a unique charm, even at his most subdued of roles; and his pairing with both Justin Bartha as a quirky comic relief, and leading lady Diane Kruger (fresh off the hit epic film *Troy*) as a love interest who proves to be just as intelligent and capable as she is beautiful, creates a likeable dynamic audience's root for. With the addition of Sean Bean, who was also enjoying success with *The Lord of The Rings* trilogy and the aforementioned *Troy*, as its charismatic villain, screenwriters known for their flashy action films and director Jon Turteltaub, known for his successful romantic comedies, and you've got a movie that's as fun, ridiculous yet charming, and patriotic to audiences that you'd expect when your protagonist's name is Benjamin Franklin Gates.