

= American Graffiti =

American Graffiti is a 1973 American coming @-@ of @-@ age comedy @-@ drama film directed and co @-@ written by George Lucas starring Richard Dreyfuss , Ron Howard , Paul Le Mat , Harrison Ford , Charles Martin Smith , Cindy Williams , Candy Clark , Mackenzie Phillips and Wolfman Jack . Suzanne Somers has a cameo . Set in Modesto , California in 1962 , the film is a study of the cruising and rock and roll cultures popular among the post ? World War II baby boom generation . The film is told in a series of vignettes , telling the story of a group of teenagers and their adventures over a single evening .

The genesis of American Graffiti was in Lucas ' own teenage years in early 1960s Modesto . He was unsuccessful in pitching the concept to financiers and distributors but found favor at Universal Pictures after United Artists , 20th Century Fox , Columbia Pictures , Metro @-@ Goldwyn @-@ Mayer , Warner Bros. , and Paramount Pictures turned him down . Filming was initially set to take place in San Rafael , California , but the production crew was denied permission to shoot beyond a second day .

American Graffiti premiered on August 2 , 1973 at the Locarno International Film Festival in Switzerland and was released on August 11 , 1973 in the United States . The film received widespread critical acclaim and was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Picture . Produced on a \$ 777 @,@ 000 budget , it has become one of the most profitable films of all time . Since its initial release , American Graffiti has garnered an estimated return of well over \$ 200 million in box office gross and home video sales , not including merchandising . In 1995 , the United States Library of Congress deemed the film " culturally , historically , or aesthetically significant " and selected it for preservation in the National Film Registry .

A sequel , More American Graffiti , was released in 1979 .

= = Plot = =

In early September 1962 at the tail end of summer vacation , recent high school graduates and longtime friends , Curt Henderson and Steve Bolander , meet John Milner and Terry " The Toad " Fields at the local Mel 's Drive @-@ In parking lot . Despite receiving a \$ 2 @,@ 000 scholarship from the local Moose lodge , Curt is undecided if he wants to leave the next morning with Steve to go to the northeastern United States to begin college . Steve lets Toad borrow his 1958 Chevrolet Impala for the evening and while he 's away at college until Christmas . Steve 's girlfriend , Laurie , who also is Curt 's sister , is unsure of Steve 's leaving , to which he suggests ? to Laurie 's surprise ? they see other people while he is away to " strengthen " their relationship . She is not happy with his proposal .

Curt , Steve , and Laurie go to the local back to school sock hop , while Toad and John begin cruising . En route to the dance , at a stoplight , Curt sees a beautiful blonde girl in a white 1956 Ford Thunderbird . She says , " I love you " before disappearing around the corner . After leaving the hop , Curt is desperate to find the mysterious blonde , but is coerced by a group of greasers (" The Pharaohs ") to participate in an initiation rite that involves hooking a chain to a police car and ripping out its back axle . Curt is told rumors that " The Blonde " is either a trophy wife or prostitute , which he refuses to believe .

Following a series of arguments , Steve and Laurie split , and John inadvertently picks up Carol , an annoying teenybopper who seems fond of him . Toad , who is normally socially inept with girls , successfully picks up a flirtatious , and somewhat rebellious , girl named Debbie . Meanwhile , Curt learns that the DJ Wolfman Jack broadcasts from just outside Modesto . Inside the radio station , Curt encounters a bearded man he assumes to be the manager . Curt hands the man a message for " The Blonde " to call or meet him . As he walks away , Curt hears the voice of The Wolfman , and , having just seen The Wolfman broadcasting , he realizes he had been speaking with The Wolfman himself .

The other story lines intertwine until Toad and Steve end up on " Paradise Road " to watch John race his yellow deuce coupe against the handsome , but arrogant , Bob Falfa . Earlier , Bob had

picked up Laurie , who is now sitting shotgun in his black ' 55 Chevy . Within seconds of the finish , Bob loses control of his car after blowing a front tire , plunges into a ditch and rolls his car . Steve and John run to the wreck , and a dazed Bob and Laurie stagger out of the car before it explodes . Distraught , Laurie grips Steve tightly and tells him not to leave her . He assures her that he has decided not to leave Modesto after all . The next morning Curt is awakened by the sound of a phone ringing in a telephone booth , which turns out to be " The Blonde " . She tells him she might see him cruising tonight , but Curt replies that is not possible , because he will be leaving . At the airfield he says goodbye to his parents , his sister , and friends . As the plane takes off , Curt , gazing out of the window , sees the white Ford Thunderbird belonging to the mysterious blonde .

Prior to the end credits , an on @-@ screen epilogue reveals that John was killed by a drunk driver in December 1964 , Toad was reported missing in action near An L?c in December 1965 , Steve is an insurance agent in Modesto , California , and Curt is a writer living in Canada (implying that he may be there as a draft dodger) .

= = Cast = =

= = Development = =

= = = Inspiration = = =

During the production of THX 1138 (1971) , producer Francis Ford Coppola challenged co @-@ writer / director George Lucas to write a script that would appeal to mainstream audiences . Lucas embraced the idea , using his early 1960s teenage experiences cruising in Modesto , California . " Cruising was gone , and I felt compelled to document the whole experience and what my generation used as a way of meeting girls , " Lucas explained . As he developed the story in his mind , Lucas included his fascination with Wolfman Jack . Lucas had considered doing a documentary about the Wolfman when he attended the USC School of Cinematic Arts , but dropped the idea .

Adding in semi @-@ autobiographical connotations , Lucas set the story in his hometown of 1962 Modesto . The characters Curt Henderson , John Milner and Terry " The Toad " Fields also represent different stages from his younger life . Curt is modeled after Lucas 's personality during USC , while Milner is based on Lucas 's teenage street racing and junior college years , and hot rod enthusiasts he had known from the Kustom Kulture in Modesto . Toad represents Lucas 's nerd years as a freshman in high school , specifically his " bad luck " with dating . The filmmaker was also inspired by Federico Fellini 's I Vitelloni (1953) .

After the financial failure of THX 1138 , Lucas wanted the film to act as a release for a world @-@ weary audience :

[THX] was about real things that were going on and the problems we 're faced with . I realized after making THX that those problems are so real that most of us have to face those things every day , so we 're in a constant state of frustration . That just makes us more depressed than we were before . So I made a film where , essentially , we can get rid of some of those frustrations , the feeling that everything seems futile .

= = = United Artists = = =

After Warner Bros. abandoned Lucas 's early version of Apocalypse Now (1979) (during the post @-@ production of THX 1138) , the filmmaker decided to continue developing Another Quiet Night in Modesto , eventually changing its title to American Graffiti . To co @-@ write a fifteen @-@ page film treatment , Lucas hired Willard Huyck and Gloria Katz , who also added semi @-@ autobiographical material to the story . Lucas and producer Gary Kurtz began pitching the American Graffiti treatment to various Hollywood studios and production companies in an attempt to secure the financing needed to expand it into a screenplay , but they were unsuccessful . The potential

financiers were concerned that music licensing costs would cause the film to go way over budget . Along with Easy Rider (1969) , American Graffiti was one of the first films to eschew a traditional film score and successfully rely instead on synchronizing a series of popular hit songs with individual scenes .

THX 1138 was released in March 1971 and Lucas was offered opportunities to direct Lady Ice (1973) , Tommy (1975) or Hair (1979) . He turned down those offers , determined to pursue his own projects despite his urgent desire to find another film to direct . During this time , Lucas conceived the idea for a space opera (as yet untitled) which later became the basis for his Star Wars franchise . At the May 1971 Cannes Film Festival , THX was chosen for the Directors ' Fortnight competition . There , Lucas met David Picker , then president of United Artists , who was intrigued by American Graffiti and Lucas 's space opera . Picker decided to give Lucas \$ 10 @,@ 000 to develop Graffiti as a screenplay .

Lucas planned to spend another five weeks in Europe , and hoped that Huyck and Katz would agree to finish the screenplay by the time he returned , but they were about to start on their own film , Messiah of Evil (1972) , so Lucas hired Richard Walter , a colleague from the USC School of Cinematic Arts for the job . Walter was flattered , but initially tried to sell Lucas on a different screenplay called Barry and the Persuasions , a story of East Coast teenagers in the late 1950s . Lucas held firm ? his was a story about West Coast teenagers in the early 1960s . Walter was paid the \$ 10 @,@ 000 , and he began to expand the Lucas / Huyck / Katz treatment into a screenplay .

Lucas was dismayed when he returned to America in June 1971 and read Walter 's script , which was written in the style and tone of an exploitation film , similar to 1967 's Hot Rods to Hell . " It was overtly sexual and very fantasy @-@ like , with playing chicken and things that kids didn 't really do , " Lucas explained . " I wanted something that was more like the way I grew up . " Walter 's script also had Steve and Laurie going to Nevada to get married without their parents ' permission . Walter rewrote the screenplay , but Lucas nevertheless fired him due to their creative differences .

After paying Walter , Lucas had exhausted his development fund from United Artists . He began writing a script , completing his first draft in just three weeks . Drawing upon his large collection of vintage records , Lucas wrote each scene with a particular song in mind as its musical backdrop . The cost of licensing the 75 songs Lucas wanted was one factor in United Artists ' ultimate decision to reject the script ; the studio also felt it was too experimental ? " a musical montage with no characters " . United Artists also passed on Star Wars , which Lucas shelved for the time being .

= = = Universal Pictures = = =

Lucas spent the rest of 1971 and early 1972 trying to raise financing for the American Graffiti script . During this time , Metro @-@ Goldwyn @-@ Mayer , Paramount Pictures , 20th Century Fox and Columbia Pictures all turned down the opportunity to co @-@ finance and distribute the film . Lucas , Huyck and Katz rewrote the second draft together , which , in addition to Modesto , was also set in Mill Valley and Los Angeles . Lucas also intended to end American Graffiti showing a title card detailing the fate of the characters , including the death of Milner and the disappearance of Toad in Vietnam . Huyck and Katz found the ending depressing and were incredulous that Lucas planned to include only the male characters . Lucas argued that mentioning the girls meant adding another title card , which he felt would prolong the ending . Because of this , Pauline Kael later accused Lucas of chauvinism .

Lucas and producer Gary Kurtz took the script to American International Pictures , who expressed interest , but ultimately believed American Graffiti was not violent or sexual enough for the studio 's standards . Lucas and Kurtz eventually found favor at Universal Pictures , who allowed Lucas total artistic control and the right of final cut privilege on the condition that he make American Graffiti on a strict , low budget . This forced Lucas to drop the opening scene , in which the Blonde Angel , Curt 's image of the perfect woman , drives through an empty drive @-@ in cinema in her Ford Thunderbird , her transparency revealing she does not exist .

Universal initially projected a \$ 600 @,@ 000 budget , but added an additional \$ 175 @,@ 000 once producer Francis Ford Coppola signed on . This would allow the studio to advertise American

Graffiti as " from the Man who Gave you The Godfather (1972) " . However , Lucas was forced to concede final cut privilege . The proposition also gave Universal first look deals on Lucas 's next two planned projects , Star Wars (1977) and Radioland Murders (1994) . As he continued to work on the script , Lucas encountered difficulties on the Steve and Laurie storyline . Lucas , Katz and Huyck worked on the third draft together , specifically on the scenes featuring Steve and Laurie .

Production proceeded with virtually no input or interference from Universal . American Graffiti was a low @-@ budget film , and executive Ned Tanen had only modest expectations of its commercial success . However , Universal did object to the film 's title , not knowing what " American Graffiti " meant ; Lucas was dismayed when some executives assumed he was making an Italian movie about feet . The studio therefore submitted a long list of over 60 alternative titles , with their favorite being Another Slow Night in Modesto and Coppola 's Rock Around the Block . They pushed hard to get Lucas to adopt any of the titles , but he was displeased with all the alternatives and persuaded Tanen to keep American Graffiti .

= = Production = =

= = = Casting = = =

The film 's lengthy casting process was overseen by Fred Roos , who worked with producer Francis Ford Coppola on The Godfather . Because American Graffiti 's main cast was associated with younger actors , the casting call and notices went through numerous high school drama groups and community theaters in the San Francisco Bay Area . Among the actors was Mark Hamill , the future Luke Skywalker in Lucas ' Star Wars trilogy .

Over 100 unknown actors auditioned for Steve Bolander before Ron Howard was cast . George Lucas was impressed with Howard 's thoughtful analysis of the role , and , as a result , offered the actor his choice of Steve or Terry " The Toad " Fields . Roos , a former casting director on The Andy Griffith Show , suggested Richard Dreyfuss for Curt Henderson . Dreyfuss accepted the role to break out of the mold of his career as a child actor . Howard would later appear in the very similar role of Richie Cunningham on the Happy Days sitcom . Bob Balaban turned down The Toad out of fear of typecasting , a decision which he later regretted . Charles Martin Smith , who , in his first year as a professional actor , had already appeared in two feature films including 20th Century Fox 's The Culpepper Cattle Co. and four TV episodes , was eventually cast in the role .

Although Cindy Williams was cast as Laurie Henderson , the actress hoped she would get the part of Debbie Dunham , which ended up going to Candy Clark . Mackenzie Phillips , who portrays Carol , was only 12 years old , and under California law , producer Gary Kurtz had to become her legal guardian for the duration of filming . As Bob Falfa , Roos cast Harrison Ford , who was then concentrating on a carpentry career . Ford agreed to take the role on the condition that he would not have to cut his hair . The character has a flattop haircut in the script , but a compromise was eventually reached whereby Ford wore a stetson to cover his hair . Producer Francis Ford Coppola encouraged Lucas to cast Wolfman Jack as himself in a cameo appearance . " George Lucas and I went through thousands of Wolfman Jack phone calls that were taped with the public , " Jack reflected . " The telephone calls [heard on the broadcasts] in the motion picture and on the soundtrack were actual calls with real people . "

Charles Martin Smith (18) and Ron Howard (18) were the only two real teenage principal actors of the film . Most of the remaining principal cast members were in their 20s with the exceptions of the 12 @-@ year @-@ old Mackenzie Phillips , and Harrison Ford , who turned 30 during filming .

= = = Filming = = =

Although American Graffiti is set in 1962 Modesto , California , Lucas believed the city had changed too much in 10 years and initially chose San Rafael as the primary shooting location . Filming began on June 26 , 1972 . However , Lucas soon became frustrated at the time it was taking to fix camera

mounts to the cars . A key member of the production had also been arrested for growing marijuana , and , in addition to already running behind the shooting schedule , the San Rafael City Council immediately became concerned about the disruption that filming caused for local businesses and therefore withdrew permission to shoot beyond a second day .

Petaluma , a similarly small town approximately 20 miles north of San Rafael , became more cooperative and American Graffiti moved there without the loss of a single day of shooting . Lucas convinced the San Rafael City Council to allow two further nights of filming for general cruising shots , which he used to evoke as much of the intended location as possible in the finished film . Shooting in Petaluma began on June 28 and proceeded at a quick pace . Lucas mimicked the filmmaking style of B movie producer Sam Katzman in attempting to save money and authenticated low @-@ budget filming methods .

In addition to Petaluma , other locations included Mel 's Drive @-@ In in San Francisco , Sonoma , Richmond , Novato , and the Buchanan Field Airport in Concord . The freshman hop dance was filmed in the Gus Gymnasium , previously known as the Boys Gym , at Tamalpais High School in Mill Valley .

More problems ensued during filming : Paul Le Mat was sent to the hospital after an allergic reaction to walnuts . Le Mat , Harrison Ford and Bo Hopkins were claimed (according to a biography on Lucas with no source citations) to be drunk most nights and every weekend , and had conducted climbing competitions to the top of the local Holiday Inn sign . One actor set fire to Lucas 's motel room . Another night , Le Mat threw Richard Dreyfuss into a swimming pool , gashing Dreyfuss ' forehead on the day before he was due to have his close @-@ ups filmed . Dreyfuss also complained over the wardrobe that Lucas had chosen for the character . Ford was kicked out of his motel room at the Holiday Inn . In addition , two camera operators were nearly killed when filming the climactic race scene on Frates Road outside Petaluma . Principal photography ended on August 4 , 1972 .

The final scenes in the film , shot at Buchanan Field , feature a Douglas DC @-@ 7C airliner of Magic Carpet Airlines which had previously been leased from owner Club America Incorporated by the rock band Grand Funk Railroad from March 1971 to June 1971 .

= = = Cinematography = = =

Lucas considered covering duties as the sole cinematographer , but dropped the idea . Instead , he elected to shoot American Graffiti using two cinematographers (as he had done in THX 1138) and no formal director of photography . Two cameras were used simultaneously in scenes involving conversations between actors in different cars , which resulted in significant production time savings . After CinemaScope proved to be too expensive , Lucas decided that American Graffiti should have a documentary @-@ like feel , and shot the film using Techniscope cameras . He believed that Techniscope , an inexpensive way of shooting on 35 mm film and utilizing only half of the film 's frame , would give a perfect widescreen format resembling 16 mm . Adding to the documentary feel was Lucas 's openness for the cast to improvise scenes . He also used goofs for the final cut , notably Charles Martin Smith 's arriving on his scooter to meet Steve outside Mel 's Drive @-@ In . Jan D 'Alquen and Ron Eveslage were hired as the cinematographers , but filming with Techniscope cameras brought lighting problems . As a result , Lucas commissioned help from friend Haskell Wexler , who was credited as the " visual consultant " .

= = = Editing = = =

Lucas had wanted his wife , Marcia , to edit American Graffiti , but Universal executive Ned Tanen insisted on hiring Verna Fields , who had just finished editing Steven Spielberg 's The Sugarland Express (1974) . Fields worked on the first rough cut of the film before she left to resume work on What 's Up , Doc ? (1972) . After Fields 's departure , Lucas struggled with editing the film 's story structure . He had originally written the script so that the four (Curt , Steve , John and Toad) storylines were always presented in the same sequence (an " ABCD " plot structure) . But the first

cut of American Graffiti was three @-@ and @-@ a @-@ half hours long , and in order to whittle the film down to a more manageable two hours , so many scenes had to be cut , shortened , or combined that the film 's structure became increasingly loose , and no longer adhered to Lucas 's original " ABCD " presentation . Lucas completed his final cut of American Graffiti , which ran 112 minutes , in December 1972 . Walter Murch assisted Lucas in post @-@ production for audio mixing and sound design purposes . Murch suggested making Wolfman Jack 's radio show the " backbone " of the film . " The Wolfman was an ethereal presence in the lives of young people , " said producer Gary Kurtz , " and it was that quality we wanted and obtained in the picture . "

= = Soundtrack = =

Lucas 's choice of background music was crucial to the mood of each scene , but he was realistic about the complexities of copyright clearances and suggested a number of alternative tracks . Universal wanted Lucas and producer Gary Kurtz to hire an orchestra for sound @-@ alike . The studio eventually proposed a flat deal that offered every music publisher the same amount of money . This was acceptable to most of the companies representing Lucas 's first choices , but not to RCA ? with the consequence that Elvis Presley is conspicuous by his absence from the soundtrack . Clearing the music licensing rights had cost approximately \$ 90 @,@ 000 , and as a result there was no money left for a traditional film score . " I used the absence of music , and sound effects , to create the drama , " Lucas later explained .

A soundtrack album for the film , 41 Original Hits from the Soundtrack of American Graffiti , was issued by MCA Records . The album contains all the songs used in the film (with the exception of " Gee " by the Crows , which was subsequently included on a second soundtrack album) , presented in the order in which they appeared in the film .

= = Reception = =

= = = Release = = =

Despite unanimous praise at a January 1973 test screening attended by Universal executive Ned Tanen , the studio told Lucas they wanted to re @-@ edit his original cut of American Graffiti . Producer Coppola sided with Lucas against Tanen and Universal , offering to " buy the film " from the studio and reimburse it for the \$ 775 @,@ 000 (equivalent to \$ 4 @,@ 384 @,@ 268 in 2015) it had cost to make it . 20th Century Fox and Paramount Pictures made similar offers to the studio . Universal refused these offers and told Lucas they planned to have William Hornbeck re @-@ edit the film .

When Coppola 's The Godfather (1972) won the Academy Award for Best Picture in March 1973 , Universal relented , and agreed to cut only three scenes (about four minutes) from Lucas 's cut ? an encounter between Toad and a fast @-@ talking car salesman , an argument between Steve and his former teacher Mr. Kroot at the sock hop , and an effort by Bob Falfa to serenade Laurie with " Some Enchanted Evening " ? but decided that the film was fit for release only as a television movie .

However , various studio employees who had seen the film began talking it up , and its reputation grew through word of mouth . The studio dropped the TV movie idea and began arranging for a limited release in selected theaters in Los Angeles and New York . Universal presidents Sidney Sheinberg and Lew Wasserman heard about the praise the film had been garnering in LA and New York , and the marketing department amped up its promotion strategy for it , investing an additional \$ 500 @,@ 000 (equivalent to \$ 2 @,@ 665 @,@ 292 in 2015) in marketing and promotion . The film was released in the United States on August 11 , 1973 to sleeper hit reception . The film had cost only \$ 1 @.@ 27 million (equivalent to \$ 7 @,@ 184 @,@ 543 in 2015) to produce and market , but yielded worldwide box office gross revenues of more than \$ 55 million (equivalent to \$ 293 @,@ 182 @,@ 159 in 2015) . It had only modest success outside the United States , but

became a cult film in France .

Universal reissued Graffiti in 1978 and earned an additional \$ 63 million (equivalent to \$ 228 @, @ 567 @, @ 857 in 2015) , which brought the total revenue for the two releases to \$ 118 million (equivalent to \$ 428 @, @ 111 @, @ 224 in 2015) . The reissue included stereophonic sound , and the additional four minutes that the studio had removed from Lucas 's original cut . All home video releases also included these scenes . Also , the date of John Milner 's death was changed from June 1964 to December 1964 to fit the narrative structure of the upcoming sequel More American Graffiti . At the end of its theatrical run , American Graffiti had one of the greatest cost @-@ to @-@ profit ratios of a motion picture ever . Producer Francis Ford Coppola regretted having not financed the film himself . Lucas recalled , " He would have made \$ 30 million (equivalent to \$ 159 @, @ 917 @, @ 541 in 2015) on the deal . He never got over it and he still kicks himself . " It was the 13th @-@ highest grossing film of all time in 1977 , and , adjusted for inflation , is currently the 43rd highest . By the 1990s , American Graffiti had earned more than \$ 200 million (equivalent to \$ 362 @, @ 251 @, @ 656 in 2015) in box office gross and home video sales . In December 1997 Variety reported that the film had earned an additional \$ 55 @. @ 13 million in rental revenue (equivalent to \$ 81 @, @ 266 @, @ 466 in 2015) .

Universal Studios Home Entertainment first released the film on DVD in September 1998 , and once more as a double feature with More American Graffiti (1979) in January 2004 . Aside from the four minutes originally deleted from Lucas ' original cut retained , the only major change in the DVD version is the main title sequence , particularly the sky background to Mel 's Drive @-@ In , which was redone by ILM . Universal released the film on Blu @-@ ray on May 31 , 2011 .

== Critical reception ==

American Graffiti received widespread critical acclaim . Based on 43 reviews collected by Rotten Tomatoes , 95 % of the critics enjoyed the film with an average score of 8 @. @ 4 / 10 . The consensus reads : " One of the most influential of all teen films , American Graffiti is a funny , nostalgic , and bittersweet look at a group of recent high school grads ' last days of innocence . " Roger Ebert gave the film a full four stars and praised it for being " not only a great movie but a brilliant work of historical fiction ; no sociological treatise could duplicate the movie 's success in remembering exactly how it was to be alive at that cultural instant " .

Jay Cocks of Time magazine wrote that American Graffiti " reveals a new and welcome depth of feeling . Few films have shown quite so well the eagerness , the sadness , the ambitions and small defeats of a generation of young Americans . " A.D. Murphy from Variety felt American Graffiti was a vivid " recall of teenage attitudes and morals , told with outstanding empathy and compassion through an exceptionally talented cast of unknown actors " . Dave Kehr , writing in the Chicago Reader , called the film a brilliant work of popular art that redefined nostalgia as a marketable commodity , while establishing a new narrative style .

== Themes ==

American Graffiti depicts multiple characters going through a coming of age , such as the decisions to attend college or reside in a small town . The 1962 setting represents nearing an end of an era in American society and pop culture . The musical backdrop also links between the early years of rock and roll in the mid @-@ late 1950s (i.e. Bill Haley & His Comets , Elvis Presley and Buddy Holly) and the early 1960s British Invasion , which Don McLean 's " American Pie " and the 1972 revival of 1950s acts and oldies paralleled during the conception and filming . The setting is also before the outbreaks of the Vietnam War and the John F. Kennedy assassination and before the peak years of the counterculture movement . American Graffiti evokes mankind 's relationship with machines , notably the elaborate number of hot rods ? having been called a " classic car flick " , representative of the motor car 's importance to American culture at the time it was made . Another theme is teenagers ' obsession with radio , especially with the inclusion of Wolfman Jack and his mysterious and mythological faceless (to most) voice .

= = = Accolades = = =

American Graffiti was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Picture but lost to *The Sting* (1973). Further nominations at the 46th Academy Awards included Best Director (George Lucas), Best Original Screenplay (Lucas , Willard Huyck and Gloria Katz), Best Supporting Actress (Candy Clark) and Best Film Editing (Verna Fields and Marcia Lucas). The film won Best Motion Picture (Musical or Comedy) at the 31st Golden Globe Awards , while Paul Le Mat won Most Promising Newcomer . Lucas was nominated for Best Director and Richard Dreyfuss was nominated for Best Actor in a Comedy or Musical . More nominations included Cindy Williams by the British Academy of Film and Television Arts for Best Actress in a Supporting Role , Lucas for the Directors Guild of America Award for Outstanding Directing , and Lucas , Huyck and Katz by the Writers Guild of America for Best Original Comedy .

= = Legacy = =

Internet reviewer MaryAnn Johanson acknowledged that American Graffiti rekindled public and entertainment interest in the 1950s and 1960s , and influenced other films such as *The Lords of Flatbush* (1974) and *Cooley High* (1975) and the TV series *Happy Days* . Alongside other films from the New Hollywood era , American Graffiti is often cited for helping give birth to the summer blockbuster . The film 's box office success made George Lucas an instant millionaire . He gave an amount of the film 's profits to Haskell Wexler for his visual consulting help during filming , and to Wolfman Jack for " inspiration " . Lucas 's net worth was now \$ 4 million , and he set aside a \$ 300 @, @ 000 independent fund for his long cherished space opera project , which would eventually become the basis for *Star Wars* (1977) .

The financial success of Graffiti also gave Lucas opportunities to establish more elaborate development for Lucasfilm , Skywalker Sound , and Industrial Light & Magic . Based on the success of the 1977 reissue , Universal began production for the sequel *More American Graffiti* (1979) . Lucas and writers Willard Huyck and Gloria Katz later collaborated on *Radioland Murders* (1994) , also released by Universal Pictures , for which Lucas acted as executive producer . The film features characters intended to be Curt and Laurie Henderson 's parents , Roger and Penny Henderson . In 1995 American Graffiti was deemed culturally , historically , or aesthetically significant by the United States Library of Congress and selected for preservation in the National Film Registry . In 1997 the city of Modesto , California , honored Lucas with a statue dedication of American Graffiti at George Lucas Plaza .

In 1998 the American Film Institute (AFI) ranked it as the 77th greatest film ever in the 100 Years ... 100 Movies list . When the 10th Anniversary Edition came in June 2007 , AFI moved American Graffiti to the sixty @-@ second greatest film . The movie was also listed as the forty @-@ third funniest . The song " Smoke Gets in Your Eyes " was nominated for AFI 's 100 Years ... 100 Songs . Director David Fincher credited American Graffiti as a visual influence for *Fight Club* (1999) . Lucas 's *Star Wars : Episode II ? Attack of the Clones* (2002) features references to the film . The yellow airspeeder that Anakin Skywalker and Obi @-@ Wan Kenobi use to pursue the bounty hunter , Zam Wesell , is based on John Milner 's yellow deuce coupe , while Dex 's Diner is reminiscent of Mel 's Drive @-@ In . Adam Savage and Jamie Hyneman of *MythBusters* conducted the " rear axle " experiment on the January 11 , 2004 , episode .

Given the popularity of the film 's cars with customizers and hot rodders in the years since its release , their fate immediately after the film is ironic . All were offered for sale in San Francisco newspaper ads ; only the ' 58 Impala (driven by Ron Howard) attracted a buyer , selling for only a few hundred dollars . The yellow Deuce and the white T @-@ bird went unsold , despite being priced as low as US \$ 3 @, @ 000 . The registration plate on Milner 's yellow deuce coupe is THX 138 on a yellow , California license plate , slightly altered , reflecting Lucas 's earlier science fiction film .