

'Jaws': Gore for gold

EDITOR'S NOTE: As one of the most respected new young critics of motion pictures, Frank Rich will now write a weekly column on current films for *The Lively Arts* section. A one-time special writer for *The News*, Rich is also film critic for *New Times* magazine and a frequent contributor to *Esquire*, *The Village Voice* and *The Manchester Guardian*.

By FRANK RICH

Nothing short of an invasion of body snatchers is going to keep audiences away from "Jaws," the smash film version of Peter Benchley's popular novel about a shark who terrorizes a New England summer resort. Here at last is a suspense movie that delivers the goods, and delivers them without resorting to the idiotic all-star theatrics of the disaster films or the crypto-religiosity of "The Exorcist."

"Jaws" is just what it is supposed to be, a fish-bites-man story, and it is happily lacking in subplots, sexual interludes and anything that might be mistaken for intellectual subtext. Director Steven Spielberg (working from a script by Benchley and Carl Gottlieb) intends only to scare the guts out of you, and he's so successful at that basic task that "Jaws" may soon force prune juice to go the way of cod liver oil.

The movie divides rather neatly (rather too neatly) into two halves: during the first we watch the disbelieving summer vacationers of Amity (read Martha's Vineyard) stand idly by as the villainous man-eater cavalierly dismantles the limbs of an assortment of frolicking bathers; during the second, three unlikely shipmates — the local police chief (Roy Scheider), a hip young ichthyologist (Richard Dreyfuss) and a craggy old Yankee fisherman (Robert Shaw) — set out to battle the shark to the death. (Rest assured that the world will be made safe for tourism.)

Unfortunately, there is a breakdown of logic in each of the two acts. For the first hour, we are forced to believe that Amity's mayor (Murray Hamilton, who else?), anxious not to lose any summer dollars, would insist on keeping the beach open after the first fatality — and that the townfolk would support his obstinate, death-dealing stand; later on, we have to buy the fact that the three harpooners would set off after the beast in a flimsy vessel without benefit of back-up air or sea support.

It is to your benefit, as well as the movie's, to put such niggling matters aside; assuming you do so, "Jaws" will be smooth sailing, however bloody the waters along the way.

As he demonstrated in his previous outing, "The Sugarland Express," Spielberg is blessed with a talent that is absurdly absent from most American filmmakers these days; this man actually knows how to tell a story on screen.

In "Jaws," Spielberg never holds a sequence too long, uses brief dialog snatches (rather than talky expository scenes) to bridge together the plot and films the aquarian battles with exuberance and precision whether he's shooting above, at or below sea level. It speaks well of this director's gifts that some of the most frightening sequences in "Jaws" are those where we don't even see the shark: Spielberg can often afford to let camera movements, water patterns and surface manifestations of the predator's presence (e.g., floating barrels that have become fastened to the fish's head) do the job.

Soon we're scared so silly that the casual splashing of joyful children or the bobbing of a female swimmer's bathing cap can push us over the edge, into shrieking, horror-movie pandemonium.

If I have a major reservation about Spielberg at this point, it is only that his movies lack a wide esthetic or personal framework that might take us beyond their narratives. The well-executed terror of "Jaws" is not strikingly original in any visual or psychological sense, and, unlike a "Psycho" or a "Vertigo," this movie is a poor bet to induce thrills on repeated viewings.

There is, to be sure, a lot of blood floating around this film, but the movie is classy enough to keep you from feeling cheapened for having eaten it all up. Though portraying highly theatrical types, Spielberg's cast doesn't go haywire (Dreyfuss' vaguely self-mocking laugh continues to be the most infectious in the business), and "Jaws" is also the first Universal film in about two years that doesn't look musty and canned; this director has triumphed where Billy Wilder ("The Front Page") and George Roy Hill ("The Sting," "The Great Waldo Pepper") have failed by managing to present his picture in real, vibrant technicolor rather than washed-out shades of brown. Nor has Spielberg neglected to throw in some smidgens of wit (including a cameo by author Benchley), a slight undercurrent of sentimentality (for the days of the great old independent fishermen) and several gorgeous sunsets over the brooding sea. No matter how you slice it, "Jaws" is pure gold; this movie is going to bring so many people into movie theaters and, concurrently, scare so many people away from the seashore, that I wouldn't be surprised if it caused a major redistribution of this country's leisure-industry wealth.

Detroit News

6/15/75

'Jaws' Sets Its Grip And Just Doesn't Let Go

BY SUSAN STARK
Free Press Film Critic

Steven Spielberg's film version of Peter Benchley's best-seller, "Jaws," has all the earmarks of a blockbuster: action, suspense, excitement, originality, simplicity. A good commercial movie is one thing, however, and a good movie is another thing entirely. "Jaws," like very few other major screen efforts, is both.

Twenty-six-year-old Spielberg, who made a dazzling directorial debut last year with "Sneakerland Express," has fashioned a lean, chilling,

controlled drama from key portions of the Benchley material.

Fans of the book will find extraneous subplots absent from the film. Fans of the contemporary horror film will find Spielberg's work peerless in both craftsmanship and integrity, most noticeably when stacked up against its best-known and most recent generic counterpart, "The Exorcist."

"JAWS" IS the story of a New England resort community's summer of terror. Just as the warm weather tourist business that supports the community year round is about to begin, a three-ton, man-eating great white shark makes its presence known by eating about 80 percent of a teenage girl out for a late-night swim.

The first half of the film describes the effort of the police chief and an oceanographer to impress the gravity of the situation on the mayor and his council members. The townspeople persist in crassly commercial self-interest until the tragedy of the moonlight swimmer repeats itself in other cases and in broad daylight.

Finally, the community stops trying to hush up the problem and confronts it by getting up the \$10,000 fee required by a brutish but highly knowledgeable local fisherman. He sets out, with the police chief and the oceanographer, to find and kill the awesome shark.

JAWS Area Theaters

Brady Quint Roy Scheider
Hooper Robert Shaw
Vaughn Richard Dreyfuss
Ellen Brody Murray Hamilton
Lorraine Gary
A Universal Pictures release,
produced by Richard D. Zanuck
and David Brown and directed by
Steven Spielberg; with screenplay
by Peter Benchley and Carl Gottlieb,
based on the novel by Benchley;
photography by Bill Butler;
underwater photography by Rexford Metz;
music by John Williams. In color. Rated PG.



Fisherman Robert Shaw

The second half of the film relies for its equally impressive effects upon action and, surprisingly, upon humor. The man vs. shark encounters rank in scope and energy with any action sequences ever captured on film. The humor, derived from interaction among the three distinctly different personalities involved in the quest, provides much-appreciated relief from the high emotional volume at which all other sequences of the film are pitched.

Roy Scheider as the police chief, Richard Dreyfuss as the oceanographer, Robert Shaw as the fisherman, and Murray Hamilton as the mayor do honor to their brilliant young director's effort. They truly are the film's stars. Steven Spielberg, absolute master of his craft as of his second full-length feature, is the film's superstar.

The film is a study in the effectiveness of structural simplicity: The first half dramatizes the mounting terror and the second half dramatizes the terrifying quest.

The first half depends principally on dramatic irony and the presence of a genuine, old-fashioned, hiss-worthy villain for its stunning effects. The audience, like the police chief and the oceanographer, knows about the shark, but the crowds who frolic on the beach do not.

Tension from the dramatic

irony of that situation runs to the thick consistency of crunchy peanut butter. Fury at the mayor's bullish, unconscionable self-interest builds to a fever-pitch before it is cooled not by reason but by stark necessity.

Detroit Free Press
6/20/75

Entrapped by 'Jaws' of Fear

JAWS, directed by Steven Spielberg; screenplay by Peter Benchley and Carl Gottlieb, based on the novel by Mr. Benchley; produced by Richard D. Zanuck and David Brown; director of photography, Bill Butler; editor, Verna Fields; music, John Williams; live shark footage, Ron and Valerie Taylor; underwater photography, Rexford Melz; special effects, Robert A. Matthey; distributed by Universal Pictures. Running time: 124 minutes. At the Rivoli Theater, Broadway at 49th Street; Orpheum Theater, 86th Street near Third Avenue, and 34th Street East Theater, near Second Avenue. This film has been rated PG.

Brody	Roy Scheider
Quint	Robert Shaw
Hooper	Richard Dreyfuss
Ellen Brody	Lorraine Gary
Vaughn	Murray Hamilton
Meadows	Carl Gottlieb
Interviewer	Peter Benchley

By VINCENT CANBY

If you are what you eat, then one of the sharks in "Jaws" is a beer can, half a mackerel and a Louisiana license plate. Another is a pretty young woman, a cylinder of oxygen, a small boy, a scout master and still more. The other characters in the film are nowhere nearly so fully packed.

"Jaws" which opened yesterday at three theaters, is the film version of Peter Benchley's best-selling novel about a man-eating great white shark that terrorizes an East Coast resort community, which now looks very much like Martha's Vineyard, where the film was shot.

It's a noisy, busy movie that has less on its mind than any child on a beach might have. It has been cleverly directed by Steven Spielberg ("Sugarland Express") for maximum shock impact and short-term suspense, and the special effects are so good that even the mechanical sharks are as convincing as the people.

"Jaws" is, at heart, the old standby, a science-fiction film. It opens according to time-honored tradition with a happy-go-lucky innocent being suddenly ravaged by the mad monster, which, in "Jaws," comes from the depths of inner space — the sea as well as man's nightmares. Thereafter "Jaws" follows the formula with fidelity.

Only one person in the community (the chief of police) realizes the true horror of what has happened, while the philistines (the Mayor, the merchants and the tourism people) pooh-pooh his warnings. The monster strikes again. An expert (an oceanographer) is brought in who confirms everyone's wildest fears, at which point the community bands together to hire an eccentric specialist (a shark fisherman) to secure their salvation.

If you think about "Jaws" for more than 45 seconds you will recognize it as nonsense, but it's the sort of nonsense that can be a good deal of fun if you like to have the wits scared out of you at irregular intervals.

It's a measure of how the film operates that not once do we feel particular sympathy for any of the shark's victims, or even the mother of one, a woman who has an embarrassingly tearful scene that at one point threatens to bring the film to a halt. This kind of fiction doesn't inspire humane responses. Just the opposite. We sigh with relief after each attack, smug in our awareness that it happened to them, not us.

In the best films characters are revealed in terms of the action. In movies like "Jaws," characters are simply functions of the action. They're at its service. Characters are like stage hands who move props around and deliver information when it's necessary, which is pretty much what Roy Scheider (the police chief), Robert Shaw (the shark fisherman) and Richard Dreyfuss (the oceanographer) do.

It may not look like much but it puts good actors to the test. They have to work very hard just to appear alive, and Mr. Scheider, Mr. Shaw and Mr. Dreyfuss come across with wit and easy self-assurance.

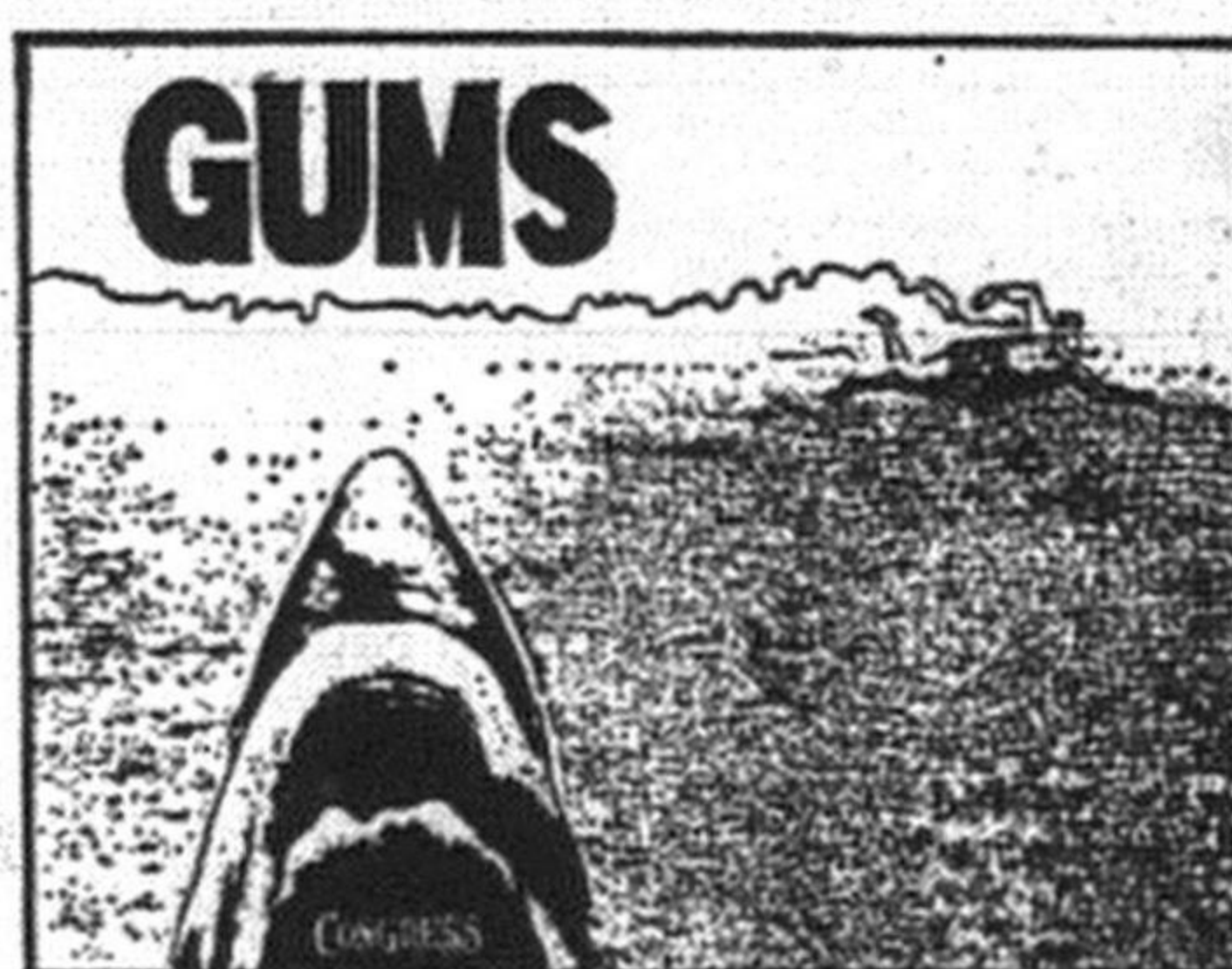
Everybody's enJAWing it!



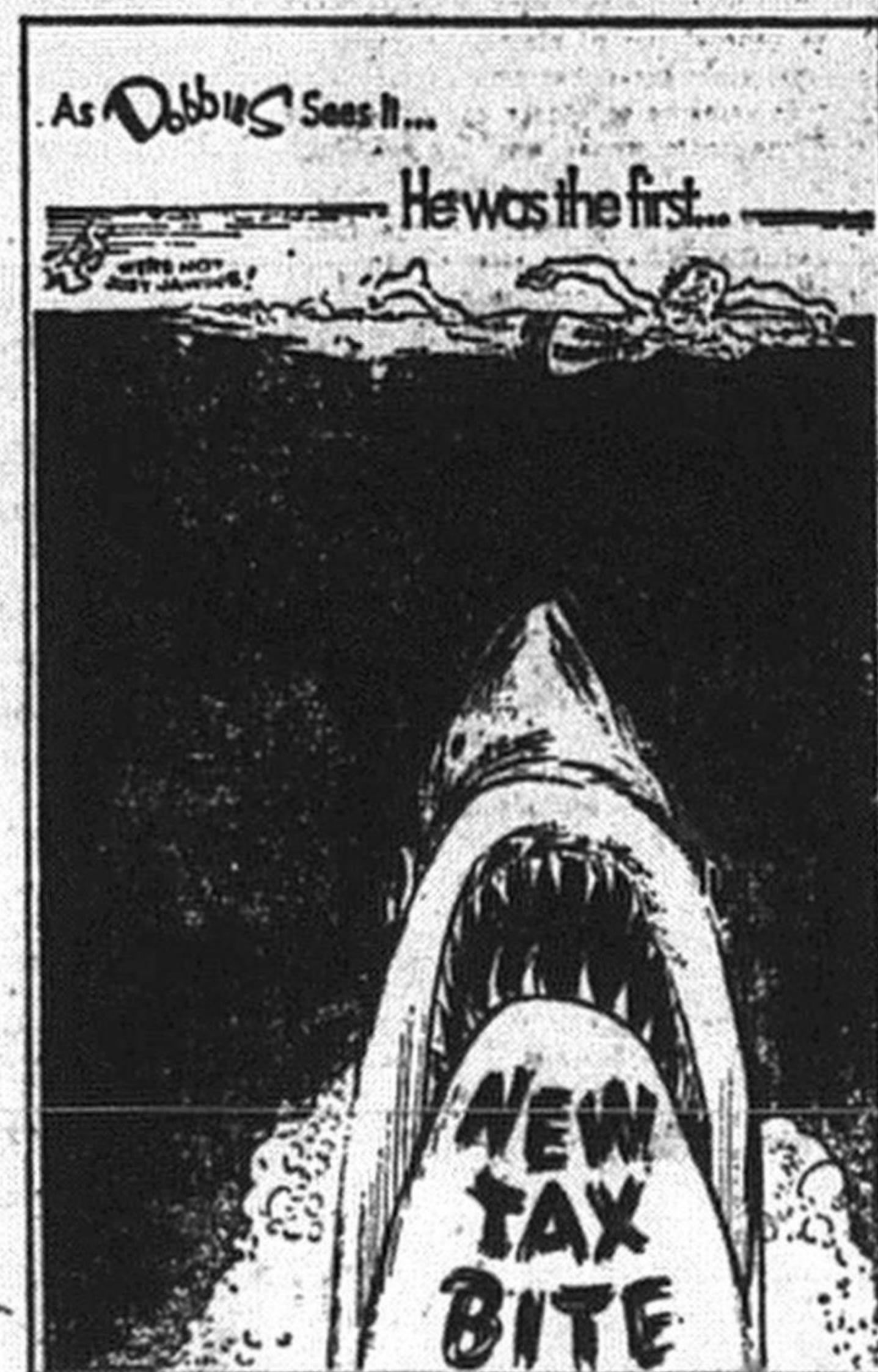
Stark — N.Y. Daily News



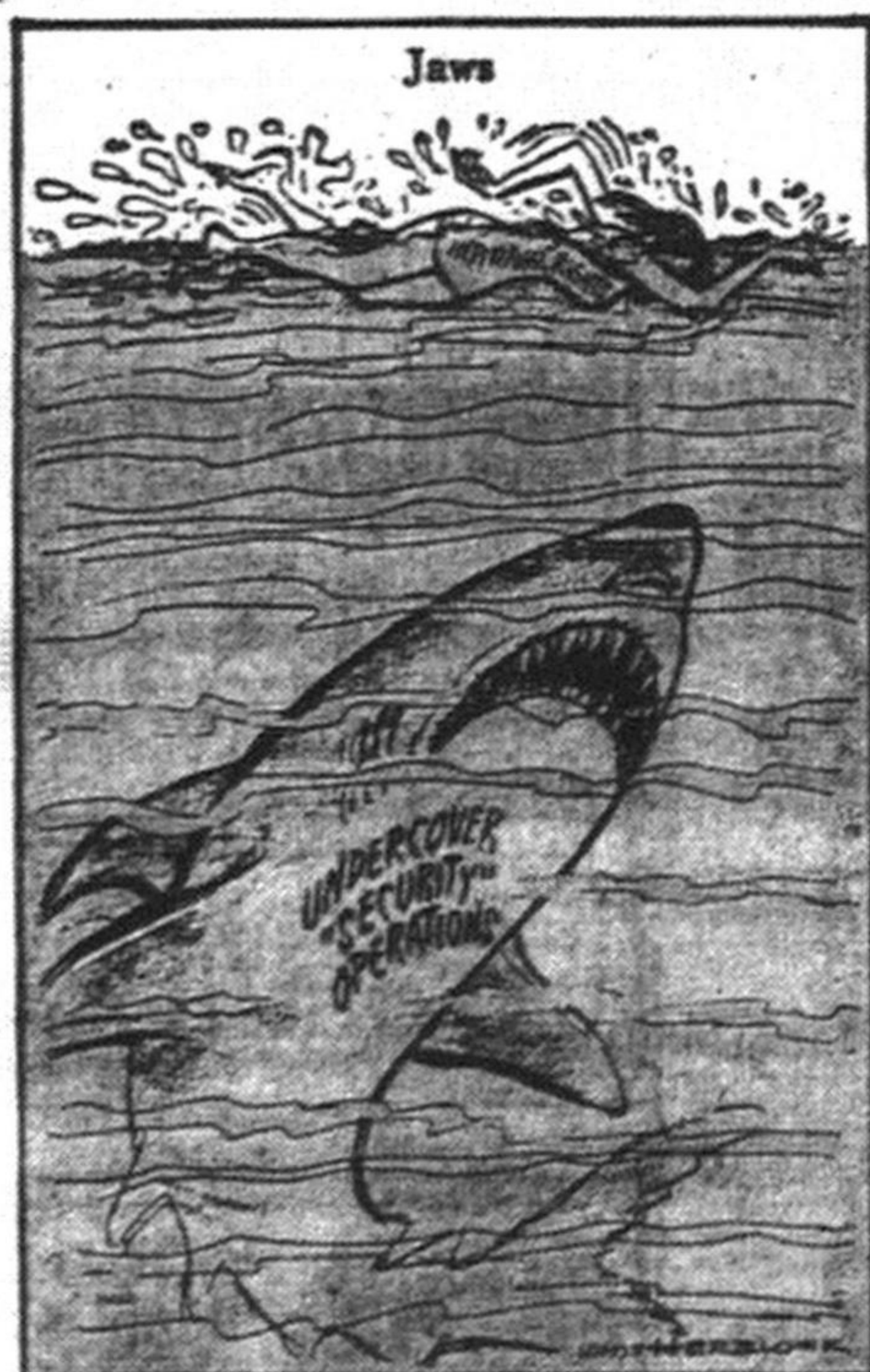
Liederman — Long Island Press



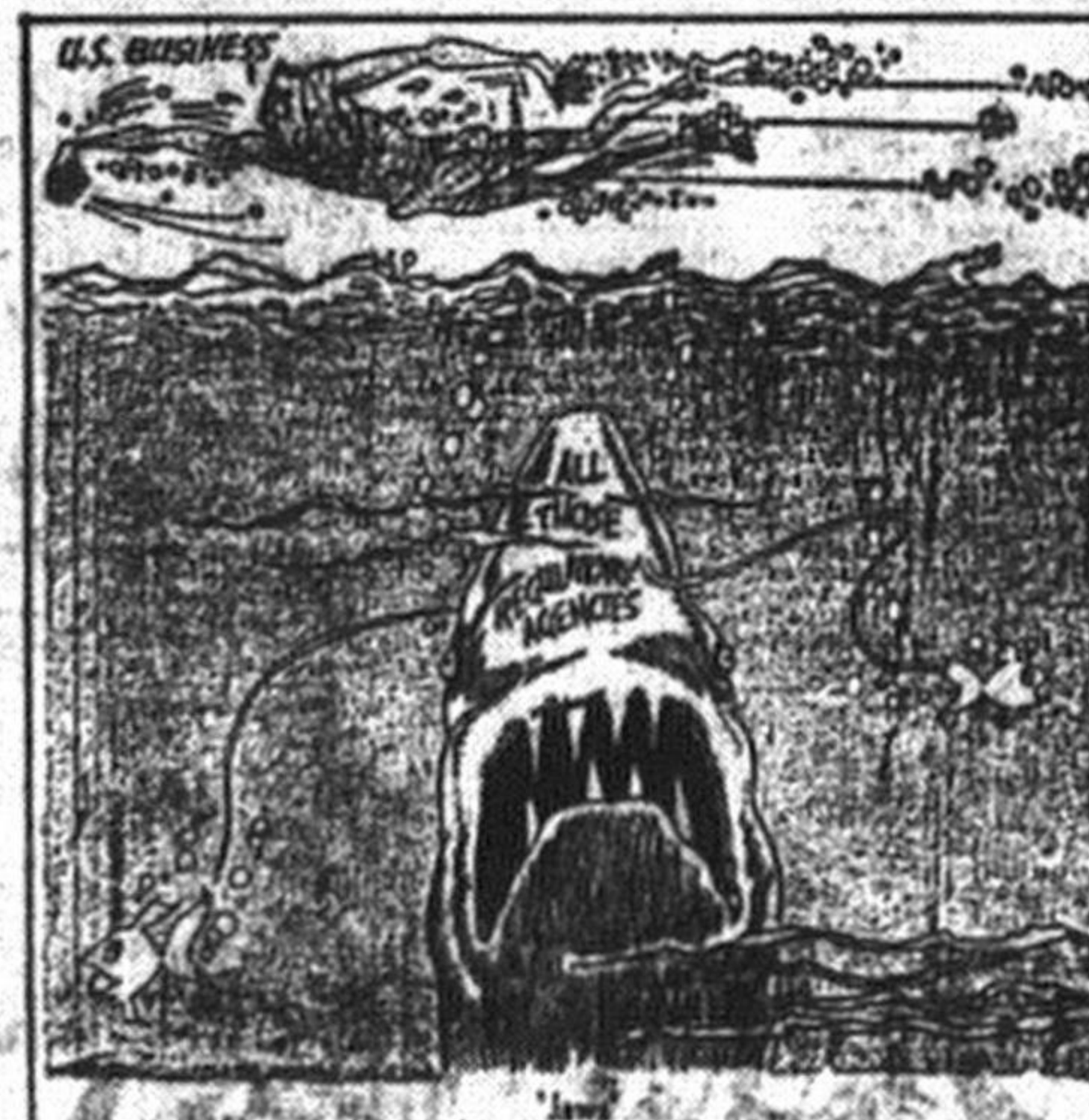
MacNelly — Richmond News Leader



Dobbins — Boston Herald American



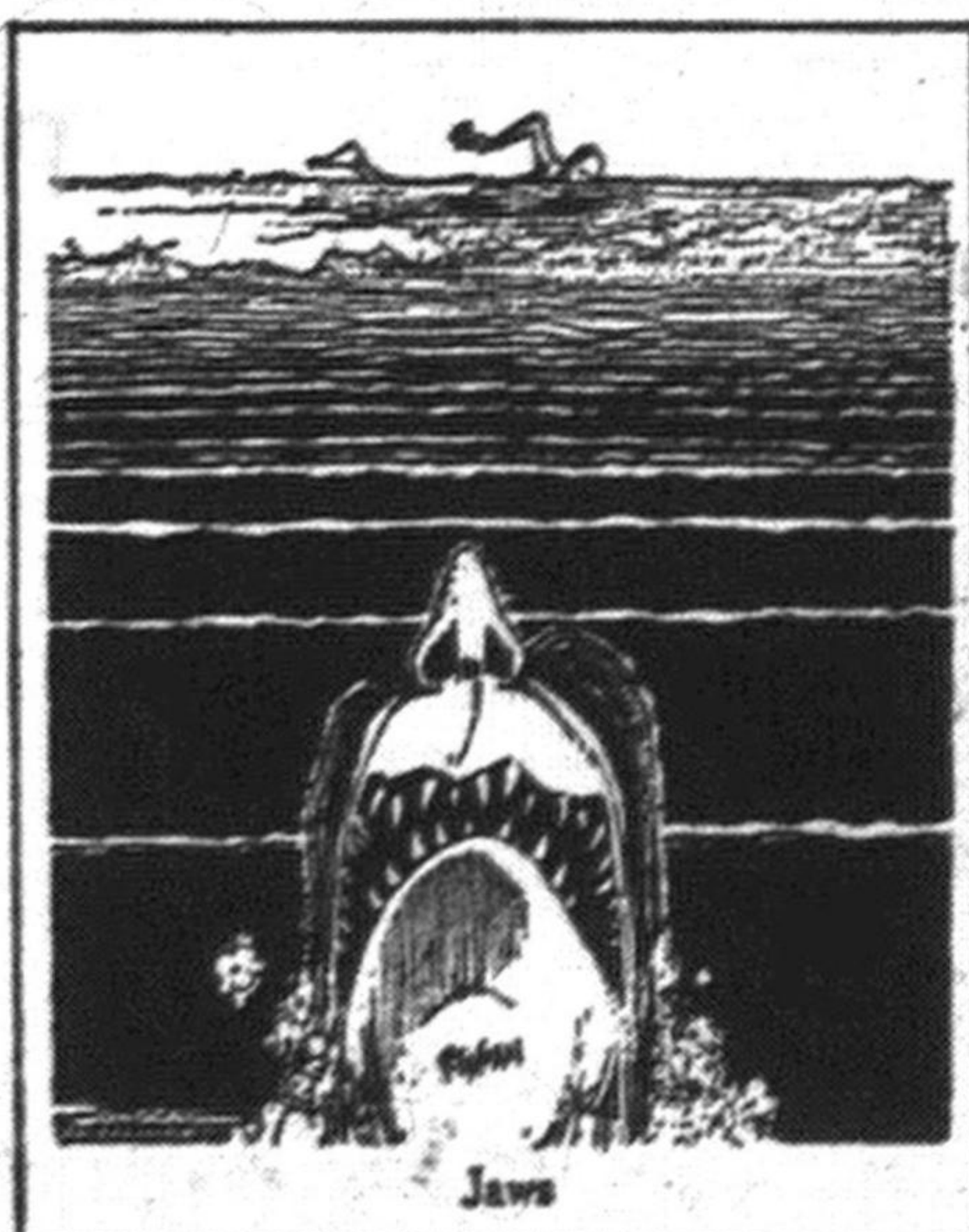
Herblock — Washington Post



Edgo — Atlanta Journal



Pileworth — Toronto Star



Conrad — Los Angeles Times

JAWS

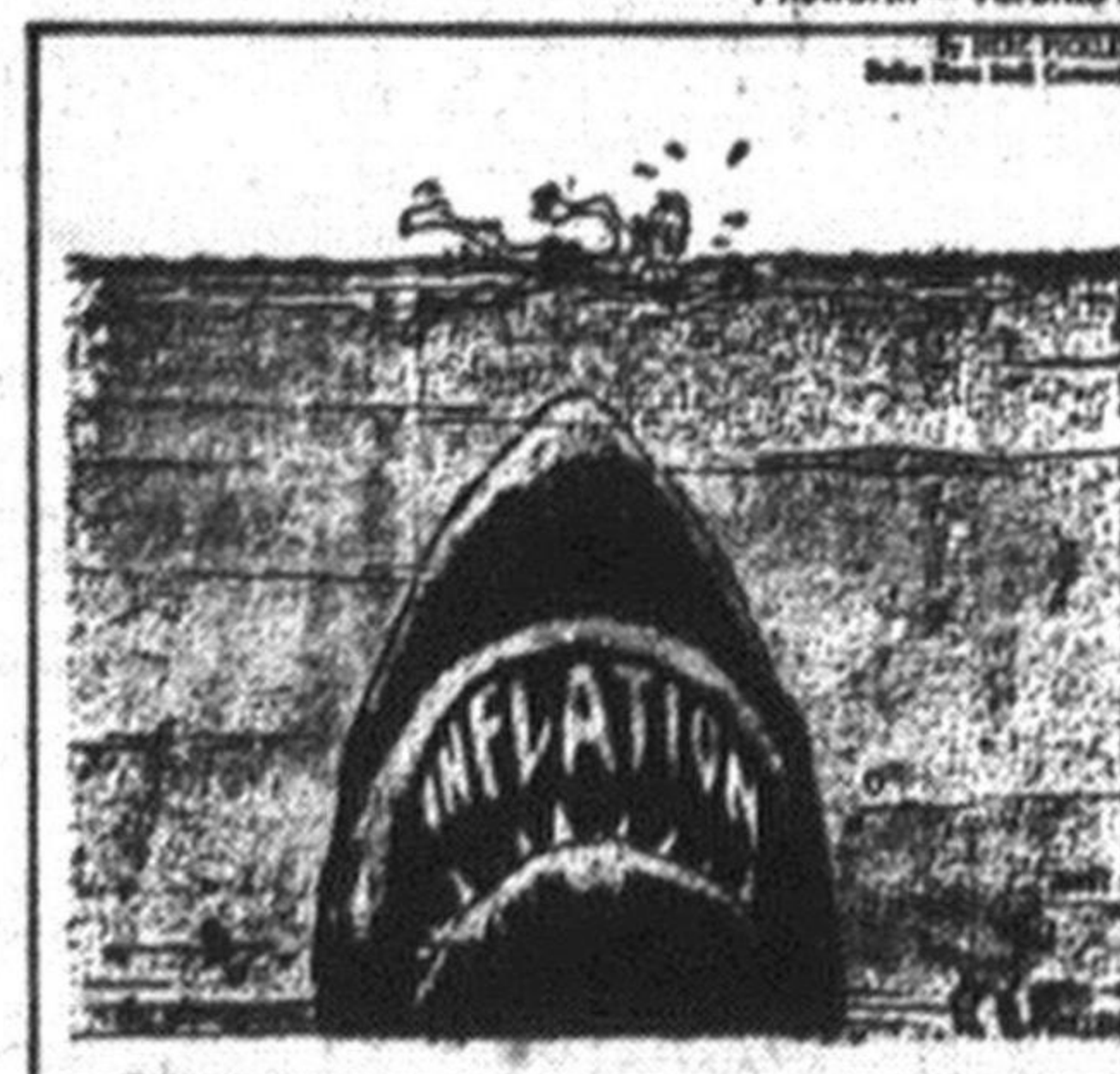
ROY SCHEIDER ROBERT SHAW RICHARD DREYFUSS

JAWS

Co-starring LORRAINE GARY • MURRAY HAMILTON • A ZANUCK / BROWN PRODUCTION Screenplay by PETER BENCHLEY and CARL GOTTLIEB Based on the novel by PETER BENCHLEY • Music by JOHN WILLIAMS Directed by STEVEN SPIELBERG • Produced by RICHARD D. ZANUCK and DAVID BROWN

PG PARENTAL GUIDANCE SUGGESTED MAY BE INCOMPETENT FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN

A UNIVERSAL PICTURE • TECHNICOLOR • PANAVISION



Fichten — Dallas News

Never before have so many people seen one movie-in just 4 weeks.

Now in its 5th Record Week at Conveniently Located Blue Ribbon Theatres

MANHATTAN			NASSAU			WESTCHESTER			N.Y. STATE			NEW JERSEY		
UA NYULJ	LOEW'S ORPHEUM	WALTER READER'S 34TH ST. EAST	CENTURY'S FLORAL PARK	CENTURY'S GREEN ACRES	UA NICKSVILLE	GENERAL CINEMA'S ANCADIAN CINEMA #1	UA BRONXVILLE	CINEMA NATIONAL'S CINEMA AIDLETTOWN	UA CINEMA 304	FLORIN'S BERKELEY CINEMA #2	UA FOR HACKENSACK	MOVIES #1	WEST END LONG BRANCH	
12:30 3:00 5:30 8:00 10:30	12:30 2:45 5:00 8:15 10:30	12:30 2:35 4:55 7:25 9:45		VALLEY STREAM	NICKSVILLE	CINEMA	BRONXVILLE	NEW CITY	HAZLEY	HAZLEY	HAZLEY	HAZLEY	HAZLEY	
BROOKLYN			BRONX			QUEENS			SUFFOLK			NEW JERSEY		
CENTURY'S KINGS PLAZA NORTH	UA CAPRI	UA ASTORIA	UA BAYSIDE	UA PITCOQUE	UA WESTHAMPTON	UA CINEMA WHITE PLAINS	LESSER'S CINEMA #1	PEARL RIVER	PEARL RIVER	PEARL RIVER	PEARL RIVER	PEARL RIVER	PEARL RIVER	PEARL RIVER
UA MARBORO	UA ISLAND TWIN #1	UA LEFRAK	UA BAYSIDE	UA PITCOQUE	UA WESTHAMPTON	UA CINEMA WHITE PLAINS	LESSER'S CINEMA #1	PEARL RIVER	PEARL RIVER	PEARL RIVER	PEARL RIVER	PEARL RIVER	PEARL RIVER	PEARL RIVER
CENTURY'S RIALTO	UA ISLAND TWIN #1	UA LEFRAK	UA BAYSIDE	UA PITCOQUE	UA WESTHAMPTON	UA CINEMA WHITE PLAINS	LESSER'S CINEMA #1	PEARL RIVER	PEARL RIVER	PEARL RIVER	PEARL RIVER	PEARL RIVER	PEARL RIVER	PEARL RIVER

(For your fullest enjoyment — be sure to see "JAWS" from the beginning.)

Detroit News, 12/19/75

Long runs . . .

Jaws (PG) — The fish that's taken a large bite out of the American pocketbook.