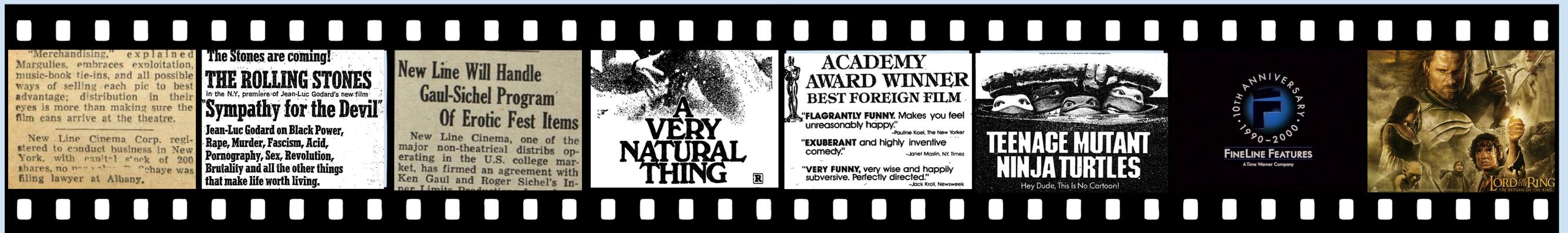


# The Modest Rise of New Line Cinema

Project by: Daniel Herbert, Associate Professor, Screen Arts and Cultures  
Poster by: Jamie Lai



**1967** The beginning of New Line Cinema, created by University of Michigan alumni Robert Shaye

**1970** New Line Cinema's distribution and screening of their first film

**1972** New line handles the controversial Erotica Film Festival

**1974** New Line releases *A Very Natural Thing*, which explicitly features a homosexual couple

**1979** New Line's first triumph with an academy award for *Get Out Your Handkerchiefs*

**1990** *TMNT* brings in \$13 million dollars in revenue... the highest grossing indie film at that time

**1990** Riding off the massive success of *TMNT* and *House Party*, New Line starts Fine Line Features

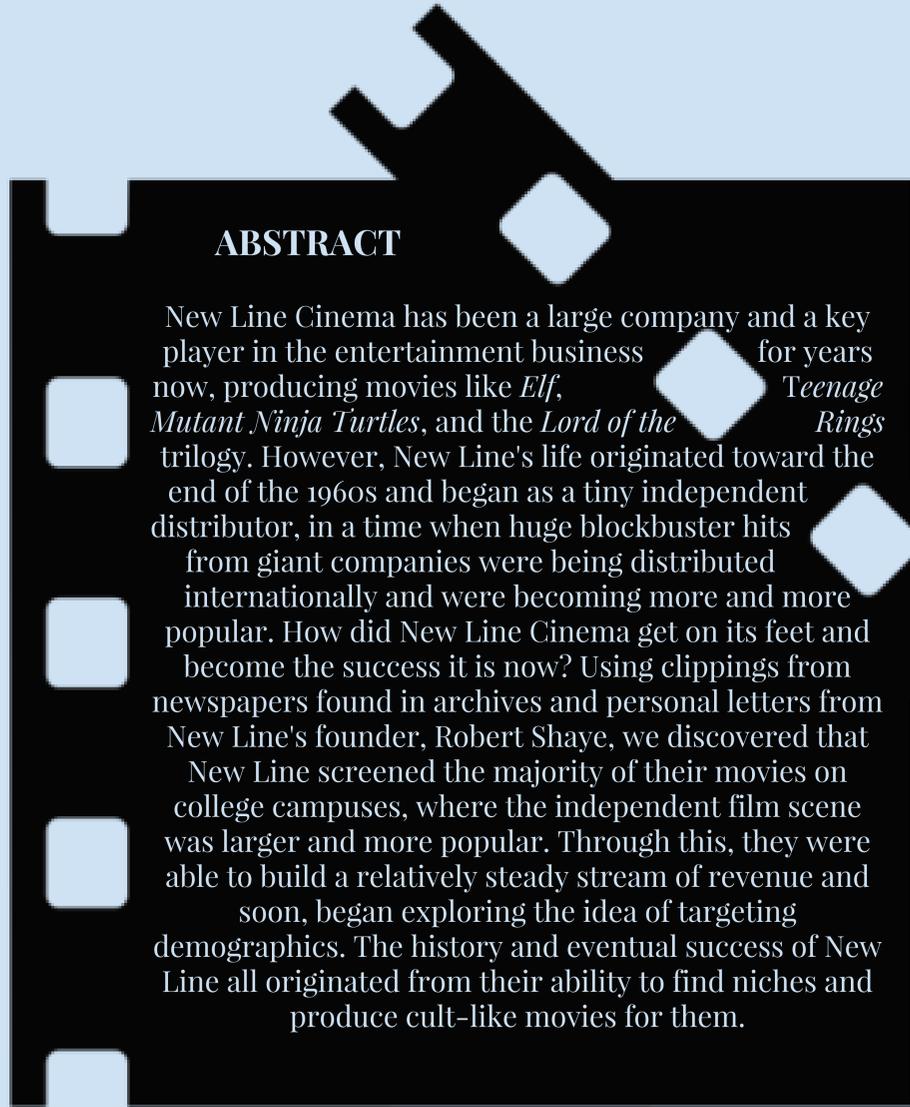
**2003** The last *Lord of the Rings* movie, *Return of the King* brought in over a billion dollars in revenue and an academy award for Best Picture

## BACKGROUND

New Line Cinema is a company that started in 1967, when Robert Shaye began accumulating distribution rights to small, foreign, or independent movies. From the college campuses where these movie found their way towards, New Line grew into a major force in the entertainment industry. The company began making movies in the seventies that targeted a very specific demographic. Back in the 60s, 70s, and part of the 80s, independent movies attracted a lot of interest and attention from college students. This was the first niche that New Line discovered, and profited on. These films were often low-budgeted, small, and in some instances, quite provocative. From short videos like "Sympathy for the Devil," which was a behind-the-scenes feature of the famous song by the Rolling Stones, to the Erotica Film Festival in the 70s, to the film *Get Out Your Handkerchiefs*, which snatched an Oscar for best foreign film, New Line steadily grew in the proceeding decades. They eventually moved from independent or foreign films to slightly bigger-budget films in the 80s while still maintaining their niche-target approach in movie-making. This time, teenage boys were the target demographic. The success of New Line Cinema came largely due to their ability to make movies that may not have necessarily done well critically, but did great with audiences. More specifically, New Line saw the potential of attracting a very specific demographic and catering toward their wants. The critical disappointment of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles but the record-smashing hit in the box offices is proof enough of that. Moreover, New Line set the standard of today's entertainment business, where companies now look to cater to specific subsets of people.

## INTRO

The main goal in mind was to analyze the way New Line was able to become such a household name with cinema giants like Warner Bros and Disney already dominating the industry. We also kept in mind of the impact New Line marketing played in developing the demographic-targeting strategy most industries use today. These questions were answered mostly by researching their movies, their advertisements, and the type of newspapers they used. Most of the time spent was on archival research. We found that by targeting college students in the very beginning with popular indie and foreign movies, New Line was able to develop a sense of what niche to target at a time with each movie. This then moved on to teenage boys, little kids, and other demographics.

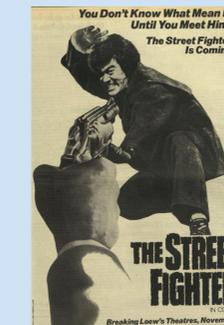


## ABSTRACT

New Line Cinema has been a large company and a key player in the entertainment business for years now, producing movies like *Elf*, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, and the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. However, New Line's life originated toward the end of the 1960s and began as a tiny independent distributor, in a time when huge blockbuster hits from giant companies were being distributed internationally and were becoming more and more popular. How did New Line Cinema get on its feet and become the success it is now? Using clippings from newspapers found in archives and personal letters from New Line's founder, Robert Shaye, we discovered that New Line screened the majority of their movies on college campuses, where the independent film scene was larger and more popular. Through this, they were able to build a relatively steady stream of revenue and soon, began exploring the idea of targeting demographics. The history and eventual success of New Line all originated from their ability to find niches and produce cult-like movies for them.

## METHODS AND RESULTS

Due to the entertainment platform New Line is part of, much of the evidence of its life can be found in newspaper clipping and personal letters and files from its founder, Robert Shaye, which he donated to the Buhr Shelving Facility. For the newspaper clipping, most of the films and production and distribution rights are online, on the database ProQuest. By looking up "New Line Cinema," and sorting the clippings oldest to newest, I was able to find everything New Line did in chronological order.



Most notably, the company started small, as evidence of the number of ads put out as well as the space and size of them. The actual ads were often small and set toward the side, while films from larger companies such as Paramount or the Warner Brothers were bigger and set towards the center. In a time when large, big-budget movies were becoming more and more popular -- especially with Disney gaining ground in their animation and children-targeted business -- New Line had to find a way to differentiate their products to stay afloat. They did this through the distribution of small, independent, and sometimes foreign films through colleges and universities. From there, New Line also began delving into more provocative, sometimes violent movies. The most notable is *A Very Natural Thing*, which was a movie about a homosexual couple. The Erotica Festival was also run by New Line and created some controversy, eventually being forcibly shut down after its second year. The ultimate success of New Line in its first decade occurred in 1978, when the company won best foreign film with *Get Out Your Handkerchiefs*. This film launched New Line forward and allowed for greater distribution rights and expansion of the company.

## CONCLUSION

Since that first decade, New Line has released a whole host of movies with cult-like followings, such as the *Austin Powers* franchise, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, which broke spring season box office records in 1990, *House Party*, which came out the same year as *TMNT* and subsequently led to the creation of Fine Line Features, and the *Lord of the Rings*, which brought in billions of dollars and several awards between the three movies. However, this successful all started on college campuses, with small movies that made money through very specific demographics. New Line found this business model and since then has utilized it to bring to the screens quirky, weird, funny, and epic stories.



# NEW LINE CINEMA