

# 'Malcolm' Searches Largely Accepted

## Theater Chain Checks With Metal Detectors

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Near the end of the new movie biography "Malcolm X," supporters of the black nationalist leader ask for permission to search the crowd at a rally for weapons. Malcolm X refuses, saying he doesn't want to discourage anyone from hearing his message.

Many customers of the west suburban Hillside Mall Theatres do not have that option if they want to see the message of Malcolm X as portrayed in Spike Lee's much-acclaimed film. To get in, they first must submit to a weapons search with a hand-held metal detector.

The sweeps, which are conducted primarily on opening and weekend nights, and only for certain films, are run by off-duty Hillside police officers hired by the Loews theater chain. Loews owns the Hillside cinema and 10 other theaters in Chicago and the suburbs.

However, Charles Goldwater, senior vice president and general manager of the New Jersey-based chain, said the periodic sweeps are conducted only at three area Loews' cinemas: the Hillside Mall, the Hyde Park in Chicago and the River Run in Lansing.

All three are used heavily by blacks from nearby communities, and all are showing "Malcolm X."

The movie also is being featured at Loews theaters in Lincoln Park and Evergreen Park, but customers entering those facilities are not being checked. And no searches are conducted at the Loews Hillside Square Theater, not far from



Hillside Mall, though a shooting took place there in a Nov. 8 screening of "Passenger 57," a skyjacking thriller. Police blamed the incident on a lovers' spat.

Concertgoers and dance club patrons routinely are patted down and subjected to pocket and purse searches. But the Loews searches, which Goldwater said have been going on for about two years, appear to be the only ones conducted at local movie theaters. A spokesman for Cineplex-Odeon, the largest movie chain in the area, said his firm does not employ such security measures, which he dismissed as unwarranted and "extreme."

Theater staffers who would not give their names said the detectors are used only at movies that draw young black audiences, such as "New Jack City" and "Boyz n the Hood."

But Goldwater insisted that

the sweeps were not aimed at young black crowds, but more typically at crowds that frequent action-oriented or horror films. "We decide, based on the [crowd] volume and the potential, where there might be the need for additional protection for the safety of our customers," he said.

And sometimes, Goldwater acknowledged, the decision to sweep is made on the advice of police. Hillside Police Chief George J. Kudrnia said the sweeps so far had resulted in the arrest of a woman who attempted to take a gun into the opening night show of "Malcolm X" last month. He insisted the sight of the metal detectors deters others with weapons from trying to go in.

Syd Finley, executive director of the Chicago chapter of the NAACP, said he found nothing objectionable in the Loews practice so long as it was administered



SUN-TIMES Photos/Tom Cruze

Assistant manager Christine Mole shows the metal detector that security guards sometimes use to check Hillside Mall Theatre patrons for weapons. The theater is in the west suburbs.

uniformly to all customers entering a theater. "This is within the [theater's] right," said Finley, who added that customers who object to being searched can leave.

Derrick Triplett, 26, of Bellwood, attended the opening night screening of "Malcolm X" at Hillside Mall and said some customers objected loudly to the searches and threatened to demand their money back. But Triplett said he did not see anybody walk out.

Triplett, who is black, said he approved of security sweeps and suggested that movies appealing to younger audiences require extra security measures. "Those young kids shouldn't be carrying guns into the theater," he said.

Nationwide, Loews uses metal detectors at theaters in New York and, Goldwater thinks, Boston as well. "I think we are all aware of the increasing incidence of violence in society anytime you get a

large crowd together. . . . It's another tool for modern-day crowd control," Goldwater said.

An official of Cineplex-Odeon, which dominates the Chicago area movie business with 200 screens, said the use of metal detectors is unnecessary.

"I don't see incidents in theaters being of epidemic proportions," said Howard Lichtman, executive vice president of marketing for the Toronto-based company. "We have 90 [million] to 100 million people going through our doors every year. There are one or two incidents."

Lichtman said one of the few highly publicized incidents at a Cineplex theater in recent years involved the fatal shooting of an Alsip teenager outside the Chestnut Station theater on the Near North Side. Metal detectors in the theater could not have stopped that shooting, he said.