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## Our view

# Specter's threat of suit a silly response to 'JFK'

### THE ISSUE:

The movie *JFK* is flawed, but it raises valid questions about a conspiracy to kill the president.

### WE SUGGEST:

Film-goers - especially younger ones - should check the facts before deciding whom to believe.

**A**rlen Specter has threatened to sue over the potshot Oliver Stone takes at him in *JFK*, but he's missing the point. Stone's painful film re-creation of the Kennedy assassination and subsequent investigation is outrageously evasive. It mingles real and re-created film footage and puts undocumented words in the mouths of conspirators. It tramples the evidence and the best explanations of Specter and others about who murdered the president, without putting the director's vision up against the test of accumulated wisdom.

The film is flawed, but that's the point, because the Warren Commission report is flawed, too — at least in the eyes of most people. Lacking any conclusive epilogue to a national tragedy, Americans have been carrying this burden of non-justice for 28 years now.

In the film, Specter is ridiculed for postulating the single-bullet theory — that one bullet caused multiple wounds in the president and then-Texas Gov. John Connally. Actor Kevin Costner's "magic bullet" rebuttal is the most gripping scene in the movie.

Specter, who is up for re-election to the U.S. Senate this year, is understandably sensitive about the film's claim that he lied to the public. Yet to bring a libel or defamation action, he'd have to show reckless disregard for the truth, and that probably would entail a real life courtroom exhumation of the facts of the assassination, perhaps set off another investigation. Are we ready for it?

Our fear about *JFK* is not that it distorts and fictionalizes — there's a purpose in this — but that a new generation of Americans may accept Stone's version as gospel and become only more contemptuous of government and history, without bothering to look deeper.

There are plenty of reference materials available to doubting Thomases — hundreds of articles and books and the Warren Commission report itself. And if *JFK* can pressure the government into releasing photographs and CIA files that have been sealed for decades, it will succeed where more rational pleas have failed.

Oliver Stone was reckless in choosing to deify Jim Garrison, the thoroughly discredited district attorney who tried to prove a conspiracy before a New Orleans grand jury in 1969. But for suggesting that the president was killed by more than one person? Hardly.



Sen. Arlen Specter