Valenti Adds Latest Fuel to 'JFK' Debate

■ Movies: The president of the Motion Picture Assn. of America calls Oliver Stone's film a 'smear' of his former boss, Lyndon B. Johnson.

By DAVID J. FOX

fter months of charges and A countercharges, debates, panel discussions, talk show appearances and Op-Ed pieces, it countercharges, debates, looked like the furor surrounding Oliver Stone's "JFK," might be quieting down. The Academy Awards were over and the film had received only two Oscars out of its eight nominations.

Even before its release, "JFK" reignited a national debate about the circumstances behind the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. After its December re-lease, the debate became more heated and Stone has been outspoken in its defense, replying personally to film critics and writers who disputed his conspiracy theories put forth in the film. He also appeared at scores of forums and awards shows in Washington, New

York and Los Angeles. Then, just when it looked like the fury had abated, Jack Valenti took aim.

In a personal statement pub-lished Thursday in the New York Times, the president of the Motion Picture Assn. of America and a former aide to Kennedy's succes-sor, President Lyndon B. Johnson, attacked the film in strong terms, comparing it at times to Nazi

propaganda films. The idea that Valenti, whose job is chief Washington lobbyist and cheerleader for America's major movie companies, would publicly assail the product of one of his association's members—in this case, Warner Bros.—caused a ripple in Hollywood circles.

And Stone, who at first was reluctant to offer any further comment, later said in response to Valenti's commentary: "The proof of the movie is in the pudding. Congress is considering opening

the [assassination] files." In an interview, he called Valen-ti "a former government official who never did anything to get the files released. Now he's attacking me, as well as my freedom as an artist.
AI wish he would have exercised

the same passion in protesting the circumstances surrounding Mr.



'My own rebuttal to Mr. Stone comes down to this: I was there, and he wasn't.

JACK VALENTI Motion Picture Assn. president



'[Valenti is] a former government official who never did anything to get the files released.'

OLIVER STONE director of 'JFK'

Kennedy's death, which had consequences for the world far more than my movie ever will."

Stone said he stood by earlier

comments he has made about how the news media has treated the

Please see 'JFK,' F4

A loving homage to road movies and a deadpan sendup of the genre."



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VALENTI

Last Saturday, Stone lashed out at the New York Times and other metia for attempting to "usah" and "censor" his movie when he was honored by the Independent Fenturee Project/West at the Independent Spirt, Awards.

Before about 1,000 industry members, he "thanked" David Belin, the former counsel to the Warren Commission, which investigated the assassination, for an essay he wrote in the New York Times on March 7, denouncing the film and deferding Chief Justice Barl Warren. The article appeared only days before ballots for the Anademy Awards were in the mail, and the article was reprinted in a full-page ad Belin bought the following week that rain in the enter-utimment trade newspaper Datily Various

In his speech, Stone alao In his speech, Stone alao In hanked the Washington Pest, who started it all. . . the New York Times . . . lpointing out writers Anthony Lewis, Tom Wieker and film critic Vincent Cambaj and the anonymous editors and the editorial bard . . for making known their and-Oscar choice last month, among many editorials attacking the moyle.

"I'd like to thank Mr. Alexander Cockburn on the left and Mr. George Will on the right, two friends in hell.

REVELATION"
Bric Montin, LA READER

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"Trible to thank Mr. [Bernard]
"I'd like to thank Mr. [Bernard]
Wehranh, the Los Angeles voyeur
for the New York Times, for his
lovely support of pure censorship
in his article detailing wby Warner
Brn. should not have made the
movie." A Dec. 23 story by Weinraub polied studie and production
executives about whether Warners
should have released the provocative film, given the criticism that it
offers a distortion of history. Weinrath also wrote the Valenti story

Thursday. In the wake of the New York In the wake of the New York Times story, there was also speculation about how the newspaper obtained Valentit's seven-page statement was not released to other modia until Thursday morning. A source close to the situation said the New York Times recoved the satement directly from Valent. "No, I did not leak it." Valenti said Thursday. "He [Weinraub] got

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siggestions that the New York Times was given the statement because it would play up the story. Weitratub would not comment on where he got the statement. As for Stone, Valenti said: "He's been pureed just about everywhere, including the Washington Post." until after the Academy Awards. Valenti had refused to comment on the film when questioned about it at an exhibitors' convention in Las Vegas in Febru-

ary.

He said his criticism is based on his experience as a personal assistant to President Johnson, and de-

nonneed "JFK" as a "smear" for its implication that Johnson was indirectly involved in a conspiracy to murder Kennedy.

"My own rebutted to Mr. Stone comes down to this. I was there, and he wasn't.

"... Does any same human heing truly believe that President Johnson, the Warren Commission members, law enforcement officers, CLA, FBL, White House addes and assorted thugs, weirdes, Fritabe throwers, all conspired togeth; or ... and then for almost 29 years, nothing leaked." Valenti laked.

In his statement, Valenti said he had been considering a public response to the film since he first saw

"JFK" in December, "I was so outraged, I could scarcely contain myself, I have loyalty and gratitude to L.B.J. . . I wasn't going to let anyone soil his reputation." But Valenti said he withheld his comments "in order to be clear that I would not hurt the hox office of the movie. Then the Oscar nominations came out in February and I decided to wait until after the halloding was over."

The movie, which stars Kevin Costiner, has grossed more than \$150 million to date in the United States and oversoes markets, and it is still performing strongly abroad. Valenti said in an interview that he has "never before" commented on the contents of a movie, and

doesn't plan on doing so in the future. 'I have a loyalty to the MFAA and Warners, one of my association's members. I waited, in order to make sure that I wasn't befouling any of my responsibilities.''

Warner Bros. Chairman Robert A. Daly said: 'Our feeling is very simple. We're totally behind this movile, have been from the start. It's one of the most important movies of the last decade. When instory looks back on this film, it's importance will be even more apparent. We have the utmost regard for what Oliver Stone did. As far as lack Valenti is concerned, the fact that he is loyal to L.B.J. is admirable."

In the interview Valenti said that despite his criticism of Stone's conspracy theory, he favors opening sealed records of the Warren Commission's investigation of the assassimation. And he gave Stone credit for making a powerful film, "The film is about as brilliant a piece of filmmaking as I have syrteen," Valent said. "But that moyie of contained a scene which said that LBJ, conspired to kill President Kennedy, I wasn't going to lei, him [Stone] get away with h... If that hadn't been in the movie, [as well as] scenes that had Johnson anying to the generats, I'l give you your [Vietnam] War.... If these lies hadn't been in the movie, I wouldn't have said anything."

