

Valenti Denounces Stone's 'J. F. K.' As a 'Smear'

By BERNARD WEINRAUB

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HOLLYWOOD, April 1 — In a highly unusual and angry statement, Jack Valenti, the president and chief executive of the Motion Picture Association of America and a former top aide to President Lyndon B. Johnson, denounced the film "J. F. K." today as a "hoax," a "smear" and "pure fiction" that rivaled the Nazi propaganda films of Leni Reifenstahl.

Mr. Valenti, a film industry spokesman and lobbyist in Washington, has kept silent until now about the Oliver Stone film, which opened in December. He emphasized that he was making a personal statement that "has no connection to my responsibilities in the movie industry."

"Indeed, I waited to speak out because I didn't want to do anything which might affect this picture's theatrical release or the Oscar balloting," he said.

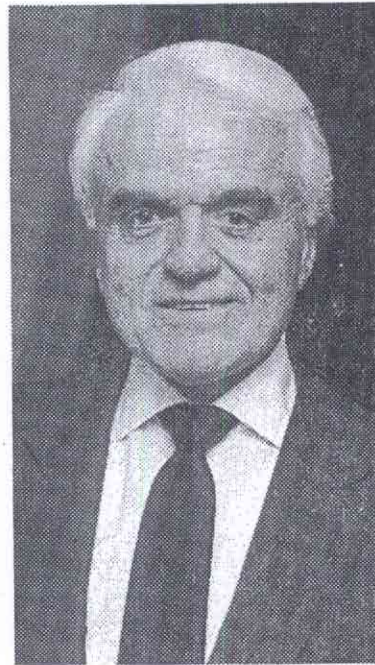
'The Half True and the Totally False'

In the seven-page statement, Mr. Valenti said Mr. Stone's film was "a monstrous charade" based on "the hallucinatory bleatings of an author named Jim Garrison, a discredited former district attorney in New Orleans." The movie implies that President Johnson was part of a Government conspiracy in the assassination of President Kennedy.

"Does any sane human being truly believe that President Johnson, the Warren Commission members, law-enforcement officers, C.I.A., F.B.I., assorted thugs, weirdos, Frisbee throwers, all conspired together as plotters in Garrison's wacky sightings?" he said. "And then for almost 29 years nothing leaked? But you have to believe it if you think well of any part of this accusatory lunacy."

"In scene after scene Mr. Stone plasters together the half true and the totally false and from that he manufactures the plausible," Mr. Valenti said in his statement. "No wonder that many young people, gripped by the movie, leave the theater convinced they have been witness to the truth."

"In much the same way, young German boys and girls in 1941 were mesmerized by Leni Reifenstahl's 'Triumph of the Will,' in which Adolf Hitler was depicted as a newborn God," he said. "Both 'J. F. K.' and



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Jack Valenti

'Triumph of the Will' are equally a propaganda masterpiece and equally a hoax. Mr. Stone and Leni Reifenstahl have another genetic linkage: neither of them carried a disclaimer on their film that its contents were mostly pure fiction."

What makes the statement especially unusual is that as head of the Motion Picture Association since 1966, the Texas-born, Harvard-educated Mr. Valenti has sought to keep his employers, the movie studios, as happy as possible without stirring controversy despite his high profile in Hollywood and Washington. One of those employers, Warner Brothers, produced "J. F. K.," which has raised considerable debate over its blend of speculation, fiction and fact.

In a telephone interview, Mr. Valenti said he delayed attacking the movie because of his job. "Warner Brothers is a member of my association, and I owe them a fidelity to my responsibility," he said. "While this is a personal statement, I did not want to do anything that, in the slightest way, would affect this picture's journey and its chances of winning an Academy Award." The movie, which

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was nominated for eight Academy Awards, won two on Monday night, for cinematography and editing, and has grossed more than \$68 million in the United States. It is also expected to prove a strong box-office success in Europe.

Mr. Valenti said he had told Warner Brothers that he planned to issue a statement but had not provided the text to the studio. "They recognize that I am in a difficult position, but I told them that this was such a personal thing it goes deep into my vitals," he said. "I owe where I am today to Lyndon Johnson. I could not live with myself if I stood by mutely and let some film maker soil his memory."

Mr. Stone, who received a copy of the statement from Mr. Valenti late this afternoon, said by telephone: "While I respect Jack Valenti's enduring loyalty to President Johnson, I find his emotional diatribe off the mark. The overwhelming majority of Americans — and not just the young whom Mr. Valenti puts down as too impressionable — agree with the central thesis of my film: that President Kennedy was killed by a conspiracy which included people in the Government."

He added: "I am enormously proud of the artistic and political impact which 'J. F. K.' has had. I hope Mr. Valenti, now that he has vented his spleen, will join in supporting the joint House-Senate resolution that all Government files in the assassination

of President Kennedy be opened so that the American people can have a fuller understanding of that tragedy and its continuing implications for our democracy."

Robert A. Daly, the chairman of Warner Brothers, said the company supported Mr. Stone but understood Mr. Valenti's fury. "Our feeling is very simple," he said. "We support the movie. We think it's a wonderful movie. We have the utmost regard for what Oliver Stone did. As far as Jack Valenti is concerned, the fact that he's loyal to L. B. J. is admirable, and I would hope anybody who worked for me for all those years would be that loyal. I have nothing but the highest regard for Jack."

Mr. Daly said that if the Warren Commission files are opened because of pressure generated by the film, he was convinced that some of the movie's speculation about more than one assassin would be borne out.

'I Was There'

Mr. Valenti began working for Mr. Johnson in 1955 when he was the Senate majority leader and later served at the White House as Mr. Johnson's assistant from 1963 to 1966. Mr. Valenti handled the press during the visit of President Kennedy and Vice President Johnson to Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963, when Mr. Kennedy was assassinated.

In his statement, Mr. Valenti said: "My own rebuttal to Mr. Stone comes down to this: I was there, and he wasn't."

Mr. Valenti said in his statement that he stood beside Mr. Johnson when he was sworn in on the plane carrying Kennedy's coffin, that he lived at the White House for two months afterwards, that he "read every paper that crossed the President's desk, including the most top-secret documents, and was an eyewitness to many of his most confidential phone conversations." He continued: "I was there when President Johnson ruminated about the assassination, and the urgency to enlist the most prestigious citizens within the Republic to inspect this murder carefully, objectively, swiftly."

After naming some of the members of the Warren Commission, which Mr. Stone has denounced because of its conclusion that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone in killing President Kennedy, Mr. Valenti said: "To indict these men of honor, along with Lyndon Johnson, is vicious, cruel and false."

He added, "No matter his brilliant creative skills, and they are considerable, Mr. Stone has with deliberate forethought put on the screen a monstrous charade about President Johnson that ranks right up there with the best work of old-guard Soviet revisionist historians."