

Valenti blasts 'JFK,' likens movie to Nazi propaganda

By Bernard Weinraub
The New York Times

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 "JFK" Wednesday as a "hoax," a "smear" and "pure fiction" that rivaled the Nazi propaganda films of Leni Reifentahl.

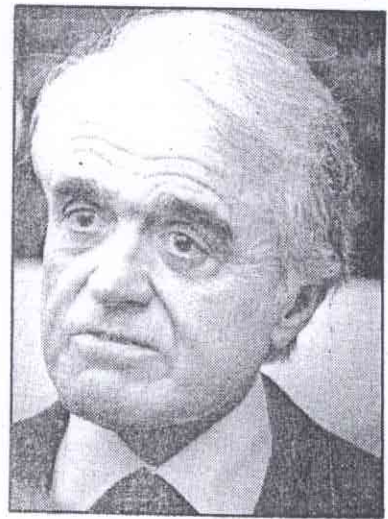
Valenti, a film industry spokes-

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man 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."

See **VALENTI** / Page 16



Jack Valenti
Calls film "accusatory lunacy"

TO—NEWS / THURSDAY, APRIL 2, 1992 / DAILY NEWS

Valenti calls Stone film on

VALENTI / From Page 1

"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.

In the seven-page statement, Valenti said 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 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, CIA, FBI, assorted thugs, weirdos, Frisbee throwers, all conspired together as plotters in Garrison's wacky sightings?" he asked. "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," 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 Reifentahl's 'Triumph of the Will,' in which Adolf Hitler was depicted as a newborn god," he said. "Both 'JFK' and 'Triumph of the Will' are equally a propaganda masterpiece and equally a hoax. Mr. Stone and Leni Reifentahl have another genetic linkage: Neither of them carried a disclaimer on their film that its contents were mostly pure fic-

tion."

What makes the statement especially unusual is that as head of the Motion Picture Association since 1966, the Texas-born, Harvard-educated 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 Bros., produced "JFK," which has raised considerable debate over its blend of speculation, fiction and fact.

In a telephone interview, Valenti said he delayed attacking the movie because of his job.

"Warner Bros. 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

other side, too (turn over)

Kennedy killing 'pure fiction'

chances of winning an Academy Award."

The movie, which won Academy Awards on Monday night for cinematography and editing, has grossed more than \$68 million in the United States.

Valenti said he had told Warner Bros. that he planned to issue a statement but had not provided the text to the studio.

Stone, who received a copy of the statement from Valenti late Wednesday 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 'JFK' 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, chairman of Warner Bros., said the company supported Stone but understood Valenti's fury.

"Our feeling is very simple," Daly 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 LBJ 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."

Valenti began working for Johnson in 1955 when Johnson was the Senate majority leader, and later served at the White House as Johnson's assistant from 1963 to 1966.

Valenti handled the press during the visit of Kennedy and Johnson, then vice president, to Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963.

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

Valenti stated that he stood beside Johnson when he was sworn in on the plane carrying Kennedy's coffin, that he lived at the White House for two months afterward, that he "read every paper that crossed the president's desk, including the most top-secret documents, and was an ear-witness to many of his most confidential phone conversations."