

# 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  
TIMES STAFF WRITER

After months of charges and countercharges, debates, panel discussions, talk show appearances and Op-Ed pieces, it 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 release, 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.

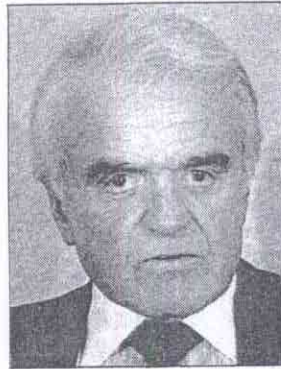
In a personal statement published Thursday in the New York Times, the president of the Motion Picture Assn. of America and a former aide to Kennedy's successor, President Lyndon B. Johnson, attacked the film in strong terms, comparing it at times to Nazi propaganda films.

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 Valenti "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."

"I 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 film.

Please see 'JFK,' F4

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# VALENTI

Continued from F3

Last Saturday, Stone lashed out at the New York Times and other media for attempting to "bash" and "censor" his movie when he was honored by the Independent Features Project/West at the Independent Spirit Awards.

Before about 1,000 industry members, he "thanked" David Rubin, 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 defending Chief Justice Earl Warren. The article appeared only days before ballots for the Academy Awards were in the mail.

In his speech, Stone also "thanked" the Washington Post, "who started it all... the New York Times... [pointing out writers Anthony Lewis, Tom Wicker and film critic Vincent Canby] and the anonymous editors and the editorial board... for making known their anti-Oscar choice last month, among many editorialists attacking the movie."

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

"I'd like to thank Mr. [Bernard] Weintraub, the Los Angeles voyeur for the New York Times, for his lovely support of pure censorship in his article detailing why Warner Bros. should not have made the movie. And Dec. 23 story by Weintraub proved about whether Warren should have ruled whether Warren offers a distortion of history. Weintraub also wrote the Valentini story Thursday.

In the wake of the New York Times story, there was also speculation about how the newspaper obtained Valentini's seven-page statement on Wednesday. His statement was not released to other media until Thursday morning. A source close to the situation said the New York Times received the statement directly from Valentini.

"No, I did not leak it," Valentini said Thursday. "The [Weintraub] got

it from somewhere." He dismissed suggestions that the New York Times was given the statement, because it would play up the story. Weintraub would not comment on where he got the statement.

As for Stone, Valentini said, "He's been purred just about everywhere, including the Washington Post."

Valentini said he held his criticism of JFK and the Academy Awards. Valentini had refused to comment on the film when questioned about it at an exhibitors convention in Las Vegas in February.

"I said his criticism is based on his experience as a general assistant to President Johnson, and de-

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

"My own rebuttal to Mr. Stone comes down to this: I was there, and he was not."

Does any sane human being truly believe that President Johnson, the Warren Commission members, law enforcement officers, CIA, FBI, White House aides and assorted things, writers, FBI-bec throwers, all conspired together... and then for almost 29 years... nothing happened? Valentini said.

In his statement, Valentini 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 the reputation."

But Valentini said he withheld his comments "in order to be clear that I would not hurt the box office of the movie. Then the Oscar nominations came out in February and I decided to wait until after the balloting was over."

The movie, which stars Kevin Costner, has grossed more than \$150 million to date in the United States and overseas markets, and it is performing strongly abroad.

Valentini 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 MPAA and Warren, one of my association's members. I wanted, in order to make sure that I wasn't breaching any of my responsibilities."

Warner Bros. Chairman Robert A. Daly said, "Our feeling is very simple. We're totally behind this movie, have been from the start. It's one of the most important movies of the last decade. When history 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 Jack Valentini is concerned, the fact that he is loyal to L.B.J. is admirable."

In the interview, Valentini said that despite his criticism of Stone's conspiracy theory, he favors opening sealed records of the Warren Commission's investigation of the assassination. And he gave Stone credit for making a powerful film.

"The film is about as brilliant a piece of filmmaking as I have ever seen," Valentini said. But that movie contained a scene which said that L.B.J. conspired to kill President Kennedy. "I wasn't going to let Stone get away with it. It had just seemed that had John Kennedy not been assassinated, I'd give you your Vietnam War... If things hadn't been in the movie, I wouldn't have said anything."

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