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'JFK'-inspired bill to open files is due today

By David Kelly
and Kevin Phinney

Film history coincides with U.S. history today, when Rep. Louis Stokes, D-Ohio, joins with other lawmakers to introduce legislation that would open sealed FBI, CIA, military intelligence and government files relating to the assassination of President Kennedy in 1963.

The legislation has been directly attributed to director Oliver Stone's conspiracy film, "JFK," which opened in December.

Sponsors of the bill include

Stokes; Rep. Lee Hamilton, D-Ind.; and Sens. Arlen Specter, R-Penn., and David Boren, D-Okla., chairman of the Senate select committee on intelligence. Together, they will conduct a press conference this morning to unveil the "Assassination Materials Disclosure Act of 1992."

The bill only addresses President Kennedy's murder.

According to a spokeswoman for Stokes, the bill calls for the release of all files that have been classified since the assassination.

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JFK files

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At the same time, the bill calls for the creation of an independent review board that would rule on how much of certain sensitive documents might be disclosed.

Documents would be scrutinized for protection of current intelligence sources or methods, damage to current foreign relations, the preservation of guarantees of confidentiality made to wit-

nesses, substantial invasions of personal privacy, and the disclosure of measures used by the Secret Service and other agencies to protect government officials.

Stone has been lobbying for full governmental disclosure since the December debut of Warner Bros.' "JFK," his filmic repudiation of the Warren Commission's conclusion — that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone in murdering Kennedy.

Behind the scenes, Frank Mankiewicz, former press secretary to

Robert Kennedy, who was assassinated in 1968, has been lining up support, screening "JFK" for lawmakers and squiring Stone around Capitol Hill.

In a prepared statement, Stone said that thanks to the "superior leadership of Sen. David Boren, Rep. Lee Hamilton and Rep. Louis Stokes, the first step toward giving Americans a complete and honest look at the most grievous act of this century in our country's history is now in motion." □

Martin A. Grove

Hollywood Report

'Ruby' takes dramatist view of JFK shooting

“Ruby” report: In the wake of Warner Bros. and Oliver Stone’s success with “JFK,” the assassination of John F. Kennedy is once again grist for Hollywood’s mill in Triumph’s release Friday of “Ruby.”

Directed by John Mackenzie and written by Stephen Davis, “Ruby” stars Danny Aiello, who’s enormously convincing as Jack Ruby. A PolyGram presentation of a Propaganda Films production, it was produced by Sigurjon Sighvatsson and Steve Golin. Davis, who adapted the screenplay from his stage play “Love Field,” recently screened “Ruby” for Santa Monica College’s Cinema Plus film preview class.

While one might imagine “Ruby” was rushed into production to capitalize on “JFK’s” success, that’s not the case. “‘Ruby’ was in the works as early as 1987,” Davis explained. “The screenplay was begun in the fall of 1987.

I first heard about ‘JFK,’ I think, in early 1990.”

Has “JFK’s” impact in the marketplace helped create a climate in which “Ruby” arrives with greater interest and awareness than might otherwise have been the case? “I feel, myself, that

‘JFK’ has changed the agenda for movies of this kind and this particular movie,” Davis told me. “I very much doubt that (if it were not for ‘JFK’) I’d be asked the kind of questions I am about ‘Ruby.’”

Davis, who’s English, takes an approach to the subject of the Kennedy assassination that differs significantly from the way Oliver Stone approached the same events in “JFK.” Davis viewed the material as a dramatist: “I originally wrote this as a stage play. I felt I couldn’t confront the Kennedy assassination head-on as a docudrama project. I think it’s taken Oliver Stone to do that. It’s created a climate for the two films to jostle each other. In some ways it’s created a very lively debate about the nature of films and the nature of fact and fiction in films. I think the fact that ‘Ruby’ comes from a different direction and works in different ways is of interest to people.”

While the Kennedy assassination is a quintessential American experience, Davis observed, “I don’t approach it from very much further away than an American might. I was 13 years old in November 1963 watching TV the same way that many millions of people were watching when the news came in from Dallas. I don’t think Americans realize, perhaps, that the news of the Kennedy assassination traveled around the world with an undiminished forcefulness.

“I don’t think foreign nationals like myself like to claim the kind of emotional investment in that assassination that Americans are entitled to claim, (but) the political implications of it and the effect on one’s psyche was undiminished. It raised a large question in the public mind as to whether the democratic institutions of the West were what they seemed to be. A great many historical changes date from that terrible afternoon. I think that my agenda as a writer and the subjects I’ve tackled has been influenced by that.

“I felt no hesitation in tackling it. I suppose I felt that possibly, if anything — and this is, perhaps, presumptuous — that as an Englishman I might have a little detachment with which to tackle the subject.”

“I think the fact that (the film) comes from a different direction and works in different ways is of interest to people,” said writer Stephen Davis.
