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MPAA Lobbyist Valenti Is Dead

Jack Valenti, the founder of the ratings system, passed away

Jack Valenti, the politician, the movie mogul and the star, passed away on Thursday, in his home, after a one-week hospitalization following a stroke. He was 85 but he was still younger and more energetic than most of the stars and businessmen he befriended along the years. Valenti began his career as President Johnson's special assistant, immediately after JFK's death. In fact, he was in one of the cars that escorted President Kennedy when he was shot and was rushed to Washington in the hours following the tragic incident and offered a chance in politics. He took it up and soon became a fixture to President Johnson, his responsibilities stretching from editing speeches to congressional relations. In 1966, Valenti gave up a brilliant career in politics and turned his attention to one of his greatest dreams as a child: the magic, illusory world in the movies. Soon, he was one of the biggest associate executives in the field, with a salary to match: \$1 million. From that to actually taking the reins in his own hands was just a step: towards the end of the '60s, Valenti realized that the movie industry had already overgrown the moral code and proposed a new ratings system that was to Guard Hollywood's audience from things that it didn't want to see. The system developed by him and immediately applied is still kept today, although it has suffered a bunch of modifications. Initially, it was only meant to warn the public as to the content to be expected from a movie but, in time, it was also used as a means of fighting a more strict censorship from the government or from other groups of interest, like major studios or even studio owners. However, many criticized the ratings system, saying it was nothing else but a way of manipulating the audience into what movies should or should not be seen and that it encouraged the activities of major studios, while working against independent moviemakers and low-budget flicks. Valenti always responded to criticism with wit and humility, mouthing his words in such a way as to make people understand that, out of all the alternatives, his ratings system was the lesser evil. Valenti was not just a businessmen and politician - he was also a star, a celebrity with his own commemorative star on the Walk of Fame. According to his successor as president of the MPAA, Dan Glickman, he was 'the ultimate leading man'. Steven Spielberg considers Valenti as the greatest ambassador Hollywood ever had, the 'giant voice of reason [...] in a sometimes unreasonable business'. Safe to say, good or bad, Valenti will be missed.