

# MAN IN HOLLYWOOD

Can the legacy of the Nixon White House be as sordid? Yes, MATTHEW TYRNAUER discovers: in Oliver Stone's certainly controversial American History 2, Hopkins resurrects a Macbeth-like president who mixes pills and booze, prostitutes his politics, and is haunted by his role in the assassination of J.E.K.



## H. R. HALDEMAN AND JOHN EHRLICHMAN

James Woods and J. T. Walsh play (respectively) the president's chief of staff and domestic-policy adviser. Haldeman and Ehrlichman were both forced to resign in April 1973. They each served 18 months in prison for conspiracy and perjury.

It starts right where it all began to unravel. The title on the screen: JUNE 17, 1972. THE WATERGATE HOTEL. Burglars in suits, wearing surgical gloves, carrying cameras. File drawers are rifled at the Democratic National Committee. The voice of G. Gordon Liddy: "Remember—listen up! . . . Leave your radios on *at all times*. . . . No IDs, no credit cards. We rendezvous. . . . Howard Johnson's. Room 214 . . . at zero three hundred." Cut.

Fade in to the White House at night. November 1973. A light is on in a second-story window. In the Lincoln parlor, a figure sits alone in the shadows, a tumbler of scotch by his side, a bottle of pills spilled on a desk. A Uher tape recorder on a side table is reeling, playing a barely audible tape.

THE PRESIDENT

They did what!? . . . Why'd they go into O'Brien's office in the first place?

H. R. HALDEMAN

Evidently to install bugs. . . .

THE PRESIDENT

If Mitchell'd been minding the store instead of that *nut* Martha, we wouldn't have that kid Magruder runnin' some third-rate burglary! Was he smoking pot?

This, fellow Americans, is *Nixon*. *Un film*, unmistakably, *de* Oliver Stone. Starring Sir Anthony Hopkins, who, with just a bad suit, fake hair, and false teeth, virtually reanimates the unindicted co-conspirator. Joan Allen co-stars as an eerie Xerox of Pat. And playing the president's men: James Woods as Haldeman, J. T. Walsh as John Ehrlichman, Paul Sorvino as Henry Kissinger, and Ed Harris as E. Howard Hunt. Stone himself, our leading deranger of National Gospel, will certainly be omnipresent this December, when the film is released, eager to answer all charges of narrative sacrilege.

With memories of *JFK* only partially negated by Jackie O's death, the prospect of a \$42 million Stoned version of Richard Nixon's life gives pause. What could *possibly* be done to further scandalize or embellish the 37th president's story, to make it more appalling (ergo, appealing) than, say, the CD-ROM version of *The Haldeman Diaries*?

Stone says that his movie, which was filmed on regal sets that duplicate the Nixon-era White House, "plays out like a classical tragedy." And Sir Anthony assures that *Nixon* "is by no means an assassination job" on the president. However, Joe Roth, the chairman of Disney Motion Pictures Group, made



## OLIVER'S TWIST

Director Oliver Stone sees  
Richard Nixon as  
"a giant of a tragic figure in  
the classical tradition.  
Humble origins, rising to the top,  
finally crashing down in  
a heap of hubris."  
*Opposite:* Sir Anthony Hopkins  
as Nixon—graceless,  
small-shouldered, flashing his  
awkward victory salute.

Photographs by MICHAEL O'NEILL



## JOHN MITCHELL

Nixon's devoted political ally, portrayed by E. G. Marshall, served as attorney general until 1972, when he assumed the chairmanship of the Committee to Re-elect the President (CREEP). Mitchell was a war hero who had commanded the young J.F.K. and was Nixon's closest contemporary in his White House inner circle. For his role in the Watergate cover-up, he served 19 months in prison.

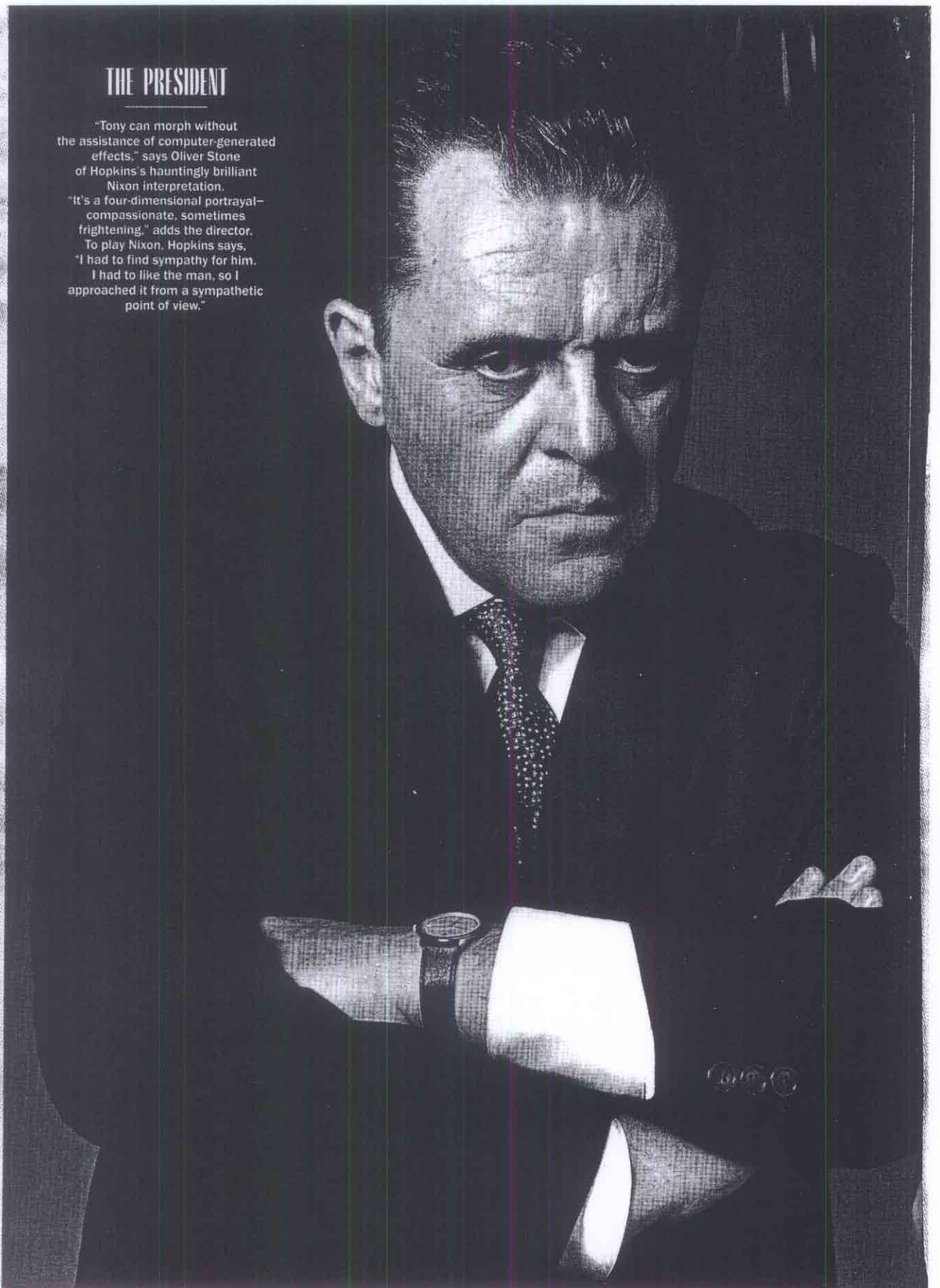
"If Mitchell'd been minding the store, we wouldn't have some 'third-rate burglary!'"

## THE PRESIDENT

"Tony can morph without the assistance of computer-generated effects," says Oliver Stone of Hopkins's hauntingly brilliant Nixon interpretation.

"It's a four-dimensional portrayal—compassionate, sometimes frightening," adds the director. To play Nixon, Hopkins says, "I had to find sympathy for him.

I had to like the man, so I approached it from a sympathetic point of view."





"Nixon sought love from the masses, but he had trouble giving love to his wife."

## THE FIRST LADY

Joan Allen plays Pat Nixon. "Evidently on the day of the resignation Pat was heard yelling at the president, 'You ruined my life!'" says Hopkins. Though this scene will not be included in the film, the marriage is portrayed as difficult and cold. "Nixon sought love from the masses," says Stone, "but he had trouble giving love to his wife."



## E. HOWARD HUNT

Ed Harris plays the former C.I.A. operative, White House "Plumber," and one of the coordinators of the Watergate break-in, whom Nixon agreed to bribe with "hush money."



## G. GORDON LIDDY

John Diehl plays the former lawyer and F.B.I. agent who helped orchestrate the Watergate break-ins. For his role in Watergate (and conspiring to raid Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office), Liddy served more than 52 months behind bars. Recently, Liddy made headlines when he announced that he practiced shooting at stick figures named "Bill" and "Hillary."

...ay didn't ...



## MARTHA MITCHELL

Madeline Kahn plays the vociferous, alcoholic wife of Attorney General John Mitchell.

"Pat can't stand her," Nixon tells Mitchell (who ultimately separated from his Arkansas belle) in the film. Martha's habit of making late-night phone calls to the press caused unfounded speculation that she died from something other than cancer.

## JOHN DEAN

Nixon's White House counsel is played by David Hyde Pierce. On June 25, 1973, as his beautiful wife, Maureen, basked in the television lights, Dean read a 245-page brief to Sam Ervin's Watergate Committee accusing the president and his closest advisers of perpetuating the Watergate cover-up. Dean served four months in prison and went on to author *Blind Ambition*.



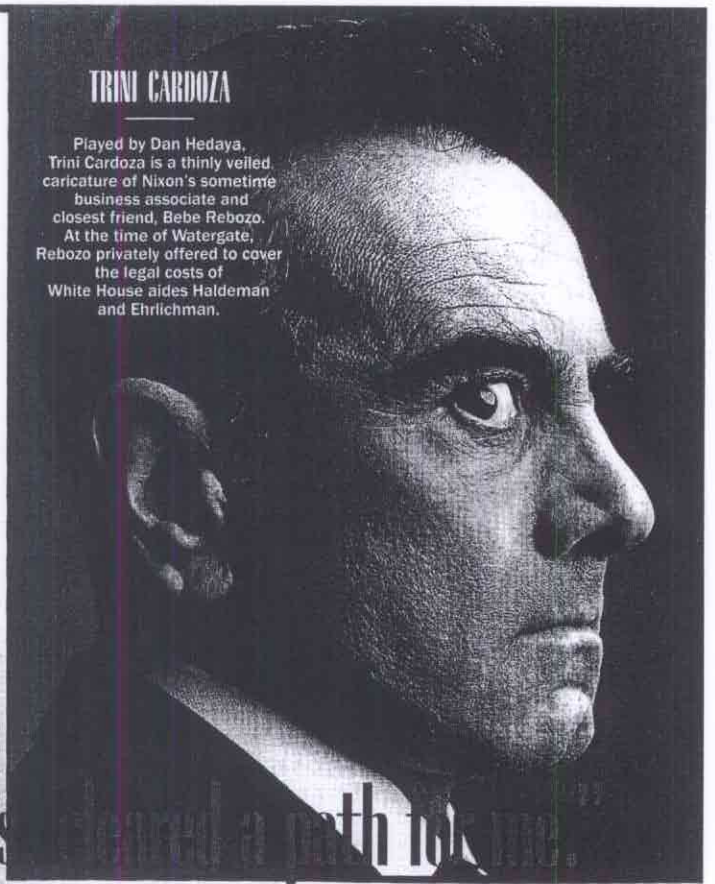
## JACK JONES

Larry Hagman plays a fictional Texas oilman, a composite character, who tries to persuade Nixon to run against J.F.K. in 1964. In the film (and Stone swears this happened) Nixon attends a party near Dallas on November 21, 1963. The next morning, he departs from Love Field just as Kennedy's plane lands. "Wherever Nixon was in his life and career, J.F.K. was just around the corner," says Stone.



## TRINI CARDOZA

Played by Dan Hedaya, Trini Cardoza is a thinly veiled caricature of Nixon's sometime business associate and closest friend, Bebe Rebozo. At the time of Watergate, Rebozo privately offered to cover the legal costs of White House aides Haldeman and Ehrlichman.

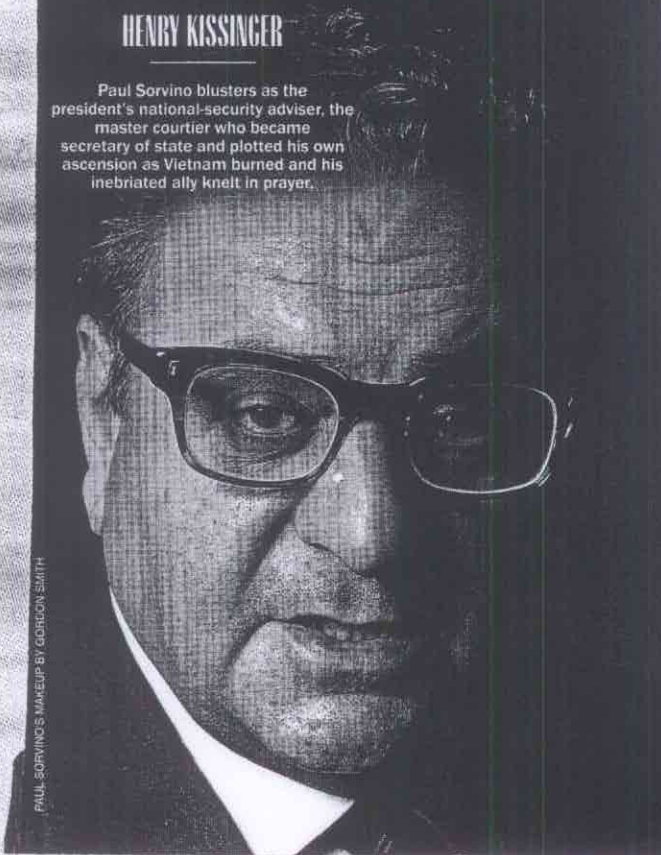


"Vietnam, the Kennedys

...path to

## HENRY KISSINGER

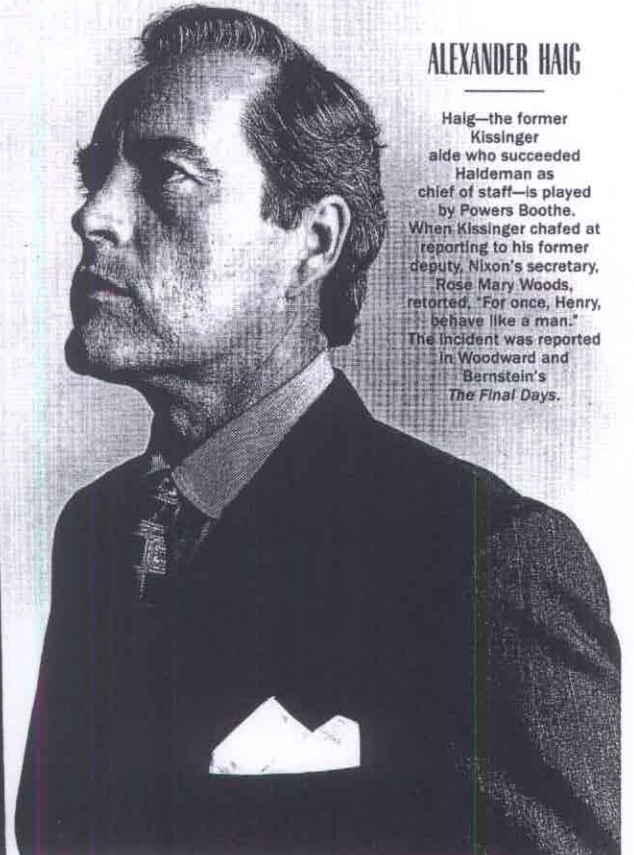
Paul Sorvino blusters as the president's national-security adviser, the master courtier who became secretary of state and plotted his own ascension as Vietnam burned and his inebriated ally knelt in prayer.



PAUL SORVINO'S MAKEUP BY GABRIEL SMITH

## ALEXANDER HAIG

Haig—the former Kissinger aide who succeeded Haldeman as chief of staff—is played by Powers Boothe. When Kissinger chafed at reporting to his former deputy, Nixon's secretary, Rose Mary Woods, retorted, "For once, Henry, behave like a man." The incident was reported in Woodward and Bernstein's *The Final Days*.





## J. Edgar Hoover and Clyde Tolson

it clear that he would not have risked a single Mickey Mouse dropping on a political biopic (box-office poison as a genre) unless it was *especially* controversial.

So it appears that Stone has been given new license to—in the approximate words of his protagonist—*sock it to us*.

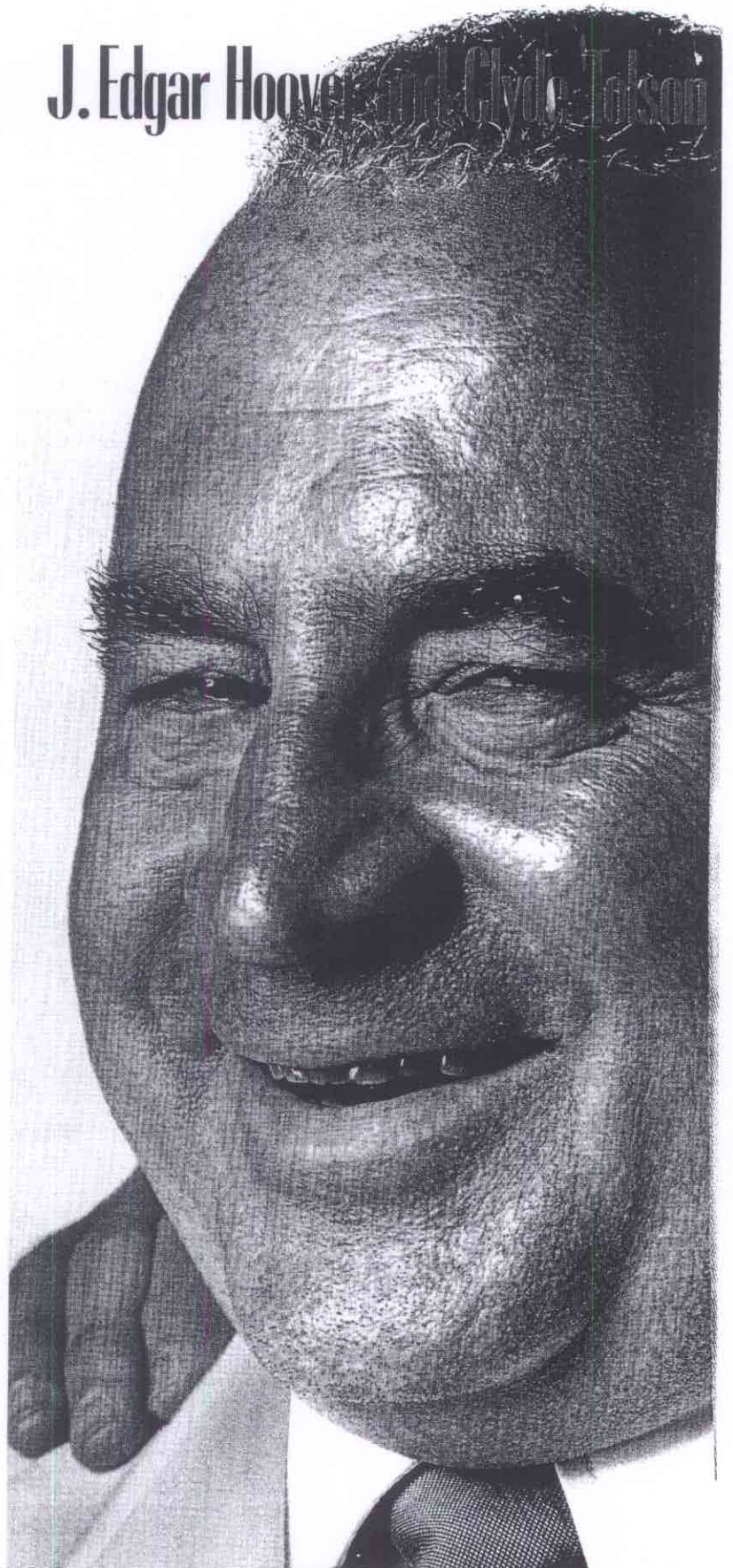
A draft of the screenplay, “based,” according to a disclaimer, “on incomplete historical findings,” provides brier patches of nasty Nixonia on virtually every page. We see a president who liberally mixes pills with drink, and conservatively mixes prostitutes with politics. Here is a tragic leader haunted, Macbeth-like, by visions of blood—even at the dinner table, where he is plagued by a steak oozing blood. Too much blood. “Death paved the way, didn’t it?” R.N. says to Haldeman. “Vietnam. The Kennedys. It cleared a path through the wilderness for me. Over the bodies . . .”

Other expected highlights: J. Edgar Hoover (Bob Hoskins) and Clyde Tolson (Brian Bedford) cavort with a boy named Joaquin *après* a steam bath; Pat threatens to leave Dick right before the “last press conference” in ’62, the point at which their union became chaste; Martha Mitchell (Madelaine Kahn), smashed, chides R.N. in the early 60s for being a political flop.

But the real *Nightline* fodder is Stone’s assertion that Nixon, as vice president, was deeply involved in Track 2, a C.I.A. plot to kill Fidel Castro, and that elements of Track 2—mobsters, Cuban émigrés, the C.I.A.—may have stayed in contact and played a role in the assassination of J.F.K.

This bend, effectively, makes *Nixon* a sequel to *JFK*, or *JFK Lie*. (A notion R.N. would have hated.) Historians are guaranteed to get the vapors. But surely all the hysteria will be for naught. If *JFK* taught us anything, it’s that even 188 minutes of a brilliant Oliver Stone film cannot overpower the 8-mm. frames of Abraham Zapruder. And even though half of the people portrayed on these pages are dead and nearly forgotten, history has already shown that no force is strong enough to overpower R.M.N.

As Gore Vidal once put it, “We are Nixon; he is us.” □



cavort with a boy named Joaquin *apres* a steam bath

**J. EDGAR HOOVER  
AND  
CLYDE TOLSON**

Bob Hoskins plays the F.B.I. chief and Brian Bedford plays his assistant and longtime companion. Throughout Nixon's career, Hoover was both an ally and a threat, as the president was terrified of what the F.B.I. director had gathered on him and secreted away in his files. Stone portrays Hoover and Tolson as a diabolical couple.

BOB HOSKINS' MAKEUP BY GORDON