

Post 1/31/96

Henry Kissinger is right ["Stone's Nixon," op-ed, Jan. 24]. "Nixon" is not history. It is a dramatic portrait set against a historical landscape, a film that attempts to interpret a life, to get at the tragedy of a man who shaped an era the historical truth of which remains unsettled. And this latter fact is due in part, at least, to Henry Kissinger's continuing efforts to revise and reinterpret his own role in that period.

The doctor declares that I "thrash between the Nixon of [my] preconceptions and the Nixon [I] encountered in [my] research," producing a "host of inaccuracies." He then parades these heinous errors, which range from our using Pat Nixon's youthful nickname, Buddy, to our depicting Dr. Kissinger holding a cigar. If Dr. Kissinger can find nothing more substantial than this to accuse me of, I ought to feel vindicated indeed.

But there is a greater truth here that Dr. Kissinger wishes to cover up. He argues that Nixon inherited a "real and not imaginary" problem in the American public's judgment "that, as fought, the Vietnam War was unwinnable." According to even so sympathetic a Nixon biographer as Stephen Ambrose, this was not only the public's judgment—it was Nixon's as well. Mr.

Stone's Kissinger

Ambrose states that as early as January 1969, Nixon knew the war could not be won. If that is the case, then fully half of the names on the Vietnam Memorial are those of Americans who died despite that knowledge.

I suspect that Dr. Kissinger must have known it, too. Yet both he and President Nixon continued for years to prosecute an unwinnable war, while actively lying to the public about their hopes and aims. For this very reason Dr. Kissinger was furious when Daniel Ellsberg published the Pentagon Papers, which threatened to expose those lies, and he argued in the grossest language that the reputation of his former colleague should be ruined in retaliation.

I was a wounded and decorated combat infantryman who volunteered for the war. I do not forget or forgive the deaths of friends that resulted from the Nixon-Kissinger war policy, nor do I forget that Dr. Kissinger accepted his Nobel Peace Prize in the shadow of the savage Christmas bombing of Hanoi, and with the deaths of those young men and women on his head.

Dr. Kissinger derides as simplistic the "yearning" of a young student in the film that the war be stopped, implying with characteristic hubris that for

reasons of practical politics beyond herken it could not have been. Yet, given that Nixon knew the war could not be won, the politics that forced him and Dr. Kissinger to continue it were "beast-like," as we suggest in our film. This was a beast that was nourished as much by the demons in Richard Nixon as by the Machiavellian geopolitics of Henry Kissinger.

It is never the Nixons or Nobel laureates who pay the price of grand global politics: It is the simplistic, "yearning" youths who believe those statesmen even when they lie. Yet at some point those youths—millions of them—saw through the Nixon-Kissinger posturings, ceased to believe their lies and helped force an end to their forlorn war. And it is clear from his article that Dr. Kissinger still wishes to malign them.

Dr. Kissinger dismisses our metaphor of "the Beast," yet by his continued collusion in an unwinnable war, he served its purposes. Though I mourn those young lives that were lost, I am glad, as Richard Nixon says in the film, that "history depends on who writes it." I should not wish Dr. Kissinger to have that field to himself.

OLIVER STONE
Los Angeles