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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Treat 'Nixon' as a movie — not history — and judge it as art

Barbara Shulgasser missed the whole point of "Nixon" ("Oliver Stone plays fast and loose with the truth," Arts & Ideas, Jan. 7). It's a movie, not a documentary. We moviegoers are not so innocent as she thinks and are quite capable of distinguishing celluloid from reality.

With each of his films, Stone has attempted to analyze what's gone wrong in America. This time he articulates it in the Lincoln Memorial scene (an encounter, according to witnesses, that actually happened) where Nixon and a young protester realize that democracy has been replaced by oligarchy ("the system").

Shulgasser is too intellectually nearsighted to realize that, like most journalists, she's merely a puppet of that oligarchy. Thank God she wasn't around to review Shakespeare's "Richard III" or Verdi's "Don Carlo." Time, not provincial critics, will decide the artistic value of "Nixon."

DON ELKE
Berkeley

Apparently Barbara Shulgasser is being facetious when she castigates Oliver Stone for lying, in his film "Nixon," to "innocent movie goers ... people who believe that Sharon Stone would have sex with Michael Douglas." However, she also apparently believes this to some extent, exposing an irritating supposition behind much criticism of this film.

Shulgasser and her fellow media mavens — film critics and political pundits alike — really think we moviegoers are idiots. They think we'll watch "Nixon" and blindly accept everything in it as gospel truth rather than as an interesting riff on current history.

They also seem to think Stone is the first artist ever to commit the shocking sin of twisting history to serve his artistic purposes. Right. And Julius

Caesar, Marc Antony and Cleopatra spoke in Shakespearean English.

It would be nice if movie critics would confine themselves to critiquing Stone's movie-making skills rather than his personality or politics. And if indeed there are people who take what they see in "Nixon" and other movies as fact, take them to task for their gullibility.

STEVE OMLID
San Francisco

I am one of those "gullible moviegoers" whom critic Barbara Shulgasser spent most of what was supposed to be a review of Oliver Stone's "Nixon" lampooning and lambasting. She attacks Stone for showing Richard Nixon in Dallas the morning of President Kennedy's assassination and asks whether Nixon was checking that Lee Harvey Oswald was at his post or just getting some barbecue to go?

After conducting legal business for which he ostensibly came to Dallas on Nov. 21, 1963, Nixon held a press con-

ference at which he urged the citizens of Dallas to give "a courteous reception" to Kennedy when he arrived the next day.

Nixon was at the airport in Dallas on the morning of Nov. 22, 1963, when Kennedy arrived. Nixon was airborne at 12:30 p.m., giving him the perfect alibi.

Since all this information is readily available in even the poorest Nixon biography, Shulgasser has demonstrated that she is as inept a historian as she is a critic. This is a movie, not a documentary, and should be reviewed as a movie. The critic should refrain from smug remarks about members of the audience who, if they are like me, said, "How interesting!" not to Stone's accurate portrayal of Nixon's presence in Dallas but to Shulgasser's column and her demonstration that those whom she laughingly derided might turn out to be considerably more knowledgeable than she.

DAVID BOYD
San Francisco

