

'JFK': Good but wrong?

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Oliver Stone's new film "JFK" about President Kennedy's assassination won mostly good reviews Friday from film critics, who called it a gripping tale. But debate raged over just how tall that tale is.

Many prominent journalists and film reviewers contend Stone has fudged facts, invented characters and elevated speculation to truth to support his burning belief that the killing was a high-level conspiracy.

"'JFK' is not just an entertainment, it's a work of propaganda," Newsweek said this week in a cover story headlined: "The Twisted Truth of 'JFK.'"

The film premiered Thursday night to a select crowd in Dallas and opened nationally Friday. Stone went on ABC-TV's "Nightline" on Thursday night and defended the film.

Among the harshest criticism was from *New York Times* columnist Tom Wicker, who covered the Kennedy assassination for the paper. Wicker lambasted Stone in a Dec. 15 piece titled: "Does J.F.K. Conspire Against Reason?"

Wicker accused Stone of fabrication and lies through omission to assert Stone's "one true faith about Nov. 22, 1963" — that a fascist conspiracy was behind Kennedy's death and a Warren Commission cover-up,

making Lee Harvey Oswald a patsy and corrupting democracy.

"He uses the powerful instrument of a motion picture, and relies on stars of the entertainment world, to propagate the one true faith — even though that faith, if widely accepted, would be contemptuous of the very Constitutional government Mr. Stone's film purports to uphold," wrote Wicker.

The controversy actually may help boost the film's box-office fortunes. Because "JFK" has been so widely discussed and argued over, industry analysts expect the epic to debut strongly this weekend.

Stone, long used to controversy from his films "Platoon," "Wall Street," and "Born on the Fourth of July," responded by blasting his critics on the op-ed page of Wicker's own newspaper Friday.

He singled out Wicker and other political journalists, saying, "I think what is clear from their efforts to destroy my film's credibility is that history may be too important to leave to newsmen."