

The Insider (1999)

Rating M (for language)

Hollywood Jesus: <http://www.hollywoodjesus.com/insider.htm>

IMDB: <http://imdb.com/title/tt0140352/>

Directed by

Michael Mann

Writing credits (WGA)

Marie Brenner (article)

Eric Roth (written by)

Cast overview, first billed only:

Al Pacino

Russell Crowe

Christopher Plummer

Diane Venora

Philip Baker Hall

Lindsay Crouse

Also Known As:

60 Minutes (USA) (pre-release title)

Man of the People (USA) (working title)

The Untitled Tobacco Project (USA) (working title)

Untitled Michael Mann Film (USA) (working title)

Runtime: 157 min

Country: USA

Language: English / Japanese / Arabic

Color: Color

Synopsis

(based on a Vanity Fair article, 'The Man Who Knew Too Much')

The Insider traces the story of Geoffrey Wigand (Russell Crowe), unexpectedly dismissed from his job as a tobacco industry executive. He was gradually persuaded by Lowell Bergman (Al Pacino) from the CBS '60 Minutes' team to 'blow the whistle' on the company despite a confidentiality agreement, to call them to account for blatantly lying that cigarettes are not addictive and do not cause unhealthy side-effects. He should know - he had been in charge of development and research. The tobacco industry went into battle to protect their profitability and avoid liability, and were prepared to do whatever was necessary to suppress and marginalise any action against them. Wigand is caught up between two powerful giants - the media and tobacco companies. He becomes a victim of a smear campaign, a pawn in the 'big boys' game, assaulted psychologically and financially, with a devastating impact on his life and marriage. The overall themes of the film include big business ethics, greed, corruption, moral dilemmas, journalistic integrity, and freedom of the press. It's an intriguing, investigative movie.

Group discussion

- What are the issues raised in the film?
- Reflecting on the lives - individual and collective - depicted in the film, what biblical stories and gospel values/truths engage with the film's story?
- What insights do we gain into contemporary society, and the human condition?

Who controls truth?

What is truth? Can we really know 'truth' in the media when they are controlled by a small number of players, each with their own interests to protect? Who decides what we see and read and who shapes what we think? What stories are not told - and why? Whose voices are heard in the media - and on what basis? (The voice of the church is often marginalised in public debates, including by politicians and public identities). In the film, the CBS legal eagles seek to control Wigand's story. The Catch 22 situation is wonderful - if Wigand has lied, CBS can't be sued. If he has told the truth, they can be sued. The more truthful he has been, the more likely they are to be sued. There are countless examples of 'truth' being manipulated in the interests of the rich and powerful. Discuss.

Discredit and disparage as a technique to suppress voices

To speak out about truth publicly is to expose oneself to scrutiny of all aspects of one's life - public and private. It is a brilliant ploy because everyone has clay feet, everyone has a 'past' of some kind. Geoffrey Wigand had a story to tell, but all the trivial dirt in his life was dug up in order to discredit him - and therefore his story. Public ignorance and fear becomes a powerful tool for the scaremongers and those who seek to control and retain power. What other examples come to mind? Discuss.

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