



Para ver *O informante*

Embora baseado em fatos reais, *O informante*, filme que você vai ver na quarta-feira à tarde, é uma criação artística. Não é uma reportagem. Evite vê-lo, portanto, como um “retrato fiel da realidade”. Para a discussão que faremos a seguir, às 19 horas, não nos interessa muito a realidade à qual o filme se refere. Nós não vamos usar *The Insider* para debater a conduta da ABC News ou para avaliar o heroísmo do repórter Lowell Bergman. A fita é útil para nós não por retratar um episódio verídico de forma fidedigna, mas por apresentar com bastante força alguns dos mais graves dilemas éticos da profissão. Poderia ser um filme de pura ficção – e teria para nós praticamente a mesma serventia.

Durante a sessão, procure fixar-se nos problemas éticos, e não nas pessoas. Vá anotando as passagens que parecem ser decisivas para você. Onde há conflitos de interesse? Quando a resistência individual preserva o interesse do cidadão? Em que momentos o poder dos conglomerados conspiram contra a democracia? O que vale mais: a amizade ou a verdade? O interesse público ou a manutenção do casamento?

As questões são muitas. A vantagem de discuti-las a partir de um filme cujos personagens não fazem parte do cotidiano brasileiro é justamente o distanciamento. Como não temos envolvimento direto com a história e com as pessoas retratadas, é mais fácil olhar criticamente as situações e evitar o maniqueísmo e as condenações moralistas.

A ética é um tema complexo, cheio de sutilezas, ambigüidades, encruzilhadas; não é algo que se resolva apenas no embate entre o certo e o errado. Não por acaso, cada vez mais o debate ético se ocupa de escolhas que temos de fazer entre duas alternativas igualmente justas e boas, *entre o certo e o certo*. Aí, já não há mocinhos e bandidos; há apenas seres falíveis, normais, buscando o melhor fundamento para suas escolhas. A qualidade do jornalismo contemporâneo depende da qualidade dessas escolhas.

Fora tudo isso, o filme não é ruim. Será um respiro durante o curso. Bom proveito.

TOWNWITHOUTpity

WITH *THE INSIDER*, MICHAEL MANN, AL PACINO, AND RUSSELL CROWE MAKE THE CASE AGAINST BIG TOBACCO, CBS, AND *60 MINUTES*. BUT THE QUESTION IS, CAN AMERICA HANDLE THE TRUTH? BY SEAN M. SMITH



Three Angry Men

RUSSELL CROWE WANTS THIS ON THE record: "People raise their eyebrows and say, 'So, what was it like to work with Michael Mann?' And I feel like saying, 'Fuck you, buddy. You've got no idea.'"

Mann, who directed *Heat* and *The Last of the Mobicars*, is known for being exacting to the point of obsessiveness. Not even the most minute detail—from the lighting on an actor's tie to the reflection in a picture frame to the type of paper clips that bind a stack of documents—escapes his scrutiny. This ambition toward controlled perfection has earned him a reputation for being difficult. But Crowe thinks the naysayers should just piss off. "Michael has a huge heart," the Australian actor says. "He never lies to you. He never short-changes you intellectually. He does what he says he's going to do, because he's a mensch."

And that made him the ideal man to direct *The Insider*. In fact, it may have made him the only man who could.

Based on a 1996 *Vanity Fair* article and co-written by Mann and Eric Roth (*Forrest Gump*), the film recounts the story of how Lowell Bergman (Al Pacino), a veteran *60 Minutes* producer, persuaded Dr. Jeffrey Wigand (Crowe), a former tobacco-company executive, to reveal the alleged unethical practices of the \$50 billion industry. But CBS, fearing a multi-billion-dollar lawsuit, initially forbade *60 Minutes* from broadcasting the incendiary interview. And the two men discovered that they were each other's only allies in their battles against separate, but disturbingly similar, corporations.

This is not, in the parlance of the industry, a sexy pitch. Indeed, it's a complicated, fact-packed, \$60 million-plus movie with an anti-establishment theme. That the ultra-establishment Disney, of all studios, decided to finance the film would be surprising if it weren't for the much greater surprise that anyone made it at all. But what saves *The Insider* from feeling like a homework assignment is that at its heart, it is



Top, from left, Mann, Pacino, and Crowe on the set; above, tobacco whistleblower Dr. Jeffrey Wigand. "Heroes are men whose flaws you can read," Crowe says.

an American parable of friendship and honor and angry men driven to tell the truth, whatever the cost. The same can be said of the men who made it. "My objective was to bring people into the intense immediacy of these two lives," Mann says. "You don't have to impute drama to this. If someone says to me, 'You guys have



Clockwise from above, *60 Minutes* correspondent Mike Wallace, who was not pleased by his portrayal in the original script; actor Christopher Plummer as the veteran newsmen; Mann carts his own camera; *60 Minutes* executive producer Don Hewitt. "We knew it was futile to take on the corporation," Hewitt says. "But we lived to fight another day."

Hollywood eyes for drama... 'Bullshit. The human experience was searing for these people.'

In the fall of 1995, Mann was finishing post-production on *Heat*, and Bergman was fighting the battle of his career. The two men had met in 1989, at the urging of a mutual friend. "He said, 'Do you know Lowell Bergman?'" Mann says. "He said, 'He has the same fucked-up politics as you do. I don't know why you guys don't know each other.'" Over the years, Mann and Bergman discussed Bergman's work, battling about stories that might make good film fodder. In 1994, they found one. But neither of them realized it at the time.

In the spring of 1993, Dr. Jeffrey Wigand, the head of research and development at Brown & Williamson, the third-largest tobacco company in the United States, was fired from his \$300,000-a-year job for refusing to toe the company line. Around this time, Bergman received a box of confidential technical documents from Philip Morris and began looking for someone to decipher them. The two men would not meet for another year, when Wigand's world had already begun to unravel.

Unable to find another job, Wigand reportedly complained to a friend at B&W about his



severance package, which included medical coverage for his chronically ill daughter but was insufficient to maintain his way of life. But by airing his gripe, Wigand had apparently violated his extensive confidentiality agreement with B&W, one that forbade him from discussing anything about the company. Several months later, B&W filed a breach of contract suit against Wigand that threatened to sever his medical coverage. The company's attempt to silence him backfired. "If they'd just given him a million dollars, he would have gone away," Crowe says. "But when they started to threaten him, and by extension his family, what kind of situation was he in? He firmly believed that the only way to protect himself was to tell the truth."



When Bergman and Wigand finally met—covertly—in February 1994, in a hotel lobby in Louisville, Kentucky, Wigand, needing the money, agreed to serve as a paid consultant on Bergman's Philip Morris story. "Theirs was an unlikely relationship," screenwriter Eric Roth says. "Wigand was essentially a company man, a gun owner, and Lowell was this guy from the '60s who'd lived in communes, and still lives in Berkeley." In the months ahead, Wigand would be persuaded to tell all on *60 Minutes*. As his reward, he'd lose his home, family, and reputation.

Getting Wigand's testimony was one of the biggest scoops of Bergman's 14-year tenure at *60 Minutes*. Working extensively with Mike Wallace, Bergman had landed some of the most controversial interviews in the program's history. But Wigand was the highest-ranking tobacco executive yet to blow the whistle on the industry's practices, and it came on the heels of top executives from the seven-largest tobacco companies testifying before Congress that they believed nicotine was not addictive.

But in the fall of 1995, CBS revealed it was concerned that the Wigand interview would expose the network to a multi-billion-dollar lawsuit. *60 Minutes* had paid Wigand \$12,000 to decipher the Philip Morris documents, and it had agreed to indemnify Wigand against any libel suits brought against him as a result of the interview. This gave the appearance that the newsmagazine had paid a source. And CBS

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lawyers feared that because of this, B&W could sue CBS for "tortious interference," alleging that the network had induced Wigand to violate his confidentiality agreement.

As Bergman saw it, however, the lawsuit would've threatened a proposed merger between CBS and Westinghouse Electric Corp., which was expected to (and in fact, did) earn CBS shareholders, including its general counsel, millions of dollars. *60 Minutes* executive producer Don Hewitt sided with the corporation and agreed to broadcast the story without Wigand's interview. "The riskiest and hardest thing to do, particularly in television news, is an enterprise story about a Fortune 500 company that is not

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to the meetings we had with the lawyers. He did raise the issue of the merger in one meeting, but that was about it." As the November 12 broadcast date neared, Wallace returned to Bergman's defense and fought to get Wigand's interview on the air. But to no avail.

"In any institution, things happen that you don't agree with, and generally speaking, you

positive," Bergman says. "The Vietnam war, Watergate, the Pentagon Papers, they're all fair game, but you cannot do a critical profile about a billionaire." Determined to fight the decision, Bergman expected Wallace to back him up. He didn't. Bergman says.

"Mike and I were friends," Bergman says. "So I was very disappointed in his reaction



Pacino (top) as Bergman (above). "There's a form of censorship going on," Bergman says. Disney chairman Joe Roth (opposite) backed Mann.

rationalize and say, 'I'll live for another day,'" Bergman says. "But it was [Hewitt's and Wallace's] behavior in relation to this, and Mike's using our personal relationship to try and keep me in line—combined with the reality of the situation—that caused me to make certain decisions that I had never made before."

That included leaking to *The New York Times* the story of why *60 Minutes* had killed the interview, and discussing with Mann and with Disney executive vice-president (and *PREMIERE* founding editor) Susan Lyne what he was going through. "Susan was the first person who said, 'I think what's going on with you and Wigand is a movie.' I said [sarcastically], 'Yeah. Right.'" But Mann agreed. "The conflicts were large-scale, and the material promised the availability of an intimate human story in a context of very large issues," Mann says. "These men were in a crisis, kind of a crucible, and they had to make choices that were going to change their lives, one way or another."

By May 1996, *60 Minutes* had finally aired



the Wigand interview, Bergman had asked to leave the newsmagazine, Marie Brenner had published the full story in *Vanity Fair*, and Lyne had snapped up the film rights. At this point, the staunchly independent Mann signed a first-look deal at Disney. "I'd never had an overall deal anywhere before," Mann says. "And the only reason I had this one was because [chairman] Joe Roth was at Disney." Roth oversaw Mann's *Mohicans* when the executive headed 20th Century Fox, and the two men respected each other. "I knew that Michael would not glamorize the characters and would present them with all their neuroses and foibles," Roth says. "I knew he would be a stickler for authenticity, and be willing to paint the picture in its true colors."

But the truth is dangerous. Although Mann and Eric Roth made minor adjustments in chronology and invented some extraneous dialogue, they adhered to the facts in such detail that Mann can, when asked, open any of the many black three-ring binders lining his office shelves and recite the source material for any scene. And that makes more than a few people nervous.

Brown & Williamson has sent at least one cautionary letter to Disney. "They haven't seen the film," Joe Roth says. "What has been interpreted to me by the lawyers is their concern over how we have portrayed the level of threat they posed to Jeffrey Wigand." And when Mike Wallace learned that the film might cast him in an unflattering light, he went ballistic—and public.

In both the *Los Angeles Times* and *Brill's Content*, Wallace has protested that the screenplay portrays him unfairly. Mann and Roth agreed to a few early script changes at Wallace's request, namely cutting the use of Walter Cronkite as a punch line, and deleting a fictionalized scene in which Wallace, played by Christopher Plummer, seems more concerned about the quality of his hotel suite than about his interview with an alleged terrorist. But the element that Wallace could not get excised

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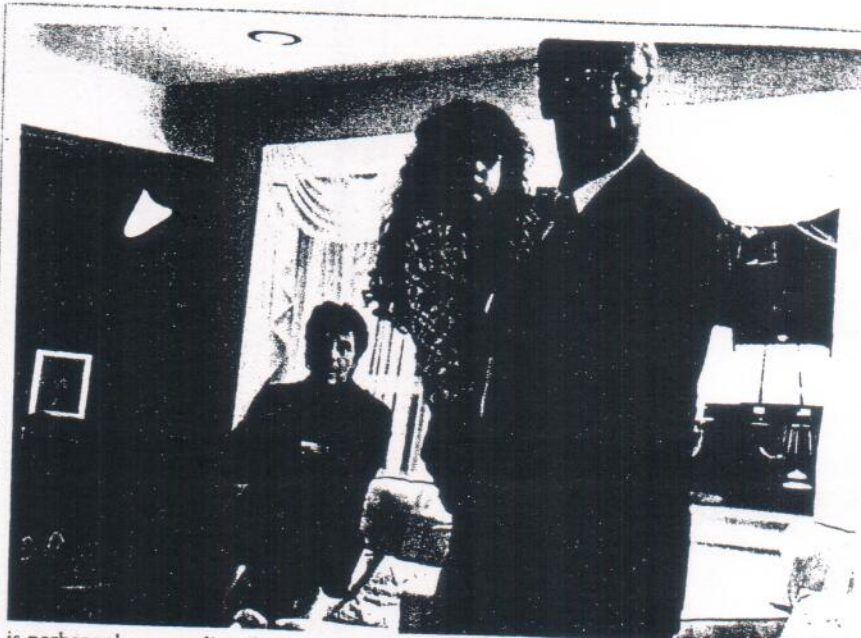
is perhaps the most disturbing: that he initially placed corporate concerns over the First Amendment. "When the chips were down, he made the wrong decision," Bergman says. "At *60 Minutes* the producer sits in the editing room and takes out all the correspondent's glitches so he never makes a mistake on the air. Mike wants me to edit the public record, and I can't do that for him."

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lance; I've watched him my whole life," Mann says. "But this motion picture is not about Mike Wallace, and I don't care to see what we did being hijacked into an issue about public image and vanity."

What they have done is create an important film, one that examines the threat to freedom of expression in an era of corporate-owned media. In this sense, it is a descendant of *All the President's Men*, *The China Syndrome*, and *Judgment at Nuremberg*—films that, in their time, sought to awaken the sleeping giant of American consciousness.

But *The Insider* is perhaps braver than any



"I had to be able to look in the mirror and see 'Wigand,'" says Crowe (above), with Pacino (rear), as Bergman, and daughter Hallie Kate Eisenberg.

of its predecessors precisely because Mann has not glamorized the truth. It is easy to imagine another director casting, say, Tom Cruise and Edward Norton in the roles of Bergman and Wigand, just to make the film a safer commercial bet. Indeed, it's doubtful that *All the President's Men* would have been a hit had Robert Redford and Dustin Hoffman actually looked like Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein (no offense, gentlemen). Yet, the strapping then-34-year-old Crowe packed on 35 pounds, shaved back his hairline, and endured the daily application of wrinkles and liver spots to his skin to play the 52-year-old Wigand. And neither he nor Pacino shied away from revealing their characters' less attractive qualities. "We've been programmed to accept the bloke in the white hat as the hero and the bloke in the black hat as the bad guy," Crowe says. "That's absolutely not the reality of the human condition." And capturing the reality of the human condition was absolutely Mann's ambition.

When Crowe arrived in Mann's office to read for the role of Wigand, the actor wasn't sure he was the right man for the part. Halfway through their meeting, Crowe stopped. "Michael, I think you're being a bit silly," he said. "There are plenty of 50-year-olds who would knock this out of the park." Sitting across from him, Mann stared at the actor for a few moments. "I'm not talking to you because of your age," he said finally, leaning forward and placing his finger in the center of Crowe's chest. "I'm talking to you because of what you've got in here."

All that remains to be seen is whether America is mensch enough to handle it.

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