

Film Title: *Tucker: The Man and His Dream*

Director: Francis Ford Coppola

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Principal Players: Preston Tucker, founder of the Tucker Motor Company--Jeff Bridges; Abe, Tucker's financial officer-Martin Landau

Genre: Business history, biography

Exact Segment: Track 13, fast forward to scene of Tucker entering courthouse; stop in Track 14 when Tucker leaves Abe and enters one of his cars

Exact Segment Length: 22:11

Exact Segment Start: 3:00 into Track 13

Exact Segment End: 11:16 into Track 14

Synopsis: Preston Tucker, entrepreneur and founder of Tucker Motor Company, is tried for securities fraud. The trial raises the question of idealism versus practicality. Although the film depicts Tucker as a hero, the facts revealed during the trial and his statements immediately after the trial indicate a more ambiguous character.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, justice, politics, business-government relationship

Setting the Stage: Preston Tucker has designed and built "the car of the future" in 1948, a car featuring seatbelts, safety glass, fuel injection, and other innovations years ahead of their time. Tucker has accused the Big Three auto makers of sabotaging his production plans while he was busy promoting the car and selling stock in his new company. Now Tucker's company has collapsed and he is on trial for selling stock and dealerships for a car that he never produced.

Description of Events in Segment: The scene begins with Tucker entering the courthouse for his trial. The prosecution presents witnesses who paid for dealerships and auditors who claim Tucker used much of the \$26 million he raised for personal expenses. Tucker counters that he made only honest business mistakes and that he did, in fact, produce the 50 cars required by the government for use of the war surplus factory he was given. He makes a closing statement to the jury in which he warns that the entrepreneurial spirit is being crushed by bureaucracy and established interests. The jury delivers a verdict of not guilty, and Tucker invites everyone for a ride in his cars. As the people admire the cars, Abe tells him the company is dead and the cars will never be produced. Tucker replies that it makes no difference whether 50 cars or 50 million cars were produced; what matters is the dream.

Ethical Concepts and Issues Illustrated: On the surface, the scene may appear to be a simple story of a good entrepreneur opposed by the evil establishment. But a closer look reveals a conflict between dreams and realistic expectations. Did the fact that Tucker had some good design ideas excuse his selling dealerships for a car he lacked the financing to produce? At what point does dreaming become fraud? The continuing controversy over Tucker provides some historical perspective on present corporate scandals and CEO's whose defense is that they dreamed too big and made honest mistakes.

Additional Comments: Tucker was working on plans to produce a sports car in Brazil when he died of an illness six years after his acquittal. Forty-seven of the fifty-one Tucker automobiles produced still exist, each worth about a quarter of a million dollars. The Tucker Automobile Club is an active organization for fans of the man and his cars.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Was Tucker ethical to sell dealerships for a car that he lacked the resources to produce?
2. Was Tucker ethical to sell very risky investments to people who could not afford the risk? Would it have made a difference if they understood the risk they were taking?
3. Was Tucker correct when he said the innovative entrepreneurs were being crushed by established bureaucracies? Is that statement true today?

4. Should the revelation that Tucker's chief financial officer had been convicted of embezzlement affect the assessment of Tucker?
5. Does the fact that Tucker produced 50 cars prove that he had a viable plan for an automobile company?
6. Put yourself in the role of (a) the prosecutor, or (b) the defense attorney, or (b) the jury at Tucker's trial. What would you have said?
7. What similarities and differences exist between the Tucker trial and the trials involving executives of Enron, WorldCom, Tyco and other executives recently tried or indicted?
8. How did Tucker's talent for press relations influence public opinion of him during his life and in history?

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