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Worth

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Worth

Abstract

This is a film review of *Worth* (2020), directed by Sara Colangelo.

Keywords

September 11, Compensation

Author Notes

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Worth (2019) dir. Sara Colangelo

What is life worth? This is the central question in this film about the victim's compensation fund for the September 11th attacks. Yes, this is an ethical and moral question, but for Kenneth Feinberg, appointed by the government as the Special Master of the fund, there's also a very specific answer.

This dramatic film stars Michael Keaton as Feinberg and Stanley Tucci as Charles Wolf, a community organiser with the willingness to challenge him. Although having the potential to be overly melodramatic, or to fall into the category of a procedural drama (like the second half of a courtroom film), the film does neither, but rather mainly explores the challenges of getting the victim's families to sign on to the compensation plan (which required an 80% commitment to work). Throughout this, Feinberg has a change of heart as he is exposed to more of the stories of the families, but also as he realises that this tragedy is different from some of the others for which he has developed a compensation plan.

Feinberg works on this file as a pro bono commitment, and his role can be seen as one of perhaps academic interest in the problem, but also one grounded in service. Although he wishes to keep an arms length from too much detail in order to remain neutral, he is portrayed as a caring person (although, in a dramatization of an historical event, it is hard to know how faithful to the facts the film is). Other characters, however, have their own motivations and their own challenging situations, from a man in an unrecognized civil union, to undocumented workers, to lawyers pushing for compensation for lifelong earning potentials of CEOs as part of their compensation.

Feinberg's firm has been involved in this work in several other tragedies, from Virginia Tech to the BP oil spill and the VW emissions case. I think this film could spur some interesting conversations in ethics, philosophy, and law classes as well as any classes which are concerned with equity and equitable practices.