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## Documentaries generate buzz at Sundance

By RICK WARNER BLOOMBERG NEWS

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GERALD HERBERT AP

Jack Abramoff, a former lobbyist now in prison for defrauding American Indian tribes, is the focus of *Casino Jack and the United States of Money*.

A documentary about disgraced lobbyist Jack Abramoff by Oscar-winner Alex Gibney is generating a lot of buzz heading into this year's Sundance Film Festival.

*Casino Jack and the United States of Money* examines the roller-coaster career of Abramoff, a high-powered Washington lobbyist now in prison for defrauding American Indian tribes, bribing public officials and evading taxes. Promotional materials describe it as "a rollicking circus of corruption, from high rollers in Indian casinos, hookers in Saipan, a murdered Greek tycoon, Cold War spy novels, plush trips to paradise ... and the United States Congress."

Money plays a crucial role in at least seven other

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documentaries at the 11-day festival in Utah, which opens Thursday and runs through Jan. 31. They include , , , , and *A Small Act*.

"With what's happening in the economy, money is obviously on everyone's mind," Sundance director John Cooper said in a telephone interview. "Though you have to remember that most of these films were started before the financial crisis began."

*To Catch a Dollar* spotlights Nobel Prize-winning economist Muhammad Yunus, who founded a bank that loans money to poor women in developing countries. The film chronicles his effort to provide the same support to a poor community in New York City.

### Lottery winners

*The Shock Doctrine* is based on Naomi Klein's best-seller about "disaster capitalism," the economic exploitation of countries suffering from natural or man-made calamities. *Lucky* examines the lives of lottery winners, while *Gasland* looks at rural landowners whose property is coveted by energy companies searching for natural gas.

*Space Tourists* is about an Iranian-American who paid \$20 million to become the first Muslim woman in outer space. *Waiting for Superman* probes the costly but dysfunctional U.S. education system, and *A Small Act* tells the story of a poor Kenyan boy who got a Harvard

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education thanks to an anonymous Swedish donor.

As usual, Sundance will feature an eclectic lineup of independent films. Along with star-studded movies like *The Company Men*, a corporate-downsizing story starring Ben Affleck, Kevin Costner and Tommy Lee Jones, the festival will screen dozens of movies with no big names and no chance of ever showing up at your local mall.

### Directing debuts

Other movies with notable casts include (Kate Hudson, Casey Affleck, Jessica Alba), about a small-town Texas sheriff suspected of murder; (Robert Duvall, Bill Murray, Sissy Spacek), the story of a Tennessee hermit who plans his own funeral party; and (Amanda Peet, Oliver Platt, Catherine Keener), about a couple who clash with their elderly neighbor and her two granddaughters.

Actors Philip Seymour Hoffman and Mark Ruffalo will screen their directing debuts at Sundance. Hoffman's *Jack Goes Boating* is a quirky romantic comedy starring Hoffman and Amy Ryan. Ruffalo's , which features Ruffalo, Orlando Bloom and Laura Linney, is about a paralyzed deejay who gets involved in faith healing.

### New approach

Sundance will show 112 feature films from 38 countries. The festival is based in Park City, but screenings are also held in Salt Lake City, Ogden and Sundance.

For the first time, eight Sundance films will be shown outside Utah during the festival.



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The screenings will take place Jan. 28 in San Francisco; Los Angeles; New York; Chicago; Nashville, Tenn.; Ann Arbor, Mich.; Brookline, Mass.; and Madison, Wis.

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