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## Spitzer's Fall, Bin Laden's Rise Charted by Gibney at Tribeca

By Rick Wamba - Apr 26, 2010

Eliot Spitzer's downfall, Osama bin Laden's rise and cheating sumo wrestlers are examined in Alex Gibney's triple play at the Tribeca Film Festival.

The Oscar-winning filmmaker has three documentaries at the festival: a yet-to-be titled movie about Spitzer, who resigned as New York's governor over a sex scandal; "My Trip to Al- Qaeda," journalist Lawrence Wright's first-person account of the rise of Islamic terrorism; and a segment on sumo wrestling in "Freakonomics," a collection of short movies from different directors based on the best-selling book about economics and human behavior.

Gibney, 56, won an Oscar in 2008 for "Taxi to the Dark Side," a documentary about the torture of terrorism suspects. In addition to his Tribeca films and "Casino Jack and the United States of Money," a May 7 release about disgraced lobbyist Jack Abramoff, he's completing movies about champion cyclist Lance Armstrong, counter-culture writer Ken Kesey and sports scapegoats.

Gibney talked about his busy schedule at the Manhattan offices of Magnolia Pictures, the distributor of "Casino Jack."

Warner: Three films at one festival. How did that happen?

Gibney: It's really an accident of timing. It does feel weird, though. I know (documentary director) Lucy Walker had two films at Sundance, but I've got three. Beat that, Lucy!

### Hooker Scandal

Warner: You talked extensively with Spitzer. How forthcoming was he about the prostitute scandal that forced him from office?

Gibney: I think he's trying to reckon with what happened, and you can see he's still struggling with it. It's not like the Tiger Woods press conference, which had to be the most reprehensible attempt at coming

clean I've ever seen.

Warner: Spitzer has re-emerged as a columnist, TV commentator and public speaker. Do you think he'll run for office again?

Gibney: It depends on whether voters trust him. Frankly I think he has a lot to offer, particularly in this environment where the financial sector seems to be destroying the entire country.

Warner: "Casino Jack" is also about a scandal -- the corruption of our political system by lobbyists and big money. How do we fix the problem?

Gibney: We have to move toward some form of public financing of political campaigns or we're done. As long as you have to spend so much to get elected, we're heading down a road to a purely pay-to-play system.

## **Sausage Making**

Warner: The closer you look at the system, the uglier it gets.

Gibney: In "Casino Jack," you see inside the kitchen of the Chinese restaurant. You see just how the sausage is made. The average person is getting hosed by these powerful, wealthy special interests.

Warner: "My Trip to Al-Qaeda" is based on Wright's one-man show. How do you turn that into something cinematic?

Gibney: It's compelling because it looks at terrorism from the perspective of a Texan who goes to the Middle East and tries to understand what's going on. There's that old phrase about knowing your enemy. Well, by experiencing Lawrence's personal journey, I think we get to understand the enemy better.

Warner: Wright talks a lot about bin Laden's transformation from the privileged son of a wealthy Saudi family to the world's most notorious terrorist. What motivates the guy?

Gibney: I think it's a search for identity and a search for glory. Bin Laden capitalizes on this sense of humiliation that many Arabs feel about the West. Out of this humiliation comes suicide bombers and others willing die for the cause.

## **Sumo Wrestlers**

Warner: You had a choice of subjects for your piece in "Freakonomics" and you picked cheating in sumo

wrestling. Why?

Gibney: It's a fascinating subject that's briefly mentioned in the book. Also, it was an opportunity to visualize this wonderful spectacle of these enormous men in loincloths wrestling in a sandpit.

Warner: How has winning the Oscar changed your life?

Gibney: I notice people stay a lot longer in our downstairs bathroom, which is where the Oscar is placed. I think they hold it up to the mirror.

Bloomberg LP, which owns Bloomberg News, is a sponsor of the Tribeca festival. Tickets and information: +1-866-941-3378; <http://www.tribecafilm.com/festival/tickets>

(Rick Warner is the movie critic for Bloomberg News. Any opinions are his own. This interview was adapted from a longer conversation.)

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