

Spacey finds depth in portrayal of Abramoff - Washington Post

Written by Administrator

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Spacey is a Democrat. Abramoff is a Republican.

Spacey starred in a high school production of "The Sound of Music." During his teen years, Abramoff was a wrestler.

Spacey is best known for his roles in films such as "American Beauty" and "The Usual Suspects." Abramoff? He's known as the lobbyist who rose high and fell hard, ultimately serving time in federal prison

after being convicted on multiple charges related to widespread corruption and fraud.

But spend an hour at breakfast with Spacey at the Jefferson Hotel in Washington - where he has come to discuss his Golden Globe-nominated portrayal of Abramoff in the new film "Casino Jack," which opens Wednesday - and it becomes clear where the Spacey/Abramoff Personality Venn Diagram may overlap.

Spacey, an actor who often plays ambitious, even ruthless men, is at turns charming (a word Spacey also uses to describe Abramoff), defensive, potty-mouthed and passionate, as well as prone to doing impressions, a trait that he shares with Abramoff and that is on display in "Casino Jack." He even dumps a healthy amount of sugar into his cafe au lait, laughing when a reporter reminds him that, as Abramoff, he does that in the movie.

"Yes, it's the little things that people informed me of that we tried to infuse into the film," he says with a smile.

Political junkies - and anyone who saw the first of this year's two Abramoff movies, Alex Gibney's documentary "Casino Jack and the United States of Money" - are familiar with how Abramoff and colleagues tried to defraud Indian tribes of millions. They also know that a subsequent FBI investigation uncovered evidence of sweeping misconduct that led to criminal charges against Abramoff, House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, former U.S. representative Bob Ney, former DeLay aide Mike Scanlon, and other congressional staffers and lobbyists.

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But it's the details - the little things, as Spacey calls them - that people may not know and that often work their way into "Casino Jack," a satirical, hyperbolic version of the events that led to the 2004 ethics scandal.

Example: how Abramoff wore the unfortunate "Godfather"-like fedora and trench coat to a 2006 courthouse appearance.

"He opened his closet, grabbed the first hat that he could grab, the trench coat because it was raining, and went outside," Spacey says, noting that Abramoff often kept his head covered in public because of his Orthodox Jewish faith. "And he never thought about, what will this look like? . . . That's why I wore the hat several times in the movie before that scene. I didn't want to make a big point of it, and I didn't want to have a dialogue about it, but there is a subliminal thing that can happen with an audience, which is, 'Oh, yeah, that's that black hat. Oh, he *always* wore that black hat.' "

Spacey uncovered that kind of information through extensive research that involved absorbing news coverage of the Abramoff case, much of which he had missed because he lives in London; speaking with Abramoff's friends and former colleagues; and spending six hours last year at a federal prison in Cumberland, Md., getting to know the man himself.

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