

## LIGHTS, CAMERA, CALL TO ACTION

"Filmanthropists" fund movies that promote their social agendas.

**W**HATEVER YOUR POLITICAL leanings, it's been impossible to avoid the film *An Inconvenient Truth*. Al Gore's clarion call about climate change not only placed the former vice president back in the national spotlight, but also took home two Academy Awards in February. But unbeknownst to many of Hollywood's glitterati, the film also set a new benchmark for affluent people who invest in socially relevant films. Call it the height of "filmanthropy."

Today, more prosperous individuals are choosing the medium of film to spearhead their causes and motivate the public to act on the messages they support. Jim Berk is CEO of Participant Productions (which produced *An Inconvenient Truth*), a for-profit film company founded in 2004 by former eBay president Jeff Skoll. Berk calls *An Inconvenient Truth* the gold standard of socially aware filmmaking. In recent years, the company has also produced such films as *Good Night, and Good Luck*, *North Country*, *Syriana* and *Murderball*.

Participant Productions primarily partners with larger studios to fund its films, but also accepts outside investments—often from individuals who would like to actively support the

company's overarching message. "It's really less about wealthy people coming to us with specific projects," Berk explains, "as [it is about] high-net-worth people coming to us and saying they'd like to be a part of the product we're putting out and asking how they can contribute. Our measure is to be able to pass an internal litmus test that asks: If you were to take this money, could it have been better spent directly on the issue or on the media we've created, which then impacts people and creates exponential efforts in support of the issue?"

Ted Leonsis, vice chairman of AOL, is credited with coining the term filmanthropy to describe this trend of investing in socially motivated films. A longtime fan of nontraditional charity work, Leonsis delved into filmanthropy with his production debut, *Nanking*, which premiered in January to favorable reviews at the Sundance Film Festival. The story of the 1937 massacre of Chinese civilians by Japanese military forces is one that Leonsis feels historians have overlooked. "What I view as filmanthropy is shining a light on subjects, and then using that content as a way to raise money and awareness," he says. "The best way to tell these stories is to make a

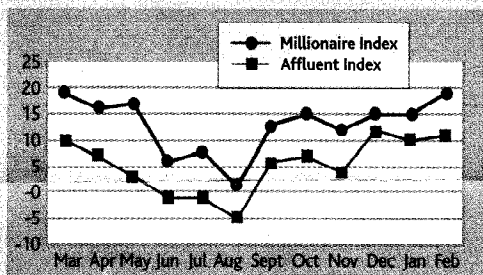


film." Leonsis plans to maximize his investment in *Nanking* by contributing all the profits to related charities and donating an additional 800 hours of survivor testimony to a historical foundation at Georgetown University.

Melissa Berman, president and CEO of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, says that using film to spread a social message represents a natural and welcome progression in the nonprofit world. "In every century, people have used the media they've had available to them to raise awareness for causes they believe in," she says, adding that today's technology is particularly useful for reaching large audiences. "All of these media outlets are turning out to be a very effective means of conveying an idea to the public."

—Jennifer O'Reilly

### BULLS BEFORE THE FALL



**BOTH THE SPECTREM MILLIONAIRE** and Affluent indices ended in bullish territory in February, in a survey conducted before the stock markets took their plunge on February 27. The Millionaire Index, which gauges the sentiment of households with a minimum of \$1 million in investable assets, rose 4 points to 19, while the Affluent Index, measuring the attitude of households with at least \$500,000 in investable assets, edged up 1 point to 11. Even before the markets dipped, both segments indicated that they were putting more assets into cash investments.