

# American gangster film review by steven zaillian

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A Film Review November 27, 2007 Title: American Gangster Genre: Gangster  
Writer: Steven Zaillian Director: Ridley Scott Date and Place of performance:  
November 21, 2007 at my house On November 21, 2007, I was home for  
break and watched an interesting-historical film titled American Gangster.  
The film was written by Steven Zaillian and was directed by Ridley Scott.  
American Gangster was a gangster movie that reflected back on the pass.  
The performance environment was at my house in the living room on a DVD  
player.

The room was dark, cool, and very comfortable, which made it very relaxing  
and easier to watch and study the film. American Gangster took place in  
Harlem, New Jersey, in the 1960's and 1970's. It was a movie that was based  
on a true story, of a man by the name of Frank Lucas. American Gangster  
was basically about Frank Lucas and his life as a big time business man, big  
time street-pharmacist, but most of all a family man. Frank Lucas was a  
business man of street drugs; he was a gangster, who transported drugs  
from Bangkok in the Vietnam War to the east coast of the United States.

Frank Lucas was not just an old street-pharmacist, he was smart he had  
people working for him, people on his side, like the war, the mob, but most  
of all his family. He got his money up and had his family had his family move  
from North Carolina over to New Jersey, in a big white house, this way his  
brothers could work for him and his clientele would increase and he would  
save money because his family was working for him. Lucas was also smart  
because he was not like the other gangsters, he did not flash around his  
money, and he did not wear loud colored clothing.

Lucas wore regular suits, as if he was a true business man, he did not have anybody on to him until people started dying from the drugs he had out on the streets, called Blue Magic. It was called Blue Magic because it was a pure drug, nothing in it was mixed. Lucas had the whole east coast on this Blue Magic; he had the Queens, Bergen Country, N. J. , Brooklyn, and the Bronx. This is when a man by the name of Rickie Roberts came in; he was a man who worked for the law and in a prosecutor's office.

Rickie Roberts was a good cop, at least he thought, he did something no cop would ever do, he turned in nine-hundred-eighty-seven-thousand dollars unmarked cash and did not one police officer respect him for it. Roberts had a lot in his life, he had a son whose mother was taking him to court for custody of the child, he was going to school to become a lawyer and his state bar test was coming up, and he wants to catch Frank Lucas. Roberts finds out about the Blue Magic by his partner dying from it, then that is when he started letting his guard down by wearing the flashy coat his wife bought for him.

This is when Roberts had the man he was looking for; he just needed a way to stop him. In the end Lucas finally was caught coming out from church, by Roberts. He was convicted of conspiracy to distribute narcotics and was sentenced to seventy-years in prison but he only served fifteen-years and was released in 1991. His brothers were convicted on drug trafficking. His mother moved back to North Carolina, and his wife moved to Puerto Rico. However, Rickie Roberts quit the prosecutors' office and became a defense attorney; his first client was Frank Lucas.

The film is episodic because of the short scenes and numerous characters. The type of message I received from this movie was “ don’t sale drugs”, because you only in up in two places behind bars or six feet under. It also gave me the feeling of a person getting fast money not working hard for what they want, but “ good things come to people who are patience and work hard”. American Gangster is compared to the American dream; and the American dream is defined as having a nice house, good paying job, kids and a dog, and no worries in the world.

The way I think American Gangster relates to that is, Frank Lucas did kind of lived the American dream and beyond because he had a nice house for his family and a good paying illegal job, a dog but no kids of his own, I guess his brothers were his kids. The purpose of this film was to inform audiences about a, true life story, of a man who tried to live the American dream by selling drugs and his negative results. The writing of this film was very unique. I thought the film was a work of considerable technical as well as artistic merit, because it makes you respect and acknowledge the fact that this was a smart dangerous man.

I think, Zaillian’s, point of view of this movie was to express how Frank Lucas’s life really was, and to get the audience to feel the hurt that Lucas went through. I thought the story and the theme was interesting because it showed how greed, wealth, progress, and success can lead to trouble in someone life. I think “ the more money you have, the more problems you will see”. The reason why I think this is because Lucas, over the time became greedy and he was not able to receive drugs anymore because the war was

over. So he started to have problems with everything, life, family, and his wife.

I thought the story gave a fresh insight into human condition of wealth and greed. I thought the American Gangster was based and a portrayal source of historical events, for example, when Roberts's partner killed the black man for drugs at that apartment, and all the black people were outside the apartment ready to charge the door. It seemed like a riot to me. The whole movie was a historical event because it was based on a true story, which is historical. The director uses a lot of money as a symbol of evil and trouble.

I think this because everybody who had money or was real wealthy in this movie was evil and had a lot of troubles in their life. The irony of it was Rickie Roberts. For example, when he had the chance to have a lot of money he did not take it, he turned it in instead, and everybody thought he was stupid for it, but really he was smart for turning in the money. I think this because the money would have brought evil and trouble to his life and since he turned it in, I think he was the real wealthy person because in the end he to Frank Lucas, he passed his law exam, and was able to become a defense attorney.

The directing of this movie was great. I thought the story was told in a visually interesting way, because it showed a lot of action and it was not just about gangsters it was also about learning how to survive in the streets. The special effects were very effective, the way characters would get shot looked real, but most of all when they showed characters use the drugs and the way their skin would look after wards. The director did a great job on the location

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and studio environment because the sound effects and picture was nice and clear.

I think American Gangster did not really show, Ridley Scott's, personal style of movies, because this movie was about someone's life and they had to make it like Frank Lucas's life was back in those days. I thought the actor's performances were guided by the director effectively. The acting of American Gangster was great. The stars of American Gangster were; Russell Crowe, Denzel Washington, Chiwetel Ejiofor, and Cuba Gooding, Jr. I thought their performances were real life like; it gave me that real street life feeling. These are also all magnificent actresses.

The actors who played the supporting roles were so effective I would have thought they were professionals. The actors made American Gangster, Frank Lucas's, story seem believable, serious, and heart fulfilling. The editing was interesting and effective. The sequences do develop emotional impact. For example, when he bought his mother and his family the new house, to see the happy look on his mother's face when she was told that it was her house, was so emotional it gave that deep feeling like when you want to cry for something that is good.

The unusual or symbolic juxtaposition I thought added interest was when Rickie Roberts was trying to put the pieces together by taking pictures trying to put the pieces together by taking pictures of suspects and putting their pictures in order so the story would come together and it would get him closer to Frank Lucas and the bottom of the story. In the end Frank Lucas put

all the pictures in order and told the story. The production elements of the movie were effective.

The setting of the movie was effective, because it starts with Frank Lucas killing someone by setting them on fire and then he shot them. This made me feel like it was going to be a really good action movie. The lighting was effective it set the moods. The music set the mood as well, when it was sad, happy, and intense. The costumes and makeup were effective; the actors played their parts well when it came down to acting like an old school gangster. For example, when Frank Lucas went into the hood to sale his products he was made up in an afro and long beard, he would be in disguised.

The special effects were effective, when they showed the dead bodies on the Army plane, they looked real. There were no continuity breaks while watching this film. The elements that I was able to identify were the music, the special effects, and the makeup. My overall impression of the film was great, I really enjoyed it. The film's strengths were the special effects and the acting. For example, the special effects were good when someone was shot and when they showed the dead bodies in the army bags.

The all around best, I think Denzel Washington is a good actress in every movie he makes. The film's weaknesses was none, I do not think I seen any weaknesses. I was not disturbed by anything; I was impressed with the whole movie. The movie was great; I would recommend others to experience this film. The iconographic that I came upon was when Frank Lucas speaks of being to loud, like the big bright suits they wore. This made me think of the

street-pharmacist today, their profile is big cars with a loud color paint job and loud music with flashy clothing.

I think foreshadowing was used when Rickie Roberts gets Lucas's cousin to snitch, then he tells him that Frank Lucas will find out he snitched then he will kill him because he was his cousin. The film's political significance was the use of violence, when the whole world became greedy and wanted money and drugs. The social significance was the study of the society in Harlem, went from bad to everybody on drugs and dying, which I would call it social dead zone. The film's historical significance was that it was based on a true story.

If the film was from another culture, their conventions would be interesting and unusual. The movie did have subtitles; it was necessary and beneficial to read the subtitles. The effect it had was good; I was able to understand what was going on in the movie and not get confused. I think American Gangster can not be a sequel because it was based on a true story of someone's life. My critical perspective of this movie was that it was very unique, never seen anything like it, I feel that it will reduce the numerous of people who sell drugs, and overall it was an incredible movie.