

Scarface vs. american gangster essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

When considering candidates for all time greatest gangster movies, one wouldn't forget to mention such classics as Goodfellas, the Godfather, Reservoir Dogs, and Pulp Fiction. Some may even consider Tony Montana of Scarface to be the hardest, roughest gangster to ever appear on the movie screen. But what characteristics make this so? Is it because he was able to take over a drug cartel by violence to become the single most made man in Miami? Was it his ruthless business tactics, which ultimately led to his death that justify such a bold statement? There exist certain elements of gangster movies that make it memorable. Either it's recklessly violent like Scarface, or it's criminally success through close-knit circuits of drug rings and passive business tactics.

The Godfather was the perfect example of this; by it's organized crime through family, and no dirty work done themselves. It is hard for a successful gangster movie to posses both these qualities, for you only see the classics being one or the other because of the nature of the criminal activity. Most drug kingpins and mob bosses, however, usually share similar characteristics in the way they make moves and conduct business. If the boss happens to be addicted to the product he's distributing, he often results to more violent, aggressive forms of business tactics, as demonstrated by Tony Montana's addiction to cocaine in Scarface.

The 2007 film American Gangster is a new look of a passive drug lord from the 60s, which is based on true events. Many have attempted to compare the two movies, saying American Gangster is the " black man's Scarface". With many sides of the spectrum to address, it is easy to see the similarities of these movies, as well as the differences. American Gangster was directed

by Ridley Scott, produced by Brian Grazer and written by Steven Zaillian. The main character Frank Lucas is based off of a real-life drug kingpin, who is played by Denzel Washington.

Lucas takes over the drug trade after the man he was a bodyguard for, and essentially a right hand man for, died, and subsequently handed Frank the business. When comparing characters, Frank Lucas is all by himself when he takes over, Tony Montana had a partner, Manny. Also, Lucas had a mentor, Montana did not. In Brian De Palma's movie, Scarface, Montana and Manny are offered a job transporting marijuana, but refuse and soon move up to a large cocaine deal. The deal was a set-up and the resulting series of events leads to Montana having both the money and the cocaine, and a way into the largest drug ring in Miami.

This single event was Montana's rise to fame. Lucas acquired the same level of drug lord status, but without violence. Lucas' mentor left him with the key advice of buying heroin directly from Taiwan and shipping it to the states via hidden compartments in coffins of fallen soldiers. Both Montana and Lucas have their small network of people that supplied the customers. Lucas' values toward the drug trade business were similar to that of the crime families such as in the Godfather. He kept his business with his five brothers, who were scattered throughout New Jersey and New York.

Frank's passiveness toward life and how he presented himself to the public were very important to him. He wanted people to know he had money, but at the same time not be obvious and get caught. This is a loud statement in nature because for one to show off ones money and not being subtle about it

is almost impossible. Frank's choice of wearing an expensive fur coat while sitting front row at a popular boxing match, ultimately gave clues, which aided detective Richie Roberts efforts to bring him down. Montana had a similar vice. When Oliver Stone decided to make changes to his written masterpiece of Scarface, he wanted to present a fictional story that was the extreme of the drug trade at the time.

He presented a similar conflict to Lucas' when Montana was involved in a sting and was charged with tax evasion. This begins the downward spiral for Montana, as prison is an almost sure fate. This problem spans from problems with family and business partners, and eventually leads to more problems. Lucas avoided problems of conflict all together, but his main concern was the police.

Montana feared going to prison, but without killing a journalist tailing his dealer Sosa, he now feared Sosa. Montana's cocaine addiction becomes serious, and leads him to violent options. Lucas used similar violent options when he ordered the termination of a CIA agent's car. Lucas was pulled over after a routine day with his brother, who forgot that there were multiple kilos of heroin in the car.

The resulting search by the same CIA agent revealed the heroin, as Lucas revealed his involvement in the car bomb, threatening next time it will be his house. Lucas was let go clean. This and similar actions, however, were not driven by a drug addiction, as many of Montana's violent outbursts were. Cocaine and heroin are very different drugs however. Cocaine is a stimulant of the nervous system and is fast acting. What it really does to the user is

works in a way that tricks the brain into believing it is receiving something pleasurable like good food or sex.

Mentally, you feel alert, overconfident, and buzzed. The after effects leave one feeling restless, fatigued, and irritable. Long-term users such as Tony Montana most likely develop such a strong dependency; they enter states of cocaine psychosis. This state results from a strong tolerance to the drug, where the user needs much more now to counteract the negative effects. Montana, because of his endless access to the drug, eventually reaches this level of addiction and his paranoia ultimately leads to his downfall.

Heroin, being a different drug, has similar effects, but stems them from a powerful and ancient plant, the opiate poppy. Heroin is different from cocaine in the fact that it is a painkiller, rather than a stimulant. Frank Lucas was aware of this and was wise in his decision not to become a user. Heroin in the 1960s went through a period of popularity, as cocaine did in the 1980s with the club scene. People of the sixties needed a way of escaping the economic and political turmoil of the war and the time period.

Lucas knew he wouldn't be able to maintain successful business if he was constantly high and not functional. He also knew how powerful of a drug it was in its purest form and how to capitalize on a trend. Frank Lucas was a businessman this way, always supplying the cheapest, most potent product to his customer. The excessive use of heroin in the sixties led to the deaths of many people as frequent users were not used to the high potency of Lucas' product. Although heroin is not as addictive as cocaine, it still managed to make millions for Lucas. But he wasn't on Montana's level.

Lucas was feared, yes, but not like Montana, who established his name through violence. Lucas would use maybe one or two instances to set an example and what he was capable of. When comparing Scarface to American Gangster, it may be easy for some to see the differences, as well as the similarities. But to go as far as to say that American Gangster is the black man's Scarface is just ignorant. The movies involve two completely different time periods, with two completely different drugs and a main character that respectively stand at opposite ends of the violence spectrum. What really makes Scarface so respectable is the fact that it was a well-written story that had a good amount of violence, and showcases what the drug scene could escalate to, if given the right circumstances.

American Gangster failed to have that similar appeal because of the fact the writer had to base the movie off of true events, which naturally had little violence. Montana's character was very stereotypical towards Cubans, and in part, contributes to the overall mood of the movie. American Gangster was far more classy, and broke down any stereotypes of rich, black men of the sixties. For American Gangster to be more like Scarface, they should have casted 50 Cent and added ten scenes with car chases and explosions.