

Denzel Washington plays a drug kingpin in "American Gangster," which co-stars Russell Crowe (r.) as ex-prosecutor Richie Roberts (l.).



# 'GANGSTER' A COPOUT

## 3 ex-N.J. police say flick rewrites history

BY ADAM NICHOLS  
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

THREE FORMER New Jersey cops say they got short shrift in Denzel Washington's new movie about Harlem drug kingpin Frank Lucas.

"American Gangster," which opens tomorrow, portrays an ex-cop-turned-prosecutor as the real hero in bringing Lucas to justice after years of selling \$1 million-a-day worth of heroin — much of it smuggled into New York in the coffins of Vietnam soldiers.

The Hollywood treatment has left the true heroes in the cold — and the rewriting of history has left them furious.

"How do you think we feel?" former Newark narcotics cop Ed Jones asked yesterday.

"We spent nearly two years risking our lives on that case, and then we see a guy who had no interest before we made the arrests take the credit. We're angry."

Jones said he and two colleagues, Al Spearman and Ben Abruzzo, started investigating the Newark end of Lucas' operation — known as the "Country

Boys" — in 1973.

Their work led to a 1975 raid after a delivery of 10 kilos of heroin. More than 30 members of Lucas' team were arrested, a bust that ended Lucas' reign.

Russell Crowe's character, Richie Roberts, was an ex-cop and, at the time, an Essex County assistant prosecutor who headed the bureau of narcotics.

"The movie shows him as the detective who was on the street and who was responsible for getting Lucas," Jones said.

"That's wrong. That was us."

Roberts, now in private practice, concedes the movie took some liberties.

"Sure, they used a little literary license," said Roberts, of West Caldwell, N.J. "[The movie] does kind of blur the lines between the time I was a detective and the time I was a prosecutor.

"These three cops were assigned primarily to this case; they worked their butts off and I said they needed a credit in the movie. They're in it in a very positive light.

"But it wasn't just me and it wasn't just them, it was an entire squad."

Universal Pictures spokesman Damion Stene declined to comment yesterday.

Lucas, who spent time on the New York movie set last year, said his conviction came not from information gathered in the 1975 raid, but from investigations that followed it.

"I'm not going to credit them with getting me," said Lucas, who became an informant under Roberts' prodding.

"Those three cops couldn't catch a cold."

anichols@nydailynews.com



Ex-Newark cop Ed Jones  
Photo by Luis M. Alvarez