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Nov 6 2007 6:58 PM EST

Real 'American Gangster' Frank Lucas Talks About Hanging With Diddy's Dad, Possible Sequel

Ex-convict is now building a Boys & Girls Club-type facility in NYC: 'I want to be remembered for helping these kids.'

By Jayson Rodriguez

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Being an American gangster isn't all it's cracked up to be. At least not to Frank Lucas, the inspiration behind [the Denzel Washington flick](#) of the same name, which is currently [sitting atop the box office](#).

According to the *New York* magazine article the movie was based on, Lucas, 80, once ruled New York's Harlem neighborhood with a fist so heavy he was able to cut out the Mafia, thereby increasing the profit margins of his ruthlessly run drug operation.

Lots of money was made, and Lucas' legend grew to ridiculous heights. But the good times didn't last forever: Lucas was locked up for nine years. And though he's doing well enough now, when he was released from prison, he didn't even have enough money saved to buy a pack of cigarettes.



"The government took all my money and everything I had," Lucas told MTV News, recalling his arrest. "The properties in Chicago, Detroit, Miami, North Carolina, Puerto Rico — they took everything. My lawyer told me they couldn't take the money in the offshore accounts, and I had all my money stored in the Cayman Islands. But that's BS; they can take it. Take my word for it. If you

got something, hide it, 'cause they can go to any bank and take it."



Frank Lucas

Photo: Johnny Nenez/ WireImage

"The movie spoke a lot of truth." — Frank Lucas on "American Gangster"

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His reign may be over, but Lucas still hopes to rule over Harlem under a new regime, by building a Boys & Girls Club-type facility and encouraging kids to follow the path he didn't take years ago. In this exclusive interview, the original American gangster — who once claimed he cleared \$1 million a day selling dope — talks about what his days are like now, recalls meeting Diddy's dad, clears up the inaccuracies of the movie and even dishes on whether a sequel is in the works.

MTV: Since you were a consultant on "American Gangster," I suppose congratulations are in order for the film landing at #1. Did you ever think your life story was worthy of a movie; and are you surprised by the opening-weekend success?

Frank Lucas: Did you expect for anything else but it to be #1? I'm in there. [*He laughs.*] But I'll tell you the truth: I had no idea. I never thought about a movie.

MTV: There have been several magazine articles written on your life — as well as a documentary on your onetime rival, Nicky Barnes, called "Mr. Untouchable" — that seem to contradict each other and the plot of the movie.

Lucas: Ask me, and I'll tell you the truth.

MTV: In "Mr. Untouchable," Barnes seemed frustrated because he claimed he was the smoother of you two; he dressed in a more business-appropriate fashion, and you were more flamboyant. He disdainfully called you a country boy.

Lucas: Nah. You saw what it was [in "American Gangster"]. That's spoken. That was the way it was. Nicky was a flamboyant guy, who was kind of live. Me and him were friends; I guess we're still friends. He would jump out of cars and beat up junkies and all kinds of foolishness. I didn't like that. I tried to stay out of the limelight. Listen, if you go out there in the streets — a 5-year-old kid would know — if you're flamboyant, you're not gonna last but a minute. If you don't do flamboyant and stay out the limelight, you might last an hour or a day. I'm just using an example, you know?

MTV: How about your relationship with Richie Roberts, the detective who was instrumental in bringing you down? Are you two really still friendly with each other now? He joked with MTV News at the red-carpet premiere that when the two of you were on set, he saw a gleam in your eye and made a comment that he may have to take you in again.

Lucas: I'm not gonna make no joke. Richie Roberts couldn't arrest his mother. He couldn't catch a cold, you know what I'm saying? I'm not gonna get into that because there's a lot I could say. But I'll tell you, Richie Roberts is all right. He's my friend. But when you turn the cameras on, he gets all hyped. Real stupid. We still have good relations, we still do — except when he goes on TV. When the lights turn on, he doesn't even know what he's saying half the time.

MTV: In the film, Denzel Washington's character marries Miss Puerto Rico. There's no mention of them having kids, but you have a son who is an aspiring rapper.

Lucas: They got that wrong. She was some kind of homecoming queen, but I don't know about [being Miss Puerto Rico]. No doubt about it, she was a pretty girl. I have seven children altogether. But since I started making this movie, people [have been] coming up to me — I got 20 more now. [*He laughs.*]



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MTV: In a previous interview, you pretty much said you aren't the biggest fan of hip-hop. How did you feel when you discovered your son, Frank Lucas Jr., was pursuing a career as a rapper?

Lucas: He is a rapper now, I guess. But there ain't much I can do about that. He's 30-something years old; he got to do what he got to do. He didn't go to college because I was away at the time. That was just that. I wanted him to get a degree; then he could have done what he had to do. Believe me, I'm trying to tell him to do it now.

MTV: Even though you aren't a fan of rap, you were friends with the father of one of hip-hop's most famous artists, right?

Lucas: Melvin Combs. He's a good friend of mind. That's Puff Daddy's father. He used to bring [his son] to my house every day, at least at least two or three times a week. And my daughter used to push him off the [toys]. He made it great. You see where he's at now. He's on top of the world now.

MTV: Were you and Melvin just friends or business partners?

Lucas: All the above. We did business and we were good friends. He was really a good friend of mine.

MTV: Do you remember how you met him?

Lucas: We all were out there on Seventh Avenue, and everybody knew everybody out there; I don't remember how I met him. But we had a good relationship. Me, him and [former street-basketball player] Pee Wee Kirkland. We were about as good of friends as you could get.

MTV: You played basketball with Pee Wee?

Lucas: Nah, I didn't play. I was doing other things.

MTV: When you were in prison, New York changed so much, particularly as the war on drugs turned from heroin to cocaine to crack. Were you surprised how much things had changed upon your release?

Lucas: It was shocking to me to see how the streets were being run. There was no leadership. Nobody could tell nobody nothing; everybody wanted to do their own thing. You think I'm lying — watch the 5 o'clock news and see how many kids get locked up for dumb stuff.

MTV: During your imprisonment, did you hear about the next generation of Harlem gangsters, like Rich Porter, AZ and Alpo?

Lucas: Who? What are their names? I heard of [the last one], but I didn't know him.

MTV: What about Mafia members like John Gotti?

Lucas: [Those are] real gangsters you're talking about now.

MTV: More so than you?

Lucas: Nah, I'm not saying that. That's for you to judge, that's not for me to say.

MTV: There have been pictures of you in a wheelchair. Is that a permanent situation?

Lucas: I broke my leg in two places about a year ago. I'll be up out of this doggone wheelchair, I guess, in about a month. I'll be glad to get rid of it because I'm tired of this wheelchair.

MTV: Has your condition kept you from doing much?

Lucas: I do whatever I got to do. I'm putting things together, trying to build a facility where kids can go play ball and whatever. I'm waiting on the mayor right now to get another space to go ahead and do that. I got some help on the way, and I want to try to put that to use. I'm working with my daughter, Francine. ... I'm getting some finances lined up now so I can do it. I want to be remembered for helping these kids. If I can get them to follow what I ask them to do, I'll be happy.

MTV: Is that how you're able to support yourself?

Lucas: Well, I'm not going to get into that. Put it this way: I'm not in the drug business.

MTV: Now that your life is being talked about so much, but with details missing or overlooked, do you have any regrets about your portrayal?

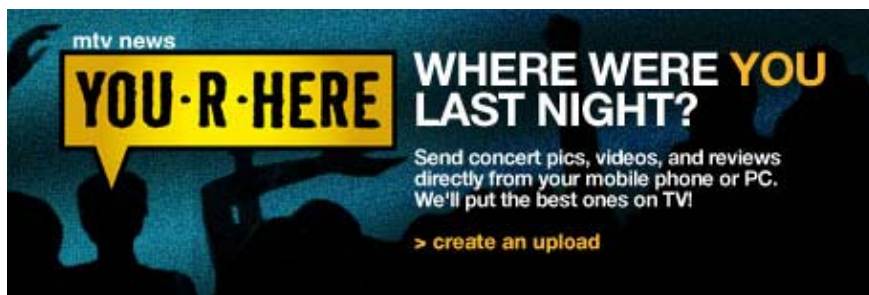
Lucas: As far as I'm concerned, it was top-notch. The movie spoke a lot of truth, because when they shot scenes they would turn and ask me. They asked me a lot of questions. And I did the best of my abilities. The best way I could do it. But I guess they have to make a movie also. I wouldn't change anything. We might make another movie, I guess. We're just waiting to see what's going on. I really don't know what [the studio is] talking about. If I see the script and read it, maybe.

Check out everything we've got on ["American Gangster."](#)

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