

# BET's American Gangster – Frank Lucas, the real life “American Gangster” episode premier



NEW YORK – October 24, 2007 – In the late '60s and early '70s, Frank Lucas was the king of the Harlem drug scene. He was also one of the toughest, dangerous and most unforgiving criminals in the country before he was caught. The real Frank Lucas – whose rise and fall is chronicled in the Universal feature film “American Gangster” starring Denzel Washington and Russell Crowe – retraces his early childhood, the turns of events that led to his life of crime, his criminal past on the streets of Harlem and his reign for the first time with BET on this season of AMERICAN GANGSTER. This episode of BET’s critically acclaimed series premieres Wednesday, October 31 at 10PM\*.

“I wanted to be rich. I wanted to be Donald Trump rich,” Lucas, 75, said during an interview for the episode. “And so help me God, I made it.”

He sure did. It is estimated that Lucas made up to \$1 million a day selling heroin that he shipped over from Southeast Asia in the coffins of dead soldiers during the Vietnam War. But while he was becoming a multi-millionaire, his drug of choice was devastating Harlem’s community and the families in it. And according to sources also interviewed for the episode, the CIA knew all about his shipments and even made it possible for Lucas to bring the dope to America. Lucas was such an astute businessman that he even had the mob, the Sicilians and Mexicans as clients. Everybody wanted what Lucas was peddling.

“Frank is very charming, very humble and he’ll have you working for him by the end of the day. He’s a force of nature,” Denzel Washington said in a recent interview promoting the film. Washington portrays the gangster in the film due out on Friday, November 2.

In 1975, Lucas was convicted on both federal and state drug charges and sentenced to 70 years in prison. The next year he cooperated with law officials and named names, which led to the convictions of more than 100 other drug lords and Lucas’ release from jail in 1981. Two years later he was arrested again for drug trafficking and in 1984, was convicted of those charges, spending another seven years in jail.

Apart from his criminal past, this episode delves into Lucas’ formative years and uncovers the experiences that would eventually define the man as an adult. Illiterate, Lucas was very affected by the racism he experienced growing up on a farm in North Carolina . He arrived in Harlem in the ’40s and immediately began “taking” what he wanted. He stole, hustled and essentially outsmarted everyone around him. Soon after he arrived, Lucas was mentored for 15 years by one of Harlem ‘s most notorious criminals, “Bumpy” Johnson. When Johnson was killed, Lucas became “the man” and Harlem would never be the same.

Called “sober, intelligent and appropriately judgmental,” by Newsday, “a savvy push into more challenging territory” by Variety, and “a public service” by the New York Daily News, BET’s AMERICAN GANGSTER explores the rise and subsequent fall of some of the country’s most notorious African American criminals of all time and the impact these crimes had on the communities in which they were committed. Narrated by Ving Rhames, each episode of AMERICAN GANGSTER creates a provocative and alternative view of Black America through these criminals’ eyes.

This season, AMERICAN GANGSTER profiles:

## PHILLY BLACK MAFIA

Premiered October 3

From the late '60s to the mid '80s, Tony Soprano and his boys had nothing on the Black Mafia. They were relentlessly ruthless and the most feared mob in Philadelphia 's Black underworld. Not only were they whacking their enemies, they had connections with the Nation of Islam, had a plethora of politicians doing their bidding and would kill anyone who resisted their demands.

## LARRY HOOVER

Premiered October 10

He was the brains behind Chicago 's largest and most powerful street gang, The Gangster Disciples. Even though he's currently behind bars, law enforcement officials still view him as a serious threat. Hoover 's supporters, however, say that he's a different manâ€”one committed to improving his community.

## MELVIN WILLIAMS

Premieres October 17

Some people considered this Baltimore crook a genius because of his extremely high I.Q., but as smart as he was, "Little Melvin" Williams never used his brain power for good. Williams reportedly was the man who brought heroin to Baltimore and oversaw his empire for 30 years. He was smart enough to evade the feds, but one day local police planted a handful of pills in his pocket and brought him down. After serving five years, he exacted his revenge by making millionsâ€”but eventually went back to jail. His criminal past inspired the hit HBO series "The Wire."

## THE D.C. SNIPERS

Premieres October 24

John Muhammad, 42, and Lee Boyd Malvo, 17, became internationally known after they engaged in a random killing spree in the Washington , D.C. , area in 2002. Since neither fit the profile of a serial killer, law enforcement officials assumed that there was only one killer and that he was a white male. The story of how Muhammad methodically trained Malvoâ€”a homeless kid in desperate need of a father figureâ€”is one of the most intriguing in this series.

FRANK LUCAS

Premieres October 31

Denzel Washington plays him in the movie, but Frank Lucas plays himself in this version of “American Gangster.” During his heyday, Lucas was one of the most successful drug dealers in the country, grossing up to \$1 million a day. He got a little too greedy though and was busted by a detective who eventually became his defense attorney when he agreed to help prosecutors dismantle the operations of his competitors. He discusses why he did what he did for the first time.

FELIX MITCHELL

Premieres November 7

He was considered Oakland , Calif. 's first major heroin kingpin. In the late '70s and early '80s he reigned supreme in the city that was once the home base of the Black Panther Party. Mitchell always rolled in style-driving expensive foreign cars, wearing the finest clothes and was a popular fixture on the nightclub scene before his conviction and life sentence. He was stabbed to death in his prison cell in 1986.

JEFF FORT AND THE BLACKSTONE RANGERS

Premieres November 14

Jeff Fort led a small group of teens from the Woodlawn section of Chicago, who were subsequently pegged to take part in a federally funded program designed to help gang members enter the workforce. Somehow, Fort was convicted for misuse of funds and sentenced to four years in jail. Upon his release Fort converted to Islam, but was busted again in 1986 for promising to commit acts of domestic terrorism that were to be subsidized by Libyan dictator Moammar Khadafy. He is currently serving an 80-year term.

## CHAZ WILLIAMS

Premieres November 21

He was a man with a plan. Charlie "Chaz" Williams was one of the most prolific bank robbers in history, robbing more than 60 banks throughout the country during his reign. He got caught and went to jail, but managed to get his 95-year sentence reduced to 15 years. Once he was released, Williams stayed clean and created Black Hand Entertainment. He is currently managing Foxy Brown, who was recently sentenced to a year in jail for violating the terms of her probation.

AMERICAN GANGSTER is produced by Nelson George, Frank Sinton of A. Smith & Company, Mark Rowland and BET.