SAY HELLO TO MY LITTLE FRIEND: DE PALMA'S SCARFACE, CINEMA SPECTATORSHIP, AND THE HIP HOP GANGSTA AS URBAN SUPERHERO

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A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

December 2009

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ABSTRACT

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The objective of the study is to intervene in the ongoing discourse that interrogates the relationship between fictional ultraviolent film representations and real life behavior in audiences that these types of films are marketed to. Using a case study approach to apparatus and audience reception theories, the dissertation investigates the significant role Scarface, the 1983 gangster film directed by Brian De Palma, has played in influencing the cultural and social development of young African-American males who live in American inner cities. The study focuses on how the inner city portion of the Scarface audience came to self-identify themselves as “gangstas” (a Hip-hop term for gangster) and why one particular character in the film, a murderous drug dealer, has served as the gangsta role model for heroic behavior for over twenty-five years.

The study found that performing the gangsta male identity emotionally satisfies these economic and socially disconnected young men and that this group viewed the violent and illegal behavior in Scarface as offering practical solutions to their ongoing struggle to survive the hopelessness and terror rooted in their environment. The research demonstrated that film narratives can be both a window into, and a mirror of, the often paradoxically complex relationships between marginalized target audiences and savvy multi-national media corporations that successfully market negative representations to these audiences, profit from the transactions and, during the process, manipulate both mainstream and oppositional perceptions of class, race, and power.
For my mother, who would be so proud right now.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There have been a great many people who have influenced my journey towards the completion of this manuscript, but none more so than Dr. Don McQuarie, my dissertation advisor. Sustained throughout by Don’s tremendous faith in this project, I am forever indebted to his unwavering support and wise counsel. Dr. Halifu Osumare was supremely influential in encouraging me to step outside of my comfort zone and take on Hip-hop as a research subject. This dissertation began as a paper in her class and I am grateful for her advice as a member of my committee. Dr. Awad Ibrahim’s suggestions were instrumental in constructing the theoretical framework around which the dissertation was crafted. Thank you, Brother Awad. I also am grateful to the Graduate College’s faculty representative, Dr. Priscilla Coleman, who became a trusted friend and staunch supporter.

So many colleagues offered words of encouragement and acts of kindness, or were there to just listen when I wanted to talk about some aspect of the process. To all of you let me convey my sincere appreciation. Finally, I want to publicly acknowledge my core supporters Dr. Denis Mueller and Dave Moody. Much love, guys. It’s two down and one to go. Finally, I would not have made it without the love and support of my extended family in Toledo: Bret and Bernadette Woods, the entire Woods entourage, and the lords and ladies of The Garage. I love you all.
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INTRODUCTION

Respect is the ultimate currency.
Dalton Russell (Inside Man, 2006)

The Education of an Old School Sixties Flower Child

I am a child of the era dominated by the Brown Decision, segregation, Mercury astronauts, Motown, The Beatles, The Civil Rights Movement, assassinations, Blaxploitation, Tricky Dick, and Vietnam. It was a tumultuous time that saw me waste a gifted Ivy League education; after all how else would you evaluate the actions of was a clinically depressed teen aged budding novelist who refused a book deal because he didn’t want to be famous. Because I spent more time partying than studying or writing, my undergraduate degree was completed with an underwhelming 2.69 GPA—and I still don’t know how it got that high. Law school, which my parents had their hearts set on for me since birth, was thus out of the question—my grades had made that option moot and, in hindsight, disappointing them now appears to be the whole point of my frivolity. So I went straight to work and did not consider trying for any type of advanced degree for nearly another thirty years. When I did it was as a “non-traditional” (read “old head”) student intending on taking just one course, The History of Vietnam, at the University of Toledo. In hindsight, I cannot explain why that one class led to this. As a wise man once said during my youth, “stuff” happens. Well, that was not the exact quote.

My absence from the formal education process evidently made me appreciate learning more because the professor of the Vietnam course, Dr. Tom Barden, a veteran of that war, thought so much of my work that he told me that I should think about a career as an academic. Although I thought he was crazy at the time, I did keep going, taking one course after another
including a summer film course at Bowling Green State University that changed my life. It was in this seminar that I learned I had the academic chops, finding myself on equal footing with second and third year PhD students. I was brought to the attention of Dr. Don McQuarie, who invited me to apply to the master’s program in the department he chaired, American Culture Studies, at Bowling Green State University. His caveat was that I go directly for the PhD full time. This offer came to a guy who was four years removed from being homeless and who was, at the time, selling hams over the phone full time and producing public service announcements for cable on the side. The year was 2003.

Having chosen film and media studies as a discipline, during my second year of PhD study I decided to study Hip-hop culture, a subject well outside my comfort zone. I did not like rap music but I wanted to better understand what the attraction was for those who did. Putting aside my apprehensions, I registered for American Culture Studies 782, “Hip Hop Media & Mass Culture,” a course taught by Dr. Halifu Osumare. Fascinated by the pants-around-the-ass wearing young black brothers I rationalized it was time, for this old dog to learn some new tricks. Hip-hop’s influence on Hollywood was very apparent to me, and learning more about that relationship was the major reason I registered for the class. During the semester I also began to develop my long term research interests, including what might be some potential dissertation topics. But having come into manhood weaned on Cotton Comes to Harlem (1970), Shaft (1971), Superfly (1972), Coffy (1973), The Mack (1973), and Black Caesar (1973), I fully intended to write a dissertation that would focus on some aspect of the Blaxploitation era. The dissertation process would be, I rationalized, no time to step out on a limb. But it was also obvious to me that films like Boyz N the Hood (1991), New Jack City (1991), and Menace II
Society (1993), among many others in the crime cinema genre that fueled Blaxploitation, contained all of the elements that made those 1970s films so compelling. Everything was there—the on-location starkness of the urban mis-en-scene, the compelling criminal villains, the stories centered on revenge and greed, and of course, the black actors who provided performances of substantial cultural meaning.

I began to search for a film, located somewhere in the eighties and one with elements of both genres, that would serve as a useful research footnote to my planned Blaxploitation foray. There had been a long fifteen year dry spell between the two contemporary black film eras, the Blaxploitation era (circa 1970-1976) and the Hip-hop cinema era, known for the so called Hood (or ‘hood) films that emerged in 1991. Professor Osumare’s course allowed for my investigation to begin in earnest. Along the way, however, my focus began to change in direct proportion to my trust in my professor. A nationally recognized Hip-hop expert, Osumare enabled me to embrace the young, black, and male part of the culture, its natural connection to me. During the process of discovery I found a film I believed was the link between the two black film eras. So for a final paper, instead of writing on a Blaxploitation related topic, a cinema that I loved and understood, I decided to flesh out my theory on the film that I was convinced was the bridge over which the elements of Blaxploitation had crossed into the stories of John Singleton, who had written and directed Boyz; Mario Van Peebles, the director and co-star of New Jack City; and Menace creators The Hughes Brothers. That film was Scarface.

The “New Jack” Moment

The 1983 Brian De Palma directed gangster film chronicles the tumultuous life and violent death of Antonio Montana, a just-off-the-boat Mariel boatlift Cuban refugee who, having been released from Castro’s jails, lands nose deep in the Miami cocaine underworld. My close
reading of Scarface found that the film contained both key elements of the basic story structure of a Blaxploitation genre film and, had clearly inspired the plots of the narco dramas that define much of Hip-hop’s crime cinema subgenre. But what I found most compelling was that Scarface had made a significant cameo appearance in the first of these ‘hood crime films, showing up smack-dab-in-the-middle of director Mario Van Peeble’s New Jack City as the favorite movie of the film’s villain Nino Brown (Wesley Snipes). This moment, seen below in a screen capture, was my epiphany. I have been engaged in researching the film ever since.

Figure 1. Point of Entry.

“Say Hello to My Little Friend!” New Jack City’s inclusion of the most famous scene from Scarface was an intertextual revelation and the foundational point of entry for this study. New Jack City screen capture by Rob Prince.

Upon reflection, it was this intertextual moment which ultimately convinced me to pursue Scarface as a dissertation project. In the screen capture the two cocaine kingpins, Gee Money (Alan Payne, on the left) and Nino Brown (Snipes, with back to camera), celebrate their success by watching, on Brown’s movie theater sized widescreen home system, his favorite film scene from Scarface—the “say hello to my little friend” siege against Tony Montana (that’s Al Pacino on Brown’s movie screen at the titular moment). Van Peebles had taken the extraordinary step of including Universal Studios’ Scarface as a plot point in his Warner Brothers production. My
desire to understand why the director saw fit to include a film from another studio was my motivation for beginning this study. I wanted to understand why this particular reference occurred, in this specific film, at this moment in film history, and what cultural meaning, if any, the scene’s inclusion had generated. At the time I first saw New Jack at the movie theater I was completely unaware of its significance to Hip-hop audience.

My long standing relationships with Youngblood Priest of Superfly, John Shaft, and all of my other black action film heroes from the seventies, endure. It was a personal confidence gained from having been there, in the moment of that glorious Blaxploitation period, which enabled me to connect my generation’s anti-heroes to the anti-heroic iconography of Tony Montana. They both are cut from the same cloth. Consequently, with Dr. Osumare’s help and encouragement, I was empowered to write a final paper in her course on the relationship between Scarface’s influence on Hip-hop audiences and the film’s ultimate transformation into a late capitalist commodity by its corporate owners. This dissertation is a reconsidered, revised, and greatly expanded version of the paper I completed for Dr. Osumare. Both she and Dr. McQuarie have continued to support my research by serving on my dissertation committee.

**Theoretical and Methodological Underpinnings**

Say Hello to My Little Friend is theoretically and methodologically an audience reception study. The project will explain how and why one specific gangster film in American cinema history inspired an acutely devoted segment of its audience to adopt the attitudes, philosophies, ideologies, and behaviors found in the film for practical use in, and reinforcement of, their own lives. As had other fans of the genre, this audience was found to be greatly impressed with the mythology of criminal capitalist success. Through an analysis of this particular reception’s raison d’être, that being the profoundly influential sense of satisfaction created from the relationship
between the hyperreality of the fictional gangster world and the harsh reality of the urban life confronting the film’s black male spectators, this study will interrogate the connection between an ultraviolent crime film and the real life behavior of the audience the film was marketed to.

Using a case study approach to apparatus and audience reception theories, I will elaborate upon the significant role the gangster crime drama Scarface has played in influencing the cultural and social attitudes of young and black male members of the Hip-hop generation who live in America’s inner cities. This audience, a group from as young as puberty to their early forties, is arguably America’s most socially feared, politically reviled, and economically deprived demographic population. They are also a group grossly marginalized by the media and rarely given thorough consideration in academic film reception studies. Say Hello to My Little Friend hopes to break new ground, and thereby remedy these negligent practices, by considering a number of salient factors. First, why this segment of the Scarface audience’s self-identification of themselves as “gangstas” (a hip hop term for gangsters) was reinforced significantly after the film was appropriated by Hip-hop around 1988; second, why the film’s main character, the murderous drug dealer Tony Montana (Al Pacino), has served as the gangsta’s role model for heroic behavior for, at latest reckoning, over twenty-five years. Given the long term and consistent eruptions of deadly black male-on-black male violence in our cities, acts which appear to mirror the behavior occurring in Hollywood film dramas of this ilk, the media driven root causes of these occurrences need to highlighted and closely analyzed. One overarching thesis the study intends to advance is that by assisting in the creation of a formula for real life “gangsta” behavior, Scarface has played a major role in perpetuating the ongoing mayhem that is occurring on the streets of urban America.
Tangentially, as the research into this supposition progressed, the study found it prudent to deconstruct the process by which this marginalized audience caused Scarface to economically and culturally prosper beyond all reasonable expectations. Scarface “blew up,” to use the original Hip-hop nomenclature. The study could not, and did not, ever lose sight of the fact that Hollywood filmmaking is first and foremost a business and, as a produced commodity of the capitalist economic system, Scarface would always be judged by its principals on whether or not it returned to them a profit and, moreover, whether that profit fell short of, met, or exceeded their projected expectations, irregardless of the film’s aesthetical contributions to culture. These underlying conditions, and the study’s evaluation of how Scarface was catapulted in economic hyper-space will, to use a screenwriting term, serve as a significant backstory for the dissertation.

In the case of 1983’s Scarface, the film had performed with modest financial success upon its release and later added market share after its eventual introduction to the (then brand new) home video sales and rental marketplace. However, when Hip-hop was “formally” introduced to the property in 1988 (by way of a rap recording, “Balls and My Word,” that sampled dialogue from the film), the response by the Scarface ownership was to, in a word, capitalize on this unexpectedly intense high level of new interest. The result was the swift corporate hyper-commodification of the film into multiple consumer friendly platforms, a response that clearly and decisively took advantage of Hip-hop’s growing power to mint cultural currency. What the study found was revealing. Despite an ongoing fear of Hip-hop black males in America, capitalist’s, in the grand traditions of patriarchal hegemony, found a use for them. Correctly evaluated as having the ability to create vast economic fortunes for anyone willing to heed the fact that they could determine the success of a business venture simply by deeming it “cool,” they were, in fact, a late capitalist’s midsummer night’s wet dream.
The Evaluative Threads of the Research

At its elementary core, Scarface is a film that was created and sold to its public by rich white men. As the study will repeat throughout, in much the same manner as a mantra, the film had no black representations. Nada. Zip. Given the adoration from the black segment of the audience to be studied herein, the research methodology was challenged to evaluate a wide variety of factors to determine why there was any attraction at all, much less the worshipful genuflections it receives from Hip-hop black males. These factors ranged from the obvious to the subtle and included the mainstream and Hip-hop audience’s different receptions of the film; the aesthetics of Scarface as a Hollywood production in the tradition of the industry’s gangster films genre; a comparative analysis between the less than satisfactory critical reviews of the film by the media and public in 1983 and its canonical rehabilitation in 2003; the film’s appropriation by rap and subsequent acceptance of its ideological values by Hip-hop culture; the near genius business model that marketed and sold Scarface (and its subsequent spin offs) to the public after the film was critically left for dead by two thirds of those same reviewers who wrote about the film when it first appeared; and lastly, the development of that successfully marketed commodity into an influential ideological force that perpetuated the continuation of Gramsci’s model of white patriarchal cultural hegemony.

In this last instance the study, while not originally intending to do so, ultimately became enamored with the juxtaposition of the Scarface brand, as symbol of ideological cultural hegemony, in relation to its greatest champion, the gangsta Hip-hop male audience that, because of the lack of any black representations in the film text and its often egregious pseudo-blackface make up transformations of white men into dark skinned Cubans, it would have been reasonable to assume would mightily resist this latest product of patriarchal stereotypicality. But, these
spectators, as the study will advance, had a stunningly opposite reaction to the film. Therefore, another aspect of the study’s theoretical foundations will include a brief contextual discussion of Antonio Gramsci’s theory of cultural hegemony, which will serve to unite the audience reception and spectatorship aspects of the study with the study’s supremely ironic concluding argument—that the ideology of the gangsta, that now bastion of unique black male toughness, owes its development to white males—in the form of cultural patriarchy.

A Case Study Methodology

This research project uses the case study model to interrogate an audience’s reception of a film. Stuart Hall’s work to develop a system which argues that audiences are active participants in the decoding and encoding of media texts is indispensable to the research conducted on Scarface. His approach allows for a space that can include a wide variety of other theoreticians and theoretical tools and the study is indebted to this brilliant scholar and his very assessable theories. In addition to Hall, Robert Stam and Toby Miller’s seminal text, Film and Theory, which, among other topics, provides an in-depth analysis of both audience reception theory and apparatus theory, concepts that allowed me to pour my own theoretical foundation for the study of the Hip-hop black male audience, was also an essential resource. Other key scholars whose research efforts were central to this study are elaborated upon under the Chapter One subheading, The Existing Conversation and Literature Relevant to the Research (page 33). However, scattered like stars throughout Say Hello to My Little Friend, are insightfully useful products from the minds of scores of scholars from psychology, psychiatry, sociology, and film studies. Most importantly, the study allows participants, practitioners, and everyday people from Hip-hop to speak on their own behalf. This methodology was purposefully engaged so as to allow the study to be accessible beyond the academy.
Concerns for achieving this accessibility caused *Say Hello to My Little Friend* to employ a decidedly non-traditional approach in its the substance, style, and format. I took full advantage of the opportunity offered by the Bowling Green Graduate College to seek out new techniques that would assist in the presentation of a dissertation freed from the limitations of traditional hard copy publication. For example, visual cues of cultural relevancy to the study will be used in making key points, and many of these are Internet based, an atypical resource. There is overall, an extensive use of Internet based references, articles, blogs, fan based chat communities, and corporate and fan based websites utilized by the study because it was found that these formed the core of Scarface’s new cultural relevancy. These research tools also underscored the lack of these resources during the film’s initial theatrical run back in 1983-1984 while providing relevant proof of the World Wide Web as an indispensable mechanism central to the development of the long term success of the Scarface mythological accoutrement.

However, the most germane resource used in the study is the Scarface film itself. Inspired by the groundbreaking acting performance analysis work of Dr. Cynthia Baron, my long time film studies mentor at Bowling Green, I have created freeze frame screen captures of the most important moments in the film relevant to Hip-hop’s subsequent interpretation. This methodological research approach serves to visually supplement the written close reading that has become traditional for film studies. In addition to written descriptions of Scarface’s key scenes, the study includes over one hundred evaluative visual representations to aid readers. These images are an integral part to the study’s methodology in that they provide evidence of how and why the gangsta’s identity has been so greatly influenced by Scarface. As goes the old bromide, seeing is believing.
These visual moments capture the idea that witnessing the gangsta male identity performed in the film emotionally satisfied, defended, and provided much needed cultural support to the Scarface Hip-hop audience who, the study discovered, decoded the violent and illegal behavior in the film in a manner that appears to be similar to experiencing an actual historical event in the moment. The actions of Tony Montana also appear to offer this audience practical solutions in their ongoing struggle to survive the hopelessness and terror rooted in their environment. A major outcome of the study is the discovery that Scarface offers both a window into, and a mirror of, the complex relationship between economically lower class audiences and the savvy multi-national media corporations that successfully sell negative representations to these audiences, profit from the transactions and, during the process, manipulate both mainstream and oppositional perceptions of class, race, and power for the benefit of the cultural status quo. Thus, the study views Scarface as a case study of a film transcending art and becoming much more than just a mere film going experience.

This occurred because, among its many contributions, the film’s influence upon gangsta Hip-hop uniquely symbolizes the ongoing struggle between marginalized populations and cultural hegemony. The marginalized are represented in this study by the Hip-hop male audience and hegemony by the Hollywood film industry and its transnational media partners. As the study will reveal, the forces of cultural hegemony are so insidiously pervasive that the performances of urban black masculinity, seemingly based on decades old street codes, unspoken honor systems, and defensively philosophical “cool” attitudes, were instead found to be ideologically based firmly within an white heteronormative patriarchal value system. In essence Scarface, a film written and produced by white males from Hollywood, espouses traditional white Eurocentric male values while managing to ignore black images. This modus operandi should come as no
surprise under normal circumstances. However, that the film crossed over from whiteness to blackness, becoming immensely culturally relevant to the black male dominated Hip-hop culture, is surprising. This study reveals how this occurred, and what is at stake.

Structure of the Study

What is at stake? The acceptance of Scarface as a role model to achieve the American dream should scare the hell out of all of us. So completely has been its inculcation into both Hip-hop street life and the mainstream (and one could argue that Hip-hop is the mainstream right now) all parties interested in a deeper psychological understanding of the urban males’ seemingly pathological propensity for violent solutions need to first recognize that the Scarface is, in fact, a highly influential social phenomenon that has been influencing aggressive styles, behavior, and attitudes since 1983. Given these circumstances, and the rich history of cinema’s ability to inflict historical context, a discussion of why and how this phenomenon occurred is crucial at this point in American history, given the horrific “Scarface styled” violence that is ongoing in our inner cities. The structural emphasis of the study reflects this concern.

Say Hello to My Little Friend is organized into eight chapters. Chapter one discusses the foundations of the dissertation. In this chapter I outline my overarching thesis: that Tony Montana’s cinematic persona was received by Hip-hop ghetto audiences as that of a comic book type superhero, with the twist being that, unlike Superman or Spider-man, his behavior could be imitated in real life. The chapter serves as a starting point for the study’s discussion of Scarface’s influence on both the construction of the “gangsta” subculture of black masculine identity and the transcendence of Scarface, from inner city role model to mainstream American popular culture icon. Readers are introduced to the idea that Hip-hop males revered the film because they viewed it as symbolic of their ongoing defiance to the oppression of white male patriarchy.
Chapter one also introduces the concept of the gangsta’s street code of honor, a recurring theme central to the study, in which I explain how Tony Montana’s behavior connects with existing values and norms within the gangsta subculture. This concept elaborates upon Hip-hop’s oppositional reading of the film.

The focus of Chapter Two will be to acknowledge and review the origins of the substantial cultural capital Scarface acquired. The chapter begins to develop answers to the question of why a film that originally received unfavorable reviews has endured as a fan favorite and, moreover, has transcended the genre to become both an icon of popular culture and a profitable corporate brand name. Since Hip-hop’s fascination with the film, traced by the study back to the Geto Boys’ 1988’s rap recording of “Balls and My Word,” borders on the obsessive, the study will use the moniker “Scarfacination” to describe this behavior.

Chapter Three provides a genealogy of events that conspired to cause the film to unexpectedly become a significant focus of the Hip-hop audience’s identity construction. This construction happened to collude with a system of ghetto street values, symbolized by scenes in the film, to form the foundation of the phenomenon. Chapter Three also recounts the story of Collins Leysath, aka DJ Ready Red; he is the man who the study discovered deserves singular credit for introducing Hip-hop culture to the Scarface film. Red’s story takes us into his New Jersey basement on a cold January night in 1987 and describes why and how Leysath decided that Scarface would be his inspiration for a seminal rap song, “Ball and My Word.” Readers will witness the “ground zero” moment that Scarface became for the gangsta evolution that followed in the years to come.

Chapter Four chronicles the cultural and economic evolution of the film after Hip-hop embraced Scarface and infused it with new meaning. The chapter documents the movement of
Scarfacination from DJ Red Ready’s basement into the living rooms of every home in America. Over the next two decades the entire world would be exposed to an incredibly well orchestrated marketing blitz, inspired by the relentless militancy of gangsta style, the results of which would ultimately mythologize Scarface by reimagining the film as aesthetically being in the same league with films like *The Godfather*. Scarface’s tainted critical history would be washed clean, and the film transformed from film industry step-sister to mainstream Cinderella. Readers will come to understand how a deeply flawed film was catapulted by the marginalized poor of the inner city into a cash cow for corporate America. The chapter also discusses how Hip-hop’s embrace of the film caused the establishment of culturally hegemonic norms within the ghetto as the film’s narrative of achieving the American dream by violent means became both a practice and an expectation of Hip-hop males.

Chapter Five places the film within the historical context of its gangster genre roots. As a reimagination of Howard Hawks’ 1932 crime cinema classic of the same name, Brian De Palma’s version invokes the legacy of the infamously ruthless Chicago mobster Al Capone, and the influential performances of gangster genre actors Edward G. Robinson, Humphrey Bogart, Paul Muni, and James Cagney. The chapter discusses how the 1983 version came to be produced, including the how the film’s star, Al Pacino, first came to propose the idea, a fact that, as readers will notice, curiously is contested by Pacino’s own business partner, producer Martin Bregman, who claims he, and not Pacino, came up with the idea doing the Scarface project first.

In Chapter Six Scarface is situated within the existing black masculine identity discourse. An analysis is undertaken to discover the socio-psychological root causes for the film’s astounding resonance with Hip-hop males. The chapter details the relationship between existing violent urban gangsta behaviors and a noticeable lack of emotion, and the effects of long term,
systemic social and economic oppression upon this particular audience demographic. In addition, the chapter lays the groundwork for understanding why the predominately black Hip-hop male audience connected with Scarface. The term “Gangsta code,” a list invented by the study which details the traits, behaviors, and rules necessary for ongoing inner city survival, is introduced. It is the Gangsta code which serves as the study’s Rosetta Stone. It decodes and interprets gangsta behavior in context with circumstances in the film, providing the translation as to how Scarface’s narrative segments were received by the Hip-hop audience.

A close reading of those scenes in the film from which the gangsta gained his inspiration is begun in Chapter Seven. It is argued that the scenes which exerted the most influence on gangsta identity construction are those that manifested the highest concentration of values adhered to in the Gangsta code. Thus, the Gangsta code’s values are clearly exhibited by the Montana character in the scenes selected for analysis.

Chapter Eight concludes the study. Therein, the two most crucial film segments of the study are evaluated against the standards of the Gangsta code. In addition, the chapter reflects upon why the Hip-hop male audience’s oppositional approach to white patriarchal heroic constructions is important. Also reflected upon is the idea of Scarface as an example of art provoking a delicious paradox. As a film revered by its young and black film audience in spite of the fact that its diegesis renders black people and their neighborhoods invisible, the study determines that we should care greatly about how and why a poor and powerless marginalized audience, ignored by the creative forces that created the story fell in love with, changed the direction of American culture.
Limitations and Caveats

Every scholarly research project has limitations and caveats that need to be expressed. In the case of this dissertation the intent of my research is to focus on a film that neither existing film studies scholars or Hip-hop cultural researchers had studied in-depth. As such, a lot of new ground will be covered. My observations, opinions, and research methods will not often reflect or “piggy back” the thoughts of other scholars who are participating in the ongoing discussion of the film because, frankly, that discussion has been limited. One good example is the use of screen captures for close reading. To my knowledge, no one has made a prior attempt to use this technique as extensively as has been employed in this study.

Let me also state that the study did not intend, nor will it attempt, to review the entirety of the gangster genre, of which Scarface is a member. Those texts which, and intellectuals who, discuss Scarface will be, of course, thoroughly reviewed. In addition, because the dissertation often contrasts and compares white and black male heroic behavior on film, and because male heroes in particular are the lynchpin of the vast majority of cinema narratives, the research intends to provide only an overview of the subject, except where specific examples of traditional and non-traditional heroic archetypes are drawn upon to advance my arguments.

The analysis of Hip-hop aged black male behaviors and attitudes, considered in relationship to a particular feature film, is a focus of this study. Within this text one specific term, the “cool pose,” a phrase created by two preeminent scholars in the field of black psychology, is utilized to define the ongoing defensive nature of life on the streets in urban America. While the cool pose can certainly be (and is) used by women in the same manner as is by men, the study chooses not to enter into a discussion on the female body and or its use of this technique. The study also utilizes visual images of women taken from various screen captures of
scenes from both Scarface and other sources. Many of these images show the female body in positions which could be (or are) considered objectifications. These representations are offered as examples of patriarchal manipulation.

Because it is the intent of the study to focus on men exclusively, this fact should not assume that the scholarship herein is anti-female or anti-feminist. By concentrating exclusively on the black male and his relationship to the forces surrounding him, the study recognizes that women are often omitted from this discussion. Both how women are portrayed in the film and how female audiences have responded to the film both inside and external to Hip-hop are both subjects worthy of analysis. However, the study will simply leave, at least for now, the analysis of the women portrayed in Scarface (and there are three major women characters in the film), to other scholars to pursue.

The study also understands that there are a great many black and or Hispanic traditional heroes in film and, again, the discussion of these characters, and the actors who play them, is limited to relevance to this body of work. Care has been taken to discuss those limited number of films and film heroes that have been determined to evidence the disparity between the creation of white male heteronormative heroes and the lack of similar heroes which could or should speak to the psychological needs of inner city black males.

Moreover, this study recognizes that marginalized people includes ethnicities other than black people in general, and black males specifically. In this case, as a black male, I feel very comfortable discussing the plight, hopes, dreams, behaviors, and attitudes of this group because, age difference aside, I am a part of this demographic. I acknowledge that a similar study could be done about Scarface and its relationship to the Hispanic population, its men in particular. The fact that the main characters (with one exception) in the film are supposed to be Cuban but are,
in fact portrayed by white male and female Italian-Americans, is as good a premise as any for an interrogation, especially since one Hispanic male fan of the film, Mr. Cartoon, is quoted in the study as believing Al Pacino’s performance to be authentic (see Figure 29. Mr. Cartoon, page 124.) The study will also leave that potential project to someone who feels more qualified than I do to undertake it.

Finally, there is my use of the word “black” to describe the race I belong to. I fully realize that African-American is the designation du jour. I have decided—after seeing us progress exponentially from having our true names erased, to being called colored, then Negroes, then Afro-Americans, blacks, and finally African-Americans—to simply stop at black. I just got tired. My use is solely based on my own comfort level, my feeling that “black” is the appropriate binary opposite for any discussion of “white” patriarchy (a term often used in this study) and my belief that James Brown’s “I’m Black and I’m Proud” is the last word on racial pride for the descendants of the slave holocaust.
How did Scarface (1983), a film that starred Al Pacino as Tony Montana, a penniless Cuban born immigrant who became the cocaine kingpin of Miami, become the culturally symbolic representation of Hip-hop’s gangsta subculture? The film, evaluated by the mainstream media at the time of its release as a consensus critical and financial failure, somehow assisted in the transformation of Hip-hop from a socially conscious, community-oriented militancy, exampled by Public Enemy’s “Fight the Power,” to a more self-centered, defensive, and violence prone attitude controlled by the gangsta values expressed in The Geto Boys’ “Balls and My Word.” This study seeks to present and evaluate the circumstances which conspired to socially construct this new philosophy. Because they are at the center of these changes, it is that segment of the Scarface film audience known as Hip-hop gangstas, typically young black males who live in the many geographic areas Americans define as the urban “inner city,” who will be the focus of this audience reception study.

Despite my status as a black male considerably older than the audience being studied, I can at least relate to having been a young black man who loved going to the movies and dreaming about being one of the heroes that I saw on the silver screen. When all is said and done, this is also what this study is about—young men seeing a film, wishing they were the hero, and then going out and trying to be that hero. It is the last part of that equation, the “going out and trying to be that hero,” that ultimately separates this audience’s reception from practically every other film going experience. Scarface features a hero who is a criminal, a hardly heroic set of circumstances—at least from the perspective of mainstream thinking. Therefore when this
audience emulates their hero they more often than not have to, at a minimum, exhibit a criminal’s attitude.

This is what makes a study of Scarface and its Hip-hop audience so interesting. Tony Montana may have one or two admirable qualities but the bottom line is that he is a drug dealing murderer. He provides cocaine to people and he profits handsomely from their resulting misery. Thus the question would be why is he so loved? One possibility is that, with the exception of scenes that include Elvira Hancock, the woman he eventually marries, the long term damage caused by cocaine use is nowhere to be seen in Scarface. So, again, why is Montana loved to the extent that he is? The answer is because he is very much, constructed fiction that he is, a “person” who is similar to his audience. A major finding of this study is that what constitutes a film hero in the inner city is vastly different from mainstream choices, in part because mainstream heroes are overwhelmingly white and male and, moreover, clearly designed to reinforce the ideological status quo of law, order, and justice. The gangsta wants no part of this trope.

**No Justice, No Peace**

His ghetto-based social and economic challenges cause the Hip-hop gangsta spectator to be, more often than not, resistant to the justice system. In fact, he would agree with anyone who would suggest that he cannot receive fair and impartial treatment from the police or the courts. The lack of social justice has often caused his frustrations to boil over into anger and even violent rage, emotions that have been well documented by both private and public research.14 These emotional responses often force spectators into a skewed world view at odds with mainstream conventions. Therefore, the rationale a Hip-hop black male uses to choose his role models should be viewed as a psychological symptom of a larger socio-economic condition. And
since the behavior of film characters often serve as one of pillars of identity construction, Scarface serves as a good example of how the external living conditions of this audience caused them to accept a decidedly non-traditional film hero. Ergo Tony Montana, a murderous drug dealer, was chosen as the gangsta’s heroic icon, for at least two reasons. First, using as a model the narrative formula employed by Blaxploitation films (the closest texts to Scarface in terms of story and character development; also films with audiences similar to the Hip-hop male audiences of Scarface), the study discovered that a major factor determining who is a hero in the eyes of the Hip-hop audience is the main character’s exhibition of traits that are in direct opposition to the known status quo. Second, it was discovered that this particular choice (Montana) was viewed by his audience as adhering to a set of long standing values and norms that constitute the behavior necessary to survive (and often thrive) on the mean streets of the inner city. The latter reason also conforms to the ability of the character to avoid supporting the status quo.

The status quo includes the fact that this ghetto based audience maintains a long standing adversarial relationship with the legal system. It responds differently to films which support fair play and attempt to reinforce the notion that justice always prevails. These spectators often feel that the law is not to be trusted and, moreover, conspires against them because they are poor, black, and powerless. This audience also lives in a geographic location where the police presence is so intense that it often looks like they are an occupying force in their neighborhoods. In the ghetto the police are most likely seen as the “bad guys,” sent in to harass and disempower poor residents, not protect and serve them. Tony Montana, in part because he purchases police protection like one would purchase toilet paper, plays out a ghetto fantasy of respect, wealth, and power. In that respect Scarface is much like the Blaxploitation films I loved as a young man.
Project Origins

As has been previously declared, this project began as an idea which would have focused on another topic entirely. Having spent my undergraduate years smack in the middle of the Blaxploitation film era, I hoped to focus on how those films presented black male identity. I thought that comparing representations in films like *Slaughter*, *Shaft*, *Superfly*, *Black Caesar*, and *Sweet Sweetback’s Bad Ass Song* would be both useful interventions in the discourse and fun to write about. But the concerns I had with the fearful views expressed by gangsta rap—of a world devoid of any goodness or hope—continued to gnaw at me. And, beginning in the early 1990’s gangsta rap’s blunt force trauma was becoming the subject of films like *New Jack City*, *Boyz N the Hood*, and *Menace II Society*, which had became influential to a whole new generation of impressionable inner city audiences.

So I changed my mind, deciding to compare and contrast Blaxploitation male imagery to those in Hip-hop cinema of the early 1990’s. Featuring the aforementioned groundbreaking films *New Jack City* (directed by black independent film maverick Melvin Van Peebles’ son Mario), *Menace II Society* (the stunning directorial debut of the twenty year old Hughes Brothers), and *Boyz N the Hood* (helmed by twenty-three year old USC graduate John Singleton), Hip-hop themed films became the topic of several articles and texts. Blaxploitation had been, and continues to a lesser extent today to be, a subject for which scholars have given many learned and passionate renderings. There was a long gap between 1975, the last year of Blaxploitation’s era of militant heroism and 1991, the beginning of the anti-heroes which were the focus for “New Jack gangsta” films such as *Menace II Society*. It was hard for me to believe that there had been no suitable heroic representations for young black ghetto males in between those two eras. But, after some reflection, I determined that the few black male film stars that
were promoted by Hollywood during the gap had been primarily marketed to white mainstream audiences. Thus I asked myself the question that would ultimately launch this dissertation. Was there a link between the two eras to be found, a similar themed film that could offer a point of intersection and observation for the heroic mythology of one generation and the next?

What occurred between the two eras is both instructive and supportive of my choice of Scarface as the film that I believe does link the two eras. In 1975, around the time when the last of the Blaxploitation films was being released, the Hollywood blockbuster era began with Jaws. Two years later, the first Star Wars trilogy (with films in 1977, 1980, 1983) began. Full of hope, and with a liberal social commentary that could be read as being thankful for the end of the Vietnam War and the beginning of Jimmy Carter’s Presidency, George Lucas’ science fiction adventure saga maintained traditional Hollywood heroic paradigms while curiously managing to eliminate the black race from the galaxy far, far away. And while there were hundreds of films made between the end of Blaxploitation and the “New Jack” era, I am not convinced that any had the deep life-changing psychological impact on ghetto audiences that occurred before and after. This fifteen year period also saw Hollywood replace perennial audience favorite Sidney Poitier, whose ground-breaking integrationist roles had fallen into disfavor, by selling the coarse comedian Richard Pryor as the next great black film star. Pryor never achieved Poitier’s level of impact on Hollywood history but, because of his comedic genius, managed to supersede the more dynamic action film persona of his close friend, the trailblazing action star, black nationalist, and pro football immortal Jim Brown. Thus, there appeared to be no representation in film which fully captured the imagination of the younger generation of Hip-hop males, the exception possibly that of the bad ass evil of Lord Vader’s black male voice.
As was discussed in this study’s Introduction, there was a moment in *New Jack City* which not only caught my attention but convinced me that the link between Hip-hop cinema and Blaxploitation had been right in front of me the whole time. In the Warner Brothers crime saga production director Mario Van Peebles had inserted a clip (see Figure #1, page 5) from Universal’s *Scarface* in his film, a highly unusual intertextual moment given that studios rarely recognize films outside of their own. Moreover, Van Peebles depicted the film as the favorite of the cocaine drug lord gangster, Nino Brown (Wesley Snipes).21 This was an important semiotic moment because, by offering a direct reference to *Scarface*’s influence on a Hip-hop cinema gangster, the significance of the scenes inclusion scene in *New Jack City* begged full consideration.

When I revisited *Scarface* it soon became apparent to me that I was on to something. After screening the film several times I began to suspect that *Scarface*, more than any other film, might be the link between Hip-hop and the Blaxploitation films of the seventies that I was searching for. I came to understand that, because of the dearth of black male heroic representations in cinema, ghetto audiences could accept a film like *Scarface* as meaningful after Blaxploitation’s demise because it offered a powerful underdog-of-the-underclass heroic journey. *Scarface* was perfectly situated to serve as a temporal bridge between the Blaxploitation era and the New Jack era. Still, there was so much I did not understand about *Scarface* and its connection to Hip-hop. For example, at the time I first began to deconstruct the *Scarface* text I did not know that there was a rapper who had changed his name to that of the film. I did not know that there were already in place dozens and dozens of homages and references to *Scarface* in Hollywood films and gangsta rap music videos. I also had never heard of a man named DJ Ready Red, a member of the controversial Houston rap group The Geto Boys, and the rap artist
who first “sampled” the film in a music video. That has all changed. Fascinated by the myth of Scarface created by hip-hop, I began a quest to get to the bottom of why a film panned by both press and public alike would be able to rise, like Lazarus, transcending the gangster genre to become an iconic symbol of urban capitalist aspirations. Thus, one purpose of my dissertation is, among other goals, to report my findings.

As it turns out Tony Montana never actually disappeared into the watery reviewer’s grave that all cinema pundits, save Roger Ebert and Vincent Canby, had prepared for him. Scarface did have an ongoing audience for its message on the American dream. Moreover, this audience sincerely appreciated Montana’s tough-talking action-taking Cuban anti-hero. Tony Montana’s quest, to try to make the American dream of wealth and fame his own, became his true audience’s quest. That true audience was situated within the urban inner city and comprised initially of members who were poor, black, and male.

The Popularity of Scarface

Scarface owes its popularity to a “hero gap” that existed at the time in cinema. This gap was the result of a more subtle, yet nevertheless systemic, racism in Hollywood where heroic representations of black characters, those that truly represented the class pathos of the inner city were, for the most part, absent between the end of Blaxploitation in 1976, an era featuring films such as Sweet Sweetback (1971), Shaft (1971), Superfly (1972), The Mack (1973), Black Caesar (1973), and Coffy (1973), and the so called “hood films” of the nineties, which began with New Jack City in 1991, and included Boyz N the Hood (1991), Juice (1992), and Menace II Society (1993). After Blaxploitation’s demise, Hollywood’s failure to continue to provide inner city audiences with black action stars caused an “oasis” type effect as ghetto audiences, faced with a barren cinematic desert of omission and neglect, appeared to fall in love with first character that
it felt represented them in a long time, 1983’s Tony Montana, the cocaine dealing lead figure in Scarface.

And while Montana’s nationality (Cuban), played by Al Pacino (he of Sicilian ancestry), was not the black heroic character audiences got used to during the Blaxploitation, his behaviors were more “gangsta,” “authentic,” or “ghetto” than those of say, Eddie Murphy’s detective Axel Foley in the Beverly Hills Cop series or Billy D. Williams’ sidekick spaceship pilot Lando Calrissian in The Empire Strikes Back and Return of the Jedi. Ironically, the baddest nigga in the galaxy in all of the original Star Wars films was the black male voiced (by James Earl Jones) Darth Vader. Given these choices Hip-hop male audiences were eager to support a hero they could call their own and Tony Montana was in the right place at the most opportune time.

Montana’s representation as an anti-hero operating outside the law was consistent with—Shaft and Cleopatra Jones being the notable exceptions—almost every screen “hero” ghetto audiences rooted for during the militant Blaxploitation era. Montana, as a cocaine dealer, was a perfect fit to assume the mantle of ghetto superhero, a template created by Youngblood Priest in Superfly. In Hip-hop vernacular, ghetto audiences, in supporting those that society would label criminals, were “flippin’ the script.” Flippin’ the script (or inversion of societal norms) will be interchangeable terms used throughout the dissertation to describe the rationales and methods the Hip-hop audiences used to later take Tony Montana’s criminal persona and construct valuable cultural capital.

**Thesis Statement**

In 2003 Vibe magazine, arguably the most popular mass circulation Hip-hop magazine in the world published a special “Hollywood” issue. On the cover was rap superstar 50 Cent presented in an exact replication of the iconic red, black, and white Scarface movie poster.
Rap superstar 50 Cent presents in an exact replication of the iconic red, black, and white Scarface movie poster.

Image of cover from the website Vibe Covers Collection at: http://www.tylerlee.net/magcovers/magvibe.htm.

50 Cent’s visage symbolized the magazine’s recognition of the film as the most influential in Hip-hop, a coronation that placed the film atop a list of fifty films the magazine honored for their inspiration to the culture.\(^{24}\) How do we validate such a claim knowing that Vibe’s main purpose is to sell magazines not undertake the scholarly pursuit of truth?

One thing is clear: Tony Montana is a superhero to the underclass males of the ghetto who consider themselves a part of the Hip-hop generation. One objective of the dissertation is to determine whether Vibe is right. Because of Hip-hop’s “Scarfacination” the film has become a multi-million dollar merchandising profit center for its owner Universal Studios, and a persona dramatis (stage name) for a rap musician. But beyond that Scarface has been used as a verb. A foreign policy expert began using the title of the film as a political term for U.S. global military aggression, calling it Scarface diplomacy.\(^{25}\) With the film now in the public lexicon what appears to be at stake is how and why Scarface transcended the mortality of filmmaking and ascended to become a cultural phenomenon.
The dissertation will explain how this phenomenon occurred. Through the use of the theoretical tools of audience reception, psychoanalytic theory, semiotics, and paradigmatic structuralism, the study will intervene in the discourse by using the character Tony Montana as a case study that will explore how cinema assisted in the black male identity construction of the Hip-hop gangsta. The study’s purpose is, therefore, to signify and study a symbolic moment, one which signifies the birth of a culturally resistant urban hero. Scarface the film became Scarface the cultural symbol because Tony Montana was received by his audience as a role model who delivered, what was read by the film’s audience as, a message of hope to the ghetto. That message—the only way the poor and powerless could achieve the American dream was to seize it by adhering to the values that they already held dear: respect, coolness, toughness, street smarts, and violence. That this message of hope was at odds with cultural norms was exactly the gangsta’s point. In Montana was found a character in the tradition of Blaxploitation’s Youngblood Priest of Superfly, the last true superhero cocaine dealer who “stuck it to the man.” The dissertation’s thesis is that Tony Montana’s fictional persona was received by Hip-hop ghetto audiences as that of a superhero in the Superfly tradition. Rapper Fat Joe, interviewed in the documentary film Origins of a Hip Hop Classic, went so far as to claim that Tony Montana was a ghetto superhero.

The emotional level of reverence and resonation approaches, even arguably surpasses, that of the traditional white male popular culture superhero icons such as Superman, Batman, or James Bond, who is not a caped crusader as are the other two but uniquely invincible nonetheless. There are three factors, I will argue, that explain this extraordinary reception of the Tony Montana character by this audience. These factors connect the film to its spectators and explain Hip-hop’s obsession with the film, the film’s influence on the construction of the
“gangsta” subculture of black masculine identity, and the transcendence of Scarface from inner city role model to mainstream American popular culture icon.

First, this reception was achieved because when we first meet him Montana’s status is similar to his Hip-hop audience in many ways. His powerless lower class economic status, as a poor just-off-the-boat immigrant, looked familiar to Hip-hop males. The fact that his background is revealed as being fatherless and uneducated also symbolizes the reality of inner city life for many young males. In addition, Montana is not a white male. Finally, his first encounter with American authority has him being detained for interrogation by white male law enforcement agents, who quickly decide to incarcerate him. These are all inescapable connections between Tony and Hip-hop males.

Second, Tony achieves the American dream in spectacular fashion, if only for a moment. He rises from poverty to achieve the “millionaire lifestyle” fantasy most males aspire to. For ghetto residents, it is a dream both antithetical to the reality of their own poverty and emotionally relevant to the extremely desperate circumstances Hip-hop males find themselves born into. Montana, therefore, becomes a role model and his “come up” (the Hip-hop term for successful rags-to-riches Horatio Alger moments) is romanticized as that of a folk hero.

Third, Montana exhibited behavioral traits in the film that indicate he both understood and adhered to the value system codified and followed by ghetto males who attempt to survive on its streets. This code acknowledges that urban ghetto life exists under oppressive, often war-like, conditions and that these conditions form the foundation of gangsta thug life identity in the urban geographic area. Using the theoretical constructs of film studies, the values performed by the Tony Montana character are accepted by the Hip-hop male audience because, as has been
suggested by Stuart Hall (among other scholars), they are elements of a semiotic system of cinema representations in Scarface that offer visual confirmation of Hip-hop urban reality.

Moreover, the persona of Al Pacino, whose status as a Hollywood gangster icon was cemented by his role as Michael Corleone in The Godfather films, gave the Tony Montana character immediate and lasting credibility because it was being performed by the man who had played perhaps the coolest gangster in what is considered, by critics and audiences alike, as the greatest gangster film of all time. Pacino’s performance is crucial to the delivery of these values to the Hip-hop male audience. Pacino’s defiant, aggressive acting movements, along with a now iconic Spanish accented staccato styled delivery of dialogue, highlighted a performance which came to symbolize the values of the Hip-hop male audience’s lower class struggle to achieve the American dream.

The Existing Conversation and Literature Relevant to the Research

The dissertation will be positioned within in the ongoing conversation about how media, in this case film, influences black male identity formation. The dissertation will expand upon and intervene in an existing discourse that includes:

- Hip hop scholarship; including but not limited to: Russell Potter, bell hooks, David Liao, Tricia Rose, Michael Eric Dyson, Todd Boyd, Bakari Kitwana, Nelson George, Mark Anthony Neal, Halifu Osumare, and S. Craig Watkins).

- Audience reception theories; especially Stuart Hall, Robert Stam and Toby Miller, and Janet Staiger. Hall’s seminal work deconstructed the system of encoding and decoding for audiences will be a foundation of the dissertation.

- Lawrence Grossberg’s work on the psychological effects of mediated experiences.

- Richard Majors and Janet Mancini Billson’s study of cool pose masculinity
• The work of Elijah Anderson in developing a theory on an inner city masculine value system which he calls the “code of the streets.”

The study, positioned within the ongoing conversation about how media, in this case film, influences black male identity formation, will expand upon and intervene in an existing discourse that includes Hip-hop scholarship and audience reception theories. Stuart Hall, whose work on a system of encoding and decoding for audiences, will be a foundation of the dissertation. In addition the study will discuss the “cool pose,” a term from the book The Cool Pose: the Dilemmas of Black Manhood in America by sociologists Richard Majors and Janet Mancini Billson, a groundbreaking study of the survival behaviors employed by inner city black males. Majors and Billson will provide some of the study’s evidence to substantiate the observation that Hip-hop male audiences accepted Montana’s criminal behavior as being heroic.

Cool pose masculinity will be discussed in context with the work of Elijah Anderson, who developed a theory on an inner city masculine value system, which he calls the “code of the streets.” The work of media theorist Lawrence Grossberg is extremely useful in establishing the relationship of this study to the discourse. Grossberg’s work underscores the importance of understanding how media, such as film, interacts with audiences to produce new identities. His theoretical model confirms that a film such as Scarface, which resonates with the audience that adopted it at the highest level, not only produces identity but effects and changes the behavior of the viewer.

Grossberg’s theories enable an interrogation of Scarface on two levels. First, Grossberg allows an interrogation of how and why hip hop males embraced such a clearly anti-heroic character as emblematic of their own lives. As a conflicted and complex cultural phenomenon, I will attempt to unpack the idea that Scarface came to symbolize a celebration of the hip hop male...
audience’s resistance to traditional heroic paradigms, which included a nihilistic rejection of the norms of middle class society. Second, Grossberg’s work allows for an argument that the film’s dazzling mise-en-scene of clothing, cars, and money influenced an interpretation of the film that was (and remains) diametrically in opposition with the original intentions of the filmmaker. Grossberg’s work underscores the importance of understanding how media, such as film, interacts with audiences to produce new identities.  

His theoretical model confirms that a film such as Scarface, which resonates with the audience that adopted it at the highest level, not only produces identity but effects and changes the behavior of the viewer. The Hip-hop audience’s behavior would change because they accepted the Scarface text as representative of an idealized gangsta behavior which exemplified rules set down for surviving in the inner city. But, most importantly the behavior was accepted because was interpreted as being superheroic. Rapper Fat Joe, interviewed in the documentary short Origins of a Hip Hop Classic, went so far as to claim just this: that Tony Montana was a ghetto superhero.

The Heroic Monomyth in Scarface

A recurring theme in this study is whether Hip-hop males are in rebellion against the traditional heroic figure, or whether they are connecting with the traditional American anti-heroic figure. Both have always existed in American mythology and in my view it is not a question of choosing one theory of the other. I believe that the gangsta embraces both equally in one philosophy (discussed in Chapter Six), what I have named The Gangsta Code. I will also discuss an issue that the Majors and Billson text does not factor into their thesis. These particular sociologists appear to suggest that the cool pose is a phenomenon unique to black males. On the contrary, Hollywood has been utilizing the cool pose behavior as a template for the behavior of
its mythic male heroes for a very long time. As far back as the silent era, cinema has constructed how a man, particularly white men, should behave in dangerous environments. That behavior has been to act cool and unflappable, with an air of invincibility. The list of films which use this type of behavior is too long to mention here but recall the silent era demeanor of Douglas Fairbanks in The Mark of Zorro (1920) and the screen behaviors of Clark Gable, Humphrey Bogart, James Dean, Sean Connery, Clint Eastwood, and Steve McQueen. In other words, the cool pose may be a unique term but, as a pattern of behavior, acting cool is certainly not restricted to black males, especially when white males have been doing so since film began.

Thus, given that most young males find at least one screen hero to fantasize about and emulate, it appears to me that the cool pose is not a behavior unique to young black men and its recognition by scholars is not as groundbreaking as it may appear. On the contrary, cinema has done much to help demonstrate to these young men how to construct archetypical attitudes and behaviors for themselves, including how to be respected for being cool under fire, for example (among hundreds), James Dean in Rebel Without a Cause.

These cinematic depictions also gave life to the alter ego (or secret identity) template of the comic book hero which, with the addition of extraordinary feats of ability to save humanity, later was transformed into the term “superhero.” The use of the term “super” as a definitive adjective to heroism, is most closely associated with the fictional comic book myth of Superman aka Clark Kent. My point is that many Hollywood film narratives would not exist without the monomyth of the superhero-with-a-secret identity. Beginning with Griffith’s The Birth of a Nation, The Mark of Zorro, and literally hundreds of subsequent films, white men have donned costumes to hide their identities as they fought imagined (as was the case with Birth) or real (Zorro’s class war) evil doers. That black male youth would seek to fantasize about being
superheroes should come then as no surprise. That this heroic monomyth, identified by Joseph Campbell’s The Hero with a Thousand Faces should be inverted in the ghetto and utilized in the worship of the criminal gangster as iconic superhero is also not farfetched. On the contrary, my observation is that this is exactly what occurred with the elevation of Tony Montana.

Like Montana, the film’s Hip-hop audience was seeking a path out of poverty and, with Scarface, they were inspired to seek the American dream. As rappers testified in Origins of a Hip Hop Classic, a documentary short film which rhapsodized that understanding Scarface was essential to understanding their demand for respect, the film offers a window through which the “come up,” as these Horatio Alger quests are referred to, is everything. Following the character’s example was a means to have hope for respect and dignity. Thus, over time, Tony Montana would become an inspiration as to how this audience could achieve the American dream of wealth and fame as he did, even if it meant killing, or being killed, in the process.

Understanding the come up is central to understanding how the film exerts so powerful an influence on Hip-hop males. In fact, my research will show that when Tony Montana’s Scarface is compared to other arguably more traditional styles of American heroic representations in cinema, what separates him from characters played by, for example, rapper turned mega film star Will Smith or Denzel Washington, is Montana’s lower class come up narrative, including the mise en scene that Brian De Palma places the character’s rise. For example in Ridley Scott’s American Gangster, a film based on the life story of Harlem heroin kingpin Frank Lucas (played by Washington), does not afford the audience an opportunity to bond with Lucas because the narrative does not include a come up segment that allows us to see how Lucas rose from North Carolina poverty and racism, which included his witnessing his cousin’s murder at the hands of the police. On the other hand, the psychologically powerful
images depicting Montana’s immediate incarceration (and later poverty as a minimum wage dishwasher) at the very beginning of Scarface allow ghetto underclass audiences, who have had or were experiencing very similar circumstances, to invest in Montana’s plight immediately and thereby relate to him on a personal level throughout the film.

There was also Montana’s non-black identity for ghetto audiences to accept. However, the issue of accepting Pacino, an Italian-American with Sicilian ancestry, as authentically portraying a Cuban (who confesses, in the film’s first scene that his father was American—although that very well may have been a lie), may be explained by the ghetto underclass audience’s reliance on negotiating with and accepting the class similarities between itself and the character. So, therefore, Montana’s representation on screen includes both class and race connections to that part of the Scarface audience which was and is primarily black. In addition, and similar to what happened with Blaxploitation audiences, which were of the same economic standing as those of Scarface’s, the black ghetto underclass fan of the film (the true Scarface audience) also appears to have wanted to support a film that would be in total opposition to white patriarchy, while at the same time paradoxically embracing that patriarchy’s capitalist dreams of success. That is to say they needed to see somebody, anybody, willing to stand up to “The Man” in the midst of the racist oppression of the Reagan era, a time complicated by the sugar coated 1950’s Father Knows Best scenarios perpetuated by 1984’s introduction of The Cosby Show.

The Gangsta as an Identity in Opposition to Mainstream Integrationists

The wholehearted acceptance by white America of Bill Cosby’s Harvard approved integrationist fantasy sitcom, which was a perennial number one hit show in the Nielsen ratings during its long run on the NBC network, may have influenced the acceptance of Tony Montana’s ghetto approved anti-hero, who was in direct cultural opposition to everything The Cosby Show
stood for. Cosby’s TV family did not in any way resemble the families of the ghetto underclass nor did the show’s star appear to be a role model that most inner city youth embraced with any enthusiasm. On the contrary, Scarface served as a reminder to underclass audiences stuck in the inner city that they could achieve success by means that were based in violence and drugs, means that appeared to them to be much closer to their lives than the Huxtables’ medical and law school achievements. But The Cosby Show was not the only reason for what, in hindsight, looks like a ghetto class based “blacklash” against integrationist Tom-ism, despite of what the hit show did positively to counteract the stereotype of the black criminal brute. As more black entertainers became wildly successful, as exampled by Michael Jackson’s mainstream success and Prince’s light skinned Little Richard styled rock sexual healings, the ghetto underclass continued to seek out symbols that they felt emulated them.

For example Michael Jackson’s 1982 long form music video on anti-gang violence, Beat It (and later in Bad, his 1987 short film on gangs, which was directed by Martin Scorsese and introduced Wesley Snipes), also may have been a cause for Hip-hop’s opposition to their mainstream media representations. Even the sole Hip-hop themed sitcom of the era, The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air, which starred soap scrubbed rapper Will Smith, was centered on a “fish out of water” premise that had Smith’s mother send him to live at the tony Beverly Hills estate of “richer than Cosby rich” relatives after he had a run in with some street toughs in West Philly. To many, Smith’s charming character was an inauthentic sellout that did not represent them. Thus, Hip-hoppers had literally no place else to turn to for, what appeared to them to be, authenticity but their little Cuban friend. So it began with an audience in search of a symbolic representation of themselves. When Scarface appeared the timing was perfect. Hip-hop, to put it in Hollywood terms, gave Scarface its “legs.”

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The film has grown exponentially in stature, figuratively from the cultural outhouse to the corporate penthouse, over the twenty-five years since its release on December 9, 1983. Therefore, I believe that contextualizing the film in a manner that recognizes its changing cultural importance--from the indifferent initial audience and critical receptions to its current position as the symbolic and psychological reference point of gangsta rap--is a relevant point of entry to this discussion. Thus, as one point of introduction, I intend to present a genealogy of how this phenomenon occurred over time. Central to this genealogical presentation will be historical evidence culled from mainstream newspaper media reviews of the film at the time of its initial 1983 release that clearly indicate Scarface was not received, by the vast majority of the press, as being an important enough film to stand beside the classic gangster films of history such as The Public Enemy (1931), Little Caesar (1931), the original 1932 Scarface, White Heat (1949), Bonnie and Clyde (1967), or either of the first two Godfather films (1972 and 1974), both of which are widely considered to be the standards of the genre.

Subsequent reviews from various media sources were written at the time of later releases of Scarface on VHS (1984), television (1987), and DVD (1998, 2003), most of which were written on the Internet, a service not available at the time of the film’s theatrical release. These media reviews substantiate my contention that, first and foremost, Scarface was intended to be a film marketed to mainstream audiences. In addition, there were several other specific interpretations intended by the creators of the Scarface text which they thought would have mainstream appeal. First, the film offered several narrative and visually symbolic moments that lead to the conclusion that Scarface was intended as a political commentary critical of the liberal Carter Administration’s policy towards Cuba, our perennial communist enemy, and a country villainized as a tributary for the flow of crime and drugs into America from Latin America.
Second, the text presented several moments which lead me to believe that the film should also be read as an openly satirical pastiche, one which expressed bitterness about the public’s romance with contemporary gangster films such as the aforementioned *Bonnie and Clyde* and *The Godfather*. Finally, the film was presented as one that was important on First Amendment grounds. The creators of Scarface spun themselves as men who dared challenge the monolithic authority of the MPAA ratings board when the controversy surrounding the film receiving an initial X rating for its violence reached a conclusion with the De Palma-Bergman team winning their appeal. So Scarface, standing clearly on the shoulders of *The Wild Bunch* and *Bonnie and Clyde*, films known for their highly stylized slow motion filming of death by gunfire, would gain an initial notoriety by appearing to further push the censorship envelope when in fact the scene the MPAA found most offensive, the bathroom shower chainsaw massacre, was nothing more than a homage to Hitchcock’s Psycho, showing absolutely nothing while suggesting everything.

To further demonstrate how the film was initially read, the study will reference the relatively slim number of scholarly articles on the film, such as Ronald Bogue’s 1993 article “De Palma’s Postmodern ‘Scarface’ and the Simulacrum of Class,” in which the author discusses De Palma as “an oppositional postmodern artist commenting on Baudrillardian postmodern culture from a theoretical position that is…decidedly postmodern.” Bogue’s article supports my contention that, until recent Hip-hop interpretations infused the film with new meaning, Scarface was critiqued “traditionally,” that is to say judged by the white male dominated press without consideration for the film’s potential impact on non-mainstream audiences that were closer to Tony Montana’s economic and social background.

These mainstream media reviews (and the few scholarly articles that have been written) appear to not take into consideration that receptions by inner city audiences could produce new
cultural meanings. Ironically, because Scarface was not a film that featured black actors or overt themes which could be construed as of interest to blacks, I could unearth only one review in the black press around the time of the film’s first theatrical release. Of course after Hip-hop embraced Scarface in the late 1980’s there were scores of articles, signifying that the film had become the darling of the subculture. However, on the contrary, the interpretation of the film by Hip-hop audiences appears to have generated all of the film’s long term cultural meanings. This is one of the major findings of my research. The cultural meanings constructed by this audience declare that the American dream is more easily reached through participation in unfettered criminal behavior and violence, the inference being that racism and poverty is so entrenched in the American way of life that crime is the only opportunity for young people to have an equal opportunity. The film’s violent criminality resonated with Hip-hop audiences who felt hopeless in part due to the crushing weight of oppression by the forces of white male patriarchal hegemony.

Their enthusiastic acceptance of Scarface’s violent means to achieve an end suggests several arguments. First, the acceptance of Scarface as a heroic role model signifies a total rejection by Hip-hop males of the traditional Hollywood heroic paradigm, which has tended to be exclusively white, overwhelmingly on the side of societal constructs of law and order, and male. Second, it indicates a profound disgust with the lack of legitimate real life economic opportunities afforded the ghetto underclass by capitalism. Third, it indicates that these audiences, while not actively participating in the political process, have been paying attention to how contemptuously the American military/industrial/media complex treats the rest of the world. Consequently my work is informed by these truths that the Scarface Hip-hop ghetto underclass audiences found within the text. These oppositional resistances to hegemony form the nexus of
the Hip-hop gangsta identity, one ultimately founded in Hip-hop’s inversion of the traditional hero. Here the criminal is transformed into the heroic role model.

One facet of the Hip-hop audience reception that I will investigate is how the inversion, the oppositional reading (called flippin’ the script) which constructed the significant meaning the film has today, replaced the original tepid mainstream reception by predominately white audiences. Key to the inversion is a textual analysis of Scarface by Hip-hop audiences, specifically the male segment of that audience, which focuses on the film’s diegesis, i.e. story, dialogue, acting movements, camera positioning, and resulting imagery, from a perspective of poor people. Economic status of the audience had the greatest influence on the Hip-hop audience’s inversion of the text. This will explain why Scarface was read differently by this audience when compared to mainstream audiences.

It will become clear that Hip-hop males revered the film because they viewed it as the major film symbol of their ongoing defiance to the oppression of white male patriarchal hegemony. Scarface is worthy of study because it will assist in the discovery of why Hip-hop males “acted out” what they saw on screen, considering the fictional dialogue as real lessons learned to be applied on the street. These males connected psychologically with the film because, after being themselves vilified by society, they saw a kindred spirit in Tony Montana, a “fellow” villain, win (and then die) in a manner that they found appealing and inspirational, one that ironically emulated the very Hollywood western heroic archetypes their inversion appeared to be in opposition to. In fact, Montana, their heroic figure, is not so different from the earlier outlaws of Westerns. Through the acceptance of certain previously agreed upon values, such as striking up the cool pose as a demonstration of insensitivity to natural human desires such as love and achieving gainful employment, the ghetto male makes a conscious
decision to invert so called traditional norms and values by classifying them negatively, for example a refusal of taking a job at McDonalds because it’s for “suckers.” He inverts out of respect for tradition and knowing that only through adherence to this tradition will he gain a reputation that commands respect under the unique code of honor that exists on the mean streets.

This outcome also lead me to discover that heroic acceptance in film greatly depends on the economic class of both hero and the spectator and less on the race of that hero. In other words, otherwise criminal behavior is very likely to be accepted by an audience if that audience itself needs money to solve its real life problems. This does not mean that all inner city residents are likely criminals because they are poor. As Elijah Anderson points out, the black working class is largely law abiding and hard working. And while they do not glorify violent revenge against the system, they are, nevertheless trapped in the same geographic space along with the gangstas. These working class residents are forced to learn how to survive by using many of the same rules respected by gangstas. Scarface, for this reason, becomes a useful case study because it has affected the real life behavior of ghetto residents, gangstas and non-gangstas alike.

Contiguous Literature and Media Evaluations

However, despite the fact that Scarface has been a titanic influence on popular culture for over twenty-five years, the text has been the subject of only a handful of scholarly articles and one book, Scarface Nation, Ken Tucker’s 2008 non-academic discussion of the film’s impact on popular culture. And while Tucker, the entertainment editor of the weekly magazine Entertainment Weekly, offers a trivia filled “inside” look at the film through interviews with its key participants (such as producer Martin Bregman and co-star Steven Bauer), he does not attempt to engage in a meaningful discussion of how Scarface manages to be so significant to the process of male identity construction in Hip-hop. In fairness, this was not the purpose of his
effort. Tucker, an older white male writing for the benefit of his mainstream following, appeared only to want to entertain his audience, not engage with any of the deeper psychological meanings Hip-hop gangstas garnered from the film. In fact, as Tucker’s book evidences, the film’s participants (Bregman’s conversation with Tucker is a key example) appear to be minimizing the impact Hip-hop males had on creating the current commercial success of Scarface as a corporate brand.

As the Hip-hop community “flipped” the iconography of the film and fused it with new cultural value, Scarface became transformed over time from a poorly reviewed mainstream film into a globally recognized corporate product brand name. Where there was only James Lloyd’s 1984 Los Angeles Sentinel review in the black press at the time of the film’s release, most likely because of the lack of a recognizable black theme, we are now witness to a plethora of glowing reviews of the film from both a black press which has itself grown exponentially and also from dozens of media sites on the Internet, which of course did not exist at the time of initial release. A useful note to the Sentinel review was the fact that it was very favorable. Lloyd wrote that Pacino gave a “very frightening and realistic portrait” and went on to add that the film was “exhilarating.” He concluded by observing, “Scarface undoubtedly makes one of the most profound statements of the year.” While many in the white mainstream press took the film to task, most notably Pauline Kael, it is interesting that the sole black reviewer loved the film.

The media’s poor reception of Scarface placed the film outside an inner circle in which the revered films of classic gangster cinema, such as The Godfather, stood. But any negative views of the text espoused during the post-initial release period from December, 1984 through March, 1984, have long since disappeared, having been usurped by a complete resonance with the film by the Hip-hop audience, a celebration that lead inexorably towards mainstream
acceptance. This view has even suggested that Scarface had biblical implications (sort of).

Rapper Rakewon proudly proclaimed in the Russell Simmons/Def Jam produced film Origins of a Hip Hop Classic, that Scarface was “the fucking bible.” Origins evidenced that the relationship between Hollywood and Hip-hop was, and would continue to be, a mutually beneficial financial partnership of mutual self-promotion. Simmons’ film lead a slick marketing push designed to capitalize on the film’s anniversary which, in addition to the unabashed cheerleading of the Hip-hop stars offered in the documentary, spun Scarface as an initially misunderstood film which deserved recognition as one of the all time classic gangster films. The campaign continued the reinvigoration of the Scarface brand and, moreover, placed the product firmly within a mainstream which had failed to support the film as much as had been expected upon its initial release.

![Figure 3](http://www.coverbrowser.com/covers/blender)

**Figure 3.** Blender cover, December 2007.

Featured on the cover of the music oriented monthly Sean Carter, better known as rapper Jay-Z, has come to embody the perfect synergy existing in today’s marketplace between gangsta thug imagery and successful corporate marketing insight. Image of cover from: [http://www.coverbrowser.com/covers/blender](http://www.coverbrowser.com/covers/blender)
The “F#@ing Bible” as Profit Center

Universal Studios, as the owner of all rights to the property, found a new profit center by branding Hip-hop audience reverence to the film and selling the symbols of that adoration back to Hip-hop audiences through franchising. This skillful product introduction-by-hyper-commodification accomplished at least two things. First, it reversed the appropriation that Hip-hop had wrestled away from the patriarchal interests and returned the film’s cultural ownership to the corporate state. Second, the corporate hierarchy appears to have instituted a complete takeover of all imagery related to Hip-hop identity, as evidenced by its willingness to pay rappers huge amounts of money to perpetuate the gangsta thug identity. The gangsta thug Hip-hop identity had its beginnings as both the exclusive province of rap music and as a notion of rebellious oppositional posturing to invert white male hegemony. DJ Ready Red’s sampling of the Scarface soundtrack changed that.

**Figure 4. The Franchise.**
Franchising the rights to the Scarface iconography, in the form of framed posters, comic books, video games and scores of other products, has proven to be very lucrative for owner Universal Studios. This marketing strategy will be discussed in Chapter three.


Gangsta Mythology

Gangsta rappers embraced the Scarface mythology, renaming themselves in honor of the film. On the left, the CD *Southern Smoke* features a rapper called “Tony Montana.” Right, another rapper called himself “Tony Yayo” (after Montana’s first name and “yayo,” the name given to the recovered cocaine in the famous Chainsaw Massacre scene in the film).


As Thomas K. Arnold reported in “Anatomy of a Brand: Scarface,” his article written for *The Hollywood Reporter*, Universal Studios would over a period of several years, seize the opportunity to amass quite a piggy bank using the Scarface iconography as a launching point. Now black male Hip-hop moguls are in partnership with white male hegemony. While it is not the purpose of this dissertation to speculate as to whether this new partnership makes Hip-hop entertainment entrepreneurs pawns of the system, it is a fair question to ask. However, what is not in doubt is that, given the corporate hegemony’s movement towards a total and complete absorption of the once culturally resistant art form of Hip-hop, Scarface exemplifies the perfection of the constant and continuous flirtatious experimentation which has occurred between the boardrooms and the streets.

Rap music, which had first tasted crossover success into the mainstream music business in 1986 with the Run DMC hit “Walk this Way,” was, as of the theatrical re-release of Scarface in 2003, the mainstream American popular cultural art form due in large part to the
prevalence of gangsta rap music and their video offspring. The gangsta rap video utilized visual cues and symbols which borrowed heavily from the formula for success articulated by Tony Montana in the film: “First you get the money, then you get the power, then you get the women.” As black males struggled to gain respect from a society which appeared set to destroy them, the money, cars, and sexually willing women, first formulated in Scarface, were reimagined in these videos as both symbols of power in male fantasies and as a representation of their collective waking rage. The videos appeared to become more defiantly violent and misogynistic as time went on. This imagery, produced and underwritten by the major labels which controlled them, played into an emerging corporate strategy that had previously introduced expensive basketball sneakers as ghetto status symbols. But in order to profit from the negative images that young black males themselves had constructed, images that were curious choices in the face of the historical perpetuation of the black man’s stereotypical representation as menace, corporations realized that they needed to purchase the cooperation of their “villains” in order for the hustle to work. Their plan has had, and continues to have, success.

Talent entering, or already in, the gangsta rap game came to understand that the only way they could get recorded was to invent new and compelling ways to demean themselves, their families, women, and ultimately black people in general. After all, there was only one Will Smith, the “clean” rapper who didn’t curse, grab his crotch, or disrespect women. Smith’s career, also nurtured by corporate titans, eventually became the most successful of any rapper in history after achieving success in music, on television, and in films. I plan on discussing Smith’s heroic persona later in this dissertation, as well as possible reasons for his disdain by some members of the academy such as Todd Boyd.
The inciting incident of the corporate hustle began in earnest when southern styled rapper Brad Jordan of the Houston based rap group The Geto Boys changed the name of his alter ego from “Akshen” (pronounced action) to “Scarface” in 1989. Possibly seeing that the rap crossover to gangsta film persona set by Ready Red was a new template for success, one which had struck a chord with fans that no one else had achieved before, Jordan’s move should not be just considered the beginning of his rise to stardom. More than that, his choice of a new “secret identity” assisted greatly in both resuscitating a film nearly moribund in the eyes of the mainstream and igniting the later commercial firestorm. This is because rap audiences unfamiliar with the name he had chosen decided to research where the name originated and thus found the film, digested it, and accepted it as gospel.

The timing of music impresario Rick Rubin’s interest in The Geto Boys also might have factored into Jordan’s decision. While Jordan has never spoken of the inspiration that lead to his renaming, at the least, when Rubin decided to sign The Geto Boys to his own label after parting with Def Jam, Rubin did not object to what Jordan’s change in persona.\(^\text{49}\) One thing is clear; the violent cinema persona of Tony Montana became ripe for development both as a subject for later contemporary film productions and for further exploitation by capitalist interests. Twenty-five years later lucrative licensing agreements have been struck between Universal and vendors wishing to use the iconography of the film to sell Hip-hop’s interest in Montana back to fans.

The hustle began to work its magic as production ideas to capitalize on gangsta imagery were immediately pitched to studios. In 1990, one year after DJ Ready Red’s introduction of the Scarface sample, the first cinema progeny of Scarface were born: \textit{Boyz N the Hood}, \textit{New Jack City}, and \textit{Menace II Society} were perfect marketing tie-ins for the virtual explosion of gangsta rap songs with their accompanying videos.\(^\text{50}\) These three films were successful in part because
they were released in the aftermath of the end of *Miami Vice* (1984-89), the ground breaking and breathtakingly stylish NBC network television series that pitted working class cops against bejeweled cocaine gangsters living the good life in opulent modern art mansions styled after those in Scarface. Audiences, as evidenced by the success of *Miami Vice*, were hungry for more cocaine drug dramas.

*Vice* was directly spawned from Scarface and was created by Universal, the very same studio for both productions. *Miami Vice* hyper-sensitized its audiences to the stylized simulacra of Miami as a new vision of an America both comprised of affluent anti-Castro Cuban Hispanics and as the cocaine capital of America, themes initiated by its predecessor. As Hip-hop gangsta films filled the void left by fictional Miami detectives James “Sonny” Crockett and Ricardo Tubbs, the gangsta Hip-hop subgenre, an angry representation of urban male despair, blossomed. A cynical corporate marketing campaign that promoted urban gang warfare as glamorous and inevitable, with misogyny and nihilism as necessary by-products, used the film industry for a unique product placement strategy. The product they were placing appeared to be hopelessness, criminality, and death.
CHAPTER TWO

ORIGINS OF CULTURAL CAPITAL

The focus of this chapter will be to acknowledge and review the origins of the substantial cultural capital Scarface has acquired during the film’s twenty-five year run. My goal is to answer the question of why a film that received unfavorable reviews, at a ratio of two to one against, has not only endured as a fan favorite but transcended the genre to become both an icon of popular culture and a profitable corporate brand name. But where did this phenomenon start? And when? Our journey to find out why Scarface became so important in American popular culture begins, with a discussion of its early reception by film critics.

Mainstream Receptions and Gangsta Hip-hop’s Search for a Hero

The December 9, 1983 release of the film was highly anticipated with several factors contributing to the expectation that the film could be the next great gangster film after the critical and financial success of Coppola’s The Godfather and The Godfather, Part II. First, Al Pacino had become one of Hollywood’s biggest stars after his stunning performances in the two Godfather films, Serpico, and Dog Day Afternoon. These efforts earned him peer awards, critical success, and fan adoration. But the fact that the man who played Michael Corleone had completed what appeared to be another epic gangster film offered both delicious possibilities and inevitable comparisons between his turn as The Don and this new role. In hindsight, the heavy burden of being compared to Coppola’s masterpieces, arguably the greatest gangster sagas of all time, turned out to be too much to bear for Scarface. In the minds of the critics, and based on their subsequent reviews of the film after its debut, Scarface did not measure up to Coppola’s two films. I, too, was disappointed with film—even without comparing it to either of The
Godfathers. At just under three hours, the film was much too long for such an uncomplicated story. But it was the near black-face make up of the white males in the cast that I found to be the most objectionable aspect of the production. The attempt to turn white men into Cubans harkened back to the days of Al Jolson.

A second cause of filmgoer’s anticipation occurred as a result of director Brian De Palma’s battle with the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), the industry’s self-policing censorship ratings board, over what they thought was excessive violence in the film. On October 28, 1983, just weeks before the film was scheduled to premiere, The New York Times reported that the MPAA had given the film an ‘X’ rating, a designation normally attributed to pornographic films, due to the defiant non-compliant posture of director De Palma who, after cutting the film four times without gaining MPAA approval, refused further requests for more cuts. Universal Studios successfully appealed the decision and won a rare victory, finally earning an ‘R’ rating after getting testimony from drug enforcement agents about what they viewed as the authenticity of the violent acts the film depicted. This controversy was played out in the press, generating considerable curiosity from filmgoers, who the studio expected to line up to pay to see what the fuss was all about. Ultimately, however, the controversy did not generate a high enough box office gross that would place the film within the top ten grossing films of 1983 (it finished sixteenth). This ranking translated into a disappointment for both filmmakers and studio heads.

Scarface had yet an additional burden. The film was a remake of one of the classic gangster films of all time, Howard Hawks’ 1932 Scarface. Oliver Stone, who had won both an Oscar and a Golden Globe for his work as the screenwriter of the nightmarish Turkish prison drama Midnight Express (1978), had crafted a fairly faithful adaptation of the original.
However, most critics did not find favor with his version. Michael Buckley, who reviewed the film for the National Board of Review called the screenplay “disappointing” and sarcastically compared the film’s ending credits dedication to director Hawks and screen writer Ben Hecht to “a cesspool being dedicated to two deceased architects.”

Film producer and review author Karen Jaehne, writing in Cineaste, the well respected journal of film studies, decided that “De Palma mutilated the (original) story.” Senior arts critic Stanley Kauffman was also unkind. In his article for the New Republic he wrote that “the story, written by Oliver Stone, is the very boring and predictable arc of a criminal’s rise and fall, not new with the first Scarface or with Little Caesar or The Public Enemy.” Kauffman’s review soured considerably from there. He likened the film to a “sewer” and remarked that the dedication to Hawks and Hecht was a “hopeless attempt at aggrandizement.” However, it was left to Pauline Kael, the Grande Dame of film critics and, prior to her Scarface review, a staunch supporter of De Palma’s work, to deliver the most telling rebuke. Kael’s reviews takes up the question of whether the film is a political statement of defiance by De Palma and Stone against no less than Hollywood itself. In a compelling finish to her essay, she discusses the significance of the restaurant scene in which Tony tells the patrons “Say goodnight to the bad guy,” writing

This is the film’s message that Tony is an honestly brutal businessman—he isn’t a hypocrite like the Wasps. There’s even the suggestion that he may be better than they are because he isn’t afraid to do his own killing. The film’s message is like a sociopathic moron’s interpretation of Robert Warshow’s thesis in his famous essay “The Gangster as Tragic Hero.” When Tony, the drunken corrupted peasant, tells off the old rich, he appears to be speaking for the writer and director. And from the film’s point of view he knows about truth and power and how it works.
It may be that Stone and De Palma got into these cheap distortions by using the movie business as their model for the world. The whole feeling of the movie is limp. This may be the only action picture that turns into an allegory of impotence.59

It is interesting that Kael, one of the few female film critics during that era and certainly one of the most powerfully influential reviewers regardless of gender, appears to attack the overbearingly masculine premise of the gangster genre by referring to the film as “limp” and “impotent.” Moreover, her response to film, from a much needed feminist perspective—given the gangster genre is supported by men, is to question Montana’s heterocentric values, particularly his bitter rejection of the established social order he sought to join, best expressed in the black tie setting of the restaurant. “The film is peddling macho primitivism and at the same time making it absurd…he gets more vital as he’s pumped full of lead,” Kael comments. Hers is a reflection worth returning to later in this chapter, when the film’s role in the construction of black masculine gangsta identity, a performance of what the reality of the mean streets demands young men to be, can be compared to her disgust with “macho primitivism.” A two-thirds majority of the reviews from mainstream media sources considered the Pacino/De Palma revision either too long (at a running time of two hours, fifty minutes), and or lacking depth, and or not nearly as accomplished as the 1932 original, a long standing icon of the gangster genre.

Of the one third of the critics who thought the film had merit, notable was Roger Ebert, he of the famous thumbs up or down verdicts, who wrote a compelling review that appears to touch on some of the points Hip-hop dwelled on as being important to them. Unlike Kael and her compadres, Ebert compares Scarface favorably to The Godfather, observing that “Scarface is one of those special movies, like The Godfather, that is willing to take a flawed, evil man and allow
him to be human. Maybe it's no coincidence that Montana is played by Al Pacino, the same actor who played Michael Corleone.” Ebert goes on to inadvertently foreshadow the future reception by Hip-hop males, underscoring their motivation to accept the character, in an insightful allocation. He commented that

Al Pacino does not make Montana into a sympathetic character, but he does make him into somebody we can identify with, in a horrified way, if only because of his perfectly understandable motivations. Wouldn't we all like to be rich and powerful, have desirable sex partners, live in a mansion, be catered to by faithful servants -- and hardly have to work? Well, yeah, now that you mention it. Dealing drugs offers the possibility of such a lifestyle, but it also involves selling your soul.

Ebert concluded his review by writing that Scarface was, “an exciting crime picture, in the tradition of the 1932 movie. And, like the Godfather movies, it's a gallery of wonderful supporting performances.” Other critics were equally effusive with their praises, including Lloyd of the historically black owned Los Angeles Sentinel. Lloyd’s analysis keenly foreshadowed the tone inner city audiences would take when he praised the film, writing that De Palma has succeeded in depicting the greed and viciousness of a power structure that uses barbarous tactics to force its American Dream to come true. For those reasons Scarface undoubtedly makes one of the most profound statements of the year.

What is revealing about Lloyd’s approach is that he accomplishes something that mainstream reviewers fail to do. By connecting the class aspirations of the inner city to the film’s premise of achieving the “American Dream” and by determining that ghetto residents face “a
power structure” that is “barbarous” in any attempt to reach their goal, Lloyd, writing for an audience comprised of a black majority in the inner city, insightfully points out to his audience that Scarface is a story of one man’s journey in rebellion against the system. This theme would be a major point of resonation amongst the poor and disadvantaged audience members who would hold the film in such high esteem.

With the film reviewers having filed their opinions, rank and file filmgoers would make the ultimate determination on the fate of the film’s legacy. Despite box office results that placed the film outside even the top ten highest grossing films during an initial release in 1983, over time it would become clear that fans of the gangster genre, which included inner city filmgoers, had disagreed with the majority opinion of the reviewers, who disliked the film by a two to one margin. Instead these audiences shared the enthusiasm displayed by Ebert, Lloyd, and a scant few others. However, since it is extremely difficult to determine the demographic makeup of ticket purchasers, i.e. how many white, black, or Hispanic filmgoers buy tickets to a particular film, the favor that Hip-hop ghetto residents would initially bestow upon Scarface was not immediately evident. The fans of violent cinema, seeking a shoot ‘em up gangster drama, were satisfied with the amount of mayhem the film employed. Moreover, these audiences, as did many of the reviewers who found the main character compelling, embraced Tony’s symbolic representation of the excesses of the Reagan era, deciding that they would rather praise than critically bury the cocaine Caesar. Over time word-of-mouth buzz about Montana’s rise from figurative outhouse to literal penthouse spread like wildfire, especially in the impoverished inner cities, where Montana’s rags to riches story generated an excitement not seen since Blaxploitation.
Scarfacination Begins

It was there, in the ghetto, amongst the poor and oppressed, that the rise of the public’s obsessive fascination with Scarface would begin. Instead of fading into obscurity due to a poor reception from mainstream, Scarface was championed by the ghetto underclass as the first authentic and culturally resistant cinematic paradigm since *Sweet Sweetback’s Bad Ass Song* resisted Hollywood’s idea of what constituted a screen hero. Had it not been for the intervention of ghetto underclass males who were, at the time Scarface hit theaters, in the process of constructing the “gangsta” as a new male identity, the current popular culture obsession with Scarface would not exist. To capture this obsession, I have coined a new term, “Scarfacination,” to describe the original and continuing national fetishization on all things Scarface.

Of course, Scarface is not the first film to be elevated by the masses to iconic stature. On the contrary, the film joins many others, some classic and some cult, that continue to enjoy long term signification by audiences who, because of the power of cinema to resonate with each of us, have made the movie going experience a unique gage of the emotional and cultural pulse of people from all walks of life.

*Casablanca* certainly falls into this category. Since its release in 1942, *Casablanca* has endured decades of unbridled adoration. For example, each year at the Michigan Theatre, a classic one-thousand seat movie palace near the University of Michigan campus in Ann Arbor, *Casablanca*, with quite possibly the most sublimely written dialogue ever committed to the screen, is free to patrons on Labor Day. Both old fans and incoming freshmen alike pack the theatre to savor its heroic tale of romantic sacrifice. But *Casablanca* is not alone in its ability to attract long term devoted fans over decades. There are many other films and or film franchises that belong on any list of iconic narratives.
1. *Gone with the Wind* (1939) celebrates the 70th year of its debut in 2009. It remains a template of both epic cinema and white supremacist social commentary.

2. The *Star Trek* franchise, which includes eleven films (including the recent James T. Kirk origins prequel released in May, 2009) and five television series, began in 1966 during the Civil Rights era. Its narratives, featuring the exploits of an enlightened military force exploring the galaxy, have created a worldwide fan base and inspired the style of personal computers and cell phones.

3. Seven *Star Wars* films, all listed amongst the highest grossing films of all time, have legions of devoted fans.

4. The champion of midnight showings, the campy musical comedy *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, which debuted in 1975, possibly best examples a fan-championed “B” movie.

5. The *James Bond* franchise. Beginning with a television presentation of *Casino Royale* in 1954, Ian Fleming’s creation of the British spy has spawned 26 films. Along with Superman, the Bond character is probably the greatest symbol of white Anglo male supremacy in motion picture history.

These films have transcended their respective genres to become lived experiences in the eyes of their fans. *Star Trek, Star Wars, and Rocky Horror* all are connected by their fans’ apparent desire to be in the film themselves as characters. This behavior might explain fan performances at conventions: through costuming (Trek and Wars), and speaking alien languages (“Klingon” in Trek). There are also the unforgettable in-costume live performances by fans during screenings of *Rocky Horror* that have set that film apart from every other film going experience. As for the James Bond series, its formula of an all-knowing, invincible white male
who has government sanction to kill created a new genre dedicated to secret agents and government operatives. After five decades of innumerable screen and print imitators, the Bond superhero archetype continues in films such as the Jason Bourne series of films and Tom Cruise’s Mission Impossible franchise. Bond films are the second most financially successful franchise (after Star Wars) and, at forty-six years and counting, are the longest running series of films in history.

In its representation of the ghetto underclass and Hip-hop culture, what makes Scarface unique amongst all of the aforementioned films is its underlying authenticity. The film mimics its predecessors from Blaxploitation, which focused on black characters who heroically resisted white male patriarchy. But Scarface avoids overt black themes, particularly the obvious thematic determinisms depicted through racial representations. But Scarface’s appeal to Hip-hop males is relatively simple because it is founded squarely upon audience identification with the male heroic journey, the structural lynchpin of the contemporary Hollywood screenplay. As such, Montana’s own journey, from his lower class beginnings to his performances of the behaviors that determine gangsta enhanced masculinity, are the major factors in his subsequent resonation with, and celebration by, Hip-hop males because each is so similar to what the ghetto male audience experiences every day on the street.

Montana’s behavior exhibits a strong sense of a street code of honor that exists in the inner city for all “players.”66 The code, as my research will reveal, is a major element in a time honored inner city value system that employs methods, such as the cool pose, to acquire street reputations that command respect. The audience’s recognition that Montana shared its values, values that are in complete opposition to white male patriarchal mainstream values, is of paramount importance to understanding the film’s influence on Hip-hop males. Scarface is
considered by these audiences to be a classic underdog film that represents, as the Black Panthers were fond of saying, the struggles of the “people.” With such a standing within the “community” (another term that black nationalists brought to bear in the 1970’s), the film came to symbolize a resistance to the dominant patriarchal heroic paradigm that Hollywood deems sacrosanct.

Defining the Phenomenon

Scarfacination is the transformation process the film undertook, from its initial lukewarm cultural insignificance in the mainstream, to its assimilation by Hip-hop males as a symbol for gangsta invincibility, to its becoming a national symbol for aggressive defiance that has transcended even the Hip-hop national boundaries. Its relevance to American culture today appears to be forced upon us by corporate marketing, as evidenced by its placement as a product brand and sales commodity, the image of Tony Montana adorns t-shirts, video games, posters, and literally every other conceivable means to turn a profit. Thus Scarface, which maintains its meaning in Hip-hop culture as the representation of a gangsta’s day to day militancy towards white patriarchy, has become transformed over time by the marketing plans of those capitalists intent on cashing in on that meaning. Once Scarface’s importance to Hip-hop became obvious, entrepreneurs rushed to purchase licenses from brand owner Universal Studios so that they could sell Scarface related products. As I will demonstrate in this chapter and in chapter three, the process of commodifying Scarface has been overwhelmingly successful, almost shockingly so, given that this film’s hero really isn’t a hero in the traditional sense. The image of Al Pacino, in costume as Tony Montana, appears everywhere today: as a bobble head doll, on cigarette lighters, as the ubiquitous action figure, and as the revenge minded superhero of his own comic book series.
But the selling of Scarface has also been problematic. The mass production and sale of these images has diluted Tony Montana’s industrial strength influence in the ongoing twenty-five year construction of today’s street thug gangsta persona. As evidenced by Ken Tucker’s book *Scarface Nation: The Ultimate Gangster Movie and How it Changed America*, the mainstream still struggles with why the film is so important to Hip-hop; in part because mainstream analysis of the film has yet to explore the relationship between Tony Montana and those crucial elements of ghetto black masculinity he performs during the course of the narrative. Tucker, *Entertainment Weekly*’s popular culture editor claims early on (his page four) that Scarface is not “deep in the sense of profound,” an observation that immediately, however inadvertently, undercuts Hip-hop’s interpretation in toto. Tucker goes on to report that director Brian De Palma “has always been a bit baffled about the movie’s ongoing, ever-morphing, and sprouting subcultural life.” His comment suggests De Palma does not now, and may never, understand why the film is a phenomenon.

Finally, Tucker quotes an unnamed producer (assumed to be the producer of record Martin Bregman) who, intended or not, diminishes Hip-hop’s influence on the furtherance of the phenomenon by offering that “it’s not just the hip-hop community—white college students have Scarface parties.” I will have a lot more to say about Bregman later in the dissertation but his remark is very revealing. He appears to imply—through his remark ‘it’s not just Hip-hop’—that granting cultural significance to Scarface needs the acquiescence of privileged college educated whites. These types of remarks, which attempt to divert credit away from the Hip-hop gangsta subculture for its role in creating the huge capitalist bonanza that Scarface, are as illegitimate as Montana’s money laundering operations.
Hip-hop males recognized that Scarface oozed cultural currency when others did not. It was they who founded the subsequent fanaticism and no other group can lay truthful claim to the discovery. Let us remember that in 1983 Hip-hop males were hungry for a larger-than-life heroic symbol to represent their new gangsta subculture. They certainly were not waiting for the right movie, or any movie for that matter, to come along—events just happened. Simply put, Scarface was the right gangster movie at the most opportune of times for inner city males. That Tony Montana, the symbol chosen to represent gangsta identity, was plucked from a gangster movie should not really surprise anyone—if one is seeking larger than life visual symbolism there appears to be no greater vehicle than cinema. Moreover, screen gangsters, as a well defined group of outlaws in American mythology, have served as heroes for the poor, powerless, and dispossessed since before the sound era began. As will be discussed in chapter four, the context of Scarface within this paradigm defines the prescience of the Hip-hop male audience in understanding the intrinsic cultural meaning of the film well before the mainstream had decided this audience was on to something larger than what lay on the surface of the narrative.

However, the white reviewers that normally set the parameters of cultural debate had judged Scarface harshly. When they made the inevitable comparisons—between De Palma’s film and the two Godfather films and between the 1932 Hawks original and its lengthy remake—the consensus was that Scarface lacked the requisite greatness necessary for historical canonization. The media critics’ disappointment relegated the film to a critical purgatory that saw no one write one word about Scarface for ten years. It was not until 1993, during the film’s tenth anniversary year, that Scarface was first critiqued in a journal by cultural scholar Ronald Bogue. But by that time public admiration of the film was growing and achievement was being accomplished without the benefit of advertising and media support. Strictly based on word of mouth, Scarface
found its niche, first as an impressively steady earner on the relatively new home rental marketplace. Second, the film became a requirement for the attainment of street credibility; specifically, it was cool to like Scarface. According to Hip-hop rappers like DJ Ready Red, Snoop Dogg, and Sean “Puffy” Combs, because Tony Montana’s street bravado could now be rewound and played back over and over, ghetto gangstas now had the capability to study the film, fine tune their approaches to street situations, and reinvent their identities based on what they saw Montana do.

As to lingering questions about whether or not Hip-hop deserves full credit for launching the Scarface phenomenon, consider this: that white college kids would recognize the cultural significance of Scarface at a time prior to Hip-hop’s full acceptance into the mainstream appears highly implausible. Until Run DMC covered Aerosmith’s “Walk this Way” into a chart topping cross over hit in 1986 Hip-hop, like all previous forms of black artistic expression, was segregated from the larger American cultural paradigm. Thus, exposure to this new aspect of black culture was limited to the curious and fortuitous. Only a few young whites, such as Russell Simmons’ college roommate Rick Rubin, gained access. I suspect that white college kids learned about Scarfacination from Hip-hop males, a group who had already developed an earnest emotional stake in the film. Certainly the cultural impact of the film on the inner city occurred first. This signification happened long before Universal Studios determined that the film could be marketed for consumption by white copycats. Therefore, I consider Bregman’s observation unsubstantiated. There is no evidence that college kids, as a group, matched Hip-hop’s love for the film until after Scarface had achieved consumer prominence.
What will become evident, as the dissertation examines Scarfacination's journey towards popular culture preeminence, is that Scarface has been, and continues to be, studied by Hip-hop males at an interest level that goes far beyond the typical movie fan interest. What my research discovered is that these young men had been, since as early as the Watts riots of 1965, in the process of embarking upon a journey that would lead to the establishment of a new identity for themselves, one they would call the “gangsta.” In 1983 the “gangsta” was an attitude of cool defiance and self defense; at that point it had yet to become an actual spoken word, much less a socio-cultural signifying adjective. But even after fledgling Philadelphia rapper Schooly D lit the fuse in 1984 with “P.S.K.,” his soon to be historic homemade rap recording that pioneered the use of “gangster” as a means for young black males to define their identities, it took another five years for “gangster” to explode into “gangsta,” its current and common vernacular usage.

The term “gangsta” was a perfect semantic intervention. The description succinctly epitomized both the inner city black male’s knowledge of his own historic economic disenfranchisement by the capitalist patriarchy and symbolized the “righteous rage… (that) called for the rise of ghetto warriors in the mold of Nat Turner.” As Hip-hop males began to fully embrace the gangsta identity through new rap music by such controversial acts as L.A.’s Niggaz Wit Attitude (N.W.A), Scarface’s Tony Montana was still yet to be appointed Gangsta-in-Chief. But the film that would come to represent their values would soon become, with an epochal assist from DJ Ready Red in the winter of 1987, the larger than life message every social movement needs.

Decoding the film as a symbol for the angry warrior within, Hip-hop males began to use the space created by the rap reference to the “Balls and My Word” scene in Scarface as a
common signifier, a mutually convenient communal reference point that allowed all similarly situated young men to acknowledge, through adherence, that a separate system of values, a warrior code if you will, existed. This code had proven to be historically indispensable to those seeking a fighting chance for survival in the ghetto’s of urban America. My analysis lead me to the conclusion that the Hip-hop males’ ongoing evaluation of Scarface included useful interpretations of the film’s semiotic representations, specifically those scenes in which Tony Montana’s loyalty to this system of values—a real life “code of honor” with which, ironically, most audiences become familiar with through Mafia gangster films—was depicted.

We have seen this code at work in films such as Martin Scorsese’s Goodfellas, The Godfather films of Francis Ford Coppola, and in two recent HBO cable television series: The Sopranos and the gritty Baltimore based narco-drama The Wire. These narratives constructed a reservoir of information, some fictional and some factual, causing audiences to believe all gangsters were, at once, an army and a family—an interwoven collective of men, and a few women, that adhered to a code that appeared to incorporate both honor and justice as established business practices in criminal capitalism. But it is their belief in this system, because these young men see themselves as warriors in an unending conflict, which forms the foundation of Hip-hop male gangsta identity. Scarface’s Tony Montana would become the symbol of that identity.

Over the past century a considerable body of social research and government reports has been conducted on and about black males. The studies and reports that have informed the discourse on the socio-economic status of inner city black families confirm the obvious: the vast majority of these men are born into, and nurtured by, environments that are so dangerously hostile they should be considered war zones.
terribly combative place, the urban male, respectful of the concept of survival of the fittest, has developed measures to enable himself the best chances for survival.

**Black Masculine Identity and the Hero’s Journey of Tony Montana**

On the surface, the overarching theme of Scarface, the “wages of gangster sin is death,” is consistent with every other film in the gangster genre. However, critiquing the film using psychoanalytic theory assists in gaining further insight into the gangsta-as-warrior mentality. As an indication of an inherent pathology of nihilism, the Hip-hop male audience equates death as the inevitable conclusion to their journey towards identity. Under circumstances of debilitating poverty, Tony Montana proclaims his manhood to be inviolate and goes forth to undertake a heroic journey that ends tragically but, is nevertheless successful. It is his quest that drives the dramatic arc of the film. Despite the violence and criminal acts Tony commits, Scarface should be viewed as a story of a man on a spiritual journey to find what he thinks should be is rightful place in the world. What Hip-hop males have done is understand Tony’s motivation—it parallels their own. As represented in the film Montana is not satisfied unless he has it all. On the way home from partying with Lopez he answers Manny’s question, “What is it that you think you have coming to you?” with “the world, Chico, and everything in it.” But to gain what he thinks he deserves Tony will be required to, given the economically bankrupt circumstances of his beginning, gird his loins and incorporate a Machiavellian approach to gaining control of the importation of cocaine into Miami.

His mantra of success by any means necessary excites the young male audience. This pleasure is received in part because their life experience of poverty naturally would result in fantasies of wealth and power. As Hall’s elaboration on audience decoding informs us, these desires are brought into the viewing experience by the audience as a part of their socio-
psychological makeup. These fantasies created a crucial space for negotiation and bonding: the
audience’s desire to be free from poverty and powerlessness formed a relationship with those
parts of the hero’s journey which best visualized consummations of that desire. According to
apparatus theory, it was within this space that the formation of a long term emotional bond,
between spectator and film, occurred. In film studies, apparatus theory88 seeks to explain the
relationship between the text, its audience, and the influence of ancillary material circumstances,
such as what events are occurring at the time the film is viewed and the emotions individual
audience members bring to the viewing.89

Another circumstance that audiences bring into the viewing experience is fantasies. One
of the pleasures of film going is to be able to immerse one’s self into whatever fantasy the
filmmaker has created. The reason Cinderella’s story has become so pervasive in Hollywood
scriptwriting is that most people who live on this planet are not rich and powerful. Ordinary
people fantasize every day about being plucked from obscurity to bask in the limelight as rock
stars, sports champions, princes, queens, heroes, and cape wearing superheroes. In the ghetto, it
is unfortunate that the people with the flash and pizzazz associated with public stardom are either
ministers driving big cars or pimps and drug dealers involved in illegal enterprises. Moreover,
American success is equated with the accumulation of money and all that it can provide.
Therefore, often the search by economically disadvantaged young men, for successful role
models that might help them to develop and construct their emerging masculine identities, boils
down to the actors and sports figures that are on television and the characters found in the
movies.

In the case of Scarface, the journey of Tony Montana was the first opportunity for Hip-hop’s would be gangstas to literally see the idealized symbol of what they wanted to become.
Movies have always given a heightened sense of reality for audiences, and to see a simulated version of their lives on the screen gave Hip-hop gangstas the confidence to believe their fantasies could come true. The life or death struggles of young men in combat on the streets allowed Scarface to become a Nietzschian philosophical metaphor for the ghetto bred male’s search for the perfected masculine street identity, one that would be cool enough, and tough enough for the gangsta to survive. And while Scarface’s function as a role model would occur, in part, due to luck; the film and gangsta rap were birthed at practically the same time and thus could grow up together. This coexisting maturation is important to the development of the gangsta identity in Hip-hop. Film apparatus theory informs the discourse about the great extent an audience is influenced during a film viewing by the depth of emotional circumstances it brings into the viewing. As outside influences on ghetto male identity construction are limited—if the preponderance for single-family female run households, high adult male unemployment, and the flight of potential employed mentors to the suburbs are reliable indicators—the fact that the Hip-hop male’s role model turned out to be a character in a film is not surprising. On the contrary, it is highly predictable.

As real life warriors on the urban battlefield, the fantasies of these mortal men are for transformation into invincible superman. Given the ending of Scarface, one in which Montana appears unharmed by dozens of bullets from powerful automatic rifles, the image of this invincibility emerges as an ideal representation of an identity that is itself overdetermined by its ultimate suitability for urban warfare. Tony’s journey, progressing through a hostile environment and overcoming obstacle after obstacle, reinforced long standing urban male fantasies centered on not only survival but a triumph in which seizing a previously elusive American dream for themselves could happen if they killed enough people and sold enough drugs. This fantasy
reoccurred over and over in the film. In many ways it was as though a mantra was being recited to great hypnotic effect.

In a key scene after Tony and Manny murder the former Castro agent Rebenga to receive green cards, Tony complains out loud that instead of washing dishes he “should be picking gold from the streets.” Later he pronounces that America is “like a great big pussy waiting to get fucked.” These observations symbolize a male desire for instant gratification and the subversion of any impulse for traditional work, such as working in that walk-up sandwich shop. Ghetto males related to this, most likely comparing the scenes to unwanted options they are faced with such as fast food jobs. This decision, to not be a “sucker” and work for minimum wages, is a part of the street code. So to see this larger than life character agree with a life choice they have made allows the Hip-hop male audience to experience the visual pleasure Mulvey wrote about. Montana, for all of his banter and apparent recklessness, lives by a code that Hip-hop males are not only very familiar with but are devoted to. Simply put, their short term devotion to the film would be shaped in large part by the character’s behavior in processing and handling circumstances similar to their own. As for the long term devotion, according to apparatus theory, and its codependent relationship to Stuart Hall’s theories on the decoding of semiotic moments in a film, this may be due to repeat viewings, references to the film in other media, and word-of-mouth. However, I argue there is also another explanation.

Black Masculine Identity and the Gangsta Code

My research has discovered the key moments of resonation between Hip-hop and Scarface. It is during these scenes that Scarface produces its considerable cultural meaning for this primary audience. These moments are depicted in scenes that symbolize the values that the Hip-hop gangsta shares with Tony Montana. These scenes provide both semiotic and
psychoanalytical references to which virtually all of the values street gangstas are devoted. I am choosing to use the term “Gangsta Code” to define these common values, which represent a functioning code of honor similar to what audiences became accustomed to in Mafia films. Montana’s adherence to this code of honor is consistently repeated in Scarface. As evidenced by the major film reception theorists, the result of these repetitions is that the representations of the gangsta code presented during the viewing serves to instruct the Hip-hop male audience, which is seeking advice, emotional support, and positive reinforcement on two levels.

First, as they take in the spectacle of the nearly three hour film, they come to believe, as they watch a man much like themselves in word and deed, that their way of life is valid. As Laura Mulvey’s psychoanalytical feminist treatise on spectatorship, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” informs reception theory, the male spectator “identifies with the main male protagonist” and projects himself onto the actions of his screen surrogate, receiving pleasure from this act. About the same time as Mulvey’s seminal article was breaking new ground, the work of French semiotic theorist Christian Metz was being translated. In 1982 his The Imaginary Signifier was published. In this work Metz further developed theories which integrated psychoanalysis (Mulvey’s area of expertise) and semiology. An understanding of Metz is useful to clarifying just how intense the spectator experience was for Hip-hop males. But my analysis of the Scarface phenomenon diverges from Mulvey’s claim that “man is reluctant to gaze at his exhibitionist like.” On the contrary, given the Hip-hop male’s predilection for self-aggrandizement in accoutrements and jewelry, Mulvey’s observation appears a bit Eurocentric. What is certain is that Hip-hop males love looking at themselves in much the same manner Christian Metz suggested occurs during the Lacanian mirror phase of identity formation.
Because the film offers several instances by which they may reference their life experiences, Hip-hop males decided to trust the message and the messenger. It is precisely because they trust that these young men learn from the film how to further their identity construction. What developed during the viewing was an unshakeable bond, a Hobbesian social contract between the spectator’s gaze and its object, which articulated the reinforcement of unwritten, but nevertheless obeyed, rules which both the character and the audience hold in mutual esteem. However, at first this bond was ignored by all except those who were participants in the early signification of the film. It would be years before this audience’s prescience would be recognized by the mainstream.

The Perfect Urban Warrior

The Hip-hop audience’s belief that the film is authentic—specifically the details of street life and the life or death decisions that have to be addressed and resolved—is what they feel separates Scarface from other film narratives of masculine achievement. And in the similar fashion in which audiences were drawn to the Star Wars fable of the young boy being taught to be a Jedi Knight by older mentor Obi-Wan Kenobi, Hip-hop male audiences are similarly drawn to this familiar paradigm (merely reimagined by writer Oliver Stone), the story of a young man (Montana) being schooled by a older mentor (Frank Lopez) on how to be successful in the drug game. Here again the code of honor comes into play. Upon meeting his future mentor Tony is informed of the fairly simple code Frank Lopez expects him to follow as an employee (never underestimate the other guys’ greed and don’t get high on your own supply). Alejandro Sosa, the Bolivian cocaine overlord, later adds his own particular rules (snitches get killed and the infamous “Don’t fuck me, Tony. Don’t you ever fuck me”). But what proves most important to Hip-hop audiences is that Montana has his own set of rules—his code often is in conflict with his
two mentors. It is Tony’s personal code which gangstas eventually signify as being a mirror of their own.

Similar to that of an ancient Japanese samurai’s devotion in defending his master’s bushido (code of honor) or the more familiar Omerta, the Mafia’s code of silence, street codes are the rules followed by hustlers and gang members. The legendary L.A. Crip assassin “Monster” Kody Scott, a currently incarcerated gang expert, confirms in his bestselling autobiography Monster that inner city black males of the Hip-hop generation live in neighborhoods that are no less than fiercely contested war zones. Therefore, there are similarities between ancient warrior values, such as bushido and the philosophy contained in Sun Tzu’s classic 6th Century, B.C. Chinese military journal The Art of War, and the mental toughness required to survive in the contemporary urban environment. The life of Mr. Scott is a self-confessed guided tour through the battlefield hell that is South Central Los Angeles. He makes it abundantly clear that a street code of honor does exist and that it exists because young men are at war—with each other. On the very first page of his book Scott observes that

Staccato vibrations of automatic gunfire crack throughout the night…there is troop movement…and in some areas the fighting is intense. The soldiers are engaged in a “civil war.” A war without terms. A war fought by any means necessary, with anything at their disposal.

Scott then goes on to self-verify his authenticity, writing that

On April 29, 1992, the world witnessed the eruption of south Central Los Angeles, the concrete jungle battlefield of the Crips and Bloods. All this began on Florence and Normandie in South Central, the latest Third World battlefield. I am
a gang expert—period. There are no other gang experts except participants. Our live, mores, customs, and philosophies remain…mysterious and untouched.\textsuperscript{102}

Given his background I trust Scott’s observations, so when he calls the ghetto a war zone I take him at his word. Upon gaining the understanding that the common experience of most, if not all, ghetto Hip-hop males is to live in the midst of urban warfare, it becomes easier to grasp why Scarface connects so forcefully with the Hip-hop male audience. And when later in his book Scott speaks of how he learned of the street code of L.A., calling it “the three stages of reputation,”\textsuperscript{103} he offers an answer to one of central research questions of my research: why does the Hip-hop audience relate to Scarface?

In the film the character of Tony Montana is a living manifestation of the ghetto’s own Samurai like code of honor. We may conclude that one major factor contributing to the resonation between Scarface and Hip-hop gangsta males is the similarity between the Gangsta code of honor employed by Montana and that employed by his audience.

The Cultural Genealogy of Scarfacination

The cultural context of what would become the Scarfacination phenomenon began almost immediately after the film ended its theatrical run in the spring of 1984. While Scarface did not receive the critical acclaim of \textit{The Godfather} (but then again, what film did?) the reviews from the mainstream press were markedly unfavorable. But the film did have its champions, a fact which contradicts the revisionist mythology championed by the film’s principals, who suggested the film was completely trashed by the press when it was released.\textsuperscript{104} Moreover, the same principals were dismayed that Pacino’s performance, while garnering a nomination for a prestigious Golden Globe from the Hollywood Foreign Press Association, was not considered for an Oscar. Because most critics who reviewed the film at the time of its first release agree that
Scarface, taken as a whole, is not a great film on the scale of *The Godfather, Casablanca,* or *Citizen Kane.* Scarface might be considered the most unlikely of films for canonization by any particular audience. Then again *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* is another example of a film that was an unlikely candidate for fan cult status, much less its arrival at cult supremacy.

Scarface, on the contrary, is a gangster film, a critique of the aberrations of capitalism to be sure but yet still part of a genre that has resisted mainstream performance-based cult status. However, the type of film that Scarface represents has a distinguished history of taking on a cult status outside the mainstream. We need look no further than back to the Blaxploitation era to see a connection between the “bad ass” Tony Montana character Al Pacino created and the anti-heroic archetypes in those seventies films that were so revered by black audiences, especially Ron O’Neal’s coke-dealing Youngblood Priest in 1972’s *Superfly.* In the case of Scarface its cultural influence is due to several factors, including an inner city fan base which went unnoticed by the mainstream press.

The fact that the mainstream media decided that Scarface was not on the level of *The Godfather, Bonnie and Clyde,* or its 1932 predecessor did not deter a small but dedicated fan base from sparking the firestorm of public interest. Before the world rediscovered the film, an “underground” movement of acceptance began almost immediately among those audiences who both appreciated the film as representative of the gangster genre and who then connected with it on a psychological level that was above and beyond the normal fan exhortations. This underground consisted of the rank and file moviegoer who may or may not read (and may or may not care) what the “official” media reviewers and film critics have to say about a film. There are many examples of narratives that acquired great public adoration without and/or in spite of mainstream reviews.105
The job of these reviewers is to render judgment on films for the purpose of ranking aesthetic achievement and historical value, taking care to compare the object of the review with, and in contrast to, other films its genre. The reviewers’ viewpoints, visually symbolized best by the thumbs up or down reviews made famous by Roger Ebert and Gene Siskel, often determine the financial and critical success of a film. These are usually offered through consumer trusted media outlets, for example local newspapers and television entertainment sections. Nationally, the prestigious mainstream reviews of *The New York Times*, *Newsweek*, and *Rolling Stone* magazines, and organizations such as the National Board of Review, exert considerable influence within the entertainment industry. And while not always overtly stated, the job of the reviewer also appears to be to advise patrons of that particular media as to whether or not to spend their money buying a ticket to see a particular film.

It could be argued that critical reviews of movies have little, if any, impact on ticket sales as hundreds of well reviewed movies each year going unseen. On the other hand, many universally panned films draw huge crowds (*Jackass: The Movie* (2002) is a good example). However, because reviewers get the privilege of screening films before they are released to the general public, I would argue that they carry enormous clout when it comes to influencing whether or not a film is determined, among other criteria, to be “important.” Because of his stature as a major Hollywood star, and because he had already portrayed one of the most memorable screen gangsters in motion picture history, Al Pacino’s participation in *Scarface* assured that the film would receive consideration by film critics as an “important” drama. Moreover, his performance guaranteed *Scarface* would be reviewed by everyone in the mainstream media. That *Scarface* was a gangster film that starred the man who played Michael
Corleone also guaranteed that the film would be compared to both Coppola’s *The Godfather* and *The Godfather, Part II*.

**The Core Instigators of Scarfacination**

The core audience of Scarface consisted of those fans that enjoyed the basic elements of the gangster genre: criminally violent opposition to authority and the idea of achieving the American dream of wealth, power, and fame by means that are outside the law. The film certainly maintained those expectations because Scarface was, at its heart, a rags-to-riches story—a penniless immigrant rises from incarceration, to dishwasher, to multi-millionaire by eliminating all obstacles on his way to the pinnacle of capitalist success. But the film’s premise was markedly different from traditional gangster films in two ways. First, it was a gangster story absent of the stereotypical Italian Mafia based narrative. Second, it was a gangster story that featured a non-white criminal as the main character, a feature not seen since the days of Blaxploitation. As for audiences who are attracted to gangster films, many would be disappointed that Scarface, despite having Pacino, would not be an epic story with the scope and dramatic arc of *The Godfather*. And problematic was the discovery that the main character, Tony Montana, appeared to be not as likeable or empathetic as was the case with Brando’s Don Corleone or James Caan’s Sonny, both of whom were ruthless but hard not to admire.

However, one thematic element of the text superseded all others and, when added to actions that saw Montana maintain the gangsta code of honor, inexorably bound itself to its audience. As is the case in stories such as *Cinderella* (which arguably is the template for every rags to riches tale), and contemporary films like *Rocky, Rudy, Dreamgirls, Working Girl* and (relevant to the gangster genre) *Little Caesar*, the rise of the hero (or heroine) from poverty and or obscurity to fame and riches, is a most compelling element because it is emotionally
satisfying. The novels of Horatio Alger reversed the feminine Cinderella mythology and created narratives in which young boys overcame hardship to achieve success. Alger’s template has been a cornerstone of many genres in cinema, none more so than that of the “tragic hero” of the gangster story. Oliver Stone, in creating the Scarface screenplay, utilized elements of the Alger template to great effect. Hip-hop audiences have termed this overarching theme—and I will repeat this term many times during the course of the dissertation—the “come up” aspect of the journey towards perfecting their masculine identity.

Once the ghetto underclass audience resolved to admire Montana’s come up, one that featured his adherence to the identical code of honor they also valued, he was deemed “authentic.” Having always been ignored by the mainstream, it did not matter what the press wrote. Hip-hop came to appreciate the disrespect Scarface had received because, frankly, it mirrored their own. All that mattered was that his journey had been successful. Their enthusiastic reception was in addition to the other segments of the film’s fan base that were loyal to either De Palma, the gangster genre, violent cinema, or to Pacino. These elements having merged, the cumulative effect of these appreciations established the creation of the Scarface phenomenon as an enduring legacy.

The legacy would include the complete physical and psychological rehabilitation of the city of Miami as the Metro-Dade County area transformed from a retirement spot where the elderly went to die into a vibrant glass tower filled multi-cultural metropolis to die for. After Scarface Miami instantly became a preferred setting for other films and television series, most notably Miami Vice, the trend setting narco-cop television drama that, unlike the Scarface production that got run out of town by anti-Castro Cubans, filmed on location. Vice used the Scarface formula of depicting the bad guy cocaine barons as sophisticated Sosa-like criminals.
but eliminated the film’s police corruption paradigm in favor of crime fighting superheroes that were virtuous and incorruptible. Scarface also primed the pump for the development of the gangsta rap music video, which extolled the benefits of the misogynistic, violent criminal “gangsta” lifestyle the film championed. In addition, the Pacino-De Palma film’s defiant attitude inspired a new genre of black action-crime drama, called “Hood” (or ‘hood) films. The feature length films expanded the music video format to create sometimes insightful, but too often stereotypical, portraits of ghetto underclass black males as unredeemable, sociopathically violent criminals.

All of these moments referenced Scarface, sometimes as pastiche but most often using visual and or thematic homages from key scenes from the story. These references were instrumental in the corporate processes undertaken to reinvent Scarface. This strategy saw the film journey from 1984, when it was released on the newly invented video cassette, towards becoming a profitable brand name, when it became solely and completely influential to Hip-hop in 1988, to its homage in 1991’s New Jack City. But the Scarface “corporate initiative” kicked into high gear at the time of the twentieth anniversary celebration year, which began in 2003. Since that time, Scarface has been fast tracked by its owner Universal Studios into a solid profit center, the impetus for countless license agreements between the owner and franchisees eager to sell fanatics symbols of their canonization of the film. In 2009, the Scarface film title was trademarked, an indication that the brand had become far more than a film property.

**Scarfacination as Faustian Bargain and Harbinger of Hegemony**

It is exactly because Scarface is a cultural phenomenon constructed from the foundation of a particular audience’s rejection of traditional mainstream heroic virtues that the film signifies a major cultural moment. This moment is the culmination of a search by Hip-hop males for a
hero (or superhero) to call their own, one that would represent their hope to overcome systemic oppression and economic hopelessness. But to date, aside from learning how to be better drug dealers, better killers, or how to die in style, these men have yet to benefit from Scarface. Once Tony Montana was identified by Hip-hop males as the hero they were searching for, the film proceeded to an exalted status that rejuvenated the franchise, making it an attractive corporate brand. But the popular cultural intensity over Scarface should also be considered a symbol of a larger issue. The gangsta did manage to capitalize on his newly reinforced gangsta image by taking advantage of new employment opportunities in rap music and other Hip-hop related businesses, if he had the acumen to do so. Through their own branding as gangstas, Hip-hop males were able to confirm their authenticity to potential customer by getting arrested, jailed, or worse, being shot. The Notorious B.I.G and Tupac Shakur both paid the ultimate price for corporate marketing campaigns which branded them as take-no-prisoners gangstas. However, it was the corporate strategists that were able to most profit from Scarface’s promotion of the gangsta as a brand name.

One reason for Scarface’s transformation, from cultural frog to capitalist prince, is that Hip-hop gangsta males are now the brand’s most faithful consumers. Outside of record sales of rap songs which use Scarface imagery (and there are scores of those) it is difficult to determine to what extent, if any, Hip-hop participates in the Scarface economy. Despite my repeated attempts to confirm to what extent, if any, Universal Studios granted inner city businesses some of the franchises for the comic books, video games, action figures, and other ancillary products developed since Hip-hop resuscitated the film, they never responded to me. However, most of the products I have seen for sale on line or in retail stores do not appear to have links to the inner city.
Thus, since around the twentieth anniversary of the film in 2003, when efforts to market Scarface as a corporate brand began in earnest, only a small core of business partners, including the owners of the Scarface property Universal Studios (and its parent General Electric), have benefited from the elevation of the film to economic juggernaut. The result has been the makeover of the film into a Scarface brand that in many ways appears to be modeled after George Lucas’ brilliant and successful branding strategy of Star Wars.  

Ironically the brand has been created as the result of the construction of Tony Montana into a ghetto “superhero,” a man who died in oppositional resistance to the tyranny of a criminal corporate structure which commissioned him to kill women and children in furtherance of the coca-oligarchy. However, as the examples of Scarfacination will prove, this construction has been inverted. The capitalists are now in effect selling the symbol of resistance back to the revolutionaries (and everyone else) for a profit. Scores of product licenses are being granted by Universal in support of Scarface and millions of dollars (and pounds and Euros) have been earned.

**Figure 6. May the Cereal Be With You.**
Kellogg’s is one of scores of businesses granted a franchise to market Star Wars iconography. The cereal maker did not find it problematic that it was using the imagery of Darth Vader, a character who mass murdered children in Star Wars: Episode III: Revenge of the Sith, to sell its product to children.

The image of Kellogg’s cereal box cover from eBay at: [http://cgi.ebay.com/2006-KELLOGGS-STAR-WARS-CEREAL-DARTH-VADER-BOX-FULL_W0QQitemZ110436148971QQcmdZViewItemQQptZFast_Food_Cereal_Premiums?hash=item19b681e6eb&_trksid=p3286.c0.m14](http://cgi.ebay.com/2006-KELLOGGS-STAR-WARS-CEREAL-DARTH-VADER-BOX-FULL_W0QQitemZ110436148971QQcmdZViewItemQQptZFast_Food_Cereal_Premiums?hash=item19b681e6eb&_trksid=p3286.c0.m14)
Tony Montana’s transition, from the mind of Oliver Stone to the face of Al Pacino on products from T-shirts to works of art, occurred only because an audience in search of a hero found one. It follows logic then that this audience, comprised of mostly young and male ghetto residents, would want to purchase artifacts that would symbolize their fealty to a man who epitomized everything about the street that they found attractive. Thus, whoever or whatever controls the production of the artifacts stands to profit immensely. However, the irony inherent in this set of circumstances is that these fans, in choosing to purchase Scarface related products, do so at the risk of supporting corporations who rarely choose to create jobs or businesses in places like the South Central neighborhood where Monster Kody Scott lived.

It is doubtful that the Hip-hop audiences who have participated in purchasing the products related to the film they love have given any consideration to how what they do affects their relationship with hegemony. Since hegemony is a term with a usage limited to academic discourses and political discussions, its relevance to everyday people relates, in all but rare cases, to studies (this one included) which attempt to connect the observable behavior of subjects (in this case the Scarface Hip-hop audience) to forces that control cultural normativity. It is these “forces,” that usually interest researchers and this study is no different. The examples of the symbols of the forces of hegemony which that have been cited earlier require attentive critical analysis.

Today Al Pacino’s visage as Tony Montana is sold on just about everything. This signifies the reclamation of Scarface by corporate interests from the shelves of mediocrity that the mainstream placed it on after its three month theatrical run from December 1983 to March 1984. It was only after being celebrated as a ghetto superhero by the underclass was Universal was able to remake Scarface into a successful product brand based. In doing so, Scarface has
now been placed by the media on the very same mainstream throne, one the film’s creators thought was rightfully theirs at the time the film was released, that was denied the film twenty-five years ago by poor reviews. This is not to say that the ghetto underclass audience has completely lost, or will ever lose, credit for mining the cultural currency that lie beneath the surface of the narrative. However, the tone of recent activities has proven to be problematic. While both lauding the film’s resurgence and celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of its release, attempts within the discourse to understand the significance of Scarface as a cultural phenomenon all seem to fall short of addressing why Tony Montana resonates so perfectly with the Hip-hop gangsta male and his code of honor.

I believe that these efforts mistakenly attempt to find a reason, any reason, to dispute the simple truth that Hip-hop was the first to connect life on the street to Scarface (and vice versa) and, just possibly, is still the only group that does. If we are to believe Ken Tucker’s well intended book that seeks to, as expressed in the title, answer the question how of Scarface “changed America,” we come to understand that his finding is that the film’s principals don’t have a clue. And while Tucker strikes a hopeful chord in his introduction, he puts down the challenge very quickly and goes on to write a very entertaining story from the viewpoint of the film’s insiders—but one that unfortunately fails to fully document and credit the rebirth of the film’s cultural significance, and thus everything that has followed, to Hip-hop.\textsuperscript{110}

Scarfacination, therefore, offers an opportunity for a Derridian deconstruction of what happened after Scarface debuted and became the symbol of the times, a moment at which point Hip-hop turned away from a community based underground culture and morphed into a multi-platformed corporate economic engine symbolized by the gangsta. As pointed out by Halifu Osumare’s insightful book on the collusion between corporate America and Hip-hop,\textsuperscript{111} Hip-
hop’s hustlers have become legitimate business opportunists dismissive of the revolutionary political base that they once defended in songs like “Fight the Power.” Because of their complicity, Scarface is now a very successful product being sold like toothpaste with Pacino, in character, as the pitch man. Scarfacination, solely due to the relevance Hip-hop placed upon the film, is making a lot of people very rich with one glaring exception: the ghetto underclass Hip-hop audiences that transformed it into a colossus. They never saw a penny.
CHAPTER THREE
THE GENEALOGY OF SCARFACINATION

In this the chapter I will provide a genealogy of these events to explain how the film became so unexpectedly a significant focus of the Hip-hop audience’s identity construction. This construction happened to collude with a system of ghetto street values, symbolized by scenes in the film, to form the foundation of the phenomenon.

The Initial Release

As previously stated in chapter two contrary to statements made by some of the film’s principals, not all of the film’s reviews were negative. In the final analysis, the initial poor showing at the box office had as much to do with the competition at the time of the release as it did with negative criticism. Scarface’s initial theatrical run began on December 9, 1983 and ended March 12, 1984, a run of 94 days (13 weeks and three days). The film earned $44.6 million dollars during this three month period. Moreover, the film did reasonably well at the box office considering that it was an R rated release of nearly three hours in length. Problematic was the fact that Scarface’s debut was placed in direct competition with Sudden Impact, the fourth installment of Clint Eastwood’s popular Dirty Harry series. What has gone largely unnoticed is that Scarface made its own sudden critical and cultural impact. Two weeks after the film debuted, it was nominated by the Hollywood Foreign Press Association for three Golden Globe awards: Best Actor (Al Pacino), Best Supporting Actor (Steven Bauer), and Best Score (Giorgio Moroder). To the disappointment of the studio and the creative team, Scarface did not win any of these awards. Moreover, the film was passed over by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences for Oscar consideration, receiving zero nominations.
That same March 1984, The Terminator, a science-fiction action thriller, began production. According to imdb.com, an online motion picture archive, James Cameron’s film would be the first motion picture to reference Scarface, a remarkable circumstance considering that the Arnold Swartzenegger’s sci-fi action film would go into production immediately after Scarface ended its run. The Terminator, which premiered in October 1984, would take the controversial, formerly X rated graphic violence of Scarface to a higher level.

![Image of The Terminator and Scarface](http://www.digitaljournal.com/image/40441)

**Figure 7. The Eyes Have It.**
Montana’s assassin, “The Skull,” appears to provide direct inspiration for the costuming accessory choice for the cyborg killing machine in The Terminator, a film credited with being the first to reference Scarface.\(^{117}\)

Swartzenegger’s memorable “I’ll be back” police station massacre scene appears directly inspired by Montana’s last stand in the final bloody battle of Scarface. Also, as an aesthetic remembrance, The Terminator borrows the iconography of Montana’s assassin, “The Skull,”\(^{118}\) by giving the cyborg dark sunglasses very similar to Skull’s, thus creating another signature image.

**1984**

The Cassette Cache

In June of 1984 Scarface was released on video cassette and laser disc for sale and rental. The sales price of the two-cassette VHS box set was a pricy (by today’s standards) $79.95.
Nevertheless, the film debuted on June 16, 1984 at #11 on Billboard Magazine’s Top 40 list of videocassette sales and at #32 in video cassette rentals. The very next week Scarface rose dramatically in the charts achieving the #1 position in rentals and placing #4 in sales.

The success of Scarface in the early days of the videocassette market has been previously overlooked as a cause for its recent iconic status in popular culture. First, the revenue the film generated in the cassette marketplace is an indication that, unlike the underdog position espoused in interviews by one of the film’s principals, Scarface has enjoyed a solidly appreciative fan base that, as evidenced by the revenue of cassette rentals and sales, was present from the very beginning. The film’s cultural work connected immediately with gangster film fans, its natural (and a mainstream) fan base. But it was Scarface’s connection with the ghetto underclass of Hip-hop that, over time, proved to be the most significant. Due in part to Tony Montana’s initial economic status as a broke and jobless immigrant, this connection created a reverentially intense psychological obsession which, over time, provided both the semiotic and psycho-social inspiration for Hip-hop culture’s deviation into the gangsta themed rap videos and films, a movement which began shortly after the release of Scarface. Simply put, Hip-hop “got” Scarface from the beginning. Thus, part of the development of the “gangsta” model in Hip-hop was reinforced by the film.

1984

Miami Vice

Scarface continued to receive tributes from other filmmakers after The Terminator started the trend. But it was left to television to create perhaps the film’s greatest homage ever, the long running dramatic series Miami Vice. Created by Scarface owner Universal Studios in partnership with the NBC television network, Vice would enjoy a successful five year run on
television from September 1984 to May 1989. Unlike Scarface, *Miami Vice* utilized authentic Miami settings that the film, as a Los Angeles-based Baudrillardian simulacrum of south Florida, only pretended to be. *Vice* also, on occasion, used some former Scarface actors,\(^{124}\) and plenty of rock stars playing villains in dramatic roles, to become a pop culture phenomenon. The television series served as a springboard for the careers of Hollywood superstars such as Julia Roberts\(^ {125}\) and Liam Neeson, and successful character actors Richard Belzer, Giancarlo Esposito, John Leguizamo, Stanley Tucci, and Dennis Farina. *Miami Vice*, as a long running hit, promulgated continuing interest in the cocaine based violent themes on which Scarface was based. The canonization of Scarface would thus begin, in the midst of its run as a video rental favorite, on a TV series that clearly borrowed its most glittering aspect, the cocaine cowboy gangster as American capitalist success symbol, to create an aesthetic tour-de-force.

*Miami Vice* made its debut a mere six months after the film closed its run in theatres. It was the continued representation of the film’s basic themes on *Vice*, set also in Miami, which forged a relationship between Scarface and the artistic pastiche which would set the film apart from others in the gangster genre. *Vice* used drug dealing as its major theme but reversed the focus. Instead of an anti-heroic archetype, the show concentrated on the heroic efforts of working class cops who, as undercover officers, only pretended to be drug dealers. However, the series, by shooting scenes filled with opulent mansions built with cocaine profits and other fixtures of the Scarface mis-en-scene, promoted the luxurious lifestyles enjoyed by the drug dealing barons of south Florida and thus extended the continuation the male fantasies of power, wealth, and respect that Scarface had fueled.

The *Miami Vice* production design insured that Tony Montana and his methods for achieving conspicuous success would not only survive but thrive over the long term. With the
Miami region itself serving as a seductive character, Vice would capture the imagination of the nation with its wardrobe choices, fast cars driven by hip undercover cops, and beautiful women. But the formula Vice borrowed from Scarface did reverse one key representation. Unlike Scarface, the show offered the police as incorruptible warriors fighting successful Montana styled drug traffickers who, like Tony, lived the American male fantasy. Vice accumulated a great amount of cultural capital for itself, so much so that it become a required text of study for media scholars attempting to understand popular culture in context with the excesses of the Reagan era. In an example of the scholarship created, media critic ONC Wang wrote that

> In 1985, sex and drugs and rock & roll had finally hit mainstream U.S. television, after they had hit the rest of the United States for the last twenty odd years. Because of such phenomena as the politics of AIDS, Nancy Reagan's saying "No" to drugs, and Nike's using the Beatles' "Revolution" to sell their shoes, people are once again debating what is at stake in sex and drugs and rock & roll.¹²⁶

**Mirror Images: Scarface & Miami Vice**

![Figure 8. Glass House](image)

Tony Montana ponders his future while looking out from inside the palatial digs of his ex-boss, Frank Lopez. Tony is there to claim Elvira, Frank’s girlfriend, as his own after killing Lopez. The floor-to-roof architecture of the Lopez mansion defined the good life of the gangster lifestyle. **Scarface** screen capture of Frank Lopez’s mansion by Rob Prince.
**Figure 9. Vice Styles.** The mansion of arms dealer Guzman from “Evan,” Miami Vice; year one, episode 21. This estate is typical of the mansions owned by arch-criminals in the series and bears a striking similarity to that of Lopez. Guzman happened to be played by Al Israel, the chain saw wielding Columbian in Scarface.

Screen capture by Rob Prince from *Miami Vice*, Episode 21, “Evan.”

**Figure 10. Ocean Views.**

Al Israel as arms dealer Guzman in an ocean view poolside scene from “Evan,” episode 21, from the first year of Miami Vice. The shot from “Evan” homages the pivotal scene on the right from Scarface, in which Tony proposes to Elvira (Michelle Pfeiffer). As was Guzman, Elvira is photographed in a robe with the ocean over her left shoulder from the pool side patio of the Lopez estate. Countless other scenes—during Miami Vice’s five year and 100 plus episodes run—utilized the production design and camera shots of its predecessor.

Screen capture by Rob Prince from *Miami Vice* Episode 21, “Evan.”
A homage to Scarface during a scene from the first year of *Miami Vice*, episode 18, “Made for Each Other.” Detectives Switek and Zito pass a store with a Scarface poster in its window. The poster was on screen for only a few seconds. The series often used posters and other art to embed social commentary.

Screen capture by Rob Prince from *Miami Vice*, episode 18, “Made for Each Other.”

**Scarface gets Ready, Meets Hip-hop**

It was in January 1987, right in the middle of *Miami Vice*’s successful run, that Scarface would achieve its second seminal moment, one that would catapult it into the heady cult enriched clouds populated by blockbuster films such as Star Trek and Star Wars. Scarface made its network television premiere on ABC and a young Hip-hop rapper, a long time fan of the film, was watching. A member of the Hip-hop rap group, The Geto Boys, whose controversial lyrics would become fodder for protests by family oriented activist groups, began the process of immortalizing the film by sampling it—a Hip-hop term for the incorporation of a previously known text into a new song. The group’s turntable mix master DJ Ready Red, the aforementioned fan of the film (pictured below wearing the number 7 shirt), was solely responsible for the beginnings of the Scarface mythology in rap by turning a key line of the film’s provocative dialogue into The Geto Boys’ 1988 single “Balls and My Word.”

This
phrase, uttered by Montana to his future business partner Alejandro Sosa, is a key plot point in the film for Hip-hop because it outlines for audiences a code of criminal ethics for those on the street who have not made money yet. Red’s story on how he came to use the film in his art is the true beginning of Scarfacination as we know it today.

Figure 12. DJ Ready Red. The man wearing jersey #7 is Collins Leysath, aka DJ Ready Red. The photo was taken in 2006 for an article in the San Jose Metroactive newspaper. Image of DJ Ready Red and friends from Metroactive.com (May 3-9, 2006) at: http://www.metroactive.com/metro/05.03.06/track-stars-0618.html.

From the very beginning of this study, I had been under the impression that Brad Jordan, solely because he had taken the name of “Scarface” as his rap persona, had been the first to use Scarface in Hip-hop. It had been one sentence that he uttered, very matter of factly, in the documentary film Origins of a Hip Hop Classic, “I took the name Scarface because that was me, man.” This comment had made me curious as to why a very large sized and dark skinned black man would so closely identify with Al Pacino, a rather smallish white man playing a Cuban criminal. I wanted to understand exactly what he meant by “that was me.”

Of course Jordan and actor Pacino don’t look alike. Jordan and character Montana don’t resemble each other either. Was Jordan saying he had been a drug dealer? Had he been to Cuba and back or lived in Miami? Since none of these possibilities were true what then were the exact
qualities Montana exhibited in the film that lead Jordan to exclaim his remark? Or was his comment just show business? I checked and he had never been directly asked in an interview whether he had pioneered usage of the film as his persona. Of greater interest to me was the fact that Jordan had also not attempted to affirm or deny what appeared to be a consensus that he had first brought the film to the ghetto underclass.

It is sometimes difficult, if not downright impossible, to distinguish hype from reality in the show business of rap. Identities are fabricated, alter egos used with impunity; it is all part of the show. Former middle class kids like Sean Combs, for example, swear up and down that they had to deal drugs to survive. Having had a grandmother that lived right across the street from the private Catholic high school Combs attended in New York, I doubt, with a great amount of certainty, that his claims of a difficult background are true. Combs has changed his stage name so many times it has become a running joke in the media. He has gone from Puff Daddy to Puffy to P. Diddy to Diddy to, as of January 2008, Sean Jean, the new name of the cologne he markets. Christopher Wallace became The Notorious B.I.G aka Frank White, and Tupac Shakur used Makavelli. The list goes on and on. All rappers seem to use alter egos.

In the matter of Brad Jordan’s metamorphosis into Scarface, when I went searching for answers, I found out on the Internet that customers who shop for rap music on Yahoo are provided, within a biography of Scarface, an erroneous history of The Geto Boys, the group Jordan joined when he was performing as Akshen (pronounced Action). According to Yahoo

Before Brad Jordan became known as Scarface, he called himself Akshen. As such, he began his rap career first as a solo artist in his native Houston during the mid-’80s for James Smith’s then fledging Rap-A-Lot label. Smith was trying to launch a group he tagged the Geto Boys, and eventually asked Akshen to join the
group in the late '80s. The Geto Boys' debut album -- Grip It! On That Other Level (1990), later repackaged and re-released that same year simply as The Geto Boys -- shocked many with its vivid depictions of violence and its overall extreme nature. This album featured the song "Scarface," which introduced Akshen's alter ego, a title he would keep from that point onward.¹²⁸

There are several misstatements in this brief biography. First, the original name of the group was The Ghetto Boys, not The Geto Boys. The Geto Boys’ name was changed, from the former to the later, after Rick Rubin, who personally made the change, recruited the group to his new label. The change occurred after the release of their second album. Second, the debut album of the group was, in fact, Making Trouble, released in August, 1988. Grip It! On that Other Level was the group’s second album, and was released in 1989. Third, the tune “Scarface” did not introduce Akshen’s alter ego. The character of Scarface was introduced on Making Trouble in the song “Balls and My Word,” during which the voice of Al Pacino as Tony Montana is heard repeatedly intoning the famous phrase again and again. Akshen was not yet a member of the Ghetto Boys when Making Trouble was released. “Balls and My Word” was the musical parchment from which could be read the Hip-hop revelation that Scarface was a ghetto bible telling the deeds of a street Messiah. As in The Matrix, Tony Montana was proclaimed The One.

The Source is Often Never Where You Think It Is

Collins Leysath had big dreams. It was his hope that his love for rap music and his virtuosity in mixing music would take him out of obscurity in Trenton, New Jersey and into the American Dream of rock star success. I had read about Collins, aka DJ Ready Red, during my research into the Geto Boys (and prime rapper Scarface) at a San Jose, California newspaper web site.¹²⁹ Red, as I have come to know him,¹³⁰ had been a founding member of the original Ghetto
Boys in 1986. I found Red to be a very warm and engaging man who, according to the news article I read, had left the group suddenly after Rick Rubin had given them, and him, what would appear to be a dream shot at success.

As he tells it he went to Houston, Texas in 1986 to take care of some “personal family business” and ended up staying after hooking up with another dreamer, James "Li'l J" Smith. Smith signed Leysath to his small local label, Rap-A-Lot, and put him to work with a new group Smith had founded, The Ghetto Boys. Smith was putting a rap act together in the hopes of cashing in on a new aspect of rap called gangsta, a subgenre that focused on the angst of inner city life. Gangsta was itself an inversion of American racism. Rappers had constructed an art form from the fear and stereotyping of black males into performances which outwardly claimed dominion of the wanton criminality that society seemed to unjustly expect from them.

Mr. Leysath had come into the business at a timely moment. It was a heady time for rap and Hip-hop. In 1983, after a decade of being a purely underground artistic pursuit fashioned by occasional bursts of media attention, Hip-hop broke through into the mainstream. With singles that featured the first gangster crime themes by Ice T and Schooly D, the first successful rap national tour headlined by the legendary Run-DMC, and a film, Beat Street. Hip-hop became the preferred choice of that segment of ghetto underclass youth who actively resented the overwhelming media attention given to Michael Jackson’s Thriller. Jackson, who with the assistance of mainstream favorite Quincy Jones, ignored the problems of society in favor of a sugar coated, color blind fantasy world made up of zombies and disco divas, created an opportunity for Hip-hop to begin an angry backlash against those black performers who appeared to forget where they came from. This backlash would proliferate in the Reagan era, as The Cosby
Show debuted with a story line that seemed anxious to erase economically disadvantaged blacks from the face of the earth.

Other black acts refused to address issues central to the concerns of the ghetto underclass such as poverty, joblessness, and police oppression. Musician Prince Rogers Nelson aka Prince, while reminding old school R & B music fans of the exuberantly raw soul made famous by James Brown and Jackie Wilson, straightened his hair and wore high heeled boots, costume choices looked upon unfavorably by young ghetto males. Other acts, such as Lionel Ritchie, De Barge, Donna Summer, Marvin Gaye, James Ingram, and Irene Cara, whose “What a Feeling” theme from the blockbuster film Flashdance both top the pop charts and won the Oscar for Best Song of 1983, embraced non controversial approaches to cross over into the white pop marketplace. The effect of all of this upon inner city fans was profound. Feeling abandoned by everyone except rappers, they embraced Hip-hop with a vengeance.

These feelings fueled the hate, rage, and get rich or die trying attitude of Hip-hop ghetto males, who saw both Jackson and Prince change their physical appearances and appear to abandon their black masculinity. Ghetto males also had to accept the humiliation that black women felt they had to deny their heritage to get ahead. A key case in point on the latter was Flashdance. The film's beautiful young female star, Jennifer Beals, caused a debate in both the media and the black community when Beals refused to acknowledge what race she belonged to. The problem was that it was obvious to black audiences that she was one of us. Today she admits her father was black and her mother was Irish. My point is that, in expressing the emotions of the powerless and disrespected, Hip-hop rappers were, as Chuck D has repeatedly opined, the CNN of the ‘hood. The Ghetto Boys’ first album, Making Trouble, tapped into those feelings and spat
them out with malice of forethought. Making trouble was what these young men called performing the anti-pop reality whites refused to see.

In 1983 a young Red (so called because of his very light skin tone\textsuperscript{133}) first saw Scarface in the movie theatre. His street-wise grandmother, who was a fan of gangster films, took him to the Eric Twin in Lawrenceville, New Jersey, the area’s reigning palace for all the “big” films.\textsuperscript{134} For Red it was love at first sight. He recalled that he was very impressed with, among other things, Tony’s mansion and told his grandma that he “was gonna get her a house like Tony's.”

Red’s reaction, while far from a firsthand ethnographic investigation into the inner city audiences who connected so completely with Scarface, did provide me with great insight. Red went into the film like that of a lot of other young inner city boys who took their poverty and dreams of escape into the dark of the theatre and came away impressed with what Tony, starting with just the proverbial shirt on his back, was able to accomplish. Red confirmed for me that Hip-hop males saw redemption for Tony as being the same key moment in the film I did, that being when he refused to kill the mother and kids of the man who was going to expose the drug cartel. "It was why he was killed and people who watch the film don't see that, " Red suggested. “All Tony wanted was a family.” Red, like most Hip-hop males, also did not see incest in the affection that Tony had for his sister. “He killed Manny because he wanted a man for Gina that would take her away from the gangsta lifestyle," Red added.

When I finally got around to asking him about the timing of Brad Jordan’s introduction of the Scarface persona, Red set me straight. Was the legend true, that Brad Jordan had become so infatuated with the idea that Tony Montana’s struggle so resembled his own he changed his name to that of the film? Or was it a case of media hype as happened when the newspaper man
said in the film *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, "when the legend becomes fact, print the legend"?

The Legend is Revealed

It was during a winter evening in January 1987 that Scarface the film and Hip-hop went on their first date. When Scarface made its ABC network television debut Red was watching. He told me about how, after the film left the theatres, many a bootlegged video tape cassette were sold in the inner city adding to the growing mystique the film was generating. Thus Red, along with legions of other fans from the underground, was anxiously anticipating the film’s arrival on the small screen. Red had set up shop to watch the broadcast in his basement practice space so he could experiment with beats while watching the movie.

There comes a moment in the film when Tony is forced to witness the murder of his boss’s chief lieutenant for snitching on a member of the cocaine cartel. Sosa, the cartel’s leader, having just ordered the execution, is wondering if Tony can be trusted or whether he should send him on a similar one-way helicopter ride. He clearly is testing Tony’s loyalty and Tony, who had survived a chainsaw wielding Columbian rip off attempt, does not disappoint. He wants in on the business Sosa has to offer, knowing Sosa is rich and powerful. Montana shows his loyalty to Sosa in an interesting way. He defiantly gestures towards Sosa and informs him, “all I have in this world is my balls and my word and I don’t break them for anyone.”

It is a line of dialogue revered by Hip-hop like no other. As for Red, Tony's line is the hook he had been looking for. At that precise moment he recalls thinking, "this could work." Red said he immediately began to try out beats based on the militant tone of Montana’s dialogue. Before the evening was over Red would give the phrase “balls and my word” a powerful cultural meaning. After practicing for days, Red was satisfied he had something special and he presented
his idea to the group. They loved it, he remembers. Al Pacino’s line would be sampled. Well after the song and album debuted a friend would tell Red that Pacino must have been proud. “How do you know?” Red asked. “He never sued you,” the friend replied.


“Balls and My Word” was the first rap song to sample the Scarface film. It made its debut on the group’s first album, Making Trouble, which was released in August 1988. Red produced the track for the album but, curiously, did not receive credit. Unfortunately, this would not be the last time that would happen to him. Brad “Akshen” Jordan was not yet a member of the group at that time. Therefore he could not have inspired the first use of Scarface in a rap record. But soon after the album dropped two of the group’s members left and Jordan was hired as one of the replacements. If Jordan did not introduce the film to Hip-hop, how then did he take on the name of Scarface?

Despite being a mostly local act, The Ghetto Boys and Rap-A-Lot understood big time marketing practices. Each member of the Ghetto Boys had, Red informed me, a specific performance persona for dramatic purposes. The performer who took on the role of the gangsta, however, would be the most important due to a new trend in rap music. Schooly D and Ice T had introduced gangsta themes into a marketplace hungry for anti-heroic archetypes in opposition to the crossover into pop by black soul music artists such as Lionel Ritchie and Michael Jackson. Angry new west coast rap artists Niggaz with Attitudes (NWA) became a super group when they took the form to its highest level of rage yet with their performances on the album Straight Outta Compton, which earned them a gold record. Gangstas sold more records because the performances were raw and “authentic,” the artists themselves were from the inner cities, and the musical content expressed all of the pent up pain and frustrations that the ghetto underclass felt as a result of what appeared to be their abandonment—by their own “crossover” music artists, by
a Hollywood that left their images off the screen, by banks who seemed to lend to everyone but them, and by a Reagan administration that was bent on reversing every gain won by the Civil Rights movement.

With no one speaking for the ghetto, the gangsta persona was all that remained for “authentic” expression. In 1984, for example, The Cosby Show’s universal acceptance as the embodiment of black acceptance of white values only irritated the festering boil.

**Figure 13. Making Trouble.**
The album featured the first sample from the Scarface film, the song “Balls and My Word” (on right, #3), at the time an innocuous appearing moment which would launch the colossus. That’s DJ Ready Red on the far left.


Thinking that it would be a good time to take advantage of the trend, and seeing how “Balls and My Word” had struck such a responsive chord with rap fans, the label made ambitious plans that relied on the group’s continued use of the Scarface theme. A big fan of the film, Brad Jordan had liked the first Scarface sample so much that, once he joined the group, he was encouraged by Red to make his persona that of the gangsta. According to Red, it was mutually agreed upon by both the group and the label that Jordan’s gangsta persona would henceforth be known as “Scarface,” a character that would debut on their next album. The Ghetto Boys went back in the studio and, with the idea of promoting Jordan’s new alter ego in
mind Red, with Jordan performing the rap as “Scarface,” produced the track “Scarface” for Grip it! On the Other Level, which was released in 1989. “Scarface” the rap song was a smash hit which caused fans of the song to reconnect with the film. These activities further solidified the film Scarface as symbolic of the cutting edge in gangsta Hip-hop. The song also created a new rap star who would indeed take things to that other level.

![Grip it! On That Other Level](http://checkthetechnique.blogspot.com/2009/02/geto-boys-grip-it-on-that-other-level.html)

**Figure 14. Grip it! On That Other Level.**
DJ Ready Red is taking his gangsta pose on the far right of the album photo.

Pre-dating the 2Live Crew’s _Nasty As They Wanna Be_ 1990 censorship trial in Florida, Grip It! would prove to be one of the most controversial albums in not only rap history but in all of music history due to the disturbing theme of one song. The infamously controversial “Mind of a Lunatic,” a fictional tale of a mentally unstable man’s fantasies of necrophilia and rape, catapulted the group into the spotlight. They attracted both the positive and negative attention of the entire nation, eventually becoming poster boys for many anti-rap music coalitions. Leaders such as the Rev. Calvin Butts (the pastor of my paternal grandmother’s and uncle’s church, The Abyssinian Baptist in New York City), Rev. Jesse Jackson, and former Pennsylvania Secretary of State Democrat C. Delores Tucker (who had partnered with former U.S. Education Secretary and conservative Republican politician William Bennett) would consistently cite “Mind of a Lunatic” as a prime example of gangsta rap gone wild.
In its May 3, 2006 edition the San Jose based Metro Silicon Valley Weekly published a retrospective article that featured Red. It explained that

The controversy over explicit lyrics helped propel the Geto Boys to ridiculous heights of scrutiny. When Grip It! was picked up and retitled for Def American, its CD manufacturer and distributor refused to press or release The Geto Boys due to songs like "Mind of a Lunatic" and "Gangster of Love." Def American later found a willing distributor, Giant, and carried on. "Mind of a Lunatic," a horror tale with lines about necrophilia and rape, solidified the Geto Boys' reputation.135

Jackson and Tucker, long time political allies from Jackson’s People United to Save Humanity (PUSH), had previously joined with the Hollywood branch of the NAACP to bring an end to the Blaxploitation era by threatening a boycott of Hollywood.136 Their efforts would only widen the gap between the ghetto underclass and a civil rights era coalition Hip-hop youth derided as not being in touch with their needs. While anti-rap forces “preached to the choir” that consisted of the mainstream “haves,” the “have nots” thumbed their noses at them and bought millions of albums. Gangsta rap was here to stay.

At this point there were some whites in the mainstream who saw an opportunity to cash in on the rage expressed by the gangsta. Grip it! On that Other Level would also attract the attention of Rick Rubin, a young white counter-culture male who had just left Def Jam, the record company he had founded with the eventual legend of Hip-hop, Russell Simmons, and started his own label, Def American.

Rubin, anxious to jump start his new label Def American, had come to Houston to show the group the benefits of working with someone bigger than tiny Rap-A- Lot. After all Rubin had produced the biggest albums of the greatest acts in the history of rap to date: The Beastie Boys,
Run-D.M.C. and Public Enemy. He was offering The Ghetto Boys the same American dream of national stardom and they accepted, bringing along Smith and Rap-A-Lot as unequal partners in the venture. Rubin quickly showed his business savvy by simply re-releasing Grip It! On that Other Level with minor changes, calling the “new” recording The Geto Boys, the revised spelling of the group’s name he instituted.

Rubin was so satisfied with DJ Ready Red's work on Grip It! that he only had to borrow one track from Making Trouble to go along with the ten (out of twelve) tracks he taken from Grip It!. He also gave Red the producer credits due him for his previously uncredited work on Making Trouble. But this recognition would mark the height of DJ Ready Red’s career in the national spotlight. Before the release of the group’s next effort he would quit the group, tumble back into relative obscurity and, after becoming clinically depressed from the experience, turn to crack cocaine.

In 1991 The Geto Boys would reached their all time zenith in rap when Rubin produced We Can't Be Stopped, which included an uncredited performance by Red. It was the group’s best reviewed and, by reaching number 24 on the Billboard Top 200, its highest charted album. According to James Bernard, a reviewer for Entertainment Weekly,

The Geto Boys are angry and defiant, and I can't imagine why they wouldn't be. Last year, their major-label debut -- stoked with vivid, violent images rivaling Bret Easton Ellis' "American Psycho" -- brought them unwelcome attention from would-be censors, finger-pointing from within the hip-hop community, and a refusal by Geffen Records to distribute their music.

However, Red confessed to me that Rubin and Rap-A-Lot shut him out of receiving both credit and royalties for his work on We Can’t Be Stopped, even though he clearly can be heard
on the first track, "Rebel Rap Family," intoning a Darth Vader like voice over. The San Jose based Metro Silicon Valley Weekly reported, in the same May 3rd edition, that Red told them

The records were selling; the group was touring with Ice Cube and Too Short. But some fans were taking the messages the wrong way ("The turning point was a kid in Chicago came up to me and said, 'Yo, I'm smoking fools to your shit.' I said, 'What?!'"). Most of all, money wasn't straight. "There'd be ridiculous royalty recoups that I found out to be crazy," Red says. "So when I wanted all my money, I got a lawyer and an accountant. They wanted to know what kind of formula was used for the accounting. I got all my money but became the bad guy." Red left the group on the eve of Geto Boys breakthrough We Can't Be Stopped. He can still be heard doing a Darth Vader-like intro on "Rebel Rap Family" and running things on "Punk-Bitch Game." The album eventually went platinum off the single "Mind Playing Tricks on Me."[140]

Red confirmed to me that he had in fact "walked away from a gold mine not to mention the fame that came with it.” He also admitted that Rap-A-Lot refused to give him any royalty points for We Can't Be Stopped.

With a hint of sadness, he expressed the notion that from time to time he has profound regrets about sampling Scarface, feelings that become especially acute when gang bangers tell him that they are using his music as an inspiration to kill people. He told me that he didn’t realize then what he does now, “that some people can't tell the difference between fantasy and reality.” He also told me that Hip-hop was an outlet and it was now time “for people to take responsibility for what they do” and not “use a rap song as a reason for doing bad things.” Red remains a security guard at the visitor’s entrance to a corporation in New Jersey.
DJ Ready Red was the first rap musician to sample the Scarface film with “Balls and My Word.” That seminal moment caused the film to be signified in Hip-hop and subsequently the culture embraced Tony Montana as its representation of gangsta manhood. Hip-hop’s enthusiastic reception caused Scarface to eventually be marketed to the world, earning corporate interests millions of dollars. But Red says he has not seen a cent of any of that money.

Oliver Stone was once asked why he thought Scarface became popular years after its release. He responded that “the pioneer doesn’t make the money. The next wave is the one that makes it.”\textsuperscript{141} In the case of Collins “DJ Ready Red” Leysath, Stone’s words couldn’t be truer. Witness the rise of Brad Jordan.

\textbf{Figure 15. Rapper Brad “Scarface” Jordan}  
Image of Brad “Scarface” Jordan from Artist Direct.com at:  
\url{http://www.artistdirect.com/artist/scarface/489754}.

\textbf{Happy Birthday, Mr. Scarface}

August 2008 marked the 20\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of the appearance of “Balls and My Word,” Hip-hop’s initial foray into the life of Tony Montana, future gangsta messiah. The earlier artistic efforts chronicling the bitter feelings of the street, as exampled by Ice-T’s “Six in the Morning,” were pieces of a larger construction of the street gangsta persona that “gave the middle finger” to a justice system that oppressed the ghetto underclass.
However, as skillfully exampled by the Scarface sample, it was Hip-hop’s use of existing film texts in its music and music videos that took the gangsta subgenre to a higher level of cultural meaning. The use of cinematic imagery allowed young Hip-hop males a rudimentarily powerful tool—the pleasure of the gaze as only spectatorship in cinema can provide. This act, in their view, legitimized what others viewed as their marginal existences. Laura Mulvey’s seminal article “Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema” is an extremely useful tool in interpreting how ghetto underclass males decoded the behavior of Tony Montana in the film. Through Montana’s actions, which included his visual objectification of boss Frank Lopez’s possessions (girlfriend, lifestyle, mansion) Hip-hop ghetto males were able to gain tangible pleasure by viewing their fantasies of masculinity and life acted out on the big screen. This interactive decoding, which in addition to Mulvey has been discussed at length by Stuart Hall, was perhaps the key moment of their identity construction, a process that I will discuss in depth in chapter five. Gangsta rap finally had a role model worthy of visual symbolism.

“Balls and My Word” was the first of hundreds of performances in Hip-hop which specifically mimic Al Pacino’s defiant performance. The Geto Boys continued to pioneer their use of the film on every subsequent album. With Grip It! On that Other Level, The Geto Boys, We Can’t Be Stopped, and Brad “Scarface” Jordan’s solo debut Mr. Scarface is Back, the first arguments can be heard for the canonization of Scarface within the Hip-hop community. And Hip-hop appeared to agree. Other rappers not only wrote their own homages to the film but developed a highly stylized pastiche that also paid tribute to The Geto Boys’ references to Scarface. However, it was Brad Jordan’s “Scarface,” a sustained, studied, and interpretive performance of the major themes inherent in the film’s text that proved to be, along with the 1991 release of New Jack City, the most effective promotion of not only Pacino’s film but the
spread of Hollywood gangster symbolism throughout Hip-hop. Jordan took the established maniacal persona of Tony Montana and became the “hook” the group needed for their neo-gangsta act.

**Scarface was Him, Man**

Jordan’s “Scarface” was an ingenious creation, given that he piggy-backed off of someone else’s idea. Despite his claim in the documentary *Origins of a Hip Hop Classic* that Scarface “was me, man,” it is interesting to note that the film did not appear to initially make a big enough impression on him for Jordan, who was calling himself “Akshen” (pronounced Action), to claim the name for his alter ego from the first moments of his career. Cleverly, he never called himself Tony Montana or any other derivation of the lead character’s name.

![Figure 16. “Scarface” the Rapper.](http://www.cduniverse.com/search/xx/music/pid/1033063/a/Mr.+Scarface+Is+Back.htm)
This choice allowed him to at once separate himself from the Montana character while enabling his rap artistry to embrace the film in its entirety. This reincarnation was bigger than Montana’s unspoken nickname. Jordan had become the film and his performance a symbol of all it signified. The film was him because he, like no other since, nurtured his claimed image over a prolonged period. By taking the title of the film as his name, according to DJ Ready Red a decision mutually planned and carried out by the group and its management, Jordan was able to perfectly position the “over the top” defiance represented by Pacino’s performance as a symbol of the group’s anti-authority posture. More importantly, his brilliantly nuanced characterization of a fictional Hip-hop gangsta caused scores of other rappers to review the film and subsequently recruit others into the gangsta fraternity. As a result, Jordan’s effective style, with the film always available as background or foreground for rap messaging, allowed for a society already fearful of black males to quickly transform the Hip-hop gangsta into the white man’s bogeyman. In turn, this created a cyclical feedback effect as the black bogeymen, prideful of the fear they were causing, rejoiced in their new found power and constructed more messages in the same vein.

Jordan’s collaboration with Ready Red also caused the rapper’s fans to revisit the film in an effort to understand the source of his inspiration. These additional connections to the film, made by the fans of “Scarface” Jordan, allowed the film to grow in stature. Soon after, with the help of music impresario Rick Rubin, whose flair for marketing anti-establishment themes had made him legendary, Jordan surpassed The Geto Boys in popularity. Using the film as a starting point, Jordan embarked on a career (see his first solo albums below) that would lead to his appointment as CEO of Def Jam South Records, a position he holds today.
Figure 17. “Scarface’s” solo albums after Mr. Scarface is Back.
Images of album covers featuring rapper “Scarface.” Left to right: Face II Face: The World is
Yours (from Amazon.com at http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb_ss?url=search-alias%3Dpopular&field-keywords=Mr.+Scarface+the+world+is+yours&amp;x=0&amp;y=0.)
The Diary (Amazon.com at http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb_ss?url=search-alias%3Dpopular&field-keywords=The+diary&amp;x=0&amp;y=0.); and The Untouchable
(Amazon.com at http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb_ss?url=search-alias%3Dpopular&field-keywords=The+untouchable&amp;x=0&amp;y=0.)

A close textual analysis of the lyrics of the songs which used the Scarface film’s themes reveals that both dialogue ripped from the soundtrack and Red’s original music were seamlessly interwoven into the fabric of the controversial Geto Boys themes, which inspired real gang bangers to use the music as a soundtrack by which to murder, a prime example of life imitating art in blurring of reality and fiction in Hip-hop. But aside from the oppositional stance the group took against society’s norms, The Geto Boys insightfully accepted the “no holds barred” brand of robber baron capitalism on which the film is based. Because the performance of Al Pacino represented Montana as a “bad ass” worthy of respect and fealty, Tony Montana, in that singular moment of Red’s inspiration, was chosen as the symbolic face of this “take no prisoners” attitude. As a result, Scarfacination would become a new and dynamic force in both global culture and the late capitalist marketplace. In the next chapter we will see the extent to which this attitude held sway in the popular cultural imagination.
The skillful use of cinematic dialogue by DJ Ready Red to flip the Scarface film script into a Hip-hop anthem had made his group, The Geto Boys, both popular and notorious, in both urban American and later, in the mainstream. Young ghetto residents, wishing to invest in and conform to this new standard of coolness, came out of the underground and began to publicly lay claim to the film. The result of Red’s epiphany that January night in New Jersey in 1987 would, to use a contemporary colloquial expression for achieving extraordinary popular cultural resonations, “blow up.” What detractors had originally felt about the inherent flaws in a deeply flawed film would not, over the next two decades, really matter anymore because, once Hip-hop culturally got a “hold” of Scarface, the film’s signification by the new cool, brave new world of gangsta style would erase all memories of the past.

In this chapter we will continue the year-by-year chronology from the previous chapter, carrying the story from 1991 to the 25th anniversary in 2008. A second focus of the chapter will be to document the movement of Scarfacination from DJ Red Ready’s basement into the living rooms of every home in America. The fact became that, whether you liked Scarface or not, over the next two decades the entire world would be exposed to an incredibly well orchestrated marketing blitz that would reimagine the film and create a lasting, and positive legacy. The end result would be critical immortality, as the influence of Hip-hop’s gangsta wing caused Scarface to be recognized by the American Film Institute as being one of the gangster genre’s ten greatest achievements—ever. Scarface would be transformed, from ugly film industry step-sister to a beautiful Cinderella. Hip-hop would provide the glass slipper, and softly whisper “I told you so.”
The Social Cool of the Collective

Once Scarface was signified by The Geto Boys’ sampling of the “Balls and My Word” as the symbol of gangsta Hip-hop’s black male driven code of heteronormal expectations, the larger Hip-hop culture quickly followed suit. The film’s newly minted cultural currency transformed a critical thud into a cool, role model thug—decades later Scarface would be called the “patron saint” for gangsta thug life. ¹⁴³ With homages to the film beginning to proliferate in rap lyrics and the music video format that was used to promote album releases putting references to Scarface characters and scenes in heavy rotation on television, acknowledgment of the film as being “cool” became a socially required expectation in the inner city.

For those that could afford to pay $79.95 to purchase the film on the (then) new Betamax or VHS video tape formats, additional respect was earned. And then there was, for those who had mastered the technology, a lucrative black market for bootlegged copies of the video.¹⁴⁴ Possession of the Scarface video earned its owners respect because it allowed for the behavior of Tony Montana to be observed, studied, and critiqued. Scarface knowledge began to serve another function as well. It appeared to become a commonly agreed upon checkpoint amongst young black Hip-hop males for internal ghetto verification of “authenticity,” a loaded term that was often used to establish identity, as in who was “black” enough and who was not. According to black popular culture scholar Mark Anthony Neal, Scarface had clearly become a “core text” ¹⁴⁵ in establishing the boundaries for gangsta identity.

Because of DJ Ready Red’s improvisation and Jordan’s Scarface impersonation, the film began to be decoded by Hip-hop males in a manner that revealed a layer of ghetto masculinity beneath its critique of American capitalism run amok—the reading intended by the filmmakers. Acceptance by the ghetto underclass forced the film into the position of being recognized as a
more complex, multi-layered text and a paradox in which the have-nots dreamed of obtaining a cultural currency screenwriter Oliver Stone had worked to overtly devalue. Scarface became, as many Hollywood films are termed, a “message” film, but this time one that held a specific meaning for ghetto audiences. Its message was that there were no rules in the capitalist system and, given that understanding, the world could be had if pursuers were willing to do check their morality at the door.

Hip-hop gangsta males read this message as “crime pays.” Hollywood, although slow to give Hip-hop males respect for their role in creating a new cultural force, would agree. In 1991, as the Reagan/Bush era was drawing to a close, the industry reinvented the ghettocentric themes that had earned them a substantial payday during the Blaxploitation era by greenlighting several projects helmed by new and talented, but as yet untested, black male directors. These artists worked within a cultural space constructed by Hip-hop gangstas, who had deified the criminal approach to the American dream. They would usher in a new era of postmodern black themed action and crime films that would glorify gangsta thug life.

A Chronology of the Strength of Street Knowledge

On the heels of Brad Jordan’s fictional conception of a Hip-hop gangster at odds with society, the son of maverick seventies filmmaker Melvin Van Peebles set in motion the definitive movement that would ensure Scarface’s long term cultural celebration. Mario Van Peebles, a chip off the old militant block if there ever was one, created the first big budget Hollywood Hip-hop gangster crime drama, New Jack City, which debuted in 1991. His insertion of a clip from the most revered scene from Scarface, the “say hello to my little friend” moment, would provide the wake up call to the mainstream media as to the significance Scarface held within the Hip-hop community. Despite all the deference rap offered to Scarface since Ready Red first dropped the
science of Tony Montana in 1988’s “Balls and My Word,” it would be left to a homage by Van Peebles’ 1991 film, ironically from Universal Studios rival Warner Brothers, to finally alert Universal to the idea that maybe those gangstas from the ‘hood were unto something that could fatten their wallets. What would happen next would be the equivalent of a ripple, followed by a bang, leading up to a nuclear explosion. We were about to witness the strength of street knowledge.  

1991

New Jack City

Warner Brothers Pictures, the home of James Cagney, Humphrey Bogart, Edward G. Robinson, and Warren Beatty’s Bonnie and Clyde, had a well deserved reputation as the flagship studio for gangster cinema until Paramount wrested away much of their glory in 1972 with the first film in The Godfather trilogy. However, Mario Van Peebles would restore at least some of the luster with his Hip-hop themed gangster drama.

Figure 18. New Jack Gangstas.
Four ghettocentric films of the early 1990’s, New Jack City, Menace II Society, Boyz N the Hood, and Juice, created a new violence based genre, called “Hood films,” based on a sociopathic black masculinity. Hip-hop quickly proclaimed the four as authentic depictions of life in the ‘hood and Hollywood, as it did during the Blaxploitation era, profited. These texts all contributed significantly to the Scarface mythology. Screen capture by Rob Prince of his PowerPoint presentation at the Southwest Texas PCA/ASA conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico, February 2007. The images of the DVD box covers in the screen capture are from (left to right) New Jack City, Menace II Society, Boyz N the Hood, and Juice. All are from the Internet Movie Data Base website at http://www.imdb.com/.
1993.

Carlito’s Way

The tenth anniversary of Scarface passed without any efforts from Universal to commemorate it. However, Martin Bregman, Brian De Palma, and Al Pacino, the same creative team that brought Scarface to life, adapted Carlito’s Way (from the novel by Judge Edwin Torres) to tell the tale of Carlito Brigante, a former heroin dealer attempting to go straight after spending five years in prison. Released in November 1993, Carlito’s Way bookended New Jack City (1991) and three other significant non-white oriented crime themed dramas that were released between them: Boyz N the Hood (1991), Juice (1992), and Menace II Society (1993). That Brigante was also Hispanic, and a legendary former drug dealing street hustler, made comparisons to Scarface unavoidable. According to John Paul Young, a fan commenting about the film in the user comment section at imdb.com, Carlito’s Way continued many of the themes begun by Scarface. Writes Young

Watching Carlito's Way I had the feeling that De Palma wanted to resurrect and redeem poor old Tony Montana. Perhaps it was self-redemption, or a means to a great film with a second view. Released exactly ten years after Scarface, the comparisons are more than obvious. Instead of classic gangster genre prerequisites employed in Scarface, such as, coming from the bottom, rising in status…Carlito's Way is Scarface with feelings.148

Another fan commented insightfully about Scarface while attempting to compare it to Carlito’s Way. The fan, self named “MovieAddict2008,” wrote from the United Kingdom that
"Carlito's Way isn't as broad and theatrical as Scarface. It is not a sequel to Scarface, it is an expansion and it seems entirely apt that its narrative is more mature, considering that Carlito Brigante is wiser than Tony Montana." I agree.

Figure 19. Carlito’s Way.
Ten years after he played Tony Montana, Al Pacino brought a more world weary look to his performance as Carlito Brigante. But the marketing of the film would use tried and found true methods as the box cover for the DVD release of the film in September 2005 revisited the red, black, and white colors made iconic by Scarface.


Carlito’s Way appeared to be a “do over” from a Brian De Palma determined to prove to the many critics of Scarface that he had learned less is more. Gone were the excesses of Scarface; the over the top violence and the mountains of cocaine. He directed Pacino into delivering a more controlled, mature performance—representing a character that had been there and done that. Pacino even appeared to have mastered the cadence of the Spanish accented patois. Seeking true love and the redemption of a straight life, Pacino’s Carlito was likeable, which may explain why he never came close to replacing Tony Montana as Hip-hop’s hero.
The World Wrestling Federation Introduces Professional Wrestler Razor Ramon

“Razor Ramon,” was the wrestling persona created by Scott Hall who, like the Al Pacino character he was modeled after, was a white American male. Hall said he created the character of “Razor Ramon” after he saw Pacino’s performance in Scarface and pitched the idea to WWF owner Vince McMahon who thought Hall’s “Razor” was brilliant. “Razor” was an arrogant sleezeball who became a champion in the scripted world of professional wrestling, where wrestlers take on comic book styled stereotypes to create fan interest.

Figure 20. Razor Ramon.
Publicity photos of World Wrestling Entertainment performer Scott Hall, aka Razor Ramon.

Fan Created Websites

As evidenced by the proliferation of websites they created, and given the exuberant “user comments” on web site message boards such as the Internet Movie Data Base, fans appear to be ignoring the historical lack of respect shown Scarface by the vast majority of film critics, who today are viewed as having missed the point of the film back then. With the development of the Internet as a news, entertainment, and advertising source, Scarface fans’ devotion allowed the film’s stakeholders to be in a position to take advantage of the unlimited future marketing opportunities that would be created. But more importantly, the Internet also created a space for
fans to communicate with each other. This new global village maintained the positive buzz that had existed since the film transferred to video cassette. These are excellent examples of technology oriented, but grass roots based, Scarfacination.

**Scarface1983.com** (below) was the first fan created website dedicated to the Scarface film.

![Scarface1983.com](image)

**Figure 21. Scarface1983.com.**
Screen capture of the website's home page by Rob Prince.

**The Scarface World** website (below).

![The Scarface World](image)

**Figure 22. The Scarface World.**
Screen capture of website’s home page by Rob Prince in August 2008. The content of this website was substantially reduced in 2009. What remains is at [http://www.thescarfaceworld.com/](http://www.thescarfaceworld.com/).

1998.

Marking the fifteenth anniversary of Scarface’s theatrical debut, 1998 was the first year Universal planned and marketed a commemoration. The DVD’s 15th Anniversary release date was March 31, 1998 and the VHS version was released on September 29, 1998. The DVD was released by Universal Studios Home Entertainment under the studio's "Collector's Edition" line. The DVD featured a non-anamorphic widescreen transfer, Dolby Digital 2.0 Surround, a "Making of" documentary, outtakes, production notes, and cast & crew bios. This release was
not successful. Many fans and reviewers complained about its unwatchable video transfer and muddled sound, describing it as "one of the worst big studio releases out there." The DVD was quickly withdrawn. Scarface was unavailable in the DVD format until 2003.153  


**Grand Theft Auto video game series**


**Figure 23.** Grand Theft Auto games.  

Grand Theft Auto (GTA) is a tremendously successful line of video games that focus on involving the gamer in committing crimes to win the game. GTA games distinguished themselves by using witty homages to a variety of pop culture icons. Released in the fall of 2001 by software developer Rockstar Games, Grand Theft Auto III (GTA III) was the first game to incorporate the Scarface film into a video game narrative, thus creating a seminal moment in the Scarface genealogical line. The story line focused on a nameless convicted bank robber who had been set up by his lover.

![Screenshot from Grand Theft Auto III showing the nameless, mute lead character in action.](http://media.ps2.ign.com/media/015/015548/imgs_5.html)

**Figure 24.** Grand Theft Auto III.  

Game screen shot from IGN website at [http://media.ps2.ign.com/media/015/015548/imgs_5.html](http://media.ps2.ign.com/media/015/015548/imgs_5.html)**
In a nod to the Dr. Richard Kimble character in *The Fugitive* television series and film, the nameless hero is freed on his way to prison when the van transporting him is attacked on the “Callahan” (as in *Dirty Harry Callahan*) Bridge. From this starting point gamers are lead through a series of missions through sprawling Liberty City that lead up to the hero’s final showdown with the ex-lover, a Hispanic drug trafficking queen who sells “spank,” the drug of choice in city. The game is based on the player’s ability to carjack transportation to get from place to place and from mission to mission. Thus, because there is a lot of driving, gamers can choose from a variety of in-car radio stations to listen to as they flee the cops or joy ride like a tourist. What makes GTA III unique is that one such station, Flashback 95.6, plays the entire Scarface soundtrack on a continuous loop, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.\(^{155}\)

With the advent of video games as serious competition to the traditional dramatic texts offered by cinema, and cinema itself embracing digital technology to enhance its product, *Grand Theft Auto III* gave consumers the opportunity to feel as though they were actually involved physically in the action. This so called “3D interaction” allowed gamers the freedom to explore their virtual city and take on crime related “missions” that involved acts of murder, carjacking, and armed robbery. These acts allowed gamers to commit to behavior very similar to that of Tony Montana. *Grand Theft Auto III* was the first narrative outside of gangsta rap music videos (the exception being 1991’s *New Jack City*) that referenced Scarface as a major part of its story. As a bonus for Scarface fans, Robert Loggia, who played Montana’s mentor Frank Lopez in the film, had a major role in GTA III.

2002.

In 2002, as a follow up to the success of *Grand Theft Auto III, Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* was released by Rockstar. Vice City turned out to be another critical moment in the cultural
development of the film’s growing mythology. Viewed as a sequel to both Scarface and Miami Vice, the video game incorporated the setting, emotional intensity and, most importantly, the cocaine trafficking story line of both stories into the game’s action. Vice City debuted in October 2002, one year before the Scarface 20th anniversary commemoration began. The new game’s story line focused on a Mafia wiseguy who is sent to Miami to complete a cocaine deal but is set up. Having to recover the money lost in the rip off, protagonist Tommy Vercetti (voiced by Ray Liotta, who starred in Scorsese’s Goodfellas) interacts with various elements of the criminal underworld and ultimately rises to the top of cocaine hierarchy, a scenario that closely follows Tony Montana’s story.

Tommy ends up owning a mansion modeled after Tony’s and, in the climatic ending that reimagines the Scarface outcome, faces down a host of bad guys- and wins. Vice City enhanced the Scarface cultural mythos by taking the Montana gangster template directly into a video game market that would prove to be, by 2008, more financially lucrative than the vast majority of first-run feature film releases. Vice City game developer Rockstar Games saw its new game earn $310 million on sales of 7.3 million units in the first year, topping GTA III, which sold 6.2 million units. If these games had been films they would have both achieved blockbuster status.

![Figure 25. Grand Theft Auto: “Miami” Vice City.](http://forcekill.blogspot.com/2008/11/outrunners-super-post.html)
Vice City’s release was a seminal moment in piquing the public’s interest about Scarface because it paid particular attention to reconstructing the film’s iconic moments. For example, gamers had an opportunity to visit a motel bathroom where a chainsaw attack had taken place. The placement of the game in a location that was an obvious replication of Miami offered gamers a duplication of Tony Montana’s lifestyle, including his mansion. The success of Vice City, when considered within a context of the ascendancy of gangsta Hip-hop and a release that was in close proximity to the 20th anniversary of the film’s release, created the opportunity for Scarface to maximize its cultural impact while being commemorated, a process that always allows fans and new initiates to reflect and purchase memorabilia.

The next set of stills is taken from Gamechronicles.com, another fan created website. They evidence the some of the key similarities between Vice City and Scarface. This site is referenced because it shows how fans of the film were not only making their own connections between it and other popular cultural sites but, most importantly, sharing their findings with other fans.  

![Image](http://www.gamechronicles.com/features/gtascarface/body.htm)

**Figure 26. Welcome to Paradise.** At the Gamechronicles.com website Vice City video game images (upper left) are compared with the images from the film (upper right). Other images (above) show the Vice City hero, Tommy Versetti (voiced by Goodfellas star Ray Liotta), in his home’s office—a replica of Tony Montana’s office. Images from Gamechronicles website at: [http://www.gamechronicles.com/features/gtascarface/body.htm](http://www.gamechronicles.com/features/gtascarface/body.htm).
2003.

The 20th Anniversary Celebration

The 20th anniversary commemoration of Scarface, officially began in the fall of 2003, is the tipping point for the celebration of Scarfacination. In the twenty years prior to the anniversary Scarface had certainly made its mark in Hip-hop. It had been made into a popular culture reference in the Grand Theft Auto games. But it was not until Universal’s theatrical re-release of the film that a determined, purposeful flurry of activity was enacted by the film’s owner’s who, it appeared, suddenly realized that Scarface had achieved a mainstream cultural significance so significant that it was likely to open up new avenues of profit for the company. When the film opened in selected theaters in ten major U.S. cities on September 19, 2003 the marketing hype to promote products related to the film’s cultural popularity became frenzied.

Some capitalists took advantage of the opportunity through less than scrupulous means.

On April 8, 2003, months ahead of the anniversary celebration, Rap-A-Lot re-created the now iconic poster of the Scarface film on an allegedly new album cover for rapper Scarface, causing unsuspecting consumers to rush out and buy it. They would be disappointed because the release merely was a compilation of previously released music. After a chorus of complaints the rapper issued a statement disavowing any participation in the scam. One such example was the shameless packaging by Rap-A-Lot Records of former Geto Boy employee Brad Jordan’s Scarface persona.

In 2003 American film reviewers were admittedly a more gender and racially diverse group and included critics from Internet websites, the new media which, by nature of its more inclusive technology, allowed fans to exchange ideas directly without the filter of white male dominated patriarchal tools. The result was shocking. The same Scarface film, that few
mainstream critics had respected, much less enjoyed in 1983, was now fawned over effusively, both in the United States and around the world.159

Figure 27. Old as New.
Rap-A-Lot records founder James (“J Prince”) Smith pulled a page from Rick Rubin’s marketing playbook by repackaging rap to take advantage of the marketplace. In this case it was old recordings by Brad “Scarface” Jordan that J Prince released as being new—complete with the red, black, and white Scarface film poster iconography. Consumers were not amused after finding out the album was a compilation of previously released songs.


But what was unique about the praise was that it appeared to be, no pun intended, universal. Granted, the Internet offered the opportunity for a wider range of critiques from a more diverse group of reviewers, but these responses to Scarface were in stark contrast to the negativity surrounding the film in 1983-84. Moreover, at times the acclaim appeared to pander to the corporate interests who stood to profit greatly from the newly minted praise. One website that reviews DVD releases, About.com, allowed Universal Home Video to write their own review about the 2003 Scarface 20th anniversary DVD. It read

To commemorate the 20th Anniversary of one of the greatest films of all time, Universal Studios Home Video lifts the moratorium and proudly presents the "Scarface Two-Disc Anniversary Edition" and "Scarface Deluxe Gift Set," rolling out on DVD on September 30, 2003. Considered one of Hollywood's greatest underworld masterpieces… the "Scarface Two-Disc Anniversary Edition" and
"Deluxe Gift Set" contain some explosive, never-before-seen bonus features including an original 20 minute documentary, "Def Jam Presents: Origins of a Hip Hop Classic," packed with interviews from today's biggest hip-hop artists, P Diddy, Snoop Dog, Eve and the rapper Scarface, on how this classic film has influenced their lives and music.\footnote{160}

Two items stand out in the self-review. First, outside of Hip-hop there are few, if any, film goers, including gangster movie lovers, who consider Scarface as being “one of the greatest films of all time.” Second, Universal’s claim that it was lifting a “moratorium” by releasing the film is a specious one. Scarface had been released in 1984 to great financial success—on the two videotape formats and on laser disc—and again in 1998 for the 15th anniversary. But the newly declaimed celebration of the greatness of Scarface was, by no means, unanimous. Wrote online DVD reviewer Adam Suraf

To mark the anniversary, Universal has re-released its purely 80’s gangster saga with a new double disk DVD. It is, to put it bluntly, one of the great film mysteries of the past 20 years as to why DePalma’s bloody, flawed guns-and-drugs picture has become such a cult classic.\footnote{161}

During my research I set out to find a copy of the 20th anniversary edition and happened across a “special edition” boxed gift set of the 2003 DVD release and purchased it. What struck me about what otherwise should have been a routine transaction was that I was offered $75.00 (on the spot) by another customer in the Best Buy store where I was shopping. I had happened to luck out and buy the last of this edition (or so said the Best Buy salesperson). At the retail price of $49.99, this would have been a fifty percent profit to me. I turned the offer down.
Figure 28. The 2003 20th Anniversary Scarface Gift Set.
Photographs of the faux alligator skin brief case (top) which houses my 2003 20th anniversary DVD collector’s gift set of both the 1932 and 1983 Scarface films. Other gift box items included a money clip, pinky ring, and several stills from the film.

Photos by Rob Prince from a personally owned 2003 anniversary boxed set.

Universal Scarfacination: Origins of a Hip Hop Classic

Included in the boxed gift set I purchased was the 1932 original Scarface on DVD, and “bonus” disk, which included extensive interviews with the film’s principals and a revelatory twenty minute short film which would cause me to focus my research on why the film was so beloved by Hip-hop. Produced by director Bennie Boom and Russell Simmons’ Def Jam Records, Origins of a Hip Hop Classic celebrates Scarface in a manner no other format has approached then or since. While it is my feeling that the film was placed on the 20th anniversary edition as a clever marketing promotion by Universal Studios, Origins offers contextual insight as to how DJ Ready Red’s moment, which semiotically and psychologically inserted Scarface into Hip-hop’s consciousness, ultimately had morphed into full blown Scarfacination sixteen years after that January 1987 evening.

The fact that Hip-hop had embraced the film was used as a major promotional tool. Universal executives sounded as though their life experiences were, up to the point of
understanding their own film from a Hip-hop perspective, completely white bread. And it was clear that, given the comments made by studio heads such as Universal’s Craig Kornblau, marketing the film was changed by Hip-hop’s bestowing of ghetto authenticity to a product that was not originally intended as gangsta social commentary. Writing in the Hollywood Reporter on September 19, 2003, the day of the film’s theatrical re-release across the country, popular culture critic Martin Grove was able to precisely pinpoint what caused Universal to finally recognize that Scarface was a sleeping profit center ready to be exploited. Wrote Grove

Through its exposure over the years on television and in home video, "Scarface" developed a big following in the hip-hop and urban music community and became an influence on music, fashion and other aspects of contemporary culture. Because many of its most avid fans weren't born or were too young in 1983 to see "Scarface" in theaters, its re-release now gives them their first opportunity to do so. ¹⁶²

Grove then conducted an interview, with Universal Home Video chief Kornblau, that I consider seminal to my dissertation. Kornblau explained, step by step, how Scarfacination, using a contemporary colloquial expression, “blew up.” Groves’ work is the only document I could find that explains the Universal executives’ thought processes in the creation of what has become a corporate business model for transforming underground enthusiasm into mainstream profits. Kornblau begins his response to Grove by stating

We were going down a path of trying to figure out what was the most respectful and most appropriate way to launch the 'Scarface' DVD and in talking with Marty Bregman it became clear that maybe we should see how it plays on the big screen. We had a test screening here in L.A. It was just phenomenal. It became clear that,
boy, we have a movie here that really has stood the test of time. *So we decided that we have to incorporate a theatrical release into our DVD launch plans and we're certainly going to reawaken today’s world to this movie.* Truly, we're talking about a masterpiece in filmmaking.163 (my italics).

In the first part of Kornblau’s response, Universal’s strategy is laid out. They are planning to release Scarface on DVD as their commemorative event. In attempting to figure out the best way to accomplish this, Kornblau consults with the film’s producer, Martin Bregman. They invite people to see the film at a theatrical screening, which means that only people who like the film are going to show up. The statistics from the audience response cards confirm this as 94% of the audience rates the film “excellent” or “good.”164 Bregman and Kornblau decide to then hold a test screening in New York, inviting Al Pacino. Again the film receives rave reviews in a manner not unlike a preacher getting a response on his sermon from the choir. In a stroke of genius, Kornblau gets Universal to greenlight a Hollywood styled movie premiere of the re-release in New York and to invite Hip-hop’s elite to the party. With the participation of Pacino, De Palma, Michelle Pfeiffer (who is now a major film star in her own right by this time), and P. Diddy, the publicity for the theatrical re-release is tremendous. The world is reawakened to Scarface.

At this moment in time, the fall of 2003, Universal is unreserved in its praise of Hip-hop and thoughtful in its acknowledgment of rap’s role in carrying the film to this point. But, Hip-hop’s role, even as it is being celebrated, will not only begin to be reconsidered by at least one of the film’s principals, producer Bregman, but also will mystify others, especially director De Palma. Nevertheless, Hip-hop and gangsta rap will have one shining moment in 2003 reserved for their testimony—the previously referenced short film *Origins of a Hip Hop Classic*, included
only in the special DVD edition. Grove wrote, “Of all the features that are part of the new "Scarface" DVD release, Kornblau is particularly proud of one on which Universal partnered with Def Jam Music Group.” We can almost see Kornblau gushing when he proclaims that

They created a piece called Origins of a Hip Hop Classic. It's an original, very compelling 20 minute documentary that is packed with interviews with the world's biggest hip-hop artists. They talk about how 'Scarface' influenced their music and influenced their lives. It is incredibly emotional. It truly is a window that opens. For people like me who really never understood that world, the window opens and for 20 minutes you truly get into their heads and you understand where they're coming from. They talk about how this movie influenced them. It's so powerful. It's so compelling.165

It is clear that Kornblau is moved by the short film. Those without a full understanding of how the hype machine works might be convinced that he had no role in the film’s content, which contains the most complete and utter worship of the Scarface mythology ever documented. Referring to Hip-hop, he does admit that he “never understood that world,” but after twenty minutes of bearing witness to the power of Tony Montana Kornblau feels that he is able to “truly get into their heads and…understand where they’re coming from.” He goes on to remark that

These guys are talking about the lesson they learned by watching and idolizing this film. P Diddy, one of the top rappers in the world, talks about how he worshipped the film because of Tony Montana's drive and the glamour and the immense success (he achieved). He's seen it 63 times, he says in the documentary. And then he talks about how the film scared him straight and that he realized how because of his personality and the way he looked at life he could have easily
fallen prey to the evil lures of the drugs, the money, the greed. *It's very powerful to hear rapper after rapper talk about their desire to avoid making the Tony Montana fate their reality and how they have to avoid that downfall and eventual death.*

I have highlighted in italics above that point in the conversation where I got the feeling that Kornblau maybe took a phone call in the middle of watching *Origins*. While it’s not hard to understand how Kornblau bought into Diddy’s specious mythological creationism detailing how Scarface scared him straight, there was *never* a point in *Origins* where “rapper after rapper talked about their desire to avoid making the Tony Montana fate their reality.” Scarface is, by no standard, a cautionary tale and for Kornblau to even suggest that this was how rapper’s responded on camera is disingenuous. On the contrary, every rapper interviewed subscribed wholeheartedly to Tony’s choices, considering him to be skillful, heroically unrepentant, and a gangsta role model.

Further, Grove’s article quoted Kornblau as predicting that

Universal's "Scarface" DVD is going to be a very popular item when it hits stores Sept. 30. Our initial orders as we sit here today—and we're still taking orders—are over two million units. That will have a street value well in excess of the $45 million that this film did in its initial theatrical release.

And so it began. In 2003, driven by a slick, well planned marketing offensive that was supported by the Internet media and fan created blogs, websites, and chat rooms, Scarface was relaunched with the full backing of its ownership. But, of great significance is the fact that *Origins of a Hip Hop Classic* became an oft quoted testimonial to both the influence the film had upon Hip-hop gangstas and the power Hip-hop culture had exerted on the placement of the film
in the middle of a popular culture revolution. Hip-hop rappers and other playas with street cred
core witness to Kornblau’s epiphany in the documentary styled short.169

Rapper Clipse’s observations in Origins are typical of the film’s focus. He states the argument that Scarface resonated with Hip-hop because “Hip-hop, especially street Hip-hop, is always about the ‘come up’ of a rapper from the ‘hood.” And since what drives the film is Tony Montana’s rise, from the insignificance of being an immigrant from the lowest economic class to that of a powerful multi-millionaire, the ghetto underclass spectator is allowed to connect, on multiple levels, with his own come up fantasy, regardless of whether he is black or Latino. There is a scene near the beginning of Origins in which Mr. Cartoon, a Latino tattoo artist, explains that “the movie had a big effect on L.A. There are a lot of Latinos and Mexicans here. To see Latinos doing it that big on the screen that was real big for us.”

His observations underscore the powerful effect of the Scarface movie going experience on the audience. Even Latino audiences, who had every right to express dissatisfaction over Pacino as a non-Hispanic, and thus inauthentic, actor in fact accepted Tony as Latino because Pacino’s performance represented their experiences. Notice that Mr. Cartoon says that he witnessed “Latinos doing it big” in the film. In fact, as has been previously mentioned, there was only one authentic Latino in a major role in the entire film, Cuban-born Steven Bauer.170 All other actors in major Latino roles were Italian-Americans, in darkened makeup. But this obvious lack of respect for Latino authenticity didn’t appear to bother the Latino Hip-hop audience one bit. The observation of Mr. Cartoon also signifies that there are meaningful suspensions of reality in the movie-going experience as audiences, according to Lawrence Grossberg, accept the ideological imagery presented to them in cinema as reality.171
Figure 29. Mr. Cartoon.
Mr. Cartoon, a Latino tattoo artist, felt Scarface reflected an authentic Hispanic experience. Screen capture from Origins of a Hip Hop Classic by Rob Prince.

Thus, if the on screen characterization of Tony Montana is that of a Cuban, he is accepted as such, despite the fact that a white male actor is playing the role. This fact also reinforces my argument that the economic class of the hero “coming up” (making the journey) is very important to Hip-hop audiences. The Origins documentary evidences that, at least for ghetto living Hip-hop males, the psychological connection with Montana’s behavior is powerful.172

An Epiphany

In addition to the moment rapper Scarface exclaims that the film “was me,” the second seminal moment for me in realizing the importance of Scarface as a cultural artifact was the moment in Origins when rapper Fat Joe called Tony Montana a “ghetto superhero,” a comment based on his observations of the character’s actions in the film. The comment startled me into questioning the implications of what Joe said. Can a legitimate comparison be made between a murderous drug dealer and a traditional superhero archetype like Batman or James Bond? If the answer is yes, and I believe that it is, why would a ghetto version of a superhero be of a different archetype, that of a criminal, instead of the stereotypical justice seeking crime fighter?

Fat Joe elaborated on the heroic symbolism of Tony Montana in an interview he gave on the VH-1 cable program The Playas Guide to Scarface, which aired September 25, 2003.173
His comments illustrate the powerful influence the film had on the creation of gangsta identity, referencing the gangsta code of honor as a major source of pride. “Scarface the movie it’s like the code of the streets man. Everybody who thinks they gangsta or are gangsta live by that movie, word,” Joe said. The following is an excerpt from that interview:

VH1: So, Tony Montana is a true gangsta?

FAT JOE: Tony Montana is an ultimate gangsta. He’s the true warrior. Ya know. The money, sex and power…and that’s what the movie was based all on…and ya see somebody coming from nothing and becoming something.

VH1: Do you think the morals of Hip-hop and those of the gangsta lifestyle parallel?

FAT JOE: Definitely. We all commin’ up from not having nothin’…and…about to get whatever (we) can by any means necessary. So that’s why we relate to Scarface so much.

VH1: Are people more taken in by him being the underdog on the rise or by him being the big dog with power?

FAT JOE: I think it began as the underdog, and people loved him for being the underdog and how he rose to power and status. People felt like finally the bad guy’s winning although he got his head popped off at the end, the way he went out, he killed about a hundred people before he got his head popped off, it’s almost like the bad guy won.

VH1: Did the Latin element have any special significance to you?

FAT JOE: The Latin flavor had a lot to do with me and all the Latino, you
know, very rarely do we see any movies based on Latinos, but to see a movie where a Latino dude came to prominence he became great, he was the hero. You see the black kids, white kids, you see everybody else loving this dude right here you felt like you representing the Latinos, you know so, you definitely felt happy that he was Latino.

As Joe points out, Montana, as a Latino, symbolized an ideal non-white hero. There had been few in cinema after Blaxploitation that the ghetto underclass male could look up to. Having been stereotyped as a menace to society, many of these young men embraced that identity. As Joe tells it, the fantasy of “money, sex and power,” Montana’s victory from an “underdog, bad guy status,” and his “coming up from nothing” were those aspects of the film that resonated with ghetto audiences. As a man of color, Tony Montana stood tall as a symbol of success to the unsuccessful.

Figure 30. Fat Joe.
Rapper “Fat Joe” talks about Scarface in Origins of a Hip Hop Classic.
Screen capture from Origins of a Hip Hop Classic by Rob Prince.

Traditional heroic identity, represented in cinema as the exclusive purview of white males, is consistently resisted by the Hip-hop males of the ghetto underclass, who construct their own models of heroic behavior. Thus an interrogation of this difference, as provided in the research conducted in this dissertation helps reveal why the study of Scarface is important.
The Playas Guide press release offers further evidence of the how Universal was shaping the argument for Scarface’s wider cultural significance, one based on Hip-hop’s reverential treatment of the film’s subject matter. MTV Networks’ Brad Brevet wrote on the VH-1 website,

In everything from the storylines of their videos to the interior design of their own homes, hip-hop artists have fully incorporated the Scarface aesthetic into their lives, and have made Tony Montana a cultural icon. Premiering on VH1 on Thursday, September 25 at 10:00 PM, "Playa's Guide to Scarface," features interviews with Fat Joe, Ja Rule, Dave Meyers (Music Video Director), Damon Dash (CEO Rock-a-Fella Records), Ice Cube, Wyclef Jean and many others who provide some additional insight on how and why Scarface has had such a significant effect upon hip-hop culture and music.\textsuperscript{174}

Brevet concludes by writing,

Here's what a few have to say about the incredible influence of Scarface:

Method Man: "Everybody and their momma done put a little Scarface in their video man."

Elliot Wilson (Editor of \textit{XXL} magazine): "It's almost like if you don't know the movie or if you don't have anything connected to the movie you're not authentic, you're not hip-hop."

Ice Cube: "Everybody's trying to go the top, everybody's got a little bit of attitude with them you know. Everybody's got a little bit of Tony Montana in 'em.\textsuperscript{175}

It was left to Bernard Weintraub of \textit{The New York Times} to place the anniversary year in context with what had gone on before. The title of Weintraub’s article, “Foul Mouth with a
Following,” seemed to reduce the film’s success to the audience’s attraction to vulgarity. But the brief Times article does capture the story of the production while offering an ominous allusion to the beginnings of its historical revision. Weintraub, unlike this author, decides to split the difference between whether Pacino’s or Bregman’s story of finding Scarface first is true by reporting that they saw the film “at the same time.” That politically correct assessment aside, Weintraub wonders aloud about one of my central questions, which asks how Scarface managed to survive initial mediocrity. He ponders that

The film was released in 1983 to mostly terrible reviews, lackluster business and studio indifference. By any measure the film, a sprawling 170 minutes with almost operatic violence and over-the-top acting, should have disappeared. It didn't. 176

Weintraub’s answer to his own question— as to why Scarface achieved popularity— was somewhat disturbing. He writes that Scarface developed a cult following among younger audiences, notably hip-hop stars and college students, and that it has become an underground classic. Weintraub’s source for the idea that college students might have assisted in the Scarface underground renaissance turns out to be none other than Martin Bregman, who had previous insisted that his film had never received a good review. Bregman told Weintraub "It's not just the hip-hop community— white college students have 'Scarface' parties. The film just keeps going. It's bizarre and amazing." After five years of research, this was the first time I had heard of white college students being involved with the urban underground movement that Scarface is beholden to. What appears to be “bizarre and amazing” is the notion that these college students would have picked up the Scarface standard and gone completely unnoticed by everyone in America except Bregman. Thus the idea, to give credit where credit was not due, appears to be an attempt
at revising the history of Scarface. Moreover, this revision appears to be based on a purposeful erasure of both otherness and class identity.

However, director Brian De Palma had a more useful response. In the same article, De Palma told Weintraub he “believed that the movie stirred younger audiences, especially those in the hip-hop world, because many of them had grown up in poor neighborhoods and had become rich almost overnight.” Said De Palma

The hip-hop community was seeing all around them what was happening in the film -- that cocaine makes you feel all powerful, and you surround yourself with entourages and palaces and outrageous clothes and women, and you lose all touch with reality; you become numb.177

After the anniversary commemoration, a torrent of publicity caused Scarface to become something akin to a publicly traded property. No longer was the film considered “just” an underground cult film adored by the ghetto underclass masses of Hip-hop who had nurtured this renaissance. Innovator DJ Ready Red, who had sparked the firestorm, was, at the time of the 20th anniversary, only a faint remembrance and soon he would disappear entirely from the public record to become an unacknowledged legend, a name to be whispered only amongst the rap cognoscente. Brad Jordan’s Scarface had flourished, having translated Red’s idea into a higher profile for Tony Montana and the gangster paradigm he symbolized. But even as Jordan’s rap sales grew the persona he created slowly grew beyond his control.

With gangsta rap becoming more and more mainstream as a direct result of the reverence the film still maintained, the next few years would find Scarface, now successfully positioned as a corporate brand, transcending its cinema origins to become a popular cultural phenomenon.
Tony Montana would be literally and figuratively resurrected in a video game, comic books, becoming an even greater ongoing inspiration to Hip-hop culture.

Figure 31. Def Jam Presents. Hip-hop’s embrace continued unabated as Def Jam, the producers of the Origins of a Hip Hop Classic short film, also produced a bestselling album that asked rap artists to create music that they felt captured the essence of their own personal inspirations. Image of the CD cover from the German fan created website Tony Montana.net at: http://tony-montana.net/2009/04/def-jam-presents-music-inspired-by-scarface/.

Craig Kornblau and Universal made history. Over the ten days of the theatrical re-release of Scarface, the film earned $437,318 on just thirteen screens in ten major U.S. cities.¹⁷⁸ But these ticket sales paled in comparison when compared to the largess Universal’s Home Video division would rake in for the corporation. Released on September 30, 2003, the Scarface anniversary DVD grossed $78.2 million dollars in just the last three months of 2003, an astonishing achievement for a twenty year old film.¹⁷⁹ In the first six months of 2004, DVD sales accounted for another $16 million.

From September 2003 through June 2004, a time span of nine months, the total sales gross of the Scarface anniversary commemoration (including only DVD sales and the limited theatrical re-release) was $94.637 million.

Never Underestimate the Other Guy’s Greed or, Resurrecting the Messiah

The higher than anticipated sales numbers for Scarface made the executives at Universal giddy with the flush of success. But where could the budding franchise go without a sequel?
Alas, there could be none because the hero had been killed off at the end of the film. At some point someone at Universal had to have asked the obvious question—What if we hadn’t killed off Tony? The resulting conversation, and this is of course pure conjecture, appears to have led to the conclusion that if Montana were resurrected somehow, the profit floodgates would open wider. Sidney Lumet’s observation, that the Oliver Stone script was cartoonish, would prove prophetic. It appeared that in order for Universal to maximize Scarface’s profit potential, Tony Montana would be required to take on, as Fat Joe already knew, comic book superhero qualities. However, the company went one step further. Universal decided that its efforts would take on biblical proportions. They decided to resurrect Tony Montana from the dead.

2004.

August

On August 10, 2004 David Adams, a reporter and blogger for video game website IGN.com, wrote that

Vivendi Universal Games today announced the development of Scarface, a new third-person shooter based on the 1983 Brian De Palma classic (in turn based on the 1932 Howard Hawks classic). The title is being developed by Radical Games and is planned for release in Fall 2005 for PC and consoles. Exactly which consoles has yet to be revealed. Players will step into the shoes of Tony Montana, the larger-than-life gangster memorably played by Al Pacino in the film. "The treacherous world of Scarface is a natural property to translate into a cinematic game play experience," said Michael Pole, Executive Vice President, Worldwide Studios for Vivendi Universal Games. "The game will feature cutting-edge
technology, a compelling storyline and the unprecedented experience of playing as one of Hollywood's most notorious gangsters, Tony Montana.¹⁸¹

“Scarface was a landmark film and has inspired countless movies and games. Having the chance to now bring gamers the authentic experience is an opportunity and challenge we are looking forward to,” said Bill Kispert, vice president of Interactive at Universal Studios Consumer Products Group in an interview for the article.¹⁸²

The stone now having been rolled away, Tony Montana would now ascend to the heavens of popular culture immortality.

**2005.**

**June**

In June 2005 *Vibe Magazine*, a Hip-hop oriented monthly founded in 1993 and published by Quincy Jones and Time, Inc., released its annual Hollywood issue. In tribute to Scarface the issue placed rap superstar 50 Cent on a cover which replicated the now iconic red, black, and white color scheme of the film’s poster. The issue also featured an article, “The 50 Movies that Shaped Hip-hop,” a list that anointed Scarface has Hip-hop’s most influential film of all time.¹⁸³

*Vibe* wrote that

Hip-hop just wouldn’t be Hip-hop without this MTC Cribs staple.” Despite a shower of critical haterade when the movie premiered in 1983, Scarface went on to influence countless songs, samples, lyrics, fashion spreads, and video treatments. Rappers could relate to the film’s core idea: The American dream could be yours; you just had to seize it.¹⁸⁴
Figure 32. 50 Cent as Tony Montana.

*Vibe’s* cover utilized the iconography of the Scarface poster in homage to its pronouncement of the film as being the most influential to Hip-hop.

Image of April 2005 *Vibe* cover (left) from: [http://www.tylerlee.net/magcovers/magvibe.htm](http://www.tylerlee.net/magcovers/magvibe.htm).


2006

The World Was His

In the three year period after *Scarface*’s 20th anniversary in 2003, the film crossed over back into the mainstream. After residing for nearly two decades within the domain of Hip-hop culture Universal Studios undertook a brilliantly conceived marketing campaign to, in the words of Craig Kornblau, “reawaken today's world to this movie.” After the great success of the anniversary DVD rollout Universal decided to “franchise” Scarface, that is to say promote and license the film across multiple platforms in the same manner George Lucas had previously done with *Star Wars*. The most significant of these franchises was granted to Canadian video game developer Sierra Entertainment to create a *Scarface* video game. The story line solved the problem of Universal’s inability to do a film sequel due to Tony’s death; the premise of the game had Tony Montana survive the ending of the film and take revenge on Sosa. Therefore, thinking that the time was right to create an entirely new narrative, Universal created a franchise by
literally resurrecting Tony Montana from the dead. That plan would come to fruition with the release of the Scarface video game in 2006.\textsuperscript{185}

July

Miami Vice Returns

After seven years of media hype, \textit{Miami Vice} returned. The \textit{Vice} television series, a stylish spin-off of Scarface themes, had evolved into its own formidable representation of 1980’s popular culture. Moreover, the series, whether inadvertently or purposefully, had symbolized both Reagan’s war on drugs in South Florida and the warriors who were fighting it, noble working class everymen drowning in an ocean of cocaine pushed by ruthless Hispanic Others bent on corrupting the American way of life. But Michael Mann, who had helmed the hit series, wrote, produced, and directed a film version that curiously did not contain any of the signature style which had made the show so popular. Starring Colin Farrell and Jamie Foxx as the iconic duo of Sonny Crockett and Ricardo Tubbs, the Miami Vice film lacked the novelty and immediacy of the series mainly because the eighties drug wars had long been lost and films such as \textit{Blow} and \textit{Traffic} had already succeeded in telling much more compelling stories on the same subject. Consequently the film received mixed reviews, much like the first reactions to Scarface in 1983, and was spun by Universal, as was Scarface, as box office disappointment despite grossing $181.3 million worldwide from the combined sales of its theatrical release and DVD sales. But the release of \textit{Vice}, which was also owned by Universal Studios, greatly benefited the Scarface franchise because it had the effect of generating more anticipation for the release of the video game that fall.
Figure 33. The Return of Crockett and Tubbs.
The *Miami Vice* film narrative represents the heroic, but nevertheless futile, efforts of local law enforcement undercover policemen Ricardo Tubbs (Jamie Foxx, left) and James “Sonny” Crockett (Colin Farrell) to stem a global cocaine distribution system that now exists simply as one of many profit centers on the balance sheet of multi-national criminal cartels that traffic in munitions, software, sex, and real estate.


**September**

To support the October release of the *Scarface: The World is Yours* video game, Universal re-released the *Scarface* DVD in a two disc "Platinum Edition." This edition was exactly the same as the 20th anniversary release of 2003—except that it presented the film in a remastered Dolby Digital and DTS 5.1 surround sound format. There was also a bonus disc, as was the case with the anniversary edition. However, only a totally superfluous item, the ability to count the number of times the work “fuck” is uttered in the film, was new. The DVD was released on October 3, 2006 and has sold 750,138 units, a gross earnings amount of $15,081,896.186

**October**

In October of 2006 the resurrection of the Tony Montana character was implemented by the Universal brain trust. Because *Scarface* was considered by its makers to be a “serious” dramatic text, any potential sequel scenario, explaining how Tony Montana could have survived
a point blank shotgun blast to his liver during the classic gun battle at the conclusion of the film, was wisely dismissed by corporate executives and the film’s creative team as breaking the limits of credibility for its well known ending. Instead, in a brilliant strategic move that would allow for the creation of a completely new narrative, someone at Universal apparently decided that if it was impossible for Tony to return in another film, it was completely acceptable to develop other texts wherein the character’s demise could be reversed. The Scarface story thus would enter an “alternative universe,” a long standing fictional technique used in novels, films, and comic books in which previous historical events are altered to create new plots.187

Scarface: The World is Yours video game was created based upon the very story that the studio felt would be impossible to do in a film sequel—Tony Montana is not shot by Sosa assassin “The Skull” at all and subsequently manages to shoot his way out of his mansion. And while the game itself appeared to me not to match the storylines of Grand Theft Auto III or Grand Theft Auto: Vice City,188 two video games which heavily homaged the Scarface film, Universal’s unprecedented and unrelenting marketing effort in support of the game’s release insured that the film would be a retail sales success.189 Two sources190 confirm that the Sierra Entertainment created game, licensed by Universal’s Consumer Products Group, sold one units million at $49.95 each (approximately a $50 million gross) in the first two months of its release. But even more than the dollar amount accumulated, what the Scarface video game evidenced was that the film had achieved a remarkable level of meaning in American popular culture. The cultural currency of the film’s narrative had now grown well beyond the domain of Hip-hop males. And article by the editor of possibly the most influential weekly entertainment magazine would confirm this assessment.
Figure 34. Montana Returns in Scarface Video Game.
Box cover (left) and two screen shots from the Scarface: The World is Yours video game. Al Pacino’s permission to use his image was essential to the success of the rollout.

October

Entertainment Weekly’s Ken Tucker wrote an article in the fall of 2006 that coincided with another Scarface event: the release of The World is Yours video game. His piece, appearing both in print and online, elaborated on two points. First, Tucker reported on just how pervasive the film had become in popular culture. Second, and most importantly to this discussion, he indicated how the film’s franchising as a brand name had moved the text beyond its reinforcement of the more serious Hip-hop male gangsta code towards its new role as a commercially acquirable symbol of deference to Hip-hop as a mainstream amusement. Tucker wrote that

Speaking of weight, Scarface still carries a lot of it, cross-cultural and multimedia: There's now a videogame, Scarface: The World Is Yours (Vivendi/Sierra), featuring a what-if-Tony-didn't-die scenario conceived by screenwriter Dave McKenna (American History X). Go on YouTube.com and you can see versions of a clever idea: the entire movie recut so that the only word spoken is f----. The
hip-hop world's embrace of *Scarface* continues unabated: There's the Houston rapper called Scarface; the DVD documentary extra interviews everyone from Diddy to Snoop Dogg about the wisdom of the *Scarface* philosophy ("Don't get high on your own supply," etc.). *Scarface* homages proliferate. The big question: Why, 23 years after its release, does this movie about the rise and fall of a cocaine overlord resonate throughout pop culture?¹⁹¹

Tucker’s 2006 article demonstrates that he clearly had his finger on the pulse of the phenomenon at the time of one its greatest moments—the video game release. Moreover, his question was my question—how indeed? The answer was complex. From the end of 2006 and through 2007, what Hip-hop males had wrought, the signification of the film as a relevant symbol of conformity to standards of black gangsta identity, slid further and further away from the more serious nature of its resonation with these young men. Now public consciousness, never willing to accept the extent of the war zone conditions of the ghetto, would be skewed as the commercial branding of the film’s iconography replaced ghetto ideology with late capitalist, hypercommodificatory efficiency.¹⁹²

Having come back around to the wisdom of the underground, the capitalists were now requesting that the economically disadvantaged fans of the film purchase the previously free symbols of their fidelity to Scarface. But regardless of the capitalist intentions something else, something deeper, was at stake. *Scarface* resonated throughout the culture in 2006 not because it was being sold at a profit. *Scarface* mattered because it appeared to fill a void in our collective self-confidence, in our national identity. It was for this same reason, after all, that Hip-hop gangstas had felt the vibe in the first place.
December

Tony Montana, Comic Book Superhero

In further testament to the film’s emerging popular culture significance, Tony Montana would be featured in his own comic book series. Universal, in yet another successful venture tied to its video game’s ongoing promotion strategy, licensed a franchise to second tier comic book publisher Idea and Design Works LLC (IDW) of San Diego. IDW’s five part Scarface: Scarred for Life, written by John Layman, simply borrowed the Tony-did-not-die story line from the Scarface: The World is Yours video game. The series was an immediate smash hit as copies flew off the shelves. This was not the first time Universal has cashed in on a written variation to the original script. Previously, L.A. (Leslie) Banks, a veteran romance novelist and the rare female exception in the male dominated pulp fiction and comics genres, had been commissioned by Universal in 2003 to pen a “prequel” novel telling the story of the beginning of Tony’s career in Cuba.193

The introduction of the comic books made Sidney Lumet a prophet. As the former director of Scarface, his disgust over the willingness of his long time creative partners Martin Bregman and Al Pacino to back what he thought was a “cartoonish” Oliver Stone script over his more nuanced approach had lead to his abrupt abandonment of the project in its development stage.194 Now a comic book with a street wise superhero, albeit one that was a criminal aberration, Lumet’s reading of the film proved to be on point as Scarred for Life remained true to the heroic paradigms created by both Marvel (the home of Spider-man) and DC Comics (Batman and Superman). And the series did not end with Scarred. Universal elongated the story for additional profits, greenlighting IDW to create Devil in Disguise, which followed Tony’s life from childhood to his days as an assassin with the Cuban Army.
Figure 35. **Scarface as a Comic Book Superhero.** Panels from the *Scarface: Scarred for Life* and *Scarface: Devil in Disguise* comic book series. Top two panels (left to right), cover art from the two comic book series published by IDW. The left image is a cover from the first series *Scarred for Life*, a story line that carried forward the idea, first advanced in the video game, that Montana survived Alejandro Sosa’s death squad, rebuilt his empire, and eventually kills Sosa. The top right image is from the second series, *Devil in Disguise*, an origins prequel. It further developed Tony’s “come up” mythology by beginning with his childhood. One mystery that is never solved in any of the story lines: the identity of his father. Bottom left, Tony’s “say hello to my little friend” moment from the film is reenacted as the opening segment of the comic book. The twist: he survives (right).

Scarface: Scarred for Life #5, cover image (top left) from eBay.com at [http://cgi.ebay.com/Scarface-Scarred-For-Life-%235%2fTony-Montana%2fIDW-Comics_W0QQitemZ220330994887QQcmdZViewItem](http://cgi.ebay.com/Scarface-Scarred-For-Life-%235%2fTony-Montana%2fIDW-Comics_W0QQitemZ220330994887QQcmdZViewItem).


Bottom left and right, panels from *Scarface: Scarred for Life* #1. Left from Scenic Reflections website: [http://www.scenicreflections.com/media/38744/Scarface:_Scarred_For_Life_Wallpaper/](http://www.scenicreflections.com/media/38744/Scarface:_Scarred_For_Life_Wallpaper/). Right, panel capture from *Scarred for Life* #1 by Rob Prince.

**The Universal Perspective**

Nelson George once wrote that Scarface was embraced as a core text by Hip-hop’s gangsta subculture. Universal Studios, as evidenced by its quick turnaround development of *Miami Vice* on the heels of the end of Scarface’s theatrical run, apparently felt the film’s cocaine gangster narrative was also a core text for corporate capitalism and the mainstream consumption that fuels it. And both George and Brandon Tartikoff, the now deceased former programming genius at NBC, were correct. Scarface was not only central to the gangsta’s ideology but a
contributor to both the discourses on contemporary Jamisonian late capitalism and Althusserian theories on state apparatus and ideology. If Scarfacination is any indication, Universal has skillfully added to its prescience about the impact Miami Vice’s direct use of the cocaine cowboy gangster themes of Scarface made. Now twenty years after the television series ended, Crockett and Tubbs also have returned (in 2006) to a Miami now serving as a simulacrum for American male fantasies. Universal’s branding made this happen and Scarface, now having crossed back over to the white mainstream from the black Hip-hop underground, now generates tens of millions of dollars in revenue from the licensing of scores of products.

Figure 36. “Manny” Returns.
Scarface star Steven Bauer (Manny Ribera) makes an appearance at a 2006 Toronto convention to promote the launch of the Scarface video game. Bauer has become the de facto spokesperson for Scarfacination, having granted more interviews about the film, and made the most appearances in support of the franchise, than any other Scarface participant. Most recently he appeared at an August 22, 2008 Miami fundraiser that celebrated the 25th anniversary screening of the film. Curiously, in stark contrast to the yearlong events that surrounded the 20th anniversary, the Miami screening turned out to be the sole public commemoration of the 25th anniversary year.


Universal’s lack of understanding about the significance the film maintained with Hip-hop and underclass audiences is characteristic of an industry that markets most of its films by an unspoken race formula. This formula has resulted in a world in which white and or middle to upper class audiences appear to have been trained to possess very dissimilar tastes from that of black and or lower income class film audiences, especially when it comes to the reception of heroic narratives. In the case of Scarface, however, Universal did eventually learn to find a common theme that allowed the marketing of the film to audiences of all economic backgrounds.
It would seem that everyone, regardless of race, creed, or class, wants to fantasize about the inner workings of the cocaine industry.

Scarfacination, even as many of my examples paint it as a corporate sales opportunity, is first and foremost a celebration of the enthusiasm of millions of fans from the ghetto underclass. Specifically, Hip-hop males have sought both spiritual and emotional nourishment from a heroic symbol who happens to be a criminal. These young men, parched from living in the cultural desert created by Hollywood’s lack of interest in constructing images and representations which would authenticate the ghetto experience, reached out to Scarface, a film that offered them a hero who represented, as Public Enemy would implore years later with the anthem “Fight the Power,” the militant opposition to the white male hegemony which oppresses them. However, in contradiction to this worshipful relationship, what we are witness to today is nothing less than the metamorphosis of Scarface, from meaningful symbol to corporate shill. This circumstance has created a paradox.

Montana’s persona and image, the mother’s milk of gangsta militancy, is now being sold back in a tainted formula meant to pacify not only the ghetto underclass but a predominately white middle class mainstream who now see Montana’s violent defiance as a welcome throwback to the old school heroics of white males like “Dirty” Harry Callahan, James Bond, and Die Hard’s John McClane, characters who starred in films that were representative of the Reagan-era Scarface was created in.

Influenced by an aggressive marketing strategy from Universal, today’s white mainstream consumers ignore the rationale behind Hip-hop’s gangsta code heroic constructions, opting for a version that makes more sense to them—Scarface as a figura bella of U.S. ubermensch—a larger-than-life symbol of the preemptive strike mentality representative of the
recently deceased Bush-Cheney-Rumsfeld era. Thus, having now gone far beyond the tipping point of mainstream fetishization, it appears that the longer Scarface remains idolized by Hip-hop, the greater the opportunity for corporate America to spirit away dollars from those who can least afford it. And since the dissertation firmly believes that such idolatry is the result of the relationship between the visual representations in the film of the codes of honor that exist on the street, until conditions change in urban America the codes will be needed, Scarface will be worshipped, and money will continue to be sent away.

As the 25th anniversary year of the film’s release concluded in December 2008, Universal (and its partners’) seemed intent on continuing to grapple with the ghetto underclass for the privilege of who exactly should now receive credit for the past discovery of the film’s cultural largess. As evidenced by both the increasing number of product licenses granted by Universal and the number of media outlets reporting inaccurate Scarface folklore, the true genealogy of Scarfacination is being revised by the film’s brand managers even as we speak. Scarfacination is a testament to coffers overflowing with the windfall profits received from the worshipful ghetto underclass fan base.

**Scarfacination as the Result of Heroic Constructions**

As previously discussed in the *Origins of a Hip Hop Classic* segment of this genealogy, when Tony Montana is compared to more traditional (i.e. white patriarchal) representations of Hollywood heroism, what separates Montana from other characters (aside from race) are two factors. First, his come up story resonates with underclass audiences. While a film narrative may or may not give an entire profile of a character’s life story, those that do appear to stand a better chance at connecting with audiences. For example, *The Godfather* is so compelling because Michael Corleone’s is a come up story of how and why the least likely of sons in a Mafia family
decides to join their criminal enterprise. More recently, John Singleton’s 1991 film *Boys N the Hood* starts out by depicting the three black teenagers, who are attempting to negotiate life in the South Central Los Angeles war zone, as children. Likewise the screen versions of the iconic comic book superhero stories of Superman, Batman, and Spider-man all convey the come up of each. Possibly the most poignant of these is the child Bruce Wayne witnessing his parents’ murder and the consequential rage that causes him to don a bat costume and fight criminals in the dead of night.

The second factor is a somewhat more complicated. It has been established in this study that one of the reasons Tony Montana resonates with Hip-hop is because he is viewed as an authentic gangsta—with “authentic” being defined by terms set by the gangsta code. One key element of the code requires that gangstas be willing to inflict violence, sometimes in a preemptive manner—a commandment of the white patriarchal model that has oppressed people of color globally for centuries. This predilection insures authenticity but a relevant question is should it? Moreover, who has the right to determine the parameters of the black experience within the borders of blackness? It is important, as I explain the moments which define Scarfacination’s heroic construction, to offer a sidebar to the overall discussion and urge readers to also give consideration to the debate within Hip-hop scholarship that appears to arbitrarily determine who or what is authentic and who or what is not.

For example, critical studies scholar Todd Boyd, author of several books on black popular culture, has questioned the Hip-hop credentials of megastar Will Smith, who began his career as a rapper who refused to use curse words in his lyrics. Boyd’s comments, which appear in his provocatively titled book *The New H.N.I.C. (Head Niggas In Charge): The Death Of Civil Rights And The Reign Of Hip-hop*, appear to take the tone of someone playing the dozens given
the incendiary tone. He writes that Smith, the former star of the long running hit television series

**The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air,**

Is, for my money, definitely a pop artist of the highest and lowest order. Smith’s music represents the epitome of “rap” and is as far from Hip-hop as possible. Thus Common makes a good point when singling out the imposter status of the man I like to call Lil’ Willie, as opposed to the Big Willie moniker he tried to attach to himself at one point. Will Smith, though, is a commercially successful pop figure who ultimately can be dismissed for his overall cultural insignificance. He has contributed nothing to the rap game…he is not interested in being part of the culture. Will Smith is not gangsta.¹⁹⁷

Boyd’s sly reference to Smith’s manhood, “Lil’ Willie,” appears to be a diss that calls for a comparative measurement of the actor’s penis size versus the author’s, and adds an uncharacteristically bitter edge to the otherwise calmness of the scholarly discourse. After reading the passage I wondered aloud both what caused Boyd to lose his manicured coolness so obviously and where his claim for dominion over authenticity had originated. But Boyd was correct. Will Smith was not gangsta. However, Smith’s cultural currency is significant. He is clearly as strong in Hollywood as Barack Obama is everywhere else. The fact that Smith became successful his way—without cursing or defaming black womanhood—does not make him less authentic than Jay-Z or Ice-T or N.W.A. Despite the wholesome fluffiness of its origins, his television series, executive produced for the first four years by Quincy Jones, the founder of Hip-hop bible *Vibe* magazine, helped bring Hip-hop into the mainstream consciousness. What Boyd’s unfortunate criticism points out is how easily it is bestow or deny authenticity; it is a regime based on commonality and empiricity, not theory.
In Smith’s case, he is a black actor who has consistently chosen, and been chosen for heroic roles, beginning with *Independence Day* (1996) in which he helped defeat an alien race bent on subjugating the earth. In the recent *I am Legend* (2007), he played a medical doctor attempting to find a cure for a plague that has wiped out most of the earth’s human population. While it would be a valid criticism that the vast majority of Smith’s roles appear to be based on the traditional Hollywood patriarchal model, his path to becoming the number one box office attraction in the world has given him the money and power to produce his own films and, moreover, finance films significant to Boyd’s idea of authenticity, for example the excellent Hip-hop themed *ATL*. Clearly, given the sheer numbers that evidence Smith’s across the board success, ghetto underclass audiences have accepted Smith’s authenticity as a hero in the same manner they flocked to see *The Dark Knight* and appear less concerned than Boyd is about whether he is “black” enough?¹⁹⁸

However, Will Smith is a rare exception, much as was Sidney Poitier in his day, given his ability to cross racial lines so effortlessly. This ability to “crossover,” from singular black audience appeal to the white majority mainstream is relevant to the case study of Scarface because the film started within the confines of white patriarchy crossed over into Hip-hop and now has found its way back into the mainstream consciousness re-energized and born again. But Scarfacination’s journey back across the cultural line does not indicate any lessening of the influence the film exerts with Hip-hop males in the new millennium.

Even when the thematic perspective of a film is similar to Scarface, as was the case in Denzel Washington’s portrayal of a heroin kingpin in Ridley Scott’s *American Gangster*, which played into the black man as menace to society bogeyman formula, Hip-hop audiences have refused to supplant Montana as their deity. So *Gangster*, a film based on the criminal activities of
real life Harlem gangster legend Frank Lucas and heavily promoted by Hip-hop icons such as Jay-Z, could not overcome the entrenched mythology of Scarface. I suspect that one major difference separating Scarface and American Gangster is that Gangster did not afford the audience an opportunity to bond with Lucas on the same elemental psychological level as was the case with Scarface. The film’s narrative did not include a segment that allowed the audience to see how Lucas “came up.” In his case the message would have been quite compelling, as Lucas rose from humbling poverty and racism in North Carolina (including the fact that he witnessed his cousin’s murder at the hands of the police). Therefore, audiences did not connect to Washington’s character at the same level as they did with Pacino’s.

Therefore, despite very similar circumstances in both films and despite the fact that Washington’s character is the same race as most of his ghetto underclass audience, American Gangster did not replace Scarface as Hip-hop’s trademark despite the enthusiastic participation by Jay-Z, who contributed music to the production. In Scarface, certain representations allow ghetto underclass audiences to invest in Montana’s plight immediately, for example the opening scene that depicts the penniless immigrant’s confrontation with hostile government officials, followed by his immediate incarceration.

These are two situations that young black males can relate to. Because they meet Tony under circumstances which evidence his oppression as a minority, Hip-hop males relate to him on a personal level throughout the film and are provided with the opportunity to elevate him, and thus themselves, through fantasy transference, to heroic levels. Frank Lucas, on the other hand, had already been groomed by his mentor, the infamous Bumpy Johnson, before audiences meet him and, judging by his tailored suit and cool demeanor, he is already financially secure. Thus
audiences are not allowed to fantasize about rising with him, a much more visually powerful part of the spectatorship process.

**Figure 37. American Gangster and Scarface.**
As both films were Universal Studio releases, American Gangster’s promotional poster could purposefully borrow heavily from the iconography of Scarface. The red, white, and black color scheme was used, as well as the defiant posture of Montana, here mirrored by Denzel Washington. Washington’s visage, however, is the exact opposite in every way to Montana’s: white shirt versus black, black suit versus white, white handkerchief versus black. But notice how Washington’s hands are exactly positioned in the same manner as Pacino’s. And also notice how Russell Crowe’s outfit replicates Tony’s colors.


**Scarfacination is Ongoing**

Real life gangsters also admired Montana’s unashamed attitude. The image below is from one of the slides that I used in my lecture. Ethan Brown’s riveting Queens Reign Supreme, a non-fiction account of the life and times of drug gangster (and Hip-hop music financier) Kenneth “Supreme” McGriff, included details on McGriff’s inner city real estate holding company, named the Montana Management Company in honor of Tony Montana in Scarface. Since McGriff grew up poor in the inner city his decision to pay tribute to the film is within the realm of understanding. However, it is bewildering that in a 1993 public disclosure by the U.S. Treasury department of the secret financial holdings of Saddam Hussein it was revealed that
Hussein also used the name Montana Management Company as a front for laundering the money he had stolen from the Iraqi treasury.\textsuperscript{199}

My review of Scarfacination came at a time when the twenty-fifth anniversary of the debut of the film, which opened on December 9, 1983 was being commemorated. With the exception being an August 22, 2008 fundraising screening of the film in Miami, the anniversary year was quiet.\textsuperscript{200} Universal did not announce any plans to re-issue the film theatrically and no new DVD releases were undertaken. Two new book length manuscripts were planned: Ken Tucker’s aforementioned discussion of the film from a popular culture perspective in \textit{Scarface Nation} and \textit{Scarface: 25th Anniversary}, a coffee table sized edition of essays on, and images from the gangster film genre, to be edited by Ben Arogundade, a London resident and native Nigerian. Arogundade’s book, however, has yet to reach the market place.

Hip-hop’s love for Scarface was as overwhelming as it was unexpected. But it appears that the significance of Hip-hop’s influence on the creation of Scarfacination is being slowly diluted. Evidence is accumulating that suggests an attempt by Scarface stakeholders to marginalize Hip-hop culture even as it profits from it. Late capitalists, playing a game of cultural catch up, now describe the film as a brand that somehow developed with the help of “young people,”\textsuperscript{201} a description that appears hesitant to acknowledge Hip-hop as the impetus for the explosive success of the Scarface product lines. Scarfacination informs us that Tony Montana is the undisputed symbol of gangsta Hip-hop, the top selling brand of the culture. One reason it remains supreme is because the withering effects of poverty and racism, the scourge of drug use and drug sales, and lack of an intact nuclear family remain unchanged after twenty five years for a core group of economically disadvantaged youth. Thus Scarface persists, as it did in 1983, to
both contextualize the violent nature of life in the ghetto and the fantasy of what it would be like to get out of that hell alive.

Therefore, the film should be placed within its own unique historical context. What were the influences, political, economic, and social, that caused its creation? What other films did Scarface compete against for audience attention? How did the creative team of the film come to choose the subject of the gangster and the subject matter of cocaine? Scarface was obviously not created in a vacuum. Having revealed the outcome of the long term effects of the Scarface text in this chapter, let us now contextualize Scarface by reflecting upon its historical origins.
CHAPTER FIVE

SCARFACE IN CONTEXT WITH HISTORY

The Scarfacination phenomenon demonstrates that Scarface transcended the limitations of cinema’s gangster genre to become a culturally significant mainstream American popular culture symbol of success by any means necessary. Al Pacino’s Tony Montana now functions both as a representation of the ideal ghetto masculine identity and as a brand name commodity. As evidenced by the activities discussed and reviewed in the previous chapter it appears that, regardless of the Scarface spectator’s ideological viewpoints, phenomenon participants are actively engaged in a long term relationship with the film. Fans continue to create websites, purchase the film’s primary and ancillary products, and blog or verbalize about the emotional connection between themselves and the content of the film. However, for the Hip-hop ghetto male, the connection goes well beyond mere entertainment. For them resonation exists in a space reserved for lived practice. By connecting their street code to the one expressed inadvertently by the film’s screenwriter, Hip-hop’s reception proves that life is not always an imitation of art.

The narrative roots of Tony Montana’s story run deep. Scarface, written by Oliver Stone, was not only a script that borrowed heavily from its 1932 predecessor but one that joined a long running discourse in cinema which has critiqued American capitalism even while profiting from the releases of these films. One of the techniques employed by filmmakers to advance their negative views of capitalism is by demonstrating the depths of depravity which exist within the system. These demonstrations are, more often than not, made through various representations of corruption, greed, and criminal behavior. This narrative modus operandi has allowed Hollywood to explore the economic injustice inherent within capitalism through its use of the white male as
gangster villain. Thus, the cinema Scarface represents belongs to a century long practice of using the onerous deeds of the white male gangster as the industry’s most recognizable symbol of its ongoing critique of capitalism.

**Scarface in Context with the Discourse on the Gangster Genre in Cinema**

In addition to social commentary on economic concerns, films within the gangster genre perform many other functions for both producer and consumer. They serve as allegorical symbols for stances on issues such as war, racism, or patriotism when filmmakers mask their personal disdain for contemporary circumstances by cleverly setting their films within other periods of time. For example 1967’s rebellious *Bonnie and Clyde*, while telling the story of the two infamous depression era bank robbing lovers, was released during the height of the Vietnam War abroad and inner city urban riots at home. These foci allowed director Arthur Penn to use the anarchical nature of the characters to allegorically comment on both the war and racism. The first two Godfather films, set primarily between the end of World War II and the beginning of JFK’s presidency, were completed in 1972 and 1974 in the midst of the deceit and corruption of the Nixon Administration. Since Nixon was long rumored to have been bought and paid for by the Mafia, both the novel (which was published in 1969) and Coppola’s epic treatments of Puzo’s prose offered the opportunity for another allegorical commentary on the purchase of political power for illicit gain.

In addition to their ability to make political and social commentary, gangster films also serve another very important function. They are fantasy fodder for male audiences who wish to escape the confinements of living under rules and laws, or seek to become men of action who exist beyond the boundaries of mediocrity and conformity. For the gangster exists squarely within the purview of masculinity and, thereby, comes to define many of the ideals of male
behavior. The gangster does not see the need to obey the law, uses violence to earn respect and
met out self-defined justice, and acquires money, power, mansions, cars, and beautiful women,
all spoils of the male American dream.

*In Nomine Patris: Scarface in Context with the O.G. (The Original Gangster) Capone*

The overarching context of Scarface situates the film within the framework a socio-
political critique in which male fantasies of power and wealth demonstrate the bankruptcy of the
American dream. Oliver Stone, the son of a Wall Street broker and a screenwriter who had
already studied the adverse repercussions of greed driven drug smuggling in his Academy Award
winning *Midnight Express* (1978), a Foucault influenced nightmare of discipline and
punishment, uses Scarface as a vehicle to rebuke the hypocrisy of a capitalist system. In
demonstrating how the capitalist system encourages greed and ambition as necessary ingredients
to the accumulation of wealth, Stone creates Tony Montana as a man with nothing (and thus
nothing to lose) who is willing to ignore morality and live by the laws of the urban jungle. By
also incorporating Sidney Lumet’s brilliant premise of placing the action within the subtext of
the cocaine wars of South Florida, Stone offers audiences a reminder of just how uncomfortable
our government had become with the Cuban socialist revolution, while deftly blaming Castro for
unleashing criminals like Montana on unsuspecting citizens. And while Hip-hop audiences
certainly were sophisticated enough to understand the social commentary, male spectators were
drawn to the Cinderella fantasy which served as the thematic foundation which connected the
men to the character. Tony Montana, the economically disadvantaged underdog Other from the
underclass, becomes a rich and powerful king. It was this elemental psychology that made
Scarface so powerful.
Scarface represents the sum of a genre which, more often than not, is thematically redundant in its typical theme: the rise and fall of an underclass young male. This is not to say that each gangster film does not have moments, memorable characters, set designs, etc. that may be claimed as unique. They do and, moreover, Scarface is no exception. But it is the film’s use of a non-white immigrant Other which is groundbreaking for the genre. The Otherness of Tony Montana may explain the film’s tepid initial reception by the all white jury of critics who appeared uncomfortable with Pacino’s transformation from cold Italian Mafia Don to hot-blooded-and brown skinned cocaine conquistador.

From a historically contextual perspective Scarface appeared at a key moment in our illegal drug history, a time very much similar to the alcohol prohibition era of the 1920’s and 30’s. While heroin remained a steady scourge which linked both the booze and coke epochs, it remained an unspectacular condiment of personal deprecation in film. In other words heroin was a downer. It caused the Mafia war in The Godfather and was the object of pursuit in The French Connection, but heroin remained problematic due to the cinematic lethargy it rendered to its users as was the case when Mia Wallace was rendered comatose in Pulp Fiction. Cocaine, by contrast, appeared elegant on film. Heroin required too many appliances; with coke all one needed was a long fingernail. Scarface not only reestablished for Hollywood the cinematic cool that coke had provided to films like Superfly. It was, in the hindsight of history, a film that serves as a benchmark for the beginning of the end of snorting the drug. Scarface, it should be recalled, was B.C.—before crack.

Certainly the influences of the era, especially the spectacular rise of consumer demand for the major cash crop of Columbia, Bolivia, and Peru, caused Scarface to embrace a sense of narrative topicality that caused director Sidney Lumet to decide that the film needed to have a
distinct Latin flavor. Within the historical context of the entire cultural construction that is the Scarface story, an examination of those moments which I have identified as major influences upon the film’s own unique creation origin will prove useful.

There are a number of important moments that I believe contextualize the creation, production, and release of the 1983 version of Scarface.

1. A forever unknown somebody gives Al Capone the nickname of “Scarface” after Capone’s left cheek is slashed twice in a fight outside a Brooklyn bar. No one ever calls Capone “Scarface” to his face, though.

2. Capone’s life, especially his “come up,” is used as a template to create the modern era gangster genre, especially three 1930’s classics, The Public Enemy, Little Caesar, and the 1932 original Scarface.

3. In 1967 Warren Beatty’s Bonnie and Clyde romanticizes the gangster as a noble martyr for the common man while raising the bar for screen bullet holes and blood splatter.

4. The Wild Bunch (1969) sets an even higher new standard in cinema for catastrophic realism as it adds an ending ballet of slow motion deaths to go with even more blood splatters and bullet holes, underscoring Sam Peckinpah’s aria to the unpredictability of random chaos.

5. The French Connection (1971), based on the true story of a New York cop who busts the infamous Mafia-French heroin distribution ring, wins a Best Picture Oscar.

6. In 1972 the gangster genre was redefines when two films again glamorize drug sales as a viable theme. First, Superfly makes cocaine dealing cool, signifying the drug’s popularity among everyday people. Second, The Godfather, one of the most critically acclaimed films of all time, transcends the genre and reframes the standard for gangster filmmaking
for all time. The expectations of all similar thematic approaches to the gangster are thus forever raised, especially when the near-perfect *The Godfather, Part II* is released in 1974.

7. The 1979 “cocaine cowboy” gangster wars make national headlines with the daytime shootout at the Dadeland Mall in Miami.

8. Sometime in late 1979 or early 1980 Al Pacino, seeking to reverse the personal stigma of three poorly received films after *Dog Day Afternoon*, accidentally comes upon a movie theatre playing director Howard Hawks’ 1932 *Scarface* while strolling down Sunset Boulevard. He goes in. Inspired by the film he springs into action, determined to remake it in his own image.

9. Sidney Lumet, who had directed Pacino in both *Serpico* and *Dog Day*, outlines for Pacino his vision of *Scarface* as the tale of a Miami-based Cuban exile involved in a CIA drug trafficking operation.


11. In 1983 Michael Jackson makes an incredible ascendancy to popular culture supremacy through the release of his Quincy Jones produced *Thriller* album. He sells more albums than anyone to that point in history. His success is based in large part upon his sugar coated rejection of both his blackness and his own come up from a poor working class upbringing. Unsurprisingly, he is as rejected by Hip-hop ghetto underclass males as he is loved by the white mainstream.
This last circumstance concerning Jackson’s success, combined with Hollywood’s failure to provide authentic black film heroes who could express the reality of the ghetto underclass, set the stage for Scarface’s long term resonance even before the film is released.

I do not intend to detail all of these moments. Suffice to say it is my belief that each had a hand in the construction of the 1983 version of Scarface. However, I wish to point out those key moments which I feel are seminal to Scarface’s proper historical contextualization.

- The **first moment** was the ascendency of Alphonse Capone to gangster imperatore. Capone, a murderous psychopath, became a larger than life folk hero legend and the template for the three most important gangster films of the 1930’s.

- The **second moment** was the production of the Capone inspired 1930’s gangster films. These were *Little Caesar* (1931), *The Public Enemy* (1931), and the original 1932 Howard Hawks directed/Howard Hughes produced *Scarface: The Shame of a Nation*.204

- The **third moment** occurred sometime in late 1979 or early 1980 when Pacino saw Hawks’ Scarface.

- The **fourth moment**. Sidney Lumet creates the contemporary Scarface story as that of a Miami based Cuban exile involved in a CIA funded drug trafficking operation. His story is changed to make it less politically controversial but the core of Lumet’s idea, to make Tony Montana a Cuban and to place the story within the drug trade, remained.

As I take a more in depth look at these four moments so as to explain the influence each exerted on Scarface, I will incorporate a brief history of the gangster genre into the conversation.
A Brief History of the Gangster Genre

- **The first moment** was the ascendancy of Alphonse Capone.

  The gangster has been around as long as cinema itself. Beginning in the silent era with the twelve minute short *The Great Train Robbery* (1903) and D.W. Griffith’s seventeen minute *The Musketeers of Pig Alley* (1912), a film, according to Marilyn Yaquinto, “often credited as the first true gangster film,” crime cinema has flourished as a viable narrative art form, in part because of the notorious life of Chicago gangster Alphonse Capone. Beginning with Josef von Sternberg’s silent classic *Underworld* which, for the first time, “brought Capone out of the shadows and put him on center stage,” Al Capone became a screen persona, a template for other “larger than life gangsters akin to Greek tragedy.”

  Written by Ben Hecht, a former newspaper reporter who later penned the original *Scarface* for Howard Hawks, *Underworld* was the first great gangster film. His screenplay won Hecht an Oscar for Best Screenplay at the very first Academy Awards ceremony in 1928. Afterwards Fred Pasley’s 1930 biography about Capone further cemented the persona of a man who has been written about, referenced, and rendered to film in scores of texts.

*Figure 38. Underworld.*

The original poster for the first great gangster film.  
*Underworld* poster from Movie Goods website at:  
Capone received his trademark scars in a fight outside a Brooklyn bar. While working there he made a less than flattering remark to the sister of a mobster patron and got his face slashed for the insult. Capone never sought a reprisal.


Like today’s Hip-hop rap stars, Capone’s mythology was in part a media creation, a fabrication that Tony Montana mirrors in tone and spirit. For his part, Capone, according to crime film historian Marilyn Yaquinto, “took great pride in pointing out he was born in Brooklyn. The press, though, insisted on giving his birthplace as Naples or Sicily- perhaps to make the monster less of a homegrown problem.” Yaquinto further observes that

The Prohibition–era gangster Al Capone has been the chilling inspiration for hundreds of screen likenesses over the years. He continues to be the preeminent model of intoxicating power and lethal charisma. Tourists can still collect Capone memorabilia on visits to Chicago, where a 1980’s eatery was name after this original Scarface.

The public’s fascination with Capone was so great that when arguably America’s most famous inventor, Thomas Edison, died on October 18, 1931, the same day that Capone’s federal tax fraud conviction was first reported, it was Capone who got top billing in the headlines (see next page).
When arguably America’s most famous inventor, Thomas Edison, died on October 18, 1931, the same day that Capone’s federal tax fraud conviction was first reported, it was Capone who got top billing in the headlines. With Big Al being sent to the “Big House,” Hollywood suddenly gathered the courage to exploit his life. Capone’s persona and career was clearly the inspiration for the 1930’s “Big Three” gangster films: Little Caesar, The Public Enemy, and the film named for Capone’s nefarious nickname, Scarface: The Shame of a Nation, written by Ben Hecht. The greatest influence of Capone on cinema was his public personality. He was dynamic, outgoing, and craved the media spotlight, unlike the low-profile corporate styled leadership of other mobsters of the era, such as Charles “Lucky” Luciano, who could never convince Capone to formally join the “Commission,” the national governing body of the Mafia. Thus Capone’s enduring legacy to Hollywood became, in the language of the Hip-hop gangsta, his “come up,” the murderous rags to riches story which has become the prime component of the gangster genre film.

Alain Silver, in his introduction to The Gangster Film Reader, a collection of many of the most influential articles about the history of gangster cinema, writes that

There is no question that the gangster film in the United States in the 1930’s coincided with the very real and very sensational gangsterism at large in American society. Little Caesar (1931), The Public Enemy (1931), and Scarface (1932) borrowed liberally from the newspapers, magazines, and books of the era.
With the release of just these three motion pictures in barely more than a year’s time, Hollywood quintessentially defined the genre. The characters, the situations, and the icons…defined the genre expectations associated with the gangster film, and that remain in force to this day.214

Silver goes on to point out that Robert Warshow’s 1948 article in the Partisan Review, “The Gangster as Tragic Hero,” was a “celebrated piece” that examined “the relationship between the audience and the gangster as a tragic figure.”215 Warshow’s influential article has been reprinted many times since 1948. After his death in 1955 it was part of a collection of Warshow’s works, published as a book entitled The Immediate Experience (1962). Alain Silver and James Ursini later received permission from the Warshow estate to include the article in their compilation of historically significant scholarship on the gangster film genre, The Gangster Film Reader (2007).

The article is important because first, despite the fact that it is sixty years old, the rudimentary—almost too simplistic for its own good—psychological explanation of the public’s fascination with the gangster archetype still remains true. Second, Warshow is germane to the Hip-hop reading of De Palma’s Scarface because his explanation closely follows what Hip-hop males viewed as key to the film: a psychological profile that explains gangster (gangsta) behavior as an obligation under oppressive circumstances. Warshow thus provides the basic template for a successful reading of the gangster drama. He informs us that

The importance of the gangster film, and the nature and intensity of its emotional and aesthetic impact, cannot be measured in terms of the place of the gangster himself or the importance of the problem of crime in American life. The gangster film…speaks for us, expressing that part of the American psyche which rejects
the qualities and the demands of modern life, which rejects “Americanism” itself.216

“The gangster is doomed,” Warshow goes on to write, “because he is under obligation to succeed, not because the means he employs are unlawful.”217 A careful examination of his words leads to the conclusion that Warshow never spells out who or what obligates the gangster to undertake this journey. However, he appears to indict an unforgiving ruling class as the root cause of the gangster’s behavior. Why else would the gangster, who Warshow decides is not necessarily employing “unlawful” means, attack the norms of society by creating illicit activities? The answer appears to be that the gangster understands that hypocrisy is the root of the “lawful” economic process—thus he is obsessed with acquiring the money necessary to purchase legal and political protection, as Don Corleone did in The Godfather.

Tony Montana also echoes this sentiment when he announces to Manny that “First, you get the money. Then you get the power.” History is littered with hundreds of examples which teach us that what is legal is not always moral or just. Both American slavery and the Jewish holocaust at the hands of the Nazis were “legal” activities according the laws of those governments. Therefore, if what is legal is scripted by those with power, gangsters act out our deepest fear that, in fact, we may live in a morally bankrupt world. Warshow goes on to argue that despite the fact that real gangsters exist, “the gangster is primarily a creature of the imagination. The real city produces only criminals; the imaginary city produces the gangster: he is what we want to be and what we are afraid we are to become.”218

Here the Hip-hop reading takes a separate path in decoding how the gangster should be interpreted. As opposed to fearing to become a gangster, Hip-hop gangsta males appear to, in word and deed, fully embrace becoming criminals and engaging in the criminal lifestyle. But
Warshow challenges us to ask ourselves what is criminal behavior and what is not? If police protection can be bought, if judges and juries can be persuaded based on securing an expensive attorney, who is to say that an activity or behavior is criminal? Hip-hop rap artists consistently have skewered the hypocrisy of the capitalist system by flaunting society’s stereotypical negative reaction to black men and black culture by creating hyper-gangster imagery which has nothing to do with their real personas—but their actions speak volumes about their acute knowledge of how the deck is stacked against them.

A case in point is the December 2007 issue of Blender magazine (see Figure #3, page 40), which is mass marketed to a young and upscale music fan base. The cover features rap mogul Jay-Z, who not only has a reported net worth of between 285 and 350 million dollars but is married to the young actress and singer Beyonce Knowles. Jay-Z clearly knows how to control his carefully crafted image as a faux gangster, which is what his “authenticity” as a Hip-hop male is derived from. On the Blender cover, take notice of how Jay-Z, with the black suit and white label carnation, reminds us of iconic images of cinema hustlers and gangsters past. For example, there is Jackie Gleason—in the Paul Newman starring vehicle The Hustler (1961).

![Figure 41. Old School Gangsta Chic.](http://www.art.com/products/p12148940-sa-i812990/jackie-gleason.htm)

The smooth as silk, carnation clad Jackie Gleason as pool shark Minnesota Fats in 1961’s The Hustler strikes a gangsta pose.
This sophisticated, yet menacing, criminal image also reflects the stereotype of how white patriarchal America expects him, as a young black male, to behave. Of all the possible descriptions that could be made about one of the most successful self made young businessmen (black or white) in history, the magazine chose the phrase “The Fly Life of an American Gangster” to adore its cover. The phrase “American Gangster” was both a marketing tie in to the title of Jay-Z’s latest album and the title of the 2007 film which starred Denzel Washington and Russell Crowe. But the phraseology is particularly insightful about the use of myths and symbols by public figures who construct popular culture for a living such as the rapper in question.

The cover notwithstanding, there is no hard evidence that Sean Carter, the true identity of Jay-Z, has ever been involved in criminal activity of any kind. However, Carter’s mythology includes his claim that he once sold crack; but for this claim there is only his word and, given the propensity of rappers to fabricate a street persona in which criminality is a major ingredient, it may be that Jay-Z is just a brilliant, successful young businessman who achieved his American dream through hard work, including knowing how to manipulate existing stereotypes of the black male. Of course there would be nothing wrong with Jay-Z being just brilliant or just using his given name Sean Carter. One would think that Carter could go on speaking tours and motivate elementary schoolers. To be sure, if in fact Carter does perform these types of public services, one would never know and therein may lay the rub of offense that pricks the conscience of the likes of Bill Cosby and Oprah Winfrey, two successful and outspokenly anti-rap African-Americans to whom Carter’s wealth is mere pocket change.

However, in rap circles one needs a criminal gangster persona to gain and maintain street credibility. Carter’s marketing of himself, aided by his knowledge of the media, aggressively promotes his faux criminality to impressionable young people who may not know that he is
playing them to get himself paid. Carter’s representation in the magazine article is a microcosm of the global issue of marketing the stereotype of young black men as criminals. This leads directly into an engagement of the issue of how a single aggressively marketed text, such as Scarface, may be read differently by diametrically opposed economic class structures.

Warshow’s definition of gangster also should be viewed as possibly having dual connotations.

Warshow concludes his article by adding that

The gangster is required to make his own way, to make his life and impose it on others. Usually when we come upon him, he has already made his choice or the choice has been made for him, it doesn’t matter which: we are not permitted to ask whether at some point he could have chosen to be something else than what he is.219

Again, in the case of the 1983 version of Scarface, Tony Montana does have a choice in careers: between life as a minimum wage dishwasher and life as a drug dealer. To quote Roger Ebert’s December 9, 1983 review of the film, “He doesn’t wash many dishes.”220 In addition to fantasizing about the instant gratification that having drug money would bring, the violent infliction of pain upon others appears to be another major factor in our response to the gangster persona. Warshow agrees. He observes that

Our response to the gangster film is most consistently…a response to sadism; we gain the double satisfaction of participating in the gangster’s sadism and then seeing it turned against the gangster himself. In the deeper layers of the modern consciousness, every attempt to succeed is an act of aggression, all means are unlawful …one is punished for success. This is our intolerable dilemma: that failure is a kind of death and success is evil and dangerous and is - ultimately -
impossible. The effect of the gangster film is to embody this dilemma in the person of the gangster and resolved by his death, not ours. We are safe; for the moment. 221

Warshow’s audience for his 1948 article appears to be upper and middle class white Americans nervous over the inevitability of a post-war era in which blacks and other disenfranchised peoples would begin to gain greater access to the mainstream economic and social structures. His uses of the conservative elite catchwords “safety,” “fear,” and “intolerable dilemma,” lead me to believe that he is assuaging those who may feel guilty about acquiring material gains. However, Warshow, in analyzing the poor as subjects, commits a sin typical of pre-civil rights era white Eurocentric male scholarship. The same holds true for then as it does now: while the typical black inner city male does feel, as Warshow states, “required to make his own way, to make his life and impose it on others,” he clearly does not view success, as Warshow does, as being evil or impossible because, in the hopeless emptiness of his poverty, he has nothing to lose. For this same reason the typical black male probably does not fear death as a member of the middle class white audience might. And while Warshow’s view reflects a certain paranoia regarding success, today’s Hip-hop male, most likely a member of the economic underclass, has no such psychological baggage. In seeking freedom from oppression, the Hip-hop male is motivated to do whatever necessary to acquire money, or in the vernacular of that generation, “get paid.” And yet, this attitude reflects that of most Americans, regardless of race or social standing.

The 1930’s gangster Warshow writes about and today’s New Jack gangsta are both members of the underclass, driven to pursue an American dream with limited access by the poor who, as Warshow has stated, were born into circumstances which have already conspired to
defeat them. Poverty is the primary obstacle that motivates the head gangsters of the “big three” (Little Caesar, The Public Enemy, and Scarface: The Shame of a Nation) gangster films. State sanctioned economic oppression, eloquently described by Gramsci (at the time in prison himself for views the status quo thought dangerous) as a main component of hegemony, is also perhaps the major underlying motivation and plot device used in contemporary crime dramas, from films about or inspired by Jesse James, to Bonnie and Clyde, through Blaxploitation, to Scarface.

Marilyn Yaquinto, in her book Pump ‘em Full of Lead, takes Warshow’s thesis a step further by discussing the evolution of the gangster in contemporary films. Beginning with a rousing description of Alias Jimmy Valentine (1915) and concluding with Tarantino’s Jackie Brown (1997) Yaquinto’s research sheds particularly useful light onto the foundational constructions of the gangster representations Hollywood has produced over the years. I will draw from both Yaquinto and The Gangster Film Reader, edited by Alain Silver and James Ursini to assist me in a brief review of the “big three.”


- The second moment: the production of three groundbreaking 1930’s prohibition era Hollywood gangster films.

Two major events conspired to create the three great gangster films of the 1930’s. The first was the prohibition of alcohol in 1919. Prohibition immediately created a booming black market for liquor and single handedly created great gangster careers; most notably of these was that of Al Capone, who used the tremendous consumer demand to literally purchase the city of Chicago. The second was the collapse of the stock market and subsequent economic catastrophe called the Great Depression. And, given the terrible unemployment caused by the temporary
collapse of the capitalist system, there was no better time, for those so inclined, to seek out a
means to imbibe. As Yaquinto explains:

Most Americans were affected as the country’s economy went sour. The Great
Depression would make the 1930’s one of the most troubled eras in the American
history. On screen the gangster would live out the nation’s feelings of despair.
The gangster would die horrendous deaths of gore and symbolism for the public’s
benefit.224

In addition, a third factor should be considered in the creation of the “big three.”
Yaquinto offers a fact often overlooked: the celluloid father of the great gangster characters
created by Edward G. Robinson and James Cagney was an actor known more for his great horror
film roles. Lon Chaney, according to Yaquinto, fashioned his criminal portrayals as
psychologically or physically deformed creatures not unlike his classic renditions in films such
as The Hunchback of Notre Dame (1923). “Chaney’s characters seem to belong more to the
horror genre, in which the ‘man of a thousand faces’ excelled,” she writes, describing his
gangster roles in three silent era classics, The Penalty (1920), Outside the Law (1921), and
1925’s The Unholy Three.225 Yaquinto reminds us that, unlike the monster character of the
horror genre,

A gangster is the anti-thesis of the horror film centerpiece. By his very moniker
he’s a social being who must be with the “boyz” or la famiglia to survive. More
than a simple symbol of evil, the gangster is a symbol of ambition run afoul.226

What is extremely useful about her analysis is that Yaquinto goes on to explain the extent
to which Chaney’s work influenced other gangster film portrayals. In The Penalty, for example,
Chaney, playing a megalomaniacal crime lord who is also a disfigured double amputee, acts like
and even calls himself “a modern Caesar,” the gangster name precursor to Robinson’s Rico
Bandello as the ‘little” Caesar. Next Chaney, employing Hollywood’s often racist system of
white male privilege, crossed racial lines by playing a Chinese crime lord in *Outside the Law.*
This kind of race bending would later make Al Pacino’s role as the Cuban Tony Montana
controversial, but also demonstrated that audiences would apparently always be willing to accept
white males as whatever race they chose to be in a film.

What made *Little Caesar*, *The Public Enemy*, and the original 1932 *Scarface* memorable
was that each film not only focused on a gangster as the lead character but “took moviegoers
inside the criminal’s head.” The big three not only changed the existing template but created a
new cinematic paradigm that featured the unredemptive gangster who usually died in a hail of
bullets at the end of the film. In addition, the 1930’s films also reversed another feature of the
pre-depression cinema gangster. Prior to these three seminal texts, gangster characters, such as
*Bull Weed* in *Underworld*, had renounced their criminal pasts. However, led by newspaper man
turned screenwriter Ben Hecht, who unrepentantly used the life of Al Capone for inspiration,
Hollywood would create immortal narratives that managed to glorify the criminal, convey the
message that crime did not pay, and capture the public’s imagination.

Hecht was a celebrated crime reporter for the *Chicago Daily News* and made his career
when he “broke the ‘Ragged Stranger Murder Case’ story, which assisted in the conviction and
execution of Army war hero Carl Wanderer for the murder of his pregnant wife in 1921.”

After being invited to Hollywood by friend and former fellow reporter Joseph Mankiewicz,
Hecht received an Academy Award for his first screenplay *Underworld* (1927). But his
experience with the film’s script, which Hecht thought had been changed for the worse by studio
rewrites and editing, caused Hecht to decide to “no longer tiptoe around the hulk of Capone.”
He was subsequently hired by producer Howard Hughes and director Howard Hawks to adapt a thinly veiled account of Capone’s story, one based on a 1930 novel by organized crime groupie Maurice Coons (pen name Armitage Trail). According to his biography, Coons

…gathered the elements for Scarface when living in Chicago, where he became acquainted with many local Sicilian gangs. For a couple of years, Coons spent most of his nights prowling Chicago’s gangland with his friend, a lawyer, and spent his days …writing Scarface. He never did meet Al Capone, who was the inspiration for his immortal character, though Capone was very much alive when his book was published. When Howard Hughes was making plans to produce the movie, Coons wanted Edward G. Robinson to play the leading role because of his resemblance to Capone but being Hollywood, it ended up with Paul Muni playing Scarface, a different-looking sort of man altogether. The author did not live to see the picture, but Al Capone did, and screenwriter Ben Hecht had to talk fast to convince Capone’s henchmen that Scarface was not based on him.233

With its rough and tumble portrayal of prohibition driven street crime and violence, the original 1932 Scarface attracted the attention of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) censorship office, run by the former campaign manager for President Warren G. Harding, Will Hays, who led industry efforts to enforce the “centralized self-regulation” that the Production Code of 1930 represented.234 Concerned the movie was possibly powerful enough to persuade the public to emulate the criminal behavior exampled in the film, the Hays office demanded that Paul Muni’s lead character Tony Camonte “turn cowardly and be hanged at the film’s end.”235 Hughes and Hawks protested and the release of the film was held up for two long years until 1932. In the meantime Edward G. Robinson, Coons’ first choice for the Hawks screen
adaptation of Capone’s life, would steal the thunder away from Scarface. He machine gunned his way onto the screen in Little Caesar, his star-making turn, on January 9, 1931.

Film professor Stuart Kaminsky writes in “Little Caesar and Its Role in the Gangster Genre,” one of many key scholarly articles about the film, that it provided “the first clear elements which have defined the gangster genre.” Kaminsky successfully argues that the “genre elements (motifs, themes, and icons) in Little Caesar have evolved with the genre, but have remained persistently recognizable because they fill a public need.” These needs, according to Kaminsky, included the inability of the public in the 1930’s to handle the grief surrounding the collapse of the economy, the failure of the government to immediately solve social the problems associated with the Depression, and the appearance and subsequent fear of Hitler’s regime in Europe. Kaminsky’s article points out the essential elements of the gangster film. These themes have not changed over time. Moreover, they are not only central to an understanding of the genre but form the template for a reading of the 1983 version of Scarface. Two themes prove to be very important.

First, the gangster is, as Robert Warshow first argued, a tragic hero. According to Kaminsky,

The downfall of the gangster comes rapidly after he has briefly reached the apex. The downfall…is emphasizing what happens to those of the lower classes who dare challenge society on its own terms. According to Warshow, we identify with the central figure (and) immerse ourselves in his anti-social behavior.

Of great significance is the fact that the gangster is often viewed by the lower class as its champion, an oppositional hero and symbol of its desire to circumvent an all-too-often frustrating relationship with capitalism. Moreover, it is this segment of the audience that is
most likely to connect with the gangster’s tragic journey. The gangster character also allows
movie audiences to fantasize about what it would be like to be rich and powerful. In the case of
Tony Montana, his initial success in crime allows audiences to dream vicariously.

Second, the gangster may be seen as representing the aspirations of the working and
lower classes. Kaminsky reminds us that “in contrast to the upper-class manipulators, the social
chairmen of the board of crime are the workers, the on-the-line-gangsters.” The gangster’s
tragic journey is also a heroic journey and, moreover, is a stylized representation which
symbolizes an “alternative” i.e. unlawful means to achieving the American dream. As
represented by the characters Rico Bandello in Little Caesar, Tom Powers in The Public Enemy,
and Tony Camonte in the original Scarface, gangsters were the charismatic symbols of the hopes
and dreams of poor people during the Depression. Fast forwarding to the 1980’s, Tony Montana
represents the dreams of a ghetto underclass struggling to overcome the stifling poverty created
by the economic policies of Ronald Reagan.

Starring James Cagney in his first major role, The Public Enemy (released in April 1931)
followed Kaminsky’s outline to perfection. Enemy was the second of the “big three” films which
drew on the persona of Al Capone for inspiration. Cagney, who grew up in the rough and tumble
inner city Irish section of New York had, according to Marilyn Yaquinto, “authentic street
credentials.” According to Yaquinto Cagney’s defiant performance was lauded by critics as
being even more powerful than that of Edward G. Robinson’s. One such critic, she says, was,
Lincoln Kirstein, who wrote that Cagney’s gangster represented “the action of the American
majority—the semiliterate lower middle class.” Kirstein also felt, Yaquinto observes, that the
role drew the attention of the public because it could relate to Cagney’s destructive behavior and
anarchic on-screen personality.
The observation is a recurring theme in this study. Class, as I will point out, is a major factor in the acceptance of a gangster film by its audiences. An example of this type of resonance is James Cagney’s role in *The Public Enemy*. He connected with depression era audiences, in part because the release of 1930’s gangster films occurred at a particular moment of economic crisis. As a result *The Public Enemy* was a box office smash. According to Yaquinto, gangster film historian Garth Jowett notes that *Enemy* grossed over one million dollars and cost only $151,000 to make. 245

**The Original Scarface**

But however great Cagney’s success was with movie goers, the film that defined the gangster genre for all time was *Scarface: The Shame of a Nation*. Scarface was the third depression era film to use a Capone-like character but should have been the first. Originally scheduled for a release date in 1930 that would have caused it to debut before *Little Caesar*, *Scarface* languished on the shelves for two years in a battle with the Hays censorship board until it finally premiered on April 9, 1932, a full year after *The Public Enemy*. One of the required changes demanded by the censors was made immediately apparent at the beginning of the film. After the opening credits rolled, audiences saw the following statement:

This picture is an indictment of gang rule in America and of the callous indifference of the government to this constantly increasing menace to our safety and liberty. Every incident in this picture is the reproduction of an actual occurrence, and the purpose of this picture is to demand of the government: “What are you going to do about it?” The government is your government. What are YOU going to do about it?
This statement, along with several other forced changes in the script calculated to make Camonte more unsympathetic, was caused by, Yaquinto reports, “a fervent moral backlash.” This public outcry was, to some extent, manufactured by the media and the Hays office. Nevertheless, the concerns evidenced how fearful censors were of the potential influence on public opinion wielded by gangster cinema. Ironically, the second Scarface film was also subjected to persecution by the film industry’s censorship board, in this case the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), which was the new name assumed by the MPPDA in 1945. The Universal release received an initial X rating for excessive violent content and excessive foul language.

The first Scarface was one of the most influential films of its era, one that the vast majority of print media film critics feel to be a far superior film to De Palma’s adaptation. One reason is that the original has influenced a great many gangster films since its release in 1932. One can see elements of Paul Muni’s cool gangster style in Cagney’s performance in White Heat (1949), and with how Warren Beatty approached his Clyde Barrow character in Bonnie and Clyde (1967). Francis Ford Coppola’s The Godfather most certainly borrowed from it, especially Howard Hawks’ use of visual symbolism to foreshadow scenes in which a murder of an important character was about to take place. Scarface also influenced (and was lovingly homaged by) Martin Scorsese’s Academy Award winning, Irish gangster epic The Departed (2006). Then there is Hawks’ invaluable commitment to “less is more” filmmaking. There are no wasted moments or scenes in the original. At a breathtaking ninety-three minutes, Scarface takes just over one-half the time the 1983 adaptation does (a bloated 170 minutes) to tell the same gangster rise and fall story.
X Marked the Spot

![Image of Scarface poster]

**Figure 42.** *Scarface* (1932).
Screen capture by Rob Prince.

In addition to setting a standard for minimalism in the gangster genre, Hawks also delivers one of the best examples ever in cinema of effectively melding thematic and aesthetic schemes. “X,” both literally and figuratively, marks the spot in *Scarface* as the letter is employed to great dramatic benefit as a visual cue to foreshadow doom.\(^{248}\) Hawks’ recurring use of the letter was taken from the newspapers, which printed photos of crime scenes and used an "X" to mark the spot where the body was found. The first appearance of an X is as a background icon during the opening credits (see still photo above). When we first meet Paul Muni’s Tony Camonte character we see that his face is disfigured by a long scar which appears to be in the form of an X and from that moment forward, whenever a character dies, an X is prominent in the scene. The bowling alley shooting of mob rival Gaffney (played by horror genre legend Boris Karloff) occurs as a pencil fills in a strike on a scorecard is an example.

![Image of bowling scene]

**Figure 43.** “X Means Death.”
Boris Karloff (left) bowls a strike and the scene immediately cuts to a focus of the bowling scoring sheet—on which an X is marked (right).
*Scarface* (1932) screen captures by Rob Prince.
Another example occurs when a St. Valentine's Massacre type scene begins in the rafters of the garage, where the roof support beams are seven X shaped pieces. Finally, when Tony kills his best friend Guino Rinaldo, the number on the door of Guino’s apartment is the Roman numeral for ten, X. And when Guino (the great George Raft) opens the door, a larger X appears behind him (see below).

**Figure 44. Crossed Out.**
Tony Camonte kills his best friend Guino Rinaldo. The number on the door of Guino’s apartment is the Roman numeral for ten, X. When Guino (the great George Raft) opens the door, a larger X appears behind him.

*Scarface* (1932) screen captures by Rob Prince.

Martin Scorsese, whose depictions of brutal gangster violence are legendary in the genre, was more direct in his homage to Scarface. In a special feature short film, on the DVD release of his multiple Academy Award winning film *The Departed*, Scorsese admits that his frequent use of the X symbol, used to foreshadow death in his film, was specifically employed in order to pay tribute to Hawks.

**Figure 45. Scorsese’s Homage.**
Det. Capt. Oliver Queenan (Martin Sheen) falls to his death past “X” taped windows in *The Departed.*

Screen capture from *The Departed* by Rob Prince.
De Palma himself offers another tribute in 1987’s *The Untouchables* when he introduces Robert De Niro’s Al Capone character sitting in a barber’s chair, with his face wrapped in a hot towel. It is by this same visual cue that Camonte is introduced in Scarface. And the artistic partnership between death and opera, a Hawks innovation, is homaged consistently in the gangster genre as evidenced in such films such as *The Untouchables*, and *The Godfather Part III*. Hawks’ use of Lucia di Lammermoor’s “Chi Mi Frena,” often whistled by Tony Camonte before he kills, examples the director’s deft incorporation of opera music into the fabric of mob murder scenes.249

Ben Hecht’s screenplay is another undervalued gem. Hecht’s work has often been overlooked in the recent rush to admire the more quotable Oliver Stone version which, in fact, borrowed heavily from the original. Stone, in crafting his adaptation of Hecht’s story, kept all of the key plot points and skillfully altered dialogue without changing themes. Many of Tony Montana’s most memorable lines, words which have resonated with Hip-hop, were uttered (or suggested) by Tony Camonte. Some examples:

Camonte (in a car, referring to his boss Lovo): He’s soft.
Montana (in a car, referring to his boss Lopez): That guy’s soft.

Camonte: (citing his keys to success) Do it first. Do it yourself. Keep on doing it.
Montana: (similarly instructing sidekick Manny) First, you get the money. Then when you get the money, you get the power. Then you get the woman.

Camonte: (responding defiantly to his boss Johnny Lovo) There’s only one thing that gives orders and this is it (pointing to a Thompson sub-machine gun).
Montana: (responding defiantly to his boss Frank Lopez) There’s only one thing in this world that gives orders and that’s balls.

After a close analysis comparing both films, I discovered there are at least two dozen other scenes that reference the original Scarface in Stone’s script. As I will demonstrate by this
list, which is not exhaustive, Oliver Stone faithfully adapts many of his screenplay’s elements from his forebearer.

Other Examples:

- Flirting occurs between both Tonys and the girlfriends of their bosses, Lovo and Lopez.
- Confrontations between both Tonys and their sisters occur in the same nightclubs as the flirting occurs.
- The iconic phrase, “The World is Yours” which appeared on the Goodyear blimp as Tony Montana watched from the Lopez’s mansion (after he had killed him and taken Elvira for his woman) was seen, word for word, outside Camonte’s apartment as he courted Lovo’s girlfriend.
- Both Tonys start out as enforcers for their bosses.
- Both Tonys meet their bosses’ girlfriends at their bosses’ homes and afterward decide to go after them.
- Both Tonys murder their bosses and take over businesses prohibited by law. The bosses, Lovo and Lopez, beg for their lives and offer their girlfriends to the Tonys.
- The ending shootouts saw both men appear to be invincible as they held off their enemies until dying in a hail of bullets.
- The unrequited incestuous relationships between both Tonys and their sisters, while more obvious in the first Scarface, exist in both.
- Both Tonys murder their best friends in a jealous rage over having sex with sisters. In both cases the couples had just been married

Scarface in Context with its Contemporary Origins

- The third moment occurred sometime in early 1980 when Al Pacino accidentally came upon a movie theatre playing Hawks’ Scarface and decides to see the film.
Figure 46. Tiffany Epiphany.
Al Pacino’s encounter with the 1932 Scarface film occurred in 1980 at the Tiffany Theatre in West Hollywood, California. It was billed on a double feature with Hell’s Angels much like this marquee paired Garbo and Grant. The image of the theater represents what it looked like when Pacino saw the film.

This image was formerly posted at the Cinema Treasures website at: http://cinematreasures.org/theater/2903/. It since has been taken down.

Pacino Craves a Hit

As the decade of the 1980’s began Al Pacino was in search of a badly needed hit film. Pacino, having won great praise for roles in The Godfather, Serpico, The Godfather, Part II, and Dog Day Afternoon, appeared in need of a jump start to a career that had stalled. Despite becoming, literally overnight, one of the breakout film stars of the seventies with Oscar nominated iconic turns as Michael Corleone, Frank Serpico, and Sonny Wortzik; Pacino had appeared in only one successful film since 1975.250 Thus he began a quest, with his longtime friend, former agent, and producing partner Martin Bregman, in search of a project that would return his career to its previous lofty levels of success. Pacino had made some poor choices prior to Scarface, having recently turned down two roles, as Han Solo in Star Wars (1977) and Ted Kramer in Kramer vs. Kramer (1979), which would have clearly continued his winning streak. So as the eighties began Al Pacino had been seemingly overtaken by Robert De Niro, passed by rival Dustin Hoffman, and had seen a newcomer, Harrison Ford, stand on the cusp of becoming the new “it guy.”
Bergman and Pacino each have different recollections of exactly which one recommended to the other that Hawks’ *Scarface* was that vehicle. To hear Pacino tell the story, it was by chance that he entertained the idea of a Scarface remake and passed it along to Bergman. However, Bergman recalls that it was his late night insomnia that caused him, and not Pacino, to think of Hawks’ classic as the perfect project for Pacino. First, the Pacino side of the story.

Pacino recalled that while taking a break from making a film, he was taking a leisurely stroll along Hollywood Boulevard when he happened upon a revival venue for classic films, the Tiffany Theatre. Playing that day was Scarface as part of a double feature. Pacino had been intent on seeing the film for years but had yet to do so. Interviewed in 2003, by Bernard Weintraub for *The New York Times* for the 20th Anniversary gala commemorating Scarface, he recalled to Weintraub that, “I had been wanting to see it since ’74, when I had done a workshop production of *Arturo Ui*.” Weintraub reported that Pacino was “referring to Bertolt Brecht’s *Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, a thinly veiled fable about Hitler's rise to power set in the world of Chicago gangsters. Pacino said Brecht had been fascinated with American gangster films, especially Scarface.”

Weintraub also reported that Pacino’s passion for Muni’s performance was boundless. “The film just stopped me in my tracks,” Pacino recalled. "All I wanted to do was imitate Paul Muni. His acting went beyond the boundaries of naturalism into another kind of expression. It was almost abstract what he did. It was almost uplifting."

In his interview for the Scarface 20th anniversary DVD Pacino appeared dazzled by Muni’s performance of Tony Camonte, calling the effort “astounding” on three separate occasions. He also said
I just wanted to imitate him. I was inspired by that performance. So I called Marty Bregman, then put together some people and they started working on developing this as a film.\textsuperscript{256}

He reiterated his admiration for Muni when he was interviewed in 2006 by biographer Lawrence Grobel for Grobel’s book \textit{Al Pacino: In Conversation with Lawrence Grobel}. Reflecting back on a storied career, Pacino recalled the first time he saw the film. He told Grobel that he had “heard about Scarface for a long time. It was the model for all gangster pictures. I just went in and saw this great movie.”\textsuperscript{257} During the course of that segment of their interview Grobel asked Pacino why he wanted to remake a fifty year old film. Pacino responded that

It had a real feeling in it, a grand feeling, and it had a great performance by Paul Muni. He did something different. I thought it would be interesting to make a remake of this, in another way. So I called Marty Bregman, and he saw it and got very excited. \textsuperscript{258}

Pacino also mentioned that he been influenced to see the film because good friend and fellow co-star (in \textit{The Godfather, Part II}) Robert De Niro,\textsuperscript{259} having just completed \textit{Raging Bull} (1980), had been rumored to have taken a interest in bringing his own version of Scarface to the big screen, with frequent collaborator Martin Scorsese directing.\textsuperscript{260}

Bregman’s recounting, which occurred on the same 20\textsuperscript{th} anniversary DVD bonus disc, differs from Pacino’s in that Bregman flatly states that it was he who presented the idea to his star. Bregman remembers that

The reason I did Scarface or, how it came to my attention was that I was watching the old Paul Muni film about three o’clock one morning when I couldn’t sleep. It occurred to me that a film like this…the rise and fall of an American gangster,
had not been done. Certainly had not been done recently. Hadn’t been done since Scarface. Having done a number of films with Pacino I always wanted to do a large gangster film where he would have a part to play in this large genre. I talked to Al about it and said to him there’s something here but I don’t know where it is yet.261

Bregman’s comments about Scarface are always interesting because he appears singularly consistent in his ability to ignore facts and or history. One might read the above quote and come away with the conclusion that Pacino had yet to act in a gangster film or that, since 1932, there had not been another gangster film which utilized the “rise and fall” narrative. If there had been no Godfather and no other gangster films made since 1932, Bregman would, of course, be correct. But since he appears to have tunnel vision on the subject the study decided to take most of the comments of the Scarface producer with some skepticism.

Bregman has also championed a revisionist legacy of the film by arguing both that Scarface was negatively reviewed by every single critic at the time of its initial release.262 In other words, in the case of who came up with the idea to remake Scarface, I am siding with Pacino because his was the influence that mattered most in the pre-production and production of the film. Bregman, as Pacino’s former agent, has always served Pacino and not the other way around. Pacino, I will argue, was more influential in determining the final product than any other person involved, including De Palma.263 One thing is certain. The circumstances making up the creation of the De Palma-Pacino-Bregman collaboration are eerily similar to those that created Hip-hop’s Scarfacination. In the case of Scarfacination, let us recall that it was DJ Ready Red who was inspired by his encounter with Pacino’s on screen machismo. For Pacino it was his being impressed with Muni’s on-screen machismo. The chance meeting with the dynamic Paul
Muni's interpretation of the gangster inspired him to create the role that Red and Brad Jordan, years later, would borrow from. Therefore, to place the role of the 1932 Scarface in context with the remake, we should see Pacino’s performance as an extension of Muni’s inspiration and accept the value of Stone’s willingness to thematically borrow heavily from the original.

Pacino’s initial inclination was to do a period remake of the 1932 Scarface. He tells Grobel:

At first I was caught up with the idea of recapturing the thirties. But when I talked to some writers, we found it was very hard, because (the original) was so melodramatic. Muni gave me such a solid foundation to the role. I knew it was a characterization I wanted to continue. Then Sidney Lumet came up with the idea of what’s happening today in Miami, and it inspired Bregman. He and Oliver Stone got together and produced a script that had a lot of energy and was well written.⁶⁴

Often overlooked is the role of Sidney Lumet, who Pacino described as “coming up with the idea” about placing the setting of the film in Miami. Actually his “idea” was a stroke of genius. Lumet, one of cinema’s greatest directors of politically astute dramas, perhaps played the key role in the early stages of Scarface’s development.

**Blame it on Sidney**

- **The fourth moment.** Sidney Lumet proposes the idea that Scarface should be a story about a Miami based Cuban exile who gets involved in a CIA backed cocaine trafficking operation. Stone eventually depoliticizes the film by removing the CIA aspect but Tony Montana turns out to be Cuban and a cocaine dealer.

It was Sidney Lumet, the director of Pacino’s two post-Godfather hits, *Serpico* (1973) and *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975), who originated the idea of setting the film in Miami’s cocaine underworld against the backdrop of perpetual American obsession with communist Cuba. Lumet’s politically charged vision included the idea that Montana was a Castro agent and cocaine trafficking into the U.S. was controlled by the CIA. Miami fit Lumet’s ideas perfectly. The city had not been the site for a major motion picture since terrorists tried to blow up the Super Bowl in the film adaptation of Thomas Harris’ novel *Black Sunday* in 1975. With Miami as a setting audiences would be entering a largely unfamiliar location that, with its distinctive Cuban influenced flavor, would give Scarface a distinctly exotic feeling.

At the time Miami was under consideration by Lumet its image was that of a frontier town in the Wild West. Cocaine gangs fought daily for control of the city, culminating in the infamous 1979 daylight gun battle at the busy indoor Dadeland Shopping Mall, which was left with so many dead bodies that it seemed reminiscent of the My Lai massacre. On May 17, 1980, Miami added racial strife to its unsavory resume, gaining more unwanted national attention when
black citizens in the Overtown section of the inner city rioted in protest after several police officers, on trial for the December, 1979 murder of an unarmed black motorcyclist, were acquitted by an all-white jury. The riot was the largest and most deadly on record since similar civil unrest had nearly ripped America apart after the 1968 assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. But the good news for the Scarface filmmakers was that Miami was ripe to be exploited as a setting for a drama involving drugs and race, if they were able to survive the turmoil that was swirling around them. Lumet, who always appeared to be on the cutting edge of directing politically charged and culturally relevant productions, seemed poised to create another cutting edge drama.267

A chronology of the drug wars, as provided by the PBS Frontline website for “Drug Wars,” a special report of Frontline, the award winning PBS documentary film news program, leads me to the conclusion that Oliver Stone had available to him a considerable amount of raw subject material that would have allowed him to make Lumet’s vision electrifying.268 My efforts to contextualize the space Scarface occupied within the actual cocaine criminal activity occurring in Miami around the 1980 timeframe of film yielded, among other findings, the January 28, 1982 announcement of President Reagan’s war on drugs, one year after the beginning of his presidency. This would prove to be a defining moment in the creation of Scarface’s gritty feel. According to “Drug Wars,” Reagan’s declaration formed the South Florida Drug Task Force in response to

…outrage by the drug trade's increasing violence in Miami. Citizens lobbied the federal government for help. Reagan responds by creating a cabinet-level task force, the Vice President's Task Force on South Florida. Headed by George Bush, it combines agents from the DEA, Customs, FBI, ATF, IRS, Army and Navy to
mobilize against drug traffickers. Reagan later creates several other regional task forces throughout the U.S.\textsuperscript{269}

Given the ongoing cocaine gang wars, the long standing anti-Castro Cuban obsession by the U.S. government, and the race riots which had occurred precisely at the same moment, May 1980, as the Mariel boatlift, Stone was presented with the opportunity to reach a level of contextual immediacy that was higher than that of any of the previous gangster films made after the original Scarface in 1932, including both Godfather films.\textsuperscript{270} Lumet clearly saw the potential in this material. Unfortunately his vision would not be realized.

Oliver Stone, in an interview for the Scarface 20\textsuperscript{th} anniversary DVD bonus disc, gives full credit to Lumet for launching the project in the right direction. Stone recalls that Bregman told him that “Sidney Lumet was very anxious to do the picture and wanted to do Cuba…Miami, 1980, ’81…the Mariel boatlift.”\textsuperscript{271}

Stone goes on to add

I started into the research into Miami. I went to Miami extensively and got to know both sides—the law enforcement side, the attorney general’s office, and the gangster elements through their lawyers. I wanted to know more, so on a separate trip I went to Ecuador and Bolivia. Actually I wrote the script in Paris because I wanted to get away from that world. I was doing cocaine myself and it was interfering with my thought process…so I really needed to get away from America because I knew too many people here who were doing coke. It was a time of cocaine and excess.\textsuperscript{272}

The script Stone wrote did include the obvious South American connection to cocaine trafficking but only offered a veiled suggestion of a more clandestine American involvement.\textsuperscript{273}
Stone often speaks in interviews about his “embedded” research in Miami during which he met both drug dealers and law enforcement figures. He artfully included all of the main themes of the original Ben Hecht story; Tony is kept as the name of the protagonist, the prohibition era remains but here cocaine replaces liquor, and the incestuous obsession Tony has for his sister is carried over, as is the Shakespearian Richard III treachery of ambition which leads Tony to overthrow his mentor by murder and take his possessions, including his woman.274

However, it appears that the overall tone of the film, as written by Stone, did not meet Lumet’s expectations. In particular, he seemed concerned that graphic depictions of violence in the cocaine business had become a focus of Stone’s script. In the end Stone’s approach was in opposition to Lumet’s more nuanced style of allowing politically charged dialogue to carry his stories, as was the case in his other films such as 1976’s Network, which used monologues to eviscerate the television industry, and The Verdict (1982), a story which literally put the sale of justice to the highest bidder on trial. Moreover, given the standard for violent realism set by Bonnie and Clyde, The Wild Bunch (1969), The Godfather films, and Blaxploitation cinema, and with the understanding that Scarface had been placed in the hands of the men who had given America The Hand, Carrie, and The Fury,275 Lumet should have expected that the newest Scarface would be drenched in gratuitous blood. Alas, he did not.

Lumet deemed Oliver Stone’s take on his Cuban idea nothing more than a “cartoon.” Problematic for the film’s director was that no one else he was working with agreed with him. Pacino, who Lumet had guided into giving two memorable performances in Serpico and Dog Day Afternoon, decided to trust someone he had never worked with at the expense of someone he had. He loved what Stone had done.
Pacino recalled that “On the first reading of the script I realized how Oliver had captured that world and made it his own and brought out that wonderful texture and nuance and power.”

Bregman, in his interview, said that Lumet “didn’t quite like it. He thought that is should take more of a political direction. I thought that not only that it would not work...it wasn’t true.”

Stone said Lumet told him the screenplay was “too violent and over the top and wasn’t what he wanted to do.”

The odd man out, Lumet left the project in disappointment over what he felt was an apparent lack of a serious political message. To Lumet, the final script appeared more interested in outdoing the ultra-violent representations found in recent cinema rather than in taking the film into the murky waters of a (then) fictional account of American CIA involvement in the drug trade. But Lumet would appear prophetic, as his fictional idea would play out as a stark reality on national television during the Oliver North Iran-Contra affair. Thus Bregman’s words, “it wasn’t true,” proved unintentionally naïve. But in defense of the majority, Lumet, in his evaluation of the script, appears to have devalued the field research Stone had done, especially in capturing the graphic violence inherent in the South America to Miami drug business. Steven Soderberg’s brilliant film Traffic (2000), given its treatment of a wide range of themes related to the cocaine wars, might be the closest project to what Lumet had in mind for Scarface, but my observation is pure speculation. However, Lumet’s parting shot about Stone’s script being cartoon like was equally prophetic. As I have shown in the previous chapter, in 2007 Scarface became a comic book series.
After Lumet’s sudden departure, Brian De Palma was rehired to replace him. De Palma was a great admirer of master filmmakers such as Godard and Hitchcock; a film school graduate who often collaborated behind the scenes with close friends Martin Scorsese, Francis Coppola, George Lucas, and Steven Spielberg, all of whom would become cinema immortals and cast indelible marks on film history. More importantly to Pacino and Bregman, De Palma was very familiar with violent narratives in film, having made his reputation on delivering bankable gore. Moreover, this would be De Palma’s access to the big-time i.e. the “A” list of directorial opportunities. Accordingly he would be less likely to complain about whatever direction Pacino or Bregman wanted the film to go.

Lumet’s Concerns Realized as Film is Rated “X”

De Palma had already had gained an unwanted, but somewhat deserved, reputation as a Hitchcock wannabe, having employed several homages to the master in his films. In a book review of Eyal Peretz’s Becoming Visionary: Brian De Palma's Cinematic Education of the Senses by David Greven, Greven points out that critics were underwhelmed by De Palma's more than flirtatious relationship with greatness. He wrote that the director’s

Astonishingly productive and ongoing agon with the work of Alfred Hitchcock—commencing with the 1973 Rear Window homage Sisters and vividly on display in his recent masterpiece Femme Fatale—has been viewed by the general run of critics as plagiaristic and crass appropriation of the "Master of Suspense" by a talented but shallow hack.²⁸⁰

Undeterred, the Scarface film would see De Palma creating one of the most controversial scenes in motion picture history when he decided to homage the shower murder of Marion Crane in Psycho (1960), arguably the controversial scene Hitchcock ever filmed. Substituting a
chainsaw for Norman Bates’ butcher knife, De Palma, a la Hitchcock, was careful not to actually show any of the mayhem, choosing to skillfully use sound and spraying blood to achieve the effect. But even the suggestion of dismemberment appeared to be too powerful for censors as the director of the gory blood splattered *Carrie* saw his new film rated X by the Motion Picture Association of America. The battle that ensued between the studio and the MPAA garnered significant interest from the press.

According to *The New York Times*, Scarface received notice from the MPAA of the rating decision on Wednesday, October 28, 1983. Times reporter Aljean Harmetz wrote

Brian De Palma re-edited the movie four times in an attempt to satisfy the seven-member rating board’s objections, but the board said it still found the movie to be excessively violent in action and language. Finally, Mr. De Palma refused to cut the film further and told the studio it would have to fire him and find someone else to re-edit the movie. If the appeal is denied, Universal will either have to accept the X rating or cut the movie against Mr. De Palma’s wishes.

As the film’s producer, Martin Bregman appealed the decision. “We have been officially designated as a pornographic movie,” said Bregman to the Times. In his book *Hollywood v. Hard Core*, cinema censorship historian Jon Lewis wrote an account of the dilemma facing the Scarface team, which included not being supported by its own studio. Lewis’ research indicated that Universal Studios was clear in its message to De Palma, who as director was responsible for making sure the film could be released to the maximum number of venues. According to Lewis, Universal executive Robert Rehme remarked that, “There is no way this company will send Scarface out in an X-rated version.” Lewis goes on to add, “Rehme left De Palma, the
auteur but not the owner of the property, with a fairly simple choice. He could cut the film to secure an R rating or move on and let someone else at the studio do it for him.\textsuperscript{286}

The MPAA was concerned with three matters: the film’s excessive use of the word “fuck,”\textsuperscript{287} the film’s shower scene, during which there was the Hitchcock-styled dismemberment of character Angel Fernandez’s left arm and leg, and the fate of Octavio, the performing clown dancer, who they felt had been hit with too many bullets. Thus the MPAA had rendered the film not fit for mass release. De Palma, however, appeared to relish the moment. At the time the rating was assigned he told The New York Times, “This is kind of good. If we win the appeal, the whole world can see what the board considers an X picture.”\textsuperscript{288} De Palma later admitted he had leaked the news of the MPAA’s displeasure to friends in the press. Clearly he wanted to challenge the system. “I wanted to establish a level of violence nobody had ever seen before,” he remarked in a retrospective interview.\textsuperscript{289} Once again, a Scarface film would be the site for a battle between artistic freedom and censorship.\textsuperscript{290}

Bregman, on the other hand, was incredulous because he felt the film gave an authentic accounting of certain violence Stone had uncovered during his pre-production research. In his interview for the DVD 20\textsuperscript{th} anniversary edition, he recalled that “the chainsaw massacre was based on real incidents. We got a big assist from the U.S. Attorney’s office down there. They showed us their files, their video tapes of crime scenes.”\textsuperscript{291} He prepared for the appeal by hiring psychiatrists, inviting Time magazine to cover the hearing and, in a move most curious for a film depicting a high level of violence, convincing the head of the Federal organized crime bureau in Miami to testify that, as an anti-drug film, Scarface would have a positive impact on children.\textsuperscript{292} Bregman’s law enforcement witness told the MPAA appeals board that, among other representations in the film, a chainsaw had been wielded by at least one cocaine gang to kill a
member of a rival crew. It was impressive evidence that helped sway the appeal in the studio’s favor.

De Palma and Bregman won their appeal by a vote of 18-2. With their victory De Palma, who had been forced by the MPAA to cut the film four times without success, decided to release the film in its original, and intended, form. With a great degree of satisfaction he appeared to gloat in his interview for the 20th anniversary DVD release. De Palma said

Because I cut the picture back three times, everybody assumes they saw the third cut. But I called the head of the studio and I said if I have an X on the third version, I have an X on the first version. Why don’t I just go with the first version? They’re all X’s. The version you see is the original version I cut. It’s not changed; it’s what we fought over.

The resolution of the censorship issue was important as a symbol of victory for the small band of artistic rebel freedom fighters over the Death Star of puritanical control. But by deciding that the CIA could never, ever be involved in conspiring to sell cocaine to Americans (later proved to be true by the Iran-Contra secret missions) but that a man could still be standing after being hit with dozens rounds of automatic rifle fire, the Scarface creative team had eliminated any possibility of the film being taken seriously by the mainstream press. But there was, of course the Hip-hop audience.

The Hip-hop audience, as did previous generations of the lower class, always seemed to fly under the radar. In the case of Scarface Hip-hop’s adoration of Pacino and his new character, they once again appeared to have escaped consideration and recognition by the press, the studio, and the creative team that produced the film. Today, as revisionists scurry to rewrite the history of the origins of the film’s popular culture prominence, these stakeholders are making
themselves appear to be no less than latter day prophets—geniuses who were far ahead of the curve. But the truth is that, in 1983 none of these stakeholders had a clue.

Enter Scarface

Scarface entered into the lives of the ghetto underclass through a door that Hollywood did not realize it had constructed. The fantasy of not only rising up against the oppression of “The Man” but beating him at his own game became a “reality” with the release of the film in 1983. Montana was not white. Check. He was poor. Check. Ambitious. Check. Had only a minimum wage job. Sounded familiar. Was given the opportunity to make his dreams come true but it involved risk. Take the risk. All of the elements involved in constructing Montana’s rise, his “come up,” were there. For those in the audience not far removed from Blaxploitation cinema, the film rang a resonating bell. For younger Hip-hop males, who had heard older adults rave about how Superfly or The Mack made them feel, there was a gratifying experience awaiting them. What critics at the time did not know was that for Hip-hop, Scarface was the equivalent of the cultural Nile, washing over their parched banks, filling every fantasy of the American dream. However, fantasy fulfillment, a basic expectation of spectatorship in cinema, appears to be but only a symptom of the dynamic that caused the film to resonate with Hip-hop audiences so completely. The cause of this symptom is simple. At the root of the fantasy is a need to relieve the pain of the economic disparity which grinds at their hopeful spirit, a pain felt by a ghetto underclass constantly searching for a hero that reflects their circumstances.

If I am correct in my analysis, a close textual reading/deconstruction of the film, one benefiting from the use of several critical and theoretical perspectives, including semiotic and psychoanalytical, should reveal key explanatory moments, i.e. certain scenes, in Scarface that demonstrate how and why the Hip-hop audience saw Tony Montana, to quote rapper Fat Joe, as
a “ghetto superhero.” This reading should also confirm that these film moments helped construct and later reinforce the ongoing creation of the Hip-hop gangsta identity. Moreover, because they evidence how Tony Montana’s behavior served as a gangsta template, these scenes will show a character definitively in opposition to traditional heroic and superhero film archetypes, norms, and monomyths, as exampled by easily recognizable characters in popular culture cinema. Finally, the representations expressed in these film scenes would allow the Hip-hop ghetto underclass audience the opportunity to decode the film on their own terms—within the context of their perspective as spectators—as an politically oppressed and economically deprived people.

In the next chapter I will discuss specific scenes in Scarface that will explore how and why the Hip-hop male audience received the film in such a way that caused them to believe Tony Montana symbolized a superhero that represented them. What will emerge from a close textual reading of these selected scenes is the theme of a gangsta code of honor, the system of values each would be street-wise male feels he has to adhere to in order to survive. This pre-existing code, one that psychologically manifests itself within the collective psyche of the Hip-hop audience, holds the key to finally understanding why these young men are so enamored with Tony Montana’s behavior. The ghetto underclass audiences also brought to their viewing experience a keen knowledge of traditional heroic paradigms and were apparently pleased to see a film that inverted this tradition by presenting a character whose behavior not only resisted Batman and James Bond but appeared to return to a past where “The Man,” and not them, was put down.

Scarface should be considered the other side of the looking glass, a film decoded in a manner similar to how mainstream audiences connect with white male superheroes but with the outcome inverted. This inversion, or in Hip-hop vernacular “flippin’ the script,” is a tool
essential for the construction of Hip-hop’s most resistant archetype, the gangsta identity. However, in order to advance my theory—that the permanent institution of the gangsta identity in Hip-hop culture was the natural outcome of the film’s complete resonation with its mostly young, black, and male audience—a discussion of the street code of honor, the primary and elemental cause of this connection, must be precluded by first gaining an understanding of how, why, and most importantly, if the code exists.

The study will now move into an area of the cultural discourse that has been visited, and re-visited, for decades—the considerable amount of scholarship on, and about, the historical roots and current condition of black masculinity. The street code of honor, I argue, does exist and its relevance has everything to do with the historical maltreatment of black men by the white patriarchal hegemony. Specifically, I will begin my discussion by again contextualizing history—in this case focusing on the lack of economic prospects offered urban dwelling inner city males. This logical starting point will offer an explanation of why the code exists and how its depiction in Scarface was the tipping point for emerging gangsta identification.

In the next two chapters I will discuss the construction of black masculine identity and how specific scenes in Scarface caused the Hip-hop male audience to believe Tony Montana symbolized a superhero that represented them. What will be learned from these chapters is that a gangsta code of honor emerges. This code provides evidence that system of values exists in the inner city, one each would be street-wise male feels he has to adhere to in order to survive. Chapter five will provide a discussion of this pre-existing code. The Gangsta Code, as I have named the system of values, psychologically manifests itself within the collective psyche of the Hip-hop audience. It holds the key to finally understanding why these young men are so
enamored with Tony Montana’s behavior. Then, in Chapter six, I will offer a close textual reading of those scenes that Scarface provides clear representations of the Gangsta Code.

What both chapters suggest is that the ghetto underclass audiences brought to their viewing experience a keen knowledge of traditional heroic paradigms and were very pleased to see a film that inverted this tradition. Scarface was seen as presenting a character whose behavior not only resisted Hollywood heroes like Batman and James Bond, but appeared to return to a Blaxploitation type past where “The Man,” and not the underclass to which these young Hip-hop males belonged, was put down. Thus Scarface should be considered the other side of the looking glass, a film decoded in a manner similar to how mainstream audiences connect with white male superheroes but with the outcome inverted. This inversion, or in Hip-hop vernacular “flippin’ the script,” is a tool essential for the construction of Hip-hop’s most resistant archetype, the gangsta identity.
CHAPTER SIX

BLACK Masculinity AND THE Gangsta CODE

Livin’ just enough, just enough, for the city.
Stevie Wonder

The purpose of this chapter is to contextualize Scarface within the existing black masculine identity discourse and to determine the root causes for the film’s astounding resonance with Hip-hop males who reside in the inner city ghettos of the United States. Specifically, the chapter will provide a historical and socio-economic context for this audience’s reception of the film. I want to be clear at the outset—the study does not claim Scarface created gangsta identity, even though both Scarface (released in 1983) and the term “gangsta,” (coined in 1984 as inner city slang for “gangster”) emerged at roughly the same time.

This contextual interrogation will include a discussion of the process of a collective identity transformation that occurred among ghetto youth over a roughly twenty-year period: from the 1965 Watts riots to the introduction of the gangsta male in the nineteen-eighties. During this time the majority of black male identities in the inner city morphed, from the more hopeful community oriented black nationalist posture, which was begun with the ascendency of leaders such as Malcolm X and represented during the eighties by rap groups such as Public Enemy, into the rugged individualism of the street gangsta, as visually symbolized by the focus of this study, Scarface. The fact that Scarface has proven to be a consistently influential force in the procreation of gangsta identity over the past twenty-five years does not mean that the film was the sole factor in the creation of this oppositional force. No motion picture has the power, on its own, to create individual identity. However, but the media, especially cinema, certainly can be classified as an enabler.
When the body of scholarship that might lend credence to a definitive critical understanding of Hip-hop audience psychology was considered, the study found that existing urban gangsta behaviors, such as a propensity for violence and consistently acting emotionless and detached (the previously alluded to “cool pose”), are the result of long term, systemic social and economic oppression, maladies that can be traced back to institutionalized slavery. As this chapter will recount, the history of the black male experience in America is one in which the kidnap victim, now freed, becomes both feared and reviled. The black male is feared because the potential for retributational justice against the kidnapper is omnipresent, due to the close proximity between criminal and sufferer. The black male is reviled because only through vilification of the victim can the horrible nature of those past crimes against him be justified in the mind of the perpetrators.

There exists a considerable body of scholarly work on the ramifications of this set of circumstances. Most of this chapter lays the groundwork for understanding why the predominately black male Hip-hop male audience connected with Scarface. This particular audience’s reaction to the film is based on its world view. The goal of this chapter is to provide a clear understanding of how this world view was created. Therefore, the study included a discussion of a portion of the substantial body of work that has been accomplished on black masculinity since the time of W.E.B. Du Bois in the early nineteenth century.

The central organizing element of these works is the legacy of African enslavement. As shall be learned through a review of the literature on black masculine identity, the African males that were kidnapped and brought to the Americas as slaves had their cultural identities forcibly taken away and replaced with a European conception of manhood. Therefore, as this study discusses the process that created the contemporary gangsta identity, I will argue that the gangsta
is a creature of the white patriarchal apparatus—and that this apparatus is panoptic in structure. And, in as much as the transition from African masculine values to European masculine values occurred at gunpoint, the majority of the discourse chronicles the influences of an environment hostile to black males.

This adversity resulted in the creation of a hybrid form of manhood for black males. This new version was one which could never attain the white ideal—and thus the black man was doomed to a perpetual cycle of psychological emasculation. This cruel set of circumstances was nurtured by centuries of systematic abuse within different systems of control maintained by the ruling classes; first under the total control of the slave system and then after emancipation, the former slaves faced a new system of oppression: Jim Crow segregation, which lasted nearly a century until it was dismantled by the modern civil rights movement. Thus, when finally freed, these former slaves were treated as though they were a plague let loose upon an unsuspecting population.

Michel Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* discusses such a plague and I find his description, of the measures taken by a town to handle the plague at the end of the seventeenth century, an excellent metaphor for how this new system of control over black masculinity would operate. For the purposes of this study, when reading the Foucault passages, the “black race” in America was substituted for Foucault’s use of the term “the plague,” and the term “black male” was substituted for “lepers.” These simple substitutions transform Foucault’s thoughts into extraordinary provocations and offer insightful speculation as to what strategies the ruling class may have employed. Foucault writes (strikethroughs and italics, my emphasis).
The plague freed black race gave rise to disciplinary projects. Rather than the massive, binary division between one set of people and another, it called for multiple separations, individualizing distributions, an organization in depth of surveillance and control, an intensification and a ramification of power. The leper black male was caught up in a practice of rejection, of exile-enclosure; he was left to his doom in a mass among which it was useless to differentiate. The exile of the leper the black man and the arrest of the plague confinement of the black race do not bring with them the same political dream. The image of the plague black race stands for all forms of confusion and disorder; just as the image of the leper black man, cut off from all human contact, underlies projects of exclusion.\textsuperscript{299}

By simple substitution of a few words, Foucault’s idea takes on a whole new meaning, one completely in-sync with the historical treatment of Black Americans. Foucault then goes on to discuss “binary branding,” a term he utilizes to define societal differentiation between the normative and the abnormal. This theoretical concept, as was applied to the above case he presents, demonstrates how the process of controlling a lethal disease (the normal or healthy versus the abnormal plague conditions) and serves as a useful metaphor to describe the manner in which a feared population could be controlled through isolation and observation. This method of cultural control would have the same outcome as that which occurred with the plague control. In addition, this system of control would have the added benefit of causing no appreciable change in the necessary psychological perspective of the ruling class forces exerting the control.\textsuperscript{300}
The Ghetto as Panopticon

Foucault called his ideas an extrapolation of Jeremy Betham’s Panopticon, an eighteenth century architectural plan for a model prison.\textsuperscript{301} Foucault binds his work to Betham when he writes that

Bentham's Panopticon is the architectural figure of this composition. Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. The Panopticon functions as a kind of laboratory of power.\textsuperscript{302}

While there are minor differences between the processes employed to control the plague town and implement the panoptic establishment, the outcomes of each method, complete capitulation, are identical. Inspired by Foucault’s metaphorical experimentation, I also took a leap forward, applying his use of panopticism to solve my own cultural puzzle. As Foucault seized upon the idea of expanding Betham’s draconian architectural masterpiece to fit his theories on state power and control, I, too, decided to expand the Panopticon beyond its intended physical carceral confines. What if an entire geographic area was a Panopticon? The study offers that this question should be taken to its logical conclusion—the inner city ghetto is the latest, and most insidious, version of the panoptic system.

Thus, if the urban ghetto was a prison without walls, this interpretation would explain the cultivation of the gangsta identity within its confined geographic space. In one regard, the gangsta’s performance, fashion style, psychological make up, and economic ingenuity is steeped in the oppression of existing American prison culture. Therefore, I view Foucault’s entire treatise on punishment as a useful delineation of this chapter’s argument. This last claim is founded in careful observation. It explains the defensive reactions of residents to the day-to-day occurrences
that occur within the environs of an area so dangerous that survival is uncertain. Much like a
“real” prison with guards, the ghetto panopticon also includes a dependence on those in power
for the most basic of services such as food supply and adequate housing. There exists, both
within and outside the ghetto, a feeling that, “inmates are running the asylum” (we’ve all heard
that comment in one form or the other), and then there are the enforcement of agreed upon rules
of conduct by armed adversaries. These rules, or “codes of the street,” a phrase coined by Yale
sociologist Elijah Anderson to define ghetto-centric values, place the highest value on the
acquisition and maintenance of individual respect, the primary currency of survival in the
penitentiary. While there are no confining walls of brick and mortar, as is the case with the
prison complex, there are, nevertheless, obvious similarities between the geographic ghetto
panopticon and being locked up in “the joint.”

The ghetto panopticon does not need walls—economic conditions and made boundaries,
such as freeways, make it difficult for the resident to leave, even temporarily. The ghetto is also
under constant surveillance by armed police, who rely on paid informants within its boundaries
to provide intelligence. Finally, as in a dangerous prison complex, the constant threat of
violence exists minute to minute in the ghetto, so much so that it has been described by residents,
such as notorious former gang members Sanyika “Monster Kody Scott” Shakur and Stanley
“Tookie” Williams, to be an occupied territory or a war zone.

The life threatening internal environment causes the gangsta, who lives in a constant
survivalist mode, to always be on the defense, as would be the case for anyone attempting to
persevere in a maximum security prison complex without walls. Despite a life lived constantly in
peril, the gangsta is considered to be a social deviant. He is considered by the white patriarchal
ruling class to be the medieval “leper” who, as Foucault recounts in *Discipline and Punish,*
needed to be isolated. As a part of the system of control exerted over ghetto residents is linguistic in nature, Hip-hop’s self-descriptive usage of the word “gangsta” itself implies a cunning self-awareness of the negative terminologies regarding black males. The Scarface film simply allowed Hip-hop gangstas another self-referential benchmark in which the script that defined them could be flipped on its axis.

The film also provided an artistic, visual expression for the rage felt by these young men. Scarface, among its attributes, examples how cinema narratives become semiotic representations of an audience’s psychological make up. In this case the film, through its use of graphic ultraviolence, manifestations the profound rage felt by the Hip-hop male. According to Camara Harrell, a professor of psychology at Howard University, black Americans perform a mental response to racism, which is what constructed the ghetto panopticon’s reprehensible living conditions. Harrell calls this response “Manichean” psychology, a term he created from the significant work of renowned black psychiatrist Franz Fanon. Harrell explains the concept, submitting that

The total expression of modern racism creates a Manichean universe in which the oppressed are doomed to live out their lives. In his discussion of racism and psychopathology, Fanon used the term Manichean to describe the world of the colonized. In fact, the adherents of the teachings of Manicheaus in the third century A.D. saw an inherent conflict between light and darkness. The Manicheans conceived of blackness and things associated with it as evil. Whiteness, or light, became associated with good. It is not difficult to see how the Manichean order manifests itself along racial lines. People of African descent become associated with evil and inferiority.
Gender scholar Sharon R. Bird expresses the opinion that, because of hegemonic masculinity and its inherently competitive base, men are often incapable of expressing emotions for fear of being thought of as weak, a key outcome of the cool pose. One of the observations that can be made about Tony Montana is that he is very open about expressing his feelings but is not thought of by his audience as being weak. This is because, in addition to being demonstrative about his love for Elvira Hancock, he balances any tenderness he might exhibit with powerful displays of unvarnished rage. It is this rage, illustrated in Scarface by Tony’s ultraviolent acts, that Hip-hop male audiences found both stimulating and psychologically fulfilling because it connected to their daily lives.

A great number of other scholars have critiqued these circumstances and, accordingly, it is not the purpose of this study to fully engage the discourse of sociologists and philosophers who have shaped the parameters of that discourse. Nevertheless, the study does acknowledge the work of several key intellectuals. Among them is philosopher Tommie L. Lott. In his collection of essays on the constructions of race and class, The Invention of Race, Lott writes that

Black urban males have been depicted in mass media as the number-one criminal threat to America. The social and political function of mass media’s image of the so-called ‘underclass’ is to routinely validate this claim. The mass media’s labeling of black men as criminals serves in the consciousness of many whites as a justification of anti-black vigilantism.

Lott goes on to identify what he sees as the primary underlying factor contextualizing all black cultural resistance movements—poverty, and the powerlessness that accompanies this condition. Lott explains that
As long as black urban youth in extreme poverty neighborhoods see themselves trapped under America’s apartheid their cultural expressions will continue to exhibit elements of resistance.\textsuperscript{308}

I agree with Lott. The conditions of extreme poverty faced by black youth in our urban ghettos are creating warriors who oppose the status quo. Cornel West’s essay, “Nihilism in Black America,” echoes this sentiment. He writes

We must acknowledge that structures and behavior are inseparable, that institutions and values go hand in hand. \textit{How people act and live is shaped}—though in no way dictated or determined—\textit{by the larger circumstances in which they find themselves}” (my emphasis).\textsuperscript{309}

The Hip-hop male’s “larger circumstances,” the poverty and despair of his daily existence, certainly created the “elements of resistance” that Lott referred to. Scarface served as a visual symbol of the resistance of young black males attempting to survive the rough and tumble life within the ghetto territories. Elijah Anderson studied this existence brilliantly in his ethnographic tour de force, \textit{Code of the Streets}.\textsuperscript{310} The “code of the street” provided all residents of the ghetto, be they gang bangers, wannabes, or non-affiliated “civilians” alike, an extremely useful set of survival rules. Ethnologist Terry Williams, as was discovered by Anderson, also connected these rules to the harsh economic conditions ghetto residents are forced to live under. He offers that the residents thought of themselves as hostages in an ongoing war of attrition. Consequently, he writes, observers should

Keep in mind the effect of economic isolation on an inner city community. The increasingly popular view among minorities (and increasingly the majority) is that they, as poor people, are viewed by the larger society as superfluous and
expendable and that they are being killed off in a sort of triage operation, victims of a kind of low-intensity war.\textsuperscript{311}

Under these living conditions, young black males strategized to become predators, and not prey, within their subculture. As American University political scientist Clarence Lusane observed, “Street culture, with its masculinist dimensions on full throttle, criss-crosses the black community at a number of class and social levels.”\textsuperscript{312} Lusane goes on to point out that this “outlaw culture” has won the battle, between traditional moral values and a code that is in opposition to the rule of law, in the ghetto territories. The term “outlaw culture” has come to define gangsta ideology. Bell hooks, in fact, used it as a book title; other scholars, including black studies professor Mark Naison, have signified its cultural meaning through their own interpretive applications.\textsuperscript{313} For example Naison, in making an observation about black inner city your lawlessness cautions that

An outlaw culture has emerged among low-income black youth that has rejected African-American communal norms in favor of the predatory individualism of the capitalist marketplace. These youngsters living in neighborhoods bereft of resources and hope, have embraced a doctrine of ‘might makes right’ that converts everyone into a potential victim.\textsuperscript{314}

In addition to the commonly used description of “victims,” critics and scholars within the discourse have been fond of presenting language, among other terms, such as “outlaw culture” (Naison and bell hooks), “low-intensity war” (Terry Williams), “submerged tenth” (Du Bois), and “racial contract” (Charles Mills), to describe urban inner city ghetto residents and or their desperate conditions and experiences. This study’s own exegetical usages of “war zone,” “ghetto territories,” “oppression,” “police occupation,” and “white patriarchal tactics,” have suggested
that considering the ghetto as a geographical area in which ongoing martial combat occurs would prove to be as descriptive. By their own word choices, scholars appear to agree that there exists both outlaws and victims in the ghetto and that, moreover, residents are economically and socially adrift due to past and existing failures of private and public sector policy makers.315

Thus, the fuse, long at the ready since the riots of the nineteen sixties, was relit by a defiant gangsta Hip-hop population. Scarface, as this study has elucidated throughout, became the latest symbol of young black male rage. Hip-hop males of the gangsta lifestyle in effect decided to flip the script on what Roger Taney had proclaimed when he wrote the majority opinion in the Supreme Court’s Dred Scott decision.316 Since society apparently had turned its back on them, there was no law that they were bound to respect, except their own.

A Necessary Word that Meant Everything

In 1983 the “gangsta” was an attitude of cool defiance and self defense; at that point it had yet to become an actual spoken word, much less a socio-cultural signifying adjective. But even after fledgling Philadelphia rapper Schooly D lit the fuse in 1984 with “P.S.K,”317 his soon to be historic homemade rap recording that pioneered the use of “gangster” as a means for young black males to define their identities; it took another five years for “gangster” to transform into “gangsta,” its current and common vernacular usage.318 “Gangsta” was a perfect semantical intervention. The description succinctly epitomized both the inner city black male’s knowledge of his own historic economic disenfranchisement by the capitalist patriarchy320 and, as Jeff Chang described, symbolized the “righteous rage… (that) called for the rise of ghetto warriors in the mold of Nat Turner.”321

With an epochal intervention from DJ Ready Red in the winter of 1987, Hip-hop males began to fully embrace the gangsta identity.322 Decoding the film as a symbol for the angry
warrior within, Hip-hop males began to use the space created by the rap reference to “Balls and My Word” in Scarface as a common signifier, a mutually convenient communal reference point that allowed all similarly situated young men to acknowledge, through adherence, that a separate system of values, a warrior code if you will, existed. This code had proven to be historically indispensable to those seeking a fighting chance for survival in the ghetto’s of urban America.323

My analysis lead me to the conclusion that the Hip-hop males’ ongoing evaluation of Scarface included useful interpretations of the film’s semiotic representations, specifically those scenes in which Tony Montana’s loyalty to this system of values—a real life “code of honor” that ironically most audiences become familiar with through Mafia gangster films—was depicted.

We have seen this code at work in films such as Martin Scorsese’s Goodfellas, The Godfather films of Francis Ford Coppola, and in two recent HBO cable television series: The Sopranos and the gritty Baltimore based narco-drama The Wire. These narratives constructed a reservoir of information, some fictional and some factual, causing audiences to believe all gangsters were, at once, an army and a family—an interwoven collective of men that adhered to a code that appeared to incorporate both honor and justice as established business practices in criminal capitalism. But it is their belief in this system, because these young men see themselves as warriors in an unending conflict, which forms the foundation of Hip-hop male gangsta identity.324 Scarface’s Tony Montana would become the symbol of that identity. As an indication of an inherent pathology of nihilism, the Hip-hop male audience equates death as the inevitable conclusion to their journey towards identity. What Hip-hop males have done is understand Tony’s motivation—it parallels their own. As represented in the film Montana’s mantra of success by any means necessary excites the young male audience. This pleasure is received in part because their life experience of poverty naturally would result in fantasies that would focus
on gaining wealth and power. As suggested by Hall’s work on decoding, these desires were brought into the viewing by the audience as a part of their psychological make up.\textsuperscript{325}

These fantasies created a crucial space for negotiation and bonding as the audience’s desire, to be free from poverty and powerlessness, formed a relationship with those parts of the hero’s journey which best visualized consummations of that desire. According to apparatus theory,\textsuperscript{326} it was within this space that the formation of a long term emotional bond, between spectator and film, occurred. In film studies, apparatus theory seeks to explain the relationship between the text, its audience, and the influence of ancillary material circumstances, such as what events are occurring at the time the film is viewed and the emotions individual audience members bring to the viewing.\textsuperscript{327} Apparatus theory also informs the discourse on black masculinity in that it explains the great extent to which the black male audience is influenced during a film viewing by the depth of emotional circumstances that audience brings into the viewing. And while this is true for any film and every viewing, the experience is heightened when an audience senses that what it is seeing has already been experienced outside the viewing.

In the case of Scarface, the character of Tony Montana was the first opportunity for Hip-hop males gangstas to view their fantasy—the idealized symbolic representations of what they wanted to become. Despite being a work of fiction Scarface’s position within the cinematic apparatus allowed the male audience to see a spectacular version of their lives on the screen and, in doing so, gave Hip-hop gangstas the confidence to believe their fantasies could come true. The life or death struggles of young men in mortal combat on the streets allowed Scarface to become a Nietzschean philosophical metaphor for the ghetto bred male’s search for the perfected masculine street identity, one that would be cool enough, and tough enough, for the gangsta to survive. Scarface’s function as a role model would occur in large part to the luck of timing; the
film and gangsta rap first appeared at practically the same time and thus could they could mature together. This co-existing maturation is important to understanding the development of the gangster identity.

As real life warriors on a deadly urban battlefield, it would be safe to assume that the fantasies of these mortal men include a wish to be transformed into bulletproof invincible supermen. Given the ending scene in Scarface, when Montana withstands the effect of dozens of bullets from powerful automatic rifles, the fantasy image of his invincibility that is projected on the screen emerges as an ideal, but nevertheless faked, representation of an identity that is itself been overdetermined within the geographic space that urban warfare is conducted. Tony’s fictional heroic journey, which progressed through a hostile environment and overcame obstacle after obstacle before achieving success and an honorable death, reinforced long-standing dreams within urban males.

These fantasies went beyond being the fittest to survive, but converged upon a triumphant outcome, one in which seizing the “American dream” of money, power, and respect was actualized. These dual fantasies would reoccur frequently in the Scarface film. Furthermore, the money-power-respect focus was rendered even more powerful by the insufferable real life economic depravity being experienced by the young black Hip-hop males that comprised the audience. The possibility of achieving this troika of money, power, and respect was due to participation in selling drugs, specifically heroin and cocaine. Called by participants “The Game,” the sale of illegal drugs in the inner city has provided the most expeditious opportunity for a young man to provide economic relief for himself and his family. Tommie Lott agrees, writing that
To see the drug trade that has devastated so many black neighborhoods as anything other than illegitimate capitalists operating under the auspices of a multinational cartel is to blindly follow the hypocrisy of mass media’s racial hype. As an equal opportunity employer the drug business is an essential part of the infrastructure of black neighborhoods that have been wrecked by economic dislocation. From a mainstream perspective, the mere illegality of drug dealing is sufficient to warrant its condemnation, but that perspective is clearly influenced by the fact that those in the mainstream have access to options not available to black youth living in extreme poverty neighborhoods.328

Lott concludes by providing an observation that clearly is germane to the reception of Scarface and its connection to black masculinity.

There is a need to distinguish between the social conditions that induce black teenagers to get involved with drugs and the cultural practices they have developed to cope with their sense of oppression. Mainstream observers of black urban youth…overlook the fact that under the conditions of anarchy that prevail in most extreme poverty neighborhoods the role of law enforcement is quite dubious with regard to crime. Contrary to the prevailing mainstream perception, rap artists sometimes quite consciously recode mainstream values by employing so-called ‘negative images’ to communicate very powerful messages to each other about issues of self-respect.329

Lott’s observations are crucial to the critical analysis of Scarface’s influence on black Hip-hop gangsta manhood. The reaction to the film was, in many ways, as though a mantra was being recited to achieve great hypnotic effect. Sell drugs, make money. Sell drugs, gain power.
Sell drugs, get respect. Scarface’s hero, to use Lott’s contemplation, operates in the same world of anarchy as does the gangsta who, in symbolic terms, perfectly recodes the bedrock mainstream values of law and order to suit his purposes. Within this ghetto panopticon, where the rules of a prison are applied, what must be concluded is this—the gangsta audience, without the benefit of possessing scholarly critical close reading skills (but what they would likely retort is white folks’ film studies mumbo jumbo), completely understood that the narrative of the film was so subversive in nature that it required virtually no recoding at all. But at the bottom of this bowl of “mumbo jumbo” soup is the hearty meat of relevance.

The Gangsta Code

The term “Gangsta code” articulates the specific values that are common between Scarface and its Hip-hop male audience. It reflects a code of honor, one very similar to what audiences have become accustomed to seeing in Mafia crime films. An outcome of this research was a list of values was compiled, collated from the great body of scholarship that is available on contemporary black masculinity, which I felt addressed distinct behavioral traits and or practiced philosophies of the Hip-hop black males who comprised the most visible faction of the Scarface audience. In constructing the list of these “Gangsta code values” I reviewed scores of articles, books, and documentary films and utilized the thoughts and ideas of a core group of writers, scholars, filmmakers, and street gang participants. And while this review of the literature was comprehensive it was not exhaustive. The Gangsta Code provides a detailed intervention because it reveals what values are currently maintained (and have been historically maintained) by black men who reside in the inner city panopticons. These works include ethnographic studies, such as two previously referenced milestone works: by Elijah Anderson, Code of the Street: Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City, and the Richard Majors and Janet Mancini
Billson study on the inner city survival strategies of young black males, *Cool Pose: The Dilemmas of Black Manhood in America*.

Several non-academic interrogations of black manhood were found to be extremely useful, especially two recent documentary films: *Tough Guise: Violence, Media, and the Crisis in Masculinity*, written and produced by Jackson Katz, and Byron Hurt’s *Hip-hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes*. *Beyond Beats and Rhymes* is unique in that it was produced by a young black male from the Hip-hop generation who took great care to allow other Hip-hop aged black males a voice to tell their own stories. Hurt’s film also included interviews with scholars who have given focus to Hip-hop, including the prolific Michael Eric Dyson, who was quick to point out in the film that the gangsta lifestyle was part of a long tradition of violent behavior in America.

The process of conducting a close critical reading of *Scarface* included taking into consideration the abiding deep psychological connection the film has achieved with the Hip-hop male audience. Consequently, an analysis of each of the individual segments in the film was undertaken to determine why certain scenes resonated more than others. For example, the Geto Boys had recorded “Balls and My Word” based on DJ Ready Red being so impressed with Tony Montana’s reaction to adversity in the scene during which Sosa has Omar Suarez tortured and killed in Bolivia. Using this audience outcome as a model, my goals became to both select the other moments in the film that had achieved high levels of connection with the Hip-hop male audience and to determine why these connections had occurred in the first place. This process resulted in the successful cataloging of several scenes which evidenced exceptional cultural resonation between the Hip-hop male audience and the film.

Each of the scenes identified reveals two useful observations along the journey towards any potential breakthrough in understanding gangsta behavior. First, these scenes provide
semiotic and psychoanalytic representations of the values Hip-hop gangstas cherish. This is an
important distinction because young black males have been so negatively stereotyped that it
often becomes impossible to recognize that they do have values which they cleave to. Second, as
the film’s story progresses the Hip-hop gangsta audience realizes that their values are Tony
Montana’s values. 330

Elements Common to the Construction of Inner City Black Masculinity

Three values or behavioral traits appear to be dominant in the construction of inner city
black masculinity. They are:

1. The need to acquire respect.
2. The ability to be, or appear to be, tough, fearless and violent.
3. The performance of a persona based on contemporary notions of coolness.

The focus of this section of chapter five will be on a discussion involving how these three
elements determined the high level of resonation between Scarface and the Hip-hop male
audience and why this resonation translated into transforming the film into a cultural icon
symbolic of the identity construction within the ghetto panopticon.

Earlier in this chapter the root causes of gangsta behavior were identified. All of the
factors mentioned appeared as obvious as they had been persistent. The socio-economic
conditions inherent in ghetto life were adverse. The residents who lived there were trapped in a
prison without walls, restricted in movement by their lack of resources that would allow them to
move away. It was a territory occupied by the police, most of whom treated the residents like
inmates to be disrespected and bullied on a whim. The study likened this dismal existence to a
socio-economic and cultural version of the Foucauldian Panopticon. This unforgivingly
dangerous landscape causes its residents to employ various techniques and methods to insure
their survival. The long term acute state of poverty within the ghetto territories did foster self-hatred and other psychopathies amongst the victims. Grier and Cobbs offered perhaps the most precise evaluation of the effects of ghetto life on the black race when they asserted that

Black men have stood so long in such peculiar jeopardy in America that a black norm has developed—a suspiciousness of one’s environment which is necessary for survival. Black people, to a degree that approaches paranoia, must be ever alert to danger from their white fellow citizens. It is a cultural phenomenon peculiar to black Americans. And it is a posture so close to paranoid thinking that the mental disorder into which black people most frequently fall is paranoid psychosis. Can we say that white men have driven black men mad?331

The study has used a number of terms to describe the ghetto’s cultural, social, and economic condition including panopticon, war zone, and urban jungle. All of these descriptions are useful in contextualizing the Hip-hop portion of the Scarface audience. The Hip-hop male gangsta is forced to compose a working relationship with a hostile living environment controlled by an unsympathetic society. Gangsta behavior thus should be considered as a predictable outcome in that it adheres to a set of values which are a collective reaction to this malady. The Gangsta code simply identifies and documents these values.

The Gangsta code also connects Scarface to everyday heteronormative cultural expectations. As evidenced by the agreement amongst the most prominent of the film studies reception theorists,332 the result of these narrative repetitions is that the representations of the Gangsta Code within Scarface provides instruction for (and reinforcement of) values necessary to the ongoing survival of the Hip-hop male audience once they leave the viewing experience. This audience, due to serious shortcomings in their long term emotional development, is seeking
life advice, including emotionally positive encouragement not unlike that sought by a son of a father. What is so curious about this set of circumstances is that a film written, produced, and performed by white men, who because of their lack of any meaningful relationships with ghetto residents should be viewed as inauthentic, acts as a central and trusted source for this information.

An Elaboration of the Gangsta Values

Value #1. Respect

- Treat power and authority with contempt
- Limit giving respect. Be loyal until it is time not to be.

The ultimate goal of the gangsta is to command respect. Respect is a necessary psychological attitude that must be maintained at every step along the gangsta’s come up—the heroic journey of the Hip-hop male. The heroic journey is a familiar tale of “becoming” in film semiotics. We have experienced Michael Corleone’s rise from indifference to becoming the new mafia boss of bosses; Rocky Balboa bucking all odds and becoming the heavyweight boxing champion of the world; Luke Skywalker’s hesitation on his journey towards becoming a Jedi; and Trey Stiles achieving a black manhood not based on violence and death in Boyz N the Hood. Euro-masculine values are skewed in favor of gaining a reputation based on fear and respect and, consequently, the Hip-hop gangsta male is compelled to command and demand respect through reputation.

Majors and Billson observe that “pride, dignity, and respect hold such a high premium for black men that many are willing to risk anything for it, even their lives.” Part of how reputation is achieved is through the come up process, through which money and power is accumulated. Ghetto males (and they are no different than any other group of poor males) are
motivated to one day come out of poverty. They also surely harbor the fantasy to achieve the millionaire lifestyle, obtaining the power and respect that comes with having money in a capitalist society. A second means of guaranteeing respect is violence or the threat of violence. This means dressing in a manner that implies a potential threat, exhibiting physical postures that convey strength, learning defensive skills, or having a weapon handy. White and Cones relate that there exists among young black men a “pathological obsession with acquiring and maintaining respect.” This reflects the consensus of scholars and observers.

Of all of the texts reviewed in preparation for a discussion of the underlying reasons which might explain not only why Hip-hop gangstas behave as they do, but also the rationale behind why they would feel compelled to emulate a fiction, Elijah Anderson’s Code of the Street proved to be the greater of equals that were essential to this study. Anderson, a sociologist, has been researching and writing about the conditions of urban blacks for forty years. Code of the Street provided this study with both a theoretical foundation for understanding the sociological models of culture at stake when contending with black masculine paradigms and a valuable ethnographic confirmation which independently corroborated a major contention of my research: that there are, in fact, extralegal rules which govern street politics in the always exigent urban environment.

Extra-legality is central to Anderson’s work. At the heart of the street code he has identified is a sense of honor and justice that the white patriarchal legal system often fails to provide in the ghetto. Anderson observes that

In some of the most economically depressed and drug- and crime-ridden pockets of the city, the rules of civil law have been severely weakened, and in their stead a ‘code of the street’ often holds sway. At the heart of this code is a set of
prescriptions and proscriptions, or informal rules, of behavior organized around a desperate search for respect that governs public social relations, especially violence, among so many residents, particularly young men and women. Possession of respect—and the credible threat of vengeance—is highly valued for shielding the ordinary person from the interpersonal violence of the street. In this social context of persistence poverty and deprivation, alienation from society’s broader institutions, notably that of criminal justice, is widespread. The code of the street emerges where the influence of the police ends and personal responsibility for one’s safety is felt to begin, resulting in a “people’s law,” based on “street justice.”

Anderson, continuing, wrote that his work “

Offers an ethnographic representation of the code of the street, and its relationship to violence in a trying socioeconomic context in which family-sustaining jobs have become ever more scarce…racial discrimination is a fact of daily life, wider institutions have less legitimacy, legal codes are often ignored or not trusted, and frustration has been powerfully building."

Anderson’s work is extremely valuable to this study because in the same manner that he provides an “ethnographic representation of the code of the street,” Scarface provides a similar semiotic representation of this same code. At the heart of the code is the issue of acquiring respect. In fact, respect, specifically the lack thereof not afforded to Tony Montana, is a central and narratively unifying theme among the Hip-hop male audience.

Anderson calls this philosophical demeanor a “campaign for respect” and, in doing so, his evaluation of these negotiations between the mostly young, black, and Hip-hop aged males
starts to lay out the rationale for the specific elements of the code of the street and, inadvertently, the Gangsta code of the Scarface audience. He points out that

In the inner-city environment respect on the street may be viewed as a form of social capital that is very valuable. Not only is it protective; it often forms the core of the person’s self-esteem, particularly when alternative avenues of self-expression are closed. Given its value and its practical implications, respect is fought for and held and challenged as much as honor was in the age of chivalry.340

Here Anderson explains not only why respect is important, that may be obvious on the surface without the benefit of additional thought. However, it is his introduction of the concept of ghetto honor and the equating of that honor with the “core of the person’s self-esteem” which facilitates an understanding of what is at stake on each occurrence the Hip-hop male audience views Scarface. In the eyes of the Hip-hop male living within the code of the street, Tony Montana is decoded as having fearlessly mastered how to acquire respect under the most trying of circumstances. To them, this is the most important issue needing resolution and, when Hip-hop males see Montana conquer the forces brought to bear against him, he becomes their patron saint and heroic role model. Thus, the representations that make clear Montana’s predilection for violence are those which garner him respect, not only in the film’s narrative but in the eyes of his audience.

**Value #2. Toughness—Fearlessness**

- Be tough. Meet any challenge using violence.

- Never show any weaknesses, especially fear.

- Get your enemies before they get you
Owning respect is crucial in avoiding potential disaster. Being tough by meeting any challenge, and a willingness to employ violence if necessary, is central to the thinking of the inner city Hip-hop male’s need to be perceived as a man. The urban gangsta male values the idea that, as someone living in the ghetto panopticon’s war zone, every day is uncertain. Given this dangerous environment being in fear would be a natural response. However, the Hip-hop male rationalizes such fears must be repressed. His strategy is to adopt an attitude of fearlessness to insure that he may be able to survive as long as possible. Anderson concurs, writing that

Central to the issue of manhood is the widespread belief that one of the most effective ways of gaining respect is to manifest nerve. A man shows nerve by taking another’s possessions, messing with someone’s woman, throwing the first punch, getting in someone’s face, or pulling a trigger. True nerve expresses a lack of fear of death. Many feel that it is acceptable to risk dying over issues of respect. Among the hard-core street-oriented, the clear risk of violent death may be preferable to being dissed.341

“When you think about American society,” commented Michael Eric Dyson in Hurt’s Beats and Rhymes film, “the notion of violent masculinity is at the heart of American identity.”342

Dyson defines this “notion of violent masculinity” as being central to American identity. He is not alone in this assessment. In fact violence, aggression, and other forms of physical assertiveness have so deeply ingrained themselves in our collective American psyche that the vast majority of scholars and practitioners within the discourse on black masculinity agreed that violent behavior was the most prevalent of all expected male traits, regardless of race.343 Given that American males, whether native born, immigrates, or kidnapping and brought here by the
slave industry, have all been indoctrinated and or subjugated by European ideology, this expectation should come as no surprise. The white patriarchal values that serve as the psychological foundation of the United States have also educated the masses under its hegemony to place great cultural annulment upon the word “black.” As “black” is unpropitiously equated with immorality, evil, misfortune, and in egregious opposition to whiteness, black manhood has been virtually synonymous with all of the negative connotations associated with violence based masculinity, despite the fact that violent behavior is most often associated with male heroism, justice, and the American way of life.

In his 2003 article critiquing Tupac Shakur’s construction of his hyper-masculine public persona, cultural identity scholar Derek Iwamoto wrote that

The most significant and often overlooked factor that perpetuates and reinforces extremely violent and competitive behavior is the way that the American culture defines and lionizes masculinity. A ‘real’ man should be tough, aggressive, daring, and have physical strength.

Recognizing that young black males have accepted this mythology is a focus of Beats and Rhymes. The filmmaker’s ethnographic documentary style allows for his Hip-hop male subjects to talk about the respect that money brings, acting tough on the streets, and the constant fear of being considered possessing those traits in opposition to traditional manhood. At one point a subject claims that the alternative to projecting these traits is to called “soft, weak, a pussy, chump, or a faggot.” Hurt’s film offered compelling representations which suggested that, in addition to being trapped within the ghetto panopticon, the Hip-hop male is also confined within the psychological prison constructed from white male heteronormative concepts of masculinity. Likewise, the theme of Jackson Katz’s “instructional” film, Tough Guise, which is geared
towards assisting in-school middle and high school programs, focuses on problematizing male fixations with violence and toughness. Ditto bell hooks, who wrote in *We Real Cool*, her critique of black masculinity, that “violence is necessary to maintain the status quo. Mainstream white culture requires and rewards black man for acting brutally.” The vast majority of the considerable body of work on black masculinity points to the incontrovertible, and disturbing, conclusion that European standards of masculinity and those of black American masculinity are, in fact, one and the same.

Social and cultural historians Joseph White and James Cones discuss this further in *Black Man Emerging*, citing social psychologists Doyle and Paludi who, according to White and Cones, list five aspects of white patriarchal masculinity. Doyle and Paludi concluded that

Real men are in control. Men should compete and win against other men at work and in sports. Making lots of money, having a high-status job, and driving an expensive car are important. Men are expected to go after what they want and...defend themselves aggressively against threats and are capable of using physical and verbal violence. Real men do not act life soft, gentle, tender females. Men should be the initiators of sexual behavior. Women are valued as objects of physical beauty and displayed as symbols of conquest.

Anderson adds several useful points that are germane to the toughness discussion and its resonance connecting the Hip-hop male audience and Scarface. He observes that

The despair, the alienation, and the distress...encourages the development and spread of oppositional culture. For those living according to the rules of that culture, it becomes important to be tough, to act as though one is beyond the reach of lawful authority. Unconventional symbols have been taken over by people who
have made them into status symbols, but they are status symbols to the extent that they go against what is conventional.\textsuperscript{350}

Each of these expectations comprise the primary thematic spine to the vast majority of Hollywood film and television narratives; the prescribed “manly” actions performed in these scripts cross every genre to serve as the psychological and spiritual foundations for fictional civilizations, both on earth and throughout the entire universe. The gangster, because of his violent environment, is particularly susceptible to this paradigm, with Scarface’s Tony Montana performing a particularly cogent hyper-masculine version. Greg Dimitriadis, in one of the few scholarly connections between the film, masculine identity construction, and Hip-hop culture made prior to this study, recalls that “films like Scarface were wholly embraced by many rappers during this period of time and much dialogue…wound up on rap albums.”\textsuperscript{351} Rap music’s commercial appeal exploded with the development of the gangsta rap sub-genre as rappers, encouraged by the corporate conglomerates that signed them, continued the proliferation of the negative cultural meanings of blackness. Rappers who decided to own Montana’s hyper-masculine violent persona included Brad “Scarface” Jordan and Tupac Shakur who, arguably more than any other Hip-hop public personality, absorbed the cool, tough, and aggressive behavioral traits of western white masculine behavior only to exude them as black gangsta manhood.

This is exactly the stuff of what makes the Scarface dream both so appealing and concretely influential. What Scarface achieves is, therefore, a synthesis of a great number of the visual cues which illustrates the exact points made by Anderson. The focus of the film, a successful come up by an underclass hero, glamorizes the inadequacy of the regular economy (the dishwashing job), the violence of the drug trade, and the imperatives of acting tough,
vengeful, and fearless on the street. In fact, being or appearing to be **fearless** is yet another trait indispensable to both toughness and violence. Anderson underscores this idea writing that

Central to the issue of manhood is the widespread belief that one of the most effective ways of gaining respect is to manifest nerve. A man shows nerve by taking another’s possessions, messing with someone’s woman, throwing the first punch, getting in someone’s face, or pulling a trigger. True nerve expresses a lack of fear of death. Many feel that it is acceptable to risk dying over issues of respect. Among the hard-core street-oriented, the clear risk of violent death may be preferable to being dissed.352

Thus, whether the male is actually afraid or not is inconsequential, he only need to act unafraid.

Value #3. Coolness

- *Exhibiting a cool exterior masks any weaknesses.*

Iwamoto’s musing on Tupac Shakur effectively ratcheted up the behavioral performances of black men to a level he termed “hyper-masculine.” He wrote that

Understandably, young men of color often enter into hyper-masculine behaviors to combat the degrading effects of racism on their self-esteem. There is great pressure to conform to the limited masculine ideals provided by the cultural media. Moreover, due to poverty and neglect, black youth are often deprived of and underexposed to cultural influence that differ from those of the mass media, which often negatively or one-dimensionally depict black men as villains, murderers, and gang members. Given the fact that the media provide minorities only minimal and stereotypical representations of males, many minority youth
exaggerate these hyper-masculine characteristics in their public personae, in order to prove themselves and be respected by their peers. Tupac, as well as many other young urban youth, adopted what Richard Majors and Janet Billson have termed the “Cool Pose.”

Acting cool is a skill that must be perfected by Hip-hop males who wish to be successful on the street. And while Anderson does not discuss the cool pose directly in *Code of the Streets,* a great number of scholars in the discourse on black masculinity give due recognition to its cultural significance. In his article “The Economic Plight of Inner-City Black Males,” noted sociologist William Julius Wilson recognized cool pose behavior as being part of a system of “attitudinal and other cultural traits linked to the (employment) opportunity structure.” Wilson relates the story of a student of a colleague who, upon visiting her old high school, discovered that

All of the black boys were fully aware of the consequences of failing to graduate from high school and go on to college. Their preference was for the ‘cool pose culture,’…which they found too fulfilling to give up. For these young men it was almost like a drug, hanging out on the street after school,…hip-hop music and culture.

The colleague, Orlando Patterson, observed that the cool pose culture was now “fully normative and that men act in accordance with these models whenever they can.” The cool pose is a mechanism of self-defense, not unlike a poker face. It provides a layer of doubt above the truth of the male’s emotions. Moreover, as White and Cones discern, “cool pose is likely to be an effective coping strategy. Cool pose can boost morale and invigorate an otherwise bleak life.” Iwamoto, referencing the work by White and Cones, thought they presented a strong
case (and I concur) that the cool pose was a coping mechanism to combat racial oppression, besides a way of validating one’s manhood. Tupac Shakur’s public lifestyle evidences this theory. The cool presentations of “the gangster or mob images were one of the main cultural-media influences on the formation of Tupac’s identity,” Iwamoto writes. “Many rappers…took on the glamorized gangsta/mobster delineation of The Godfather series and other mafia movies.” Curiously, Iwamoto’s article does not mention Scarface, despite the fact that by the time Tupac had become a star Pacino’s film was firmly established as Hip-hop’s most relevant influence on the gangsta lifestyle.

While Anderson’s study does not address the issue of street cool directly, other scholars do, and with mixed reactions to the performances of coolness. Black feminist scholar Marlene Kim Connor, approaching coolness from a historical context, wrote about the behavior as being an outcome of slavery. “It became essential to survival itself for these African-American males to remain outwardly calm while watching their women raped and beaten,” she wrote. “The captives had to condition themselves to remain impassive, to mask their emotions, to internalize their anger.”

Fast forwarding into the new millennium bell hooks, who has provided blistering criticisms of the Hip-hop approach to manhood, unambiguously announced in We Real Cool that, in the age of the gangsta, acting cool was now a fraud. But Connor appears a bit more understanding. She observed that “a man’s ability to defend himself is at the very core of cool. Conveying this ability becomes a combination of appearance and attitude; thus the symbols of cool…must convey that you are down, you know what’s happening.”

One of the very first opinions Connor offers in 1994’s What is Cool is a provocative one: “Cool is perhaps the most important force in the life of a Black man in America. Cool is the closest thing to a religion to him, and it is easily his most basic method of determining manhood.
Cool…is a life style.” Cool was, in fact transformed from practice into theory, by psychologists Majors and Billson in 1992. Their work, along with Anderson’s code of the street and the aforementioned behavioral elements advanced by other key participants in the discourse on black masculinity, allows for the cultural meaning of Scarface to be revealed as a hyper-masculine, violence based fantasy which symbolizes the Hip-hop gangsta’s notion of an idealized masculinity.

The Cool Pose

From a film studies perspective, cool pose behavior is nothing new. The fact is, cool posing is one of the foundational acts of heroic masculinity that can be seen on screen. Humphrey Bogart, Marlon Brando, James Dean, Clark Gable, Clint Eastwood, and Steve McQueen are but a few examples of the hundreds available. In fact, other than infliction of pain through violence, the perception of being cool is probably the most consistent of male behaviors in film. In real life, the cool pose is a theory of psychology which catalogs certain types of observable behavior patterns performed by black males, most of whom live in the inner city. As the study has discussed, there are a wide range of scholars and practitioners who inform the black masculinity discourse, and within that group there are a significant number of men and women who have branched out to engage in discussions specific to Hip-hop masculinity. For the purposes of this study the cool pose theory provides an ethnographic based socio-psychological profile of the Hip-hop audience. Therefore it may be used to understand the viewership of Scarface over the years. Moreover, the cool pose proves to be an extremely useful tool in identifying those key moments in Scarface that resonated at a highest level of influence for the Hip-hop spectator. While Mahalik, Pierre, and Woodland argued that black males tended to
“focus primarily on …aggressive assertion of masculinity,” they recognized being cool as a necessary strategy for street survival, writing that the Cool Pose is a Coping strategy that entails behaviors, scripts, physical posturing, impression management, and carefully crafted performance. The goals of cool pose are social competence, pride in self, and protections. It is one way of…adapting to environmental circumstance.

The three scholars deliver a useful report on the status of black masculinity which acknowledges that black men are expected to conform to the dominant culture’s gender role expectations—success in a competitive environment, and a predilection towards aggression, especially the use of violence. Within this paradigm is a system of “cool,” according Connor, who adds “cool is a system for many young black men. Street cool is one level, one mode. It…still influences our daily lives, no matter who we are, where we go, or what we do.”

Psychiatrists Grier and Cobbs, in Black Rage, offer convincing evidence that, despite performances of overt coolness, rage drives this particular black male behavior. As a result cool behavior is characterized as being a symptom of mass mental illness amongst black men. In several of the evidentiary case studies that Grier and Cobbs present the cool pose (called “playing it cool” by the authors) is alluded to. The psychiatrists observe cool as “the ability to divorce oneself emotionally from an object,” a behavior that “is necessary for survival.” In another example, they speak about

Playing it cool. A man may be overwhelmed with conflict, threatened with an eruption of feelings, and barely maintaining his composure, but he will present a serene exterior. For the black man it is socially…important that the façade be maintained.
Unlike Grier and Cobbs, Richard Majors and Janet Mancini Billson do not appear to consider acting cool as a symptom of a mass mental illness. The authors of *Cool Pose: The Dilemmas of Black Manhood in America* are found to be more in agreement with Elijah Anderson, whose finding was that the primary core value of Hip-hop males is the need for respect, and that the behavior that most insures respect is acting cool. Further, Majors and Billson’s, (and Anderson’s) rationale for coolness is that this behavior is the best way to survive in an unforgivingly dangerous environment. Thus the cool pose not only “renders the black male visible and empowers him” but at the same time is an “ego booster comparable to the kind white males more easily find through attending good schools, landing prestigious jobs, and bringing home decent wages.”

Continuing, Majors and Billson add that the cool pose is constructed from attitudes and actions that become firmly entrenched in the black male’s psyche as he adopts a façade to ward off the anxiety of second class status. It provides a mask that suggests competence, high self-esteem, control, and inner strength.

Due to the existing evidence of the fan based ennoblement of Scarface within the popular culture discourse (as was discussed in chapter three), this study builds upon the work of Anderson, and Majors and Billson, utilizing their research to re-examine the gangsta identity and how it became omnipresent within black youth culture.

One Additional Value: Street Smarts

In order to survive the gangsta must also learn street smarts. Being poor, circumstances have already dictated that the Hip-hop male’s journey towards freedom (the “come up”) will be fraught with peril. He must come up by doing whatever it takes to earn money (“get paid”) so that he may survive, and hopefully thrive, economically. On-the-street experience is valued over
education because book knowledge is deemed not useful and most young men, given the dire financial circumstances in their families, feel that they cannot wait to obtain even a high school diploma. Robert Staples, representing the thoughts of other scholars of the black masculinity discourse, also made it clear that the acquisition of wealth was of paramount importance to young black men. Queens Reign Supreme, Ethan Brown’s book length investigative study on the connection between the rap music industry and drug distribution in and around Queens, New York, echoes these sentiments.

Given chronically high unemployment rates among young black men, and their propensity to not accept minimum wage jobs, the inner city male must use his street smarts to secure income, called “getting paid.” This would include various “hustles” (minor scams, off-the-books odd jobs, petty thefts) and the temptation of selling drugs. Anderson makes two important observations about this set of circumstances. First, he notes that “the attraction of the violence-prone drug trade results from a combination of inadequate opportunity in the regular economy, on the one hand, and the imperatives of street life, on the other.” Second, “the drug trade,” says Anderson, “is the most lucrative and most accessible element of an underground economy and has become a way of life in numerous inner-city communities. Many youngsters dream of leading the drug dealer’s life, or at least their highly glamorized conceptions of this life.” This returns us to the primary work product of the research undertaken in this chapter, the construction of the Gangsta Code and its practical application to the Scarface film.

Applying the Learnings of the Gangsta Code to a Close Reading of Scarface

The Gangsta code functions as a compilation of those masculine qualities that black Hip-hop males feel are of greatest consequence to them. The Code also serves to amalgamate the consensus reached by scholars and practitioners within the discourse on Hip-hop black
masculinity. Further, the Code unlocks the psychological rationale that explains the high level of
resonation between the film and gangsta masculinity. As they take in the Hollywood spectacle of
the nearly three hour film, the Hip-hop male audience comes to believe that, as they watch a man
much like themselves in word and deed, their way of life is valid. Laura Mulvey’s highly
influential psychoanalytical feminist treatise on spectatorship, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative
Cinema,” informed reception theory in 1975 that the male spectator “identifies with the main
male protagonist” and projects himself onto the actions of his screen surrogate, receiving
pleasure from this act.” 378 And while she did not write this observation with Scarface in mind,
her concept perfectly describes the audience’s reception. But my analysis of the Scarface
phenomenon diverts from Mulvey’s claim that “man is reluctant to gaze at his exhibitionist
like.”379 On the contrary, given the Hip-hop male’s predilection for self-aggrandizement in
accoutrements and jewelry, Mulvey’s observation appears decidedly Euro-patriarchal.380

About a year earlier, in 1974, the work of French semiotic theorist Christian Metz was
being translated.381 Metz’s The Imaginary Signifier focused on the integration of psychoanalysis
and semiology. Metz is useful in clarifying just how intense the spectator experience was for
Hip-hop males. Moreover, he supports my contention that the male gaze drives the obsession hip
holds for Scarface. What is certain is that Hip-hop males love looking at themselves, and Metz
suggests that this is exactly what occurs during the Lacanian mirror phase of identity
formation.382 However, this is admittedly made problematic given that Hip-hop black males are
looking at Al Pacino, a white male in dark make-up.

It is critical to the success of any commercial film that the audience checks its belief in
reality at the door. However, in the case of Scarface, despite the films obvious flaws (such as the
lack of any reference to black Miamians), the black Hip-hop audience believes that the film is
authentic. Specifically the details of street life and the life or death decisions that have to be addressed and resolved is one, of several, reasons that Scarface is placed in significantly higher regard when compared to other film narratives of masculine achievement. Another reason is that the film offers a surrealistic fantasy ending, one that is accepted by the audience as romantically nihilistic. Scarface’s Tony Montana, a drug dealing Cinderella plucked from obscurity by luck, makes his own glass slipper, and then dies an honorable death defending both the Code and his home. What proves most important to Hip-hop audiences is that Montana is a rebellious figure that has his own set of rules—his code often is in conflict with his two mentors. It is Tony’s personal code which gangstas eventually signify has being a mirror of their own.

Former Los Angeles Crips gang assassin Sanyika Shakur (who was formerly known as “Monster” Kody Scott) is one such example of a gangsta who offers insight into how Tony Montana’s behavior connects with the street. Shakur confirms in his bestselling autobiography Monster that inner city black males of the Hip-hop generation live in neighborhoods that are no less than fiercely contested war zones. The life of Mr. Shakur is a guided tour through the battlefield hell that is South Central Los Angeles. He makes it abundantly clear that a street code of honor does exist and that it functions because young men are at war—with each other. On the very first page of his book Scott observes that Staccato vibrations of automatic gunfire crack throughout the night…there is troop movement…and in some areas the fighting is intense. The soldiers are engaged in a “civil war.” A war without terms. A war fought by any means necessary, with anything at their disposal.

Shakur then goes on to verify his authenticity, writing that
On April 29, 1992, the world witnessed the eruption of south Central Los Angeles, the concrete jungle battlefield of the Crips and Bloods. All this began on Florence and Normandie in South Central, the latest Third World battlefield. I am a gang expert—period. There are no other gang experts except participants. Our live, mores, customs, and philosophies remain…mysterious and untouched.\textsuperscript{386}

Given his background, I trust Shakur’s observations. When he calls the ghetto a place for a “war without terms” he should be taken at his word. Later in his book when Shakur speaks of how he learned of the street code of L.A., calling it “the three stages of reputation,”\textsuperscript{387} he helps answer one of central questions posed by this research project: why does the Hip-hop audience resonate with Scarface? Because it is the common experience of ghetto Hip-hop males to live in the midst of urban warfare that rages within the panoptic prison, Scarface, once its narrative thread is read as a visual representation of the same code gangstas hold in highest regard, forcefully connects at the deepest psychological level, with the Hip-hop male audience.

Moving Forward with a Critical Analysis: A Resonation Equation

Pacino’s gangster persona, earned through his stellar performances as Michael Corleone, certainly factored into the connectivity. However, Hip-hop males appeared to have looked beyond the superficiality of being impressed with Pacino’s former role and instead, mostly because Corleone was a white, upper class male, focused on other deeper psychological similarities. The claim I presented at the beginning of this study was that the “film’s hero is from the same economic class that they are” (‘they’ being the Hip-hop audience). The research conducted certainly has expanded this thinking. It appears now that my original hypothesis was only one part of a more complex set of circumstances. For one thing, Tony Montana certainly exhibits other commonalities that bear heavily on his resonance with Hip-hop males. While his
status, as a penniless just off the boat from Cuba immigrant, does place him squarely in the same lowest economic class as his primarily audience, the imagery we see prior to meeting Tony is useful in bringing to light another important, albeit obvious, factor: Tony is not an Anglo white male. And beyond that it is Montana’s personality and behavioral traits which appear to outweigh class and race factors.

An example of this observation is contained in Scarface’s opening sequence. As the credits roll to start the film actual documentary footage of the Marielito flotilla brings to mind the Diaspora of the mid-Atlantic slave trade because Cuba’s sugar plantations were a final destination for thousands of the kidnapped Africans. Admittedly Montana is not quite the authentic representative of the slave trade for African-Americans but his non-whiteness allows him access to a space where the character may begin to gain the trust of all black audience members. Therefore, Montana’s identity, as a non-white immigrant, places his Otherness at the center of the narrative, even before we see him. But beyond race and class lies the issue of common values, an orientation to which audiences will gain access to immediately when they view Montana’s status as a man of color being detained for questioning by white male authorities, who in ordering the character’s arrest, quickly remove Pacino’s whiteness and place it squarely within the black male incarceral experience. At that very moment a direct psychological connection was made between the Hip-hop male street experience and any future actions taken to be taken by Tony Montana during his come up journey.

The relationship blossomed because of values shared between the film’s spectators and the main character, Tony Montana. The study wants to be very clear that the resonation that exists between street styled anti-heroes and inner city audiences is not a new concept, having first appeared en masse during Blaxploitation’s heyday. What is new is how Scarface reverses
this paradigm by its replacement—of black characters, black actors, and black action themes—with white actors portraying characters of color (a blackface lite, if you will) in a film that offers no black representations but still manages to be completely accepted by a large segment of the black audience. This latter point is one of the reasons that make the Scarface audience reception by Hip-hop so intriguing.

Thus, my theory on how the film, lacking any overt black representations whatsoever, managed to resonate so completely with its predominately black and male inner city Hip-hop audience is based on an observation from the film—the Hip-hop male audience shares with Tony Montana the same economically disadvantaged background and the same gangsta ethical code, and the same dreams for success. Montana, through the script written by Oliver Stone, provided convincing evidence that he lived the code on his come up journey. Whether Stone was imbued with some special knowledge of the street or just had a moment of simple dumb luck is inconsequential. Montana resonated with Hip-hop males on a remarkably intense psychological level. My *resonation equation*, attempts to clarify, possibly even quantify, the hypothesis I offered in response to my first central research question. That question was: why does the Hip-hop audience relate to *Scarface*? The responding hypothesis that I advanced in chapter one was as follows:

*The film’s hero is from the same economic class that they (Hip-hop males) are and demonstrates that he shares the same values as they do. His triumph is their triumph, even unto death.*

Thus my “resonation equation” seeks to quantify my hypothesis.

*Audience acceptance of the film’s fantasy presentation (Montana’s successful come up journey) + the film’s reinforcement of spectator reality (the existing street code of honor*
The character of Tony Montana is a living manifestation of the ghetto panopticon’s own Samurai-like code of honor. We may conclude that one major factor contributing to the resonation between Scarface and Hip-hop gangsta males is the similarity between the Gangsta code of honor employed by Montana and that employed by his audience. This hypothesis will be elaborated upon in chapters six and seven.

Connecting Each Drop of Blood

The two concluding chapters discuss each of the crucial scenes that connect the film, the audience, and the gangsta values both espouse. In these scenes Tony Montana performs one or more of the core values, identified in the gangsta code, that are adhered to by Hip-hop’s street warriors and hustlers. I relied heavily on the recollections of legendary gang members Sanyika Shakur (the former gang assassin “Monster” Kody Scott) and Stanley “Tookie” Williams, founder of the notorious Crips gang. Montana’s performance of these values was received by the Hip-hop male audience as a symbolic representation of their circumstances and, as such, the film influenced the construction of the gangsta identity. Throughout the film Tony Montana’s decision making, body movements, and verbal utterances depict all of the core values of the gangsta.

Having placed the film within its historical, socio-economic, and cultural contexts, and through the presentation by Hip-hop participants that the film was a visual confirmation of an existing street code of conduct, the study will now proceed to identify exactly which scenes most likely participated in the construction of gangsta identity. I have previously discussed the twenty years of influence the film has had on Hip-hop culture in general, in particular the concept of a
Scarface “philosophy” on life, developed beginning with the “ground zero” moment, DJ Ready Red’s 1988 sampling of the “balls and my word” line of dialogue from the film.

The discussion has also considered several psychological factors which provided the elements of resonation connecting Hip-hop male audiences to the film and concluded the attraction is due to spectator perception that Tony Montana’s performance of street toughness is both authentic and cool—and this because not to think that would be to invalidate their own perceptions of themselves. Lastly, there is the factor of good ol’ dumb luck. The timing of the release of Scarface inadvertently coincided with the development of an emerging and, in the view of many in society, disturbing occurrence—the beginnings of a public, almost romantic, glorification of the urban street gang culture by not only gang members themselves, but from the entertainment industry. The selection of the scenes deemed most influential considered all of these factors.390

Moreover, a discussion of those scenes which serve to connect Montana to his Hip-hop gangsta fan base will advance my idea that the psychological influence of the film on these young men is rooted firmly in the reception of the visual performance of the gangsta code. To determine which scenes best perform this task I will point out what behaviors or traits Montana exhibited in these scenes that caused Hip-hop males to connect their value system with that of the character’s and why the connection resonated. I have chosen only those scenes which appear to decisively follow the code of urban street behavior that has been referred to and followed by authentic criminals (i.e. gang bangers) referred to in this study.

And while the code may have been expressed by these criminals in various shades of difference, they still express a consensus of opinion, one that has been alluded to by Hip-hop rappers in various interviews and articles also previously referred to in this study. I will then
focus on where the street code was performed in the film so as to evidence the significance of how *codified common values* became the connecting point between authentic Hip-hop masculinity and fictional bravado. The focus of chapter six will be to deconstruct the key scenes in the film so as to gain a specific understanding of how Tony Montana facilitated the film’s assistance in the construction of the gangsta identity.
CHAPTER SEVEN

GANGSTA PERFORMANCE AND MEDIA ROLE PLAYING

All along the watchtower, princes kept the view.
Bob Dylan

Mario Puzo’s 1969 novel, *The Godfather*, begins with the epigram “behind every great fortune is a great crime,” a sly criticism of capitalism that the author attributed to the French novelist Honoré de Balzac. We should know enough about the troubled social and political histories of the United States to believe this observation has a ring of truth to it. Consequently, the gangster film’s raison d’être—capitalist power usually achieved by murder and betrayal—has allowed audiences to savor criminal activities in the comforting darkness of a movie theater before they return home to real life crime, served up courtesy of CNN. It is the savoir faire of Bonnie and Clyde, Vito Corleone, Rico Bandello, and Butch Cassidy, characters who took what they wanted from whomever they pleased, that provides the spectacle of attraction. With Scarface, that spectacle is provided by Pacino’s Montana. He is a celebration, to reverse Spike Lee’s admonition, of people doing the wrong thing.

Chapter five introduced the “Gangsta code,” a term invented by this study. The Gangsta code combined Hip-hop’s most defiant word with my attempt to bring Anderson’s “code of the streets” nomenclature face-to-face with a Hip-hop generation he chooses to not recognize by name. While firmly based upon Anderson’s work, The Gangsta code should, nevertheless, be viewed as distinct from it. One difference is that my research offers an in-depth discussion of the role media plays in determining real life decision-making. Another is that this study has identified Scarface as a text that has been interpreted by Hip-hop males as both their master narrative and the overarching symbol for that generation’s underclass, an audience which, given
the proliferation of violence based media they have created to represent themselves, has chosen
to vigorously oppose the tenets of white patriarchy in every available venue—even as the
capitalist arm of that patriarchy exploits Hip-hop for profit. Finally, one other key element of
differentiation is that the study has identified Tony Montana as Hip-hop’s common reference
point within this symbolic cultural moment. His character’s defiant contempt for power and
authority connected to the rage felt in the urban geographic panopticon that Anderson has studied
over the years.

What may be discerned from this connection is that Pacino’s performance in Scarface
offers an opportunity to determine which moments in the film provide the highest influence upon
gangsta identity construction. In this chapter, and in first half of chapter seven, this study
identifies, for the first time, those scenes from which the gangsta gained his inspiration. As will
be discussed the scenes that exerted the most influence on gangsta identity construction are those
that manifested the highest concentration of values adhered to in the gangsta code. The study
found that the more the Hip-hop male audience experiences their values performed throughout a
scene, the more he is influenced that his way of life has cultural meaning and is a pattern of
behavior that he should emulate. As I will demonstrate, the Gangsta code’s values are clearly
exhibited by the Montana character in the scenes selected for close reading. Moreover, the scenes
have been determined by gangsta’s participant warriors to have such a significant cultural
meaning on the streets that their importance appears to border on the obsessive.

Having placed the film within its historical, socio-economic, and cultural contexts, the
study will now discuss those scenes in the film which most likely participated in the construction
of gangsta identity. The focus of chapter six will be to deconstruct how Tony Montana’s
performance of this gangsta code of conduct facilitated the film’s assistance in this process. In
the previous chapter we learned how the extreme conditions of poverty and hopelessness have caused a large segment of the inner city population to adopt rules of survival within their geographic location that do not confirm with what we as Americans have been trained to think of as “normal” behavior. Consequently, we should not be surprised when role models for the resulting gangsta identities constructed by these circumstances, in this instance drug kingpin Montana, do not conform to the standards set by the dominant white male patriarchal system.

As we will discuss in this chapter, in scenes throughout Scarface, the violently tough, fearless, street smart, and cool appearing actions of Tony Montana congeal to function as performances of the Gangsta code in a series of symbolic moments within scenes throughout the film. The work of Elijah Anderson, the cool pose theoretical development by Billson and Majors, and observations by several other scholars and non-scholar practitioners involved in the Hip-hop male identity discourse all confirm that the conduct of the gangsta is founded upon the inequities of capitalism and its “golden rule”—he who has the gold makes the rules. But how do ghetto youth, ultimately the victims of these disparaging sets of social circumstances, end up being so influenced by a movie that their collective behavior, and to a certain extent their entire life choices, uniformly conforms to a rigid standard of violent heteronormative masculinity?

The Apparatus and Audience Reception Revisited

How audiences interpret the meaning of media texts has been an ongoing area of research within the reception theory discourse. Reception theory includes several highly influential ideas relating to audience decoding and encoding, a methodology identified by Stuart Hall. Hall proposed that audiences, armed with their own sets of values and norms, have the capability of confronting and negotiating with media narratives during their ongoing process of interpretation and signification. In cinema, the key moment of constructing meaning from a particular
narrative occurs when the ideology of the filmmaker collides with that of his or her audience. As presented in chapters two and three, the multitude of fan created, positive interpretations of Scarface suggest that the interpretation of film texts by audience participants does not end when the final credits roll.

The work of media studies theorist Lawrence Grossberg augments Hall’s work. Grossberg’s Media Making: Mass Media in a Popular Culture, is an influential evaluation of the major theoretical concepts in media studies. Grossberg offers a concise discussion of the nature of an audience’s ideology, reminding us how these views remain an underpinning of film spectatorship. The spectator brings his or her ideology (the individual’s lived experience) into the apparatus process. Grossberg writes that

\[
\text{People live within the systems of representation; they experience the world according to their codes of meaning. There is nothing outside of them that allows them to measure or judge their truth. Ideologies then, are the systems of meaning within which people live in reality or...live their relationship to reality.}\n\]

In other words, young Hip-hop males came into viewings of Scarface predisposed to a certain world view due to their social and economic conditions. Scarface turned out to be a film that reinforced the belief system of young gangstas and gangsta wannabes. Unlike The Godfather’s glorification of the all powerful white male, Scarface provided a character that was not white and met its ghetto audience’s expectations for defiance. Moreover, Tony Montana’s manic, cocaine-fueled behavior inspired emerging gangsta males, providing cues in the film which reinforced existing knowledge. For Hip-hop males desperately searching for affirmation Scarface was the perfect blend of fantasy and reality—for them it was one thing to dream about wearing a bat suit and jumping off a building to fight crime but quite another to see a guy selling
drugs, driving a Porsche, and marrying a hot blonde. Between those two courses of action, the latter is doable.

Thus, Scarface, despite being a dark, nihilistic vision of the American capitalist dream, was a powerfully effective character study. Tony Montana created a space for ghetto underclass moviegoers to feel that the relatively new gangsta philosophy, being espoused by rappers, was not only an accurate analysis of their socio-economic status but that Montana’s methods to escape poverty were valid, reasonable, and achievable. Scarface was able to accomplish, nearly a decade after its initial release, a cultural validation of Hip-hop’s transformation from the black nationalism of Public Enemy to the all-hands-on-deck violent retribution suggested by N.W.A. Brilliantly performed by a reinvigorated Al Pacino, Tony Montana was both the film’s focal point and the foundation for all of the subsequent fanaticism exhibited by the Hip-hop ghetto underclass. The character’s journey, as interpreted by Pacino, represents a clear series of symbolic moments, albeit paradoxical ones, that both harshly criticize the capitalist system and reinforce the need for violence, cunning, and the strength of street knowledge from an underclass perspective.

Audience receptions appear to be an ongoing process that continues to be negotiated, contested, re-interpreted, and validated through repeat viewings, discussions with other fans and critics, exposure to positive and negative reviews of the film and, as was the case with Scarface, an application of the narrative to real life situations and scenarios. For example, the conflicts faced by Montana allow his audience to not only test Tony’s behavior in their own environments, but also allows them to imagine themselves as larger than life heroes of the ghetto panopticon, unrepentant criminals who, like Tony, can thumb their noses at a society that has mistreated
them. This fantasy became a real solution to many seeking to reclaim a black manhood that was disrespected by society.

Thus we must consider the key scenes that will be discussed as demonstrative of the psychological factors which connected Hip-hop male audiences and the film. One such factor relates to the spectator’s perception of himself. Tony Montana’s performance of street toughness must be both authentic and cool—because not to think that he is cool would be to invalidate their perceptions of themselves. A second factor is that the psychological influence of the film on these young men is also very much rooted in their reception of the visual performance of something that gives meaning to their lives, that being the belief in the collective, which is itself symbolized by the gangsta code or, in Anderson’s term, the code of the streets. While this set of values is not normally written down, the uniform belief in these rules connects every resident in every ghetto because to not know them might get you killed. In a recent conversation with a young Hip-hop aged male, this belief was called the “psychology of the tribe.” Accordingly, I will point out what behaviors or traits Montana exhibited in the scenes that caused Hip-hop males to connect their value system with that of the character’s and why the connection resonated. I have chosen only those scenes which appear to decisively follow the gangsta code of urban street behavior that has been referred to in this study.

And while the code may have been expressed in various shades of difference, they will nevertheless still express a consensus of opinion, one that has been alluded to by Hip-hop rappers in various interviews and articles also previously referred to in this study. I will then focus on where the street code was performed in the film so as to evidence the significance of how codified common values became the connecting point between authentic Hip-hop masculinity and fictional bravado. What I mean by “the significance of codified common values” is that the
bond between Tony Montana and Hip-hop gangsta males exists in a space created by a confluence of two sets of values, fictional and factional. The *fictional* values are those performed by Montana in the Scarface film. The *factual* values are those practiced by Hip-hop males on the urban streets. Within this space values merge—those of the Scarface film text with those of lived experience and memory. The interaction that occurs is called, in the parlance of film studies, “the apparatus,” which is at once the active mechanism which mediates the psychological influence of cinema upon its audiences and the inciting elemental incident for the creation of cultural meaning in this art form.³⁹⁸

**Semiotic Considerations**

When Scarface was first released in 1983 the subsequent print media reviews of the film appeared to focus on, as Stuart Hall suggests in, the intended reading. Given Pacino’s major role in *The Godfather*, it was natural for Scarface to be compared to Coppola’s film. But Scarface was not deemed to be in the same league aesthetically or thematically, as Coppola’s masterpiece; virtually every mainstream reviewer agreed that *The Godfather* was clearly superior. *The Godfather*, a more traditional gangster film in that it focused on the Mafia’s Italian upper class family structure, was well received by black audiences of all economic classes. But, the Hip-hop audience overwhelmingly appreciated Scarface more than *The Godfather*. The 2003 *Vibe* article is a good barometer of this. Ghetto audiences loved Scarface because it resonated with them on a deeply personal level. These audiences discarded most, if not all, of the De Palma/Stone intended political subtext of the film, choosing instead to concentrate on how Tony Montana achieved a successful come up.

The relationship between Pacino’s performance and Hip-hop’s reception of that performance is another key to our understanding of why Scarface is so important to Hip-hop
males. Pacino’s interpretation of Tony Montana is the key component of the film that Hip-hop males find so inspiring. His street savvy thug offers a sympathetic take on the rags to riches come up story that is central to understanding the gangsta perspective of Hip-hop males. Pacino’s dynamically defiant performance delivers visible representations of the Hip-hop come up through both his body movements and ostentatious delivery of dialogue. In the balance of this chapter I will point out these moments that will explain why the Hip-hop male ghetto underclass audience feels Pacino’s performance validates them.

Pacino’s Performance

Al Pacino’s performance is central to the resonation that Scarface maintains with Hip-hop males. According to the star, Pacino based much of the uncompromising ferocity that Tony Montana exhibits in the film on the tiger-like grace and menacing persona of boxing world champion Roberto Duran. In fact, Pacino mentioned during an interview that Montana was the first character that he developed “from the outside in,” meaning that he used external inspirations, such as constructing his character visually, instead of his trained method acting approach of finding the internal motivations of the character first. Several aesthetic elements combined to help Pacino visually establish Montana. These physical attributes helped to position Montana as meriting the immediate respect of his audience from the very first scene onward. Pacino’s costuming, which evolved with Montana’s changing station in life, and his dark hued make up, haircut, defiant body moments, and piercing gaze all helped the actor to disappear into his role. Upon closer inspection, Pacino was visually transformed into a character that was very similar in appearance to Duran.

Duran was an athlete who earned the nickname “hands of stone” for his ability to knock out opponents with one punch. He held world championship belts in the lightweight,
welterweight, junior-middleweight, and middleweight divisions, an unprecedented achievement of excellence in his sport. Moreover, he was one of the most recognizable and celebrated Hispanic sportmen of his generation, with an absolutely ferocious persona. The fact that Pacino chose Duran as a model to pattern Montana’s defiant posture and predatorial demeanor is extremely useful to unlocking the unbridled machismo at his performance’s core. Even more telling is the fact that Pacino’s Montana (in photo on right below) has a striking resemblance to Duran, including having his hair styled in a similar manner (color, length, parting at scalp).

![Figure 48. Fierce.](http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=roberto+duran&FORM=IGRE)

Roberto Duran (left photo) was a fierce competitor in the boxing ring during the 1970’s and 1980’s. Duran’s fierce gaze was copied by Pacino for his performance of Tony Montana.

Scarface screen capture by Rob Prince.

But the ferocity of Pacino’s gaze, featuring an intensity mirroring that of Duran’s focus on his opponent in the ring might be, along with his physical posturing, the most noticeable feature of his performance. In fact, Pacino’s interpretation of being a Cuban drug dealer includes a constant stare aimed at his antagonists in a manner that suggests they are prey. See the next photo for another example. Pacino’s performance was what the audience focused on. He was in every scene in Scarface, intensifying this audience focus. His interpretation of Montana’s every
gesture and conversation was a representation of the film’s social commentary, which posited itself as being extremely resistant towards the established social order.

**Figure 49. Boxer’s Angle.**
Montana at the moment he tells Sosa “All I have in this world are my balls and my word.” Notice the complete focus of his eyes on his target. Pacino’s body stands at an angle, similar to how boxers are trained—so as to make it difficult for the opponent to strike a telling blow.

Scarface screen capture by Rob Prince.

But Scarface presented itself as a paradox to its audiences. On the one hand it presented an almost cartoonish approach to these excesses. On the other hand it allowed the have nots of society a space in which to fantasize about what it would be like to fulfill the American dream of unlimited consumer freedom.

**Detailed Synopsis of Scarface**

*Scarface* was a remake of its 1932 namesake, a Howard Hawks directed prohibition era crime-doesn’t-pay morality tale adapted from a novel by Armitage Trail, a young gangland groupie who, like many of his fellow Chicagoans, was fascinated with the criminal empire run by Alphonse Capone. The updated version, epic in length at two hours and fifty minutes, was proclaimed by star Al Pacino to be an operatic styled film. Sidney Lumet, during his brief association with the film, placed the story within the historical context of the 1980 April to October Mariel boatlift that allowed Cubans to leave for Miami. It was Lumet who also decided
that the film should take place within the world of international cocaine distribution. The resulting screenplay was written by Oliver Stone, who adapted the Ben Hecht written-Howard Hughes produced-Howard Hawks directed 1932 original.

Opening Credits/Mariel Boatlift

Tony Montana (Al Pacino), a Cuban Army veteran of unknown rank, has been forced to leave Cuba by Fidel Castro during the 1980 Mariel boatlift. Penniless and with just the clothes on his back, he arrives in south Florida in search of the "American Dream."

INS Interrogation

We first meet Tony while he is being questioned by a team of INS officials at an immigrant processing center. During a contentious interrogation, two distinguishing marks on his body are revealed. The first is a long scar that starts over his left eye, parts his eyebrow, and runs down the cheek. The second is a tattoo on his right hand that, according to the INS, brands him as an assassin. Suspicious, but unable to prove he is a criminal, Montana is shipped off by the INS to a detention camp called “Freedomtown” while the government evaluates his demand for “my human rights…just like the President Jimmy Carter says.”

Freedom Town

On the bus to the camp we meet his compadre and best friend Manolo (Steven Bauer) who, sometime later, presents Tony with the opportunity for them to receive green cards and jobs if they agree to kill a former trusted aide to Castro, Emilio Rebenga (Roberto Contreras). The murder of Rebenga is commissioned by Frank López, a wealthy, politically connected cocaine distributor who fronts as a luxury car dealer. Lopez wants revenge on Rebenga because of his involvement in the torture death of Lopez’s brother while he was Castro’s prisoner. During a riot inside the camp Tony stabs Rebenga to death and, as promised, Montana, Manny, and two
other members of their crew are rewarded with their cards. However, the jobs turn out to be not quite what Tony had in mind.

**El Paraiso**

In the next scene, he and Manny are seen working as dishwashers at a grimy Cuban sandwich and coffee stand. While dreaming about being able to afford the good life that they see at a hot nightspot just across the street, we are introduced to a López henchman, Omar Suárez (F. Murray Abraham), who offers Tony and Manny jobs unloading marijuana. Tony insults Suárez by first haggling over the fee for their labor and then turning down the job. Suárez, not one to be trifled with, then sets Tony up to be killed by offering him a more lucrative errand: sending him and his crew to pick up a sample of coke from a Colombian dealer for a $5,000 fee.

**Chainsaw Massacre**

Tony, Manny, and the two other Marielitos in his crew, Angel Fernández (Pepe Serna) and Chi Chi (Ángel Salazar) then set out to meet "Hector the Toad" (Al Israel) at a seedy motel on south beach. The meeting does not go smoothly. Tony grows irritated with Hector, who is slow to give him the cocaine in exchange for money. Suddenly, Montana and Angel are double-crossed by the Colombian, who now wants to rip him off. To convince Tony to give over the cash, Hector dismembers Angel in a shower stall with a chainsaw. At the point Tony is about to suffer the same fate, Manny arrives in the nick of time to gun down Hector's henchmen in the hotel's room. Hector escapes but Tony vengefully confronts him in the street and shoots him dead. Tony and his crew then get away with both the coke and the money before the police arrive.
Meeting Lopez

Seizing the opportunity, Montana then insists that Suarez introduces him to Lopez so that he can impress the boss with not only the return of his cash but with a gift of the coke. We now meet Frank (Robert Loggia) at his palatial residence. The affable, generous Frank takes an immediate liking to Tony, hires his crew into his criminal hierarchy, and invites his new employees to a night on the town. Tony and Manny are then introduced to Lopez's live in girlfriend, Elvira Hancock (Michelle Pfeiffer), who will eventually become the source of tension between the two men. Montana now begins his rise through the ranks of the Miami cocaine underworld. He flirts with Elvira at the Babylon Club, Frank’s favorite hangout, and listens to Frank give him advice on how to conduct himself in the business. But Tony is already scheming. On the way home he startles Manny by telling him that he thinks Frank is “soft” and that Elvira fancies him. When Manny cautions Tony not to get involved with the girlfriend of the boss, Tony responds that he “wants the world, and everything in it.”

Go-fers

The story then jumps ahead three months. Tony and Manny have moved up in the organization. The cocaine business is treating them well as we next see them relaxing poolside trying to pick up the beautiful women they could only dream about as dishwashers. After Manny is rebuffed trying to get a date using his tongue in a sexually suggestive manner, Tony suggests to him that to be successful with the opposite sex, “first you get the money, then you get the power, then you get the woman.” In the next scene Tony and Manny are serving as Lopez’s personal go-fers. When they arrive to pick up Elvira for a day at the race track, she complains about their old Cadillac. To impress her, Tony immediately pays cash for a new Porsche and, after snorting coke with her, makes an awkward attempt to kiss her. Resisting his advances, her
rebuff appears to be more challenge than put down as she explains “I don’t fuck around with the help.” Tony takes this to mean that once he is no longer the help, he might have a chance with her.

**Family Reunion**

Tony then visits a small home on the edge of an industrial area. A woman answers the door. It is his mother (Miriam Colon). Thus begins a scene in which we find out something about Tony’s background. He has in fact served time in jail. He has a teenaged sister, Gina (Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio), who clearly has missed him very much. Tony gives Gina a gold necklace engraved “love always” and, judging by their mutual affection, if we did not know they were siblings it would appear as though they were lovers. In Momma Montana’s cramped kitchen we find out more about Tony and the family. Momma has a factory job while Gina works part time in a hair salon and attends junior college. We also learn that Tony’s father abandoned the family, which has caused both mother and son to become bitter. But it is the mother’s distrust of Tony which comes to the forefront in the scene.

After he dramatically tells the family that he is an anti-Castro organizer and tosses $1,000 in cash on the table to impress them, Momma Montana sees past the lie. She launches into a tirade during which she angrily denounces his criminal life style, refuses the money by throwing it back at him, and orders him out of the house. His sister is horrified by what occurs. Tony convinces her to secretly take the money and have some fun. Manny sees a grown up Gina for the first time and it is love at first sight for him. Tony sees it and tells Manny “she’s not for you.” We are not sure whether it’s out of selfish jealousy or due to fraternal concern.
Meeting Sosa

The action switches to South America. While on business in Bolivia to help Omar Suarez set up a new distribution deal for Lopez, Tony begins to show his defiance to Frank’s authority when he negotiates a deal with Alejandro Sosa (Paul Shenar), an aristocratic drug baron living in splendor. While conducting price negotiations over lunch Sosa receives a phone call. Afterwards, he quickly maneuvers Suarez away from Tony and onto a helicopter for a trip back to Miami. But it’s a set up. As Tony watches, Sosa has Omar tossed from the helicopter at the end of a rope. It turns out that Suarez was a police informant and the execution sends Tony a message that Sosa is ruthless. Tony maintains his cool while Sosa makes it clear he is not impressed with how Lopez does business, implying that maybe Tony could serve his interests better. They agree to a partnership that suggests maybe Tony should do something to get Lopez out of the way.

Tony and Frank Break Up

Upon Tony’s return to Florida he reports to Frank Lopez, who is livid over the deal and accuses Montana of "stealing" it. When Tony defiantly excuses himself from their meeting it becomes clear they no longer will be working together. Tony then immediately seeks out Elvira, to whom he makes a private and unexpected marriage proposal. Later, when Tony makes a public overture for Elvira, it becomes obvious to Frank that he wants her. A humiliated Lopez decides to take Tony out.

But Frank’s bid to assassinate his former employee fails. After Tony smacks his sister around for snorting coke in the men’s room with her date, two hit men strike. Hired by Lopez to kill Tony as he takes in a show, the two men spray the Babylon Club with machine gun fire. But after only innocent patrons die in the barrage, Tony manages to shoot both of his attackers. In retaliation a vengeful Montana decides to finally take all of Frank's possessions. Later that night
he and Manny kill both Frank and the detective on his payroll, Miami Chief of Narcotics Mel Bernstein (Harris Yulin), who had already shaken down Tony for a hefty monthly payment and airline tickets to London. Tony then goes to Frank’s home to collect his prize, Elvira. She dutifully packs her bags and casts her lot with Tony without so much as a previous tender moment. Tony sees a Goodyear blimp pass overhead. The advertisement reads “The World is Yours.”

**At the Top, then the Fall**

His problems apparently solved, Tony begins a profitable relationship with Sosa, marries Elvira, buys a new mansion, and sets his sister Gina (Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio) up in business with her own beauty salon. At the wedding it becomes clear that Manny and Gina have fallen in love. The rise is complete.

The second half of the film details Tony’s rapid fall. As Montana's business grows, so does his cocaine addiction and paranoia. His banker informs him that he will be charging higher fees for laundering the increasing flow of drug money. Elvira, whose own coke habit has become much worse, becomes distant. Tony bathes in a pool sized tub in his bedroom and sarcastically comments on an evening news editorial which calls for the legalization of cocaine. He trades barbs with Elvira, who retorts that he is “not that good in bed” and utters the infamous line, “nothing exceeds like excess.” After Manny convinces him that he has a way to save money on the laundering of the coke cash, Montana is arrested in a sting operation by Manny's contact, an undercover police officer. Montana's lawyer tells him that he will probably have to serve prison time for tax evasion even after paying a hefty bribe to the prosecutor and judge.
Sosa Proposes a Solution

Sosa, not wanting to lose his main distributor, steps in to intervene by offering Tony a way out of going to prison. He introduces Montana to his partners in the cocaine cartel, a group that includes a Bolivian Army commander, the Minister of the Interior, the head of a sugar corporation, and a mysterious American referred to as Charles Goodson, "our friend from Washington." Sosa guarantees that the IRS will not send Tony to jail. In exchange Montana must assist in the assassination of a Bolivian reformer attempting to expose Sosa, his partners, and the ongoing corruption in the Bolivian government. Tony returns to Miami with a chance to remain on top.

The Last Supper

At a dinner with Manny and Elvira in an expensive restaurant Tony, resplendent in black tie and tuxedo, takes caustic stock of his success. He is, judging by his drunken speech on the state of his affairs, very unhappy. His criticism of Elvira’s drug habit causes her to lash back at his criminal lifestyle, despite the fact that she has benefited from it. Giving tit for tat, Tony admits to Manny that Elvira cannot bear a child due to complications arising from her drug use. An enraged Elvira commits to leaving Tony and stalks off, never to be seen again. Having created a spectacle for the well heeled restaurant guests, Tony admonishes them as hypocrites who “need a bad guy” to point a finger at. “Say goodnight to the bad guy,” he tells them as he staggers out.

Mis-Hit

The film now switches to New York City. Montana supervises Sosa’s assassin, who plants a bomb under the Bolivian reformer’s car. The next day Tony, clearly in an agitated state, continues to snort coke. Suddenly he has second thoughts about carrying out the hit when the
target, about to deliver a speech at the UN which will expose the cartel, unexpectedly is accompanied by his wife and two baby daughters. Tony, in an attempt to redeem his life, becomes a hero and shoots the assassin before the bomb device can be detonated. He has prevented the entire family from being killed but also has sealed his own fate with Sosa.

Tony Kills Manny

Returning to Miami, Tony and Sosa have a final conversation. Calling Montana a “little monkey,” Sosa explodes in rage over the failure of Tony to deliver on the murder. But Momma Montana also has bad news. Gina is missing. Tony can’t reach right-hand man Manny, either. After getting Gina's new address from his mother, Tony goes to the house. Manny unexpectedly opens the door. Tony then sees Gina in a night gown at the top of the stairs. Enraged that Manny has obviously slept with his sister, Tony kills him without hesitation. Gina goes into shock. Hysterical over the chain of events, she reveals that they had just been married. Tony has Gina taken back to his mansion.

Miami Alamo

Unknown to Tony, Sosa has sent a platoon sized assassination team to Montana's mansion in revenge for the missed opportunity to kill the reformer, who has now exposed the respectable land owner and his politically influential partners to the world as cocaine dealers. With his greatest threat outside literally storming the gates Tony sits at his desk inhaling prodigious amounts of cocaine. Alone, he finally comes to terms what he has done to his best friend. In the midst of his regret Gina suddenly enters his office armed with a pistol to confront him. She has come to the conclusion that Tony wants her for a lover and begins to shoot at him while demanding he take her sexually. But a Sosa assassin is hiding on the balcony. Thinking
Gina is shooting at him, he leaps into the room and shoots her several times. Tony, in a cocaine stupor, still manages to throw the man off the balcony, killing him.

**Say Hello to My Little Friend**

Sosa’s men have swept aside Tony’s small security force and reached his office door. As his men are being killed outside his locked office Tony, still delirious from the cocaine, cuddles Gina's dead body while begging her for forgiveness. All of Tony’s men are dead at this point. As the assassination squad prepares to kick down his doors Tony arms himself with an M16 rifle with an undermounted M203 grenade launcher, yells the famous line "Say hello to my little friend!" and blows down the door, killing the first wave of attackers. He advances to the balcony and engages in a furious gun battle with his enemies during which time he is shot multiple times. However, numb from the cocaine, he appears impervious to his wounds. Tony remains standing while goading the shooters to fire at him. Finally, in the midst of his taunts, he is shot point blank in the back by a sunglass wearing, shotgun wielding lone assassin called the “Skull,” the same man who had executed Omar Suarez. Tony, mortally wounded, falls face first into the stairway pool below, unleashing a huge splash of blood. The film ends as the assassins examine Tony’s lifeless body.

**Previous Critical Approaches to Reading Scarface**

Several approaches have marked previous analytical readings of the film. Among them:

- Miami based Cubans approached the film as an affront to their authentic identities as hard working, and law abiding, immigrants. Even before the script was made available to community leaders, fears that Scarface would be a film that would fan racial flames by presenting Hispanics as stereotypical socially unredeemable criminals (and it turned out these fears were well founded) were very publically expressed. Extremist anti-Castro
groups threatened the lives of the filmmakers, forcing the production to leave Miami just as principal photography was beginning.404

- Another approach was to consider the film as a text potentially harmful to film goers. A crucial reading was undertaken by the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) to judge whether Scarface met its standards of decency. The MPAA determined that the film’s language and violence were excessive and demanded that offending scenes be excised. Universal Studios appealed the decision to censor the film and won a reversal.

- Traditional scholarly approaches to Scarface have been as varied as they have been rare. The study has previously referenced Ronald Bogue, the first scholar to publish on Scarface, who determined that the film was a “decidedly postmodern” Baudrillardian simulacrum of class.405 Film professor Tricia Welch argued that Scarface could not be easily classified as a member of gangster genre. She observed in a 1997 article that the film “employed cross-generic conventions to create a tense but lively interplay of forms” that were born from the conventions of the horror/slasher genre.406 In 2000 Linda Salamon compared Tony Montana’s ambition based villainy to that of Shakespeare’s Richard III, noting that Al Pacino had played both.407

- Approaches by mainstream media reviewers at the time of the film’s initial theatrical release, while disagreeing on the overall merits of the film, focused on comparing Scarface to either The Godfather, its 1932 Scarface namesake, or both. Reviewers and scholars alike agreed that the 1983 version of Scarface did not meet the high standards of aesthetic richness and narrative complexity set by The Godfather, a film that Scarface apparently cannot escape being compared to.408
Overall the various approaches to evaluating Scarface’s cultural impact evidence standards enforced by both the white male dominated mainstream media and the white male dominated academic hegemony. Exceptions were scarce but noticeable. For example, before even reading the script Miami’s powerful Anti-Castro Cuban community correctly determined the film would offer multiple negative representations of Cubans as criminal drug dealers. They exerted their considerable political clout to get the film’s production moved out of South Florida (to Los Angeles) in an attempt to protect their image. Another intervention of cultural opposition occurred when David Liao, a popular culture scholar who often writes for Internet websites, offered an evaluation of Scarface that it was both scholarly and street smart. His widely overlooked 2006 article, “The World is Yours: The Influence of ‘Scarface’ on Hip-Hop Culture, and Def Jam Presents: Origin of a Hip-Hop Classic,” written for the Africa Resource website (and later reposted at MySpace when the Africa Resource site removed it), broke new ground when Liao became the first scholar to discuss the influence of the film on Hip-hop culture.

What was also obvious was that in 1983 the mainstream media did not mention any inner city receptions of the film because, at that time, the relationships between street behavior and the film were not considered important enough to discuss. This despite the fact that the Blaxploitation era should have offered valuable insight as to the potential impact such a film would have on inner city audiences. Therefore this study’s own reading of the film is a crucial step towards making a determination as to precisely how Scarface influenced Hip-hop identity construction. In deconstructing the influence, this study contends that Al Pacino’s personal charisma had everything to do with the connection of the film to the black male Hip-hop audience. In other words, the fact that Michael Corleone was playing a Latino “brother” made
Identifying the Key Moments in Scarface that Influenced Hip-hop

Liao’s article is a concise analysis of the relationship Scarface enjoys with Hip-hop. He wrote that

The characterization in "Scarface" plays an important role in the film's appeal to hip-hop audiences. Al Pacino's portrayal of Tony Montana, infused with brazen and exaggerated machismo, is regarded as one of the more memorable performances in film history, and one of the most impersonated ("Say hello to my little friend!"). Beneath the sheen of violence, glamour, performance, and politics of "Scarface" is a standard rags-to-riches narrative that speaks not only rappers, but to desolate, poor urban minorities in general. There is a sense of hope in Tony Montana's rise from a penniless refugee to an outrageously wealthy kingpin that resonates with the hip-hop culture's struggles to break out of the despairing ghetto-life and pursue the American Dream.\textsuperscript{410}

Liao’s argument supports this study. He agrees with my analysis that the nature of the attraction between Scarface and Hip-hop males falls within two relevant contexts: first, the cultural context—a hypercommodified capitalist creature formed from underground fan popularity. Second, the historical context—as both a member of one of the oldest of all genres (the gangster genre) and a remake of arguably the best gangster film prior to \textit{The Godfather}. Hip-hop males, as evidenced by their testimony in various forums such as \textit{Origins of a Hip Hop Classic}, discussion boards such as those at the Internet Movie Data Base (imdb.com) website,\textsuperscript{411} and my long conversations with Scarface-to-Hip-hop pioneer DJ Ready Red, confirm why
Scarface is a blueprint for Hip-hop male behavior. Tony Montana’s triumph represents the ultimate Hip-hop fantasy of power, success, and deliverance from the hell that is inner city.

The first clear point of resonating connection between the film and Hip-hop males occurs immediately in the opening scene in the film. Here De Palma has the audience witness an interrogation of a man. This beginning sequence foreshadows Montana’s coolness, an attitude which permeates the film. His air of invincibility grants Tony Montana respect at the beginning of the film, and it is respect, as we have learned in chapter five, that is the most precious of commodities to the gangsta. The audience sees that Tony Montana might be a criminal because he is in some sort of government custody being interrogated by white men, is charming in a cunning way, and certainly understands the value of spouting the politically correct American anti-Castro mantra to the point of almost convincing his INS adversaries not to lock him up.

The opening is a revelation to Hip-hop audiences who had always wanted their very own Superfly type anti-hero. Like Renee Zellweger’s famous response to Tom Cruise’s long lament at the end of Jerry Maguire, Tony had them at hello. Throughout Scarface all of the scenes in the film depict behaviors that represent the existing core values of the Hip-hop male. These scenes clearly assisted in the early construction of gangsta identity. When taken collectively, these depictions are the points of resonance that connect Scarface to Hip-hop.

**Methodology Used in Determining the Sequences**

While Tony Montana performs the values adhered to by the street gangsta throughout the film, I selected three of the film’s sequences for a closer textual analysis because they appear to be the most influential. Using the 2003 20th anniversary DVD edition of Scarface as my text, I undertook a close analysis of all thirty-four scenes in the film. The thirty-four scenes were grouped into sequences so that the key scenes could be seen in relation to the rest of the
Using the gangsta code as the standard of importance that determined the most influential scenes, I chose, for further study, nine sequences from the thirty-four scenes. The sequences chosen contained very demonstrable examples of the gangsta code’s core values.

As Al Pacino is in every scene in the film, there was an embarrassment of riches when it came to evaluating the film’s key moments. It could be demonstrated, with a sufficient degree of certainly, that the presence of one or more of the gangsta values exists in every scene in the film. With this in mind, a careful process of elimination reduced nine key sequences down to three essentially influential moments. My methodology was fairly simple. I looked for the presence of the gangsta codes that were evident in each scene and then added up the number of occurrences found therein. The scenes with the highest number of occurrences were then compared to other empirical evidence, such as comments from Hip-hop interviewees about the particular scene under consideration.

Useful to the study was the discovery that just because a particular scene was more memorable to the audience, such as the motel chainsaw dismemberment which caused the film to originally be awarded an X rating, that interest did not necessarily translate into a connection with the core values of the Hip-hop inner city male. In the chainsaw scene, for example, Tony Montana performed many of the laws (coolness, toughness, does not show weakness, treats power with contempt) and would have died with his pride intact, possibly the major goal of a street operative. However, in the motel chainsaw scene it is clear that Montana only survived because he was lucky enough to have his side kick Manny come to his rescue. The scene is an example of one that did not make the final cut of the most influential scenes despite the fact it exhibited a great number of the behaviors on the Gangsta Code list.
The Three Sequences in Scarface that Exerted the Greatest Influence on Gangsta Identity

- Just Off the Boat (scenes 1-5)
- “Balls and My Word” (scenes 13-14)
- “Say Hello to My Little Friend” (scenes 33-34)

Two of the sequences are very well known, so much so that they have become iconic both in Hip-hop culture and global popular culture. “Balls and My Word,” is a two scene sequence that includes Hip-hop’s sacred symbolic moment—the first overt and public affection of the film. As mentioned in a previous chapter, the moment was produced by rapper DJ Ready Red, who viewed Tony Montana’s behavior as being so accurate a depiction of the defiant nature of gangsta militancy that he brought Scarface forward as a role model in 1988, sampling the “balls and my word” dialogue, from Montana’s tense conversation with Sosa, in his music. Later, following the release of the song, Red’s fellow Geto Boy rapper Brad “Scarface” Jordan then invented and performed a convincing gangsta persona which captured the essence of the film and confirmed the validity of much of Cool Pose theory, also based on this sequence. Mr. Jordan admits that when he heard “balls and my word” it was the moment of epiphany for him. However, he was not a Geto Boy when the song was released but joined the group soon after. When he joined it was without the Scarface name, which Jordan, then known as Akshen, would add later.

The second well known sequence is “Say Hello to My Little Friend.” Without question, Montana’s last stand during the Sosa army’s siege upon his residence, which includes the utterance “say hello to my little friend” before Tony launches that infamous grenade towards the villains at his door, is one of the most memorable moments in cinema history. When the scene was featured in the Hip-hop gangster film New Jack City, De Palma’s work was assured
immortality amongst Hip-hop males. The “say hello” line of dialogue is universally known. It ranked #61 on the American Film Institute’s Top 100 list of the greatest movie quotes of all time. \(^{416}\) It most likely will be the line of dialogue that Al Pacino will be remembered for, this despite everything else he has done in an unmatched career on both stage and screen.

The third sequence has considerably less notoriety, understandable given the cultural heft of its two brethren. It is comprised of the opening five scenes in the film, which I have entitled “Just Off the Boat.” It depicts, among other action, Montana’s interrogation by the INS, his incarceration at the Freedom Town detention center in Miami, his murder of a former Castro agent (which earns green cards for Tony and his compadres), and his fateful first meeting with Omar Suarez, the senior henchman of Frank Lopez, the cocaine crime boss. While it is not talked about at the level of the two more famous scenes, it could quite possibly be the most influential of the three in terms of bonding the film with Hip-hop males.

The “Just Off the Boat” scenes demonstrate the defiant behaviors that would characterize Tony Montana’s come up journey. But beneath the obvious bravado, a common theme of Montana’s performance of the gangsta code, “Just Off the Boat” is representative of life in the prison subcultural panopticon as Montana goes from interrogation to incarceration in a federal immigration internment camp ironically named “Freedomtown.” It is useful to recognize the significance of gangsta Hip-hop’s relationship to prison culture because they appear to be synonymous. Therefore, Scarface, if viewed as an early representation of masculine behavior within the prison culture, was very influential in gangsta identity’s proliferation. Michel Foucault expounded upon the significance of these circumstances at length in his seminal treatment of the culture of incarceration, *Discipline and Punish*. \(^{417}\) As discussed at length in chapter five,
Foucault’s observations have been made even more probative by the fact that prison has become a common experience for a growing number of young, black inner city men.⁴¹⁸

The representations of Montana’s detention immediately connect Tony to the Hip-hop male audience because many of these male spectators, as was expounded on by Tupac Shakur in the MTV produced documentary film Tupac Resurrection,⁴¹⁹ assume that going to jail is a black male rite of passage. The prison culture mentality has caused many young black males to expect to be interrogated, incarcerated, and eventually paroled into minimum wage jobs, as was the case with Tony Montana. Moreover, according to many critics of black culture, including cultural commentator and media critic Jason Whitlock, who commented in his June 2008 Playboy magazine article, “The Black KKK,” that prison culture and gangsta thug life are one in the same.⁴²⁰

Outline of the Sequences

The sequences (sequence titles are my own), with each individual scene name (names and scene numbers are taken from the DVD), are as follows:

Sequence #1. Just Off the Boat. Scenes 1-5.

Scene 1. “A Political Prisoner.” The interrogation of Montana by the INS agents and his forced detention at Freedom Town.


Scenes 4 & 5. “The Good Life/A New Job.” Tony and Manny are dishwashers at El Paraiso, a grimy walk up café, where they first meet Omar Suarez, the first lieutenant to coke boss Frank Lopez.


Scene 14. “Revenge.” After killing Suarez for being a snitch, Sosa tests Tony’s loyalty to Lopez by proposing they work together. Montana responds, “All I have in this world is my balls and my word and I don’t break them for anybody.”

Sequence #3. “Say Hello to My Little Friend.” Scenes 33-34.

Scenes 33. “Siege.” With Sosa’s platoon of assassins storming Casa Montana, Gina offers herself sexually to Tony after he has killed Manny. The siege begins as she is murdered.

Scene 34. “Montana’s Last Stand.” Montana makes a heroic last stand after snorting a huge mound of cocaine but is murdered by the chief Sosa assassin, called The Skull.

What follows is a detailed description of the three sequences, reflecting what the Hip-hop audience decoded and why it matters.

Sequence Details

Sequence #1. Just Off the Boat

Scene 1. “A Political Prisoner.”

The Mariel boatlift montage, which occurs during the opening credits, segues into the audience’s introduction to Tony Montana. We first see Montana as he is being questioned by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) agents whose job it is to process the arriving Marielitos. Writer Oliver Stone’s method of character introduction thus provides an opportunity for the audience to meet Tony and learn information about his background. After Brian De Palma’s name appears at the conclusion of the opening credits the camera slowly pans right; the
blackness that backgrounded the sequence morphs into the introduction of Tony Montana. The camera continues to pan right; past unknown objects which continue keep the screen dark. Finally, there is an opening of light and the camera comes to rest on the face of an almost unrecognizable Al Pacino, who is seated.

Figure 50. Introducing Tony Montana.
This is the very first shot of the film and the moment spectators first lay eyes on Tony Montana. Pacino’s performance begins with Montana’s defiant gaze at his INS interrogators. He is shown to be looking cool, contemptuous, and unafraid—all at once.

Scarface screen capture by Rob Prince.

His face appears thinner than in previous films, as if he hasn’t had a good meal for several months. There exists a thick scar on his left cheek and his skin is darker than ever, well beyond a tan, and we realize that it is due to dark hued make up. His eyes, always a feature of a Pacino performance, seem so wide as to be manically deranged. And he is smiling a most becoming smile as he turns, cat-like, to and fro. Immediately a voice asks him his name, first in English and then, almost as an afterthought, in Spanish—¿cómo se llama? His answer reveals that he is Hispanic, as his accent, which will become a source of derision when Pacino’s performance is later critiqued, appears to be inauthentic at first.

It is during this interrogation that perhaps the critical point of resonance in Scarface occurs. This first scene and the two subsequent scenes that follow—his interment at Freedomtown and the scene after that, during which he quits his minimum wage dishwasher job to pursue a job in the cocaine industry, establish the character as being someone who is facing
the same type of treatment men of the underclass have traditionally been exposed to. This familiarity allows for an immediate bond to be formed between character and spectator.

It becomes apparent that he is being questioned by at least two or more white immigration officers, who lurk above Tony’s seated position. Since the camera is positioned at the level of his chair, we can only see the interrogators from below the waist at first. As the questions continue, we get the sense that the men are growing impatient with Tony’s attempt to prove that he is harmless, maybe even a buffoon. The evidence, that this might be the most important sequence in the entire film, even more so than the infamous “say hello to my little friend” final gun battle, is intriguing. This is the scene during which Montana’s come up begins, where he begins to establishes his street credibility with the Hip-hop audience, and the point where gangsta males spectators begin to engage in a critical analysis of his use of the gangsta code. Every rapper who has commented about Scarface points to the come up of Montana as being what connects them to the film. And as I have argued during this dissertation, the come up is the most influential component in the Hip-hop male fantasy of achieving the American dream.\textsuperscript{422}

The interrogation scene allows director De Palma the opportunity to introduce the character by way of an adversarial technique—a tense Q & A. We learn about Tony’s background through a testy conflict that is driven by words and not violence. And while it is not the “full contact” dozens that is engaged in between verbal combatants on the urban streets, a tradition explicated by Henry Louis Gates,\textsuperscript{423} the back and forth between Pacino’s character and the federal agents hoping to trip him up is demonstrative of gangsta values. The scene also establishes that Montana desires to be the heir to the gangster (and gangster film) legacy. When asked how he learned English (which is spoken throughout the film instead of a Cuban’s native
Spanish) Montana responds that his father took him to the movies. “I learned to talk,” he says smiling, “from James Cagney, Bogart…I like those guys.” While there is a minimum amount of violence in the Immigration sequence (the exception being the contract murder of Rebenga by Montana) spectators learn not only how Tony handles himself under pressure from the police-like INS agents, who have the power to lock him up for no good reason other than suspicion (and do just that), his values are exposed—to be critiqued by Hip-hop males.

Tony realizes he must behave in a certain way and, if he maintains his illusion of invincibility, it will establish his street reputation and allow him to survive. Consequently, Montana impresses his audience by exhibiting what they already know—if reputation is the sum total of inner city identity then it is a precious resource that must be cultivated with deliberate care. For young, black Hip-hop males the interrogation sequence, which began the film, was a profoundly symbolic moment. These opening minutes bonded this audience to Montana behavior because seeing him being questioned by the police in a hostile manner was similar to their own common experience. Moreover, Montana’s defiant attempt to “run a game” on the INS conformed to what street smart panopticonicians perform on a daily basis.

Figure 51. Cool Under Fire.
Montana’s poker like defensive approach to his interrogation by the INS calls attention to his steely coolness. He never shows fear or weakness to his enemies as he answers their questions by telling them what they want to here. This scene resonates with the Hip-hop audience because many of these young men have been interrogated by the police.

Scarface screen capture by Rob Prince.
Figure 52. Textbook Cool Pose.
Pacino’s frozen half smile and fixed gaze on his interrogator appears to mask any discomfort the interview is causing him. This is textbook Cool Pose behavior. Hip-hop males immediately determined that he is trying to “run his game,” that is do whatever is necessary to get through the questioning without having to go to jail.

Scarface screen capture by Rob Prince

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Tony next tells the INS everyone in his family is dead. He understands that to reveal that he has family, the existence of which we do not learn until much later in the film, might place them in jeopardy or cause them to be used as leverage against his interests. Montana shares this trait with comic book and movie superheroes and Hip-hop spectators pick up on this commonality. The iconic long jagged scar on the left side of his face is revealed next.

Figure 53. Scarface.  
His scar is a defect that proves to be an asset that adds to Montana’s street credibility.  
Scarface screen capture by Rob Prince
A street smart man knows the situation he is in and what type of game he must play to achieve his objective. In this case the objective for Montana would be to get in and out of the interview without revealing anything useful to the authorities. Hip-hop males surely picked up on this and admired the fact that Tony understood “the game.” We get the feeling that Montana appears to be lying about pretty much everything he is saying. He also understands full well that nothing he says can be proved or disproved.

The chief INS interrogator makes a sarcastic remark about the scar by asking Tony if he got it eating pussy. He laughs, brushing aside the question, another indication of his bravado. The next questioner then asks if Tony is gay. His answer: “No. Fuck no.” There are however, suggestions in the film that Montana may have at least more than a passing interest in other men. The most suggestive of this interest was left on the cutting room floor. In the deleted scenes section of the 20th anniversary DVD release, Tony is approached by a gay man in the tent city detention camp dormitory who, in making an advance towards Montana, alludes to the unspoken knowledge in prison culture about the sex that occurs between men, consensual and otherwise. While Tony spurns these advances, the scene did not make it into the final version of the film. But Tony’s relationship with Manny has enough homoerotic moments to allow for a vigorous
interrogation of who Montana is more upset with, Gina or Manny, when he finds out near the end of the film that they have betrayed him and made love.

But the issue that causes the greatest concern for the INS is a tattoo on Montana’s hand, a pitchfork that the agency thinks is the mark of an assassin. Whether or not that is true is never decided but what is not in question it that the “tatt” is a gang sign, a symbol for a group that Hip-hop males can relate to. But this is also the moment the interview turns, becoming overtly contentious. The INS lead interrogator wants Montana detained now. What happens next reveals Montana’s true nature. Suddenly Tony arises out of his seat, announcing to the audience that his best defense is, in fact, a good offense. Moving toward the chief agent like a bolt of lightning, Montana challenges the decision to incarcerate him over the tattoo. This is the moment of connection for Hip-hop audiences with Tony. As he explodes with rage against his tormentors, his fearlessness proves that he is one of them, a gangsta.

With the challenge to avoid incarceration before him, Montana’s gamesmanship kicks into overdrive. Before he allows himself to be escorted out of the room Tony reverses the interrogation and begins questioning the questioners. Tony asks the lead investigator if he is a communist and launches into a soliloquy about what it is like under Castro.

**Figure 55. Assassin’s Tattoo.**
But the issue that causes the greatest concern from the INS is a tattoo on his hand, a pitchfork that the agency thinks is a symbol for an assassin. Whether or not that is true is never decided but it is a gang sign, a symbol for a group that Hip-hop males can relate to.

Scarface screen capture by Rob Prince
Again, we don’t know if this is at all true but his aggressive repudiation of Cuban communism is meant to be a grand pro-capitalist American gesture, and it works. He knows that the U.S. government hates Castro so he uses this to his advantage. With great fanfare and cunning he manages to turn the tables on his tormentors, giving a rousing anti-communist speech and, invoking President Jimmy Carter, demands his “human rights” as a “political prisoner.”

**Figure 56. Political Prisoner.**
Moving toward the chief agent like a bolt of lightning, Montana challenges the decision to incarcerate him over the tattoo. This is the moment of connection for Hip-hop audiences with Tony. As he explodes with rage against his tormentors, his fearlessness proves that he is one of them, a gangsta. Pacino passes the test of presenting a performance that is, and will be throughout the film, credible in the eyes of his Hip-hop male audience. Montana leaves the room with the audience on his side.

Scarface screen capture by Rob Prince

**Figure 57. Contempt for the Powers That Be.**
On the left, notice Jimmy Carter’s framed portrait at the extreme left above. Montana, now standing, shows his contempt for the powers that be by exhibiting fearlessness and bravado. In this moment Tony cements his hustler credentials with the audiences of the inner city. On the right, the INS officials realize Tony is as slick as oil, they realize, and someone to respect.

Scarface screen capture by Rob Prince.
His anger causes the Hip-hop male to make an investment in Tony’s plight from this point on. Here is a young man of color, just like them who suddenly in trouble, just like they have been. He subsequently is thrown in jail without any evidence against him, as happens too many times to men just like them. Few films establish this bond so deftly---and so quickly. Tony’s moves invoke pure gangsta values and, from the look on the faces of his interrogators as he is lead out for incarceration, he has gained both their fear and the grudging respect that comes with their realization that he knows the game.

Finally, the white male in authority (dark sweater in above stills) decides to send Tony to the detention center anyway. What the scene accomplishes is that the audience is offered the opportunity to relate to being questioned by the police with the result being that Montana’s defiant attitude is respected and approved. Pacino passes the test of presenting a performance that is, and will be throughout the film, credible in the eyes of his Hip-hop male audience. Montana leaves the room with the audience on his side.

Observable Gangsta Code Behaviors

In this scene sequence six behaviors can be observed that adhere to the Gangsta Code.

- **Respect.** Montana commands respect at all times. He does not wilt from the grilling he receives from the INS agents, who are lead by white males looking to find a reason to send him to detention. While they succeed in ordering his detention, Tony appears to gain their begrudging respect. Of great importance that he earns the respect of the Hip-hop male spectators. Because of this bravado an unshakeable bond is formed that unites film fantasy with audience reality.

- **Coolness.** Montana is cool at all times. Montana constructs an impenetrable cool pose exterior that cannot be invaded by the agents. He is purposefully affable, charming, and
knowledgeable about the benefits of a strategic performance. The result he “gets over” on the agents (in that they do not know any more about his background after the interview than they do before). Despite his success they send him to the detention camp anyway, a move that appears to have been pre-determined.

- **Toughness.** When challenged by the agents Montana does not back down. In fact he goes on the offensive, using the anti-communist sentiments of the Americans to his advantage. This is a non-violent and politically astute form of toughness that is often overlooked in the critical analysis.

- **No Evidence of Weakness or Fear.** By being cool and demanding respect, Montana does not reveal any of the potential weaknesses (cocaine use, love for his sister and or Manny, a mother that is living in Miami, his background as an Army assassin) that could be used against him by the U.S. government. The less information they have on him, the less they can use against him.

- **Using street smarts.** Montana clearly knows the “the game,” or how to fool (“get over on”) authorities. He also appears to know “the drill” (in street vernacular a foreknowledge of police interrogation techniques).

- **Contempt for power and authority.** Within this secondary level of respect acquisition, Montana treats the INS agents’ power and authority over him with contempt. The scene foreshadows the totality of the film’s over-the-top critique of power through its representational affront against any and all authority by demonstrating a powerless minority in futile pursuit of fighting “city hall.” Montana is merely the symbol for this rage, the emotional content of which is distributed to the impressionable Hip-hop males which constitute the core of the film’s constituency.
The interrogation scene lays the foundation for Montana’s relationship with Hip-hop male spectators because of its elemental usage of victimization by white racism. Montana’s Castro initiated refugee status is treated with contempt as his American interrogators, who cannot do what they really want to and send him back to Cuba, carry out the next best thing (in their minds) and lock him up. Various forms of incarceration are in play throughout Scarface, be they physical, psychological, job related, or political. This recurring theme molds the first building block of resonance between the Hip-hop audience and the narrative and is, because it is the first impression of Montana offered, key to the overall construction of their gangsta identities.


The Freedom Town/Green Card sequence not only serves the film’s dramatic structure as a bridge between Montana’s arrival and his opportunity to sell drugs for a living, but also demonstrates key aspects of gangsta masculinity. Freedom Town is a detention center for Cubans being detained by the INS. As a prison Hip-hop males are familiar with the location. Many also aspire to reside there as a validation of their manhood. Here the camp is depicted as an overcrowded, dirty shanty town of dingy tents and a basketball court in the exercise yard. Not much happens except that Manny, whose role in the film appears to be as a conduit for connecting Montana and the crew to the next adventure, gets contacted by an unknown benefactor. The benefactor wants Tony and Manny to murder a former Castro official who is being sent there by the Castro government. The man, known as Rebenga, had tortured to death the brother of the benefactor while the brother was being held by the Castro government. Evidently now, however, Rebenga is no longer favored by Castro and has been either kicked out of Cuba or allowed to leave as part of the Mariel boatlift.
Manny, who appears to be well connected in the anti-Castro community, informs Montana of the order for the assassination which, when completed, will give not only Tony and Manny green cards but also benefit two other members of their rag tag crew. A riot in the detention camp serves as the perfect cover for the execution and Tony shanks the hapless Rebenga, who dies unnoticed in the midst of the chaos. The sequence jumps immediately to an office where Tony, Manny, and rest of Tony’s crew are presented with their permanent resident identifications. Given the paperwork that is involved in securing green cards, the impression made by the scene is the idea that Montana’s benefactor is politically well connected.

![Green Card for a Killer](image)

**Figure 58. Green Card for a Killer.**
The successful hit results in a green card, a sly political commentary offered by De Palma. Notice again the near life size photograph of President Jimmy Carter (left photo). It seems the filmmakers want to make it clear who is responsible for the foreign policy decision that loosed Montana on an unsuspecting public.

Scarface screen capture by Rob Prince.

From this point forward the film depicts Montana's rise to power—in Hip-hop vernacular his "come up." He begins his journey as a dishwasher for a grimy street corner walk up diner.

**Scenes 4 & 5. “The Good Life/A New Job.”**

The scene begins with De Palma providing the audience with a Baudrillardian illusion, offering a shot of what appears to be the paradise that is Miami.
But, as the camera pans down, reality is exposed. The visage is a cruel trick—it is only a billboard. The downward camera pan De Palma engages in reveals that Montana and Manny are working, not on a beach with an oceanfront view, but at El Paraiso, a Cuban curb side sandwich stand.

As the camera continues to pan down we see Tony and Manny doing the jobs that their benefactor promised them for the assassination of ex-Castro torturer Rebenga. But the promised jobs are minimum wage—if that.
Figure 61. A Dream Deferred.
During a break from toiling as a dishwasher and short order cook (top) Tony and Manny gaze longingly at the good life right across the street (middle). The intensity of Montana’s gaze underscores his desire to for a better life—by any means necessary (lower).
Scarface screen captures by Rob Prince.

The Call to Adventure

According to standard Hollywood screenplay story structure, “the hero's journey pattern (also known as the monomyth) is the template upon which the vast majority of successful stories and Hollywood blockbusters are based upon.”427 Heroic journeys such as Montana's begin with a "call to adventure."428 Tony’s adventure begins with another connection made by Manny, who gives audiences the early impression that, despite just getting literally off the boat, he knows all the right people in Miami. The connection happens to be Omar Suarez (played by F. Murray Abraham), a lieutenant of the still unknown benefactor. Suarez offers the two dishwashers five
hundred dollars to help unload a boatload of marijuana. But Tony is not impressed. He scoffs at the idea, overruling Manny, who is ready to supplement his income, telling Omar that “the "going rate is one thousand a night, you know that. Who do you think we are baggage handlers?"

Figure 62. An Insult.
Montana scoffs at the idea of making less than the going rate for unloading marijuana. “Who do you think we are,” he asks Suarez (left, played by F. Murray Abraham), “baggage handlers?” Once again Pacino employs an intense stare that focuses directly on his adversary. A key element of gangsta masculinity is to not let an insult go without challenge.

Scarface screen captures by Rob Prince.

Insulted, Omar demeans Tony, calling him a “space cadet.” Commanding respect at all times, Montana lunges at Suarez, who immediately goes for his gun. Even though he is, at this point, still a dishwasher, Tony refuses to work for Suarez loading marijuana unless he is paid well, and this is another significant point of connection between Montana’s behavior and Hip-hop males, who related to that defiant behavior and saw it as validation of their own militancy. Montana also shows fearlessness and coolness while, at the same time, indicates he is tough because he is willing to use violence to assure Omar respects him. These are all values which are quickly proving to the Hip-hop males Tony has what it takes to be a gangsta. Moreover, he is exhibiting behavior that indicates to the audience that they should consider emulating him.
Figure 63. A Threat.
After Omar insults Montana and threatens him with a gun, Tony responds defiantly and has to be restrained. He exhibits toughness, fearlessness, and is demanding of respect, all key gangsta code components.

Scarface screen capture by Rob Prince.

Omar decides that shooting Tony would not be in his best interests. It is possible that he does not act because the secret benefactor has given him orders to show respect to the man who has avenged his dead brother. But, whatever the reason, Omar quickly gets over his anger. He suddenly decides to give Tony a “big job for some big bucks.” There is a pick up and delivery task, involving buying a sample of cocaine, that will pay Tony and his crew five thousand dollars. Tony accepts, believing that his toughness has caused Omar to respect him. But what he does not realize is that Omar has set him up to be murdered.

Tony and Manny, excited about finally getting the chance to earn some real money, quit their sandwich shop jobs immediately. The El Paraiso scene is a very pivotal one. This is the moment that Tony decides to forego any opportunity for achieving the American dream through legal means. However, the audience can very easily empathize with his decision, given the squalor in which he is working.
After Tony and Manny negotiate an ill-fated cocaine pick up deal with Suarez they decide to quit their jobs.

Scarface screen capture by Rob Prince.

“I’m With You, Now”

The action in the scene confirms much of what society already knows about the choices young black inner-city males make. While many do decide to take minimum wage jobs at places like McDonald’s, the lure of making fast money is a great temptation. Tony Montana’s depiction as a minimum wage dishwasher perfectly represents the job prospects of so many Hip-hop males. Therefore, the sequence reinforces Montana’s growing relationship with his urban male spectators. Pacino’s aggressive movements and cold stare convey both defiance and pride. Combined with the first scene, the El Paraiso moment solidifies Montana’s reputation with his audience. Montana’s path is now set and he begins his ascent up the cocaine dealer’s ladder.

What is significant about the sequence is that without Pacino’s efforts to establish his credentials as a bona fide Hispanic street tough, the remainder of the film collapses. Tony Montana’s behavior so mirrors the experience of Hip-hop males that these young spectators need no further translation of the film language spoken therein. As was the case in The Godfather, when Michael Corleone resolved to join the family business at his father’s hospital bedside and whispered in his ear “I’m with you, now,” Hip-hop males were looking very closely at every...
move and gesture Al Pacino’s character undertook from this scene forward. They resolved to be with him now.

Observable Gangsta Code Behaviors

In this sequence six behaviors can be observed that adhere to the Gangsta Code.

- **Respect.** Tony reminds Omar Suarez that he successfully carried out the Rebenga assassination and for that he should be considered a man of respect.

- **Coolness.** Throughout his contentious exchange with Omar, Tony maintains his cool as long as he can—that is until he has to prove his toughness by threatening Omar with violence.

- **Toughness.** Meet any challenge using violence. At the moment his “employment negotiations” with Omar start to deteriorate Tony threatens him with violence, even though Omar produces a gun.

- **No Evidence of Weakness or Fear.** Tony’s fearlessness in attempting to attack Omar Suarez was seen as an admirable trait by Hip-hop males. He shows no weakness or fear in wanting to attack a man with a gun.

- **Using street smarts.** By refusing to accept a lower paying marijuana job, Tony exhibits street savvy. He also exhibits his desire to **strive to come up by doing whatever it takes to get paid.** Montana quickly seizes upon an opportunity to leave his dishwashing job to make some cocaine money. This choice is one that young males face in the ghetto every day.

- **Contempt for power and authority.** Tony understands that Omar, while exerting some authority over whether Tony and Manny can make some extra cash, is not the boss and thus treats him with contempt.
Cutting the Chainsaw Scene

Immediately following the scenes at the El Paraiso, one of Scarface’s the most memorable scenes occurs. The motel chainsaw massacre sequence featured a deranged Columbian drug dealer who, using what has become an iconic yellow colored power saw, murders one of Tony Montana’s friends. While audiences never see the chainsaw actually inflict harm, the scene was found by the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) to be so disturbing that it singlehandedly caused the MPAA to give the film an X rating. And while the rating was eventually overturned on appeal, the bathroom dismemberment of Angel Fernandez remains both a lightning rod for the critical punishment of the excessive violence in the film championed by director De Palma and a symbolic moment in popular culture, one representing the obsession insatiable audiences have with ultraviolent death.

While it was given strong consideration, the chainsaw massacre scene is not included in my list of the most influential segments which influenced Hip-hop gangsta masculinity. Montana does perform behavior in the scene that conforms to the standards of the code. He is cool, he commands respect, is fearless, and exhibits a defiance that belies the predicament he finds himself in. However, several of the scene’s issues prove too problematic to be dismissed. First, Montana ignores his street smarts in this scene and allows himself to be marked for death by the wily Omar Suarez, whose cunning outwits Tony and forces him into a trap at a motel near the ocean. Second, Montana cannot watch his own back much less that of his crew. On the contrary, he must be rescued by Manny, who comes in, guns blazing, to save his friend. Third, Montana’s lapse in judgment causes the death of his friend, Angel. It is Angel who, as helpless victim, suffers the murder by chainsaw—a moment which openly homages the classic 1960 Alfred Hitchcock Psycho shower scene.
However, more than any overt misappropriation of gangsta values, it is the underlying current of Montana’s helpless submissiveness that relegates the chainsaw scene to exclusion from the most influential scenes. Montana’s bravado is, in fact, underscored by the situation he finds himself in—being at the mercy of a psychopath. The Hip-hop audience rarely mentions, if at all, the confluence of bad judgment and fortuitous intervention that mark Tony’s capture and escape from death. Hip-hop also fails to address how De Palma juxtaposes Manny’s heterosexual hands on flirtation with a bikini-ied blonde outside the prison of the hotel room with his representations of Tony and Angel’s incarceration within the motel’s walls as a metaphor for prison’s potential for homosexual violation.

Figure 65. Chainsaw Massacre.
In a supremely symbolic moment blending fear, sado-masochism, and the cool pose hyper-masculinity of prison culture, Tony Montana finds himself bound, submissive, and surrounded in the shower by phallic symbols that wish to rip him apart in the disturbing motel chainsaw massacre scene. Scarface screen capture by Rob Prince.

Curiously, the scene stands out in the minds of urban males only for its iconic naming of cocaine as “yayo,” a term Montana uses to refer to Hector’s now unattached cocaine after Manny arrives to save the day. Rapper Method Man explains in the documentary short Origins of a Hip Hop Classic that the film “had niggers callin’ that coca ‘yayo,’ I know that much. That was the first time I heard that, get the yayo.”
Figure 66. Sexual Confusion.

Hip-hop males either chose to ignore, or did not grasp, several instances in Scarface where director De Palma appears to attempt to confuse the sexual identity of Tony Montana. Here the reality of prison rapes are allegorized by a horror genre styled chainsaw dismemberment fantasy. Notice two symbolic representations. First, the villain’s gun as phallic symbol is suggestive of a forced oral sex act. Second, the chain around Pacino’s neck looks like a dog collar. This staged pose reinforces heteronormative masculinity by suggesting Montana might be a gay submissive. These challenging psycho-sexual representations went overlooked in the Hip-hop male expressions of gangsta performativity.

Scarface screen capture by Rob Prince.

Tony’s escape from death allows him to maintain the leadership of his crew but, inexplicably, his incompetent handling of the whole affair is not perceived to be problematic by his Hip-hop male spectators. And while this study seeks to explore the reasons certain moments contributed to gangsta masculinity the Freudian symbolism of the chainsaw scene cannot be avoided, as it appears it has been by Hip-hop males. But here another set of rules applies, that being those of the prison subculture, which demands that what happens in prison stays in prison. Therefore, the fact that Tony was not violated and murdered, and since he is the focus of Hip-hop male adoration he is all that counts, it is inconsequential that his “dog,” Angel, had to die. What is of consequence is that from this point on Tony has both knowledge and leverage. He has survived Omar’s set up. He has the unknown benefactor’s buy money. And, as a bonus, he has the cocaine that he did not have to pay for. Montana’s come up looks promising.

Tony goes on from this scene to next meet Frank Lopez, the previously unseen and unnamed benefactor. It is Lopez who becomes Montana’s mentor in the Miami drug business.
After all Montana is smart enough to both return the buy money and offer Lopez an imperial tribute—a gift of the yayo captured from the now dead Hector the Toad. Every step Montana makes, from now until he reaches the top of the cocaine game, is revered by Hip-hop males.

**Figure 67. Frank’s Place.**
Frank Lopez’s opulent mansion is designed as a post-modern art museum.
Scarface screen capture by Rob Prince.

**Figure 68. The Yayo.**
Tony Montana’s gift to Lopez was the return of his buy money and the “yayo,” cocaine cache he got after surviving the chainsaw attack of the Columbian, Hector The Toad. After Scarface, the briefcase became iconic for its use as an indispensible tool for the drug dealer.
Scarface screen capture by Rob Prince.

**Figure 69. Loyal Employee.**
Lopez not only appreciates the work Tony did in killing Rebenga but is certain that Montana, although he is unrefined, can be molded into a loyal employee. Pacino’s interpretation of the character is to place his hands on his hips when confronting a rival, a movement he does through the first half of the film. The camera placement is one of the few instances in when Pacino’s short height is so obvious.
Scarface screen capture by Rob Prince.
Frank’s affable nature, as evidenced by his willingness to recruit Montana into his organization so quickly, will be his undoing. Immediately after Lopez extends himself to Montana in self-serving friendship, Tony determines to replace him. During an inaugural night of partying with their new boss Montana has been introduced to Lopez’s trophy girlfriend, Elvira Hancock, who is much younger than Frank. Elvira, a gorgeous blonde according to American standards, is a socially vapid, cocaine addicted predator. Tony decides to possess her.

Figure 70. Elvira.
When we first meet Elvira, she is framed as a beautiful bird caught in the gilded cage that is her elevator. Her thigh high slit on a shimmering evening dress gives notice that she knows that she must keep herself sexually attractive to the much older Lopez in order to continue their mutually beneficial relationship. He needs a beautiful possession. She needs the next line of cocaine. Montana’s gaze up at Frank’s woman indicates that he want to be Frank and possess everything he owns.
Scarface screen captures by Rob Prince.

Figure 71. “He’s Soft.”
Tony, ready to seize on any weaknesses, remarks to Manny during their drive back home, after an evening on the town with Lopez and his entourage, that their new boss “is soft.”
Scarface screen capture by Rob Prince.
Montana’s ambition knows no limits or loyalties. The seeds are planted for the eventual takeover of Frank’s business, his woman, and finally, the ending of his life. Tony will be loyal to Frank until he finds the right moment to strike, the best example in the film of the self-serving Gangsta Code commandment “be loyal until it is time not to be.” What occurs next is the second of the most influential sequences, the moments leading up to and including Montana’s seminal declaration, “All I have in this world is my balls and my word and I don’t break them for anybody.”

In the final chapter, I will discuss the two most recognizable sequences in Scarface and offer my conclusions as to why these moments so greatly influenced the construction of Hip-hop gangsta masculinity. Finally, the chapter will consider two points. First, I will discuss why we should care deeply about the reasons Scarface resonated so greatly with an audience that has long been dispossessed and abandoned by the mainstream. Second, chapter seven will consider why Scarface is a late capitalist Rorschach test, one which offers a number of salient interpretations about what happens when there is a free market confluence of media hype, hyper-masculinity, and hyper-commodification.
CHAPTER EIGHT
A “BALLS AND MY WORD” IDENTITY

Ideology is a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence.

Louis Althusser

In this, the concluding chapter, I will attempt to answer the essential question readers will surely pose—that being, so what? So what if young black males of the Hip-hop generation saw a violent film, went all ga-ga over it, and decided to mirror the attitudes in the film? They are all violent gangbangers anyway, aren’t they? And while the latter was a rhetorical question, enough people in the United States believe the answer is yes for there to be cause for concern. The fact is conversations about Hip-hop aged black males are being held around family dinner tables, at the water coolers of industry, and in the classrooms of colleges all over the world. Depending on one’s ideological and or political persuasion that part of the Scarface audience, the young, black, and male population which has been the focus of this study, could be cast as either victim or villain when the status of their existence is considered. If, in fact, Scarface is a window into or mirror of the souls of these men, the cultural meaning of this film needs to be deliberated upon.

But, before we begin an evaluation of the cultural meaning inherent in this study, I want to begin this chapter by completing my review of the significance of the sequences that were discussed at the end of chapter six. The plethora of cultural and film theories attest to the fact that there are many different ways to read a film text. However, it is essential to the deconstruction of Scarface to assess the role that heroic identity formation plays in the film’s acceptance by the Hip-hop male audience. Simply put, it appears that Hip-hop males from the ghetto underclass have a different concept of what constitutes a hero. The reality that they are forced to deal with on a daily basis is an inversion of what most non-Hip-hop mainstream
Americans believe about the American dream. It is the American dream’s mantra—work hard, play by the rules, and you will gain success—that glues the disparate psyches of Americans together. And when black men sing the dream’s wholesome praises, success often follows. For example, America fell in love with Barack Obama when he told his mythic story at the 2004 Democratic National Convention. Will Smith has also benefited from a more non-resistant posture—he become the top box office draw in the world playing heroes that both forsake the stereotypicality of Hollywood’s representations of racial blackness and exhibit wholesomely distinctive conservative American values.431

But Smith’s crossover appeal has met with significant scholarly resistance. As an actor who has taken the heroic construction of black male identity in cinema to arguably its highest level in history, Smith has yet to gain the complete respect of Hip-hop audiences. Even though he started out as a rapper he is considered “inauthentic,” and not just by the rank and file.432 Thus, none of Smith’s heroic characters appear to have supplanted Tony Montana as the hero of choice in the inner city. Smith’s case is useful to understanding how Scarface became a heroic role model. Like Eddie Murphy and Denzel Washington before him, Smith has failed to get hard core inner city youth to get as excited about his characters as they are about Tony Montana as a role model. The fact that Smith did not grow up in poverty or has never rapped about violence is a contributing factor.

While Smith’s John Hancock become the first traditional superhero in cinema history who happened to be a black male,433 it is Montana, Pacino’s drug dealing killer, who is the recipient of ghetto males’ mad respect. Given this set of circumstances, the study has reached the conclusion that the psychological urge to reject any hint of normalcy, the type of man that Will Smith most often represents on screen and always performs in real life, is demonstrably very
powerful—it appears to trump all traditional male fantasies brought on by cinema spectatorship. These circumstances compel the study to revisit a critically important recurring question. Why is it that Scarface, a film with no black actors and no overtly black narrative theme, resonates so completely with the young black male Hip-hop spectators? The answer lies within the constructs of heroic heteronormativity. In these last two segments that will be evaluated, the study will show how the film inundates the Hip-hop male spectator with heroic paradigms which symbolize those values that men have been indoctrinated by society to accept as normative.


The long standing male obsession with crotch grabbing has been a source of great humor, especially in the inner city where it symbolizes the larger issue of oppression and discrimination in the face of western standards of patriarchal power. Historically Richard Pryor, who became infamous for his bawdy routines, focused on the male genitalia as a source of his biting sarcasm (as have many other black male comedians including Pigmeat Markum, Eddie Murphy, Robin Harris, and Chris Rock) and to express dissatisfaction with the continued social, economic, and cultural emasculation of black men. In the seventies Pryor was fond of saying “check your package,” so it is no wonder that Pryor’s Blaxploitation era tradition would continue with Hip-hop’s focus on Tony Montana’s reflection about having ownership of only his balls (manhood) and his word (reputation). With there being no differentiation amongst Hip-hop males between manhood and reputation, the study discovered why this particular line of dialogue resonated with DJ Ready Red that cold January evening back in 1987.

By this point in the film Tony is established as a trusted lieutenant. Despite the tension that must exist between Montana and Omar Suarez, due to the latter’s failed attempt on Tony’s
life, Lopez dispatches both to Bolivia to meet with potential new connection Alejandro Sosa, an elegant, educated man who refines coca for distribution from a manufacturing facility located on his enormous mountainside property.

![Figure 72. Sosa’s Estate.](image)
The imperial courtyard of Sosa’s mountainside Bolivian estate was actually filmed in California.
Scarface screen capture by Rob Prince.

![Figure 73. Alejandro Sosa.](image)
Bolivian Alejandro Sosa (center, played by the openly gay Wisconsin born actor Paul Shenar) is a cocaine baron looking to expand his empire when he meets Montana and Suarez, who are on a business development trip representing the interests of Miami kingpin Frank Lopez.
Scarface screen capture by Rob Prince.

Sitting down for lunch after a tour of Sosa’s factory, Suarez and Montana begin to bicker over Suarez’s negotiating style, with it becoming obvious that Montana wants to impress Sosa for his own purposes. The argument is interrupted by a phone call for Sosa, who returns to spirit Suarez off to Miami to gain Lopez’s permission to consummate a much more lucrative distribution deal. But in a moment reminiscent of Michael Corleone’s deadly deception of Carlo Rizzi in *The Godfather*, Sosa’s intent is to get Omar on a helicopter for a one way trip to oblivion. He succeeds.
Scene 14. “Revenge.”

The following frames demonstrate the powerful influence the “Balls and My Word” sequence exerted on Hip-hop males. The ferocity of Pacino’s performance is evident here as he uses his body movements and hand gestures to convey Montana’s point to Sosa—that he may not have Sosa’s wealth and class but what he does possess, bravado and reputation (balls and word), is enough to get him to the top.

**Figure 74. Omar Bids Farewell.**
The bickering between Montana and Omar Suarez over who can get the best deal with Alejandro Sosa for Frank Lopez is eventually interrupted by a phone call which leads to Omar’s imminent death. However, most significant in the scene is Pacino continues his practice of putting his hands on his hips, a gesture that he repeats when confronted by his foes during his come up. Once he has achieved success about halfway through the film, the practice stops.

Scarface screen capture by Rob Prince.

**Figure 75. Sosa’s Trickery.**
After receiving a mysterious telephone call, Sosa (left photograph) implores Suarez to allow Montana to stay behind in Bolivia while Suarez returns to Miami to consult with Lopez about the pending multi-million dollar drug deal. But Sosa’s request is a ruse to keep Tony away from Omar’s fateful meeting with his two henchmen, The Skull (right photograph, seen behind Omar) and Alberto The Shadow (in front of Omar).

Scarface screen capture by Rob Prince.
Figure 76. Everything a Man Could Want.
Hand gestures were a major component of Pacino’s performance. Here Tony Montana congratulates Sosa on his magnificent estate and all of his trappings of power. “You have everything a man could want,” Tony comments. The two men are walking down to a plaza where Sosa will put his power on display by offering Tony a front row seat to the execution of Omar Suarez. Hip-hop males had to be impressed with the opulence of Sosa’s drug fueled holdings.
Scarface screen capture by Rob Prince.

Figure 77. Suarez is Murdered.
From left to right, these still photographs show Sosa demonstrating to Montana how ruthless he can be. He orders his assassin, The Skull, to toss Suarez, who Sosa suspects of being a police informant, out of the helicopter at the end of a hangman’s noose.
Scarface screen captures by Rob Prince.

Tony is grateful for Suarez’s demise because it eliminates his major competition to be Frank’s favorite in the Lopez crime family. But Sosa is devious. With so much money at stake he begins a personal attack on Montana to determine his strengths and weaknesses.

Figure 78. Treating Power with Contempt.
Whatever Montana is feeling after he sees Omar’s gruesome demise he keeps it to himself. Sosa, however, proves to be a master psychologist. After tossing the binoculars (left) back at Sosa, he sets out to prove to the drug overlord that he is fearless, tough, and should be respected—qualities that were not evident in Suarez. By treating Sosa’s power with contempt, Montana exhibits a militancy that should be considered the first visual treatment of gangsta performance.
Scarface screen captures by Rob Prince.
Sosa begins his assault on Montana with a personal affront. “How do I know you are not a chivato (Spanish for informer) too, Tony?” he asks. Montana prepares to defend his honor because the code of the streets demands it. He tosses Sosa’s binoculars back at him and strikes a defiant pose.

**Figure 79. You Got That?**
Montana launches into a defensive soliloquy, but he clearly is ready to die. “Let’s get one thing straight, Sosa. I never fucked anybody that didn’t have it coming to them. You got that?”
Scarface screen capture by Rob Prince.

**Figure 80. Balls and My Word.**
“All I have in this world is my balls…and my word. And I don’t break ’em for anybody. You understand? You wanna go on with me, you say it. You don’t?...then make a move.” Tony has grabbed his crotch (off camera and below the frame) right after saying “balls.” He then pauses for effect and places his hands on his hips (below).
Scarface screen capture by Rob Prince.

**Figure 81. Make a Move.**
Montana now waits for Sosa to respond to his challenge to “make a move.” More than any other event in the film, this is the singular symbolic moment of influence for the Hip-hop gangsta. Montana desperately wants in with Sosa and the only currency available to him is his bravado—his balls (western civilization’s term for hyper-masculinity) and his word (a flexibly expeditious term for conveniently offered loyalty and demanded respect).
Scarface screen capture by Rob Prince.
His defiant, yet still defensive, posture was the street smart approach for Montana to convey his realization that he lacked Sosa’s resources—economic, political, and enforcement. At this particular moment Oliver Stone’s script conveyed a sense of his apparent knowledge of the Chinese martial philosophy of Sun Tzu, who Stone would make a household word in his next film, Wall Street. The warrior who understands when he is overmatched can regroup, Tzu wrote in The Art of War. And, as written by Stone, Montana, as the role model for gangsta warriors everywhere, would successfully convince Sosa that he was the warrior the Bolivian needed to take over the drug trade in South Florida. It is useful to note that while Tony Montana receives all of the accolades, it is Alejandro Sosa who is the personification of true power in Scarface. In “Pitbull and the Cuban Boatlift,” an article for the website Hip-hop Republican, Cuban-American rapper Pitbull reflects on Sosa and the Mariel Boatlift. His reflection underscores Sosa’s underrated status in gangsta mythology. Pitbull says

My father was involved in bringing three boats over from Cuba. He brought 547 people to freedom in Miami. There were 125,000 refugees that came over from Cuba during the boat lift, which lasted from a six-to-eight-month period if I’m not mistaken. It’s a vital part of Hip-hop because the whole movie Scarface was based on the boat lift. Everybody knows Scarface because it’s a story about going from nothing to something, which we all come from in Hip-hop. And [Tony Montana] was sort of like the good guy and the bad guy, which we all like in Hip-hop also. I’m not trying to be Scarface or Tony Montana. I’m trying to live more like [Alejandro] Sosa—if they wanna take that movie and depict it for its attributes. That’s basically Pitbull in a nutshell. I’m low key and proper when I have to be and a street when I have to be type of guy.
“Low key and proper” perfectly describes Sosa. But, as Pitbull also accurately states, Sosa can get “street,” as he did when ordering the torture and murder of Omar Suarez. The Balls and My Word sequence is richer because of the work of Paul Shenar’s deft portrayal of Sosa. Shenar remains classically mute but pensive during Montana’s rant. As seen in the shot below, Shenar’s interpretation of his character is to offer a steely cool glare right back at Montana. Sosa, having challenged Tony’s manhood, allows for his new protégé to finish his tirade. His imperial stature allows what occurs next to further construct Montana’s street standing.

Figure 82. No More “Mr. Sosa.”
For the first time since they met earlier in the day, Tony Montana has stopped using “Mister Sosa” to address Alejandro Sosa. He has challenged Sosa to go ahead and “make a move” (try to kill him). But by now Montana’s coolness under fire, and his refusal to allow Sosa to detect any weakness in his character, has convinced the cocaine baron to give Montana a chance to be all he can be—Sosa’s man inside the Lopez organization with a chance to overthrow the weak Lopez.

Scarface screen capture by Rob Prince

After successfully baiting Montana into revealing his warrior nature, Sosa turns on Frank Lopez’s judgment as a means to test just how loyal Tony is to his Miami boss. Montana determines that he will defend Frank—for now. At first Sosa challenges Montana’s loyalty to Frank Lopez by suggesting Lopez is incompetent—after all he had a police informant, Omar Suarez, as his top lieutenant.
Figure 83. A Cool Pose.
Immediately after Omar’s murder Sosa sits down to have tea, an indication of his indifferent coldness. But Tony’s eyes are still focused on the helicopter as it takes Suarez’s body away off camera. Again, Pacino has his hands on his hips, indicating his defiance and fearlessness. Whether or not he has been affected by Sosa’s pointed message cannot be determined, the whole point of cool pose behavior. Scarface screen capture by Rob Prince.

Montana’s reponse (screen cap below) is to defend his boss. “That could happen to anyone,” Tony says. Pacino still has not removed his left arm from his hip and his eyes are focused on Sosa, even as the Bolivian refuses to give Montana eye contact. Montana clearly wants Sosa’s respect but it is being withheld—for now. Alejandro Sosa has finally seen Montana’s anger and nervous energy dissipate to a level where now, unbeknownst to Montana, he can proceed to interview Tony for the job opening he ultimately wants him to fill—to be Sosa’s man inside the Lopez organization with a chance to overthrow the weak Lopez.

Figure 84. The Ice Man Stareth.
The consistently icy stillness in the imperial demeanor of Paul Shenar is in stark contrast to Al Pacino’s more contemptuous posture, which had gruated to an anxiously tough stance earlier in the sequence. Scarface screen capture by Rob Prince.
While Sosa exhibits classic cool pose street warrior behavior, his Ivy League intellect seems out of reach for the gangsta street soldier. Therefore, by going toe to toe with a smarter, more powerful man (and surviving), Montana’s actions validate the value of a street education, proving its usefulness. However, Sosa’s power cannot be ignored. As the sequence closes he implores Tony to remember that it is he, Sosa, who is King. “I tell you this only one time,” Sosa says to Montana. “Don’t fuck me, Tony. Don’t you ever try to fuck me.”

Montana’s reaction, to stop looking directly at Sosa and to instead look down at the table, speaks volumes. This is the only time in the film where Montana exhibits any hint of humility. However, having stood up for himself so well during his tense encounter with Sosa, this moment does not diminish him in the eyes of his Hip-hop male audience. After his contentious meeting with Sosa, the Balls and My Word sequence ends.

![Intimidation](image)

**Figure 85. Intimidation.**
De Palma’s camera positioning is set up to capture Paul Shenar’s fixed gaze towards Pacino, who in a purposeful gesture of vulnerability, manages to appear intimidated by Sosa’s declaration. This would not occur again in the film.

Scarface screen capture by Rob Prince.

**Observable Gangsta Code Behaviors**

In this sequence eight values can be observed that adhere to the Gangsta Code.

- **Respect.** Montana’s approach to the Sosa meeting is to impress the Bolivian at the expense of Omar Suarez. He lets Sosa know he is knowledgeable about the cocaine trade and he opening contradicts Suarez in front of Sosa. After Sosa’s surprise murder of
Omar, Montana is challenged by the baron to prove he merits joining the partnership. The balls and my word moment is the ultimate proof of that Tony’s definition of what it took to be a street warrior was exactly what Hip-hop males wanted, and needed, to witness.

—Treat power and authority with contempt. Montana exhibits a certain amount of measured contempt for Sosa at the time the Bolivian questions whether or not he, like Suarez, is a “chivato.” In fact, his “balls and my word” response to Sosa is the very embodiment of contempt for authority. This contempt is what fuels the rage of Hip-hop street warriors. It was immediately pick up on by DJ Ready Red and spread throughout the rap game. Since this contempt has yet to be abated by the development of a social contract with residents of the ghetto, Scarface, the symbolic measurement of this contempt, remains very much alive.

—Be loyal until it is time not to be. Tony Montana is sent to Bolivia with Omar because Frank Lopez must trust him to some degree. However, there comes a point in the negotiations with Alejandro Sosa that Tony realizes Sosa wants very much to have a partnership with him, not Lopez. In true capitalist fashion, Montana decides to take advantage of the situation and become disloyal to his boss.

• Coolness. Throughout the entire meeting with Sosa, and especially after Omar’s murder, Montana maintains a cool exterior. Even when he spat back at Sosa that all he had was his balls and his word Montana never raises his voice. This cool pose performance was the perfect demonstration of how to behave on the street.

• Toughness. Likewise, because he has demanded respect in the face of possible death and because he was so cool during the performance of that demand, Tony exhibited the toughness that Hip-hop street warriors admire so greatly.
• **Fearlessness.** *Get your enemies before they get you.* In this case Sosa takes care of the treacherous Omar Suarez for Montana.

• **No Evidence of Weakness or Fear.** Montana accomplishes this trait throughout the sequence. If he is fearful at any time, Sosa cannot tell. Neither can the audiences.

• **Street Smarts.** *Strive to come up by doing whatever it takes to get paid.* The entire sequence exemplifies Tony Montana’s drive to do whatever it takes to get ahead. He decides to make the cocaine deal without Frank Lopez’s approval because Sosa respects his drive and ambition, not Lopez’s. Montana’s business acumen can be observed throughout the sequence. He shows he is tough, can be loyal to Sosa (at least for the time being), distances himself very quickly from any close association from the recently deceased Suarez, and makes the intelligent decision to defend Lopez to Sosa when his current boss is being questioned.

**Sequence #3. “Say Hello to My Little Friend.” Scenes 33-34**

The final sequence of Scarface includes its most famous and recognizable moment, Tony Montana’s “Say hello to my little friend” declaration of war during the siege of his estate by Sosa’s a platoon of killers. This Alamo-like last stand resonated with Hip-hop males, as it did with practically everyone who saw the film. DJ Ready Red explained that “when Tony wouldn’t kill kids, it was redemptive. It was why he was killed. People don’t see that.”

Red’s observation points a finger at those outside of Hip-hop nation. They are the “people” he claims that do not see the influence of this particular moment. After New York, Sosa and his cartel take the obvious step to move on Montana.
Figure 86. Stopping the bomb.
Seeing the Bolivian reformer’s children, who are playing in the back of the car, convinces
Tony to stop Sosa’s assassin from carrying out the hit on the family.
Scarface screen capture by Rob Prince.

Figure 87. Moral Compass.
The intensity of Pacino’s facial expression is demonstrative of a man who has suddenly regained his
moral compass. Here Tony blows away Sosa assassin Alberto “The Shadow” in a fit of righteous
indignation. The moment is curiously cathartic for Hip-hop males, who appear to accept Montana’s love
of family as symbolic of their own.
Scarface screen capture by Rob Prince.

In a scene that appears worthy of inclusion in Milton’s Paradise Lost, Sosa’s cool pose is
stripped away in favor of a previously unseen intensely animated anger towards a disobedient
employee. Montana manages to strip away every familial tie he maintains over the course of the
last minutes of the film. After severing ties with fraternal figure Sosa, Tony is summoned by his
mother to find his sister Gina, who has disappeared. Montana finds her at an address unknown to
him. The man who answers the door is his best friend, Manny. Tony sees Gina upstairs and,
based on the fact that she is wearing a night gown, correctly assumes she has spent the night.
Montana’s obsession with his sister’s ability to attract men has been an interesting back story in
Scarface.
Alejandro Sosa has the look of Satan reigning in Pandemonium as he barks at a petulant Montana who, for his part, continues to demand respect from his more powerful business partner. Tony’s refusal to admit his weaker hand, exhibits the type of bravado that resonated with the newly emerging street gangsta mentality.

Scarface screen capture by Rob Prince.

Scarface ends with a symbolism that suggests Tony Montana is, as several rappers emphatically stated, a ghetto superhero. The choice of the adjective “ghetto” is instructive because it elegantly allows for Hip-hop males to demonstrate that they discern the disparities between white patriarchal masculine fantasy and their own. Many significant elements converge in the last sequence to construct the supremely nihilistic vision Hip-hop males have utilized to forge themselves into the gangsta identity.

First and foremost, there is the prodigious mountain of cocaine on Montana’s desk in his office. The drug has been ingested throughout the film, but only by Elvira and Tony. And while “don’t get high on your own supply” was Frank Lopez’s second commandment of drug dealing, Montana has ignored this part of the street code. Beginning with Sosa’s tour of his Bolivian factory and later exampled by his encounter with Elvira, after he purchases a Porsche to impress her, Tony (and writer Stone, who was trying to kick his addiction to coke while crafting the screenplay) makes it clear he considers quality high end drug use a staple of the American ideal. Now, clearly in shock over his own actions, Montana resorts to self-medication for his
depression. But the cocaine, as evidenced by the gun battle that will occur, appears to imbue Montana with the magical powers typical of a comic book superhero.

Figure 89. Reflections.
Surveying a mountain of cocaine, Tony Montana reflects upon his murder of best friend Manny, the loss of his wife, and the impending catastrophe to be reaped from Sosa’s vengance.
Scarface screen capture by Rob Prince.

Up until this point cocaine has been depicted as a fairly innocuous ingredient in Scarface, a snort here from Tony, a toot there from Elvira, who has been the film’s de facto representative for addiction in America. But here the drug is reformulated—becoming a powerful agent of change. It transforms Montana into a God of sorts, freeing him from the confines of earthly mortality. Now he is morphed into a poor man’s Superman, absorbing bullets from countless rounds fired into his body. From now until the end of the film spectators see that coke is the sole reason for Tony’s ability to avoid the plausible inevitability of certain death. It is once again the mystic Incan enabler of superheroic deeds. 438

Scene 33. “Siege.”

With Sosa’s platoon of assassins storming Casa Montana, Gina offers herself sexually to Tony. Apparently high from a sedative that has failed to put her to sleep, she shoots him in the leg as he spurns her advances. Hidden on the balcony is a Sosa assassin who, after fearing that she might hit him, sprays the room with automatic gunfire, killing Gina. Tony, in shock at the suddenness of her demise has been, to this point, unaware of the advance of Sosa’s army beyond his perimeter. His response is to first ingest an ungodly amount of cocaine and then attempt to
have a conversation with his dead sister. After asking her to “wait” for him, he retrieves a
grenade launching M16 automatic weapon and proceeds to take on Sosa’s entire platoon
singlehandedly.439

Figure 90. “Say hello to my little friend!”
Scarface screen captures by Rob Prince.

As demonstrated by the two screen shots above, the resulting carnage is predictable.

However, because De Palma, in a matter of a few minutes of action, is able to fold into the action
the existing masculine cultural mythologies advanced by Henry Nash Smith, James Fennimore
Cooper, John Ford, Joseph Campbell, and The Bible, he achieves reaching a deeper, and more
satisfying, psychological and intellectual outcome for his audience. In addition, and prior to this
moment, spectators had not seen Montana use his army training or witness the obvious
consumate skill he enjoyed under battlefield conditions. To heighten the drama and increase the
tension of the action De Palma’s cinematographer, the great John Alonzo, was able to precisely time and capture, with his camera shutter, the flame expelled from Pacino’s use of his weapon of choice, the M16 automatic assault rifle. Working with the film’s gunsmiths, Alonzo rigged each machine gun burst to open the shutter for dramatic effect.

Figure 91. Montana on a Rampage.
The body count at the end of Scarface reached epic proportions, thus keeping the attention of the male audience until the film’s conclusion. Tony Montana’s one man rampage set a new standard of audience expectation for screen violence. He also gave life to the Hip-hop gangsta male fantasy of the joys of taking revenge against their enemies, both real and imagined.

Scarface screen captures by Rob Prince.

Scene 34. “Montana’s Last Stand.”

What occurs next allows a street thug to dream big. Whether the amount of cocaine ingested by Tony Montana was sufficient enough, in real life, to make his body withstand the punishment of scores of bullet wounds is, in the final analysis, irrelevant to the Hip-hop male audience. The sheer spectacle of Montana seen still standing after repeated volleys have failed to end his life is astounding. Unlike every Superman television series and film, which depicted the “Man of Steel” as impervious to pain from gunshots, Tony Montana does feel pain. This difference allows Montana to become superheroic while, at the same time, maintaining his humanity. See below.
There is one obvious comparison to be made between Scarface and a Superman film. Montana’s last stand might be considered to be more heroic because, unlike Kal-el of Krypton, Tony is a mortal transformed into a superman by a substance. He is also both a person of color and a man whose dreams are more easily reached by spectators.


His suffering from mortal wounds causes Montana’s Alamo-like last stand to resonate with his street gangsta fan base. Tony commands respect, remains cool literally while under fire, and refuses to show weakness in the face of overwhelming odds. The final shootout in the film thus becomes an object lesson for Hip-hop males to follow the street code of honor Montana has therein exemplified.

Scarface screen capture by Rob Prince.

More elements of the gangsta code are evident in the final sequence than in any other in the film, primarily because De Palma stages the ending as a homage to the Randolph Scott-John Wayne cowboy films, here as a circle-the-wagons Custer’s last stand. From a tactically superior position high above the main floor of his mansion, Tony Montana heroically outlasts Sosa’s forces until the stealthy assassin who led the execution of Omar Suarez (called The Skull in the credits but never mentioned by name in the film) takes Montana out with a point blank shotgun blast from behind. Even the manner of death, being shot in the back, smacks of the cowboy film paradigm. The screen shots on the next page reference those moments during the ending sequence that Hip-hop males found particularly relevant to their gangsta code value system.
Gangsta Values

Figure 94. Get your enemies before they get you.
Montana kills scores of men before he dies.
Scarface screen capture by Rob Prince.

Figure 95. Be tough.
Montana is hit by dozens of rounds of automatic gunfire and remains standing.
Scarface screen capture by Rob Prince.

Figure 96. Exhibit a cool exterior.
Montana realizes he surrounded but still manages to taunt his enemies by laughing at them.
Scarface screen capture by Rob Prince.

Figure 97. Never show any weakness.
After being shot repeatedly, Montana becomes more vigorous than ever as he continues
to yell at Sosa’s men.
Scarface screen capture by Rob Prince.
Figure 98. Treat power and authority with contempt.
In the gunsmoke filled mansion Montana’s last gestures defiantly call for Sosa’s army to keep shooting at him. He is screaming, “I take your fucking bullets!”
Scarface screen capture by Rob Prince.

Figure 99. Command respect at all times.
Throughout the siege Montana remains in charge of his own fate. By fiercely resisting he keeps the wolves at his door at bay.
Scarface screen capture by Rob Prince.

Figure 100. Be loyal until it is not time to be.
Earlier scenes were indicative of Montana’s penchant for disloyal behavior. He has disrespected Sosa and brought down the forces of power against him. He has also killed the one person, Manny, who had his back at all times. By choosing when to be loyal, Montana reaps the whirlwind.
Scarface screen captures by Rob Prince.
Observable Gangsta Code Behaviors

In this scene sequence seven values can be observed that adhere to the Gangsta Code.

- **Respect.** The final shootout exemplifies the respect Montana has earned from Sosa, who sends his best assassin and a platoon of armed men to kill him. After Sosa’s forces dispose of every single man Tony has left, Montana still manages to fight them to a stand off until The Skull sneaks up behind him and fires the kill shot. Even if there were no other actions taken by Tony in the film to prove his manhood, this one sequence would serve as his lasting testament. The last man standing paradigm is a viable and popular set of circumstances in cinema, one with a long tradition across many genres.

  —*Treat power and authority with contempt.* As was the case with the opening interrogation by the INS agents the last gun battle exists as an affront to power and authority. Montana, having apparently reestablished his moral center by not assisting in the murder of an informer, his wife, and two young daughters has, in the eyes of his Hip-hop male audience, transcended even his murder of Manny to become an iconic symbol of ghetto warrior grit. His death is perceived as a mythic superheroic martyrdom, a raison d’être for continuing the cultural, social, and economic resistance that exists under any oppressive regime.

  —*Be loyal until it is time not to be.* Disloyalty turns out to be Tony Montana’s undoing. He betrays Manny, who is murdered by Montana; Elvira, who leaves him; and Alejandro Sosa, who has him killed.

- **Coolness.** The “cool under fire” motif is also a popular circumstance in cinema, particularly in westerns and gangster films. Tony Montana exhibits this particular behavior throughout the film but more acutely in the final gun battle.
• **Toughness.** Not only does Montana have to fight Sosa’s men alone, he manages to withstand being shot multiple times. This is possibly the defining moment of fantasy that shapes the value of Tony’s actions. Here Scarface goes beyond anything James Bond had to endure. Moreover, not even during the heyday of Blaxploitation did those heroes get to behave like Superman. And with the anesthetic properties of cocaine known to the audience, Montana’s ability to absorb the pain of being wounded becomes plausible.

—*Get your enemies before they get you.* While Tony Montana is eventually brought down by The Skull, he manages to kill a large number of his enemies. The spectacular staging of the final action scene recalls other film moments where the hero met a valiant death against overwhelming odds—such as Errol Flynn’s classic 1941 film about George Armstrong Custer, *They Died With Their Boots On* or John Wayne’s *The Alamo* (1960).

• **No Evidence of Weakness or Fear.** Once again Montana is able to prove his fearlessness by giving Sosa’s forces all they can handle during the gun fight.

**Conclusions and Findings of the Study**

When we look at what Scarface has accomplished it must be considered a remarkable achievement, considering the film’s obvious shortcomings: a run time that was too long given the simplicity of the story, an over-the-top performance by a white guy in near blackface makeup, and cocaine as the wonder drug that makes users bulletproof. Scarface was not viewed as a great film at the time it was released and, despite a serious reconsideration of its place in film history by the American Film Institute, the film’s long term legacy as a great film is questionable, outside of the inner city. The previously discussed final sequence tops off the
construction of the semiotic monument for gangsta culture, the foundation of which was laid when a rebellious Montana was introduced to spectators at the beginning of the film.

I first saw Scarface when it was released in 1983. At that time I thought the film had serious shortcomings as an engrossing movie going experience. Moreover, as a film that did not have a single black character, much less an overt black theme, I found it intriguing that, twenty years after its debut, the Hip-hop magazine *Vibe* would assert that Scarface was the number one most influential film (out of fifty) in the history of Hip-hop culture. This designation was puzzling to me. How could anyone argue that Scarface was more influential than say, Spike Lee’s *Do the Right Thing* (#14 on the *Vibe* list), a film that introduced Public Enemy and “Fight the Power” to the mainstream? The list of fifty films included *New Jack City* (#13), *Menace II Society* (#12), *Boyz N the Hood* (#3), and *The Godfather* (#6), a film that, in addition to being my favorite film of all time, has been acknowledged by consensus, along with *Casablanca* and *Citizen Kane*, as one of the three best in all of cinema history. To my surprise *Superfly*, a film which directly influenced all cocaine based street crime dramas since it was released in 1972, did not make *Vibe’s* list; neither did *Shaft*.443

This was my personal central research question. Why? This simple question began my journey to determine by what means Brian De Palma’s Scarface had attained reverential status with both Hip-hop culture and subsequently, because of Hip-hop’s influence, transnational popular culture. But here it was, a cultural phenomenon, this poor remake of one of the acknowledged greatest gangster films of the nineteen thirties. My opinion appeared to be the consensus—Scarface was also a film with the misfortune of being judged by two out of three film reviewers in 1983 as being mediocre or worse.
I wrote in Chapter One that one objective of the dissertation was to determine whether Vibe’s judgment regarding the importance of Scarface was correct. When I began this dissertation I thought the magazine would be right, even though I didn’t think that, as a film, Scarface deserved the recognition. I expected not to share the same values as Hip-hop males, a population which determined the cultural direction of Hip-hop. I wrote in chapter one that “what appears to be at stake is how and why Scarface transcended the mortality of filmmaking and ascended to become a cultural phenomenon.” As for Vibe, I have to agree with their assessment, as much as I would prefer not to.

This study began by making several claims, interspersed with questions that were to be researched, that constructed a point of entry from which this phenomenon, which I labeled “Scarfacination,” could be interrogated. In the simplest terms, I felt it would be important to our current understanding of how certain symbols become culturally meaningful to find out how a drug dealing killer could become an icon and a “superhero” (to quote rapper Fat Joe from Origins of a Hip Hop Classic). It might be understandable that Tony Montana had become as significant to Hip-hop as Captain James T. Kirk was to Trekkers but, as I came to understand, I Scarface had transcended Hip-hop culture to become entrenched in global popular culture. And, to my surprise, no one was talking about it. I went to work.

I stated in Chapter One that the purpose of the dissertation was to signify and study Scarface as a symbolic moment, the birth of a culturally resistant urban hero. My thesis was that Tony Montana’s “cinematic persona was received by Hip-hop ghetto audiences as that of a superhero on the same level as popular culture icons Superman, Batman, or James Bond.” The dissertation claimed that it would “explain how this phenomenon occurred.” I also promised to utilize certain theoretical tools—audience reception, psychoanalytic theory, semiotics, and
paradigmatic structuralism to intervene in the discourse by using the character Tony Montana as a case study that will explore how cinema assisted in the black male identity construction of the Hip-hop gangsta.

**Discovering the Symbolic Hero**

There existed three factors, I proposed, that would explain the extraordinary reception of Tony Montana by the Hip-hop male audience: emerging from a similar economic status of being poor, becoming a role model due to his successful “come up” in achieving the American dream of wealth and power, and exhibiting behavior in the film that indicated he both understood and adhered to a value system codified and followed by ghetto males who hustle on the streets to make a living. The bulk of this dissertation has been an exploration and elaboration of these three themes.

Unlike most gangsters in cinema, Montana dies heroically—an ironic ending for a character who has acted so unheroically throughout the film. Nevertheless, the sequence of events in the film, which has seen him survive interment, escape death-by-chainsaw, avoid assassination, exact lethal revenge on his mentor, reject murdering a mother and her daughters, and then kill his best friend for having sex with his sister, comes full circle with Tony’s circle-the-wagons-and-die-in-a-blaze-of-glory Alamo-esque last stand. Scarface concludes in the same manner as Stone’s previous two screenplays, *Midnight Express* and *Conan the Barbarian*, with vengeful violent retribution; however, with Tony Montana here is not a clearly likeable protagonist—at least according to mainstream standards of heroism. Scarface does make it clear that sometimes heroes don’t survive, after all Custer did not. But, depending on whose point of view is being considered, Custer may, or may not have been, a hero. And this is exactly what is at stake with Scarface. He has become an “unlikely” or “unexpected” hero to ghetto residents
because the point of view of those who revere him, Hip-hop males, is not taken seriously by the white male dominated patriarchal mainstream. Tony Montana does not fit the mold of the conventional action film hero; but he speaks for an audience that has been traditionally marginalized and ignored.

The search for and acceptance of heroes who symbolize masculinity is a major thread which weaves the fabric that becomes heteronormativity. According to Krin Gabbard’s article, “Someone is Going to Pay: Recurrent Masculinity in Ransom.” The male hero in cinema is defined as a man who “often risks his life to save the people he cares about.” The constructs of the American cinema narrative insist that the hero of the story, usually male and white, triumphs over obstacles to rescue his woman or family from peril, or to exact revenge for a transgression that has befallen him or his loved ones. He could also need to save his ranch, his city, the nation, planet, or universe. To meet these challenges man must, as Nietzsche suggests, transform himself into a superman or, in the common vernacular, a superhero.

These heroic behaviors influence boys of all ages, races, and social backgrounds regardless of class. And, as these boys began to grow into men, the psychological implications of just what constitutes manhood, in the face of and in context with heteronormative behavioral standards, remains the major factor in how men (and often women) make meaning out of their lives. For example, Laura Mulvey’s article on visual pleasure is characterized by black film scholar Manthia Diawara as an argument focused on “gendered spectatorship” precisely because it recites a so-called “feminist perspective,” that is one which challenges white male heteronormativity. But what audiences perceive as heroic behavior, both in real life and on screen, is carefully constructed from elements cut from culturally paradigmatic master narratives. These include American patriarchal standard bearers such as westerns, the comic book superhero
genre, and crime dramas, all of which depict the simulacra of justice, meted out by aggressive males. This process of masculine cultural assimilation begins before we are ever born—blue is for boys, pink is for girls.

Over the years the heroes of cinema have transcended the constraints of cultural relevancy to attain immortality in the public consciousness. Ian Fleming’s fictional British secret agent, the eternally vigilant James Bond 007, still serves Queen and country and, at twenty-five films (and still counting), is the longest running continuous series of all time.\textsuperscript{446} Then there is Elvis Presley, who despite the lack of acting ability was at one time the highest paid actor in Hollywood and who transcended death into the folklore of immortality.\textsuperscript{447} The year 2008 marked the seventieth anniversary of the first appearance of Superman in Action Comics. The white male alien from the planet Krypton has attained exalted status as the quintessential all-American hero, having been featured in comic books, comic strips, television series, and films.

Gabbard writes that “American heroes…write their own laws, answering to an internal but infallible sense of right and wrong. The hero often risks his life to save the people he cares about.”\textsuperscript{448} Masculinity, as defined by American cultural norms, encompasses both the acceptance of philosophies and willing performance of certain rituals, otherwise known as traditions, which have been designated by cultural forces in furtherance of historical heteronormal male behaviors. The willingness to commit physical violence upon others is clearly one of the rituals we men are asked to accept as a philosophy, if not perform (and perform well), in defense of our persons and our loved ones. Most film genres that are geared toward males (westerns, gangster, crime, action, adventure) are based upon thematic violence in further of achieving a greater good, such as justice. Successful contemporary Hollywood film franchises such as \textit{Dirty Harry}, \textit{Die Hard}, \textit{Indiana Jones}, \textit{Star Wars}, \textit{Star Trek}, \textit{Batman}, \textit{Spider-man}, and \textit{The Godfather} (and there are
hundreds of individual films) all are predicated upon the use of justifiable violence to right the ills of society. Through the representation of Tony Montana, Scarface presented a seductive ghetto fantasy for young men, one that allowed them to worship a different kind of superhero that could symbolize their street values, met out familiar brands of ghetto justice, and oppose every cinema model of traditional American heroism.

David Liao observed that

No movie has had as conspicuous an impact on hip-hop, and more specifically the genre's gangsta variation, as Scarface. Since its release, Scarface has lent its dialogue, music, fashion and imagery to countless rap artists and their songs, such as Notorious B.I.G's "10 Crack Commandments" and Mobb Deep’s "It's Mine." One rapper has even gone so far as to adopt "Scarface" as a stage name, and build an entire career around references to the movie. Indeed, two decades later, it seems as if the very essence of De Palma’s film has been assimilated by the hip-hop community, or at least a highly prolific segment of it. Further evidence of Brian De Palma's "Scarface" being internalized by hip-hop culture can be seen in the frequent references to the film made in music videos.449

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Figure 101. Gangsta’s Paradise.
This stunning visage of the Lopez estate offers Hip-hop spectators, to quote Montana’s compliment to Sosa, fantasies of “everything that a man could want.” The film displays the dazzling artifacts of power here—a beautiful home, a breathtaking ocean view, and a gorgeous blonde female in a bathing suit who is lounging by the outdoor pool waiting to do whatever is necessary to make her man happy.

*Scarface* screen capture by Rob Prince.
Scarface, because it included spectacular visions of what power can obtain, became part of the common language in the inner city, so much so that it became required reading in order for Hip-hop males to maintain their cool poses. The multi-national entertainment corporations, seeing Hip-hop as their next cash cow, scurried to begin cranking out gangsta rap recordings. As Nelson George observed, Scarface was quickly anointed as “the patron saint of coke dealers” as these narratives, supported by short film music videos, proclaimed that the drug and cash money lifestyle was obtainable if the example that Tony Montana set was followed. As an earlier generation of black men had found a hero in Superfly’s Youngblood Priest, the Hip-hop generation also turned to a drug dealer to look up to.

Along with Halifu Osumare, black political theorist Clarence Lusane was among the few scholars writing about the relationship between gangsta rappers and multi-national corporate interests. In Race in the Global Era: African Americans at the Millennium, Lusane observed that Gangster rappers do not challenge the horror that many black communities face; indeed, they revel and exploit it and, more often than not, advocate greater exploitation. They…reproduce a media distortion that is normative. It is the media and the corporate construction of ghetto and poverty myths that is more in line with the pedagogic value of most gangsta rap songs than the liberation ethos of the freedom songs of the past. Capitalist mass media has always been receptive to outlaws. Gangsta …make connections with this legacy in many ways…with their rhetoric of lawlessness, anti-police themes, and espousal of violence. Lusane correctly assesses the issue of gangsta culture’s assimilation of lawlessness as a major theme of its rebellion. But, in the absence of a functioning social (racial) contract between
the ghetto poor and the white capitalist patriarchy, these oppressed citizens are forced to conclude that the law is prejudicial, arbitrary, and the chief means to maintain the oppression.

As this study has argued, the historical legacy of the abominable social conditions faced by slaves, former slaves, and their descendants over the past four hundred years in America are similar to those experienced in an occupied territory or a war zone. Detroit, with homes selling for pennies on the dollar and no major grocery chain willing to sell food within the city’s boundaries, examples a set of social conditions that are a not unlike a siege, during which a city under attack by an enemy is denied the possibility of acquiring food from outside sources. Under these draconian circumstances laws are very likely to be ignored, much less respected, by those suffering from such deprivation. Accordingly, “gangsta” behaviors are the actions and reactions of a particular group of people, already trained by the code of the streets, who feel as though their very survival as human beings are threatened—and they have history as evidence that this is in fact the case. The closest mentality to the gangsta may be the jihadist—like the terrorist with nothing to lose, these Hip-hop gangsta males expect to die and, as did Tony Montana, they want to go out in a “blaze of glory” taking as many of their enemies with them as possible. It’s not Baghdad, it’s only Baltimore.

Anderson’s Code of the Streets points to the role of the media in the construction of this paradigm, and he concurs that the media, especially television glamorizes violence to the extent that it is made legitimate. Anderson also reminds us of the psychological toll inflicted on Hip-hop males that has incited their cultural rebellion in the first place. He observes that

When alienation becomes so entrenched, an oppositional culture can develop and flourish. This culture, especially among the young, gains strength and legitimacy by opposing the dominant society and its agents. Those who experience contempt
from society often cannot enjoy self-respect without dishing out contempt in return.454

Anderson’s comment is both persuasive and instructive because it creates a space in which the level of gangsta masculinity’s alienation and contempt may be gauged through the art of filmmaking. Scarface, like all gangster genre films, is the study of a character in opposition to existing power. And while a fascination with outlaws has always been a part of mainstream popular culture, let us remember that the Scarface text was re-imagined, re-invented, and re-invigorated by Hip-hop culture, which utilized the film’s narrative to institutionalize the gangsta subculture as the militant wing of a cultural rebellion that continues today.

Through the Looking Glass

The study has previously discussed Lacanian scholar Christian Metz’s landmark work, The Imaginary Signifier, in which Metz theorized that spectators gain a sense of participation in a cinema text, not unlike Lacan’s notion of the mirror stage of early childhood development, by projecting themselves into the action. 455 Referring to the spectator’s gaze Metz wrote, “At every moment I am in the film by my look’s caress.”456 Todd McGowan, a critical film theorist who has written extensively on Lacanian philosophy, identifies the mechanism through which spectators of the film became enamored of the film’s thematic systems. McGowan writes that Cinema, like the mirror stage, is imaginary in Lacan’s specific sense of the term. The imaginary provides an illusion of completeness in both ourselves and in what we perceive. In order to do this it dupes us into not seeing what is missing in ourselves and our world. Lacan’s term “imaginary”…is at once visual and illusory.457
Thus Scarface, as a functioning film text, is representative of an imaginary signifier.

Thus, while spectators agree to suspend their disbelief\(^{458}\) upon participating in a viewing, film texts have the potential to influence real life behavioral changes because spectators have a deep, often subliminal, desire to project onto themselves what they alone determine to be the best parts of a character—what Lacanian psychoanalysis calls the narcissistic “illusion of completeness.”\(^{459}\) This would explain the Hollywood “happy” ending, in which an outcome of joy (the completeness) is guaranteed by the apparatus upon the spectator’s agreement to participate in the gaze. The happy ending ensures that the film text fills a gap otherwise lacking in the life of the spectator, who naturally want the best only for himself. This base appeal to the ego by the text ultimately satisfies the spectator. In the case of Scarface, if you were a member of the audience who considered Tony Montana’s behavior to be defiantly heroic (even though he was, according to societal norms, a vicious drug dealing scum of the earth human being) the ending was satisfying. If you were also a member of the impoverished economic class that Montana was portrayed as representing, you were doubly satisfied because you considered his to be an honorable death after a life of following the Gangsta code.

A Dissenting Opinion

One prominent scholar, bell hooks, does not agree with the rationale for the construction of the gangsta’s identity as a logical outcome of the social conditions and media conditioning that young black men are experiencing, including the values inherent in their code. Hooks’ argues why she believes black men have difficulty in attaining African standards of manhood in *We Real Cool*, a work that is part critical analysis and part evangelical plea. As she discusses the complicity black men must own up to not having so far gained liberation from white patriarchal
hegemony, hooks directly confronts Todd Boyd and, indirectly, the findings of this study. Hooks contends that

Patriarchal hip-hop ushered in a world where black males could declare that they were “keeping it real” when what they were really doing was taking the dead patriarchal protest of the black power movement and rearticulating it in forms, that, though entertaining, had for the most part no transformative power, no ability to intervene on politics of domination, and turn the real lives of black men around. The *fake cool pose* of “keeping it real” has really…been an expression of dominator culture.460 (Italics are my emphasis).

Hooks then deconstructs Boyd’s work in *The New H.N.I.C*, describing his pronunciation of Hip-hop as been a product of Black Nationalism, as being “the stuff of pure fantasy.” She continues,

Not only is Hip-hop packaged for mainstream consumption, many of its primary themes—the embrace of capitalism, the support of patriarchal violence, the conservative approach to gender roles, the call to liberal individualism—all reflect the ruling values of imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy, albeit in black face.461

Hers is an insightful feminist analysis, biting in its critique of the old boys club, which now appears to include Hip-hop capitalism. It is clear that hooks does not buy Boyd’s defense of Hip-hop and its, as she quotes his terming of the culture, “detached, removed, nonchalant sense of being.”462 She then diverts from the expected scholarly criticism to attack Boyd’s thinking, writing
Boyd and many of his cronies like to think that calling themselves “niggas” and basking in the glory of gangsta culture, glamorizing addiction to drugs, pussy, and material things, is liberation, they personify the spiritual zombiehood of today’s ‘cool’ black male. They have been bought with a price; they are not their own.463

The tone of hooks in We Real Cool at times approaches that of an Easter sermon by a fiery Baptist pastor. Assuming the role of that preacher, hooks has identified the devil (presumably Boyd), and is prepared to cast him out. The spirituality inherent in her hopefulness reaches out to embrace the reader; much in the same way Dr. King was able to convince his followers of the evils of self-defense in the face of violence. Thus, from a purely theoretical standpoint of ‘what if we used self-forgiveness and grace to save black manhood,’ she is correct. Drugs, sex, and material possessions, each one a major motivation driving Tony Montana’s agenda, have been glamorized in the film and its subsequent homages, to the point of being obsessive compulsions. But hooks does not account for the fact that these men have grown up under the oppressive conditions of what may be termed a post-industrial apocalypse 464 and the opportunity to be “bought,” as hooks alludes to, can be a welcome one when there are few alternatives. Hooks is again correct when she adds that

Gangsta culture and violence colluded with the dominant culture in producing a cult of death that is the current ethos of black males’ life. Collectively black males today are in a world of crisis and …for many death is the only way out. Hip-hop culture…has yet to “keep it real” by interfacing with the world beyond the subculture and mainstream commodifications of blackness in a way that deadens to truly offer black males…blueprints for liberation, healing, a return to soul, wholeness.465
Later in the same work, hooks, while offering a scathing critique of The Moynihan Report, uses Marxist-rooted black nationalist rhetoric, referring to Moynihan’s work as being a product of the “imperialist white-supremacist capitalist state.” Despite her fiery old school Panthersque comment, the findings of this study, however, contradict hooks’ characterization that “gangsta culture colluded with the dominant culture in producing a cult of death.” Collusion suggests a willful conspiracy between partners. Moreover, according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, collusion is defined as a “secret agreement or cooperation especially for an illegal or deceitful purpose.”

Hooks does not make it clear what part of gangsta culture she is referring to, but gangsta rap videos might be her most likely target. And while there have been a plethora of such videos produced, history teaches us that slaves more often cooperated with their masters to survive than not. Inner city gangstas saw an opportunity to get paid. Given the lack of opportunities available to them, they cannot be faulted for participating in a system that ultimately has proven to be self-destructive. However, there was nothing deceitful about their actions and no secrecy was involved.

Why Scarface Matters

Hooks’ definition illuminates what is at stake when a gangster film reaches the exalted status that Scarface, as a product of the very capitalist state she opposes, has obtained. The film was a big budget Hollywood production that was embraced by Hip-hop males, a group that, given their oppression by the state, should be in opposition to anything that the white male patriarchy would care to create. But, on the contrary, Hip-hop males appear to desperately want to be a part of the mainstream American dream. They created a gangsta subculture which had its roots planted firmly in the soil which Scarface had tilled. White patriarchy created the social and economic depravity that created the Gangsta code, which are the rules of engagement. White
patriarchy created Scarface and, even if Hip-hop males flipped the script by constructing a hero from a heel, reaction to the film still places the ideology of the gangsta identity, which Scarface symbolized, within the white patriarchal system of control.

One example of this control was the issue of black representations in the film, specifically the lack of any black presence in the simulated Miami mis en scene. This omission was particularly egregious given that Scarface was set during the time of one of the worst race riots in American history. The filmmakers thus removed racial authenticity from the film’s diegesis in favor of reinforcing existing Cuban-American criminal stereotypes. It is apparent that the Gangsta code’s signification overrode any racial concerns the Hip-hop audience may have had and, therefore the same white patriarchy (that had created the ghetto in the first place) convinced this segment of the Scarface audience to look past any long term solutions that might reverse their plight and instead embrace the violent stereotypes the film offered as short term remedies. Hooks offers further insight into this dilemma in her book Black Looks, observing that white patriarchal norms on manhood “did become a standard used to measure Black progress” Sociologists Mahalik, Pierre, and Woodland appear to agree, adding that Pressure to meet European American standards of manhood…are representative of an important dilemma of African American men. On the one hand, African American men see adapting to mainstream culture as gaining access to opportunity. However, as the attempt to adapt to a mainstream environment that does not validate their existence as integrated, individual and collective selves, they may experience psychological and interpersonal distress.

Add these factors to the siege mentality that is the outcome of living in inner city neighborhoods that are both economically deprived and police occupied, and the end result can
be best exampled by the conditions that are just short of those which exist in a war torn areas such as Darfur, Liberia, Baghdad or Beirut.\textsuperscript{472} When a well financed major motion picture decides to create a character that is similar in every way to the oppressed, and determines that this character should triumph against these odds to achieve astounding wealth and power, the residents who actually live under these conditions really have little to offer in the form of a psychological defense against accepting this character as a role model.\textsuperscript{473} The acceptance of Scarface confirms this theory. The film, and its inherent cultural dominance over the ongoing construction and receptivity of the gangsta male’s worldview, promulgated a narrative in which a character was accepted as a role model—and that role model was later assimilated and enthusiastically performed on the streets because it was seen as an accurate Lacanian mirror of their own lives. Whether or not the Hip-hop underclass spectators of the film realize (or care) that they are “pleasing the white power structure” as they act out this role is ultimately inconsequential to white patriarchal interests. These interests, as the study has documented, are earning both financial and cultural capital as a result of these enactments.

In a perfect world, Black males would offer themselves a plan for, as hooks suggests, liberation and healing, and it is fair to say that many black men are, at this moment, doing just that. But unfortunately, the opportunity to change black men back into what they were before being kidnapped and sold into bondage has been lost. Moreover, hooks commentary suggests that the dream of an idyllic African civilization prior to the kidnapping of millions is as mythic as the stories of Troy before the Greeks destroyed it or of Eden before the apple incident. Even with a current role model as great as the first black President of the United States, the opportunity for a collective transformation of black men into enlightenment is highly unlikely.
As for Dr. Boyd, he may be as bad as hooks makes him out to be, or maybe he is articulating the harsh reality of black masculinity that he experienced growing up in Detroit. Given where he started, Boyd deserves a bit of glorious self-congratulatory basking to have become a chaired scholar of international reputation at the University of Southern California, recognized as the finest film school in the world. As for her bashing of Boyd’s position, the “healing” choices hooks alludes to are not easily respected in the inner city, and for functional reasons that have everything to do with adhering to the gangsta code of values. At the moment there is no possibility for collective liberation, only individual day-to-day survival. As a young man-child, maybe the drug boys will leave you alone if you are school smart and you can later leave the ghetto for greener pastures. Maybe you have that one-in-a-million jump shot. Maybe you can rap your way out. Or, and this is the unfortunate truth, maybe you can come up through the drug game just like Tony Montana because it is the only job that can get you where you desire to be in the shortest amount of time.

Countless films, television programming, music videos, websites, and rap recordings have been inspired by, and heavily referenced homages to, Scarface. There are, at last count, well over two hundred such films and an undocumented, but known to be substantial, number of rap related videos and songs that have been produced—and this product certainly outnumbers the films by a wide margin. A significant new genre, the so named “‘hood” films, which include elements of the Blaxploitation genre, has been created. This business strategy has resulted in the transfer (by way of ticket sales) of tens of millions of dollars from the poor, who saw themselves represented in these films as mostly negative stereotypes and caricatures, to the rich Hollywood infrastructure.
In the final analysis what must be understood, above all else, is the fact that the gangsta agenda, of which Scarface has become the most recognizable symbol, has been largely written by white males entrenched within the dominant patriarchy that Hollywood serves. It was an elite white male team consisting of Pacino, the great white male actor, director De Palma, and screenwriter Oliver Stone, who captured the imagination of inner city male cinema spectators at a time when a Black artistic golden age, which featured Michael Jackson, Eddie Murphy, and Bill Cosby as the most popular top grossing stars in music, film, and television industries, respectively, was occurring. At the beginning of the 1980’s Hip-hop was just a blip on the far distant radar of American culture. Today the gangsta agenda exists as a multi-billion dollar hyper-commodified goliath--put in play by a few white boys who didn’t appear, at that time, to have a clue as to what they were bequeathing.

At a Hollywood cocktail party some time ago, New Jack City screenwriter Barry Michael Cooper saw Oliver Stone across the room. Cooper, who intertextualized Scarface with Hip-hop by using Stone’s “Say Hello to My Little Friend” scene in his film at a key moment, had long considered Stone as his hero. He simply wanted to meet the director and thank him, possibly for providing the inspiration for his own scene, which had become the signature moment of New Jack City. Cooper wound his way through the crowd and finally was able to introduce himself. After some perfunctory small talk, Cooper got around to telling Stone that he was a big fan. Stone then unexpectedly volunteered that he knew why that was so. It was reported by the New York Daily News that Stone, who later was described by eyewitnesses as being “high,” told Cooper that he knew Cooper was a fan because, “All niggers like Scarface.” With that cynical broadside, Stone walked away. Cooper had to be restrained from going after his idol.
Introduction

There is an ongoing conversation about the correct orthographical usage of the word “Hip-hop.” Scholars differ widely on this and no one spelling as been agreed upon across the discourse. The word has been spelled as: 1. “Hiphop” (For example, see Harvard’s Hiphop Archives at http://www.ghoparchive.org/); 2. “hip-hop” (the Cambridge dictionary at http://dictionary.cambridge.org/define.asp?key=37206&dict=CALD). 3. Hip-hop 4. Hip-Hop 5. hip hop

The Microsoft Word program’s spell checker, interestingly enough, uses both Hip-hop and Hip-hop. The study does not intend to engage in this debate and seeks only to be stylistically consistent by choosing one version, in this case “Hip-hop,” and sticking with it through the manuscript. No disrespect is willfully intended to any practitioner who uses any of the other four versions.

Mario Van Peebles was also a living link between Blaxploitation and the Hip-hop cinema era. He is the son of Melvin Van Peebles, the film auteur widely given credit for influencing the beginnings of Blaxploitation due to his tour de force work as star-director-producer-independent distributor of his landmark Sweet Sweetback’s Baadasssss Song (1971). In fact it was the then thirteen year old Mario who played the Sweetback character as a child in the infamous opening scene during which Sweetback, living in a brothel, is seduced by one of the sex workers. The scene was particularly graphic considering Mario’s age and included him performing simulated coitus while in the nude. I found it disturbing that a father would place his child in a situation, fictional as it was, that would cause the son to appear to be raped. However, I was at the Philadelphia premiere of the film in 1971 and the reaction of the packed theater was not one of consternation. On the contrary, the scene was viewed as an expected rite of passage into manhood. Moreover, the fact that Sweetback was so young seemed to confirm his “stud” status with the male members of the audience that I spoke with in the theater’s lobby at the conclusion of the film.

Scarface is, of course, the subject of this dissertation. According to MLA style requirements, as a film title this would demand that it be underlined every time it is used. However, because of the sheer frequency of its usage the study will not adhere to this standard. Other referenced film titles, names of books, newspapers, etc. will adhere to proper stylistic rules.

The term “screen capture” defines stop motion (freeze framed) photographic images taken by the author of individual moments from films used in this study. Appendix F is a compendium of every screen capture employed.

Throughout this study all pictorial images are referred to as “Figures,” a term mandated by the Graduate College of Bowling Green State University. The use of all “figures” is for the purposes of non-commercial academic scholarship and research and meets all other relevant standards of fair use as described by relevant copyright laws. Figures fall into two distinct categories. First, those images downloaded from Internet sources, which have been employed for use in this study in the same manner any other scholarly reference. In these uses each figure is properly cited by both name and source. Second, there are images that have been created by the author after a frame by frame review of the film being referenced. In this usage, the figures are referenced using the term “screen capture,” a common term (also referred to as a screen shot or video capture) used in media studies that can be best described here as freezing a single frame of a film and taking a photograph of it. For the purposes of this study, the
Gramsci’s concept of cultural hegemony, as complicated as the times he lived in, is extremely useful to understanding this acceptance, especially the identification of the marginalized with the values of the dominant class. Also see Davarian L. Baldwin, “Black Empires, White Desires: The Spatial Politics of Identity in the Age of Hip-Hop,” in That's the Joint!: The Hip-hop Studies Reader. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal, Eds. New York: Routledge, 2004, pp. 159-177, and particularly his concept of the “new hip-hop bourgeoisie aesthetic.” Also see Osumare, pp. 166-172. There are dozens of texts that grapple with Gramsci’s signature theory. However, I found that doctoral student Trent Brown, in his article “Gramsci and Hegemony,” provides an often brilliant analysis of the history of the term Gramsci so famously created. Brown points out that

It turns out to be a difficult question to answer (“What is hegemony?”) when we are talking about Gramsci, because, at least within The Prison Notebooks, he never gives a precise definition of the term. This is probably the main reason why there is so much inconsistency in the literature on hegemony – people tend to form their own definition, based on their own reading of Gramsci and other sources. The problem with this is that if people’s reading of Gramsci is partial then so too is their definition. For example, Martin Clark (Antonio Gramsci and the Revolution that Failed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977, p. 2) has defined hegemony as “how the ruling classes control the media and education.”

While this definition is probably more narrow than usual, it does reflect a common misreading of the concept, namely that hegemony is the way the ruling class controls the institutions that control or influence our thought. Most of the academic and activist literature on hegemony, however, takes a slightly broader view than this, acknowledging more institutions than these being involved in the exercise of hegemony – at least including also the military and the political system. The problem is that even when these institutions are taken into account, the focus tends to be exclusively on the ruling class, and methods of control. Hegemony is frequently used to describe the way the capitalist classes infiltrate people’s minds and exert their domination. What this definition misses is the fact that Gramsci not only used the term “hegemony” to describe the activities of the ruling class, he also used it to describe the influence exerted by progressive forces. Keeping this in mind, we can see that hegemony should be defined not only as something the ruling class does, it is in fact the process by which social groups – be they progressive, regressive, reformist, etc. – come to gain the power to lead, how they expand their power and maintain it. (Italics are my emphasis).

Brown goes on in his article to discuss hegemony in a context useful to this study. In a concise review of The Prison Notebooks, he refers to the three stages of development required to achieve hegemonic power. The first, economic-corporate, accurately describes the self interest exhibited by the Hip-hop gangsta, and tends to explain how the gangsta was co-opted into an affiliation with the corporate state, a phenomenon Osumare covers in her book (see citation #4). An excerpt of Brown’s review of Notebooks is informative. He observes that

In The Prison Notebooks Gramsci refers to hegemony to describe activities of both currently dominant groups as well as the progressive forces. For Gramsci, whatever the social group is, we can see that there are certain common stages of development that they must go through before they can become hegemonic. Drawing on Marx, the first
requirement is economic: that the material forces be sufficiently developed that people are capable of solving the most pressing social problems. Gramsci then goes on to state that there are three levels of political development that a social group must pass through in order to develop the movement that will allow change to be initiated.

The first of these stages is referred to as ‘economic-corporate.’ The corporatist is what we might understand as the self-interested individual. People become affiliated at the economic-corporate stage as a function of this self-interest, recognising that they need the support of others to retain their own security. Trade unionism is probably the clearest example of this, at least in the case of people joining a union for fear of pay cuts, retrenchment etc. One can also speak of short-term co-operation between otherwise competing capitalists in these terms. The point to emphasise is that at this stage of a group’s historical development there is no real sense of solidarity between members.

This explanation fits the gangsta’s need for survival perfectly. As someone who comes to understand that selling drugs is a preferred, perhaps even the only, means of employment, the inner city gangsta becomes a corporatist—a small, but obviously important, cog in the multi-national cartels that provide cocaine and heroin to millions of addicts and recreational users in the United States. However, at the street level there is limited sense of solidarity which, as we will learn in Chapter Five, is governed by a respected code of behavior. For Trent Brown’s complete article, written for Links: International Journal of Socialist Renewal, go to http://links.org.au/node/1260.


Chapter One

10 Scarface, released on December 9, 1983, was produced by Martin Bregman for Universal Pictures. The film was directed Brian De Palma and starred Al Pacino, Steven Bauer, Robert Loggia, Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio, Michelle Pfeiffer, Paul Shenar, and F. Murray Abraham.

11 For the purposes of this study we will call this audience Hip-hop black males, or a few variations, including inner city males. And while there are a wide variety of races represented in the inner city, the study will concentrate solely on how young black males received Scarface.

12 One of the best compilations of essays on the subject is The Ghetto: Readings and Interpretations, edited by Joe T. Darden, especially pp. 5-14. The words “ghetto” and “inner city” have become interchangeable terms meant to define and or represent geographic areas within the boundaries of large urban cities. However, there is an appreciable difference in each term’s socio-economic construct. Inner cities can and do include entire neighborhoods consisting of working class and middle class
residents. In addition, due to gentrification, many inner cities have seen upper class higher income citizens move back into them from the suburbs. The ghetto, however, exists exclusively within the inner city. Within its boundaries are entire neighborhoods of residents that, typically, are extremely poor due to underemployment or unemployment, and unemployment is but one of a host of problems which confront them. Ghettoes traditionally have the highest rates of crime, the highest concentrations of police interventions, the lowest property values, the fewest fresh food groceries, the most liquor stores, and the fewest businesses owned by residents.

13 It could be argued that Scarface falls into the categorical genre of a “cult” film. The live performances of The Rocky Horror Picture Show notwithstanding, since the Blaxploitation era Scarface remains the only film in recent memory that has inspired direct behavioral mimicking in daily ghetto street life.

14 Two good examples: William H. Grier and Price M. Cobbs. Black Rage. New York: Basic Books, 1968. The book offers a psychiatric perspective of these issues. Also, see the highly controversial The Negro Family: The Case for National Action. The Office of Policy Planning and Research, United States Department of Labor, 1965. Better known as The Moynihan Report, this study, assisted greatly by the work of renowned social scientist E. Franklin Frazier, provided the policy “white paper” rationale for Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty, a direct government intervention taken on behalf of the poor during the contentious period that was the 1960’s American Civil Rights era.

15 Blaxploitation films often were marketed by the studios as having heroes who “stuck it to the Man,” the “Man” referring to the white power structure, white men in general, police, and hegemony (although that was a term not in use in the ghetto) among other long standing foes. Sticking it to the man meant that the hero was defiant, rebellious, thought outside the box, was trying to “get over,” etc. I cannot think of one hero from this genre that did not exhibit this trait. These characteristics were all central to Scarface’s Tony Montana character. Keep in mind that the Hip-hop male audience was already exposed to the narrative mythologies of Blaxploitation practically from birth—having been raised in families that included members who themselves were Blaxploitation film goers. In describing her son’s efficacy for defiant art, Afeni Shakur, the mother of rapper Tupac, a young man who symbolizes all that Hip-hop gangsta culture stands for, was cited in Bad Ass Cinema, the documentary film which explored the rise and fall of the Blaxploitation era, as saying these films had been a major influence on Tupac’s world view.

16 Among the excellent texts which provide in depth discussions about these types of films are Celeste A. Fisher’s Black on Black: Urban Youth Films and the Multicultural Audience. Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2006; and Sheril D. Antonio’s Contemporary African American Cinema. New York: Peter Lang, 2002.


18 Of all post-Blaxploitation black male film stars, only one career spanned the entire period: that of Richard Pryor. And while Pryor was an inner city legend for the graphic profanity of comedic routines, his films never came close to showcasing heroic deeds that would inspire black youth. Eddie Murphy
followed Pryor as Hollywood’s “designated” black male star and immediately established himself with a string of blockbuster level hit films including his debut in 48 Hrs (1982), Trading Places (1983), and Beverly Hills Cop (1984), a film that initially was to star Sylvester Stallone as a “take no prisoners” Dirty Harry type cop. While 48 Hrs. and Cop two featured Murphy in action-crime comedies, because of his middle class Long Island upbringing, Murphy never really connected with gangsta types. Other black male stars who had major roles during this “gap” period were Danny Glover, Denzel Washington, and Morgan Freeman. Glover was the most bankable actor with his starring turn in the smash hit Lethal Weapon (1987; and its subsequent hit sequels in 1989, 1992, and 1998) as the family oriented cop partner to Mel Gibson’s suicidal loner. Washington won an Oscar for his role as a runaway ex-slave Union soldier in Glory (1989). However, it was left to Wesley Snipes in 1991’s New Jack City to catch the attention of similar minded youths seeking to live the thug life.

19 The voice of villain Darth Vader was performed by black actor James Earl Jones in the first trilogy. After protests from black film goers about the lack of any visible black actors in the original, Billy Dee Williams was hired in a supporting role in the final two episodes, The Empire Strikes Back (1980) and Return of the Jedi (1983). Lucas was much more diverse in his casting for the second trilogy but he ran into claims of racist stereotyping because of the character Jar Jar Binks, his mumbling, shuffling, minstrel-like digitally created buffoon. Overwhelming criticism against Binks reduced his presence in the final two episodes to mere cameo appearances.

20 Pryor’s film career began just before Blaxploitation and ended in 1997. His good friend Jim Brown, the Pro Football Hall of Fame inductee, had arguably a greater impact on black heroic construction in films than Pryor. Brown’s career began in 1964 with The Dirty Dozen and, fifty-four roles later, is still ongoing. However, because of his Black Nationalist politics Brown was never promoted by Hollywood at a level equal to “A” list black stars, such as Denzel Washington, Morgan Freeman, Danny Glover, and Will Smith.

21 The fact that Van Peebles had the entire WB gangster film library at his disposal and chose not to use it is informative. Warner Brothers is considered the studio which has released the best gangster films in the history of Hollywood, literally re-inventing, with 1931’s Little Caesar, a genre started during the silent era.

22 As the study will discuss in Chapter Five, “authentic” has become a loaded term that means different things to different people. An authentic male in Hip-hop has come to be understood as someone who is born and raised in the urban inner city, and has decided to live by, what Anderson calls, the “code of the streets.” This most often means that the authentic individual has carved out a reputation for violence, disinterest in formal education, and lack of interest in traditional employment opportunities, among other traits. In short “authentic” black ghetto/inner city dwellers, when compared to traditional American mainstream values, are respected for taking actions in opposition to these values. As for “ghetto,” see citation #5 above.

Douglas Glasgow also provides a very useful explanation of the term “underclass,” including how the term “ghetto” replaced “slum” and came to describe where and how this underclass is forced to live. See The Black Underclass: Poverty, Unemployment and Entrapment of Ghetto Youth, p. 34-36. Also useful to defining these distinctions are the essays in Darden’s The Ghetto, (see cite #5) including Darden, p. 6-14 and 27-31, and Wirth, p. 15-26.

23 This character archetype was resurrected by Denzel Washington in American Gangster, which was based on the life of Harlem heroin kingpin Frank Lucas. The film was adapted from Mark Jacobson’s August 7, 2000 article in New York magazine, “The Return of Superfly.”


While *Origins* has a style that would place it within the documentary format, it offers only the one sided opinion that *Scarface* is a great film. This is not to say that those interviewed are not sincere in their positive reactions to the film. However, without any opposing or contrary views, *Origins* appears to be more of a marketing device in support of Universal’s attempts to sell more DVD units.

See Danny Fingeroth’s *Disguised as Clark Kent: Jews, Comics, and the Creation of the Superhero*. New York: Continuum, 2007. “Superman” was the name a newspaper gave to Kal-el, the orphan from the doomed planet Krypton, and whose alter ego disguise was the mild mannered reporter Clark Kent. Originally created in 1938 by Jerry Siegel and Jose Shuster, two Jewish-American teenagers from Cleveland, Superman, according to Fingeroth, symbolized both the subconscious need for an invulnerable hero to deliver the race from the horrors of Nazi Germany and the desire, as immigrant aliens, to fit in as Americans. Superman became the mom and apple pie champion for, as famously stated at the beginning of the 1950’s television series, “truth, justice, and the American way.” Superman’s Jewish origins are only today being examined by popular culture scholars.

George Lucas used Campbell’s work as the philosophical underpinning for the heroic narrative in his *Star Wars* films.

Harvard psychiatrist Dr. Alvin Poussaint was a paid consultant to the series, an effort by Bill Cosby to insure that the series’ scripts portrayed African-Americans in an “authentic” manner. However, because the vast majority of African-Americans were not members of the same economic class as the Huxtables, those audiences were less likely to view many the story line as representative of their own.

“Legs” is a term used by Hollywood studios to describe a film that, at a minimum, has transcended the normal length of a film’s exhibition time in a theater—which usually is a minimum of four weeks.
35 The Internet became commercial in 1988.


39 See Michael Moore’s Bowling for Columbine (2002), which includes an animated segment (narrated by a Talking Bullet) that points out what Moore feels is the nonsensical historical white fear of the black man.

40 Unlike the deaths of the anti-heroes in the films Bonnie and Clyde (1967) and Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid (1969), Scarface’s Tony Montana was fully aware of his ambush at the end of the film. In true cowboy fashion, and not unlike Errol Flynn’s Gen. Custer in They Died with Their Boots On (1941), he too died with his metaphorical “boots” on. Montana, in true cowboy fashion, “faced down” a horde of assassins before getting shot in the back—the same manner in which Jessie James was murdered.


43 Lloyd, Los Angeles Sentinel.

44 See Kael’s “A De Palma Movie for People Who Don’t Like De Palma Movies,”” in the December 26, 1983 issue of the New Yorker (p. 50-53). Her review came to symbolize the poor response the film received from the mainstream upon its initial release. One of the most prolific and recognized film reviewers in history she had, prior to Scarface, written generally favorable reviews on the films of Brian De Palma. However, Kael came to symbolize the poor response the film received from the mainstream upon its initial release. She wrote that, among other things, Scarface “may be the only action picture that turns into an allegory of impotence” and that the film “has the length of an epic but not the texture of an epic and its dramatic arc is faulty.”


46 Indisputably “Walk this Way” jump started rap’s acceptance into the mainstream, lead reluctantly by the influential MTV cable network, which had at first refused to play music videos by black artists (including the reigning king of pop, Michael Jackson). “Reluctantly” is accurate because MTV waited—debuting its first rap programming series, “Yo! MTV Raps,” in August, 1988—a full two years after “Walk” aired on the network. The song featured the original recording artists of the song, Aerosmith, who were at the time struggling to make a comeback. Interestingly, after their collaboration with rap Aerosmith never looked back—and never worked with a black act again.
For a full and complete analysis of the sneaker phenomenon, and its role as both a ghetto status
symbol and popular culture icon, see Just For Kicks (2005), an excellent documentary film which talks
about this strategy. It features an artist who customizes sneakers by painting images of Al Pacino as Tony
Montana on each shoe.

Boyd, a film and cultural scholar based at the University of Southern California, has been
outspoken in his criticism for former rapper Smith. For examples of his disdain See The New H.N.I.C:
p. 53-54.


“Before Brad Jordan became known as Scarface, he called himself Akshen. As such, he
began his rap career first as a solo artist in his native Houston during the mid-'80s for
James Smith's then fledging Rap-A-Lot label. Smith was trying to launch a group he
tagged the Ghetto Boys, and eventually asked Akshen to join the group in the late '80s
after the group had released Making Trouble (1988), its first album, which included the
seminal “Balls and My Word.” The group's second album, Grip It On That Other Level
(1990), later repackaged and re-released that same year simply as The Geto Boys (a name
change made by Rick Rubin, who took over as producer, shocked many with its vivid
depictions of violence and its overall extreme nature. This album featured the song
"Scarface," which introduced Akshen's alter ego, a title he would keep from that point
onward. The ensuing controversy surrounding the group's debut put The Geto Boys on
the map and set the stage for the impressive We Can't Be Stopped (1991). In the wake of
the group's national success came solo albums, one of which being Scarface's debut,
Mr. Scarface Is Back (1991). The album made it evident who the group's most talented
member was, and the acclaim showered on Scarface resulted in bitter tensions with his
fellow Geto Boys, Bushwick Bill and Willie D. By the time Scarface returned with his
follow-up album, The World Is Yours (1993), his reputation overshadowed that of his
group's.”

See the website Hip-hop Area. They explain that “N.W.A's follow-up record, 1991's
"Niggaz4Life," sold 954,000 copies in its first weeks of release to become the first hardcore rap album to
hit No. 1 on the charts, despite being banned by some record stores and seized by English authorities as
obscene.” Go to: http://www.hiphoparea.com/rap/unofficial-hip-hop-timeline.html

Chapter Two

Two-thirds of the film critics who screened Scarface wrote unfavorable reviews. I chose to
sample 30 reviews of the film that were written between November 30, 1983 (the pre-release review by
Daily Variety) and the March-April 1984 issue of The Humanist. Of these, 20 (66.67%) were
determined to be negative reviews and 10 positive reviews (33.33%). The criteria for sampling were
based on the reputation and consistency of the critic and or the reputation of the journal in which the
review appeared. See Appendix A for the complete list of the reviews considered.


See Appendix B. Scarface finished with ticket sales of $44,668,798, the 16th highest box office
domestic gross sales of films released in 1983. The calculation of the gross amount took into
consideration the fact that the film was released near the end of the year and counts all ticket income earned during the initial theatrical run, which lasted from December 9, 1983 until March 15, 1984. In comparison, The Godfather grossed $134.9 million domestically in 1972, an amount triple that of Scarface’s gross.

54 It was Pacino who initiated the film project. He became enthralled with the 1932 original after seeing it in Los Angeles and called on his old friend, producer Martin Bregman, to put a production package together.


56 “Scarface.” Cineaste volume 13, #3 (1984): 48-50. I found Jaehne’s review to be one of the most mean spirited I came across. As were a few other reviews I read for this project, Jaehne exhibited considerable disregard for assuring accuracy in her details. For example, she writes that during the chainsaw scene “the television plays out its predictable role, reporting on the mess in Nicaragua.” Actually, as practically every Scarface trivia buff knows, the TV is playing the film Earthquake (1974, starring Charleston Heston). It’s an intertextual moment because the screenwriter of that film is none other than Mario Puzo, the author of both the novel and the screenplay of The Godfather, which was directed by De Palma’s good friend Francis Coppola. The use of a minor detail to skewer the film, when the detail is not accurate, examples Jaehne’s problematic approach to this film review.


58 Ibid.


61 Ibid.

62 Ibid.

63 Other notable dissenters from the majority opinion were Richard Corliss (Time. December 5, 1983. p. 96), who commented that the original ‘X’ rating was “a bum rap. Scarface is no fouler than Richard Pryor on a good day and less graphic than the last three dozen splatter movies. The only X this movies deserves is the one in explosive.” Also, the influential Vincent Canby (The New York Times. Dec. 9, 1983, p.C18). Canby called the film “the most stylish and provocative—and maybe the most vicious—serious film about the American underworld since Francis Ford Coppola’s Godfather.” Newsweek’s David Anson also concurred. He pronounced the film “a grand, shallow, decadent entertainment, which like all good Hollywood gangster movies delivers the punch and countpunch of glamour and disgust.” (December 12, 1983. p.109)

For a complete list of Bond films go to the website 007 at http://www.klast.net/bond/filmlist.html

Urban street vernacular for drug dealers, pimps, hustlers, gang bangers, and anyone else who is an active participant in the underbelly of the inner city.

As part of this study I made several attempts to contact Universal Media Licensing (UML), a division of Universal Studios Consumer Products Group, itself a division of NBC Universal Studios, which owns the Scarface brand. UML considers partnerships with businesses and entrepreneurs on licensing and franchising agreements. My phone calls and emails to the headquarters of UML in Universal City, California, in an attempt to find out the number of Scarface related franchises awarded by Universal, were never responded to.

I have corresponded with Tucker by email on several occasions and he has proven to be gracious, friendly, and interested in my work. However, my observation to him—that the timing of the release of his book appeared to be done in concert with the efforts of Universal’s ongoing marketing of the film for a 25th anniversary celebration—was categorically denied.


Ibid, page 5.

Ibid. During my three years of researching this project I have yet to come across any evidence of white college students hosting Scarface parties. There have been discussions and lectures at the college level to be sure—but nothing to substantiate the claim made by Bregman. Second, my research uncovered that this particular quote originated not from any conversation Tucker may have had with Bregman directly. The source is actually a New York Times article, “A Foul Mouth with a Following: 20 Years Later, Pacino’s ‘Scarface’ Resonates with a Young Audience,” by Bernard Weinraub, September 23, 2003. A reading of the article reveals that it was Weintraub’s interview, and not Tucker, that garnered the quote from Bregman. The reason that Tucker used the quote, verbatim, without acknowledging the true source, is unknown.

Beginning with the film that began the gangster genre, 1927’s Underworld (written by Ben Hecht, who also wrote the screenplay for the original 1932 Scarface).

See Ronald Bogue, “De Palma's Postmodern Scarface and the Simulacrum of Class.” Criticism Vol.35, 1993. p.115-29. Bogue’s analysis attempted to persuade scholars that the value of the film was as a postmodern repository of Baudrillardian simulations. His article concluded with the claim that “De Palma, in sum, is an oppositional postmodern artist commenting on the Baudrillardian postmodern culture from a theoretical position that is, like Lyotard’s and Deleuze-Guattari’s, decidedly postmodern. De Palma’s strategy is to play with the simulacra of post-modernity, to question them but without proposing a programmatic alternative.” Like the film critics who attempted their own understanding of the film, with some enjoying it and most expressing disappointment, Bogue wrote for a specific audience that did not include Hip-hop.

Entertainment industry sales and revenue standard Billboard Magazine first began reporting Video Homes Sales (VHS), Betamax (Beta), and Laser Disc rental and sales figures for Scarface in June 1984, the first year that these formats were aggressively marketed to the public. The typical rental fee range was $3-10 per day. The cost of purchasing the Scarface film averaged $80. Scarface was first
charted on June 9, 1984 and remained on the Billboard Top 40 Video rentals list for 44 consecutive weeks, until April 6, 1985. Only Raiders of the Lost Ark (60 weeks) had a longer run during this period. When Raiders dropped out of the Top 40 on February 2, 1984, Scarface became the longest running video rental. In second was The Big Chill (at 34 weeks) followed by Romancing the Stone (30 weeks).

I spoke with Collins Leysath, aka DJ Ready Red, by telephone on July 7, 2008. He confirmed that as a kid on the streets a part of being “cool” was to have seen the Scarface film and be able to discuss it. As for Dogg and Combs, they both confess on Origins of the Hip-hop Classic, the previously reference documentary film chronicling Hip-hop’s love for Scarface, that they have watched the film multiple times (Combs said he had done so 63 times) learning something new about street values each time.


Schooly was, at the time, a member of the notorious Park Side Killers street gang (thus the initials PSK) in Philadelphia. It was his prideful pronouncement that is given credit for initiating the gangsta identity in rap and all resulting mythology.

From the article “Black British Cultural Studies and the Rap on Gangsta” by Eithne Quinn published in the Black Music Research Journal, Vol. 20, No. 2, Autumn, 2000. pp. 195-216. Quinn writes that “The term gangsta rap started to gain currency in 1989. It’s first American broadsheet appearance was in the Los Angeles Times, when the controversial single ‘Gangsta, Gangsta’ by N.W.A. (Niggaz wit Attitude) was in Billboard’s Hot Rap singles chart.” Quinn cites her claim by writing a footnote which reads, “the first usage of the term gangsta rap is based on the finding of a Nexis computer search of the U.S. broadstreet press for the terms gangsta and gangster rap conducted by the author on May 8, 1997. ‘Gangsta, Gangsta’ is a single take from N.W.A.’s groundbreaking 1988 album Straight Outta Compton.”

The study of the disenfranchisement of African-Americans (also known as blacks, and formerly as Negroses), the descendants of Africans who were kidnapped from their homeland and brought to the United States to work as slaves, is long and distinguished. For the purposes of my research The Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, a government study published in March 1, 1968 and popularly known as the Kerner Commission Report, serves as the definitive body of work on the root causes of post-Brown decision era urban violence and the neglect of societal forces to address the disparities faced by residents of these neighborhoods in any meaningful way. Forty years after the Kerner Commission issued its recommendations calling for economic justice (which were ultimately curtailed by the funding priorities of the Vietnam War), the Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation critiqued the Kerner Report and found that conditions for African-Americans living in America’s inner cities had, “for the most part, failed to meet the Kerner Commission’s goals of less poverty, inequality, racial injustice and crime” (page 2, Executive Summary—link found at http://www.eisenhowerfoundation.org/. Eisenhower is an organization that, according to its website, is “the international, nonprofit continuation of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders—aka the Kerner Riot Commission, after the urban riots of the 1960s—and the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence—aka the National Violence Commission, formed after the assassinations of the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. and Senator Robert Kennedy.” See also a February 28, 2008 story by USA Today on the Eisenhower study at the newspaper’s website, http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2008-02-28-kerner-commission_N.htm.
Respected journalist and documentarian Bill Moyers also weighed in on the 40th anniversary report, citing that the conservative think tank The Heritage Foundation placed the blame for the lack of economic progress for blacks squarely at the feet of black men. Moyers wrote that

Referencing the Kerner Commission report has become rhetorical shorthand in some ways. For critics it suggests wasteful federal spending programs — for others, societal goals and potentials not yet met. In covering the 40th anniversary report USA Today headlined its 40th anniversary coverage “Goals for Black America Not Met.” The article raised some ire when quoting Robert Rector of Heritage Foundation: ‘Rector says the report ignores a major cause of poverty: single-parent homes. He says 70% of black children do not have a father in the home.’ That sentiment earned this response from Elliott Currie, a member of the Kerner Commission, 40th Anniversary Task Force: ‘The implication is that it’s the heedless behavior of black men — rather than the strains of a blighted economy and a legacy of discrimination — that is responsible for the continuing crisis of poverty and racial disadvantage 40 years after the Kerner Commission.’ Thus the vilification of black men by white male policy makers, and their complete awareness of their status as dupes, pawns, and victims, continues to fuel the rage resulting from the disrespect and neglect of white patriarchy—the resulting behavior being the advancement of the gangsta identity, including gang membership and the violence inherent with that choice, as a mechanism of self defense.

80 See Chang, p. 311

81 Glasgow’s The Black Underclass, chapter six, “Adapting to Survival on the Street,” p. 87-104. Here Glasgow addresses the psychology surrounding both the street hustle and hustler, beginning with 1965 in the Watts area of Los Angeles. For the purposes of this study, and with full knowledge that the street behavior Glasgow describes started in America’s urban centers decades earlier, the Watts area serves as a useful bookmark for gangsta related psychological profiling since it is commonly known as where the gangsta lifestyle took root and became popular, in part due to the artistic success in promoting the genre through artists such as Tracy “Ice-T” Marrow, and the gangsta rap super group N.W.A., which featured militant legends Ice Cube, Dr. Dre, and Easy E.


83 The list is as long as it is distinguished. Scores of studies, reports, books, and articles that have considered the plight of black men, both within the context of the black family and as a separate sociological group. The two most prominent government studies published in the last fifty years have been headed by white males: 1. The Negro Family: The Case For National Action, Office of Policy Planning and Research, United States Department of Labor, March 1965 (better known as The Moynihan Report). 2. Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, March 1968 (commonly called the “Kerner Commission Report” or the “Kerner Riot Commission Report”). African-Americans have also studies themselves, either within the confines of academic research or through autobiographical reflection. Any review of scholarly literature on black males (who, in the beginnings of the discourse, appear to be studied within the context of research on the black family), must begin with the prolific W.E.B Du Bois and include his most famous work The Souls of Black Folk (1903). Others on the list of most prominent research should include: the work of pioneering sociologist E. Franklin Frazier, who wrote several groundbreaking articles and books including “The Pathology of Race Prejudice”(1927), The Negro Family in Chicago (1932), and The Negro Family in the United States (1939); the epochal 1944 Carnegie Foundation study by Swedish economist Gunner Myrdal, An American Dilemma: The Negro
Problem and Modern Democracy; the research of eminent African-American psychologist Kenneth B. Clark, including Dark Ghetto: Dilemmas of Social Power (1965)—the U.S. Supreme Court had relied on Clark’s expert testimony in making its Brown v. Board of Education decision in 1954. Black psychiatrists have frequently contributed to the body of work about black men. Franz Fanon is unquestionably the pioneer in this area and Black Rage, by William Grier and Price Cobbs is a brilliant study which traces the effects of slavery identity construction. More recent contributors to the discourse have been Cornel West, Henry Louis Gates, Robert Staples, Jacob H. Gordon, Anthony J. Lemelle, Jr., Mark Anthony Neal, bell hooks, Michael Eric Dyson, and James McWhorter. Autobiographies by Eldridge Cleaver, Malcolm X, Sanyika Shakur, and Claude Brown highlight personal observations by black men themselves. Their reflections are indicative of the constant struggles of black men to understand themselves and survive as symbolic strangers in a strange land.

84 See Shakur, particularly the opening pages.

85 Although widely attributed to Charles Darwin, the phrase was first used by British economist Herbert Spenser in his 1864 textbook, Principles of Biology.

86 The “wages of gangster sin is death” is paraphrased from the King James Bible, Romans 6:23. “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” As for Scarface’s overarching theme being consistent with every other gangster film, there is one notable exception: The Godfather and its two sequels. However, Michael Corleone’s survival of the Mafia wars, allowing him to die peacefully in Sicily at the end of The Godfather III (1990), was tempered by the living hell of his life—the murder of Sonny, his decision to kill Fredo, and the death of his beloved daughter due to an assassin’s bullet meant for him. A larger body of exceptions can be found from a review of the crime themed Blaxploitation films produced between 1970 and 1976. The depictions of black criminal activity in these films, particularly those of gangsters, were usually of heroic and successful protagonists. The best example might be Fred Williamson’s portrayal of Tommy Gibbs in Black Caesar (1973). This paradigm is in direct opposition to the traditional gangster narrative, typically a violent morality play in which the gangster does (or has) achieved success but dies at the end (Cagney in White Heat (1949), Muni’s Tony Camonte). The overdetermination of cinematic deaths for gangsters is supported by Warshow’s seminal essay, “The Gangster as Tragic Hero,” which points out that the cultural space and social symbolism held by the gangster monomyth is proof of the powerful psychological connection between the need for fantasy in an incarceral society and public popularity of the genre. Warshow underscores the power of film to persuade audiences. A case in point: Hollywood maintained, until postmodern filmmaking gained preeminence in films such as Bonnie and Clyde (1967) and The Wild Bunch (1969), a long held fear that the widespread public romance with the behavior of gangsters might culminate with the established order being overthrown. This paranoia over perceived public sentiment towards anarchy lead the government into taking the necessary steps to create and implement censorship of those narratives which, in the opinion of a white patriarchal elite, were deemed to be potentially dangerous. At the top of this list were several “troublesome” representations: sexuality that deviated from Puritan based concepts, positive imagery of minority groups, race mixing, and criminal activity. The codification of the opposition to these representations was established in the 1930 Production Code of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA). See Ruth Vasey, The World According to Hollywood: 1918 to 1939. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997. The current MPAA ratings system is the latest version of Hollywood’s censorship of its own art. Both versions of Scarface received initially harsh treatment from their respective censor boards.

87 Jean-Louis Baudry was one of the first theorists to employ psychoanalysis as a tool to deconstruct film texts and their effect on audiences. Baudry critic Noel Carroll confirms this in his essay “Jean-Louis Baudry and The Apparatus,” writing that Baudry believed films to have a “paramount

Miller goes on the write that the power of film as the ultimate device for reality transference is evidenced by its ability, through spectatorship, to “blend narrativity, continuity, point of view, and identification to see spectators become part of the very apparatus designed for them (my emphasis). The apparatus takes the spectatorial illusion of seeming to experience film as real life and makes it a combination of power...and engagement” (Ibid). These key observations support my claim that the gangsta identity, in 1983 just at the point of beginning its search for a symbolic entity to represent it, was able to progress in major part because Hip-hop males within that lifestyle were able to make consistent referrals back to Scarface, a text that could not only be replayed over and over but amended to suit the needs of the audience. When DJ Ready Red connected the film to their lifestyle through rap—gangsta had its front man.

These events could include a war, as was the case when Casablanca was released in 1942 or Black Hawk Down, released in January, 2002, four months after the attacks on the World Trade Center. Both events affected how audiences looked at the need for patriotism. But audiences also brought into the viewing experience their own feelings about these two events which, according to apparatus theory, would prejudice how they would receive the film. For inner city audiences affected by crime, poverty, gang warfare, and other situations, they would bring their feelings about these circumstances into the theater as well.

The audience processes each scene and decodes in accordance with the experiences and values they bring into the viewing, these include reality and even dreams. According to the theoretical constructs developed by Hall, Janet Staiger (Media Reception Studies. New York: New York University Press, 2005, p. 2-8), and Jean-Louis Baudry. His seminal article, “The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in Cinema” defined the theoretical change from a purely semiotic approach to reception towards a more psychoanalytical view. Baudry was convinced that cinema created an effect upon the spectator that was accepted as being “more than real.” See Baudry’s article reproduced in Mast, p. 690.

Mulvey writes that “as the spectator identifies with the main male protagonist, he projects his look on to that of his like, his screen surrogate, so that the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active power of the erotic look, both giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence”
(See her article in Media and Cultural Studies: Keyworks, Meenakshi Gigi Durham & Douglas M. Kellner, Ed. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 2001. pp. 393-404). Mulvey’s article is, without question, canonical. It first appeared in the prestigious quarterly film journal Screen, in the fall of 1975 (issue 16 #3, p.6-18). Today it is required reading—as evidenced by its inclusion in a number of film studies readers including Film Theory and Criticism, (p. 746); Stam & Miller’s Film and Theory (p. 483); and Durham & Kellner.

93 Ibid.

94 Metz’s Film Language: a Semiotics of the Cinema. (Translated by Michael Taylor. New York: Oxford University Press, 1974) began a vigorous debate in film studies. His groundbreaking work, which theorized that film was a language and not a language system, was largely refuted at. This was an epiphanistical moment in film studies because it challenged the canon—long standing methodologies championed by linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and others. South African media cultural scholar Keyan Tomaselli wrote perhaps the most concise history of this debate in S - European Journal for Semiotic Studies, vol. 7(1/2), p. 259-273. An excerpt of which is available at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Durban, South Africa) website: http://ccms.ukzn.ac.za/index.php?option=com_folder&task=view&id=624&Itemid=72


96 See Mulvey in Durham & Kellner, p. 398

97 Despite it being written in 1975, after scores of Blaxploitation films had been released, Mulvey’s idea, that “men cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification” (in Dunham & Kellner, p. 398, leads me to believe she never saw The Mack or SuperFly or any black themed crime drama of that genre which were saturated with a wide variety of opportunities for the pleasurable homoerotic gaze. What she apparently is referring to in her article are white heterosexual homophobic males. And while the vast majority of the Blaxploitation films were clearly phallocentric, I have to beg to differ with Mulvey’s broad claim that her analysis applies to all films, as she seems to infer. Further, a critique of her psychoanalytic approach to the gaze does not account for the black male experience with the prison-industrial complex and the various cultural deviations that arise from such contact, such as the consensual and non-consensual homosexual relationships which occur during incarceration. While the sexual identity of Tony Montana is never called into question by fans of the film, there are enough instances of symbolic impotence and sexual deviation in Scarface to question his heteromasculinity and thus undermine the fantasy of his perfection. But this subject has never been fully developed.


99 See Origins of a Hip-hop Classic. The entire short film is a testament to this claim.


101 See Shakur, p. xi
102 Ibid. p. xiii


104 While the research discovered a clear two to one majority of negative reviews, Scarface was not universally condemned. Producer Martin Bregman has been the chief proponent of this mischaracterization. A case can be made for the idea that the filmmakers were expecting Scarface to be a box office and critically acclaimed blockbuster. The film was made at an epic length of two hours and fifty minutes, rarely done unless studios want the Academy Award jurors to take notice. And with Al Pacino transforming himself into a non-white character, it can be assumed that this willingness to perform as an “other” was thought by the filmmakers to be worthy of Oscar consideration for a man who had already been nominated five times. So while the film received modest success it was not the success hoped for. Thus we see today a mythology that seeks to revive history and see Scarface as a film that was “misunderstood” (to quote Bregman) at the time of its release.

105 This also applies to television programs which are cancelled due to poor ratings and or reviews. The best and greatest example of this is the television series Star Trek, which was cancelled by NBC in September 1969 due to poor ratings after just three seasons and 79 episodes. See imdb.com episode list at [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0060028/episodes](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0060028/episodes).

106 Jackass: The Movie (2002) and the sequel, Jackass: Number Two (2006) were films spun off from the MTV cable network. They featured men performing often dangerous stunts designed to inflict personal injury. These included one event in which a male placed his penis in a glass box which contained a cobra snake. According to Box Office Mojo, a website dedicated to counting movie ticket sales, the two films collectively grossed $137 million dollars on a combined budget of $10 million.

107 For example, the National Board of Review may be the oldest organization (99 years) that reviews films. Its website (at [http://www nbrmp.org/about/](http://www nbrmp.org/about/)) informs the public that “NBR members annually view approximately 300 films: theatrical, independent, and major studio, documentary and foreign language. The screening membership comprises knowledgeable film buffs, academics, young film professionals, and students in the New York metropolitan area. Frequently, in-depth discussions with filmmakers, directors, actors, producers, or screenwriters follow screenings. At year’s end, members receive a list of all films screened, along with final ballots, which are tabulated by a certified public accounting firm in order to determine annual honorees.” The NBR offers prestigious awards and its reviews pack a lot of influence. Likewise, the Hollywood Foreign Press Association, ([http://www goldenglobes.org/about/index.html](http://www goldenglobes.org/about/index.html)), is comprised of, according to its website, “members of the world’s press.” It offers the Golden Globe awards, arguably one of the three most prestigious cinema awards (the other two being the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences’ Oscar and the Cannes Film Festival’s Palme d’Or. My point is that when De Palma, Bregman, or Pacino say that the film received poor reviews the above mentioned reviewers are the peers they refer to.

In one case the marketing campaign became cynical. The appearance of the villainous Darth Vader on the box made the effort problematic. In Star Wars Episode Three: Revenge of the Sith (2005), the newly appointed Vader (not yet transformed into machine like appearance) murders (albeit off screen) a score of very young children who are studying to become Jedi.

See Tucker, pp. 7-8 and 204-205. He writes on page seven that “Scarface was birthed at the same time that Hip-hop turned hard” and concludes the paragraph by observing that “It’s ‘The World is Yours’ message informs Hip-hop business dealings and countless lyrics of the then nascent gangsta rap genre, even as the film’s grandly languid displays of ostentatious wealth became the backdrop to many Hip-hop videos.” Tucker also makes a second attempt to connect Hip-hop’s gangstas to the film on page 204. There he observes that “people like rules…such things are as inspiration, as codes of discipline and honor. In the absence of either a legal system that saved or protected the vulnerable…the rules as set down in Scarface has an irresistible allure.” In both instances Tucker’s analysis does not address what we have come to understand from reception theory: that the Hip-hop audience brought into the viewing a considerable amount of life experience that it used to decode the text. I would argue that the film’s “allure” occurred because rules that already existed on the street were found compatible with Montana’s rules. Thus audiences were excited to find reinforcement through a film that offered verification of their system.

See Osumare.

Chapter Three

See Citation #1. There were many other reviews conducted on the film but, as has been repeated, my research confirmed, through a sampling of the major print media outlets, that two out of three reviews would be considered less than favorable.

See Appendix B.

Even today a three month run is typical of a major studio release that has, in the nomenclature of the industry, “legs.” Most films, however, do not remain in theaters that long: it was common around the time Scarface was released that a film usually ran only about 4-6 weeks.

Longer running times offer theatre owners less opportunities to show a film per day.

Clint Eastwood’s film, which included the iconic line “go ahead, make my day,” trounced Scarface by grossing $67.6 million over the same three month period.

See the Internet Movie Data Base at http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0086250/movieconnections. The Terminator is listed as the first film under “Referenced in.”

“‘The Skull,” played by Gino Silva, was Sosa’s personal assassin. He killed Omar Suarez and also killed Tony Montana at the end of the film. His trademark was wearing dark sunglasses in each of his scenes.

At the time of release in 1983 video cassettes were available on both Video Home Systems (VHS) and Sony’s Betamax tapes. Betamax slowly lost market share until it was discontinued in the U.S. in 1988.
Beginning with the June 16, 1984 issue, Scarface’s 44 consecutive weeks run on the Billboard charts may be tracked each week in the magazine. The film's last appearance on the chart was on April 6, 1985. Only the immensely popular Raiders of the Lost Ark (which ended a 60 week run on February 2, 1985) appeared on the charts for a longer period of time during the initial Billboard compilation of video rentals and sales, which was a new industry at that time. When Raiders dropped off the list Scarface became the reigning champion of longevity. This remarkable run has never been factored into the current phenomenon and belies the notion that Scarface came out of nowhere to be suddenly understood by the public. The fact is the film was a consistent money maker all along.

See Ken Tucker’s article from EW.com, the online version of the weekly magazine Entertainment Weekly at [http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,1548398,00.html](http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,1548398,00.html) – posted online on Oct 20, 2006 and published in the hardcopy issue #904 on Oct 27, 2006. Tucker quotes Bregman, who says, "I think it's a better film than Star Wars. It's about something. [It has] a moral code. We were shocked by the negative reaction. We did not get a good review, not one. The critics did not get the movie; the audience got the movie, young people got it. If you mention Scarface to somebody, they say, ‘Oh, that's a great movie.’ Boy, that didn't happen then.”

While there is no available research data to support a conclusion that would indicate exactly what percentage of the ghetto underclass or of Hip-hop black males make up the video cassette rental and sales market, it would be a fair assumption to state that the fan base of Scarface was made up primarily of Al Pacino fans, fans of gangster films, fans of Brian De Palma’s films, and non-white audiences (given the fact that Tony Montana was a non-white character).


Three actors who appeared in Scarface in key supporting roles went onto play major roles in Miami Vice. They were Pepe Serna (Angel), who appeared in Vice on three different occasions between 1986 and 1987, including a pivotal role in a two part 1987 episode (“Down for the Count,” parts one and two) in which he played a heroin dealer who ordered the murder of a main character on the series; Al Israel (Hector the Toad), who played an illegal arms dealer in “Evan,” a 1985 episode from the first season; and Richard Belzer (the Babylon Club M.C.), whose brief 1986 appearance in “Trust Fund Pirates” foreshadowed a long relationship with the NBC network. According to imdb.com Belzer “became the third person to play the same character in six different prime-time TV series, playing Detective "John Munch" in "Homicide: Life on the Street" (1993) (originating series), "Law & Order" (1990) (crossover), "Law & Order: Trial by Jury" (2005)(crossover), "The X Files" (1993) (crossover), "The Beat" (2000) (guest appearance in the short-lived UPN series), and "Law & Order: Special Victims Unit" (1999).” See Belzer’s bio at imdb.com at [http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0001938/bio](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0001938/bio). The site neglected to mention was that Belzer reprised his “John Munch” role yet again—on the Baltimore based HBO crime drama The Wire. Belzer had initiated the role on Homicide: Life on the Street which was also set in Baltimore.


An excerpt from the “Balls and my Word” lyrics from Making Trouble
All I have in this world is
All I have in this world is
All I have in - all I have in - all I have in - all I have in
All I have in this world is
All I have in this world is
All I have in - all I have in - all I have in this world is
Balls, balls, ba-ba-ball, ba-balls
Balls, balls, ba-ball, ba-ba-ba
Balls and my word
Balls and my word
Balls and my word - DON'T FUCK WITH ME!
Balls and my word
Balls and my word - DON'T FUCK WITH ME!
Balls and my word
Balls and my word - DON'T FUCK WITH ME!
Balls and my word
Balls and my word - DON'T FUCK WITH ME!
Balls and my word
Balls and my word
Balls and my word - DON'T FUCK WITH ME!
Balls and my word
Balls and my word - DON'T FUCK WITH ME!
Balls and my word
Balls and my word - DON'T FUCK WITH ME!

Balls and my word
Balls and my word - you got nothin on me
Ba-balls and my word - you got nothin on me
Ba-balls and my word

First you get the money, then you get the power
Then when you - then when you - then when you get the money
You get you get you get the power
This town like a great big pussy just, waitin to get fucked
This town like a great big pussy just, waitin to get fucked
This-this, this-this-this
This town like a great big pussy just, waitin to get fucked
This-this-this-this
This town like a great big pussy just, waitin to get fucked
SHAY HELLO TO MY LIL' FRIEND!
SHAY HELLO TO MY LIL' FRIEND!
SHAY HELLO TO MY LIL' FRIEND!


129 Go to: http://www.metroactive.com/metro/05.03.06/track-stars-0618.html

130 After visiting his website page on MySpace, I emailed him to see if he would be interested in talking with me about his role in the group and confirm for me that Jordan was the source of the use of
Scarface in Hip-hop. To reach him I had to sign up for a MySpace account, which I accomplished by creating my own made up alter ego. I called myself “R.U. Scarface.” Red gave me his phone number and we eventually had a conversation that lasted well over an hour. During this conversation, he recounted his role in the creation of Hip-hop’s Scarfacination.

131 From Answers.com and my interview with Red on July 8, 2007. The Ghetto Boys originally consisted of Prince Johnny C., the Slim Jukebox, and DJ Ready Red. During 1987–1988, both Johnny C. and the Jukebox quit, forcing Smith to add another rapper. This performer was the dwarf dancer-turn-emcee named Bushwick Bill (born Richard Shaw, in Jamaica) and two Rap-A-Lot solo acts: Akshen (aka Scarface born Brad Jordan, from Houston) and Willie D (William Dennis, also from Houston).

132 Produced by Harry Belafonte who, given his different musical background, might be considered an unlikely collaborator.

133 Red is the same nickname, for the same reason, given to Malcolm Little while he was a street hustler. Little converted to Islam while in prison and took the name of Malcolm X.

134 For a brief history of the theatre see http://cinematreasures.org/theater/12700/


136 See Isaac Julien’s Bad Ass Cinema (2002), an award winning documentary on the Blaxploitation era.

137 Rap broke worldwide in 1986 as a result of two landmark LPs, the Beastie Boys’ Licensed to Il and Run-D.M.C.’s Raising Hell, both of which were produced by Rubin. A year later, he also helmed Yo! Bum Rush the Show, the debut record from arguably the most pivotal act in hip-hop history, Public Enemy. See additional information on Rubin at http://www.answers.com/rick%20rubin.

138 It also reached number five on the Hip-hop charts according to Answers.com http://www.answers.com/topic/we-can-t-be-stopped-1

139 Found at http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,315167,00.html. Also in Entertainment Weekly, on 8/16/91.


141 In Creative Screenwriting, vol 8, #4. p.52

142 Once again, Mulvey’s article, “Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema” is useful. Also see Stam and Miller, two of the disciplines most widely read and respected scholars. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, from a film theory perspective, Scarface’s connection to its audience may be explained by both the spectatorship experience and apparatus theory. Miller points out that spectatorship is a complex process of interaction between filmgoer and film. He writes that “the relationship between films and their viewers is perhaps the key to film theory” (337). He goes on to add that “the active audience…is powerful as an interpretive community” (342). By interpretive Miller argues that the audience, while viewing a film, not only reads the film as text but “fixes the meaning of text” (Ibid) based on what cultural
experience the viewer brings with him to the viewing. But audiences not only bring something to the viewing they come to the viewing with the expectation that they will take something away. Therefore “fans construct parasocial or imagined connections to celebrities or actants. Their chosen ones fulfill friendship functions or serve as spaces for projecting and evaluating schemas to make sense of human interaction” (Ibid). Miller’s use of cult film theorist Umberto Eco adds to my point. He observes that Eco “teases out the issue in his exploration of what makes a cult film. In addition to adoring the text, cult movie audiences domesticate the characters, removing them for the overall story and quoting their escapades as if they were aspects of the fan’s private…world. References to segments of a movie become catalysts of collective memories” (Ibid). Miller thereby provides concrete evidence here that the type of social construction of meaning that I have been suggesting that occurs between Scarface and its audience does in fact exist.

Chapter Four

143 For a chilling confirmation on one representative outcome of Scarface’s effect on Hip-hop aged youth see Joe Killian’s August 26, 2007 article in the Greensboro (N.C.) News-Record, “Why do kids join Gangs?” Killian spells out the relationship between gangsta and the film writing that,

You see Al Pacino's face a lot in the hood. Like a patron saint, he appears nearly everywhere in gang territory — on posters, car hoods and even tattoos. ‘Scarface,’ a 16-year-old gang member says, eyes lighting up. ‘That's the flick. Because that's how you do it. You ain't given nothing in this life. You got to get yours.’ For many viewers, the 1983 film — about a drug dealer who rises from poverty only to be gunned down in his mansion — is a morality tale and a warning to those who aspire to the gangster life. But to kids in Greensboro's poorest neighborhoods, it's a Cinderella story. They imitate Pacino, quote lines from the film and play the 'Scarface' video game, which rewards players for taunting the people they shoot. Increasingly, the line between fantasy and reality seems to be disappearing.

144 During my telephone conversation with DJ Ready Red on July 7, 2008 he volunteered that he witnessed such activity taking place in his Trenton, N.J. neighborhood.


146 New Jack City (1991), was directed by first time film director Mario Van Peebles, son of the legendary Melvin Van Peebles.; Menace II Society (1993), was also the first effort by the twins Allen and Albert Hughes, who were just 20 years old at the time their film was being made; Likewise, John Singleton, who wrote Boyz n the Hood while an undergraduate film student at USC, insisted on directing his script as a condition of selling it to Columbia Pictures. Only 23, he had never directed a film before but the studio wanted the story so badly it agreed to give him a shot. Their gamble paid off. Singleton became the youngest Best Director nominee (24 years old) in Academy Award history. The second youngest—Orson Welles, was nearly 27 when he was nominated for his first feature, Citizen Kane. The last of the “big four,” Juice, (1992), was directed by Ernest Dickerson, who began his career as the cinematographer for eight Spike Lee films, including Spike’s Student Academy Award winning Joe’s Bed-Stuy Barbershop: We Cut Heads (1983), Do the Right Thing (1989), and Malcolm X (1992). But even though he was forty years old at the time of its release Juice was Dickerson’s first directing gig.

147 These were the memorable words, taken from NWA’s “Straight Outta Compton” rap from New Jack City that opened the film:
You are now about to witness the strength of street knowledge.

Verse One: Ice Cube

Straight outta Compton crazy motherfucker named Ice Cube
From the gang called Niggaz With Attitudes
When I'm called off I got a sawed off
Squeeze the trigger and bodies are hauled off
You too boy if ya fuck with me
The police are gonna hafta come and get me
Off yo ass that's how I'm goin out
For the punk motherfuckers that's showin out
Niggaz start to mumble, they wanna rumble
Mix em and cook em in a pot like gumbo
Goin off on a motherfucker like that
with a gat that's pointed at yo ass
So give it up smooth
Ain't no tellin when I'm down for a jack move
Here's a murder rap to keep yo dancin
with a crime record like Charles Manson
AK-47 is the tool
Don't make me act the motherfuckin fool
Me you can go toe to toe, no maybe
I'm knockin niggaz out tha box, daily
yo weekly, monthly and yearly
until them dumb motherfuckers see clearly
that I'm down with the capital C-P-T
Boy you can't fuck with me
So when I'm in your neighborhood, you better duck
Coz Ice Cube is crazy as fuck
As I leave, believe I'm stompin
but when I come back, boy, I'm comin straight outta Compton


149 Ibid.

150 There are a great many such sites. For the purposes of brevity, I offer what I think are the best examples in the body of the dissertation. Other examples are listed below:

1. The Internet Movie Data Base. While the Internet Movie Data Base (imdb.com) website is not specifically dedicated to the film, it has maintained an active blog site for Scarface fans for many years. Click on: Scarface fan message board

2. [Scarface.com](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0086250/) fan created site.

151 See the Scarface page at the Internet Movie Data Base at [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0086250/](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0086250/)
See Entertainment Weekly, October 27, 2006. Martin Bregman, in an interview the dissertation refers to on several occasions, reflected that “We were shocked by the negative reaction. We did not get a good review, not one. The critics did not get the movie; the audience got the movie, young people got it. If you mention Scarface to somebody, they say, ‘Oh, that's a great movie.' Boy, that didn't happen then.”

See http://www.lycos.com/info/scarface.html and Todd Doogan (September 3, 1998) who wrote in The Digital Bits, “DVD Review - Scarface: Collector's Edition,” that The first was released by Universal Studios Home Entertainment on the film's 15th anniversary in 1998 under the studio's "Collector's Edition" line. The DVD featured a non-anamorphic widescreen transfer, Dolby Digital 2.0 Surround, a "Making of" documentary, outtakes, production notes and cast & crew bios. This release was not successful, and many fans and reviewers complained about its unwatchable video transfer and muddled sound, describing it as 'one of the worst big studio releases out there.

From http://www.answers.com/topic/grand-theft-auto-iii?cat=entertainment: “Despite being officially nameless in Grand Theft Auto III, the player character's name is later revealed to be "Claude" in a brief cameo in the series' later game, Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas; because of this name he is theorized to be Claude Speed from Grand Theft Auto 2.”

The logo of the GTA III radio station, “Flashback 95.6,” which broadcast the Scarface film’s soundtrack 24/7. Since the game is centered on stealing cars, players had a choice of radio stations to listen to after thefts and Flashback was one of those choices.

The GTA IV game grossed $500 million in its first week. See Box Office Mojo website at: http://news.cnet.com/8301-13772_3-9938601-52.html. Compare to The Dark Knight, the second highest grossing film of all time after Titanic, which took six weeks to reach the same amount. See Cnet.com at http://www.boxofficemojo.com/alltime/fastest.htm?page=500&p=.htm

Click on: Fan created website comparing Scarface film to Grand Theft Auto-Vice City

Scarface was re-released theatrically on 9/19/03 a limited basis. According to The Numbers website http://www.the-numbers.com/movies/1983/0SCFA.php earned $656,161 in two weeks playing on 13 screens (about one each) in New York, Los Angeles, Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., Detroit, Dallas, Miami and San Francisco. for list see http://forums.dvdfile.com/now-playing/36182-pacino-movie-Scarface-set-return-theaters.html

From Australia a 2003 contemplation of Scarface’s 20th anniversary. Click on hyperlink at Typical review hyping the 2003 DVD release and supporting the mythology of Scarface as a misunderstood text


See http://www.dunkirkma.net/inreview/features/scarface.html

The Hollywood Reporter, 9/19/03.

Ibid.
164 Ibid.

165 Ibid.

166 Ibid.

167 This fact was pointed out in Joshua Rich’s October 3rd review of the 2003 DVD release in Entertainment Weekly. See http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,492439,00.html which states “Even better is a... smart Def Jam-produced short in which rappers sing Scarface's praise. Quoth the Wu-Tang's Raekwon, "That s -- - was the f -- -ing Bible."

168 The Hollywood Reporter, 9/19/03.

169 As has been previously stated, Origins is a documentary film in style only. While using interviews and clips, the short film is decidedly biased in favor of Scarface and offers no dissenting opinions whatsoever.

170 Bauer’s birth name was Esteban Echevarria—yet another instance of using an alter ego to deflect attention from non-white “otherness.” In this case Bauer used his mother’s maiden name.


172 Some other testimonials from the documentary that reflect the psychological connection: Kevin Liles, President, Def Jam Music Group: “I think people don’t realize the importance of a flick like this. You got something that failed in the box office but became a ghetto classic.”
Raekmon: “Nigga that shit was the fucking Bible.”
P. Diddy: “As time goes on this movie gets bigger and bigger.”
N.O.R.E: “Brian De Palma, I don’t even know if he knows the impact that shit had on America.
Prodigy: “Niggas wanted to be Tony Montana.”
Ray Benzino, writer The Source magazine: “Scarface gave it to a lot of people that this is the American Dream, that you can have the world.”
Clipse: “Rappers relate to (the film) because that’s how we come up.”
Andre 3000, Rap Artist: “He’s actually doing wrong but the crowd is rooting for him because he’s come from nothing. That’s what attracts people to his character.”
Russell Simmons: “Scarface is about empowerment at all costs and when you see that it inspires you not to take no for an answer.”
Mehki Pheifer, Actor: “Scarface represented the capitalistic society that we live in. But it also represented that you don’t have to conform to society in order to ‘make it.’”
Scarface: “I took on the Scarface name, because that was me, man. I guess what inspired me about this movie was that this cat was just like me. I knew right then that if that cat could do it...I mean come over here with nothing and leave here with everything, I knew for a fact that that was for me.”

173 “Playas Guide” was a thirty minute program, clearly placed in support of the DVD release, that exampled the media’s attempt to cash in on the Scarface anniversary by selling advertising. It consisted of interviews with black entertainers, both in and out of Hip-hop, on the influence of the film.

174 Go to Ropes of Silicon.com at: http://www.ropeofsilicon.com/article/vh_1_celebrates_scarface_with_a_playas_guide_to_scarface
175 Ibid


177 Ibid.


179 While there are several reliable sources for this information, the most comprehensive available is Lee’s Movie Info at http://www.leesmovieinfo.net/title2.php?t=1284. DVD rental and sales figures are jealously guarded by the film industry and while titles are charted by Billboard, the magazine does not provide box office grosses on the chart. However, adjusted for inflation the DVD grosses in 2003 equaled what the film earned during its initial three month theatrical run in 1983. For the inflation calculation see http://www.westegg.com/inflation/. At the site, entering the $40.95 million Scarface earned theatrically in 1983 and then entering what that amount would be worth in 2003, shows that the 1983 amount would be worth $74.82 million in 2003 dollars. This compares favorably to the $78.2 million in DVD grosses but proves that the staying power of the product was remarkable 20 years later. But the film continued to earn for Universal on the DVD market as it took in another $16 million in early 2004. This would have earned another $8.8 million in 1983 dollars. There are no figures available for the rental and sales grosses for Scarface’s video tape and laser disc versions for 1984 and beyond.

180 According to a fan posting on the Acme Airsoft Website, “Jawinn” wrote that she had seen the E! True Hollywood Story for Scarface. “There was a bunch of tid-bits that I never knew about it. 1. Brian De Palma regrets killing Tony in the end. He said he definitely would have done a sequel. I have to say that this is one of the great things about the movie but man part 2 would have been pretty sweet.” http://www.acmeairsoft.com/archive/index.php/t-1598.html


182 Ibid.

183 See the cover of Vibe, April 2005. The article is on p.122-28.


185 In May of 2006 the news about the video games began to flow. The following Hip-hop oriented website is part of the conveyance system hyping the news about the new video game.

Click on: Article from Hip-hop Press website hyping release of Scarface video game

186 Figures from the website The Numbers at http://www.the-numbers.com/movies/1983/0SCFA-DVD.php
The alternative universe (also known as alternative history) narrative utilized by Universal to invent a new Scarface trajectory is founded in previous examples of success. Some examples include The Boys from Brazil (1978) in which the novel (written by Ira Levin, author of Rosemary’s Baby and The Stepford Wives) and its film adaptation imagined a world in which Hitler has consented to be cloned before he died; also The Confederate States of America (2004), a faux documentary from filmmaker Kevin Willmott, whose premise—what if the south had won the Civil War—offered a post-war interview with an exiled Abraham Lincoln. Bestselling author Dr. Harry Turtledove has made a career out of writing alternative history stories. He was the first to compose a series of tales, beginning with the novel How Few Remain (1997), based upon what the world would have looked like if the Confederate army had been victorious.

I learned to play both GTA games on my home PC. My able undergraduate research assistant (and video game aficionado) Sean Martin was given the task of playing the entire Scarface game and writing an extensive report in which he compared the Scarface game to the film, and the game to the two GTA games. He then served as my teacher as I attempted to play the Scarface game on Playstation 2, which I proved to be not good at but, nevertheless, was able to complete. Long term game play and a subsequent thorough review of Scarface: The World is Yours revealed a rather disappointingly predictable storyline in which the gamer, as Montana himself, kills literally all of his rivals (for example, the Dias Brothers) left over from the film. The game also curiously redeems Tony’s rather uncertain sexuality in the film by now mimicking Manny’s wolfish behavior. And there is the happy ending which has Montana confronting and killing Sosa at the conclusion of the story.

One of the most striking results of my research was my discovery of the parallels between Universal’s promotion of the video game and the promotion given to a motion picture release. The hype for the game began in August, 2004, two years before the game eventually appeared on the market. This is a strategy typically reserved for blockbuster films such as The Dark Knight (2008). Perhaps the best example of contemporary video game-as-blockbuster film promotion is the incredible success of Grand Theft Auto IV, which grossed $310 million from the sale of 3.6 million units on its first day of release, a figure that is unrivaled by any film ever. See CNN.com’s story at http://www.cnn.com/2008/TECH/05/08/gta.sales/index.html.


November 28, 2006 - Scarface: The World is Yours has sold more than one million copies worldwide. The videogame sequel to the cult hit film topped the NPD sales charts in October and has proven to be one of the biggest surprises of the year. It was total domination for Scarface as gamers spent their last few current-gen dollars on Vivendi’s action title. Released on PSP, PS2, PC and Xbox, Scarface the game has managed to follow its own storyline. When first announced, many dismissed The World is Yours as a cheap cash-in, only to see the game rise up to both critical and retail success. Hyperlink to Sierra Entertainment website: Scarface Video game sales topped 1 million only one month after release in October 2006. Per unit price @ $49.95.

Please refer to Appendix C for a compendium of relevant hype related schemes surrounding the 2006 video game, examples of the collectibles being sold after the game became wildly popular, and the results of my own personal odyssey in search of the Scarface brand name.

Banks, who holds an undergraduate degree from the prestigious Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania, was interviewed about her role in creating a new format for the Scarface franchise by Jennifer M. Contino for the Comicon.com website. Go to: http://www.comicon.com/cgi-bin/ultimatebb.cgi?ubb=get_topic;f=36;t=005625

On the left, the cover of the prequel novel, written by Banks as a marketing precursor to hype the release of the video game that fall in 2006. Scarface: The Beginning. Milwaukie, OR: DH Press, 2006. Note: written under a license granted by Universal Studios Licensing LLLP.

Lumet, Bregman, and Pacino had previously collaborated on two dramas adapted from real lives and events: Serpico (1973), about the life of Frank Serpico, the policeman who pioneered contemporary undercover work, and Dog Day Afternoon (1975), the story gay bank robber Sonny Wortzik and his attempt to steal money for his lover’s sex change operation. Both films were critically acclaimed and received multiple Academy Award nominations. Serpico received two nominations, but no wins—for best actor (Pacino) and for Best Adapted Screenplay. Dog Day, however, fared much better. The film won for Best Adapted Screenplay and was nominated for five additional Oscars, including Best Picture, in a year of stunning filmmaking achievements. Dog Day, and director Lumet, kept company with fellow 1975 Best Picture nominees (and four of the greatest directors of all time) Barry Lyndon (dir. Stanley Kubrick), Jaws (dir. Steven Spielberg), Nashville (dir. Robert Altman), and winner One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest (dir. Milos Forman). Between 1957 and the time he was hired to direct Scarface in 1982, Sidney Lumet had earned an enviable reputation as one of the most important directors in all of cinema. In addition to Serpico and Dog Day Afternoon Lumet’s credits include a virtual “who’s who” list of thought provoking dramas. Among these are 12 Angry Men (1957), Long Day’s Journey Into Night (1962), The Pawnbroker (1964), Fail-Safe (1964), Network (1976), Prince of the City (1981), and The Verdict (1982). Given that he had been nominated four times for Best Director (The Verdict, Network, 12 Angry Men, and Dog Day), when comparing Lumet’s accomplishments to Brian De Palma’s (or more to the point, the lack thereof) and that of Oliver Stone’s at that time in their careers, the rationale behind Bregman and Pacino’s decision not to trust Lumet’s instincts about the script (and subsequently lose his enormous talents from the project) remains a mystery.


For a report on this event see the article at the online site of the Miami New Times at: http://www.miaminewtimes.com/events/25th-anniversary-of-scarface-1109483/


This question is also germane to the acceptance by the Hip-hop male underclass of the presidential candidacy of Barack Obama. As seen on Youtube.com Obama was heckled by a young black male who questioned his authenticity. The candidate’s response was to tell the heckler that he had a
choice of voting for someone else or running for office himself. See the YouTube incident at
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OnOvKSf-LBc&feature=related

199 See Time magazine, April 1, 1991 at
http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,972672,00.html. Also
http://www.snopes.com/politics/war/magazine.asp and
http://www.america.gov/st/washfileenglish/2004/April/20040415183745ndyblehs0.8977014.html

200 Local Miami CBS television network affiliate WFOR wrote about their coverage of the event
held at the Gusman Center for the Performing Arts in downtown Miami, Florida. Go to:
location shoots in Miami were…the tent city that housed immigrants throughout the boatlift, shot
underneath I-95.” In fact, according to interviews with both Brian De Palma and Martin Bregman that
were conducted on the special 20th anniversary edition DVD, the filmmakers had been chased out of
Miami at the time these scenes were shot. The referenced scenes were actually shot in the Los Angeles
area.

201 See Ken Tucker’s article, “Scarface Lives” at

Chapter Five

202 Of course there were the early days of Vito Corleone in Sicily and New York’s Little Italy.

203 One take on this longstanding rumor can be found at Crime Magazine.com.
http://www.crimemagazine.com/06/mobpresidentnixon,0205-6.htm

204 According to Imdb.com, Little Caesar was released on January 9, 1931; The Public Enemy,
April 23, 1931; Scarface, March 31, 1932.

205 See Marilyn Yaquinto. Pump ’em Full of Lead: a Look at Gangsters on Film. New York:

206 While his life is the stuff of legend, it is supreme irony that Capone would die on January 25,
1947 on a small private island off mainland Miami Beach in an opulent mansion, originally built in 1922
for Clarence Busch (of the Anheuser-Busch brewery and sold to Al Capone in 1928 for $40,000 ; see
details at http://www.blavish.com/if-those-walls-could-talk-al-capones-miami-beach-house-for-sale). It is
symmetry of the highest order because Scarface, a film bearing his infamous sobriquet, would be set in
Miami, rekindling the legacy he bequeathed to American popular culture. The City of Miami would itself
be economically reborn with the help of Scarface’s offspring, the television series Miami Vice,
which opened the flood gates for scores of other films and TV programs to be shot there.

207 Yaquinto, p.18.

208 Ibid.


210 Yaquinto, p.7.

Ben Hecht recounts how he was confronted by “employees” of Big Al after Capone saw the film. Capone’s men were inquiring on behalf of their boss, who wanted to know if the film was about him. Hecht nervously said no and, amazingly, Capone believed him, or at least didn’t kill him. The Capone-as-film saga came full circle when, in 1987, Scarface director Brian De Palma took on the Capone myth when he directed a fictional version of the gangster’s downfall in The Untouchables, with Robert De Niro performing a very convincing, right down to the pudgy body, Capone. Other actors who have played a “real life” Capone on screen include a credible Rod Steiger (Al Capone, 1959) and a less so Jason Robards (The St. Valentine’s Day Massacre, 1967).


Ibid. p. 4.


Ibid.

Ibid.


Warshow, p. 88.

Irish political studies theorist James Martin provides an extremely coherent analysis of Gramsci’s theory on hegemony. In Gramsci’s Political Analysis, Martin explains that Gramsci “offered the challenging thesis that the bourgeoisie was able to maintain its economic advantage over subordinate classes by eliciting their cultural and political support” (p. 65). Martin goes on to state that “hegemony has since come to be understood as a mode of social control by which one group exerts its dominance over others by means of ideology” (66). The entire chapter from which these remarks are gleaned is a treasure trove of precise analysis of Gramsci’s pioneering work on hegemony. See Gramsci's Political Analysis: A Critical Introduction. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998. pp. 65-88.


Yaquinto, p. 25.

Ibid, p. 20.

227 During the Blaxploitation era, Fred Williamson would star as Harlem-based crime lord Tommy Gibbs in *Black Caesar* (1973).

228 Robert Downey, Jr.’s role as a white actor in blackface playing a black soldier in the 2008 comedy *Tropic Thunder* was a most recent example of white privilege.

229 Yaquinto, p. 27.


232 Yaquinto, p. 28.


235 See Yaquinto, p. 29. Another Hays requirement did stick. Hays forced Howard Hughes to add “Shame of a Nation” to the title.

236 Kaminsky’s article is cited from *The Gangster Reader*, p. 47-63. It originally appeared in the summer 1972 edition of the *Journal of Popular Film and Television*.

237 Ibid, p. 47.

238 Ibid.

239 Kaminsky wrote in 1972 that “*Little Caesar* contains the first clear depiction of the elements which have defined the gangster film genre and have remained strongly evident in such films for over forty years. The genre elements (motifs, themes, and icons) in *Little Caesar* have evolved with the genre, but have remained persistently recognizable because they fill a public need” (p. 47). Continuing, Kaminsky points out that “*Little Caesar* was the grid on which the others which followed were placed. As Robert Warshow states, *Little Caesar* is archetypical. Other elements of the gangster film were clearly evolved from Howard Hawks’ *Scarface* (1932) and … *The Public Enemy*” (47-8). Kaminsky’s list of the elements of the genre, with few exceptions, is very similar to those that attracted Hip-hop to *Scarface*. They are:

1. The gangster is usually short in stature. “The two central gangster figures of the 1930’s, Edward G. Robinson and James Cagney, are extremely short” (p. 49). Pacino is also very short.

2. The big city makes the gangster. “That is the place of opportunity,” writes Kaminsky (p. 52). In *Scarface*, Montana goes from Cuba to the big city of Miami.

3. Women are acquisitions for the gangster. Women are rewards, proof of success, like the stick pin and the ring…all evidence that the gangster has ‘made it’ in his business, in American society” (p. 54). Montana is obsessed with possessing Elvira from the first
moment he lays eyes on her. 4. *Gangsters come from the working class*, “the gang itself is often composed of first-or second-generation immigrants (p. 56). 5. *Gangsters always fall after reaching the top* (p. 59).

240 Kaminsky, p. 59.

241 Kaminsky agrees with my assessment. He writes that “the result in an audience viewing a gangster film, especially in the 1930’s if they were members of the working class, may well have been to feel that there was something to be despised in a system in which they cannot get ahead as they had been led to believe.” p. 57.

242 Ibid, p. 56.

243 Yaquinto, p. 37.

244 Ibid.

245 Ibid.

246 Yaquinto, p. 40.

247 Among many similarities, *The Godfather’s* use of oranges to foreshadow impending death became classic. Coppola certainly was inspired by Hawks’ use of the letter X to announce the death scenes in his *Scarface*.

248 Also Scorsese employed a more direct approach in *The Departed*. In an obvious homage to Hawks’ use of the X, Martin Sheen’s character, Captain Queenan, is tossed off the roof of a building. As he falls to his death he passes several windows that are taped in a manner to show the X mark.

249 In De Palma’s *The Untouchables*, Capone attends an opera performance by Enrico Caruso (who brings the gangster to tears while singing an aria from *Pagliacci*) and hosts the tenor at a lavish champagne reception afterwards. An opera performance, this time of “Chi Mi Frena,” is also featured in *The Departed* and, instead of champagne, Scorsese chooses to use the music as part of a cocaine fueled montage in which the mob boss Costello’s (Jack Nicholson) sexually deviant proclivities are brought to the forefront. Coppola also features a night at the opera to conclude *The Godfather, Part III*. These examples indicate the intertextuality of opera and gangster themes. “Chi Mi Frena,” in addition to being featured in Muni’s *Scarface* and *The Departed*, was also a tune on Double Clef FM, the opera oriented radio station on the *Grand Theft Auto III* video game.

250 Pacino played lawyer Arthur Kirkland in *And Justice for All* (1979) and was nominated for an Academy Award as Best Actor.

251 More than likely it played with Howard Hughes’ other 1930’s era classic, the World War I air combat drama *Hell’s Angels* (1930), which featured Jean Harlow. See the website Cinema Treasures, which is dedicated to archiving historic old movie palaces at [http://cinematreasures.org/theater/2903/](http://cinematreasures.org/theater/2903/). The following posting from the website is a recollection from a moviegoer who attended a double feature with *Scarface* and *Hell’s Angels*. While there is no concrete evidence of the date when Pacino saw the film or that this fan was referring to the same screening that Pacino attended, the likelihood of *Scarface* being shown more than once is rare. This is what the blogger, “Scoop,” had to say:
I remember seeing a doubleheader of two Howard Hughes classics that hadn't been shown in years (like forever I thought at the time): SCARFACE & HELL'S ANGELS).

PRISTINE PRINTS!

I attended other double features at the Tiffany, but preferred seeing movies at the Nuart, FOX Venice, and Vagabond. I was more of a '60s hard rocker in the late '70s & early '80s, so dealing with the glitter crowd that seemed to attend the Tiffany on a regular basis was a tad much for me (especially when I attended a midnight screening of THE ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW). Everyone there seemed to have a good time though.

Posted by “Scoop” on Dec 5, 2005 at 6:37am.


253 Ibid.

254 Ibid.


256 Ibid.


258 Ibid.

259 Although they shared star billing in Coppola’s epic sequel, Pacino and De Niro did not share a scene in that film. Their first appearance together: two scenes in Michael Mann’s L.A. based 1995 crime drama Heat. They also were paired in the buddy cop thriller Righteous Kill (2008) during which they shared the screen for the entire film.


262 Previously in this study I have cited Ken Tucker’s October 20, 2006 article posted on the Entertainment Weekly website at http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,1548398,00.html. Tucker quotes Bregman as saying about the film that “we did not receive a good review, not one.”

263 See Georgia A. Brown’s article in American Film (December 1983, p. 28-34). Brown writes an insightful article, one Andrew Sarris, in his review of the film for the Village Voice (12/20/83, p.77), called a “persuasive rationalization” about De Palma’s career up to that point. She seems to settle the question of who exactly had the final say on the Scarface project, observing that “De Palma is used to developing and writing his own material, but Blow-Out had not been a box-office success, and his next project, on the Yablonski murders, failed to get backing. Scarface is Pacino’s project, and Pacino is a man with ideas of his own.”
Harris would go on to create the serial killer Hannibal Lector, the sophisticated, urbane villain of a bestselling series of novels that were also adapted to the big screen. These films include the multi-Oscar winning The Silence of the Lambs (1991).

As previously stated, Lumet’s involvement with politically edgy, thought provoking film projects, prior to his involvement with Scarface in 1983, include 12 Angry Men (1957), Fail-Safe (1964), The Pawnbroker (1964), Serpico (1973), Dog Day Afternoon (1975), Network (1976), Prince of the City (1981), and The Verdict (1982).

See “Drug Wars” at the PBS Frontline website: http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/drugs/drugs/

See “Thirty Years of America’s Drug War” at the PBS “Drug Wars” website: http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/drugs/cron/

See Appendix A.


The character of Charles Goodson (Gregg Henry) is introduced to Montana by Sosa at a meeting of the cocaine cartel. This occurs at a time when the operations of the group has come under investigation by a Bolivian national whose exact affiliation, or name curiously, is never revealed. At the meeting Tony is recruited by Sosa to participate in assassinating the Bolivian, who is about to go to the United Nations with information he has gathered on their trafficking operation. At the time Tony is out on bail after being arrested for money laundering and tax evasion. Goodson is introduced as being “our friend in Washington,” and Sosa alludes to the fact that someone he knows has enough influence with the IRS to keep Tony out of jail. Goodson’s role is never made clear, nor it is revealed exactly what person, group, or agency would have that amount of power. However, it is most likely the CIA.

What Stone does not include is any reference to the Miami race riots. In failing to do so Scarface erases the black experience from the history of the period. Why the film refuses to reference this critical moment in the city’s history in any way will remain a mystery. The irony of this circumstance, that Scarface has become such a beloved icon of the mostly black male driven Hip-hop cultural movement while the film’s authors purposefully removed all reference to black Miamians at a time of great pain and anger for this community, is one of the great paradoxes of audience reception. One can only speculate if this may have been an unspoken reason for Lumet’s displeasure with the Stone script.

The Hand (1981) was a forgettable horror film directed by Oliver Stone and focused on a vengeful dismembered appendage. A tepid response to the film dimmed Stone’s future directing hopes and caused him to seek employment again as a screenwriter. De Palma’s Carrie (1976), adapted from Stephen King’s novel, became somewhat of a cult hit and featured John Travolta in his first starring performance, and Sissy Spacek as Carrie, the psycho-kinetic victim of a prom night prank. De Palma also helmed The Fury (1978), a star-studded B-movie that saw Kirk Douglas searching for his (also) psycho-
kinetically powered son (Andrew Stevens), a kidnap victim of John Cassavetes, with the help of Amy Irving (who incidentally De Palma introduced to his friend—and her future husband—Steven Spielberg).


277 Ibid.

278 Ibid.

279 Stone was able to gain access to police files which documented the often gory details of the drug related murders. For example, the chainsaw scene was inspired by the actual chainsaw dismemberment of a rival to Griselda “Black Widow” Blanco, the blood thirsty head of the Columbian cartel in Miami. The Billy Corbin directed documentary film, Cocaine Cowboys (2006) provides an in-depth study of Blanco and her role in the coke wars in Miami during the 1980’s.

280 Cineaste, Vol. 33 No.3 (Summer 2008). Article is also online at Cineaste’s website http://www.cineaste.com/articles/brian-depalmas-cinematic-education.htm.


282 Ibid.

283 Ibid. In the same Times article Bregman also said that “he was so certain that Scarface would receive an X rating that he arranged for the appeal” prior to the MPAA ruling.


285 Lewis, p. 286.

286 Ibid.

287 The word was used 218 times, according to several sources that bothered to count.


289 Ibid.


Ibid. The fact that children under seventeen years of age were not going to be able to see the film, regardless of whether the film was an X or R, obviously did not deter Bregman’s approach.


Al Pacino has always been thought of as being cool by most young people, especially in the black community. My first exposure to him was as Michael Corleone, the college educated war hero of The Godfather, who is thrust into taking an active role in his family’s Mafia business. I recall my reaction to how he carried himself in the film, being of college age myself, as being something I wanted to emulate—not the acts of murder, of course, but I found that I could even empathize with that. The reaction I had was similar to practically everyone I have ever talked to about the film. Pacino then went on to Serpico, another cool guy who happened to be a cop, and then back to Michael Corleone again. The best example of my generations’ fascination with Pacino can be seen in John Travolta’s reaction to a disco girl’s compliment in 1977’s Saturday Night Fever. She tells him, “You look like Al Pacino.” This causes him to wake up the next morning, look at his Serpico poster, and dance around in his underwear screaming (referencing Dog Day Afternoon), “Aaaaal Pacino! Attica! Attica! Attica!”

Chapter Six

According to Pierre, etc. al. “the voyage from the African continent to America was a moment in which the African male’s personal autonomy was denied…and his relationship to his historical and personal context severed. There was a psychological departure from African worldviews to a new cultural identity formation” (23). The end result of the barbarity was that “enslaved Black men of the 19th century used the white slave owners as the standard of manhood to which they aspired. The white male’s possessions of dominance, power, and control were well-established aspects of manhood. As a result, the white man and his perception of masculinity became the yardstick by which black men began to measure their own manhood” (24, 25).


Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid. Writes Foucault, “The constant division between the normal and the abnormal, to which every individual is subjected, brings us back to our own time, by applying the binary branding and exile of the leper to quite different objects; the existence of a whole set of techniques and institutions for measuring, supervising and correcting the abnormal brings into play the disciplinary mechanisms to which the fear of the plague gave rise.”


Foucault, pp. 195-228.
Ibid. One of the longest standing, and rigorously enforced, codes of the inner city is not to snitch (the same as it is within a formal prison). Foucault writes that

So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary; that this architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it; in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers. The inmate must never know whether he is being looked at any one moment; but he must be sure that he may always be so.

In his book Monster, Sanyika Shakur details this war in Chapter 3, “The War.”


Ibid, p. 123.


Charles Mills. The Racial Contract. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997. In a groundbreaking study that combined philosophy, sociology, and a razor sharp Marxist critique of capitalism, Mills provided compelling evidence that the failure to implement, within the black population, the Jeffersonian social contract afforded whites of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness was the primary cause of black social distress. He termed this agreement (or lack thereof) “The Racial Contract.” Mills further argued that since slavery was conceived as a means to exploit one race for the benefit of another, the black population, as a whole, had never been able to “catch up” with whites economically.
Taney wrote for the 7-2 majority opinion of the U.S. Supreme Court in the Dred Scott v. Sanford decision that Black people “had for more than a century before been regarded as beings of an inferior order, and altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in social or political relations; and so far inferior, that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect” (my emphasis).

Schooly was at the time, a member of the notorious Park Side Killers street gang (thus the initials PSK) in Philadelphia. It was his prideful pronouncement that is given credit for initiating the gangsta identity in rap and all resulting mythology.

From the article “Black British Cultural Studies and the Rap on Gangsta” by Eithne Quinn published in the Black Music Research Journal, Vol. 20, No. 2, European Perspectives on Black Music (Autumn, 2000), pp. 195-216. Quinn writes that “The term gangsta rap started to gain currency in 1989. It’s first American broadsheet appearance was in the Los Angeles Times, when the controversial single ‘Gangsta, Gangsta’ by N.W.A. (Niggaz wit Attitude) was in Billboard’s Hot Rap singles chart.” Quinn cites her claim by writing a footnote which reads, “the first usage of the term gangsta rap is based on the finding of a Nexis computer search of the U.S. broadsheet press for the terms gangsta and gangster rap conducted by the author on May 8, 1997. ‘Gangsta, Gangsta’ is a single take from N.W.A.’s groundbreaking 1988 album Straight Outta Compton.”

Many well meaning scholars have misspoken on the timing of the coinage of the term “gangsta.” For example, in her book length critique of the gangsta’s commercial music success, Eithne Quinn writes that “the genre term “gangsta rap” (or “gangster rap”) was coined in 1989,” by L.A.’s Niggaz Wit Attitude (N.W.A). However, Schooly D deserves this distinction, having first used the phrase in 1986 with his self-published recording “Gangster Boogie.” By 1990 rappers were being demonized by the political establishment.

See also a February 28, 2008 story by USA Today on the Eisenhower study at the newspaper’s website, http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2008-02-28-kerner-commission_N.htm. Respected journalist and documentarian Bill Moyers also weighed in on the 40th anniversary report, citing that the conservative think tank The Heritage Foundation placed the blame for the lack of economic progress for blacks squarely at the feet of black men. Moyers wrote that
Referencing the Kerner Commission report has become rhetorical shorthand in some ways. For critics it suggests wasteful federal spending programs — for others, societal goals and potentials not yet met. In covering the 40th anniversary report USA TODAY headlined its 40th anniversary coverage “Goals for Black America Not Met.” The article raised some ire when quoting Robert Rector of Heritage Foundation: ‘Rector says the report ignores a major cause of poverty: single-parent homes. He says 70% of black children do not have a father in the home.’ That sentiment earned this response from Elliott Currie, a member of the Kerner Commission, 40th Anniversary Task Force: ‘The implication is that it's the heedless behavior of black men — rather than the strains of a blighted economy and a legacy of discrimination — that is responsible for the continuing crisis of poverty and racial disadvantage 40 years after the Kerner Commission.重大omment.html

http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/03282008/profile.html

Thus, the vilification of black men by white male policy makers, and their complete awareness of their status as dupes, pawns, and victims, continues to fuel the rage resulting from the disrespect and neglect of white patriarchy—the resulting behavior being the advancement of the gangsta identity, including gang membership and the violence inherent with that choice, as a mechanism of self defense.

321 Chang, p. 311.

322 According to Kevern Verney’s African Americans and U.S. Popular Culture, (New York: Routledge, 2003) Hip-hop’s arrival “reflected the alienation and social and economic deprivation of ghetto communities. Gangsta rappers incorporated images of guns and violence into their lyrics as a mode of artistic self-expression. Their music was rooted in the L.A. street gang culture of the Crips and Bloods and reflected the distrust of any form of authority, most especially white-dominated law enforcement agencies. Straight Outta Compton compared life in the ghetto to the Vietnam War and included a song with the title ‘Fuck the Police.’ A number of Gangsta lyrics engaged in revenge fantasies with white law enforcement officers being gunned down by black ghetto protagonists. Preoccupation with violent early death was another strong theme in Gangsta recordings. Artists frequently fantasized about their own deaths, either in violent shootouts or in executions sanctioned by the state.” pp.95-97.

323 See Douglas G. Glasgow’s The Black Underclass: Poverty, Unemployment, and Entrapment of Ghetto Youth, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1980); specifically chapter six, “Adapting to Survival on the Street,” pp. 87-104. Glasgow addresses the psychology surrounding both the street hustle and hustler in the chapter, beginning with 1965 in the Watts area of Los Angeles. For the purposes of this study, and with full knowledge that the street behavior Glasgow describes started in America’s urban centers decades earlier, the Watts area serves as a useful bookmark for gangsta related psychological profiling since it is commonly known as where the gangsta lifestyle took root and became popular, in part due to the artistic success in promoting the genre through artists such as Tracy “Ice-T” Marrow, and the gangsta rap supergroup N.W.A., which featured militant legends Ice Cube and Easy E.


325 From Hall, Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices, Hall writes that “producing meaning depends on the practice of interpretation, and interpretation is sustained by us actively using the code- encoding, putting things into the code- and by the person at the other end interpreting or decoding the meaning.” p.62.
“Apparatus,” according to film studies theorist Toby Miller, “refers to the interaction between spectators, texts, and technology. Apparatus theory is concerned with the material circumstances of viewing: the nature of filmic projection or video playing, the textual componetry of what is screened, and the psychic mechanisms engaged.” Apparatus focuses “on cinema as a ‘social machine.’ This machine…goes into the realm of demands, desires, fantasies, speculation” (Stam and Miller, 402). Miller goes on the write that the power of film as the ultimate device for reality transference is evidenced by its ability, through spectatorship, to “blend narrativity, continuity, point of view, and identification to see spectators become part of the very apparatus designed for them (my emphasis). The apparatus takes the spectatorial illusion of seeming to experience film as real life and makes it a combination of power…and engagement” (Ibid). These key observations support my claim that the gangsta identity, in 1983 just at the point of beginning its search for a symbolic entity to represent it, was able to progress in major part because Hip-hop males within that lifestyle were able to make consistent referrals back to Scarface, a text that could not only be replayed over and over but amended to suit the needs of the audience. When DJ Ready Red connected the film to their lifestyle through rap—gangsta had its front man.

These events could include a war, as was the case when Casablanca was released in 1942 or Black Hawk Down, released in January, 2002, four months after the attacks on the World Trade Center. Both events affected how audiences looked at the need for patriotism. But audiences also brought into the viewing experience their own feelings about these two events which, according to apparatus theory, would prejudice how they would receive the film. For inner city audiences affected by crime, poverty, gang warfare, and other situations, they would bring their feelings about these circumstances into the theater as well.

Lott, 123-124.

Ibid, 125.

In essence, Montana is their superhero fantasy alter ego; a Spider-man to their Peter Parker. Alter egos are, of course, nothing new in Hip-hop. Rare is the performer who does not use a fantasy name on stage. “Scarface” is Brad Jordan’s rap name, “Jay-Z” was chosen by Shawn Carter, and Collins Leysath transformed himself into “DJ Ready Red.”


The audience processes each scene and decodes in accordance with the experiences and values they bring into the viewing, these include reality and even dreams. This occurs during each viewing according to the theoretical constructs developed by Hall, Janet Staiger (see Media Reception Studies, New York: New York University Press, 2005. pp. 2-8), and Jean-Louis Baudry, whose seminal article, “The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in Cinema,” defined the theoretical change from a purely semiotic approach to reception towards a more psychoanalytical view. Baudry was convinced that cinema created an effect upon the spectator that was accepted as being “more than real.” See Baudry’s article reproduced in Film Theory and Criticism. pp. 690-707.


Ibid.
For other reflections on the necessity of respect and reputation see Greg Dimitriadis, *Performing Identity/Performing Culture: Hip-hop as Text, Pedagogy, and Lived Practice* (New York: P. Lang, 2009), p. 60; Majors and Billson, p. 100; Steve Estes, *I am a Man! Race, Manhood, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), p. 91; filmmaker Jackson Katz’s *Tough Guise*; Hurt’s *Beyond Beats and Rhymes*, particularly the comment advanced by rapper/actor Mos Def, “Hip-hop encourages you to assert yourself, every man wants respect, it’s just a part of every man’s life.” Consideration should also be given to nicknames and street names. For example former Crips assassin Kody Scott’s street reputation was reflected in his nickname, “Monster.” And, lest we forget, gangsta rapper Kody Scott’s stage name was “Scarface.”

Anderson, 9-10.

Ibid, 11.

Ibid, 68.

Ibid, 66.

Ibid, 97.

For one of the most comprehensive and thought provoking works on the history of violence in America, see *Documenting American Violence: A Sourcebook*, edited by Christopher Waldrep and Michael Bellesiles (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). They contend in their introduction to the volume that they “seek to organize otherwise disjointed data while remaining faithful to the often chaotic nature of American violence.” p. 3. Further, they write that “Violence forms a background for all American history, toppling British rule, creating and ending slavery, frustrating Reconstruction, and promoting civil rights. It is an element of American character, a driving force that has defended privilege, challenged authority, advanced causes, and throttled hopes.” p. 4.

For example, see the definition of “black” in any dictionary. Adjectives include: soiled; dirty, evil; wicked; harmful, disgraceful, full of sorrow or suffering; sad; dismal; gloomy, disastrous, sullen or angry, black looks; without hope, a black future; inveterate; confirmed; deep-dyed, a black villain; humorous or satirical in a morbid or cynical way black comedy; secret; covert; hidden, a CIA black operator. The scene in Spike Lee’s Malcolm X (1992), in which the inmate Malcolm Little is asked to read the dictionary by a Black Muslim mentor, is a telling example. In the prison library the man soon to be known as Malcolm X learns that, in addition to the word “black” having such negative connotations, the word “white” is a noun—meaning, among other things, “innocence.” White also may be defined as: morally or spiritually pure; spotless; free from evil intent, and relatively harmless. Even a lie is made clean (a white lie). Definitions are taken from http://www.yourdictionary.com. These definitions are consistent with every known English language dictionary.


See We Real Cool, Chapter 4, pp. 47-66. There hooks writes about masculine traits within the context of the cultivation of “an abusive personality in childhood” (p. 61).

Several scholarly works expose the connection between Euro-American masculinity and black masculinity. The most influential to this study are: first, the aforementioned article by James R. Mahalik, Martin R. Pierre, and Malcolm H. Woodland, “The Effects of Racism, African Self-Consciousness and Psychological Functioning on Black Masculinity: A Historical and Social Adaptation Framework,” Journal of African American Men, pp. 19-39. Second, another previously referenced work—White and Cones, pp. 32, 71, and 116. The authors list assertiveness, toughness, forcefulness, and dominance as distinctive European traits (32, 71). They also compare these Euro-centric behaviors with black masculinity and find them similar; listing physical and psychological toughness, aggressiveness, and the propensity for physical assault among the most valued traits, (116). Janet Mancini, who later co-authored Cool Pose with Richard Majors, wrote in Strategic Styles that black men saw their masculinity in terms of being “tough, seeking conflict, dominating, impenetrable, and aggressive,” p. 90-125. Robert Staples in Black Masculinity cites violence (p. 58-62) and aggression (p. 62); Dimitriadis, in Performing Identity/Performing Culture, focuses on invulnerability (p.59), respect (p.59), and violence (p.70, 121). Komisar’s article, “Violence and the Masculine Mystique,” proved extremely useful. Her list, mirroring other researchers, referenced violence, toughness, aggressiveness, domination, and control (beginning on p.202). She also wrote that

Violence and male supremacy have been companions in the course of civilization. Bernard Clark, professor of government at the London School of Economics, speaks glowingly of ‘the fierce masculine joy of striving for possession according to some more or less acknowledged rules of a game.’ That is the game that...enshrined Jesse James as a national hero, and the game that spills buckets of human blood and guts on battlefields at home and abroad. That game says that to be a man one must possess, control, dominate—and that domination must be assured by force and violence. Masculinity is interpreted to demand male supremacy (213).

Here Komisar demonstrates that gangsta behavior is a typical masculine response, and has little to do with race. Komisar also cites The National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, formed by President Lyndon Johnson in 1968, reporting that “violence is actually often used to enable a young man to become a successful member of ghetto society,” (201).

White and Cones, p. 116.

Anderson, 112.

Dimitriadis, 32.

Anderson, 92.


He had done so nine years previously. See *Streetwise: Race, Class, and Change in an Urban Community*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.


Ibid, 64.


White and Cones, p. 92.

Iwamoto.


Hooks, *We Be Cool*. “While the patriarchal boys in the hip-hop crew may be talking about keeping it real, there has been no musical culture with black men at the forefront of its creation that has been seeped in the politics of fantasy and denial as the more popular strands of hip-hop. The fake cool pose of keeping it real…has really been an expression of dominator culture.” p. 150.

Connor, 26-27.


Ibid.

Connor, 41.
Sanyika Shakur’s pronouncement, that the inner city is a place of war, is the one of the most accurate of assessments. Moreover as a former gang member he never considers his behavior as mentally unstable.

Majors and Billson. p.5.

Ibid.

Ibid.

One of the best fictional representations of this occurred in season four of the HBO narco-drama *The Wire* (2002-2008) focused on troubled Baltimore middle school black boys, the impact of the drug industry on their lives, and the efforts of two disgraced cops-turned-social crusaders to try to save them from destruction. One thread focused on Michael, an intelligent youth who was forced to quit school—so he could support his little brother and raise enough cash to allow them to leave their crack addicted mother. Michael’s choice was a noble one as he sacrificed any potential for his own success to gain the favor of the neighborhood kingpin, who provided him with guerilla warfare training and employment as an assassin and drug corner supervisor.

Staples, p. 65.

See Ethan Brown, who offers a great accounting of street smarts when he writes about the savvy Queens, N.Y. drug dealer, Thomas “Tony Montana” Mickens. He writes that Mickens “moved ounce after ounce of cocaine, and his cash grew larger by the day. Mickens envisioned houses, cars, yachts, everything his hero Tony Montana flaunted in Scarface. The arrest and subsequent prison time had taught Mickens that in order to achieve such lofty goals he would have to be smarter than the average hustler. Therefore, he began to fashion elaborate schemes to protect himself from law enforcement scrutiny.” p. 16.


Ibid, 111.

Mulvey writes that “as the spectator identifies with the main male protagonist, he projects his look on to that of his like, his screen surrogate, so that the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active power of the erotic look, both giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence” (Durham & Kellner, p. 398-399). Mulvey’s article is, without question, canonical. It first appeared in the prestigious quarterly film journal *Screen*, in the fall of 1975 (issue 16.3, p.6-18). Today it is required reading—as evidenced by its inclusion in a number of film studies readers including *Film Theory and Criticism* (p. 746) itself a member of the canon; Stam & Miller’s *Film and Theory* (p. 483); and *Media and Cultural Studies* (Durham & Kellner, p. 393).

See Mulvey in Durham & Kellner, p. 398.
Despite it being written in 1975, after scores of Blaxploitation films had been released, Mulvey’s idea, that “men cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification” (in Dunham & Kellner, p. 3980, leads me to believe she never saw The Mack (1973) or Superfly (1972) or any black themed crime drama of that genre, films that were saturated with a wide variety of opportunities for the pleasurable homoerotic gaze. What she apparently is referring to in her article are white heterosexual homophobic males. And while the vast majority of the Blaxploitation films were clearly phallocentric, I have to beg to differ with Mulvey’s broad claim that her analysis applies to all films, as she seems to infer. Further, a critique of her psychoanalytic approach to the gaze does not account for the black male experience with the prison-industrial complex and the various cultural deviations that arise from such contact, such as the consensual and non-consensual homosexual relationships which occur during incarceration. While the sexual identity of Tony Montana is never called into question by fans of the film, there are enough instances of symbolic impotence and sexual deviation in Scarface to question his heteromasculinity and thus undermine the fantasy of his perfection. But this subject has never been fully developed.

Metz’s Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema, translated from the French by Michael Traylor (New York, Oxford University Press, 1974), began a vigorous debate in film studies. His groundbreaking work, which theorized that film was a language and not a language system, was largely refuted at. This was an epiphanistical moment in film studies because it challenged the canon—long standing methodologies championed by linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and others. South African media cultural scholar Keyan Tomaselli wrote perhaps the most concise history of this debate in S - European Journal for Semiotic Studies, vol. 7(#1/2), pp. 259-273. An excerpt of which is available at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Durban, South Africa) website: http://ccms.ukzn.ac.za/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=624&Itemid=72

Jonathan Scott Lee provides critical insight into the mind of Jacque Lacan in his biography of the famed psychoanalyst, particularly Lacan’s writings about fantasy and desire—which, in turn, complement the analysis of the Hip-hop audience’s decoding of the symbolic moments (relating to their own lives) that occur during the film. See Lee, Jacques Lacan. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990). p. 133-170. In particular two quotes from Lacan are notable as they directly point out the Scarface Hip-hop audience’s underlying emotional context, see p. 142-143. “To say that desire is caused by fantasy is to say that the desiring subject sustains himself as desiring in relation to an ever more complex signifying ensemble” (142). “The imaginary dimension of fantasy…suggests that desire owes its existence—is caused by—the interference of the imaginary in the symbolic” (143). The so called “mirror stage” Lacan presented has been written about extensively and has become canonical in psychoanalysis. The University of Hawaii English department maintains a website dedicated to understanding Lacan’s theory. Go to: http://www.english.hawaii.edu/criticalink/lacan/index.html.

See Origins of a Hip-hop Classic. The entire short film is a testament to this claim.


See Shakur, p. xi.

Ibid. p. xiii.


See chapter one of this dissertation, page 15.
See Stanley Tookie Williams, Blue Rage, Black Redemption: a Memoir, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007. The incredible life of Williams, one of two founders of the Crips gang, saw him nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize five times and the Nobel Prize in literature four times. He was put to death by the State of California in 2005.

A point of clarification. When I discuss how Scarface connects to an audience group, what is being expressed is the relationship between that audience and Tony Montana. In addition to the fact that Montana is in every scene in Scarface, Al Pacino’s performance simply overwhelms all others actors and characters. Pacino’s penchant for choosing characters with manic behaviors, which has since become a trademark of his acting career, began with this performance.

Chapter Seven

There is compelling evidence that Puzo was unknowingly borrowing the phrase from another author (C. Wright Mills’ The Power Elite) and not directly from Honore de Balzac, who may not have said or wrote the phrase at all. Oprah Winfrey and National Public Radio favorite Ralph Keyes, a prolific writer/commentator on the human condition, seems to settle the question in his book, The Quote Verifier: Who said what, where, and when (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2006). See page, 67-68. Regardless, due in large part to the popularity of Puzo’s novel, the phrase is a popular rationalization for the gangster’s often sociopathic behavior. See The Valve website’s Wednesday, October 08, 2008 entry for an example of how Puzo’s epigram serves as a jumping off point for any number of scholarly discussions. Go to: http://www.thevalve.org/go/valve/article/epigrammatic_accumulation.

Hall’s textbook, Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices, not only advances his own groundbreaking theories on audience reception but critiques many of major theoreticians in cultural studies that relate to representations—for example, Foucault (power, masculinity, subjectivity) and Saussure (interpretation, structuralism). Particularly useful to this study is Hall’s section entitled “The Spectacle of the Other,” in which he asks “can a dominant regime of representation be challenged, contested, or changed? (p. 269). The Scarface creative team, by choosing to make its lead character a Latino, caused an unexpected contestation of white male patriarchy by black Hip-hop, when Pacino, the film’s white male star, was accepted as an authentic representation of, and symbol for, the urban ghetto male. This type of reading, according to Hall, utilizes Bakhtin’s concept of trans-coding, described as “taking an existing meaning and re-appropriating it for new meaning.” pp. 235-236.


According to self described “visual semiotician” Daniel Chandler, Hall “proposed a model of mass communication which highlighted the importance of active interpretation within relevant codes. Justin Wren-Lewis insists that Hall’s model, with its emphasis on coding and decoding as signifying practices, is ‘above all, a semiological conception. Hall rejected textual determinism, noting that ‘decodings do not follow inevitably from encodings.’ In contrast to the earlier models, Hall thus gave a significant role to the ‘decoder’ as well as to the ‘encoder.’’ See Semiotics for Beginners, Chandler’s in-depth web based work at http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/S4B/sem08c.html.
Continuing, Chandler writes that, “Hall referred to various phases in the Encoding/Decoding model of communication as *moments*, a term which many other commentators have subsequently employed (frequently without explanation).” Chandler also points to the contribution of John Corner, a colleague of Hall. Corner devised several of his own semiotic definitions including the *moment of encoding*, the *moment of the text*, and the *moment of decoding*. See Corner’s “Textuality, Communication and Power,” *Language, Image, Media*, Howard Davis & Paul Walton (Eds.). Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983. pp. 266-81. Grossberg also refers to Hall in his influential text *Media Making*. He states that “whatever the text—a film, an album, or a comic book—different readers are likely to have different interpretations and evaluations. The transmission model of communication assumes that the aim of all communication is to maximize the likelihood that the receiver receives the exact same message (that is, meaning) as the sender sends. Hall argues to the contrary that communication has to be seen as an articulation of two distinct processes, encoding and decoding, which do not have any relationship to each other. Audiences interpret messages by articulating them into their own codes. It is then reasonable to assume that the decoded meaning will differ from the encoded meaning, which describes the ways the text is articulated within the institutional contexts of its production.” pp. 161-162.

Robert Stam also praises Hall’s work. He wrote that, “Hall, borrowing from Umberto Eco and Frank Papkin, determined mass media texts do not have a univocal meaning but can be read differently by different people, depending not only on their social location but also on their ideologies and desires. Hall sees texts as susceptible to diverse readings based on political-ideological-contradiction. See *Film Theory: An Introduction*, Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 2000, p.230.

394 Grossberg, p.205-6.


396 A point of clarification. When I discuss how Scarface connects to an audience group, what is being expressed is the relationship between that audience and Tony Montana. In addition, to the fact that Montana is in every scene in Scarface, Al Pacino’s performance simply overwhelms those of all other actors and characters.

397 Conversation with Will Callier, a black male of the Hip-hop generation and Bowling Green State University master’s degree student from Atlanta; August 16, 2009.

398 Stam and Miller, p. 402. They write that “apparatus refers to the interaction between spectators, texts, and technology.”


401 I wrote a version of this approximately seven page synopsis for Wikipedia in 2006 in an attempt to edit their poorly written synopsis of the film. While some of my work remains on the site I admit that I do not recognize it, as it has been mostly replaced by another poorly written version. I have revised and extended my original work for use here.

Brian DePalma's opening expository crawl gave audiences misinformation about the number of Marielitos with criminal backgrounds. According to a study published in 1993 in the Social Science Quarterly, there were 124,779 immigrant Marielitos. However, the study gave evidence that only seven percent of the Marielitos (about 8,700) committed offenses that would be considered crimes in the U.S. From “Memories vivid of threats that forced 'Scarface' from Miami,” reporter Steve Persall’s article in the St. Petersburg (FL) Times, Monday, April 14, 2008. Persall reports on his interview with producer Martin Bregman, who recounted that the production faced escalating threats from Anti-Castro Cuban expatriates. Persall reported that, "The plot outline leaked in 1982, angering much of Miami's Cuban-American community built by refugees, including city Commissioner Demetrio Perez Jr. Six months before filming began, Perez introduced a resolution — later voted down — to deny the use of city facilities to any production that might portray Cuban-Americans in unfavorable ways. That was the public face of Cuban-Americans' disapproval of Scarface."
The article is reprinted at the newspaper’s website: [http://www.tampabay.com/features/movies/article453409.ece](http://www.tampabay.com/features/movies/article453409.ece).


As explained previously in this study, two-thirds of the film reviewers referenced in this study—who were commenting at the time of the film’s theatrical release in 1983—filed disparaging opinions. See Appendix A. However, beginning with the 2003 twentieth anniversary DVD release, these initial reviewers (typically from white mainstream media outlets) were overwhelmed by a new wave of critical acclaim from internet based reviewers, a media source not available in 1983.


Ibid.

From the Scarface fan discussion boards at the Internet Movie Data base: [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0086250/board](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0086250/board).

According to the Yale University Film Analysis Web Site ([http://classes.yale.edu/film-analysis/](http://classes.yale.edu/film-analysis/)) a scene is defined as “a segment of a narrative film that usually takes place in a single time and place, often with the same characters. Sometimes a single scene may contain two lines of action, occurring in different spaces or even different times, which are related by means of crosscutting. Scene and sequence can usually be used interchangeably, though the latter term can also refer to a longer
segment of film that does not obey the spatial and temporal unities of a single scene. For example, a montage sequence that shows in a few shots a process that occurs over a period of time. See also http://classes.yale.edu/film-analysis/htmfiles/basic-terms.htm.

413 Ibid. Yale’s website defines sequences as being two to four consecutive scenes that are linked together by a common narrative theme. Using this definition as my model, I grouped key scenes into sequences. For example, I grouped together three scenes to comprise one of my sequences: Tony’s interrogation by the INS upon his arrival to Miami, his detention with Manny and rest of his crew at Freedom Town, and his employment as a dishwasher at the El Paraiso walk-up sandwich shop. I named this sequence “Just Off the Boat.”

414 Appendix D explains on how scenes were grouped into segments.

415 The chainsaw segment was a rare departure from all of Tony’s other representations in the film because he was not able to control or influence the ambush at the motel. Montana, taken by surprise, was captured and ultimately was responsible for the murder of a member of his crew. He also had to be rescued by Manny, his faithful sidekick.

416 Another Oliver Stone line from his film Wall Street, “Greed, for lack of a better word, is good,” was listed at #57. See the complete list at the American Film Institute (AFI) website: http://connect.afi.com/site/DocServer/quotes100.pdf?docID=242.

417 Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish.

418 From Elliott Currie, Crime and Punishment in America. New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998. Currie points out that, “By the mid-1990s roughly one in three young black men were under the ‘supervision’ of the criminal-justice system--that is, in a jail or prison, on probation or parole, or under pretrial release. The figure was two out of five in California, and over half in the city of Baltimore, Maryland. In California today, four times as many black men are ‘enrolled’ in state prison as are enrolled in public colleges and universities. Nationally, there are twice as many black men in state and federal prison today as there were men of all races twenty years ago.” An excerpt of this quote is available at The New York Times website’s “Books” section. See http://www.nytimes.com/books/first/c/currie-crime.html.

419 Information on the film is available at imdb.com (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0343121/). Noted film critic Roger Ebert of the Chicago Sun-Times wrote in his November 14, 2003 review of the film that “Tupac: Resurrection is about rap music, the forces that created it, and the world it then created. Shakur talks about the experiences and politics that went into his own music, in a way that casts more light on rap than anything else I’ve come across in a movie.” See the entire article online at http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20031114/REVIEWS/311140306/1023.


421 “Montana” translates from the Italian into English as “the mountain.” Ironically, the name was given to the lead character in the film by writer Oliver Stone to honor his favorite football player, San Francisco 49ers quarterback Joe Montana, an Italian-American.
See Appendix E for examples of the come up’s significance as explained by Hip-hop practitioners.

Henry Louis Gates, *Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp. 44-88. His quote of H. Rap Brown at the beginning of chapter two, (p. 44) is a wonderful example of how the opening exchange between Montana and the INS might resonate between street players. A similar example of the strength of rhetorical dozens occurs in Harrison Ford’s *Presumed Innocent* (1990), a film about a prosecutor (Ford) wrongly accused of murder. In a key early moment the trial judge, played by the great black actor Paul Winfield, overrules a motion by the state prosecutor to accept a sarcastic remark made by Ford’s character as an admission of guilt. Winfield tells the overzealous D.A. that in the inner city neighborhood where the judge grew up Ford’s remark would be akin to saying “ya mama,” a standard retort in playing the dozens.

See “Deleted Scenes” section in the 20th anniversary edition of Scarface, disk two, bonus features. Two deleted scenes take place in the all-male dormitory of the detention camp (both are actually the same scene shot from different camera positions). Each takes is very provocative because they depict a very playful sexual tension between Tony and Manny. The second of the two takes ends with a homosexual proposition being offered to Tony from an obviously gay bunk mate whose motivation appears to be to spirit Tony away from Manny, who appears to Tony’s lover (Tony has just drawn Manny near by putting a towel around his neck and has told him he loved him). And while Montana spurns the offer for sex, his reaction is not the typical violent repulsion we would expect from the stereotypical heteronormative homophobic male.

In the MTV produced documentary film *Tupac Resurrection* (2003) Tupac Shakur says he thought that prison was an inevitable rite of passage that allowed young black males to prove they were men. His comment echoes the thinking of many other young black males.

The name “El Paraiso,” in one form or another, has appeared in every film De Palma has directed. Locating its inevitable appearance has become both a parlor game and inside joke for De Palma and those fans that obsess about his films.

This structure is well known among screenwriters. For an example see Kal Bashir’s template, 510+ stage Hero’s Journey, Monomyth, Screenplay, Story, Structure, Templates at http://www.clickok.co.uk/index4.html.

De Palma’s early career is highlighted by a number of films in which he homaged Hitchcock’s camera positioning and stylistic choices. The *Psycho* (1960) shower sequence, one the most memorable in the history of cinema, provoked an inordinate amount of fear and tension from audiences considering that the scene lacked any visible violence, tame even for the standards of its time. Hitchcock never actually shows the butcher knife, wielded by Tony Perkins’ dressed-as-his-mom character, touching Janet Leigh’s body. De Palma skillfully recreates the same sensation in the motel chainsaw scene. While the violence all happens off-screen in the scene, the thought of dismemberment was so disturbing that it caused the MPAA to swear it saw *something*, so much so that the filmmaker was asked to cut what only existed in the mind.
Chapter Eight

431 The obvious exception to this characterization is Smith’s portrayal of Muhammad Ali in Michael Mann’s Ali (2001).

432 Previously mentioned in Chapter three of this study, the prominent popular cultural scholar Todd Boyd, who along with Michael Eric Dyson should be considered Hip-hop’s gatekeepers of authenticity, has argued that Smith’s credibility as an “authentic” rapper in Hip-hop be summarily dismissed. See Boyd’s The New H.N.I.C. pp.53-54.

433 I do not count Wesley Snipes’ Blade character as a “traditional” film superhero because he is part vampire, nor is Spawn (Michael Jai White) because he is a demon from hell.


435 Ibid.

436 See also rapper D-Block’s “Styles Freestyle #2” at http://www.lyricsdir.com/d-block-styles-freestyle-2-lyrics.html. “You can tell your man I'll smoke ya. Rap’s Alejandro Sosa, hang you from the helicopter.” Sosa also has his own MySpace website at http://www.myspace.com/alejandroxsosa.


438 The native Incas in Peru regarded the coca plant as a divine gift from the gods and made traditional use of the narcotic leaves long before the arrival of the Spanish Conquistadores to the South American continent. The coca was for the exclusive use of the priests and royal families. Inca society also permitted the chewing of the narcotic coca leaves by the wealthy and talented people in Inca society. See http://www.herbs2000.com/herbs/herbs_coca.htm.

439 The M16 with M203 grenade launcher attachment is a weapon that has entered popular folklore due to it being the “little friend” that Montana refers to in his famous utterance “Say hello to my little friend.” Fans have gone to great lengths to converse their knowledge of the weapon. For example at the popular Yahoo answers website a fan asked for help in confirming the M16. The fan asked: “The rifle that Tony Montana used at the end of Scarface, that is a M16 with a M203 attachment right?” Answer from another fan: “At the time that the movie "Scarface" was made the M16 series rifle had not been modified to have a 3 shot burst selector, that modification was a post M16A2 modification. The M16 and M16A1 were originally select fire either semi-automatic or fully automatic weapons and as far as I know were not converted over to the M16A2 standards. The M203 is known as the 'Dual Purpose Weapon' when it is attached to the M16 series rifle or M4 series Carbine.” Go to: http://au.answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20080314090840AAarbPG.

Another fan asked the same question: “What gun does tony montana use?” Answer: “Tony Montana (Al Pacino) uses an M16A1 with a Fake M203 grenade launcher attached during the final battle. In one of the film's more memorable moments Tony yells out "Say hello to my little friend!" and blows a door down with a 40mm grenade, killing several of Sosa's men. Also of note is that he has two 20-round magazines taped together 'jungle style'. After expending his first 20 round magazines, he inserted a 30 round before the end. The grenade launcher used is a 39mm smooth bore "Fake M203" commonly used to imitate the M203 in the 1980s before the advent of the Cobray CM203 Flare Launcher, and is also seen used in films
such as Predator and Heartbreak Ridge.” Go to: 
http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20090315220024AAqFsh

The amount of detail in each response shows the level of interest in getting the exact specifications absolutely accurate for posterity.

440 John Alonzo amassed a stellar thirty-five year career as a Hollywood cinematographer. In addition to Scarface, among his best films are the cult classic Vanishing Point (1971), Sounder (1972), the lushly photographed Chinatown (1974, for which he received an Oscar nomination), Conrack (1974), the Miami based terrorist thriller Black Sunday (1977), Close Encounters of the Third Kind (1977), the surveillance based cop drama Blue Thunder (1983), and Star Trek: Generations (1994). Go to: 
http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0002166/


442 As to the issue of where Scarface ranks on the list of the all time great films in cinema history—according to the American film Institute (AFI), considered to be the sina qua non of arbiters in these matters, Scarface does not merit a rank on either their 1998 or 2007 list of the Top 100 greatest films of all time. Scarface also did not make the Time magazine Top 100 list, the IMDb.com Top 100, or film critic Roger Ebert’s list of the best 297 best films of all time. Scarface was, however, listed as the 10th (out of ten) best film of the gangster genre according to AFI. This may be attributed to the great performance of Pacino and to the recent value placed upon the film by Hip-hop culture. A number of films that I feel are superior to Scarface come immediately to mind—Miller’s Crossing, Donnie Brasco, The Untouchables, Mean Streets, Once Upon a Time in America, American Me, and City of God. After the 2007 list appeared Scorsese’s The Departed would certainly make the list. The 1932 original Scarface ranked 6th on this list. Other gangster films on AFI’s Top 100 list— #2. The Godfather; #32. The Godfather, Part II; #42. Bonnie and Clyde; #92. Goodfellas. As an aside, I don’t consider Bonnie and Clyde a true gangster film because the bank robbers were not participants in or members of an organized crime syndicate.

443 Six other films, released around the same time as the Blaxploitation era (1971-1976), made Vibe’s list: The Mack, 1973 (#7), a film about a pimp’s rise and subsequent resignation from the game; Foxy Brown, 1974 (#18), Pam Grier’s turn as a vigilante prostitute; Cooley High, 1975 (#27), a well done, but mostly forgotten coming of age tale; Uptown Saturday Night, 1974 (#32), the hilarious Poitier-Cosby comedy; The Harder They Come, 1974 (#37), Jimmy Cliff’s Jamaican reggae classic that greatly influenced the creation of Hip-hop in New York City; and Enter the Dragon, 1973 (#33), the Bruce Lee film which made martial arts fighting the standard skill for all serious crime fighters and spy heroes in film.


446 Bond has appeared in twenty-two films that were authorized under the original licensing agreement between British author Ian Fleming, who wrote fourteen Bond novels and two book length compilations of Bond short stories, and American film producers Harry Saltzman and Albert Broccoli, the
latest being 2008’s Quantum of Solace. In addition, there have been two unauthorized films which have featured the character, one in 1967 (Casino Royale, a comedy spoof with Peter Sellers and Woody Allen) and Never Say Never Again (1983, which brought back Sean Connery, again, for the third time after swearing he would never to do another Bond adventure, thus the title). The first Fleming/ Bond story filmed was Casino Royale. Fleming’s first novel, which curiously featured Bond as a card playing CIA operative in a 1954 television episode of the "Climax Mystery Theater" on the CBS Network.. That show starred Barry Nelson (below) as Bond.

447 Elvis was a folk hero that, for a time, elicited a number of conspiracy theories from fans who refused to accept his death. He continues to be referenced (and or paid homage to) in many popular films such as True Romance (which featured an Elvis muse), Ocean’s Eleven (2001, a film that employed an Elvis tune in the opening credits), and 3000 Miles to Graceland (2001, featuring a casino heist conducted by a gang of Elvis impersonators using an Elvis impersonators convention as a cover).

448 Gabbard, p.9.


453 See Anderson, Code of the Streets. p. 135. He writes that “Television images portray and even glamorize the fast life and movies, such as The Godfather, Set It Off, Boyz n the Hood, and Menace II Society that feature gratuitous violence, help legitimize violence for many young men. Films…help youths become inured to violence and, perhaps, death itself.” While this study has documented the influence of Scarface upon ghetto underclass males, I find it interesting that Anderson joins the long list of scholars who chose to exclude the influence of De Palma’s film on these youth.

454 Anderson, 318.

considerable influence on film theory is that he “never theorized about film” (p.1). Lacan’s essay on the mirror stage, “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the ‘I’ function” was an unrelated to film studies psychoanalytic paper delivered in 1949. Louis Althusser was the most significant theorist to use Lacan’s work, mapping the mirror gaze’s ideological influences. McGowan correctly observes that Althusser “politicized Lacan’s theory and offered film theorists an avenue for developing a critical understanding of the cinematic experience that was informed by psychoanalytic thinking” (2).

456 Metz, The Imaginary Signifier, p. 54.

457 McGowan, p.2.

458 Eighteenth century poet Samuel T. Coleridge coined the term “suspension of disbelief.” He wrote in his autobiography, the Biographia Literaria, “In this idea originated the plan of the "Lyrical Ballads"; in which it was agreed, that my endeavors should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith.” See Biographia Literaria, or, Biographical sketches of my literary life and opinions. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.

459 For a concise definition of this term, which concerns how individuals use the gaze to assist in acts of narcissism, see “Part-object” in An introductory dictionary of Lacanian psychoanalysis by Dylan Evans. New York Routledge, 1996. p. 137-138.

460 Hooks in We Real Cool, 150.

461 Ibid, 151.

462 Ibid, 152.

463 Ibid, 153.

464 I credit this term to my friend and colleague Kristy Ganoe, who used it during my conversation with her (June 18, 20009) about the fate of Detroit, Michigan given its stunning lack of any national chain of grocery stores.


466 Daniel Moynihan’s 1965 report to President Lyndon Johnson was officially titled The Negro Family: The Case for National Action.

467 See http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/collusion

This was the reason why the Scarface production was run out of Miami by Cuban oppositional leadership. See “Miami Official Objects to Cuban Refugee Film,” by reporter Gregory Jaynes of the New York Times, Aug 24, 1982, p. A12. Also “Movie Crew Quits Miami After Cuban Criticism.” New York Times, Aug 31, 1982, p A10. I admit to having a suspicion about the nature of Oliver Stone’s early work and, having already accused him of being a writer of fascist leaning screenplays in an unpublished paper I wrote for a PhD graduate seminar, I was not surprised by the reaction of Miami’s Cuban leadership. Miami City commissioner Demetrio Perez, Jr. wrote a letter to producer Martin Bregman and expressed his concern about the script—even before reading it. One reason for his alarm over the production was that he had seen Serpico (a film that starred Al Pacino), and it had struck him as “offensive” because it questioned the credibility of the New York Police Department. The story of Frank Serpico was based on the life of the legendary pioneer of police undercover work but Perez sensed, and rightfully so, that if Bregman could make the NYPD look bad, he do likewise, or worse, on ordinary Cubans. Bregman threatened to take the production out of Miami several times and then recanted. However, eventually, due to death threats from serious minded anti-Castro operatives, Bregman packed up the production with Brian De Palma and fled town. The recognition by Perez of the power of film to transform fiction into a constructed reality was a crucial moment for cultural identity. Hispanic youth of the Hip-hop generation did become susceptible to accepting Al Pacino as authentic, as evidenced by Mr. Cartoon’s statement to that effect in the documentary short Origins of a Hip-hop Classic. Young black Hip-hop aged males took that construction one step further and wholly accepted a film which offered them absolutely no representations of themselves, relying solely on class similarities and the influence of seeing the code of the streets acted out on the big screen.


Mahalik, et.al. p.25

New Jack City’s crack cocaine criminal mastermind, Nino Brown, describes his forceful takeover of the Carter housing complex in New York as one in which he likens the residents as being forced to live under occupied, siege-like conditions. “If they co-operate,” thinks Brown, “It’s lovely. If not, it will be like Beirut.” What Brown describes are warlike conditions for victims. However, these same conditions exist for real life residents living in the oppressed and occupied American ghetto.

The sociologists offer further observations that suggest black males perform roles which seek to “please the white power structure. It is a role that convinces white oppressors that they had finally accepted the reality of white cultural dominance over their lives” (p. 25).

According to imdb.com. See the Scarface page on the website at http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0086250/movieconnections. As an aside, these inspirations are not unlike what occurs in academia when scholars, out of academia necessity, must reference those icons that have come before them as a means to assert their own validity.

These ‘hood films, for the most part, however, were not black independent productions as were Sweet Sweetback and Superfly, but rather were major studio productions exploiting the market Scarface created. And despite all of the great films produced, directed, and acted in by black filmmakers and movie stars such as Spike Lee, John Singleton, Denzel Washington, Samuel L. Jackson, Jamie Foxx, Forrest Whitaker, and Will Smith, I suspect that if today you went into any major city ghetto and asked a representative number of young persons who is the cinema hero that best represents them—they would undoubtedly say Scarface Tony Montana. Given all of the heroic fictional deeds seen and enjoyed on the screen in the last twenty-five years, Scarface would be an implausible answer.
As reported by New York Daily News gossip columnists George Rush and Joanna Rush Molloy, in the Saturday, April 14, 2007 edition. They wrote, “Oliver Stone may wind up in the same circle of hell as Don Imus now that the director has been accused of using the N-word. Screenwriter Barry Michael Cooper says Stone whipped the racist epithet on him at an L.A. party shortly after Cooper's movie "New Jack City" came out in 1991."Oliver Stone's my hero, so I went over to him," Cooper recalls in StopSmiling magazine. "[I said,] 'Man, I love your movie Wall Street. … He said to me, 'Okay, thank you very much. I bet you like [the Stone-scripted] Scarface, too. All n——s like Scarface.' [Stone] stumbled off. Right before I could go after him and commit career suicide, [director] Stan [Lathan] and [hip-hop mogul] Russell [Simmons] pulled on my arm and said, 'No you don't. Let it go. That's just him, he's high.'” Go to: http://dailylynching.blogspot.com/2007/04/oliver-stone-all-niggers-love-scarface.html.


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A


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   Artists, 1976.

   Bros., 1942.

Casino Royale. Dir. Martin Campbell. Perf. Daniel Craig, Eva Green, Mads Mikkelsen. MGM,
   2006.

   1974.


D


E


F

48 Hrs. Dir. Walter Hill. Perf. Eddie Murphy, Nick Nolte. Paramount, 1982


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Paramount, 1954.


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APPENDIX A

SCARFACE MOVIE REVIEWS

The Initial Theatrical Release from November, 1983 to April, 1984

Reviewers are listed in alphabetical order, last name first. Several reviews were “mixed,” i.e. evaluated as having struck a balance between positive and negative opinions. These types of reviews were not calculated in the final percentages that were quoted in the study and are not included in this Appendix.

Favorable Reviews


Brown, Georgia A. “Scarface by De Palma, the Director You Hate to Love.” American Film: a Journal of the Film and Television Arts. Vol. 9, 1983. pp. 28-34.


Unfavorable Reviews


APPENDIX B

BOX OFFICE ANALYSIS

The public controversy and media coverage of Scarface’s receipt of an initial “X” rating from the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) should have caused a spike at the box office, especially after the matter was resolved in favor of director Brian De Palma and Universal Studios. Several factors contributed to a box office gross that did not meet the expectations of the either the Scarface creative team (De Palma, Bregman, and Pacino) or the studio. First, a significant number of poor reviews from the media hurt the film’s appeal. Second, competition from other more traditional, family friendly releases, such as Terms of Endearment and The Big Chill, both of which had strong, positive, and emotional content, lessened the film’s audience draw.

Another factor was the decision of Universal to release the film during the same weekend as Sudden Impact, the fourth installment of Clint Eastwood’s immensely popular Dirty Harry cop series. Sudden Impact simply blew box office holes in the gangster film, trouncing it both during its opening weekend and in overall gross receipts for the year. Sudden Impact finished seventh overall in domestic box office earnings for 1983 while Scarface was sixteenth. The list on the next page shows (left to right) the yearly ranking of the film within the top fifty grossing films of that year, the total first year gross, the maximum number of screens during the first year, the gross for the opening week, and the number screens the film opened on during that first week. The top fifty domestic grosses for 1983 were acquired from the Box Office Mojo website. Go to: http://www.boxofficemojo.com/yearly/chart/?yr=1983&p=.htm.
Sudden Impact 7. $67,642,693 1,602 $9,688,561 1,530

Scarface 16. $44,668,798 1,008 $4,597,536 996

Related Issues:

1. At two hours and fifty minutes, Scarface’s exceptionally long running time reduced the number of times theatre owners could screen the film. Many movie chains passed on Scarface because its length minimized gross earnings potential.

2. Sudden Impact was accepted by theater owners for viewing on 534 more theatre screens. Eastwood’s film was 53 minutes shorter and allowed it to be shown five times per day to three for Scarface.

Assuming a first screening at noon, a cleanup period between films of 30 minutes, and last screening at 10 pm in most urban markets in 1983, Sudden Impact could be shown five times per day. Scarface, starting at 11 am could be shown 4 times, but more than likely only three because of the late ending time of the last screening.

Scarface did not do badly, however. It has grossed over $65 million (in theatrical sales alone) since December, 1983. Adjusted for inflation, the Scarface worldwide gross in 2008 dollars would have been $151.63 million. The film was released in 1983 to a (then) near maximum 1,008 theatre screens. A wide release in 2009 means up to 4,300 screens, so the gross amount could be much more today.

APPENDIX C

THE HYPERCOMMDEDIFICATION OF SCARFACE 2006-2007

The marketing of Scarface intensified after its 20th anniversary year in 2003. However, beginning with 2006, Universal decided to create additional revenue streams by franchising the property through a reinvention of the film’s story. Whereas Tony Montana had been murdered to conclude the picture, it was decided the character would get another chance at life in a video game story which in the middle of the final gun battle, but before Tony was fatally shot. With this new wrinkle, video gamers were able to continue in the game as Montana and seek revenge on Alejandro Sosa. Successful gamers would be able to kill Sosa and live happily ever after.

In addition, Tony’s story was enriched by the franchising of a comic book line which would explain details of his early years that were only alluded to in the film (how he got the scar, his army service, his parents. Life under Castro, etc.). The following information provides details on the chronology of these events and includes the author’s personal photographs of the phenomenon as the search for Scarface memorabilia was conducted.

2006

October

Fan blogs were used extensively to support the corporate hype machine promoting the roll out of the new Scarface video game, a product that received a full blow promotion worthy of a big budget major motion picture. The blog listed below was in support of the “Platinum Edition” DVD released in 2006 with “enhanced sound quality.” While that fact may have been true the new release was timed to hype the game. See The Spoon Blog from Singapore,
October

Another smart notion in support of the video game was a special presentation of the
MTV program “Cribs,” which spoofed its own focus on visiting and showing off celebrity homes
by creating a virtual Tony Montana and his mansion. It is available on YouTube at:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zIwewwN1pFg.

November

The video game and related fandom continued unabated with a website for Scarface
video game purchasers created months ahead of the game’s release by website Gamespot.com.

2007

Examples of a few of the licenses granted by Universal’s Marketing division.

- **Alibaba.com** is a website selling Scarface brand men’s suits. Go to:
http://www.alibaba.com/product-free/11772173/Mens_Suits_Tony_Montana_The_Scarface.html

- **Stylin Online** offers an extensive collection of urban oriented gear that clearly is
marketed to hip hop consumers.

- **Amazon.com.** The popular site has 20 different product categories for Scarface related
items and there were over 6,100 items available for sale. However, to put that number in
context, Amazon lists over 25,600 books alone that are available in the Star Trek
franchise inventory.
Amazon’s list of the top selling Scarface products is located at:

http://www.amazon.com/s/qid=1215020503/ref=sr_pg_1?ie=UTF8&rs=&keywords=Scarface&rh=i%3Aaps%2Ck%3AScarface&page=1

From the Private Collection of the Author

Figure 102. _I Trust Me_. Tony’s face on a framed poster. Photo by Rob Prince.

Figure 103. _Yellow Caddy_. A model of the 1963 Cadillac that Tony traded in for the Porsche he bought. The model comes complete with tiger skin seats and a Tony Montana doll to scale. Photo by Rob Prince.
**Figure 104. Scarface at the Mall.** The above photographs were taken by the author at Westfield Shoppingtown Mall, the largest and busiest in the Toledo metropolitan area. This free standing kiosk sells sports related and popular culture paintings, of which about 75% were gangster film oriented. Of those, all except two included images (or were singular renderings) of Al Pacino as Tony Montana/Scarface. From left to right: The kiosk, a painting of Tony (top), and a painting which includes a rogue’s gallery of gangster criminals (identified as, from left to right): Don Corleone, Montana (seated at the head of the table in his signature chair), the Goodfellas crew, and Tony Soprano.

**Figure 105. Wal-Mart Loves Scarface.** These pictures (the photo on the right is a blow up of the one on the left) were taken by the author at the Wal-Mart in Bowling Green, Ohio during the 2006 Christmas holidays. Notice that the Scarface DVD is being sold right next to The Passion of the Christ. The side by side placement of both products underscores the ironies of capitalist interests as two vastly different symbols of messianic heroism are joined together to persuade consumers to apparently choose between heaven and hell (or enjoy both). In the left photo also notice that directly below Scarface is Carlito’s Way (lower row on extreme right) also directed by Brian de Palma and starring Al Pacino as yet another Hispanic who is killed for his association with the drug life. While critics thought that his performance of Carlito Brigante was superior to that rendered in Scarface, hip hop audiences did not embrace Pacino’s Carlito. My feeling is that Brigante’s desire to not re-enter a life of crime once out of prison, coupled with the fact that his “come up” is absent from the film kept Carlito’s Way, with a more mature and nuanced performance by Pacino, from connecting with Hip-hop audiences.
APPENDIX D

SCENE LIST AND SEQUENCE GROUPINGS

The Scarface 2003 20th Anniversary DVD divides the film into thirty-five scenes. The DVD gives a brief title to each scene (see below, “DVD Scenes List”). After the Scenes List I created a second list, which I named “Sequence Groupings.” Based on the standard film studies definition of sequences (see Notes; Citations 412 and 413), I grouped all of the film’s scenes into sequences. After grouping all scenes into sequences, I then created my own title for each sequence. Finally, I selected what I felt were the three most influential sequences for a detailed close analysis. They are “Just Off the Boat,” “Balls and My Word,” and “Say Hello to My Little Friend.” The scenes critiqued in the three sequences are highlighted below in bold.

DVD Scenes List

1 A political prisoner
2 Freedom town
3 Killing for a green card
4 The good life
5 A new job
6 Columbians and chain saws
7 Mr. Lopez
8 Elvira
9 A night in Babylon
10 How to pick up girls
11 Going in style
12 The prodigal son returns
13 The drug lord
14 Revenge
15 Serious money
16 A proposal
17 Shakedown
18 Brotherly love
19 Two guns for Tony
A hostile takeover
Laundry bills
Philosophy in the bathtub
The cost of doing business
Problems and solutions
Dinner conversation
Prelude to murder
No women and children!
Severing business ties
The end of the honeymoon
Preparing for war
Gina’s offering
Siege
Montana’s last stand
End titles

Sequence Groupings

1. **Just Off the Boat**
   1. A political prisoner (Montana’s Interrogation by INS)
   2. Freedom town (The detention camp)
   3. Killing for a green card (The Rebenga hit)
   4. The good life (Montana’s brief stint as a dishwasher at the El Paraiso sandwich shop)
   5. A new job (Montana meets Omar Suarez)

2. **Risk and Reward**
   6. Columbians and chain saws
   7. Mr. Lopez
   8. Elvira
   9. A night in Babylon
   10. How to pick up girls
   11. Going in style

3. **Montana Family Reunion**
   12. The prodigal son returns

4. **“Balls and My Word”**
   13. The drug lord (Montana meets and impresses Alejandro Sosa)
   14. Revenge (DJ Ready Red’s “Balls and My Word” scene)
   15. Serious money
   17. A proposal
5. Lopez Eliminated
   17 Shakedown
   18 Brotherly love
   19 Two guns for Tony
   20 A hostile takeover

6. Reaching the Summit
   21 Prosperity

7. Tony’s Fall Begins
   22 Laundry bills
   23 Philosophy in the bathtub
   24 The cost of doing business
   25 Problems and solutions

8. Disenchantments
   26 Dinner conversation
   27 Prelude to murder
   28 No women and children
   29 Severing business ties
   30 The end of the honeymoon
   31 Preparing for war

9. “Say hello to my little friend”
   32 Gina’s offering
   33 Siege (along with 34, the battle with Sosa’s goon squad)
   34 Montana’s last stand (“Say hello to my little friend” and death)
   35 End titles
APPENDIX E

HIP-HOP TESTIMONIALS

Rapper Clipse’s observations in the Origins of a Hip Hop Classic documentary short are typical of the film’s focus. He supports the study’s argument that Scarface resonated with hip hop because “Hip Hop, especially street hip hop, is always about the ‘come up’ of a rapper from the ‘hood.” Mr. Cartoon, a Latino tattoo artist, explains in this film that “the movie had a big effect on L.A. There are a lot of Latinos and Mexicans here. To see Latinos doing it that big on the screen that was real big for us.”

Other evidence:

Ray Benzino, writer The Source magazine: “Scarface gave it to a lot of people that this is the American Dream, that you can have the world.”

Clipse, Rap Artist: “Rappers relate to (the film) because that’s how we come up.”

Andre 3000, Rap Artist: “He’s actually doing wrong but the crowd is rooting for him because he’s come from nothing. That’s what attracts people to his character.”

Mehki Pheifer, Actor: “Scarface represented the capitalistic society that we live in. But it also represented that you don’t have to conform to society in order to ‘make it.’”

Scarface, Rap Artist: “I took on the Scarface name, because that was me, man. I guess what inspired me about this movie was that this cat was just like me. I knew right then that if that cat could do it…I mean come over here with nothing and leave here with everything, I knew for a fact that that was for me.”

In an interview with the VH1 cable network, Fat Joe called Tony Montana a “ghetto superhero,” a comment based on his observations of the character’s actions in the film.
VH1: So, Tony Montana is a true gangsta?

FAT JOE: Tony Montana is an ultimate gangsta. He’s the true warrior. Ya know. The money, sex and power…and that’s what the movie was based all on…and ya see somebody coming from nothing and becoming something.

VH1: Do you think the morals of hip hop and those of the gangsta lifestyle parallel?

FAT JOE: Definitely. We all commin’ up from not having nothin’… and…about to get whatever (we) can by any means necessary. So that’s why we relate to Scarface so much.

VH1: Are people more taken in by him being the underdog on the rise or by him being the big dog with power?

FAT JOE: I think it began as the underdog, and people loved him for being the underdog and how he rose to power and status. People felt like finally the bad guy’s winning.

As Joe tells it, the fantasy of “money, sex and power,” Montana’s victory from an “underdog, bad guy status,” and his “coming up from nothing” were those aspects of the film that resonated with ghetto audiences.
APPENDIX F

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS OF SCREEN CAPTURES

Acknowledgments for all images cited as screen captures are as follows:

1. Screen captures from New Jack City


Figure 1. Point of Entry. PAGE 4.


Figure 16. “Scarface” the Rapper. PAGE 104.

Figure 29. Mr. Cartoon. PAGE 128.

Figure 30. Fat Joe. PAGE 130.

3. Screen captures from Miami Vice (television series).


Figure 9. Vice Styles. PAGE 87.


Figure 10. Ocean Views. PAGE 87. (Left screen capture only)


4. Screen captures from *Scarface* (1932).


Figure 54. Affability. PAGE 275.

Figure 55. Assassin’s Tattoo. PAGE 276.

Figure 56. Political Prisoner. PAGE 277.

Figure 57. Contempt for the Powers that be. PAGE 277.

Figure 58. Green Card for a Killer. PAGE 281.

Figure 59. A Baudrillardian illusion. PAGE 282.

Figure 60. El Paraiso. PAGE 282.

Figure 61. A Dream Deferred. PAGE 283.

Figure 62. An Insult. PAGE 284.

Figure 63. A Threat. PAGE 285.

Figure 64. Quitting Time. PAGE 286.

Figure 65. Chainsaw Massacre. PAGE 289.

Figure 66. Sexual Confusion. Page 290.

Figure 67. Frank’s Place. PAGE 291.

Figure 68. The Yayo. PAGE 291.

Figure 69. Loyal Employee. PAGE 291.

Figure 70. Elvira. PAGE 292.

Figure 71. “He’s Soft.” PAGE 292.

Figure 72. Sosa’s Estate. PAGE 297.

Figure 73. Alejandro Sosa. PAGE 297.

Figure 74. Omar Bids Farewell. PAGE 298.

Figure 75. Sosa’s Trickery. PAGE 298.
Figure 76.  Everything a Man Could Want. PAGE 29.
Figure 77.  Suarez is Murdered. PAGE 299.
Figure 78.  Treating Power with Contempt. PAGE 299.
Figure 79.  You Got That? PAGE 300.
Figure 80.  Balls and my Word. PAGE 300.
Figure 81.  Make a Move. PAGE 300.
Figure 82.  No More “Mr. Sosa.” PAGE 302.
Figure 83.  A Cool Pose. PAGE 303.
Figure 84.  The Ice Man Stareth. PAGE 303.
Figure 85.  Intimidation. PAGE 304.
Figure 86.  Stopping the bomb. PAGE 307.
Figure 87.  Moral compass. PAGE 307.
Figure 88.  Pandemonium. PAGE 308.
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Figure 90.  “Say hello to my little friend!” PAGE 310.
Figure 91.  Montana on a Rampage. PAGE 311.
Figure 92.  Bulletproof Superhero. PAGE 312.
Figure 93.  Last Stand. PAGE 312.
Figure 94.  Get your enemies before they get you. PAGE 313.
Figure 95.  Be tough. PAGE 313.
Figure 96.  Exhibit a cool exterior. PAGE 313.
Figure 97.  Never show any weakness. PAGE 313.
Figure 98.  Treat power and authority with contempt. PAGE 314.
Figure 99. Command respect at all times. PAGE 314.

Figure 100. Be loyal until it is not time to be. PAGE 314.

Figure 101. Gangsta’s Paradise. PAGE 322.