

Rampage

Australia 2006

Director: George Gittoes

Certificate 15 108m 15s

Two of America's most forbidden zones are explored in *Rampage*: first, the shocking, pointless violence of the Iraqi war; and second, the shocking, pointless violence of American inner-city drug wars. Not only is the US losing both struggles, but they share precisely the same American casualties: underprivileged, unprotected outcasts of 'the system', particularly poor black males. Australian film-maker George Gittoes' racial/political accusation is overt right from the opening sequence, which contrasts landscapes of ravaged Baghdad against glossy Miami. The latter harbours at its core its own bullet-ridden war zone, the desperately dangerous ghetto Brown Sub. The film makes no bones of its damning view of Bush-era American politics, giving voice to contemporary America's ignored, silent underclass (think Hurricane Katrina) in a hip-hop-soundtracked political exposé.

The idea for *Rampage* came to Gittoes when he met young black soldier Elliott Lovett in Iraq while filming his 2004 documentary *Soundtrack to War*. "We get shot at more in Miami than Baghdad," Elliott had explained, so Gittoes followed him home to Miami to film this complex family portrait. By the film's end, with bulletholes scarring almost every black body on screen and one of Elliott's brothers, Marcus, actually murdered, it is easy to understand the young man's sense of relief in returning to Baghdad, where at least no one will shoot him just to steal his shoes. Gittoes' devices to structure the film – dividing it into large chapters (eg, 'The Haters') or inserting talking-head mini-screens around a main character as if to 'build a portrait' – tend to feel forced and artificial against the handheld, energetic pace of the film, which builds enough narrative drive without having to resort to such heavy-handed tropes. Dramatic highs include a very real, potentially violent argument between Marcus and gangster Willy T, which is conducted in rapped rhyming couplets worthy of Tybalt and Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet*. (Marcus is compared to



Boys in the hood: Marcus Lovett, Denzell Lovett

Shakespeare early in the film.) The sense that we are watching a fictionalised drama is soon dispelled however with a breakdown of neighbourhood life: by their late twenties, out of some 30 Brown Sub black males, roughly 15 to 20 are dead, another eight or so are in jail, two to three have made their way into the music business, and one has landed a low-paying job. One effective recurring image in *Rampage* is of an immense billboard of four successful rappers towering over the ghetto, virtually the only advertisement in this impoverished neighbourhood – and featuring the only sympathetic eyes observing this desolate and abandoned place.

Exposing its viewers to these rarely visited, distant places makes *Rampage* a kind of modern-day exotic musical – virtually what *South Pacific* represented to clean-cut moviegoers in the 1950s. This exoticism is reinforced by the subtitles used to spell out the rappers' words ("mama raised a hell-raisa!"), which supports the impression that the boys are speaking in tongues inspired by the god of hip-hop. Redemption courtesy of the music industry is elusive, however. When enthusiastic record producers encourage the youngest Lovett brother, Denzell, to rap about "age-appropriate" material, instead of drug deaths and homicides, his uncomprehending, disappointed eyes ("I'm surrounded by smoke," Denzell says with his usual poetic

flourish) reveal that he has no idea how to begin. Despite the boy's desperation for a recording contract, he is utterly unable to replace the real, living content of his poetry for some other, culturally foreign, safe reality: the American 'land of the free' which is nowhere to be seen in this biting film. **➔ Gilda Williams**

CREDITS

Director

George Gittoes

Producers

George Gittoes
Gabrielle Dalton

Director of Photography

George Gittoes

Editor

Nick Meyers

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Corporation Australia Limited/Gittoes & Dalton Productions Pty Ltd

Production Companies

Gittoes & Dalton Productions Pty Ltd and Film Finance Corporation Australia Limited present a George Gittoes film

A Gittoes & Dalton production

Principal Investor: FFC – Film Finance Corporation Australia

Financed with assistance of Mike Betar and Cinque Pirati Films

Based on a concept by

George Gittoes
Gabrielle Dalton

2nd Camera

Harley Gittoes

Additional Camera

Gabrielle Dalton

Derek Tucker

Initial Editing

Nick Deacon

Associate Editor

Vanessa Milton

Soundtrack

"Rampage"; "She Checkin' My Style"; "Seen a Lot"; "Money"; "Hungry in the Jungle"; "Candy Paint"; "Champion"; "Bring That"; "Talking Over"; "Terrible Child" – Demo; "Don't Mess Wit E" – Lil E; "Coming Home"; "Stomp & Grind"; "Soundtrack to War" – Lil E. Hotline; "Egypt"; "Mtume"; "Jump Up";

"Country"; "Tip"; "Instrumentals – Misc. Hip Hop Beats" – Adrian Clarkson; "Dirty Dirty"; "Home of the Brave" – Janel Daniels; "Friday" – Demo, Trigger, Lil E, Yung Terror, Dave Knight; "Ooh" – Yung Terror; "For My Brother" – Demo, Lil E; "A Friend in Jesus" (trad) – the congregation and choir of the Refuge Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ of the Apostolic Faith, Miami; "Ashes for Marc" – D. Williams, S. McNally; "Emergency 911" – Luis Diaz; "Flag Song" – J. Knoop; "Instrumentals – Improvisations on Solo Guitar" – Jack Bladt Brown

Film Extracts

Soundtrack to War – Iraq (2004)

WITH

Elliott Lovett
Denzell Lovett
Marcus Lovett
Steve Rifkin
Swizz Beatz
Fat Joe
DJ Khaled
Steve Rifkind
Rich Christina
Eric Nix
DJ Laz
Professor Joe Bryce
Detective Steve
Bradje
Terry Clarkson
Precious & Uncle Tim
Dylan & Ariel
Bam Bam
Big Jay
Uncle Max Eulo
Fambeam
Elder Johnny Davis
George Gittoes

In Colour

Distributor
Revelation Films Ltd

9,742 ft +9 frames

The Santa Clause 3 The Escape Clause

USA 2006

Director: Michael Lembeck

With Tim Allen, Elizabeth Mitchell

Judge Reinhold, Wendy Crewse

Certificate U 91m 50s

In the outtakes played over the credits of this film, the movie's mock-offended star, Tim Allen, addresses his laughing colleague thus: "Is my acting somehow humorous to you?" Millions would say yes; since the success of 1990s sitcom *Home Improvement*, audiences have had great affection for Allen's act, a vying mix of the paternal, the macho and the From a one-letter pun which links folkloric symbol of midwinter genre with the American spirit of litigious Disney has now spun a third instalment of the efforts of divorced father Scott Calvin to balance family commitment with the job of being Santa Claus.

The original *Santa Clause* (1994) dealt largely with Calvin's incredulity at his unsolicited new identity, while the sequel (2002) saw him dating both a contractual obligation to find a Mrs Claus. The third film progresses to finding Santa nervous at the prospect of fatherhood – a responsibility he's already messed up once. As director (with greater focus than he brought to *The Santa Clause 2*) by former actor Michael Lembeck, this chapter gathers Santa's extended family at the North Pole as Santa plays host not only to his in-laws, but to his son, ex-wife, husband and their daughter. The sub-message that family comes first, and it's OK for families to be imperfect – long as we're together", is undercut by the paradoxical implication, in Santa's loving relationship with his ex-wife's family, that sometimes a family's best interests may involve splitting up.

As with *Clause 2*, much energy is on getting the rather complicated plot across. There is charm and wit on display though, as when Santa makes his in-laws believe they are simply in Canada instead of at the North Pole. "Our grandchild is being born in the brood cupboard of a Canadian toy factory Alan Arkin's Bud, horrified on visiting the local "elfirmery". Also effective in *The Nightmare before Christmas*, to hijack Christmas. The chaos wrought by Frost's sabotage may pall, but he himself proves quite the villain. An icicle-haired Martin Short belies his comic appearance to present some real menace with his greedy eyes, icy breath and like conversational subversiveness.

The film climaxes like *It's a Wonderful Life*, with Calvin seeing how grim life would be in his town had he never become Santa. As footage from the *Santa Clause* film mingles with new material, the hero is shown huddled behind a snowman and watching his younger self taking unwitting steps a future of being Santa. One can imagine that Allen himself, an edgy 1980s

■ **SYNOPSIS** Miami, the present. Drawing parallels between the violence in urban America and that in war-torn Iraq, this documentary chronicles a year in the life of the Lovett brothers, three young black Americans aged between 14 and 23 living in Miami's hellish Brown Sub neighbourhood. While detailing an environment dominated by gangland shootings, drugs, hip-hop music and the local gospel church, *Rampage* features interviews with the brothers – Elliott, 'the soldier', Marcus, 'the poet', and 14-year-old Denzell, 'the rising star', as well as commentary by family, friends, neighbourhood characters, police, 'experts' and music impresarios.

The film shifts gear halfway through, when Marcus, seemingly the brother with the most promising prospects, is murdered by a 16-year-old hitman – partially, it appears, because of jealousy over the attention he was receiving in the making of this very documentary. With Marcus dead and Elliott returning to military duty in Iraq, the family pins all its hopes on the talented (but potentially suicidal) Denzell, who travels to Manhattan and beyond in pursuit of a recording contract. Although the many music producers whom Denzell auditions for are impressed by his virtuoso rapping, they are wary of its deeply "age-inappropriate" violent content, and Denzell returns home empty-handed – for now.