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Ghett'a Life Review

<http://www.thefilmpilgrim.com/reviews/ghetta-life-review/7317>

By

Jodie Hatley

– November 30, 2011



<http://www.thefilmpilgrim.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Ghett'a-Life-Don-Sin-and-Derrick.jpg>

Release date (UK) – 2nd December 2011

Certificate (UK) – 15

Country – Jamaica

Director – Chris Browne

Runtime – 103 minutes

Starring – Kevoy Burton, Winston Bell, Carl Davis, Chris McFarlane, Karen Robinson, Lisa Williams, Kadeem Wilson

Chris Browne's *Ghett'a Life* is set in a politically turbulent inner city community of Kingston, Jamaica. Elections are fast approaching, and people are divided into two strict 'sides' based on politics. Yet for aspiring boxer Derrick (Burton), all that matters is the sport, he wants to fight for his country and doesn't see himself as belonging on either side of the political divide. Unfortunately for him, his coach Manuel (Bell) and the boxing gym strongly support one side, meaning that in order to pursue his dream he must betray his father Lenford (Davis), a loyal party supporter, and put his family in danger at the hands of Sin (McFarlane), the psychopathic Don of Derrick's community.

Ghett'a Life is Browne's second feature film as a director, after [Third World Cop \(http://www.awin1.com/awclick.php?mid=1418&id=111038&p=http://www.play.com/DVD/Region_14-/2494668/Third-World-Cop/Product.html\)](http://www.awin1.com/awclick.php?mid=1418&id=111038&p=http://www.play.com/DVD/Region_14-/2494668/Third-World-Cop/Product.html) (1999), another Jamaican action-crime film set in Kingston. Browne won the award for best script for *Ghett'a Life* at The Hartley-Merrill International Screenwriting Competition at the Cannes Film Festival in 2006, but struggled to find a producer to raise funding for the film. Thanks to a hastily shot trailer and a group of Jamaican businessmen, he managed to raise the budget, and somewhere along the way Lennox Lewis landed himself an executive producer credit.

http://www.thefilmpilgrim.com/?attachment_id=7319The first thing to say about this film is that it feels wonderfully authentic. English subtitles are required throughout, due to the fascinating Jamaican Patois language being spoken by the majority of the characters. It's highly commendable that Browne has used subtitles rather than recording all the dialogue in strict English, as it can be incredibly irksome when filmmakers betray a country's native language so as to appeal to a wider audience (such as David Fincher, setting his English-language [The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo \(http://www.thefilmpilgrim.com/trailers/the-girl-with-the-dragon-tattoo-trailer/6228\)](http://www.thefilmpilgrim.com/trailers/the-girl-with-the-dragon-tattoo-trailer/6228) in Sweden). This combined with DOP Bobby Bukowski's vivid and beautifully colourful cinematography paints a genuinely atmospheric and vibrant picture of Kingston that we rarely get to see on screen.

While the plot of the film does seem to resemble that of [Billy Elliot \(http://www.awin1.com/awclick.php?mid=1418&id=111038&p=http://www.play.com/DVD/DVD/4-/3294199/Billy-Elliott/Product.html?searchtype=allproducts&searchsource=0&searchstring=billy+elliott&urlrefer=search\)](http://www.awin1.com/awclick.php?mid=1418&id=111038&p=http://www.play.com/DVD/DVD/4-/3294199/Billy-Elliott/Product.html?searchtype=allproducts&searchsource=0&searchstring=billy+elliott&urlrefer=search) (2000), but with boxing rather than ballet, Browne's award-winning script is impressive, despite occasionally relying on dramatic clichés. *Ghett'a Life* could have ended horribly predictably and mawkishly, but thankfully Browne ends the film in a surprising and very effective way. What's also impressive about *Ghett'a Life* is that the moral message of the need for national unity is obvious from the outset, yet cleverly conveyed with great subtlety. The political

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segregation and sectarian violence that instil fear into the minds of the majority of the community feels very unjust, and completely real.



<http://www.thefilmpilgrim.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Ghett-a-Life-Derrick.jpg> However, *Ghett'a Life* is not without its flaws. At times the performances feel melodramatic, and the choreography of the boxing scenes between Derrick and his opponents is so poor that the fights look completely false and lack any kind of tension. Derrick's romance with Manuel's granddaughter Camella (Williams) is underdeveloped and lacks credibility, and the character of Don Sin, while genuinely frightening, is disappointingly stereotypical. Having said that, the relationship between Derrick and his grieving mother Dawn (Robinson) feels authentic and is at times very moving. The same can be said for Derrick's relationship with Gully Rat (Wilson), a youngster from the boxing gym. At first Derrick and Gully Rat are total enemies, as Gully Rat is not in the least bit happy about Derrick training at his gym. Even though it was predictable that they would realise that friendship can cross the political divide and that the divide itself is a very damaging thing, the journey the two friends go on doesn't feel forced in the slightest.

With *Ghett'a Life*, Browne has certainly proven himself to be a talented screenwriter and director. While the performances are at times melodramatic and some of the events of the plot are extremely clichéd, on the whole this is a thought-provoking and moving tale of friendship, revenge and the detrimental effects that politics can have on society.

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