

Blaxploitalian, a Documentary and a Call to Action

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Blaxploitalian, by Italian Ghanaian director and activist Fred Kudjo Kuwornu, is a documentary that puts itself on the path of different waves of pioneers of African descent who, since the beginning of the 1900s, have worked in Italian Cinema.

"My name is [Fred Kudjo Kuwornu](#) [2], I'm an African-Italian director, producer, activist and public speaker of Ghanaian descent (my dad is from Ghana and my mom is from Italy). I work in both New York and Rome. Tonight at 6.30 come see me in Harlem at the Maysles Cinema, 343 Lenox Avenue (subway ,2,3,4,5) for a quick introduction of my latest project titled "[Blaxploitalian](#) [3] (Cent'anni di Afrostorie nel cinema italiano, One hundred years of Afro-stories in Italian cinema), a documentary I am trying to put together."

With his new film Fred is beginning a new cultural campaign towards the ways in which Italy represents itself in film, television, and in a much broader sense, mass media. He believes strongly that this multi-cultural Italy must be depicted much more-- even by writers and actors, who are the sons and daughters of immigrants and ethnic minorities. Here Fred, in his own words, tells us about the project.

"Blaxploitalian Cent'anni di Afrostorie nel cinema italiano," was inspired by the book [L'Africa in Italia](#)



[4] edited by Leonardo De Franceschi. "Blaxploitalian" is a documentary that follows the different waves of pioneers of African descent since 1914, the year that the movie *Salambo*, starring Domenico Gaido, the first black actor, came out. The documentary covers more than a century, it starts with silent and colonial cinema to get to contemporary cinema, and it tells about the contribution of African American actors such as John Kitzmiller, Harold Bradley and Fred Williamson, about African Italian actors such as Zeudi Araya, Ines Pellegrini, Iris Peynado, Fiona May, Denny Mendéz, Letizia Sedrick, Bobby Rhodes, Livio Beshir, Salvatore Marino, Jonis Bascir, Germano Gentile, Hedy Krissane and more. These names represent only the tip of the iceberg: there are indeed hundreds of actors who have taken part in Neorealistic films, in historical and mythological movies, in the popular commedia anni '60 (comedies that came out in the 60s), in the police flicks of the 70's, in all other sorts of comedies (including commedia sexy all'italiana, sex comedy Italian style), or who have become part of the collective Italian memory for their TV appearances (among them we find Lola Falana, Rocky Roberts, Sammy Barbot and more)."

"The idea comes from my wish to produce a series of documentaries that are testimony of the African contribution to Italian society; that includes the historical benefaction of the African soldiers who fought in Italy (a story I told in my documentary titled "Inside Buffalo") and the current affluence of new generations (a situation that I exposed in my "18 IUS SOLI." My cinematic journey continues with the exploration of their influence in the world of media, to continue with sport and a project focused only on affluent women of African descent."

"I cannot mention too many names, as there are so many influential actors. One that always comes to mind is John Kitmiller, an African American actor who worked in more than forty Italian films. He arrived in Italy during the Second World War and then decided to stay for many years to come. Another great African American actor is Fred Williamson, he was very famous in the USA because he was, back in the 70s) a big star of Blaxploitation genre. In Italy he produced more than ten films, mostly of the apocalyptic and crime genres for directors of the likes of Enzo Castellari. Then there are famous Italian actors, such as Zeudi Araya. A beautiful Eritrean-Italian actress and producer, Araya was active mostly in the seventies."

"There are plenty of stereotypes in cinema. In Italy, if you are of African descent you'll end up playing the Nigerian prostitute, the windshield washer, the drug dealer or the illegal immigrant. This can be applied to actors of Asian and South American descent. But I can say this happens in the US as well, where Hispanics, regardless of their North American citizenship and birth, often portray immigrants who speak broken English or prostitutes. With *Blaxploitalian* I want to launch a universal campaign: MORE DIVERSITY ON EU SCREEN is a European social campaign, recently joined by English actor Idris Elba, that promotes a major representation of ethnic minorities on screen."

"In order to complete the production of the documentary, the crew and I will need to travel between Italy, the rest of the Europe, and the United States, to interview actors, directors, and critics, who have been selected as witnesses and conveyers of this hidden history of Italian Cinema. The collection of funds would be fundamental in covering the costs of renting equipment, audio/video production and realization of a final cut, in order to participate at various film festivals. The main goal is to have the documentary ready for next January 22nd, when the Sundance Film Festival begins. We have launched a crowdfunding campaign.

Anybody, anywhere in the world can contribute with a small donation, \$10 is a good start, and by suggesting to their friends to do it as well. To do so people can go to this site <http://igg.me/at/blaxploitalian.com>. Last but not least don't forget to follow our facebook page. Whoever donates to the production by way of Indiegogo.com can receive, as a gift, original items such as; Posters, Autographed postcards by the stars of Italian Cinema, T-Shirts, DVDs, Books, Private Screenings, and Premiere Screenings, or downloads of rough cuts of the documentary."

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[2] <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm2295617/>

[3] <http://www.blaxploitalian.com/>

[4] <http://www.aracneeditrice.it/aracneweb/index.php/pubblicazione.html?item=9788854858862>