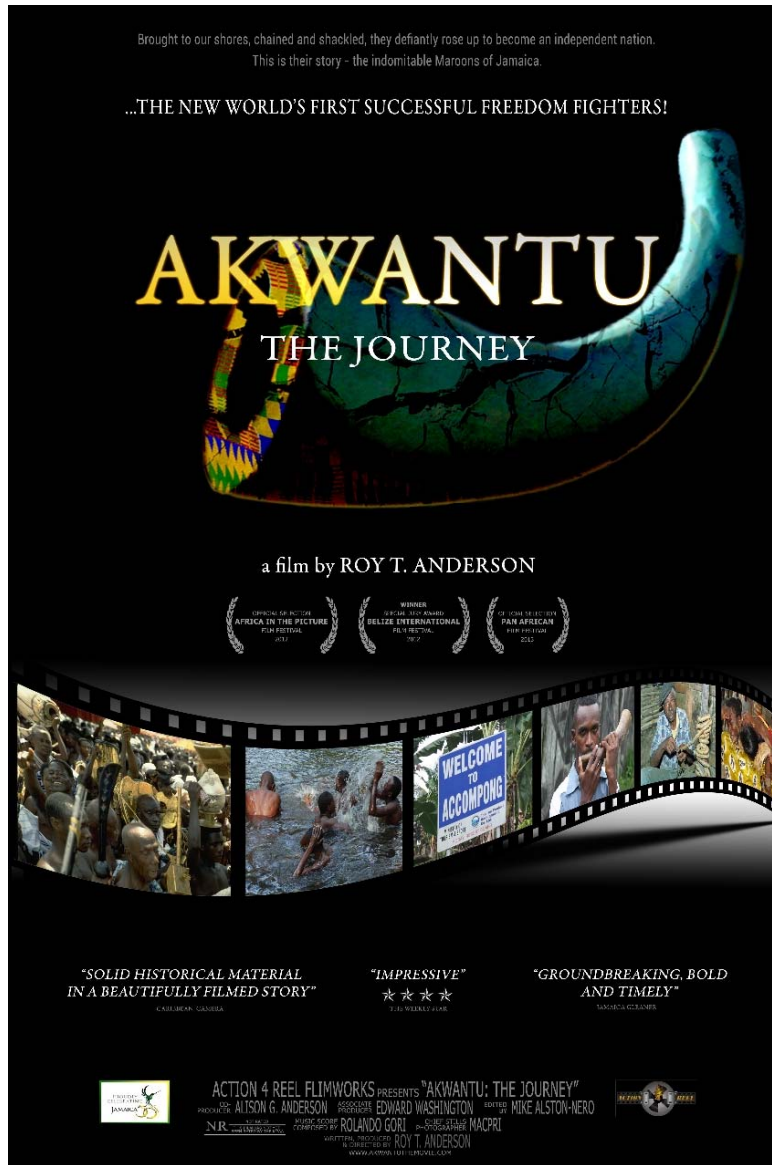


# AKWANTU: THE JOURNEY



Written, directed, and produced by  
**ROY T. ANDERSON**

Co-producer ALISON G. ANDERSON  
Associate producer EDWARD WASHINGTON

**Special Jury Award: Best Feature Documentary – 2012 Belize International Film Festival**  
**Official Selection: 2013 Pan African Film Festival**

TRT – 87 min | 2012 USA

Action 4 Reel FLIMworks presents

A film by Roy T. Anderson

## ***AKWANTU: THE JOURNEY***

Writer/Director	ROY T. ANDERSON
Producer	ROY T. ANDERSON
Co-Producer	ALISON G. ANDERSON
Associate Producer	EDWARD WASHINGTON
Editor	MIKE ALSTON-NERO
Composer	ROLANDO GORI
Chief Stills Photographer	MACPRI
Narrator	ROY T. ANDERSON
Colorist	DARIO BIGI
Sound Designer	ROLANDO GORI
Graphic Artist and Original Map Design	MATT HOOBAN
Artist	FRANK LUMSDEN
Animations	VINEET VERMA
Animation Colorist	REGINALD AMUKOSHI EMVULA
Consultant	HARCOURT T. FULLER
Production Associate	ASHLEY COOPER
Production Assistants	CLIFTON ROWE GARY WILLIAMS
Legal Counsel	PAUL J. REYNARD
Publicity	ACTION 4 REEL PAUL H. WILLIAMS

# ***AKWANTU: THE JOURNEY***

## **SYNOPSIS**

*Akwantu: the Journey* explores an important part of Jamaican culture that has long fascinated observers. Through this 87-minute film audiences will learn about a people – the Maroons, who are often referred to as the Spartacus of their time, except these enslaved Africans were victorious in their fight for freedom. Poorly armed and outgunned, these brave warriors engaged the mighty British super power over an 80-year period and were victorious. As a result, two peace treaties were signed in 1738-39 that established Maroon self-government for the first time in the New World. This fact is not lost on modern day Maroons like Jamaican-born, New Jersey-based director Roy T. Anderson, who with this film has set out to weave his own personal ancestral sojourn with a more significant historical journey that tells the tale of his heroic ancestors. Because of its significance, the Jamaican Government officially selected this film to participate in its historic 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Independence Celebrations in 2012.

## **DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT**

This film is a result of the search for my roots. What started out as an innate sense of curiosity grew into a newfound sense of pride as I began to learn more and more about my ancestors; brave men and women that history refers to as Maroons. There were many days during my research when I was simply not able to contain myself as I uncovered new and fascinating information. I was driven to find out more. From there things just really took on a life of its own. Without realizing it, I had given birth to *Akwantu: the Journey*.

Many scholars have studied the Jamaican Maroons, and their exploits are well documented. As a Maroon descendant I seized on the opportunity to present my own perspective on a people generally regarded as the New World's first successful freedom fighters. What the Maroons, rebel slaves of West African ancestry, were able to accomplish in their many battles with the colonial forces is nothing short of amazing.

What follows is the first feature-length documentary that examines in depth the triumphs and struggles of a proud and resilient people whose historical importance has either been ignored or misunderstood. *Akwantu: the Journey* tells the story of an enduring people who possess an indomitable spirit, whose towns and populace are physically indistinguishable from that of their fellow Jamaicans. Yet even today, the Maroons remain a "nation within a nation," steadfast in the knowledge that their forebears violently opposed a system that sought to enslave them and that only through the force of their collective will were able to fight for and win their freedom.

Maroon communities celebrate each day by honoring their spirited ancestors. That defiance of spirit first exhibited by our African forebears who endured the worst indignities associated with slavery is very much alive today. This film provides a rare window into the lives of a proud people whose ancestors chose to die fighting rather than remain in bondage. It takes a look at the amazing exploits of Maroon heroines and heroes like Nanny and Cudjoe and others as expressed to us by present day Maroons and scholars, in Jamaica and elsewhere. *Akwantu* also looks at the hardship and challenges faced by Maroons in Jamaica today as told by the people themselves. You will notice that Maroons by their very nature are very insular and not very trusting of outsiders. The film will also seek to find the root of this distrust for outsiders. As a Maroon I was able to gain their trust as I observed them intently and interacted with them in their natural surroundings. On my many visits to the different Maroon communities in Jamaica

profound pride was self-evident on the faces of all Maroons. You could hear it in the way they spoke, in the way they danced, and in the way they sang. On my first visit to Accompong I was overwhelmed as I walked the very same pathways my ancestors did more than three hundred years ago. And the people spoke about their affinity for the Motherland. This aroused my curiosity even more. To really get a sense of the genesis of marronage (flight from slavery) I traveled to where most Maroons believe it all began – the African continent.

With much difficulty I traveled along parts of the same roads where my ancestors made their agonizing long march on foot from the African interior to the coast, and to where they had their final bath. From there they would continue their trek to the coastal dungeons. The emotions I felt were absolutely astounding. I decided then that the path they took would also be my journey as well. When they cried, I cried. When they felt pain, I felt pain too. When they triumphed, I claimed their victory.

As I toured the Cape Coast Castle dungeons and took that symbolic walk out the “Door of no Return” to the beach where the boats awaited, I could only imagine the anguish felt by my ancestors. For perspective, I boarded a motorboat that sailed the Gulf of Guinea. The Castle disappeared from view as the boat sailed farther away. For my ancestors, this would have been their last snap shot of their beloved Africa as they start out on the dreaded Middle Passage to an uncertain future. For those that survived the voyage they carried with them old traditions and beliefs that gave them comfort in a foreign land.

Out of this group that the British generally referred to as Coromantees, there emerged a segment whose proponents, thousands of miles away from their point of origin, were sufficient in numbers to resist slavery and violently put down any other cultural complex that threatened their own. They are of the Akan-speaking group – most notably the Asantes and Fantes, who were fiercely independent. They formed the core of the old-time Maroons. And their accomplishments were nothing short of amazing. They eventually became an independent nation. Nowhere else in the New World had Africans enjoyed such a degree of autonomy, coming more than thirty years before the American War of Independence, and almost sixty years before the Haitian Revolution (1791).

So while the signed Treaties inspired others to rebel, it crushed the hearts of many who also yearned to be free. The Maroons were seen as traitors and collaborators for having signed a pact with the British. *Akwantu* examines the many intricate details of these Treaties which have made the Maroons hated and despised by their fellow African brothers and sisters.

This dislike towards the Maroons is still evident today, but most Jamaicans are quite proud of what they accomplished. In the face of insurmountable odds, this band of poorly armed Africans stood their ground against the mighty British Empire.

This journey has taken me from the remote regions of Jamaica to the African continent, and back to North America. During this time I thought deeply about my forebears and the indignities they suffered along the way more than three hundred years ago, and how they persevered. They chose to die fighting rather than remain in bondage. That fighting spirit makes me extremely proud, and it lives on in me. And that is why I felt the story of the Jamaica’s most famous but least known people, had to be told. It was my aim to make *Akwantu: the Journey* not only a stunning visual piece, but also a study in man’s innate desire to remain free and to use all the tools at his disposal in pursuit of that necessary human need for freedom.

## FEATURED INTERVIEW SUBJECTS

### DR. EMMANUEL K. AKYEAMPONG

Emmanuel Akyeampong is a Professor of History at Harvard University. Born in Ghana, Dr. Akyeampong received his PhD in African History from the University of Virginia in 1993, and his bachelor's degree in history from the University of Ghana at Legon. Professor Akyeampong is one of Africa's pre-eminent scholars. As a former chair of the Committee on African Studies at Harvard, he has been instrumental, along with Professor Henry Louis Gates, in establishing the Department of African and African American Studies.

### DR. MARCUS REDIKER

Marcus Rediker is a distinguished Professor of History at the University of Pittsburgh. He has many publications to his credit, including the seminal book *The Slave Ship: a Human History* (2007). Dr. Rediker's invaluable contribution to this film is the unique perspective and analysis he provides on what is one of the most inhumane institutions of slavery – the slave ship.

### DR. VERENE A. SHEPHERD

Dr. Verene A. Shepherd is Professor in the Department of History at the University of the West Indies, Mona Campus, Jamaica. She is a member of the United Nation's Working Group of Experts on People of African descent. A prolific author, Professor Shepherd has received numerous awards, most recently a Publication Grant from the University of the West Indies for *Slavery Without Sugar* (2001).

### COLONEL FRANK LUMSDEN

Frank Lumsden has been the leader of the Charles Town Maroons since 2005. Born in the town of Buff Bay, Jamaica, Lumsden attended Southern Illinois University and graduated in 1970 with a Bachelor of Science degree in business management. After graduating he worked briefly in corporate finance, eventually turning to his lost love – art. Today his work can be found in hospitals and homes and other institutions in the United States, Austria, Germany, and Jamaica. Colonel Lumsden is in Charles Town to help preserve the culture. Under his leadership, he aims to use culture as an anchor for development. Lumsden also contributes original artwork to this film.

### COLONEL SYDNEY PEDDIE

Sydney Peddie served as Colonel of Accompong, Jamaica from 2000-2010. He is very much aware of the economic challenges that his community faces. During his time in office he was very active in his attempt to forge alliances with non-Maroon institutions such as the Tourism Product Development Committee (TPDCo.) in a bid to make his remote town a major tourist destination. "If we make our village a good tourist destination" says Peddie, "then we will be able to provide more job opportunities."

### COLONEL WALLACE STERLING

Wallace Sterling was pre-ordained for the position of Colonel of Moore Town, Jamaica, a title he has held since 1995. "As a youngster growing up," Sterling says, "I was chairman of the youth club. I definitely had leadership aspirations as a young boy." Colonel Sterling, born and bred in Moore Town, was immortalized in the 1978 film *Moore Town: Capital of Earth*. He is passionate about the culture, and this film owes him a great deal of gratitude for his participation and his profound views shared on Maroon culture.

## LEWIS ROWE

Lewis Rowe was born in 1917 to Joseph Rowe and Caroline Rowe (nee Campbell) in the small village of Ridge Pen in the parish of St. Elizabeth, Jamaica. Growing up in rural Jamaica Rowe experienced life the way many youngsters did. It was important to tend to the farms and assist the adult family members in whatever way necessary to eke out survival. Rowe was very close to his two older brothers Alfred and Ivan, the former being the director's grandfather. Prior to Rowe's passing 2009, he recounted to his nephew Roy details about the family history that was previously not known to any other family member alive. This was a major triumph for Anderson because with his uncle's oral tales and documentary evidence uncovered, he was able to put his family history into a clearer focus.

## CREW BIOS

### ROY T. ANDERSON – Writer/Director/Producer

Roy T. Anderson is writer, director and producer of his first feature-length documentary *Akwantu: the Journey*. A veteran stuntman/stunt coordinator, Anderson is a world record holder and an award winning stuntman. For more than twenty-five years he has performed stunts for such Hollywood stars as Will Smith, Denzel Washington and Jamie Foxx, accumulating more than 400 production credits in the process. He's appeared in such hits as; *The Dark Knight Rises*, *Spiderman 2*, *Bourne Ultimatum*, *American Gangster*, and top-rated TV shows; *Law & Order*, *Sopranos*, *Person of Interest*, and *Elementary*. While continuing his stunt work, Anderson has flipped the script to direct his first film. During his storied career Roy has shown the ability to be very creative in his performance and coordination of difficult stunts, and he brings this same imagination to the table as a first time director who has observed some of the best filmmakers in the world.

### ALISON G. ANDERSON – Co-Producer

Alison G. Anderson is co-producer on her first feature length documentary *Akwantu: the Journey*. She is an alumna of Munroe College in the Bronx, NY where she graduated summa cum laude with a Bachelors degree in Computer Science. She was very much involved with *Akwantu* from conception to post production, collaborating with husband and the film's director Roy T. Anderson. It is a partnership that is bound to spawn many future projects.

### EDWARD WASHINGTON – Associate Producer

Edward Washington is an actor and producer working on his first documentary feature film. As an actor Edward has performed in productions off-Broadway and regionally, in plays such as August Wilson's *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* and Shakespearean productions like *Titus Andronicus*. In between those performances Edward decided to put his energies into producing which has resulted in two short films.

### ROLANDO GORI – Composer

Rolando Gori is a composer, producer, singer-songwriter and sound designer. He studied piano at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto, and continued to deepen his studies at Concordia University in Montreal where he received his BFA in Music Theory and Composition with honors. Rolando is also the co-founder (along with his wife, Heidi Siegell) of Musa212, a creative enterprise which specializes in music and sound production.

MIKE ALSTON-NERO – Editor

“My grand father is from Jamaica but he never really talked about his experiences there. So when Roy approached me to edit his film I jumped at the chance to work on my first feature. I was excited too because of the opportunity to learn more about Jamaica and the Maroons,” say Harlem-born Mike Alston-Nero. “It was an incredible experience.” The love for the arts started back in high school where he partnered with childhood friend Mark Caboroy shooting movies on Super 8 for their filmmaking class. They have since collaborated on several short films, including the 2010 award-winning festival favorite *Blindsided*.

ADISA S. OJI – Chief Stills Photographer

Adisa S. Oji is the younger brother of the film’s director, Roy T. Anderson, and a graduate of the University of Toronto. The love for documenting the daily lives of African around the world has turned this young man into a very curious modern nomad who shares his time living in North America, the Caribbean and Africa in an effort to accomplish his life’s mission. In 1987 he founded Mother Africa’s Children Photographic Reproductions International (MACPRI) for that stated purpose. The images taken over the last 25 years by Oji have become priceless collectables.

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