

New documentary on escaped Jamaican slaves

The Central Alabama Caribbean American Organization will present a special screening of Jamaican-born and New Jersey-based filmmaker Roy T. Anderson's "Akwantu: The Journey," on Thursday at 6 p.m. at the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute. It's free and open to the public.

The 87-minute documentary tells the story of Anderson's ancestors, the Maroons of Jamaica and their connection to Africa. The Maroons are escaped slaves of West African origin, who successfully fought the British army for their freedom. In the mid-18th century, the Maroons formed independent communities in remote areas of Jamaica. Anderson, who has also worked as a Hollywood stuntman for actors such as Will Smith, spent one year researching the Maroon's story and three years filming it. He filmed it in Jamaica, Canada, the United States and Ghana. He funded the project himself. "I didn't want anybody to look over my shoulders and tell me how I should do it. I wanted to do it my way. There is a certain sense of sensibility I wanted to bring to the project and that allowed me to do it," he told a Jamaican morning show, Smile Jamaica, this month. Anderson premiered the film earlier this month in Jamaica. He will be unable to attend the Birmingham showing. However, Harcourt Fuller, a Georgia State University professor and Maroon descendant, will be present and conduct a Q&A after the film, said Pauline Ford-Caesar, president of the CACAO. Ford-Caesar considers the Maroons to be the first freedom fighters in the Western Hemisphere. "I think the slave trade was probably at its peak at that time. This was prior to the Civil War in the United States and the Haitian Revolution,... when these Africans just banded together in large enough numbers to basically fight for their freedom." "It took tremendous courage to do something like that because you are in a new world and new environment and at that point." June is Caribbean-American Heritage Month and Ford-Caesar said it seemed like the appropriate time to show the film. The CACAO was created in 2011 to serve as a resource for Caribbean students attending school in Alabama and to share the Caribbean culture with others. For more info, go to www.cacaoonline.com or call 205-401-7382 or 205-393-5529.