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Dixon, Delaina. “Black Is Beautiful: The Kwame Brathwaite Story” documentary honors a visionary who redefined beauty,” *Ebony*, October 14, 2025.



Kwame Brathwaite
Ali, Gray Day on the Congo, 1974 c.
Archival pigment print, mounted and framed

Premiering at the BFI London Film Festival, *Black Is Beautiful: The Kwame Brathwaite Story* pays tribute to the photographer who turned Black pride into art and comes to New York, Nov. 13, 2025.

Kwame Brathwaite, the trailblazing photographer who helped usher in the “Black Is Beautiful” movement, is being remembered in a new film, aptly titled *Black Is Beautiful: The Kwame Brathwaite Story*. The documentary made its world premiere at the BFI London Film Festival on October 9.

The documentary originated from Brathwaite Jr.’s commitment to honor his father’s work, which centers on Black and Afrocentric beauty. The film utilizes archive footage, interviews with family and friends, and hundreds of images shot by the senior Brathwaite throughout his 60-plus-year career to capture his life story. The film’s title also reflects his photobook *Kwame Brathwaite: Black Is Beautiful*, which was published in 2019 to rave reviews.

British director Yemi Bamiro, along with Joanna Boateng, Kwame S. Brathwaite (Jr.) and his wife Robynn Brathwaite, who are on the film’s executive production team, will attend the New York City screening and participate in a post-Q&A.

The film comes two years after the photographer’s passing in 2023.

“I am deeply saddened to share that my Baba, the patriarch of our family, our rock and my hero, has transitioned,” S. Brathwaite had shared with the world. “Thank you for your love and support during this difficult time.”

Born in New York City in 1938 to parents from Barbados, the senior Brathwaite relocated with his family to the Bronx when he was five.

Drawn to photography at an early age, he went on to attend the School of Industrial Art (now the High School of Art and Design). A touchstone moment that awoke his creativity was David Jackson’s photograph of a brutalized Emmett Till in his open casket, published by JET. After seeing the image of Till, Brathwaite realized that photography can be a force for political change.

In 1956, he and his brother, Elombe, co-founded the African Jazz Arts Society and Studios (AJASS), which served as his base for documenting Black culture and activist activities.

Brathwaite continued to perfect his craft by shooting luminaries on the jazz scene, such as Thelonious Monk, Dizzy Gillespie, and Miles Davis, and was one of the principal photographers of the Randall’s Island Jazz Festival in Manhattan. He fit right into the jazz scene, being a tenor saxophone player in his own right. Many of these photos are presented in the film. As his popularity increased, he documented *The Motown Revue* at the Apollo in 1963.

One of Brathwaite’s greatest contributions to the arts was being one of the leaders of the “Black Is Beautiful” movement.

In the 1970s, Brathwaite began photographing other genres of Black music. He traveled to Africa with the Jackson Five to document their tour. He photographed Muhammad Ali and George Foreman’s historic “The Rumble in the Jungle” in Zaire (now known as the Democratic Republic of the Congo) that same year. He also worked with Stevie Wonder, Sly and the Family Stone, Nina Simone, Bob Marley and many more.

For his work spanning several decades, which highlighted the Black aesthetic, especially in the beauty of Black women, Brathwaite is one of the most celebrated photographers of his generation.

“His images, carefully calibrated to reflect a moment precisely, made Black beautiful for those who lived in the 1960s, and continue to do so for a generation today who might only now be discovering his work,” historian Tanisha C. Ford wrote in *Aperture* in 2017.

Following its North American premiere, *Black Is Beautiful: The Kwame Brathwaite Story* will be available to stream online from November 14 to November 30.

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