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1970s action movie icon and NFL star will speak at Block Museum

Fred Williamson will discuss his work during Block Cinema screenings Oct. 13 and 14

October 11, 2016 | By [Kayla Stoner](#)



Still from "Three the Hard Way" (Gordon Parks, Jr., 1974, USA, 16mm, 105 min.)

- Iconic movie star/director to introduce, discuss groundbreaking action films
- Free screenings of 'Three the Hard Way' and 'Bucktown'
- Williamson is an alumnus and former Northwestern and NFL football player

EVANSTON, Ill. --- As an action star, Fred Williamson had three rules for Hollywood executives: he doesn't die, he wins every fight, and he gets the girl in the end – if he wants her.

A professional NFL player turned actor/filmmaker/iconic director, Williamson will introduce and discuss two of his groundbreaking films in a free, two-night [Block Cinema](#) program, titled "[Exploiting Who? Fred Williamson's Revolutionary Heroes in 1970s Blaxploitation Films.](#)" The program will take place Oct. 13 and 14 at Northwestern University's [Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art](#), 40 Arts Circle Drive, Evanston.

Both films, "Three the Hard Way" (1974) and "Bucktown" (1975), star Williamson and represent the unique aesthetics of the Blaxploitation movement. After the screenings, Williamson will take part in a discussion with Northwestern [School of Communication](#) professor [Harvey Young](#), a prominent historian of African-American theater and film.

Williamson is one of the most iconic directors and stars of 1970s black action films (commonly referred to as "Blaxploitation" -- a term Williamson and others believe was coined to discredit the films).

More than 40 years after "Three the Hard Way" and "Bucktown" were originally released, "their representation of systemic racism and oppression is depressingly just as relevant and resonant," Block Cinema programming coordinator Justin Lintelman noted. "But these films are important for the same reason they were then: because they propagate a call to action and, as Williamson recognized, because it is refreshing to see the heroes win."

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Born in Gary, Indiana, in 1938, Williamson played football for Northwestern before moving on to play defensive back for the Pittsburgh Steelers (1960), the Oakland Raiders (1961-64) and the Kansas City Chiefs (1965-67). During his tenure with the Chiefs, Williamson became one of football's first self-promoters, earning the nickname "The Hammer" because of his on-field hits and off-screen brags. Williamson played in historic Super Bowl I before turning his attention to acting and directing in television and film.

As a public figure, Williamson was able to create and preserve a strong on-screen persona, distanced from the marginalized roles that affected minorities in Hollywood before 1970. The rise of African-American produced and directed action films in the 1970s provided opportunities to present black culture in a new way. With a revolutionary spirit, Williamson played heroes who worked outside the law to fight for the oppressed.

"Though the films simplify systemic problems of racism and corruption into 'flesh-and-blood' bad guys who can be fought and killed, there is something to be said for the boldness of presenting these social issues to a mainstream audience and the impact of creating black heroes who overcome this symbolic oppression," Block Cinema's Lintelman said.

"Three the Hard Way"

7 p.m., Thursday, Oct. 13, FREE
(*Gordon Parks Jr., 1974, USA, 16mm, 105 min.*)

With its ensemble cast, nonstop action and a storyline that has to be seen to be believed, "Three the Hard Way" is a high point for the Blaxploitation genre. Three friends (Williamson, Jim Brown and Jim Kelly) team up to get to the bottom of a kidnapping. While investigating, the group uncovers a genocidal Neo-Nazi plot involving a specialized poison wiping out the black populations of Washington, D.C., Los Angeles and Detroit. Between this film and 1972's "Superfly," Parks made his own distinctive cinematic mark as a director, stepping out of his father's (photographer, writer and Shaft director) large shadow. The Impressions provide the soundtrack, as well as make a cameo. Referred to as "The Big Three," Williams, Brown and Kelly went on to team up in two other films, "Take a Hard Ride" and "One Down, Two to Go."

"Bucktown"

7 p.m., Friday, Oct. 14, FREE
(*Arthur Marks, 1975, USA, 35mm, 94 min.*)

In "Bucktown," Duke Johnson (Williamson) arrives in town for his recently deceased brother's funeral and quickly discovers that the town is run by a racist police force that uses violence and murder as intimidation to extort money from local business. Duke calls for backup from old friends (including Thalmus Rasulala and Carl Weathers), and together they lead an all-out war against the corruption of the city. There is a strong link between the Blaxploitation and Western genres, and this is a prime example: A stranger rides into town and restores order. Williamson's Duke is a revolutionary in contemporary America, fighting against the injustices of this microcosm of the United States.

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