

Mongrel Media  
Presents

# BLACK GOLD

A documentary by Nick Francis and Marc Francis

(2006, UK, 78 mins)

Distribution

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# BLACK GOLD

***“your coffee will never taste the same again...”***

***“Compelling” Premiere***

***“Visually ravishing” Variety***

***“First-class” Daily Telegraph***

**[www.blackgoldmovie.com](http://www.blackgoldmovie.com)**



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## THE STORY

Multinational coffee companies now rule our shopping malls and supermarkets and dominate the industry worth over \$80 billion, making coffee the most valuable trading commodity in the world after oil.

But while we continue to pay for our lattes and cappuccinos, the price paid to coffee farmers remains so low that many have been forced to abandon their coffee fields.

Nowhere more evident is this paradox than in Ethiopia, the birthplace of coffee. Tadesse Meskela is one man on a mission to save his 75,000 struggling coffee farmers from bankruptcy. As his farmers strive to harvest some of the highest quality coffee beans on the international market, Tadesse travels the world in an attempt to find buyers willing to pay a fair price.

Against the backdrop of Tadesse's journey to London and Seattle, the more powerful sides of the international trading system begin to unfold. New York coffee traders, auction houses and the double dealings of trade ministers at the World Trade Organisation reveal the enormity of Tadesse's task to find a long term solution for his farmers.

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## **FILMMAKERS STATEMENT:**

Marc Francis and Nick Francis  
London, January 2006

### **WHY BLACK GOLD?**

We were provoked to make a film about coffee after it was announced at the end of 2002, that Ethiopia was facing another famine. Twenty years earlier people across the world had been motivated to respond to this crisis in Ethiopia. But still, even now nothing seems to have changed. We wanted to fire up a western audience to realize that the problem had not gone away. But this time we wanted to find a way to make it connect to our every day lives. Our hope was to make a film that forced us, as western consumers, to question some of our basic assumptions about our consumer lifestyle and its interaction with the rest of the world. And in doing so, we wanted to challenge the way in which the Western media bombards its audiences with an overload of de-contextualised images depicting poverty in Africa with no link to our own lives.

We focused on coffee because it is a universal experience enjoyed by billions of people on a daily basis and is part of an industry worth over \$80 billion a year. But, the people behind the product are in crisis with millions of growers fast becoming bankrupt. Our goal was to urgently remind audiences that through just one cup of coffee, we are inextricably connected to the heart of the global economy.

We passionately believe that the language of film is a uniquely powerful medium to communicate to audiences everywhere about an engaging and timely issue that impacts the world in which we live. This has been the underlying theme of all of our work. But with BLACK GOLD, we were even more determined to make a film that would reach audiences everywhere and be relevant for all people.

### **BLACK GOLD – YOUR COFFEE WILL NEVER TASTE THE SAME AGAIN**

From the beginning we wanted to make a film which, while having a political purpose, was not overly polemic; a film which was observational - giving the viewer the opportunity to draw their own conclusions about what they are experiencing.

But ultimately the film was made to urgently remind people that as consumers we are at the very center of a globalized economy that is undermining the lives of millions of people every day. We hope that people will watch BLACK GOLD and be moved to take action.

# **PRODUCTION NOTES:**

## **ETHIOPIA – THE BIRTHPLACE OF COFFEE**

There was an immediacy to this story, so we couldn't wait around for commissioning editors to give us the go ahead to make this film. So in July 2003, we pulled our resources together and flew out to Ethiopia.

On our first trip there, we travelled to the south of the Ethiopia and found coffee farmers, once the backbone of the country, being impoverished by the fluctuations of the global coffee market. Thousands of families were losing money and fast becoming bankrupt. The situation directly impacted the 15 million people in the Ethiopia who depend on coffee for their survival and the country's economy that derives 67% of its export income from coffee. It was not just in Ethiopia that this was happening, but also across the world, where farmers were being crippled by low coffee prices.

## **TADESE MESEKELA – ONE MAN COMMITTED TO INSPIRING CHANGE**

In Ethiopia's capital we met Tadesse Meskela, the manager of The Oromo Coffee Farmers Co-operative Union that represents over 70,000 farmers. He was trying to bypass the international trading system by finding buyers who would pay more for his high quality coffee. For him his work was more than just a job. He was passionate and determined to improve the lives of the thousands of farmers he represents.

We spent a few days with him in the capital and he toured us through the processing plant where hundreds of women work for eight hours picking out a few bad beans from the thousands of good ones before they are exported. These women were a key link in the coffee chain and were being paid merely half a dollar a day – a recurrent theme of today's globalization.

Tadesse's work, his commitment, and the enormity of the situation and task he faces were genuinely awe inspiring – others were replicating his work in the context of the world trade talks in Mexico.

## **THE WTO PLAYS A MAJOR ROLE**

After our first shoot in Ethiopia, we knew that in order to tell the story of how trade rules are undermining Africa's development we'd have to get to Mexico for the meetings of the World Trade Organization. It was here that for the first time developing countries refused to be forced into signing agreements that were against their interests. Ministers from across the continent told us they didn't want more aid, just a fairer system of trade. A 1% increase in the continent's share of world trade would in itself generate \$70 billion per year – five times what the continent receives in aid. But despite the rhetoric of countries like the UK, there had been little or no change in the status quo: a system of trade that is rigged in favor of rich countries continued.

After Ethiopia and Mexico we returned to London to make a rough cut of the film. Together with the support of Christopher Hird, our executive producer we continued to raise funds for the project. We managed to bring on board an extremely talented editor, Hugh Williams, who has over 15 years of experience in international documentaries. He worked closely with us to put together the first rough cut of the film.

## **MORE FILMING NECESSARY TO TELL THE STORY**

Through the rough cut, we soon realized that in order to develop the thrust of the narrative we'd have to return to Ethiopia to spend more time with the coffee farmers and our main character Tadesse Meskela, At this critical point we received support from The Sundance Documentary Film Program, to make this next shoot a possibility.

We then travelled back to the coffee areas of southern Ethiopia and found coffee farmers who were digging up their coffee trees and growing instead the leafy narcotic, chat. From Ethiopia we went to America, to the trading floor of the New York commodities exchange where the price of coffee is established. And in Seattle we followed Tadesse to the largest coffee trade show in the world, where he tried to find new buyers for his farmers' coffee.

In August 2005 we met Andreas Kapsalis at the Sundance Documentary and Composers Lab, As part of a workshop process he scored to some selected scenes over a few days. He connected with the film immediately and subsequently went on to score the whole film.

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## **COFFEE FACTS:**

Coffee is the largest trading commodity in the world after oil, generating annual sales in excess of \$70 billion dollars per year.

Coffee is the most popular drink worldwide. Globally, about 2 billion cups of coffee are drunk every day

America is the largest coffee consuming nation in the world. It is estimated that more than 100 million Americans drink an estimated total of 400 million cups of coffee a day.

Some estimates suggest that around 3,400 cups of coffee are consumed every second of the day around the world

Ethiopia is the birthplace of coffee. 15 million people depend on coffee for their survival. It accounts for 67% of their foreign income

Coffee grows in more than 50 countries around the world and employs over 25 million coffee growers.

Four multinationals, Kraft, Nestle, Proctor and Gamble and Sara Lee dominate the world coffee market.

The price of coffee is established on the major futures exchanges in New York (Arabica coffee) and London (Robusta coffee).

It takes fifty coffee beans to brew an espresso.

In the last few years the price of coffee reached a thirty year low.

On average a coffee farmer receives less than 10 US cents for a kilo of coffee.

Ethiopia is the birthplace of coffee. Legend has it that coffee was discovered by a goat herder named Kaldi in Ethiopia about four centuries ago when he noticed that his goats became very hyperactive after eating some reddish coloured berries.

Today, 15 million people in Ethiopia depend on coffee for their survival. It accounts for 67% of the country's firing export income.

Ethiopia is one of the poorest countries in the world and is more dependent on emergency aid now than anytime in the last twenty years. On average 7 million need emergency assistance every year.

If Africa's share of world trade increased by one percentage point it would generate over \$70 billion per year – five times what the continent currently receives in aid.

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## **CAST:**

### **TADESSE MESKELA:**

**General Manager, Oromo Coffee Farmers Co-operative Union, Ethiopia**

After a two month co-operative training placement in Japan, in the late 1990's Tadesse Meskela returned to Ethiopia and was instrumental in establishing the Oromia Co-operative Union. The union has grown over the last few years and now involves 74 co-operatives made up of over 70,000 coffee growers.

He is determined to return more money back to the coffee farmers, by bypassing the international commodities exchange. Tadesse's determination and energy is remarkable. He balances bringing up a family, running the union and flying around the world to meet with new buyers

It was an inspiring experience spending time with Tadesse in London, Ethiopia and the USA. He has an absolutely unstoppable energy and drive. His story is the story of an attempt to make globalization work for the producers behind some of the world's most valuable products. He has successfully found a way around the structures that block farmers being paid a fair price. However, as he says himself in the film, this is not just an issue that affects coffee but all the products coming from the poorest countries in the South.

For more information about the union please visit [www.romiacoffeeunion.com](http://www.romiacoffeeunion.com)

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*Speak-it Films in association with Fulcrum Productions*

## **CREW:**

### **MARC AND NICK FRANCIS: Directors and Producers**

Marc Francis and Nick Francis are independent documentary filmmakers.

They began their career making short documentaries concerning social, global and human rights stories before developing feature-length productions for international audiences.

Their work has been supported by the Sundance Institute, the Channel 4 British Documentary Film Foundation and the UK Film Council. Their latest production, Black Gold, about the world of coffee and trade premiered at Sundance and is currently being screened at film festivals across the world.

### **SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY:**

*Nuke UK / 2001*

*Black Gold / 2006*

## **HUGH WILLIAMS: Editor**

Hugh Williams is a London based editor with over fifteen years of experience. Recently he has worked on a range of feature length documentaries for international broadcast and theatrical distribution. His work is characterised by strong narrative films with engaging storylines.

[www.thecuttingroom.tv](http://www.thecuttingroom.tv)

Selected Editing Credits include:

**Finding Franklin's Lost Expedition UK/Ger/Ire/Can.** 90 min. In the 1840s John Franklin left London with two ships and 168 men to find a route through the North West Passage, never to be seen again. Today researchers have developed different theories as to what happened.

**White King, Red Rubber, Black Death UK/Ger/Bel for worldwide TV & US cinema release.** 109 mins. The story of King Leopold II of Belgium's brutal colonisation of central Africa, turning it into a vast rubber-harvesting labour camp in which millions died.

**World War 3: Al Qaeda 'The Hidden Enemy' BBC2/Arte/TLC.** 60 mins. The most authoritative and revealing account of the secret war between the Western intelligence agencies and al-Qaeda's networks

**'Exclusive to Al Jazeera' BBC2/PBS.** 60 min. Observational documentary inside the Arabic TV news station during the Iraq war.

## **CHRISTOPHER HIRD: Executive Producer**

Christopher Hird is one of the founders, and joint managing director of Fulcrum Productions, a British independent production company founded in 1986. Fulcrum have made a wide range of factual television and documentaries for broadcasters on both sides of the Atlantic. Until 2004, Hird was chair of the Sheffield International Documentary Festival and is currently chair of the British Documentary Film Foundation and is also a trustee of Writers and Readers International, publishers of Index on Censorship.

Selected credits as executive producer:

**The Terror and The Truth (1997), for BBC.** 3 x 50 minutes. A series which dealt with the issues of truth, justice and reconciliation in East Germany, Chile and South Africa. Winner: Best Series, European Commission Humanitarian Office,

**Belonging, (2002)** 1 x 80 minutes Independent feature length documentary following a 29 year old woman, orphaned in Cambodia, who returns to the country of her birth to discover the truth about her past and that of her country. Shortlisted for the Grierson Award for Best Documentary feature, 2003.

**The Luckiest Nut in the World (2003) for Channel Four, UK.,** Presented by an animated peanut, the film deals with the influence of the IMF, World Bank and WTO on the overseas trade of nut producing countries in the South. Winner, Best Short Film, Full Frame Festival, 2003.

**CLAIRE LEWIS: Associate Producer**

A BAFTA nominee and winner of a Royal Television Society individual special award for outstanding contribution to the UK TV industry, Claire Lewis has produced and Executive produced dozens of programmes for BBC and ITV over the last 20 years. Her production credits include: **Trouble at the Top**, for BBC2; **Imagine**, for BBC1; **42UP** and **49UP**, for Granada TV

**OISTEIN THORSEN: Associate Producer**

After living in Sudan, Ethiopia and Norway Oistein worked on a range of high profile international trade campaigns at Norway's leading development organization. He recently completed a paper on the impact of the coffee crisis in Africa at the London School of Economics. He now works as a programme officer at UK's Voluntary Service Overseas.

**ANDREAS KAPSALIS: Composer**

Andreas Kapsalis began his movie scoring career at the Sundance Institute, where he was invited as a fellow in 2005 for the composers' forum. This opportunity introduced Andreas to London film directors Marc and Nick Francis, who subsequently commissioned Andreas to score their latest documentary *Black Gold*. With the addition of Andreas' music, *Black Gold* was chosen to premiere at the 2006 Sundance Film Festival.

Although Andreas is fresh to the movie industry, he is no novice to the music industry. Recently featured on featured on NPR and praised by jazz legend Dave Brubeck, Andreas has already received acclaim within the music world. Utilizing his rare eight finger guitar technique, Kapsalis explores classical and Mediterranean styles with his ability to play melody, rhythm, and bass simultaneously. Bringing his expertise to film scoring is a natural step as proven by *Black Gold*. Beyond this project, Kapsalis has been working hard on music for future films, and continues to make waves in the music industry. [www.andreaskapsalis.com](http://www.andreaskapsalis.com)