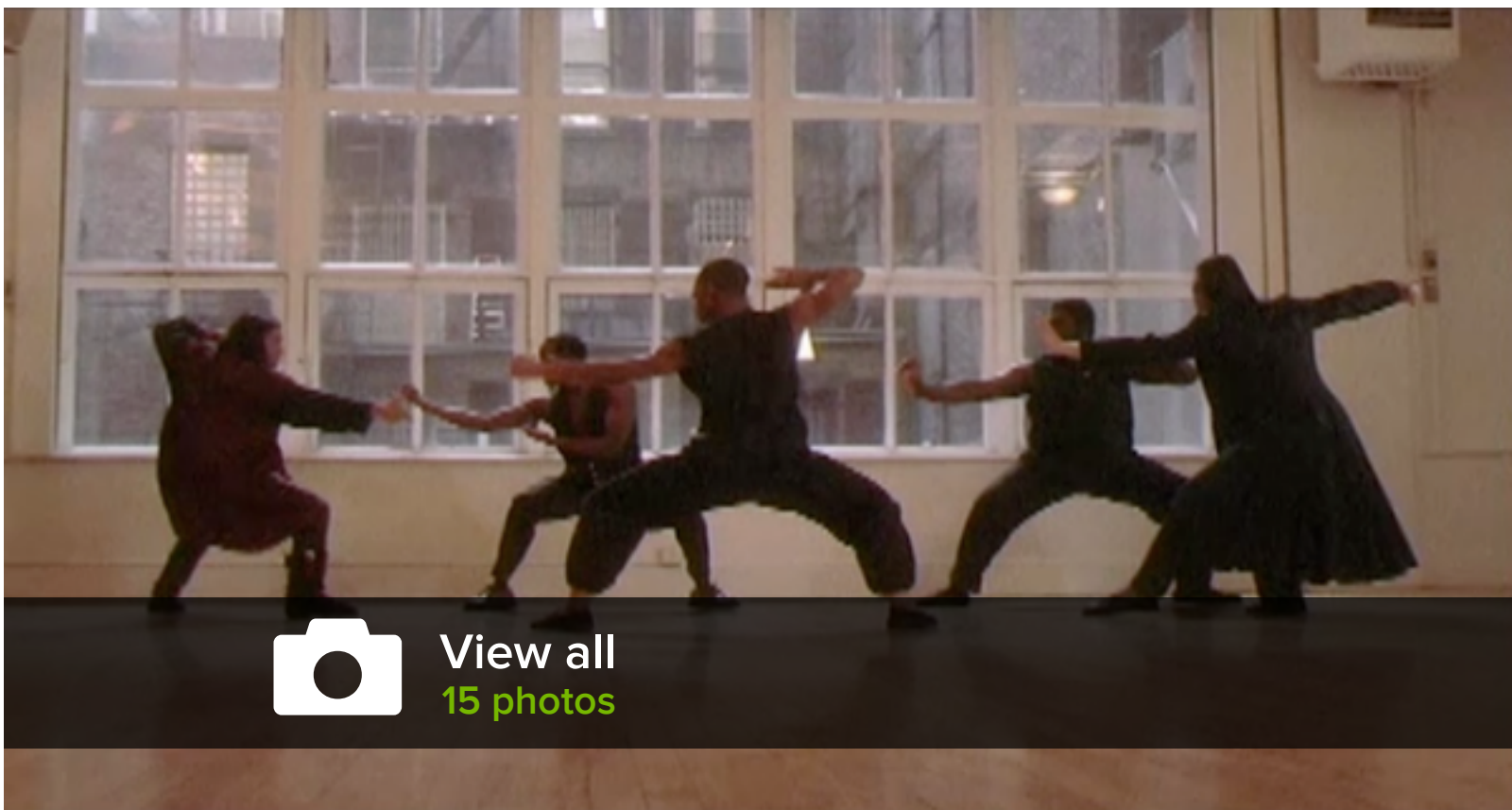


Must watch: Urban Dragons

June 19, 2013

4:27 PM MST

The documentary [Urban Dragons](#) was first shown at [Busboys And Poets](#) in Washington D.C. in February this year and later in March at [Schomburg Center](#) in New York. The reception was great.



View all
15 photos

A scene from Urban Dragons

Urban Dragons



Urban Dragons

Filming started in 2007 and completed final editing in Dec. 2012; *Urban Dragons* explores the lives of urban African-American and Latino martial artists. It tells the stories of fifteen chosen masters but also demonstrates the healing and transformational power of ancient Chinese [martial arts](#) for men “who exist on the periphery of their society”.

Dr. Keith Hunter, Executive Producer of the movie, explained that many young urban black and brown men are caught in an environment of crime and drugs and it is hard for them to see beyond their broken community. As a martial art practitioner for about 40 years, Dr. Hunter understands the power of martial arts, which can help develop maturity. “Once people can make one thing out of themselves, they can master other things in life,” concluded Dr. Hunter. The characters of this film are legends in their respective art and role models in breaking cycles of economic and moral poverty.

Co-Producer/Film Maker [Master Jose Figueroa](#) grew up in New York City and excelled in Traditional Chinese Martial Arts in the areas of competition, performance, education and publishing. Jose founded the Mind Body Synergy Institute in 1992, which utilized various forms of Chinese [Wushu](#) exercise and treatments for detoxification. He has been a [Tai Chi](#) (Taiji) Consultant at the Veterans Affairs Hospital's Psychiatric Department where he has applied Chen style Tai Chi for Post Traumatic Stress disorder patients, drug & alcohol dependents, and patients with spinal cord injuries. He felt compelled to tell the stories of the black and brown masters who survived hardships and thrived in the arts.

Under the directorship and production of Kamau Hunter, who has produced and directed several films that examine hidden cultures and arts, *Urban Dragons* tells stories with a powerful message. Master [Stephan Berwick](#), known for his "deadly legs" and founder of “True Tai Chi”, provided narration for this movie and led us through the path how Chinese Martial Arts was introduced and developed in American inner cities, how black and brown martial artists grew up and became masters and the

evolution of a craft. The road to mastery wasn't easy; in addition to strenuous training, diligent study and disciplined practice, masters had to face other obstacles like proving Chinese martial arts as a viable one by competing and fighting against Karate, Taekwondo and other boxing styles. In many ways, the black and brown martial artists are the true heroes in establishing Chinese Martial Arts in the West and earning respect for the arts. However, due to cultural misunderstanding, the black and brown masters endured some form of perceived discrimination.

Sankofa, a word in Anka language used in [Ghana](#), means "reach back and get it". When urban dragons went to China, they were treated as honorable sons returning home. They were showcased and recognized by the fatherland.

- Chinese Grandmasters [Alan Lee](#) and [Frank Yee](#) are included in the movie for their contribution to teaching black and brown people in the early stage of the urban phenomenon.
- Fearless Grandmaster [Tayari Casel](#) is a true legend with his superb fighting skills and unwavering attitude. He has won over 100 championship titles. Tens of thousands if not millions around the world witnessed his amazing ground fighting techniques. He has taught kids how to fight on stage as well as how to fight against substances in life through various charitable organizations.
- Grandmaster [Dennis Brown](#) has 47 years experience in Shaolin [Kung Fu](#) and is recognized as one of "25 Most Influential Martial Artists of the 20th Century" by *Black Belt* magazine. He founded one of the largest Kung Fu tournaments in the U.S. to promote martial arts and has hosted numerous radio and TV shows. Though he is a celebrity in the martial arts community, his persona is low-key, warm and genuine.
- Master [Vingrove Thomas](#) has mastered several Chinese Martial Arts including but not limited to Fu Jow Pai (Tiger Claw), Wing Chun, Tai Chi, and Xinyi for health and fitness as well as fighting techniques ranging from bare-hand solo routines through advanced weapons sets and sparring. His students have earned top rankings at numerous local and national competitions. He has taught students in the U.S., Italy and Switzerland.
- Master and author of "The Power of Shaolin Kung Fu", [Ron Wheeler](#) represented the U.S. Wushu Team and competed in Zhen Zhou, China, where he delivered Gold Medal performances in the categories of Southern Fist Form and Long Pole. Back at home, he is active in promoting Chinese martial arts via TV and other media.
- [Master Raul Ortiz Jr.](#) is an 8th generation closed-door disciple and successor of Grand Master Lee Kam Wing of Hong Kong. In 1987 at the age of 27 he was approached by

Panther Productions to do a series of Mantis Kung Fu videos, which have sold worldwide. At his retirement from competition in 1998, he held the undefeated title New York Kung Fu Champion for 13 years in Fighting, Weapon, Forms and others. He has been a tactical instructor to the NYPD and Westchester County PD.

- Born and raised in Harlem, Grandmaster **George Crayton Jr** is the pioneer who brought the strength, beauty and grace of Kung Fu onto the tournament scene. He is a disciple of Grandmaster Lee Hung Yea for Kung Fu and Grandmaster Liu Chengde for Tai Chi. This multiple Hall of Famer is known internationally and has appeared on television shows such as Johnny Carson, Joe Franklin, Mike Douglas and the Geraldo Rivera show. He once performed in front of thousands in China.
- Action movie actor **Michael Woods** may not be familiar to American moviegoers. But in the Far East and Europe, he was the famous villain and played in at least seven major movies. He is skillful in Taekwondo and studied Chinese Martial Arts with Grandmaster **Bow-Sim Mark**. Woods was the first Western member of the famous “Wo Yuen Ping Clan,” one of the top martial art film families. He also appeared in the Tai Chi short film **Final Weapon** with Grandmaster Ren Guangyi.
- Master **Raymond Nelson** is a world famous fighter, and teacher of Northern 7-Star Praying Mantis and a top student of Grandmaster **Chiu Leun**.
- Master **Luis Ginorio** came from a rough neighborhood. During the movie, he spoke frankly of how Chinese Martial Arts changed his life. He adopts functional applications of Praying Mantis style into MMA and Boxing.
- **Master Pedro Cepero Yee** was introduced to Filipino martial arts studies at age 6. Later, he studied Karate, Shuai Jiao, Wing Chun and Hung Ga. He is a well-respected Martial artist by way of performance, seminars/classes across the U.S., Canada, Bermuda, Bahamas, Puerto Rico, Scotland, England, Germany, Trinidad, Malaysia, Hong Kong, and the Peoples’ Republic of China. He is the eighth Senior In-chamber Disciple of Master Frank Yee. He became the first non-Asian person to appear on the cover of the Hong Kong Magazine “New Martial Hero”.
- **Master Philip Redmond** is a highly accomplished martial artist in many different styles. He has earned a black belt in AikiJiu Jitsu and Kobudo from Sensei Ronald Duncan. Yoel Judah, the US kickboxing champion, trained Redmond for his first full contact bout, which he won. But his greatest achievement was being recognized on Wing Chun Grandmaster William Cheung’s Honor List, indicating his contribution to Traditional Wing Chun Kung Fu for a minimum period of ten years, showing respect, dedication, honor

and self-sacrifice.

Due to a budget constraint, this movie is 42-minutes long. It would be better if it included more biographic background of these masters. However, you can visit the official website <http://urbandragonsfilm.com/#!/prettyPhoto> and learn more about each of them. This is a great movie that can inspire people of all backgrounds. You can get a copy at <http://kunaki.com/Sales.asp?PID=PX00ZQU8Y6>.

SUGGESTED LINKS

- Final Weapon will be screened at NewFilmmakers
- “Man of Tai Chi” is coming
- TaijiFit and TaijiZen march together to popularize Tai Chi worldwide
- Everyone should read “The Harvard Medical School Guide to Tai Chi”
- Help Autistic children with Tai Chi and Kung Fu



Violet Li

Tai Chi Examiner