

# Willie 'Bam' Johnson to study Kung fu in China

By Brion Tyson  
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After years of wanting and waiting, Baltimore Kung Fu Master, Willie "Bam" Johnson is finally realizing one of his most cherished dreams. Saturday, the Baltimore martial arts instructor departed from Baltimore - Washington International Airport for Mainland China to visit the ancient Shaolin Temple of Martial Arts and practice and study with the native masters.

Sponsored by martial artists Dennis Brown, Sherman Lewis of 7-11 stores, Bob Stewart, of Belair Market, Sports Mart, and Osborne Payne, Willie is the first Baltimore martial arts instructor to gain international recognition by travelling to meet with the masters in Mainland China.

After picking up his airline tickets Friday, Johnson said, "I've waited for this opportunity for a long time and I'm really excited."

Last year shortly after the opening of his Shaolin Wu Shu martial arts school located at 23 West North Avenue, Johnson dreamed about travelling to the ancient Shaolin Temple of Martial Arts. He believed that such a trip would improve his credibility as a martial arts instructor teaching in the Baltimore area.

"This trip means a lot to me

because many times when people come through these doors and see me, a black man, sitting behind the desk, automatically they assume that a black man is incapable of teaching traditional and authentic martial arts. Although I am capable now, when I return from China, I will have had as much exposure to the traditional arts or more than any other instructor in this region," Johnson told the AFRO.

Johnson says he tries to create in school a "health spa" kind of atmosphere in his school so that students won't feel that all they are there for is to learn how to fight.

In his 16 years as a martial artist Johnson has been very successful, winning a number of trophies and tournaments from year to year. Some of his winnings include: first place in the Champion's Karate Tournament, second place in the 1979 Jr. Olympics; first place in Baltimore's 6th Pro - Am Tournament; first place in the All American Open held in New York; second place in the Empire State Karate Championship.

He was Grand Champion in Baltimore's Karate Tournament, first place winner in the Maryland Gold Cup Kickbox Championship, fourth place winner in Minnesota's Diamond National Karate Championship,

third place in the American Karate Association's National Competition held in Grand Rapids Michigan, and second place in the Professional Karate Association Nationals. He has since returned to defend many of these titles.

On August 8 Johnson was named one of Baltimore's best by Mayor William Donald Schaefer who recognized the day in his honor for setting a positive example in the black community. He was given an award that day.

"I enjoy being a role model. I've done Kung Fu demonstrations for the organization to locate Missing Children and "Stop the Killing." And I plan to do another demonstration for "Stop the Killing" on Oct. 14," Johnson told the AFRO.

Also, on Jan. 18, 1986, Johnson plans to perform a special Kung Fu exhibition at the Martial Arts extravaganza scheduled to take place at the Community College of Baltimore's Harbor Campus.

"We're doing this to raise money for the American Cancer Society. I feel good about it because my mother died from cancer, and now I have a chance to raise money to help scientists find a cure for the deadly disease," Johnson added.

A former drama student at Dunbar's Career Arts School,

Johnson has set goals for himself in the entertainment field as well.

"I've written several stories that I will eventually develop into motion pictures. Meanwhile I'm still doing my regular morning program, Wu Shu Forms on Channel 50 at 7:45 a.m. Ultimately, I want to be a black movie hero because there are so few positive black role models," Johnson said.

Explaining his method of introducing new students to the most ancient of the martial arts, Johnson said, "Our introductory gives an example of what Kung Fu consists of. Once a student passes that stage we work to unite his mind and body because both have to work together. I teach my student's mind to say 'yes' even when their body is saying 'no'."

Gary Gillis and a professional television crew from Channel 50 will travel to China along with Johnson to videotape the trip and hopefully use it for a documentary on one of the major networks.

"I plan to do a lot of studying when I get there, but also I will get insight on ways to improve my life, as well as gather ideas or my movie. I've already submitted several demonstration tapes, but I haven't heard from anyone yet. I plan to keep on trying," said Johnson Thursday.