

SHORT CAPOEIRA HISTORY BY CONTRA MESTRE GERARD TAYLOR

Capoeira, as a historical study, is often divided into three distinct eras: the slavery period, the underground period and the 'Academy' period. 'Modern Capoeira' is customarily said to have begun with the 'Academy Period' in the late 1930s, when Mestre Bimba received a government license to teach the previously illegal art form in an indoor academy which he called the Centro de Cultura Física de Regional Baiano.

Each 'era' is the result of existing and previous circumstances. Capoeira's eventual acceptance by the Brazilian Ministry of Education, was the culmination of a tortuous process.

Until the 1930s, successive police chiefs were infamous for ordering attacks against capoeira rodas, by cavalry officers armed with swords and batons.

It is in this context that we can see the great achievement of the capoeira Mestres born in the final years of the 19th century; the innovators of capoeira perpetuated during the early academy period, the 1930s to 1950s.

Arguably the most profound influence on Salvador based capoeira, which spread South to other cities in Brazil in the 1960s, was Mestre Bimba. His pedagogical methods enabled him to teach large numbers of capoeira students over the course of a long career.

From the 1940s, Mestre Pastinha also founded the Centro Esportivo de Capoeira Angola, which flourished in Salvador in the 1950s and 60s. Mestre Pastinha retained all the traditions of the capoeira, which he gave the name 'Capoeira Angola', delineating it from that being taught by Mestre Bimba.

It was left to the next generation of capoeiristas, born in the 1940s, or early 50s, to open a mass market for academy based capoeira in Brazil. By no means everybody had a lineage stemming from

Mestre Bimba or Mestre Pastinha. Mestre Bispo, from Santo Amaro in Bahia, began playing in rodas in São Paulo by the mid 1940s.

In 1963, Mestre Sombra, another North Eastern émigré, joined Mestre Bispo's Grupo Bahia do Berimbau, a very traditional street roda. Mestre Sombra continued with capoeira, forming his own academy: Associação de Capoeira Senzala de Santos, in 1975. It was in this academy that Mestre Sylvia and Marcos trained capoeira under Mestre Sombra.

Between 1970 and 1980, capoeira went from being an unknown entity outside Brazil, to something taught, not widely, but available in numerous cities in Western Europe and the USA.

Capoeira became first established in England in the late 1980s, when Mestre's Sylvia and Marcos founded the London School of Capoeira in the West End of London. Since then, with a continual presence in the capital as dedicated, professional educators, they have further publicized and entertained with the art nationwide and internationally, with the Passo dance company.

During the 1990s, there was a veritable 'explosion' of capoeira all over the world. The boom was fuelled by the combined factors of cheaper air travel and mass emigration of Brazilian capoeiristas

Fortunately, the microcosm of the capoeira academy has remained reassuringly stable. Honest mestres still abound and are still respected. The berimbau calls the game and capoeiristas still play two by two in a ring of friends and comrades. Capoeira still strengthens player's bodies and feeds their spirits, many times helping to heal social or physical maladies in unexpected ways.