

Capoeira: Martial art or dance?

Have you ever seen a martial arts scene in a movie and thought it was like a dance? Martial arts and dance have a lot more in common than you'd think. In fact one of the oldest martial art forms, *capoeira* is based on just that — the combination of dance with kicking, slap-punching, and head butting! Check it out!

Where did it come from? Capoeira is an Afro-Brazilian martial arts form that originated in the 16th century. Portugal had taken control of Brazil, making it a 'colony', and one of the largest areas held by a European country. However they didn't have the manpower to develop it. So like many European nations of the time they chose to do a terrible thing. They turned to slavery as a solution.

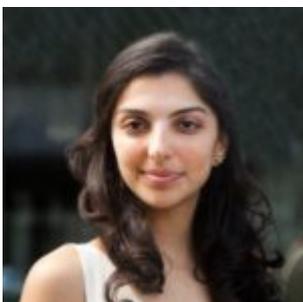
What is a slave? A slave is someone who is forced to be the legal property of another and is forced to work as well as obey. Slavery was used by colonizers to develop their colonies, most often in for physical labor such as farming or mining. It is estimated that between the 16th and 18th centuries between 9 and 11 million Africans were forced to be slaves. Over time it has been globally declared illegal. Mauritius was the last country to declare it illegal in 1981.

How does this connect to capoeira? The main activity in the Portuguese colony of Brazil was the development of sugarcane plantations. Being labor-intensive many Africans were brought there as slaves and were forced to work in the worst of conditions. If they disobeyed their masters, they were physically beaten and abused. Not permitted weapons of any kind they could not defend themselves. ***So they turned to their cultural heritage and used traditional dance to disguise combat techniques to protect them. It worked and soon capoeira became a self-defense tool for escaped slaves!***

As more slaves escaped they started *quilombos* (settlements) in places that were hard to get to. Quilombo dos Palmares was the biggest one and consisted of many villages. It managed to withstand 18 attacks from the colonizers.

With the development of cities and mass migration to them, it became even easier for slaves to learn capoeira. Over time it became such a powerful tool the government made it illegal to practice or use it!

Towards the end of the 19th century, slavery in the colony came to an end. Historians believe it was largely due to the resistance of capoeiristas (people who practice capoeira). Today it is celebrated as a national sport in Brazil, and it is taught as a martial art all over the world.



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