The Unification of Body, Mind, & Spirit through the practice of

Black Folklore in the Midwest

Being at the bottom of the pecking order, black folk (worldwide) are, indeed, in need of some uplifting and a firm foundation on which to stand. It is not that blacks are inferior to other peoples, but rather that in America we (because of slavery) have been made to feel inferior from the womb to the tomb. Enslavement, Jim Crow laws, red-lining, limited economic opportunity, gang violence, mis-information, etc. have all contributed to making this a reality. As W.E.B. Dubois asserted, we are one of the few ethnicities worldwide that possesses "double consciousness". That is, we are taught to see ourselves through the eyes of the oppressor rather than with our own God-given eyes.

Black Americans have contributed mightily to the greatness of America, not only with their sweat and blood toiling in the cotton fields, but with their minds and sprit as well. Indeed, thanks to Black History Month, we are now learning a great deal more about these contributions in the field of sports (Jackie Robinson, Joe Lewis, Mike Tyson, Wesley Snipes, Michael Jordan, etc.), entertainment (Michael Jackson, the Wayans brothers, Sydney Potier, Flip Wilson, Nat King Cole, et al) as well as inventors like George Washington Carver who invented over 300 products from peanuts. I emphatically note here that the cotton gin was not invented by Eli Witney, but rather by Sam, one of his slaves. There were also Black American businessmen of note (Roebuck of Sears and Roebuck was a black man), revolutionaries (Nat Turner, Malcolm X, Bobby Seale, Paul Robeson, Martin Luther King, etc.) and explorers. Both Estebanico, the founder of Los Angeles, and Matthew Henson, the first man to reach the north pole, were black. Even the man who invented he first flying machine was black. Indeed, it was Charles Page (and not the Wright brothers) who was the first man to have a patent on a flying machine. And, by the way, San Juan Hill was not taken by Teddy Roosevelt and his "rough riders" as we were made to believe; but rather by units of the Buffalo soldiers, who first came to world notice thanks to intriguing lyrics of one of Bob Marley's most notable songs.

Moreover, our cuisine has become world famous and tourists from all over the world still flock to Sylvia's restaurant in Harlem to try her fabled "cone pone" (corn bread), greens and chitterlings at very high prices. Name any cultural or scientific field of endeavor and you will be amazed to discover that black folks around the world from Ancient Egypt to Tupelo, Mississippi have "been there and done that".

The key to uplifting the psyche and well-being of black folk, in my view, is not to give us "40 acres and a mule" but rather to help us change the perception of ourselves as "weak, poor, ignorant, and inferior" to "strong, prosperous, smart and superior".

I argue in this paper that this goal can be accomplished by strengthening and unifying our minds, bodies, and spirits through the utilization of three elements already present in our ancestral culture. For the mind, all black people should be taught *umlabalaba (*a Zulu board game) which is as easy to play as tic-tac-toe; but is as hard to win (against an experienced player) as international chess. This is an ideal game for black people because its immediate roots are found in Zulu culture (Africa), but may be traced back as far as Ancient Kemet (Black Egypt). To develop the body we, of the BLAC Foundation, emphasize the teaching of Capoeira, an African martial art, that was brought from Africa to Brazil by enslaved Africans over 500 years ago. Although the old forms are changing, its inner essence remains, and thus its Africanity (Black origin) is still quite obvious to the discerning eye. Finally, for the spirit we emphasize the

teaching of Cosmic Combat Yoga a legacy of the wisdom of our “Asiatic Black brothers” recently codified by myself.

However, all three of these black cultural jewels, are rapidly being appropriated by non-black groups – much like the Kjarkas of Bolivia have appropriated the Saia of Black Bolivians and left them holding an (empty) sack. Capoeira was once the exclusive property of Africans, then of Afro-Brazilians, then of Brazilians; but today it belongs to the world. And Yoga is still believed to be the invention of Vedic chanting Aryans, even though it was practiced in India well before the arrival of these Caucasians cattle-herders to that country.

The purpose of this paper is to present a brief but detailed description of the three aforementioned Black cultural expressions and note their impact in the US Midwest with an aim to promote their practice both in America and in the world at large. However, to enable us to learn where we hope to go, we must first know where we are coming from. For that purpose, I include below a link to a podcast I made with the assistance of BLAC Foundation board members Kamau Rashid and Andrea Newton during the covid epidemic. The podcast (using the observation of an umlabalaba board as its onset) clearly demonstrates that we do not see with our physical eyes, but rather with our minds: https://blacfoundation.org/eye-of-the-beholder-podcast/ .

That said, let us now proceed to describe the three aforementioned “black jewels” that, if exploited, will lead to the unification of Black Mind, Body and Spirit providing us with a firm foundation on which to stand and progress.

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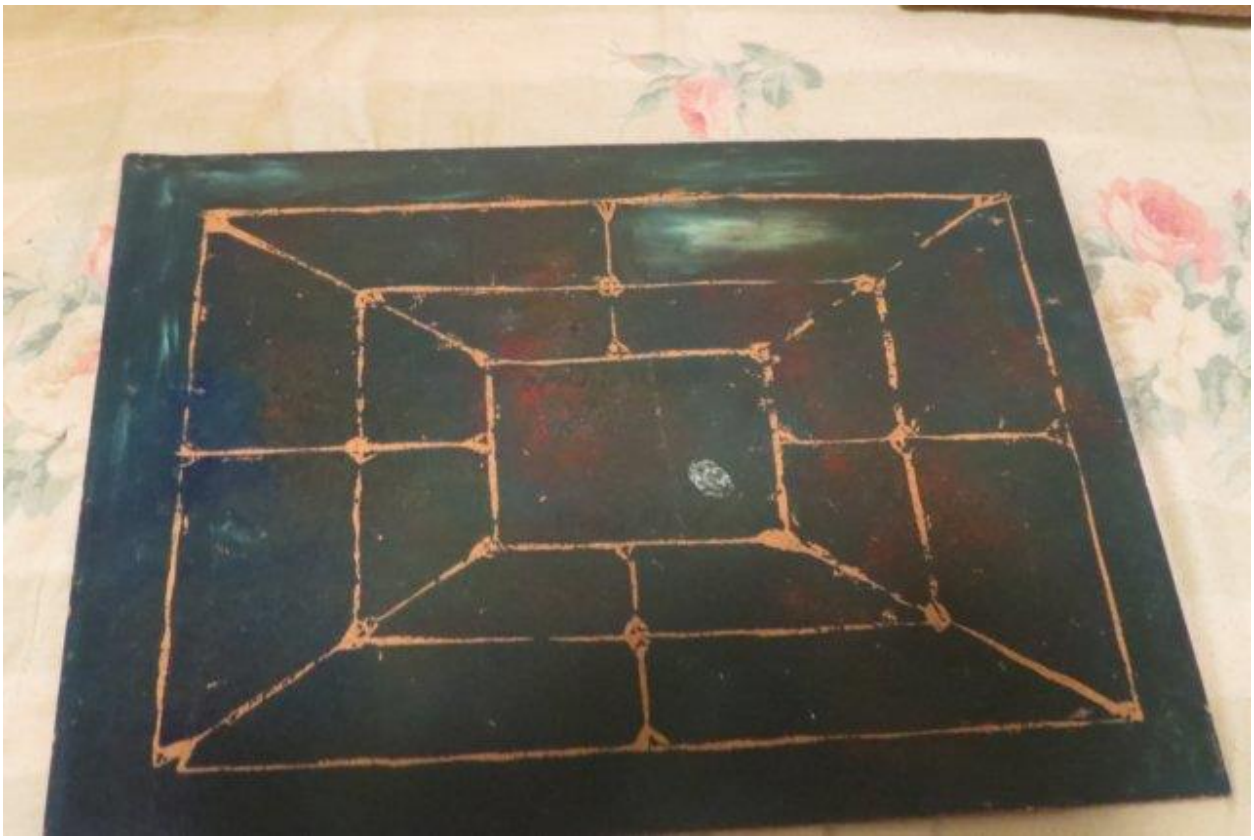
Umlabalaba in the Midwest



A few years before the onset of the COVID epidemic the Black Languages, Arts and Culture (aka BLAC) Foundation [www.blacfoundation.org], headquartered in Madison, WI, initiated its "Rising Star" initiative with the stated objective of "uniting the mind, body and spirit" of black people worldwide. Capoeira was selected as the major component for the development of the body, cosmic combat yoga for the development of the spirit, and umlabalaba (a Zulu board game) for the development of the mind.

Although this is considered to be a worldwide effort aimed at uniting diverse black ethnic groups, this section deals primarily with the BLAC Foundation's umlabalaba initiative in the Midwest, namely: Madison, Wisconsin, Chicago, Illinois, and St. Louis, Missouri.

ITS ROOTS

Umlabalaba (aka Zulu chess) is a Zulu board game, versions of which are currently in vogue in South Africa, Namibia, Mozambique and Botswana. While the game incorporates many features of Zulu life and is said to have been played by Zulus from time immemorial, the BLAC Foundation asserts that it possibly has its origins in ancient Kemet (Black Egypt). Indeed, the design of the board is reminiscent of a step pyramid when viewed from the sky. See

[https://blacfoundation.org/pdf/Symbolism-Umlabalaba-Board-Kemet.pdf] for further similarities.

There are presently many variants of this type of game with differing rules and board designs worldwide which makes It an ideal topic for folklore investigation. In Zululand, it is a cattle acquisition game in which a player must align three of his/her tokens in a row to acquire a cow from the adversary. This is an ideal game of the mind because (like international chess) there is little, or no element of chance involved. Moreover, while it is as easy to learn as tic-tac-toe (to which it is distantly related) it is as difficult to win against an experienced adversary as it is to win an international chess match.

In the US Midwest, the game is currently being promoted by Dr. Edward L. Powe in Madison, Wisconsin, Dr. Kamau Rashid in Chicago, and Wesley Cox in Missouri, all of whom work under the auspices of the BLAC Foundation. The BLAC Foundation also produced an APP developed by one of it members (Joshua Powe) where anyone (black or white) can access, learn and play the game online https://app.zuluchess.com/ .

RULES OF THE GAME

Each of two players starts out with 12 cows each. The player who obtains 10 cows from his adversary is the winner. The rules of the Zulu version of the game are as follows:

1. Each player is given 12 tokens. Note that in ***isizulu*** they are all considered to be cows but that in the BLAC Foundation version of the game each player has 9 cows (**izinkomo**), two herd boys (***abelusi***), and one warrior group (***ibhuto***). Nevertheless, for all practical purposes, they are treated as if they were all cows since they are moved and taken in the same way.
2. Player one places one of his tokens on any one of the possible board positions (i.e. points where two board lines meet or intersect).
3. Player Two then places one of his/her tokens on any one of the remaining possible board positions.
4. Player one then places another one of his/her tokens in any position with an aim at blocking his opponent from the possible alignment of three tokens in succession (i.e. an ***isibhamu*** "capture line") or to form his own "capture line" composed of three tokens (as in tic tac toe).
5. If either of the players succeeds in forming a horizontal, diagonal, or vertical row of three consecutive tokens (a capture line), he removes any one of his adversary's tokens.
6. The game continues thus until the second player places his/her last token on the board. Then the second phase of the game begins.
7. After the second player places his/her last token on the board, the first player moves one of his tokens one space along the grid lines into an empty adjacent space in an effort to form a capture line or to block his opponent from forming a capture line. Note that, in the event all 24 positions are occupied, the first person who moved must remove any one of his/her own tokens and gift it to his opponent (***ilobolo***). The second player is then

required to reciprocate by gifting any one of his/her tokens to the first player. Note also that if a player is unable to move because all his/her pieces are immobilized, the adversary moves again.

8. When a capture line is formed, that player must remove any one of his opponent's tokens.
9. When a player has only three tokens remaining s/he may (in desperation) move any one of these tokens to any unoccupied intersection on the board. When a player captures ten of his adversary's tokens the game ends and s/he is declared to be the winner.
10. Note that it is possible that the game may never come to an end if each player makes the same move and countermove repeatedly. In such an event the game is declared a draw. Moreover, when both players have only three tokens left, if no capture is made within 30 moves (i.e. player 1 and player 2 each move 30 times) the game is also declared a draw.

MEANING & IMPACT

As explained in an article I wrote entitled "Umlabalaba and the Meaning of Life" (for which see, https://blacfoundation.org/pdf/Umlabalaba-Life.pdf) a player who masters umlabalaba, masters life itself. That is, the ultimate meaning of life is, in essence, "group survival" and, as in life, some of the tokens have less mobility than others and are not as important strategically. Yet, they have the same intrinsic value and because of their potential could eventually move to a position of greater possibilities and eventually decide the fate of the group. Indeed, learning how to form strategies and defend oneself from the strategies of the adversary by skillfully maneuvering tokens is the essence of umlabalaba and, indeed, the essence of life itself. Moreover, the sharpening of the mind produced by mastering the game leads to greater awareness and individual achievement as one can easily transfer this skill to become more conscious of the pitfalls of life and effectively develop a plan to deal with adversity before it even occurs.

CURRENT UMLABALABA ACTIVITY PROGRAMS IN THE MIDWEST.

While the BLAC Foundation has high hopes for the propagation of this game in the African American communities of the Midwest and, indeed, throughout the United States, it has only begun to implement feet-on-the ground programs.

Dr. Kamau Rashid (one of the BLAC Foundation's board members) first used the game as part of an Afro-American rites of passage ritual for black boys in Chicago and remarked that he was amazed how a bunch of initially rowdy noisy boys instantaneously became silent and focused when playing the game.

Lacouir Yancey, from Madison introduced the game at a Kwanza celebration in 2019

Wesley Cox introduced the game to students at the predominantly black Pamoja Preparatory

Harvest event in St. Louis, Missouri and was requested by some students to start an Umlabalaba Club at their school. He is presently working on implementing this with the school staff and plans to hold a tournament there with a $100 cash prize for the winner. Moreover, he also plans to introduce it to other schools in Missouri and hold competition between them not only nationally but internationally as well. Indeed, Wesley has already played internationally against his Mayan counterpart in Guatemala with mixed results.

Edward Powe introduced the game on a number of occasions in Madison to church groups, a student veteran group, Madison game club members, and at an Africa Day celebration in which High school students were invited to UW-Madison to learn more about Africa. He is also planning on conducting tournaments both nationally and internationally in an effort to provide needy students with the opportunity to sharpen their minds as well as receive recognition and cash prizes.

Student Vets mini-Tournament Fall 2019-01

As can be seen from the above examples, the game has mostly been taught and played in a setting where black Americans are being made aware of their African roots. Indeed, when it is believed that black Americans started off as slaves in a plantation (tabula – rasa) rather than that they were enslaved peoples coming from a rich cultural heritage, it is much more difficult to instill pride in them. Umlabalaba, therefore, serves as a tool not only to sharpen the mind but also to make players (be they black or white) aware of the rich cultural heritage of the so-called "dark continent."

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Capoeira

Just as the BLAC Foundation has chosen the Zulu board game called *umlablaba* to develop the minds of our black citizenry so, too, it has chosen the African art of Capoeira to further develop the body. With this in mind we have recently created a subsidiary of FACA (*Federacao Autónoma da Capoeira Africana*) International :called FACA-US https://faca-us.com/],here in Madison, under the leadership of Lacouir Yancey.

Origins of Capoeira

Capoeira, also known as *o jogo de angola* (the game from Angola), is a ritualized mock-combat, having its origins somewhere in Africa (most probably in Angola) that was transported to Brazil by enslaved Africans in the fifteenth century. Despite its oppression, it subsequently thrived as folklore after having undergone significant modifications in form and style. In its present form, Capoeira de Angola is a unique fighting technique in which the cadence and speed of the combatants is subordinated to the rhythm of various traditional instruments (berimbau, tambourines, drums, scrapers, cow-bells, etc.) played by non-combatants. This musical accompaniment, along with the associated chants and songs, is an integral part of the capoeira ritual. Long the exclusive property of a segment of the impoverished black underclass in Brazil, Capoeira has blossomed into a martial art with broad appeal and perhaps one day Brazilians will become as proud of its *capoeiristas* (practitioners of capoeira) as they are of their soccer players.

The Capoeira Ritual

Capoeira is traditionally performed in a *roda* (circle formed by spectators and musicians). At the beginning of the performance ritual, two combatants enter the *roda* and squat facing each other in front of three men playing berimbaus (“musical bows”).The other musicians form a line or arc, facing the combatants in such a way the lead berimbau player (*berimbau mestre*) retains a central position. Before the actual combat begins, the *berimbau mestre*, an associate, or one of the combatants intones a type of prayer in the form of a series of short invocations which is known in Capoeira as the *ladainha*.

During the singing of the *ladainha*, the vocalist typically invokes his place of birth, teacher and perhaps describes a significant historical event which may be of a personal, regional, or universal nature. Occasionally he may choose to express friendship or enmity with his opponent.

The two combatants then make the sign of the cross (on their bodies or on the ground) and perhaps utter a silent prayer, shake hands and – to the accompaniment of further singing (*corridos*) – execute a ritual bow (often in the form of a *negativa angola* or a *queda de rins*) followed by a ritual entry. It is then that the physical contest truly commences typically in a *jogo*

de baixo which is a combat pursued low to the ground. This is then usually followed by a game in which combatants are mostly standing (*jogo de pe*) . In both types of game, the blows are released rhythmically thus giving the adversary sufficient time to defend himself.

A lead singer continues his song with words of encouragement or reprimands (in the form of *corridos*) while the musicians supply enthusiastic choral responses. The music continues throughout the combat, but the choral singing can stop and then resume at the will of the singers.

The fighting itself has a dance-like aura because the combatants are in continual motion moving like dancing cobras in harmony with the speed and rhythm of the music which is sometimes slow and sometimes fast.

During the performance either fighter may terminate the flow of action in one of four different ways: 1) by returning to the foot of the lead berimbau player and inviting his opponent to join him; 2) by squatting on the ground with hands extended (*chamada de cocoras*); 3) by standing still and – either facing or with his back to the opponent – extending his arms like Christ on the cross (*chamada de pe*); or 4) by running counter-clockwise around the internal circumference of the *roda*.

After a fighter calls for a stop, his adversary (in case #3) stealthily approaches him taking every precaution lest the fighter who is calling deals him a blow. He then brings both of his hands into contact with those of his opponent and they move three steps forward and then three steps backward. After this display, the person who called the other tries to strike his adversary.

In case #2, the opponent also squats joining hand and they bounce up and down three times before the person who made the call delivers a kick.

In the run around the perimeter (case #4), the adversary pursues his opponent with caution. The person who is running in front then executes a *macaco* (back flip) with the aim of striking his opponent or knocking him down with a backward scissors. He may optionally drop into a *queda de rins* and execute the same type of back-scissors. The adversary escapes of course utilizing an *au* (cartwheel) or a *tesouro* (cissors) of his own beneath the adversary.

Please open the following link to see this ritual performed at a FACA Workshop in Chicago 2016

https://blacfoundation.org/be-a-ba-do-berimbau/

Aim & Essence of Capoeira.

The essence of Capoeira is to defend oneself by selecting one of eight prescribed defensive postures (*negativas*) while at the same time arming a trap. The adversary then moves closer and springs the trap, subsequently defending himself and arming his own trap. His trap is in turn sprung by the adversary and so it continues until the lead berimbau player calls the fighters to him (by lowering the berimbau while striking it continually) or halts the encounter by striking and emphatic "low-high" tone sequence followed by silence. Alternatively, the *berimbau mestre* can summon the two combatants to his feet with the same special call and then halt the match. The two fighters then shake hands and exit the *r*oda. The ritual is then repeated with two new combatants

Note that If two seasoned *capoeirstas* are competing there is little or no contact because they are quite skilled in dodging each other's blows. If one *capoeirista* is better than the other, he demonstrates his superiority by making his opponent break the rhythm of the fight rather than by striking him. Good fighters tend to alternate strikes with the right and left leg in such a way that most action falls within the center of the *roda* rather than its periphery.

When a fighter breaks rhythm because he is obliged to make an awkward defense, this evokes smiles from the adversary and those familiar with the combat routine. Sometimes, however, a combatant is hit – not usually due to malice but rather by accident. If this happens the fight is usually stopped.

It is to be noted that one combat is never exactly like another. That is, these combats are not choreographed. For every attack, the defender has a number of possible defenses and can release his trap in a number of different ways. It is because of this variety of possibilities and the unpredictability of defenses and attacks that each match – like a game of chess – is never the same.

In addition to being able to defend themselves with skill, some *capoeiristas* have absolute mastery over their bodies and are able to execute graceful acrobatic movements. There, however, is a big difference between a fighter and an acrobat, for if the acrobatic movement is not the obvious result of a offensive or defensive movement, it does not sit well. For instance, if someone comes out and does an unprovoked flip it is not as appreciated as if he executes this move as a defense against a *rasteira* (sweep) and then immediately recovers from the flip - within the rhythm of the fight – in position to deliver a blow to his opponent. Most *capoeiristas* (like break dancers) have pliant bodies and can do exceptional things; but an unmotivated display of body suppleness is acrobatic show-boating and is out of place in a *roda*.

Another bad habit of beginning *capoeiristas* is to execute blows which have no possibility of striking the opponent. In effect, a blow should always strike through the position where the adversary was standing or squatting prior to defending himself. A good *capoeirista* is also capable of stopping a blow he delivers such that if the adversary does not defend himself. No serious injury results. A gentle tap to the face or other part of the body is sufficient to inform the adversary and audience that the person could have been severely injured.

This in brief, is capoeira – an art that is hard to classify. Some call it combat, some call it dance; **some call it folklore**. For the practitioner of capoeira, however, I is not only exercise and entertainment, but also a ritual, a philosophy, and even (for some) a way of life.

CAPOEIRISTAS IN THE MIDWEST

Here, I interviewed Dr. Kamau Rashid (in Chicago), Wesley Cox (in Missouri), Dr. TJ Desch-Obi (formerly of Milwaukee)and Lacouir Yancey (in Madison) by asking for responses to following seven questions

1. When and where were you born?
2. How and when did you first hear about capoeira?
3. Who was your teacher?
4. What were the high and low points of your capoeira experience?
5. How has capoeira affected your life?

6. What is Capoeira's potential impact upon Black people?
7. What do you do now?

I also include some comments concerning my own experience teaching Capoeira in NJ and Washington State as well as in Madison. While this is not a comprehensive sample it is most definitely representative.

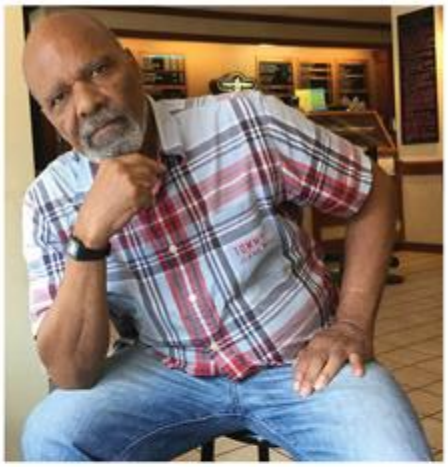
The problem in talking about "Capoeira" is one of inclusiveness vs exclusiveness. There are presently three major schools of capoeira: 1) *Regional* (founded by Mestre Bimba in Brazil) adhered to by most white capoeiristas; 2) Angola (originally from Africa) that attracts black *capoeiristas*; and *Contemporanea* (a modern mixed form that has lost much of its Africanicity) . For purpose of this paper, I have chosen to deal exclusively with Capoeira Angola, which is the form I discussed above and the closest to its original African roots.

Dr. Kamau Rashid - Born in Chicago in 1975, Dr. Rashid first heard of Capoeira at the age of 21 and began teaching it when he was 36. It was not until he was 47, however, that he travelled to Brazil to embibe its culture. In 1996 a college friend told him about the existence of this art and he subsequently learned how to do some of the movements from him. This friend also told him about the movie "Only the Strong", which he watched and found it interesting. However, he was not particularly drawn to the art because the actors were not black. However, two years later he decided he wanted to learn it. The opportunity to do so did not present itself until 2006 when he was in graduate school. There was a capoeira group on campus; but he didn't feel motivated to join the group because it was all white. However, in 2005 he attended a mostly black martial arts camp that included capoeira. The capoeira component was taught by Mestre Preto Velho and included instructions on how to do ginga, *negativas*, *resistencia* and *au.* The following year he moved to St. Louis and started training with Tebogo of the *Grupo Cordao de Ouro*. This person, he says, was his first teacher in a "meaningful sense". Although this predominantly black group eventually grew in size, Kamau stopped the mainly one-on-one training, to focus on his PhD dissertation and returned to Chicago in 2009. In 2016 he got a small research grant to study African Martial Arts and brought several people to make presentations in Englewood, Chicago. One of the persons was me.

The Chicago African Martial Arts Institute
Presents
a Capoeira workshop series instructed by
African martial arts scholar and pioneer

Dr. Edward Powe

- A direct student of Capoeira Angola legend, Mestre Pastinha
- One of the first people to open a Capoeria academy in the U.S.
- Author of numerous books including: Combat Games of Northern Nigeria, Northern Nguni Stick-Fighting, Elementos Basicos de Capoeira de Angola, and many others.
- Founder of the Blac Foundation and the Federacao Autónoma da Capoeira Africana to support the development and growth of the African combat arts



Dates/Times:
Friday July 8, 6 PM to 8 PM & Saturday July 9 10 AM-1PM

Cost:
$10 donation requested for each workshop to support Dr. Powe's initiatives:
The Blac Foundation and the Federacao Autónoma da Capoeira Africana

Location:
Hamilton Park
513 W. 72nd Street, Chicago, Illinois

For more information contact Dr. Kamau Rashid at kamau.rashid@gmail.com or 773-226-5025

Co-sponsored by Harakati za Waasi Martial Arts and the Kwame Nkrumah Cultural and Arts Center

In 2011 he began teaching children aged 6 -11 in Pilsen, Chicago and in 2013 joined forces with Baba Zakee to teach children and adults. In 2014 he felt he needed to learn more and began to search for a competent teacher. He received a grant and invited Mestre Preto Velho and others to Englewood, Chicago to present workshops. Shortly thereafter he began training with Mestre Preto Velho. In November of 2017 he attended his first *batizado* and obtained a green cord. He opened his own academy in May 2018 with all black students, in 2020 began to teach Zoom classes in Capoeira and in 2022 travelled to Brazil to attend a Capoeira inauguration ceremony in Rio de Janeiro to celebrate the installation of a statue of Mestre Touro (Preto Velho's teacher) and Mestre Dentinho. He still continues to teach capoeira but, due to the COVID crisis it lost a lot of steam. He said that over his lifetime he has taught more than 100 students including grammar school pupils on the Southside of Chicago. On being asked about his best students he replied that one of them became an actor, one is studying to become an engineer, another is in college, some of them are in IT and one finished his doctorate in Educational Policy Studies (Not for profit). Because of his teaching he says he has developed discipline and heightened co-ordination, as well as a stronger, better sense of rhythm.

In response to a question I asked concerning how has capoeira affected his life, he responded tat he is more mindful of the way knowledge is transmitted and that his sense of rhythm and agility is much greater. During covid he gained 15 pounds (all muscle) as he was doing capoeira 5 days a week. Prior to taking up martial arts (goshin jitsu) he says he was a bookish child. When he began to study capoeira he says he couldn't even sing and play berimbau at the same time. However, he now feels that he has embodied a set of historical and philosophical dynamics associated with the Afro-Brazilian struggle and has found it very empowering. He says he attained that level by 2007 and that though he now feels like a "resident alien" in the Asian martial arts he practices (wing chun and choy lay fut) he feels like a bonafide "citizen" in Capoeira. Presently, Kamau teaches on zoom and holds face to face classes as well.

When asked what he knew about black capoeira instruction in the Midwest, he responded that in Chicago there are 3 other black teachers (one of whom is Brazilian). He also knew of a fourth Angola group which no longer exists. He added that he knew of a black instructor in Detroit and another in Minnesota as well as two in Madison. He then added that he knew of 3 black capoeira teachers in Texas, 8 in California, 3 in Atlanta, 2 in North Carolina, 1 in New Jersey, 2 in New York, and 1 in Arizona. When asked about the impact of capoeira upon Black people he replied that it is profoundly significant in that it connects them with the history and culture of our Black ancestors as well as conditions both the body and mind.

Lacouir Yancey - born in Madison in 1973 - first heard of capoeira in 1991-1992 from Joe Seitz (a white American) while he was in high school. At the tie, Lacour was training for the HGS Nationals in gymnastics when he saw a bunch of white guys in a corner doing capoeira. Then in 1996 (now out of HS) he went to theLoft center to do breaking and heard the sound of the berimbau in the back of the gym. That day he said he watched for a while and told Joe (the leader of the group) he would return. He then trained with them for 2 years for free. His interest waned; but when Joe told him the masters of Angola were all black, this revived his interest. Joe Seitz then took him to Chicago for a capoeira workshop where he met Ivan Watkins and Cobra Mansa at a workshop hosted by Ginga Arte. This encounter stimulated his interest enormously because both them were black and after the workshop he was convinced that capoeira would have a permanent place n his life.

Shortly before that, still unmarried, he met me in Madison and agreed to be a model for my "ABC and Bay-Ah-Bah of Capoeira" book. Time passed and he was fizzling out at Omulu where he was the only black student. That group was led, at the time, by Mestre Preguica (a white Brazilian who taught the Regional style); but Lacouir was more interested in Angola.

After his marriage and the birth f his daughter, he decided not to continue with Omulul He left Omulu 2000 and 9 years later joined FICA. Two years later he travelled to Brazil for the first time and remained for three weeks. He says he loved it because of its blackness,

He stayed with FICA until 2018-19 when it dissolved and subsequently joined FACA. Moreover, hetaught capoeira for the last few summers to mostly black and brown kids here in Madison.

Although Joe Seitz was his first teacher, he considers FICA's Mestre Beto as his major teacher because he was with that froup for 10 years. Lacouir co-founded FACA-US in 2019; but shut down shortly thereafter due to the covid epidemic from 2020 – 2022. He did, however, continue to teach drumming on line. Lacouir says he has taught over 300 children capoeira some 70% of whom were black or brown and that his best students are now playing golf or basketball.

Lacouri says capoeira changed his life by forging positive connection with the black diaspora and black & brown community children. Presently he continues teaching capoeira in summer camp and is also working on the development of FACA-US website and is in the process of reconnecting with old students and writing grants.

In response to the question dealing with the impact of capoeira upon black people, he said that a sense of pride is awakened as a member of a larger black community. Moreover, it stimlated in him a desire to visit Africa (which he did last year). He says he now feels more global, has increased confidence, and inspired him further explore therapeutic movement as a healing system

Wesley Cox - born in St Louis, Missouri in 1994 - first heard of Capoeira when he was 6 years old. At that time a video game called Tekken, featured a capoeirista as one of its fighters. It was only in 2021, however, that he reached out to Baba Kamau Rashid to learn the art in a weekly on-line class and he is still an active student. Moreover, he travelled to San Diego in November 2022 where he received his green cord at a batizado hosted Mestre Preto Velho with guest masters Mestre Touro and Mestre Raio. The high-point of his capoeira experience, he says, is the acquisition of knowledge about African culture and affirms that capoeira has increased his awareness of all things, gives him pride, and promotes his contact and awareness with various black ethnicities worldwide. Moreover he says “capoeira has helped him “aline his mind, body, and spirit culturally”. Wesley also says that there are some underground capoeira groups in St. Louis with whom he has played. He currently works as a solar energy manager.

Dr. Edward L. Powe – born in Paterson, NJ in 1941- can no longer do a *queda de quatro* (four point stance) – and therefore (at 82) jokingly refers to himself as *mestre queda de seis* (six point stance). He first became aware of the existence of the truly remarkable martial art of Capoeira in 1967 after having received a Fulbright Grant to study Brazilian culture and language in Brazil. He was originally assigned to study in Recife, Pernambuco; but after a short visit to Salvador da Bahia during one of the frequent university strikes, he requested a transfer to the university located in Bahia. The main reason for this request was his initial exposure to Capoeira, where he witnessed João Grande spinning around on his head during one of the exhibition matches and his subsequent head strike of Raimundo Pequeno who was propelled over the heads of a row of gawking tourists that were seated upon low benches.

He was enthralled not only by the beauty of the movements and the captivating rhythms, but also by the fact that this was a Black art form said to have had its origins in Angola, Africa. That performance and further contact with the art - first as a student of Mestre Pastinha and then subsequent contact and participation with other groups headed by the late Mestre Caiçara, the late Mestre Bimba, Mestre Gato, Mestre Roque (Pavãozinho, Rio) and the Grupo Senzala from Rio - left a lasting impression which he says continues to this day.

After several years full of adventure had passed, he enrolled in a Ph.D. program at the University of Wisconsin majoring in African Languages and Literature with a specialization in Hausa. Although he applied for a grant to do research for his Ph.D. dissertation on martial arts in Angola, that application was summarily declined. Thus Dr. Kenneth Dossar – a member of the ICAF 2 (International Federation of Capoeira Angola) Board of Directors who wrote his doctoral dissertation dealing with Capoeira - was able to beat him to the punch. Powe eventually ended up going to Nigeria as a lecturer / researcher in the Department of Nigerian Languages in Kano, Nigeria (1981 – 1983) and, while there, was exposed to a

number of forms of traditional Hausa martial arts including dame (a kind of boxing), *shanci* (wristlet fighting), Konawa (a kind of wrestling), *sharo* (Fulani stick-flogging), *tauri* (toughskin competitions), *farauta* (hunting expeditions), etc. Upon returning to the US, he wrote and defended his doctoral dissertation dealing with Hausa Combat Literature (drum calls, recitations, songs) in 1984.

Ten years later, he wrote a companion volume to the dissertation entitled Hausa Combat Games . This was the first volume in a series of books dealing with Black Martial Arts. The second book in that series dealt with Morengy (2001), and the third (but referred to as the fourth) dealt with Northern Nguni Stick-fighting (2002). He had intentionally put off the writing and publication of the book dealing with Capoeira until he had the opportunity to visit Angola - a visit that he argued would have to await the termination of belligerence in the interior of that war-torn nation.

In 1992 he went to Madagascar and the Indian Ocean where he discovered that these people, too, had a rich tradition of martial arts said to have come from Africa. It was only much later that he wrote and published two books dealing with capoeira: Capoeira and Congo, followed by the ABC Ah-Bay-Say and Bay-Ah-BAH of Capoeira. Other books abot Capoeira followed these over the years.

When asked who his teacher was, he named Mestre Pastinha (from whom he received a Diploma. He added that Getulio taught him basic movements and that Malvadeza and Cabrinha taught him how to sing and play the musical instrument.

Dr. Powe opened his first Capoeira academy in 1972 when he served as EWSC's first director of Black Education Programs (BEP). Though it was enthusiastically received, it was discontinued in 1974 when he left EWSC to become an Asociate Peace Corps Director in Chad. Among the highlights of this groups were participation in the World's Fair in Seattle, and in various TV productions. He said he taught some 60 students aged 9 – 15 and that his best student dropped out because his father wanted him to learn something with a potential to make money in the future or win a scholarship like baseball or football.

Powe added that capoeira had a lasting effect on his life. Because of Capoeira he became very much interested in studying martial arts in Nigeria instead of something else and indeed, wrote his PHD dissertation dealing with Hausa Combat Literature as an expression of word magic.Presently Dr. Powe is a life-long student and CEO of the BLAC Foundaton..

Dr. Thomas J Desch-Obi (aka TJ) – Born in _____ in _____, Dr. TJ first learned of the existence of Capoeira when he witnessed a Brazilian dance performance in the late 1970s. This performance made a lasting impression upon him and he began to learn the art in 1984. TJ said he had three teachers, the first of which was master Nego Gato followed by master Deraldo Ferreiro (both in Boston).After that Nego Gato helped bring mestre Joao Grande to the US and he trained with him for the longest amount of time. TJ then opened my academy, K&K Capoeira, in Milwaukee in 1990 where he was the primary instructor until 1994. When he was the lead instructor of K&K Capoeira, his group mostly traveled to play with the groups in Minnesota and Madison. It was only later that he found out about the groups in Chicago. He added that he doesn't know too much about the later history of capoeira instruction in the Midwest after the mid 1990s. When TJ left Milwaukee, he left the academy in charge of James Stanford and Tom Bartylla who then took over most of the instruction. TJ is now living between the East Coast and South America, and so does not return to the Midwest very often. However, he says, he still remains in touch with some of the students that remained in the area.

When asked how Capoeira has affected his life, he replied: “Capoeira **has been a real blessing in my life. It was love at first sight, and it has changed the course of my life in the sense that I devoted over ten years of my early academic career studying its African history.**

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When asked about Capoeiira’s impact upon Black people in general he replied: “I think the impact of capoeira has been really positive outside of Brazil. I never studied karate formally, but I had a lot of friends in various African American karate schools in Milwaukee and that was a powerful scene that has yet to be properly documented. They were already integrating karate into Black Power paradigms and aesthetics, **but capoeira took it to a whole new level**. In North America, it has **really helped vindicate the view that Africana culture is as rich as Asian culture**.

Presently TJ is a professor at the City University of New York's Baruch College, where he teaches in the departments of History, Black and Latino Studies, Latin American and Caribbean Studies, and Religion departments.

BENEFITS OF CAPOEIRA

There are many benefits accrued from practicing capoeira, including (but not limited to): 1) the pure enjoyment of competing in the *roda*; 2) conquest of fear and ability to defend one’s self against an adversary; 3) pushing one’s self to his or her limit; 4) perfecting one’s reflexes and remaining youthful; 5) getting needed exercise and staying in great physical shape; 6) associating with other *capoeiristas* and making new friends; 7) achieving fame as a *capoeirista*; 8) earning money by teaching or as a member of a performing group; 9) releasing tension and frustration; and 10) identifying (particularly for Afro-Americans) with a truly positive aspect of Black culture.

Appropriation

Unfortunately, today, there is a concerted effort to deny the African origin of this art. Rather, it is now being argued (and even stated in the best Brazilian dictionary) that Capoeira was the unique creation of enslaved creoles in Brazil. Moreover, it is argued that many of the characteristic movements of Capoeira are a product of the fact that their creators wore chains. Indeed, on a recent journey to Sao Tomé, I heard an employee of the Brazilian Embassy proclaim on television that “*Capoeira nasceu no Brazil*” (Capoeira was born in Brazil). The BLAC Foundation can n\ot accept this effort to tear Capoeira from its roots without a fight and will do everything possible to proclaim, as did the early capoeiristas, “*a Capoeira veio da Africa, foi Africano quem mandou* (Capoeira came from Africa it was the African who sent it). See the following link for more details concerning the origin of Capoeira.

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While umlabala is from Africa and Capoeira from Brazil, Cosmic Combat Yoga, the third of our three foundation jewels, hails from Southern India, the land of the Dravidians (Ancient Tamils) . Our foundation thus stretches over three continents.

Cosmic Combat Yoga

To establish and strengthen the spirit BLAC Foundation encourages the practice of "Cosmic Combat Yoga" which draws its inspiration from the little talked about Asiatic Black Man's creation of Yoga. Although the 8 limbs of Raja Yoga were codified by Patanjali, they predate him by thousands of years, and although Yoga in southern India was said to be "invented" by Agastyar (a Brahman midget from the north), many people hail Hanuman as its foremost disciple. According to these believers he learned the art of yoga from the sun.

In my book, Cosmic Combat Yoga: The Sixth Face of Hanuman, I defined "cosmic combat yoga" as a collection of 24 principles, but here I will streamline them to 16, namely: the eight limbs of Ashtanga Yoga (codified by Patanjali some 5,000 years ago) and the 8 dark mysteries or laws of the cosmos (cited by me on pages 159-162 of the aforementioned book), the details of which will be presented below. But first let me elucidate further on what is meant by Cosmic Combat Yoga (The Pathe of Warriors):

1) **Combat** – is an intense life-threatening struggle (indeed a battle or war) to achieve an objective in the face of an attacking enemy. On the battlefield one must face an armed external human opponent or his weapons of mass destruction; but the struggle, is nevertheless both external and internal for one must rally his own courage, defeat fear and persist in the face of adversity. If he fails to do this he will undoubtedly surrender and plead for mercy or perhaps retreat to fight another day. The yogi's struggle is also both internal and external: a) **external,** because he must defeat the products of the senses (smelling, touch, sight, hearing, tasting) that consistently assail the mind, distracting him from concentration and meditation; and b) **internal**, because he must seize control of his own mind in order to become aware of the "internal self" to free it from the bondage of lifetimes of karma in order to unite it with the godhead. Both the battlefield warrior and yogi must have confidence in his/her cause, persistence in his/her effort, and the support of fellow soldiers and allies to achieve their goals.

2) **Cosmic** – By cosmic, I mean unrestricted, uninhibited, and all embracing. That is, the struggle or combat is not restricted to a specific locality or time, but is inclusive of all one's surroundings, both internal and external. In modern warfare, soldiers may be compelled to face the threat of powerful atomic weapons aimed at them from land, sea, air, or outer space. The theater of battle is, therefore, not limited to the beach heads of Normandy or the jungles of Guadalcanal. The yogi, too, is engaged in a cosmic struggle for he must engage himself against the whole of *maya* (the illusions of the material

world) to free his *atman* (individual soul) so that it can enter into union with the *paramatman* (cosmc soul).

3) **Yoga** – Here yoga is the "science of warfare". It deals with the training of warriors (the soldiers and yogis), their weaponry (i.e. material armament or *kriya* techniques) , and strategic objectives and goals (stages of battle leading to victory; a hill perhaps in the material world or a level of meditation in the non-material world) as well as providing sufficient leadership (officers in the material world and gurus in the spiritual world) , motivation (physical booty in the material world and *siddhi* powers in the spiritual world), and support (military barracks in the material world and monastic orders in the spiritual world) to achieve the stated objectives (victory over an external enemy in the material world and victory over external and internal obstacles in the spiritual world).

4) **Warrior** – By warrior, I don't mean a simple soldier or religious mendicant; but rather an individual who makes a commitment to realize the objectives laid out for him by his officers or *gurus*. He or she is an exceptional individual who has all the "success" characteristics described by Alexander and Madino on pages 142 -145 of Cosmic Combat Yoga.

The 8 limbs of Ashtanga Yoga (as codified by Patanjali some 5,000 years agoi) are:

1. **Yama** (abstinence control) - This first step deals with one's ethical standards and sense of integrity; that is, our behavior and how we conduct ourselves. The five *yamas* (avoidances) are: a) *ahimsa* – do not be violent or injurious to others; b) *satya* – truthfulness (i.e. abstinence from lying or falseness of any kind); c) *asteya* (*asatya*) abstinence from theft; d) *bramacharya* – chastity and celibacy (abstinence from lust); e) *aparigraha* – abstinence from envy (an attitude of the mind that does not consider anything to be one's own, even one's life or physical body).

2. **Niyama** (observance control) – This second step involves individual spiritual practices promoting self-discipline. It involves regular attendance at spiritual services, saying prayers before meals, developing one's own meditation skills, etc. The five *niyamas* (things to cultivate) are: a) *sancha* – cleanliness (internal and external purity) b) *santosa* – contentment (expresses the willingness of the yogi to accept and face reality, as it is, without being elated or depressed by it. He has to bear pleasure and pain, gain and loss, fame and contempt, success and failure, sympathy and hostility with equanimity; c) *tapas* - spiritual austerities (forbearance, fasts, and other aesthetic practices to increase one's self control); d) *svadbyaya* – study and understanding of sacred scripture and of one's self (self-development or self-education); and e) *isvara pranidhana* – constant thought of the divine and surrender to His will.

3. **Asana** (posture) – The third step involves the domination of the body through the practice of various postures. Through this practice one makes discipline a habit and increases his or her ability to concentrate, both of which are essential to meditation.

4. **Pranayama** (breath control) – The fourth step up the ladder to liberation is breath control or extension. Here one learns how to master the respiratory process while at the same time becoming aware of the relationship between the breath, mind and emotions. Proper control of breathing not only rejuvenates the body but can also prolong one's life. This step can be practiced separately or integrated into various posture routines. It is usually done in a seated position.

5. **Pratyahara** - For some, this begins the second stage of the ascent and means withdrawal. Here, we make a conscious effort to draw our awareness away from the external world and outside stimuli and direct our attention inwardly. This detachment provides the practitioners with an opportunity to step back and take a look at themselves. Thus, the practitioner can objectively observe his/her cravings (i.e. habits detrimental to health that are likely to interfere with inner growth). For Shahul Hameed this is a purely mental step.

6. **Dharana** (concentration) – Having relieved oneself from outside distraction in the previous stage, the practitioner is now ready to deal with the distractions of the mind itself. In this practice of concentration (which precedes true meditation) one learns how to slow down the thinking process by concentrating on a single mental object: a specific energetic center in the body, an image of a deity, or the silent repetition of a sound. Extended periods of this one-pointed attention concentration are said to lead naturally to meditation.

7. **Dhyana** (meditation) – is a state of being keenly aware without focus and is reached when concentration becomes spontaneous. At this level, the mind having been quieted, few or no thoughts are produced.

8. **Samadhi** (final liberation). This final step is described by Patanjali as a state of ecstasy. At this point, the person meditating merges with his or her point of focus and transcends the self altogether. The practitioner then comes to realize a profound connection to the Divine, an interconnectedness with all living things, the experience of being at one with the Universe. The attainment of this bliss can neither be purchased nor possessed. It can only be experienced.

   Note that according to Jagannathan "Samadhi itself involves two steps. The first is conscious samadhi where the yogi attains supernatural powers by the strength of his Yogic practices, becomes clairvoyant, adept at mind-reading, and thought transmission.

These powers (called siddhis) are looked down upon in Yoga, but unfortunately most sanyasis never go past this stage."

According to Bharadwaj, the third chapter of the *Yoga-darshana* by Patanjali lists, among others, the following superhuman feats attained at this level of perfection: a) the ability to become big or small and heavy or light; b) the attainment of speed like that of the mind; and c) the acquisition of extreme physical prowess, beauty, grace, omniscience, and the ability to disappear. The temptation to use these powers is great; but the yogi who ignores such powers eventually attains the super consciousness where the mind is in full union with God. At this point, the bonds of the cycle of births and deaths are broken and the yogi becomes a liberated soul.

The second set of elements comprising Cosmic Combat Yoga is my codification of the "8 dark mysteries" that govern the cosmos, namely:

1. ***Nature of the Universe*** – As it is in the heavens, so it is on earth. That is. The universe is a hologram, each element of which is a reflection of the whole. Moreover, the same universal causal laws apply equally to humans, animals, and non-sentient entities that populate the universe. Indeed, the universe can be compared to a giant balloon that inflates and deflates in cycles according to prescribed natural laws. The multitude of things and beings that exist in the universe were once a single entity and are destined in time to return to that initial primordial state. Thus everything is interconnected. No man is an island unto himself.

2. **Governing forces of the Universe** – Dark matter (God, if you wish) is the origin and governing force of the Universe and everything therein. The visible universe was born out of the Big Bang; but the hundred billion bright galaxies of the known universe are bound by the gravitational pull of mysterious invisible threads of "dark matter". Indeed, according to Katherine Freese, "Dark matter particles make up more than three-quarters of the mass of the universe" and "in fact billions of them are going through us every second."

3. ***Law of attraction and repulsion*** – Matter attracts matter to the point of impact (cf. how static electricity causes small particles to cling together). When this point is reached, matter accretes, and heat is generated. This occurs with clusters of matter both large and small. When all the matter of the universe coalesces into a single unit, however, the heat produced is so great that the ball of matter explodes again (the Big Bang) producing a new universe through its dispersion. That is, imploding forces (attraction) eventually will produce exploding forces (repulsion).

4. **Law of repeated cycles** – is the inevitable product of the operation of the law of attraction and repulsion. When imploding matter reaches the critical point of saturation, it explodes outward; but remains bound by itself (like an inflated balloon). As the dispersed matter cools (cf. air is released from the balloon), the law of attraction reasserts itself until the point of saturation is reached again. Although this is my contention, it is not an original thought for ancient philosophers and some modern astronomers have drawn the same conclusion. [Cf. the Black American saying: What goes around, comes around.]

5. ***Plains of existence*** - -There are gross (the physical body) and subtle (the spiritual) plains of existence, both of which (according to law #1 above) are governed by the same causal laws. That is, just as gross bodies attract each other, so do subtle bodies. This accounts for what we might call "true love". The "big bang" created charged bodies and it can be said that similarly charged bodies attract each other (if there is no intervening force field obstacle). That is why (by natural law) "birds of a feather, flock together".

6. ***Nature of will*** - All living beings through their intellectual capacity, are able to orient themselves physically and spiritually to a proximate (a stronger) or distant (weaker) force of attraction. Hindus call the distant force of attraction "god"; but you can call it anything you will. This distant force (by the law of attraction) attracts you to God as well as God to you. That is, it is a natural phenomenon. On a lesser plain good people are naturally attracted to good people and bad people are naturally attracted to bad people.

7. ***Nature of impediments*** – In the physical world, the moon is attracted to the Sun; but because it is distant (weaker), that force is not strong enough to break free the stronger force of the earth's gravitational pull. The earth, too, is attracted to the sun; but the sun is not close enough to pull it closer. The force of attraction between the subtle bodies (in the spiritual plain) is likewise diminished in strength by the crass physical envelopes in which they are embedded. In other words, the mutual attraction and eventual union of the individual subtle bodies (souls) and the great subtle body (God) is blocked by the crass physical envelope (the living body) in which the individualized subtle body (the soul) is entrapped as well as by neighboring bodies created by karma. Thus, a willing soul may be impeded in achieving its unification with God, not only by its own material encasement but also of proximate forces pulling in an opposing direction.

8. ***Meaning of life*** - Life can be defined as the attachment of bio-energy to matter resulting in the capacity to reproduce through cell division and its basic aim is to survive and reproduce itself. The supreme realization (goal) of an individual soul (and

indeed mankind) by cosmic law, however, is not merely to reproduce itself like bacteria and dogs or cats; but rather to bind itself with the great soul mass (God) while still conscious of its individuality, for without the physical body, the soul (being of the same nature as the great soul mass) loses its uniqueness. Indeed, the meaning of (and the highest goal in evolutionary human life) is to unite with god and, through compassion for one's fellow beings, elevate the entire species of "manhood" to godhood" [cf. Black 5 percenters] . In short, sacrifice and ego-denial does not necessarily lead to depressing sadness and detachment; but rather, through helping ourselves as well as others, can enhance our appreciation and enjoyment of the phenomenal world in which we are entrapped.

Cosmic Combat Yoga in the Midwest

While the BLAC Foundation has not formally introduced Cosmic Combat Yoga in the Midwest as yet, its "rising star initiative" now counts with 2 individuals in Madison and one in Missouri who aspire to become Cosmic Combat Warriors. There are also already more than 18 Cosmic Combat Warriors in southern India (for which see pgs. 77-138) of Cosmic Combat Yoga, the Sixth Face of Hanuman.

According to statements obtained in interviews with them, they have all benefitted enormously from walking this "path" . Although none of them have reported the acquisition of siddhic powers as yet, they have all reported continuing good health, peace of mind, success in school or at work, victories in competitions, visions of longevity, and a burning desire to help their fellowman. Our "rising stars" in Madsion and Missouri (both of whom do Umlabalaba, Yoga and Capoeira) will undoubtedly reap the same results as they mature in the path.

CONCLUSION

This brings to an end the presentation of the three "black jewels" upon which we can build our houses, hopes, and aspirations. There are countless other jewels that can be added to this base, according to whim or inclination, including break dancing, hiphop, jazz, blues, gospel, voodoo, reggae, sega, seggae, calypso, Ethiopian Christianity, Santeria, Macumba, Xango, etc. Nevertheless, these three alone constitute a solid and durable foundation that can serve not only to unify our body, minds, and spirit , but also give us a sense of well-being to boot. Moreover, this foundation will help forge a stronger bond between black Americans and other black populations around the world with an ultimate aim of attaining "social justice" by making all peoples aware of the value of black folk as a whole so that we, too, will be a welcome guest at the table of humanity. As the keynote speaker at the 2024 MLK Celebration at the Overture Theater

in Madison asserted in his presentation: “If we aren’t seated at the table, we will find ourself on the menu.”

Note that for those interested in learning more about: a) **umabalaba** - see https://blacfoundation.org/umlabalaba-game; b) **capoeira** see https://blacfoundation.org/capoeira/ and https://blacfoundation.org/faca/ and c) **cosmic combat yoga,** see https://blacfoundation.org/body-mind-spirit/

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