MARTIAL ARTS STUDIES

BEN PENGLASE

THE UNSPOKEN WHITENESS OF BRAZILIAN JIU-JITSU: THE GRACIES VERSUS LUTA LIVRE

ABSTRACT

This article explores why the relationship between race and Brazilian jiu-jitsu, and the ways that Brazilian jiu-jitsu has been racialized as white, have often been invisible, particularly for non-Brazilians. It argues that both non-Brazilians who practice the martial art, and the scholarly analysis of jiu-jitsu, have often ignored how the marital art has been positioned as 'white' within Brazil's complex and highly unequal structures of racial dominance. Focusing on challenge matches that the Gracie family fought against practitioners of luta livre (a Brazilian style of catch-wrestling), the article shows how these matches located jiu-jitsu within Brazil's racial hierarchy, though often in implicit ways. The article situates this process within the academic literature of race in Brazil which argues that race, and in particular whiteness, is often vitally socially-important, yet also rarely directly spoken about.

CONTRIBUTORS

R. Ben Penglase is an associate professor of anthropology and Latin American Studies at Loyola University Chicago. He is a cultural anthropologist whose first major research project focused on urban violence, inequality and insecurity in poor urban neighborhoods in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. His research interests also include Brazilian jiu-jitsu, race, gender and embodiment. He teaches classes on Latin American culture, human rights, culture and violence, and the cultural construction of the body.

KEYWORDS

Brazil, Gracie family, jiu-jitsu, luta livre, martial arts, race, wrestling

Accepted for publication on 25 November 2025

Penglase, B. (2025). The unspoken whiteness of Brazilian jiu-jitsu: The Gracies versus luta livre. *Martial Arts Studies, 18*, 78–93.
https://doi.org/10.18573/mas.300

The Unspoken Whiteness of Brazilian Jiu-jitsu: The Gracies versus Luta Livre

Ben Penglase

INTRODUCTION: BRAZILIAN JIU-JITSU'S MOMENT OF RACIAL AWAKENING

A common narrative in many Brazilian jiu-jitsu academies is that they are spaces of male sociability where racial, ethnic, religious and other forms of difference are set aside[1]. The jiu-jitsu gym where I trained in Chicago for over 12 years, for instance, posted the following on Facebook in 2016: 'Race disconnected us; religion separated us; politics divided us; and wealth classified us. In Jiu-jitsu we are all the same.' [2] That the photo which accompanied this post showed sixteen men and only one woman was revealing. Yet in all its contradictions, the post captured a common sentiment: that 'the mats' are a space where racial and ethnic differences among men are unimportant and what matters is one's skill, ability and determination to learn. In a widely circulated post on Instagram, Renzo Gracie, a Brazilian jiu-jitsu teacher, former Ultimate Fighting Championship (U.F.C.) competitor, and grandson of Carlos Gracie, one of the co-creators of Brazilian jiu-jitsu, put it this way, in the idiosyncratic English of a native Portuguese-speaker:

> On the mats, doesn't exist the color of your skin, doesn't exist your religion, doesn't exist your nationality, everyone there are brothers. You sweat with them, you exchange your knowledge with them, you accept them the way that they are.[3]

Yet in 2020, in the wake of the protests after the murder of George Floyd and heated discussions about the role of racism in American society, Brazilian jiu-jitsu in the United States seemed to have a moment of racial reckoning. Journalists who cover the mixed martial arts world pointed out that many prominent Brazilian jiu-jitsu teachers supported Brazil's far right-wing president Jair Bolsonaro, who has a history of making statements that many see as racist (Zidan, 2020; Guardian, 2023). [4] And then racist tweets from prominent Brazilian jiu-jitsu competitors and teachers, including ones quoting Nazi ideologues, surfaced. After reading such an article, a Black man who trains at the Brazilian jiu-jitsu academy that I trained at in Chicago wrote on social media that he was dismayed by 'troubling facts about someone that I personally hold … or held … in high regard.' Black and Asian jiu-jitsu practitioners at the gym where I trained began to openly talk about incidents that had happened to them while training that they identified as racist.

For many Brazilians, the conservative political views of many Brazilian jiu-jitsu teachers, and the ways in which jiu-jitsu is interconnected with Brazil's deeply entrenched racial and economic inequalities, were hardly surprising. Yet Americans who practice the art seemed to suddenly wake up not only to the often racist, sexist and homophobic views of many (though not all) Brazilian jiu-jitsu teachers, but also to the deeper ways in which the art is racialized. This is particularly surprising, since Brazil has the largest population of African-descended people in the Western hemisphere and has deeply entrenched patterns of racial inequality. According to Brazil's 2022 official census, approximately 45.3% of the country's population described themselves as pardo (a term meaning of mixed race) and 10.2% classified themselves as preto (Black), while 43.5% reported being white and fewer than one percent classified themselves as indigenous or Asian (Belandi & Gomes, 2023).[5] Despite this multi-racial makeup, and contrary to a commonly held belief that racism is relatively rare in Brazil, research has consistently shown that patterns of racial discrimination are deep and pervasive. In a review of the relevant literature, Marcelo Paixão states: 'ethnographies, official statistics, and surveys from 1990-2020 confirm that a racial hierarchy system and racial injustice, violence, and inequality prevail in Brazil' (Paixão, 2021; see also Telles, 2004).

This article explores how and why the relationship between race and Brazilian jiu-jitsu has often been invisible, particularly for non-Brazilians. It argues that often missing from how non-Brazilians perceive the martial art, and from the scholarly analysis of jiu-jitsu, is how the marital art has been positioned as 'white' within Brazil's complex and highly unequal structures of racial dominance. Particularly important in this process are the strategies that the Gracie family, particularly the brothers Carlos and Hélio, used in Brazil to promote their version of jiu-jitsu,

1 This article uses the term 'jiu-jitsu,' which is one of the more common ways to spell the name of the martial art (along with jiu jitsu and ju jutsu). The term has evolved due to variations in the Romanization of Japanese words, the Brazilian pronunciation of the Japanese term, and a broader lack of Japanese language knowledge. The standardized Japanese Romanized spelling of 柔術 is jujutsu (the author thanks an anonymous reviewer for this information). The article also uses jiu-jitsu to distinguish the Brazilian version from the Japanese style.

2 This article is based on a combination of archival research and ethnographic research conducted in the United States and Brazil with the formal approval of my institution's Institutional Review Board (as project #1178). In keeping with this journal's policy, I am disguising the locations of my ethnographic research.

3 This quote was reposted on Instagram by one of the instructors with whom I trained. To maintain the anonymity of that person and their academy, I am not providing a full citation.

4 Most prominent, in the online MMA news world, were articles published in 2020 by Karim Zidan on the site Bloody Elbow, especially one entitled 'From Pioneer to Propagandist: Renzo Gracie's history of hate' (Zidan, 2020).

5 The percentages of people in Brazil who identify as Black or mixed-race (pardo) has been growing in past twenty years indicating, among other things, that these seemingly 'fixed' racial categories are sometimes flexible (Telles & Flores, 2013, pp. 421-422). Many researchers have argued that these census categories condense and oversimplify a wider range of descriptive terms that are used in daily life in Brazil (Harris et al., 1993; Sanjek, 1971; Telles, 2004).

especially their now-legendary 'challenge fights' against partitioners of other styles of martial arts. [6]

As they promoted their brand of jiu-jitsu, Carlos and Hélio Gracie and their students fought high-profile challenge matches against a range of other fighters, but especially those who practice three other martial arts: capoeira, judo and luta live (a Brazilianized version of catch wrestling). In what scholars Riqueldi Lise and André Capraro have called a 'hegemonic narrative' about the development of Brazilian jiu-jitsu, these matches are seen as playing a crucial role in developing a fighting style that came to be seen as especially effective in combat situations with few rules. They also linked Brazilian jiu-jitsu to one family, the Gracies (Lise & Capraro, 2018, p. 319). José Cairus has also explored how the Gracies sought to use these challenges to situate their brand of jiu-jitsu within Brazilian nationalist narratives (Cairus, 2011, 2020).

The hegemonic narrative about the creation of Brazilian jiu-jitsu also privileges the roles of Carlos and Hélio Gracie. As Tiago Negrão Andrade points out, this entails the erasure of the role of other jiu-jitsu lineages, such as the one connected to Oswaldo Fadda, and minimizes the importance of Carlson Gracie (Andrade, 2025). Significantly, and as will be further detailed below, both Fadda and Carlson Gracie broke with the elitist orientation of Carlos and Hélio Gracie and taught a much wider range of students including many from working-class and non-white backgrounds (see also Drysdale 2020).

Building upon these analyzes, this article examines how these matches that Carlos and Hélio Gracie and their students waged against luta livre fighters occurred within a Brazilian racial context which positioned Brazilian jiu-jitsu as 'white.' As many scholars have pointed out, whiteness must be understood not only as culturally-constructed, but also as deeply relational, built out of a set of contrasts and comparisons (Frankenberg, 2020; Ware & Black, 2002, p. 5). In addition, Patrícia Pinho notes that in Brazil 'whiteness is less frequently explicitly marked than it is more commonly implicitly and carefully manipulated' (Pinho, 2009, p. 44). In a different article, I show how challenge matches with capoeira fighters and Japanese judo fighters positioned Brazilian jiu-jitsu as 'white,' (Penglase 2025).

This article examines the often-unacknowledged racial subtext of matches between the Gracies and their students, on the one hand, and practitioners of luta livre, on the other. These fights are now somewhat legendary in the lore of Brazilian jiu-jitsu. Along with the style of Japanese judo that the Gracies developed, luta livre, a Brazilianized style of European and American catch-wrestling, was a widely popular style of combat in Brazil. As such, it presented a double challenge to the Gracies: not only was it explicitly oriented towards hand-to-hand combat, but it could also claim to be a truly Brazilian fighting style.

Less commonly noted, though, are the racialized undertones of these challenges. Luta livre was most often practiced by working-class, Black, and mixed-raced Brazilian men. As such, it fit very comfortably within Brazil's hegemonic racial ideology which extols and celebrates racial mixture as a central aspect of Brazilian national identity. The Gracies, by contrast, actively sought to connect their art and their family to Brazil's wealthy, and white, upper-class. Yet they also wanted to claim the banner of 'truly-Brazilian' fighting heroes. Thus, challenges with luta livre fighters were not simply about proving the combat superiority of jiu-jitsu, but also about positioning it as both white, yet also Brazilian. In this case, the 'whiteness' of Brazilian jiu-jitsu was not simply the product of the phenotype of its practitioners, but was 'spoken' through other registers, in particular class and urban space.

While this article focuses on race and Brazilian jiu-jitsu, it is important to point out, as Ali Rattansi and others have argued, that racialization 'always exists in complex imbrication with nation, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality' (Rattansi, 2005, p. 296). Particularly significant for the argument that follows is how race, and in particular whiteness, intersects with masculinity. Analysts have long pointed out that sports often carry gendered meanings, naturalizing supposedly innate differences between men and women, and perpetuating dominant ideologies about masculinity and femininity (Coakley, 1989, p. 35; Besnier et al., 2018, p. 128-129). Scholars who have examined combat sports, and sports involving extensive physical contact more generally, have pointed out that these sports often buttress an understanding of masculinity that emphasizes strength, aggression, competitiveness and the ability to physically dominate others (Messner, 1990; Messner & Sabo, 1990; Schiller, 2020).[7]

In keeping with scholarship on masculinity and sports, this article analyzes gender as a dynamic system of relations, within which multiple forms of masculinity may be enacted or contested (Connell, 1995). Seen in this way, this article will argue that more than simply promoting a brand of masculinity associated with strength, the strategies that Carlos and Hélio Gracie used to promote their art associated jiu-jitsu with a specifically white form of masculinity. As Richard Dyer has perceptively argued, normative white masculinity is not associated with 'innate' physical strength, but rather with bodies whose 'natural' urges have been trained and channeled and whose strength is the product of deliberate, rational, planning (Dyer, 2017). As the article will show, Brazilian jiu-jitsu came to be associated not simply with men from the Gracie family who could be victorious over men who practiced other martial arts. More importantly, the Gracies promoted their martial art by connecting success in fighting other men not with brute strength, but with the ability to learn specific skills and techniques. In a highly patriarchal way, these techniques, which were supposedly created by the first

6 This article does not examine whether Brazilian jiu-jitsu is its own martial art, or simply a variety of Kodokan-derived Japanese judo, with which it shares many similarities. Instead of attempting to assess what Brazilian jiu-jitsu 'really' is, this article analyzes the strategies and rhetoric that the Gracies used to promote their style to show how these strategies fit within a larger Brazilian understanding of race.

7 There is also a growing body of literature which addresses the experiences of women in martial arts and combat sports (see, for example, Matthews & Channon, 2015).

generation of Gracie brothers, were then passed on to their sons and grandsons.[8]

While the Gracies worked hard to cultivate the patronage of wealthier people living in Rio's more prosperous Southern Zone, luta livre was associated with the less wealthy and more Black and mixed-race northern parts of the city of Rio. There were also people teaching jiu-jitsu in this part of the city. In the early 1950s, Oswaldo Fadda opened a jiu-jitsu gym in the working class neighborhood of Bento Ribeiro (Schapira, 2019, p. 117; Laydner 2014: loc 3776). Fadda studied jiu-jitsu under Luiz França Filho, who in turn most likely learned jiu-jitsu from some of the first Japanese to teach the martial art in Brazil.[9] And while Fadda's school is often spoken of as a 'non-Gracie' lineage, the evidence to support this is unclear.[10] Much more importantly, though, unlike Carlos and Hélio Gracie, Oswaldo Fadda very deliberately sought to make his academy an open and inclusive space, often not charging students and making instruction available to the underprivileged and handicapped (Drysdale, 2020, p. 194; Schapira, 2019, p. 117; Telles and Barreira, 2025, p. 213). And while this article focuses on competitions that Carlos and Hélio Gracie and their students fought with luta livre practitioners, the Gracies also fought competitions against Fadda's students (Ferreira, 2019, p. 21). As this article will show, like the contrast between Gracie-derived jiu-jitsu and luta livre, the contrast with jiu-jitsu practitioners from Fadda's lineage also had clear racial undertones, though these were largely implicit.

In the end, as the article will show, the style of jiu-jitsu that the Gracies practiced did not eradicate luta livre. Instead, jiu-jitsu ended up becoming far more economically profitable than luta livre, while also incorporating aspects of luta livre, such as fighting without a judogi (what is now called 'no-gi') into its own style. Here too, the racial and class connotations are worth emphasizing: the whiter and wealthier style incorporated aspects of a darker and more working-class style into its own system, as a 'specialized' part of a larger set of techniques, while also allowing luta livre to continue to occupy marginalized economic, social and urban spaces.

To be clear, this article examines the processes through which Brazilian jiu-jitsu was racialized and associated with white masculinity, examining how the martial art came to carry meanings associated with race which located it in Brazil's highly unequal system of racial domination. It does not claim that any specific practitioners of jiu-jitsu are, themselves, racist. Rather, this article will show how through challenge matches with luta livre fighters, the Gracies positioned their style of jiu-jitsu within Brazil's racial hierarchy as a 'white' male social practice, though most often in ways that were unspoken and implicit. By the time the Gracies brought their jiu-jitsu to the United States, in the 1980s, the 'whiteness' of their art was fully legible to the people who already knew how to understand Brazil's racial system. For many others, like the friends I trained with in Chicago, this racialization was invisible until it was dramatically brought to light.

This article will analyze this process by first providing an overview of the scholarly literature on racial structures in Brazil, with particular attention to the complexities and contradictions of 'whiteness.' It will then examine how the Gracie family, who trace their ancestry to Scotland, claim to have developed a brand of jiu-jitsu initially brought to Brazil by a Japanese immigrant. The article will then show how the Gracies deliberately marketed their brand of jiu-jitsu to elite, and disproportionately white, men in the city of Rio, and also how their brand of jiu-jitsu came to be racialized as 'white,' though most often in implicit ways. The bulk of the article further explores how jiu-jitsu was racialized by examining challenge matches that the Gracies and people who practiced their style of jiu-jitsu fought against people who practiced luta livre, which was most often associated with Rio's poor, Black and mixed-race population. The final result, the paper will argue, was that Brazilian jiu-jitsu came to be understood as 'white,' though in terms that were largely implicit and 'invisible' to Brazilians exactly because they seemed, in retrospect, so 'obvious.'

RACE IN BRAZIL AND THE COMPLEXITY OF WHITENESS

Part of why the racial context of Brazilian jiu-jitsu has not been easily legible, especially to non-Brazilians, is because of how race in Brazil functions in ways that are both similar to the United States and other countries, yet also unique. As Denise da Silva has argued, colonialism and slavery, and the circulation of ideologies which grew out of and accompanied them, have led to race being a common discursive basis for the worldwide subordination of Black and non-white people (Da Silva, 1998). A common aspect of these ideologies is how they privilege whiteness as superior. Yet, as da Silva argues, Brazil's racial ideologies also have a specific, local, dynamic.

Several aspects of racial relations in Brazil need to be highlighted to understand the context within which the Gracies promoted their martial art. Brazil has a long history of racial miscegenation,

8 Between the two of them, Carlos and Hélio Gracie, the two brothers often seen as having developed Brazilian jiu-jitsu, had 18 sons by seven different women (Gracie, 2008). Carlos Gracie alone had 21 children with six women.

9 Some people claim that França studied jiu-jitsu under Mitsuyo Maeda, the same Japanese immigrant said to have taught Carlos Gracie (França Paz, 2022, p. 1761). However, there is little direct evidence of this, and exactly who França learned jiu-jitsu from seems unclear. Some sources claim that França studied with Soshihiro Satake, a Japanese jiu-jitsu instructor who first came to Brazil with Maeda and settled for a time in the city of Manaus, where he opened a judo academy (Laydner 2014: loc 1231). Others speculate that França may have learned jiu-jitsu when he was in the military, from Takeo Yano, who taught jiu-jitsu to the Brazilian Navy (Drysdale, 2020, p. 178).

10 Oswaldo Fadda's main jiu-jitsu instructor was Luiz França Filho (Ferreira, 2019, p. 20; Telles and Barreira, 2025, p. 208). França, in turn, seems to have at one point been a student of Hélio Gracie (Drysdale, 2020, p. 193; Ferreira, 2019, p. 21). While these disputes about lineages might seem arcane, and clearly simplify a much more complex process of learning, they are also indicative of the symbolic weight now attached to whether or not someone studied under the first generation of Gracies, in particular Carlos and Hélio.

and a tradition of trans-racial cordiality, particularly among the lower classes (Sansone, 2003, p. 8). Livio Sansone has pointed out that unlike in the United States – though like much of Latin America – Brazilians tend to not group people into separate, and clearly-bounded, racial groups. Rather, people are often located, and locate themselves, along a spectrum of different colors, and often avoid using the 'extremes' of white (branco) or black (preto or negro). Sansone emphasizes that this 'flexible' system nonetheless privileges whiteness, noting that a person might use 'whiter' intermediary terms – most often moreno – to classify someone with whom they are friendly (Sansone, 2003, p. 45). Liv Sovik notes that as a result, hegemonic discourse in Brazil 'affirms mestiçagem [racial mixture] as a primary national characteristic, and claims that Brazilian society is non-racist and open to a multiplicity of racial identities' (Sovik, 2004, p. 315). Yet, as Peter Wade has pointed out, in a dynamic common in many parts of Latin America, celebrating racial-mixture and using a variety of terms to categorize people can coexist with racism and pervasive racial inequalities (Wade, 2008).

In his analysis of race in Brazil, Carl Degler documented a wide variety of racial terms that Brazilians use to classify themselves. He noted that terms like 'mulatto' describe a wide range of appearances between black and white, and that distinctions 'are between lighter and darker, not simply between Negro and mulatto or mulatto and white' (Degler, 1971, p. 104). Degler also argued that a person's racial classification can depend not simply upon phenotype (or appearance), but it can be influenced by social criteria such as wealth, education and class (see also Telles, 2002, p. 417). Degler argued that racial relations in Brazil were less conflictive than in the United States. Yet he also understood Brazil's system of multiple racial terms to be a hierarchical one, where greater wealth could position a person 'closer' to white and, as a result, higher in the social hierarchy (Degler, 1971, p. 105).

Scholars have repeatedly argued that the use of multiple color terms to identify individuals, the relative absence of clear-cut racial categories, and the nationalist exaltation of racial-mixture (or mestiçagem), hardly mean that Brazil is non-racist. Substantial research has shown that racial inequalities in Brazil are deep and enduring, with negative consequences for the life outcomes for those classified as Black or pardo, the official census term for mixed-race (Hasenbalg, 1985; Hasenbalg & Silva, 1999; Lovell and Wood, 1988; Silva, 1985; Silva, 1999; Telles, 2004). Degler famously argued that Brazil's 'mulatto escape hatch,' or the opportunity for social mobility allocated to some mixed-race people, means that Brazil lacked the formal separation of the races and patterns of racial animosity common in the United States. Nevertheless, he observed that pejorative attitudes toward Blacks are 'rather widespread in Brazil' (Degler, 1971, p. 113).

More recent scholarship has argued that locating individuals on a racial spectrum rather than in discrete categories and emphasizing the inherently 'mixed' nature of Brazil's demographic make-up can go hand-in-hand with privileging whiteness. This underlying preference for whiteness is a legacy of post-abolitionist immigration policies which sought to 'whiten' Brazil's population by encouraging European immigration (Sovik, 2004, p. 315; Skidmore, 1993, p. 64). Historian Thomas Skidmore notes that in the 1930s, prominent Brazilian intellectuals like Oliveira Vianna and Paulo Prado affirmed that while there were no inherent differences between the races, European immigration would lead to a 'whiter' population with black 'traits' eventually disappearing (Skidmore, 1993, pp. 200-205). In this way, Pinho argues, such nationalist ideologies simultaneously celebrated racial mixture while 'confirming racialized assumptions of Brazilian tradition as embedded in mestiçagem' (Pinho, 2009, p. 49). Kabengele Munanga points out that while such nationalist ideologies posit the harmonious coexistence of people of different social groups, they also 'allow the dominant elites to conceal inequalities and prevent members of non-white communities from being aware of the subtle mechanisms of exclusion of which they are victims' (Munanga, 1999, p. 80).

For the purposes of the analysis of race in Brazilian jiu-jitsu, there are two key points to draw out of the larger literature on race in Brazil. First, as many have noted, Brazilians are often simultaneously deeply aware of racial differences while also, because of a nationalist ideology that claims that Brazil is free of racial animosity, very reluctant to speak openly about racism. Degler noted that while Brazilians might be more conscious of color differences than people in the US, there is also a widespread refusal to 'recognize, or even talk about, the problem of race or color' (Degler, 1971, p. 167, p. 207). More recently, in her ethnography of race relations in Rio de Janeiro, Robin Sherrif argued that while there are clearly visible patterns of racism, there is a widespread 'cultural censorship' which leads Brazilians to systematically refrain from explicit discussion of racism (Sheriff, 2001).

João Costa Vargas, in an insightful analysis, argues that Brazilian social relations are characterized by two, seemingly opposite, dynamics. On the one hand, Brazilians have an intense preoccupation with how to classify themselves and others within a racial hierarchy, which Costa Vargas terms a 'hyperconsciousness of race' (Costa Vargas, 2004). At the same time, Brazil's hegemonic racial ideology not only valorizes mestiçagem, but also insists that race does not play a significant role in social life. Costa Vargas argues that this produces a common 'vehement negation of the importance of race' (Costa Vargas, 2004, p. 444). It is precisely this dynamic – hyper-awareness of racial difference combined with a reluctance to speak openly about racism – that has played a key role in why race has so often been invisible in Brazilian jiu-jitsu. For non-Brazilians, as well has many Brazilians, the country is seen as relatively free of racial prejudice. Yet at the same time, racial differences are intensely monitored and experienced, though most often in ways that are implicit.

The second key to understanding of the racialization of Brazilian jiu-jitsu is the nature of 'whiteness' in Brazil, and how it is also similar to, yet different from, whiteness elsewhere. If race is to be understood as culturally-constructed, dynamic and contested, and as varying across geographic and social spaces, then whiteness must be understood as not simply inherent in a person's

appearance or ancestry. Rather, following Ruth Frankenberg's classic formulation, it is essential to understand whiteness as 'location of structural advantage' (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 1). In this sense, 'whiteness' is not simply a way to classify a person based upon their appearance, but is a location within a hierarchy which is connected to a set of social practices.

In other words, the 'whiteness' of Brazilian jiu-jitsu does not necessarily refer to the appearances of those who practice it, but to how the Gracies located the practice within a larger set of racialized assumptions and meanings. Degler, for instance, noted a widespread tendency not only to 'value white or light color and to disprize dark color or black,' but also to see white 'as the symbol of success, virtue, purity, goodness' (Degler, 1971, pp. 210-211). Another common pattern is for whiteness to be presented as the 'norm' or standard against which other races are assessed and evaluated, in effect rendering whiteness as ubiquitous and hence 'invisible' (Dyer, 2017, pp. 2-3). Cida Bento likewise notes a common pattern in Brazil whereby whiteness is presented as the 'universal' and 'rational' (Bento, 2022). As Frankenberg astutely stated, in many cases 'whiteness does not speak its own name' (Frankenberg, 2020, p. 417).

Scholars of Brazil have pointed out, though, that while whiteness in Brazil as in other parts of the world is often unspoken, it nonetheless can take rather specific local forms. Brazil's racial common sense insists that the country is inherently racially-mixed, and that this racial mixture is fundamental to Brazilian culture. This renders whiteness in Brazil, as John Norvell has argued, 'uncomfortable' (Norvell, 2002). On the one hand, greater degrees of whiteness clearly correspond to higher social status. Yet Brazilian racial common sense not only rejects such notions of racial 'purity' but identifies the 'truly' Brazilian person as racially-mixed.

Scholars have noted that 'whiteness' in the Brazilian context, is highly variable, and does not necessarily mean that a person has no non-white ancestry (Sovik, 2004, p. 315). Rather, people are thought of as possessing different 'degrees' of whiteness depending not just on their appearance, but on other social qualities such as income, education, and class status. Pinho argues that in Brazil, whiteness 'is not defined only by skin color; it requires a much wider economy of signs' (Pinho, 2009, p. 39). In this context, not only are there no clear racial dividing lines, but there are 'degrees of whiteness' including people who are 'white but not quite' (Pinho, p. 40). Further, many scholars have noted that people who are identified as white in Brazil might not be classified as white in the United States or Europe (Degler, 1971, p. 103; Sovik, 2004, p. 323).

As will be detailed below, the implications of this complex racial system – in particular how it makes race both of central importance and yet unspeakable, and how whiteness is both a site of privilege and yet contested and unstable – were central to both how the Gracies positioned their art, and to why this positioning was often not visible outside of Brazil. Not only did Carlos and Hélio Gracie position their jiu-jitsu as 'white,' but this whiteness was often unspoken, and racial differences were both highly socially-meaningful, and yet not explicitly articulated. Two of the key 'subtle mechanisms of exclusion,' to borrow Munanga's term, through which jiu-jitsu was positioned as white, and through which race was spoken, were by linking it to specific urban spaces and social classes (Munanga, 1999).

THE GRACIES AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF BRAZILIAN JIU-JITSU

In the hegemonic narrative about the creation of Brazilian jiu-jitsu, sometime around 1916, Carlos Gracie, the eldest of five brothers, is said to have learned jiu-jitsu from Mitsuyo Maeda, a Japanese immigrant to Brazil (Cairus, 2011, p. 112).[11] In 1922, the Gracie family moved from the Amazonian city of Belém to Rio de Janeiro, then Brazil's capital (Lise & Capraro, 2018, p. 322). There – or so it's often stated – Carlos opened up a jiu-jitsu school and taught this martial art to his four brothers, especially the youngest Gracie brother, Hélio. Thomas Green and Joseph Svinth state that the opening of the Gracie academy in Rio 'marks the official birth of the system known today as Gracie Jiu-jitsu' (Green & Svinth, 2003, p. 67).

In the narrative about the creation of Brazilian jiu-jitsu, much is often made about the foundational role of Hélio Gracie in taking the martial art said to have been taught by Maeda to his oldest brother, Carlos, and transforming it into something new. For instance, Green and Svinth credit Brazilian jiu-jitsu's emphasis on groundwork 'to the innovations of Hélio Gracie' (Green & Svinth, 2001, p. 54). Hélio Gracie's role in developing jiu-jitsu is also a moment where the 'whitening' of Gracie jiu-jitsu intersects with masculinity. Dyer notes the white male body is often understood not as naturally strong, but as the product of the superiority of mind over body (Dyer, 2017, p. 161). Many authors emphasize that as a young boy, Hélio was skinny, physically frail and weak (Gracie, 2008, p. 66; Green & Svinth, 2001, p. 54; Peligro, 2003, p. 15). Because of this and because of his young age, Hélio was not allowed to participate in classes but could only observe his brothers as they taught. Hélio is said to have paid close attention to the uses of leverage and techniques that could allow smaller people to defeat larger ones, rather than relying on the more aggressive style of his brother Carlos (Peligro 2003, p. 15). Eventually, Carlos was unable to teach class one day, and Hélio stepped in. The author Kid Peligro, in a popular biography of the Gracie family, states that Carlos quickly recognized Hélio's 'genius for innovation and instruction' (Peligro, 2003, p. 16).

11 As several people have pointed out, and as I detail in a different article (Penglase, 2025), much of this is under dispute: not only is it not clear how long Carlos studied with Maeda, but many sources claim that Carlos may have mainly learned jiu-jitsu from Brazilian students of Maeda such as Jacyntho Ferro and Donato Pires dos Reis (Pedreira, 2014, pp. 133-134; Ferreira, 2019, p. 18).

As Dyer argues, the body of white men is often depicted as 'the body made possible by their natural mental superiority. … it is built, a product of the application of thought and planning, an achievement' (Dyer, 2017, p. 164). As if echoing this analysis, Reila Gracie, Carlos's daughter, states: 'under the influence of Carlos, Hélio began to overcome his insecurities and fears, no longer being affected by weakness and pain in his joints' (Gracie, 2008, p. 69). As will be detailed below, it is significant that Hélio, an almost a prototypical example of the white man's ability to use determination, will power and rational thought to overcome weaknesses, featured in many of the challenge fights that the Gracies would stage in Rio to publicize their jiu-jitsu school.

When they began teaching jiu-jitsu in Rio de Janeiro, the Gracies were also doing so within an already established larger racial context. Long before Carlos Gracie and his family arrived in Rio, the martial art that Gracie claimed to have learned from Maeda was already inserted within a complex racial context. Maeda was not the first Japanese person to have practiced jiu-jitsu in Brazil, and challenge matches between jiu-jitsu practitioners and those who used other fighting styles were already common. Famously, in 1909, a travelling Japanese fighter named Sada Miyako lost a challenge match to a capoeira fighter nicknamed Cyríaco (Cairus, 2011, p. 102; Laydner, 2014, loc. 1358; Pedreira, 2014, pp. 49-50). The style that Carlos Gracie claimed to have inherited from Maeda was thus already actively compared to capoeira, which was closely associated with Afro-Brazilian culture. Carlos Gracie and his brothers also had to distinguish their style from other Kodokan-derived styles taught by Japanese immigrants in Brazil who began to arrive in Brazil in 1908, most of whom followed Jigoro Kano by calling their art 'judo.' The Gracies thus, also had to distinguish their style as 'Brazilian,' and not Asian.

When the Gracies moved to Rio, though, they also faced another set of challenges and contrasts, which had yet more implications for how their style of jiu-jitsu was racialized. Cairus points out that the Gracies were descendants a formerly aristocratic, Scottish, family, who were downwardly mobile due to poor business decisions made by Gastão Gracie, Carlos and Hélio's father, during the Amazonian rubber boom (Cairus, 2011, p. 113). Moving to Rio was a strategy that sought to improve the family's economic fortune by teaching martial arts to Rio's economic and political elite. The racial components of this move are also important to point out. While the Gracies clearly possessed a European last name, their 'whiteness' was by no means guaranteed. Sovik notes that in Brazil, 'North American or European origins regularly trump Brazilian systems of prestige' (Sovik, 2004, p. 317). Yet, if 'whiteness' is to be understood as not uniform, but as internally variable and stratified – as composed of, in Pinho's terms, 'degrees' of whiteness – how the Gracies marketed their style of martial art was key not just to the family's financial success, but to its social, and hence racial, status.

The Gracies also arrived in a city where another Brazilian fighting style, luta livre, was already well-known and widely-practiced. In the late nineteenth century, wrestling (usually called lucta romana, or 'Greco-Roman') was often a component of travelling circuses (Lise et al., 2018, p. 166; Pedreira, 2014, p. 16). Particularly important in popularizing luta livre in the city of Rio de Janeiro was Paschoal Segreto, an Italian immigrant and self-made entertainment mogul (Pedreira, 2014, p. 23; Chazkel, 2011, p. 197). Among his many other ventures, Segreto organized wrestling tournaments in Rio in 1906, 1907 and 1909 (Lise et al., 2018, p. 167). These events were immensely popular. Historian Amy Chazkel notes that by the time Segreto died in 1920, 'he was a restauranteur, urban developer, theater producer, boxing and jiujitsu promoter, and local celebrity' (Chazkel, 2011, p. 197). Chazkel also notes that part of Segreto's success was because he deliberately marketed entertainment towards Rio's working class, and hence to a largely, though not exclusively, Black and mixed-race audience.

One final aspect of these early days also deserves mention because of how it is often highlighted in Gracie mythology, but with its class, and racial, subtext often going unexamined. In her biography of her father, Reila Gracie states that in 1925 Carlos Gracie opened the Academia Gracie de Jiu-Jitsu on Rua Marquês de Abrantes 106 (Gracie, 2008, p. 63). This location, in the Flamengo neighborhood, an old and aristocratic part of the city of Rio, was hardly surprising. The academy was a short distance from the Palácio do Catete, at that time Brazil's presidential palace. Flamengo was also directly connected to Rio's downtown, and hence a highly-valued residential neighborhood for Rio's elite. Lia Schucman notes how whiteness in Brazil is often tied to 'neighborhoods, environments and places where wealth is accumulated' (Schucman, 2021, p. 174). By locating their academy in Flamengo, the Gracies thus began a pattern of marking their martial art as 'white' but doing so implicitly through associations with specific urban spaces. The Gracies would continue this pattern, locating their schools in more affluent, and hence whiter, parts of the city of Rio, known as the Zona Sul (Southern Zone).

By contrast, the Brazilian jiu-jitsu academies associated with Oswaldo Fadda, mentioned earlier, and which have largely been neglected in the hegemonic narrative about the emergence of Brazilian jiu-jitsu, have been located in the poorer and more Black and mixed-race neighborhoods of Rio's Zona Norte (Northern Zone). Significantly, the way that Fadda and his students broke with the efforts of Carlos and Hélio Gracie to tie jiu-jitsu to Rio's white elite is rarely in terms of racial difference. Instead, this is often discussed in overlapping terms of urban space and social class. For instance, in an interview with Robert Drysdale, when asked about the main difference between Fadda and Gracie academies, João Resende, a prominent black belt and long-term student of Fadda, stated that the Gracies taught in 'a richer area that was the southern zone' while Fadda and his students took 'the initiative of teaching in the suburbs' (Drysdale, 2020, p. 182). Likewise, Hélio Fadda, Owaldo Fadda's nephew, described his uncle's students as 'suburban students, the vast majority of whom were poor people' (Drysdale, 2020, p. 185). In this way, urban space and social class serve as a marker for racial differences,

continuing the pattern of making race 'invisible' to those who cannot read these cues.[12]

Further, while Reila Gracie, and many others, state that it was the Gracies who opened the academy on Rua Marquês de Abrantes, others dispute this. It now seems fairly clear that the 'Academia de Jiu-Jitsu' was actually opened under the direction of Donato Pires dos Reis (who later would fall out with the Gracies), with Carlos Gracie serving as an instructor and his brother George as a monitor (Lise et al., 2017, pp. 1156-1157; Pedreira, 2014, pp. 146-148; Drysdale, 2020, p. 287).

Such a dispute over whether the Gracies were the directors of the first academy or instructors might seem minor. Yet the class and racial connotations are important to point out: by stating that the academy was theirs, Carlos and his brothers were claiming to be business-owners, and hence upper-class and white men. By contrast, serving as employees would position them not simply as having a lower social status, but in the Brazilian context, employees of such elite institutions are often Black or mixed race. In fact, as we will see, several of the early figures involved in the development of luta livre made their living in exactly this fashion: by serving as instructors to whiter and wealthier clients.

The comparison with students who trained under Oswaldo Fadda and his black belts, in the Rio's poorer and less-white Northern Zone, and the way that these differences are articulated in terms of class, and technique, and not racial difference, is again significant. In early competitions with students trained by the Gracies, jiu-jitsu fighters trained by Fadda were often disparagingly called 'sapateiros' (shoe-makers) (Schapira, 2019, p. 117; Telles and Barreira, 2025, p. 213). This pejorative nickname functioned at two levels: first, it ridiculed the use of leg-locks, which Fadda and his students specialized in, and in fact which they used to defeat several Gracie students (Pedreira, 2015b, p. 128). The Gracie students often saw this technique as 'unfair' and not in keeping with tradition. As Andrade has argued, such ideas of 'technical purity' serve to exclude non-white bodies, which are seen as deviant (Andrade, 2025). Just as importantly, this nickname tied Fadda's students, and their style of jiu-jitsu, to a decidedly working-class occupation.

GRACIES VERSUS LUTA LIVRE

In their matches against luta livre fighters, the Gracies sought to position their art not only as more effective than luta livre, but also within Brazil's racial hierarchy. Here, the overt markers of difference, and the 'subtle mechanisms' through which jiu-jitsu was tied to whiteness, continued to be ones of class and geography: the Gracies strove to market their style of jiu-jitsu to upper-class, and lighter-skinned patrons who live in Rio's wealthier Southern Zone, while luta livre was practiced by a wider variety of people in many other parts of the city. This included, and continues to include, people who live in more working-class areas of Rio's northern and western areas, which have a disproportionately larger proportions of Black and mixed-race people (Rolnik, 1989; Telles, 2004, pp. 198-205).

Like Brazilian jiu-jitsu, luta livre was a hybrid fighting style which also had strong Brazilian roots. Relatively little scholarly research has been done on luta livre, it seems to have emerged at various places at different times, and the fighting style has always been very flexible (see Lise et al., 2018; Garcia et al., 2016; Welko & Silva, 2014; do Amaral, 2014). But it is clear that luta livre first emerged as a Brazilian version of catch-wrestling. Shows by wrestlers from the United States and Europe were extremely popular in Brazil in the first decades of the twentieth century. These wrestlers used a variety of styles – often some combination of Greco-Roman wrestling, which forbids holds below the waist and emphasizes throws, and the less restrictive style known as 'catch-as-catch can' – with the exact rules often varying depending on the match. The name luta livre – literally 'free fighting' – might in fact have been a loose Brazilian translation of 'catch-as-catch can.' Several Brazilians quickly picked up on this style and began to compete in wrestling matches.

One person credited with popularizing luta livre in Brazil was Euclides Hatem, known as Mestre Tatú (Garcia et al., 2016, p. 380; Welko & Silva, 2014). Born in 1914, Mestre Tatú was a chubby and barrel-chested child (hence his nickname, Tatú, or armadillo), and he began to wrestle at a young age a way to lose weight (Welko & Silva, 2014). He would apparently go on to wrestle in the United States, Europe and Japan. Mestre Tatú also fought various matches against the Gracie brothers, for instance in 1942 defeating George Gracie (Pedreira, 2014, pp. 445-446).

Another person involved in the early development of luta livre was Agenor Moreira Sampaio, known as Sinhozinho. In addition to teaching his own style of capoeira, Sinhozinho competed in Greco-Roman wrestling, and taught a wide range of fighting styles at various sports clubs around Rio, including wrestling, boxing, savate (French kick-boxing), and his own style of capoeira (Lussac, 2019, p. 173; Assunção, 2005, p. 131). While many early luta livre teachers and successful wrestlers were from working-class backgrounds, they taught at popular sports clubs, and their students were often members of Rio's upper-class. For example, in 1920, Sinhozinho had what was described as 'a type of fighting team' at the Flamengo club in Rio, and he often taught outdoors in

12 Raphael Schapira, who trained with a Fadda academy in Rio, notes that this elision of racial difference also occurs within Fadda academies. He notes that even though many Fadda students are Black or mixed-raced, most coaches 'state that skin colour is inconsequential to them, asserting that racism or other forms of discrimination do not exist within BJJ' (Schapira, 2024, p. 19).

the chic beach-front neighborhood of Ipanema (Garcia et al., 2016, p. 382; Castro, 1999, pp. 350-352).[13]

Perhaps even more so than jiu-jitsu, luta livre was a very hybrid and flexible sport. While Sinhozinho and Mestre Tatú were deeply influenced by European and American wrestling styles, they also appear to have been flexible in how they applied the rules and regulations of these sport, often allowing holds and chokes that would not be permissible in more formal competitions. The differences between luta livre and jiu-jitsu were also very blurred: many practitioners claim that the main difference was that jiu-jitsu was usually practiced with a judogi uniform, while luta livre was not. Some very influential luta livre practitioners, such as Roberto Leitão, also were well versed in judo (Leitão had a black belt) (Garcia et al., 2016, p. 383; Castilho, 2020).

If the Gracies were going to claim that their fighting style was distinct and different, superior to others, challenging luta livre fighters seemed inevitable. Personal animosities also fueled a long feud between the Gracies and luta livre fighters. Most notorious was the feud between the Gracies and Manoel Rufino dos Santos, one of the people who taught wrestling to Mestre Tatú. A prominent figure in the Brazilian wrestling world, Rufino cast doubt on the skills of the capoeira fighters who lost to the Gracies in early fights and personally challenged the Gracies to fight him (Pedreira, 2014, p. 153). Rufino seems to have had a personal dislike for Carlos Gracie (Pedreira, 2014, p. 155). A match between the two occurred on August 22, 1931 (Laydner, 2014, loc. 1708).

Much controversy and uncertainty surround the outcome of this fight. In the run-up, as was often the case with the fights involving the Gracies, there was substantial disagreement about the rules and time limits (Pedreira, 2014, p. 156; Laydner, 2014, loc. 1705-1708). These disagreements over the rules were important in at least two ways. First, as was the case in their confrontations with capoeira fighters, the Gracies often insisted on rules that would benefit them and their fighting style. In this case, Rufino, probably the more experienced fighter, wanted a fight with no time limits, while the Gracies wanted five-minute rounds. The Gracies also insisted that both fighters wear a judogi. Since this was uncommon in luta livre, Rufino also disagreed with this demand.

The Gracies also often used debates about the rules to distinguish their fighting style from others. Because jiu-jitsu and luta livre were quite similar, this was particularly important. Reila Gracie states that Rufino not only refused to wear a judogi, but also insisted that the fight could end when one fighter pinned the other's back to the ground for three seconds, as was common in luta livre (Gracie, 2008, p. 87). When Gracie refused, Rufino claimed that 'modern jiu-jitsu,' as practiced by Kano in Japan, followed this rule. This, in fact, was true, and was one of several changes that Kano made to develop judo into a modern sport (Sato, 2012, p. 308). The reaction from the Gracie camp is particularly indicative. Reila Gracie states:

> Though he recognized that jiu-jitsu was a Japanese fighting style, Carlos had appropriated this martial art and refused to represent any country besides Brazil, much less follow the rules of an institution with which he had no tie. It was in this moment that he felt it necessary to definitively separate (desvincular) his jiu-jitsu from that practiced in Japan or anywhere else on the planet (Gracie, 2008, p. 87).

The ironies here – and their ethnic and racial connotations – are rather profound. As a different essay argues, the Gracies tried hard to distinguish the jiu-jitsu that they taught from the Japanese fighting styles from which it derived, while still anchoring it in a 'tradition' (Penglase 2025). In this sense, insisting on the use of a judogi was crucial both to symbolically distinguish jiu-jitsu from luta livre and to connect jiu-jitsu to a prestigious foreign tradition. Yet at the same time, by insisting that fights could only end with 'submission or a knockout,' and that there should be no point system, marked Gracie jiu-jitsu as distinctive from judo. Both of these rules – in particular insisting on the use of the judogi – also favored the Gracies in the ring.

Insisting on the use of a 'uniform,' and not simply fighting bare-chested as was common in luta livre matches, also symbolically marked the Gracies as 'civilized,' and hence white (even if tied to an Asian tradition). This episode also reveals another larger connection between whiteness and masculinity. Dyer notes that in the West it was unusual, until the 1980s, to see a white man semi-naked in popular culture (Dyer, 2017, p. 146). Among the exceptions were boxing matches and, of course, exactly the type of wrestling exhibition that Carlos was proposing to engage in. Insisting on wearing a judogi, in this context, can thus be seen as an attempt to contrast Gracie's white masculinity with the 'less refined' version of his opponent. Dyer also notes that the naked body 'is a vulnerable body' (Dyer, 2017, p. 146). For Carlos this was rather literally true: without a judogi to hold onto, Carlos had fewer options to use to attack Rufino. Rufino nevertheless eventually conceded to the Gracies' demands: Carlos wore a judogi while Rufino fought bare-chested, and the fight would consist of five minute rounds with no points, ending only with submission or knockout (Pedreira, 2014, p. 156; Gracie, 2008, p. 89).

When the fight between Carlos Gracie and Rufino finally occurred, on August 22, 1931, the uncertainty and controversy continued. Newspaper reports from the time, as unearthed by Roberto Pedreira, say that Rufino dominated the first two rounds (Pedreira, 2014, p. 157). After that, though, things are unclear. It seems that perhaps the fighters were about to go outside the ring, and the referee blew a whistle to stop the action and order them back into the center of the ring. At that moment, Carlos Gracie

13 These students include Tom Jobim, one of Brazil's most famous musicians, who took lessons in weight-lifting with Sinhozinho (though only for a short period, since he apparently saved his hands for playing the guitar and piano), and the brothers Roberto and Rogério Marinho, heirs to a large family fortune which included the media giant O Globo (Lussac, 2019, p. 172)

took advantage and applied a headlock on Rufino. Other accounts say that Carlos had already applied the headlock before the referee stopped the fight. Instead of restarting, though, the fight was suspended, with both sides arguing about what had occurred (Pedreira, 2014, pp. 158-160; Laydner, 2014, loc. 1726). Both men claimed they won. Carlos Gracie claimed that after he applied the choke, and before the referee stopped the action, Rufino had quit, and that there was no need to continue (Gracie, 2008, p. 90). Rufino said that he had not quit, and that by refusing to continue, Gracie had forfeited. Ultimately, the referee gave the decision to Rufino (Pedreira, 2014, p. 159).

Controversies would continue to swirl around the fight. Carlos Gracie was particularly incensed that prior to the fight, Rufino had taken jiu-jitsu lessons from Donato Pires dos Reis, one of Maeda's original students, and Gracie's former business partner. The Gracie viewed this as disloyalty. Rufino, for his part, gave interviews to the press questioning the quality of Gracie's fighting style (Laydner, 2014, loc. 1860). This would later escalate into one of the more notorious episodes in the early history of the Gracie family: on October 18, 1932, Carlos and his brothers Hélio and George attacked Rufino on the street outside of the Tijuca Tenis Club, where Rufino worked, punching and kicking him and striking him with a metal object (Pedreira, 2014, p. 236). The swirl of controversies, though, did achieve at least one goal: as Reila Gracie states, the fight between Carlos and Rufino 'was positive for the recognition of jiu-jitsu and the Gracie name' (Gracie, 2008, p. 93). On the other hand, Maciel Welko and Elton Silva state that the fight 'perhaps created the impetus for the rivalry between jiu-jitsu and luta livre, which escalated especially in the 1980s and in the 1990s reached its highest peak' (Welko & Silva, 2021). Street fights between the Gracies and luta livre fighters continued to occur.

At this early stage in the confrontations between jiu-jitsu and luta livre, in the 1930s and 1940s, the class and racial differences between practitioners were somewhat blurred. When they moved to Rio in the 1920s, the Gracie family could draw upon some of their aristocratic connections, and they sought very deliberately to teach the city's political and economic elite. In addition to regular classes at the Gracie Academy, the Gracies also taught private self-defense classes to wealthier patrons including, for example Jorge and Carlinhos Guinle, sons of Rio's prominent millionaire Carlos Guinle (Gracie, 2008, p. 72). And while a newspaper article about the Gracie academy in 1951 stated that the Gracies were willing to offer classes to women, so that they could defend themselves against domestic assault, the article noted that their clientele was made up 'of men who could afford to spend hours of their time learning jiu-jitsu' (quoted in Cairus, 2012, p. 144).

The backgrounds of early luta livre fighters were far more mixed, though much more scholarly research on this fighting style needs to be done. One of the early stars in the Brazilian wresting scene was José Floriano Peixoto, the son of a former president (Lise et al., 2018, p. 171). As the style became more commercialized and professionalized, though, most of the early prominent luta livre fighters were from working-class and Black or mixed-race backgrounds. Manoel Rufino dos Santos, according to Reila Gracie, ran away from home at an early age, and then joined the merchant marines (Gracie, 2008, p. 86). It is perhaps significant to note, here, that lower-class and Black and mixed-raced men often served in the lower ranks of Brazil's Navy (Beattie, 2001). Rufino also lived for a time in the United States, where it seems that he first began to wrestle competitively (Laydner, 2014, loc. 1700). When he returned to Brazil, Rufino taught wrestling at various places, including the Associação Cristã de Moços (the YMCA).

Sinhozinho, the other important early figure in luta livre, lived for a period of time in the Morro de Santo Antônio neighborhood in Rio, a working-class and largely Black and mixed-race neighborhood (that was later demolished) (Lussac, 2019, pp. 162-163; Lacé Lopes, 2002, pp. 105-154). Ricardo Lussac describes Sinhozinho as 'a short and stocky mulato [mixed-race person]' and a 'member of the working class' (Lussac, 2019, p. 163). Like Rufino, Sinhozinho also taught physical fitness and various fighting styles to a wide swath of students, many of them from Rio's elite (Lussac, 2019, p. 172).

If the class and racial differences between jiu-jitsu and luta livre were initially implicit and articulated through the registers of class and employment, this was certainly not the case by the 1980s. While the Gracies offered jiu-jitsu classes to a relatively wealthy and male clientele in Rio's southern zone, luta livre schools spread in other, more working-class neighborhoods, and correspondingly attracted more Black and mixed race fighters. As luta livre became professionalized in the 1930s, it promised a career in prize-fighting, if often a poorly-paid one. And compared to jiu-jitsu, luta livre classes were more accessible, in part because they did not require buying a judogi, and hence were more attractive to poorer, and more disproportionately Black and mixed-raced Brazilians.

By the 1950s and after, as the Gracie's jiu-jitsu became much more dominant, racial differences with other fighters were often obvious, either because they were openly stated, or because they were too clear to merit discussion. For instance, in 1955, Hélio Gracie fought a legendary match against a Black fighter named Waldemar Santana. This now legendary fight lasted perhaps as long as three hours and 34 minutes without interruption before Hélio collapsed in exhaustion (Peligro, 2003, p. 32). Here again, there are clear connections between this event and classic representations of white male bodies. As Dyer notes: 'The spectacle of white male bodily suffering typically conveys a sense of the dignity and transcendence in such pain' (Dyer, 2017, p. 28). Newspaper accounts of the fight contrasted Santana's strength – he was described as an athletic but unskilled street fighter – with Hélio's capacity to endure punishment (Pedreira, 2015a, p. 138). Much later, Peligro, in his popular history of the Gracie family, states that even though Hélio eventually lost the fight, those present saw Gracie's perseverance against a much younger opponent as 'one of the most heroic acts they have ever witnessed' (Peligro, 2003, p. 32).

The racial overtones were even more obvious, if often stated implicitly. While photographs of the match make it clear that Santana was Black, and his nickname was Pantera Negra (or Black Panther), his identity and rivalry with the Gracies is more commonly articulated in class terms. Santana, a former dock worker, had first been hired to work in the Gracie's downtown academy to clean and take care of clothing, a rather stereotypical Black profession (Gracie, 2008, p. 286). He was also allowed to take classes and eventually became an instructor. When, in a clear effort to increase his income, Santana broke with the Gracies to pursue prize-fighting without their permission, this was taken by Hélio as a personal betrayal (Peligro, 2003, p. 31; Pedreira, 2015a, p. 132). Santana, apparently, had not only violated his 'loyalty' to the Gracies, but had defied his situation of racial subordination.

In the following decades, this recourse to implicit ways of signaling racial difference was less necessary. For instance, in 1983, in another famous challenge, Rickson Gracie, Hélio's son, fought against Casemiro Nascimento Martins, a luta livre fighter known as Rei Zulu (King Zulu), whose identification as a Black fighter was clearly obvious (Pedreira 2015b, p. 219). Yet even here, Zulu's nickname clearly associated him with a supposedly 'uncivilized' African ethnic group and a 'non-modern' political system.

Another self-identified Black fighter, who would be a persistent thorn in the side of the Gracies, was Eugênio Tadeu. Tadeu studied luta livre with Carlos Brunocilla, whose father was a student of Mestre Tatú (Welko & Silva, 2014). In a newspaper interview published prior to a highly-publicized fight with Renzo Gracie, Tadeu described himself this way: 'I'm poor, Black and a fighter, I've always had to fight to make a living' (Cordeiro, 1997). Tadeu fought two particularly significant matches against the Gracies: a closed-door private fight against Royler Gracie, one of Hélio Gracie's sons, in 1988, and a highly publicized and controversial match against Renzo Gracie in 1997. These matches, though, need to be put into the context of a larger rivalry between jiu-jitsu and luta livre that had long been simmering, and that burst in to the open in the 1980s and 1990s in a series of street fights.

Perhaps the most famous fight was a confrontation between Rickson Gracie, another one of Hélio Gracie's sons, and Hugo Duarte, a luta livre fighter who was a team-mate of Tadeu. There are multiple conflicting versions of what led up to the fight, though a tourist happened to videotape the fight, which can still be seen on YouTube (Hayes1, 2001). Duarte had apparently been challenging the Gracies, and one day Rickson Gracie and a number of family members and friends confronted Duarte on the Praia do Pepê beach. In the video, it's clear that Rickson begins the fight, striking Duarte's face with an open hand. Duarte then takes off his shirt, a group of people form a circle around Duarte and Rickson, and the two fight, with Rickson eventually winning.

More significant than the fight itself is how it was later described in a widely-circulated VHS videotape (and later DVD) entitled Gracie Jiu-Jitsu in Action. This film was first available to a broader audience in 1988, five years before the first UFC fight would catapult Brazilian jiu-jitsu to broader fame, and it was one of the first ways that American martial artists got to know Gracie jiu-jitsu. While the racial and class context of this confrontation would be clear to many Brazilians, goes entirely unmentioned in the film. In fact, Hugo Duarte, who at that time was a well-known luta livre fighter, is not even named. Instead, the key variable in this case is urban space: specifically, the fight takes place on a beach in the neighborhood of Barra da Tijuca, at that time a newly developed affluent and largely white residential neighborhood.

The section of the film featuring footage of the fight between Duarte and Rickson, though, provides no background about the feud between luta livre and jiu-jitsu. Instead, it depicts jiu-jitsu as a set of techniques that are effective in 'real' fighting situations. Here again, white masculinity is not tied simply to physical strength, but to having the mental capacity to acquire skills that can allow white men to face physical challenges and emerge victorious through the mastery of technique. The narration by Rorion Gracie, Hélio Gracie's eldest son, is worth quoting at length:

> Though this footage is not very clear, it gives you a good idea of what to expect in a real street fight. ... Fights like this occurred frequently in Brazil and it was in this kind of environment that the Gracie Academy established itself as the most complete and effective source of jiu-jitsu instruction in the world (Gracie Jiu-jitsu Videos, 1988).

In response to this fight, Eugênio Tadeu and a group of luta livre fighters staged their own 'invasion' of the Gracie jiu-jitsu academy in the Humaitá neighborhood of Rio de Janeiro. It seems that there was a brief scuffle, and Tadeu fought with Royler Gracie, before the police arrived and broke up the fight. The Gracie brothers then challenged Tadeu to a private, closed-door fight. Video footage of this fight also exists (Fight History, 2018). Fighting shirtless and in shorts, as was common in luta livre, Royler and Tadeu battled for over 45 minutes. After trading punches and kicks for almost ten minutes, Tadeu, the smaller man, takes Royler to the ground the first time. Tadeu then spends much of the fight on top of Royler, in Royler's guard, before the fight is finally broken up and declared a draw. In the video of the event, while Rickson Gracie praises the two fighters, it is clear that the larger feud between jiu-jitsu and luta livre fighters is hardly over. It is also worth noting that this event is often described as an 'invasão' (or invasion), pointing to how Tadeu and the luta livre fighters, mostly men of working-class and Black and mixed-raced origins, were violating Rio's implicit urban segregation by entering a Gracie academy located in the city's wealthier, and whiter, southern Zone. The patriarchal imagery is also potent: men were seen as challenging the 'honor' of other men by invading their personal spaces. And in return, as the rivalry heated up, the Gracies and other Brazilian jiu-jitsu fighters would also stage 'invasions' of rival luta livre schools

The feud between jiu-jitsu and luta livre reached its peak in the 1990s. In 1991, a series of fights between jiu-jitsu fighters associated with the Gracies and luta livre fighters (including Tadeu and Hugo Duarte) was held at the Grajaú Country Club in Rio's working-class north side. The jiu-jitsu men won all three fights. Journalist Luiz Otavio Laydner says that after the event 'luta livre as a sport never recovered from the blow' (Laydner, 2014, loc. 4527).

One more match between luta livre and jiu-jitsu, though, would finish the rivalry. On September 27, 1997, another contest between jiu-jitsu and luta livre fighters, at the Tijuca Tenis Club, also on Rio's north side, erupted into chaos. During the second round of the fight between Eugênio Tadeu and Renzo Gracie, Tadeu pushed Renzo against the ring's fence. Footage clearly shows Tadeu in a dominant position, standing over Renzo, while spectators kicked and stomped on Renzo through the fence. At this point, the lights in the arena went off, and a massive brawl amongst spectators broke out, stopping the fight. In the ensuing chaos, several people were hurt, and gunshots were heard in the crowd. Rio's mayor subsequently prohibited similar events (Pedreira, 2015b, p. 341-2; Vasconcelos, 1997).

This last fight was perhaps the high – or low – point of the rivalry between jiu-jitsu and luta livre. After this, three things happened. First, according to Tadeu, in an online interview, the fight led to what he called a 'democratization' of martial arts: the issue was no longer whether luta livre or jiu-jitsu was superior, but whether one fighter was better than another (NRFight Club, 2015). Second, the two fighting styles went on to have very different levels of economic success. Brazilian jiu-jitsu, after the fights with luta livre in 1991, attracted a vast number of students in academies throughout Rio's wealthier Southern Zone neighborhoods.

Third, and most importantly, when the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) debuted in 1993, the popularity of the Brazilian jiu-jitsu would go global, representing the culmination of the Gracie's strategy of using fights between practitioners of different martial arts to publicize their style of jiu-jitsu. The first UFC, broadcast on pay-per-view television in the United States was rather easily won by Royce Gracie (Green & Svinth, 2001, p. 55). The event was also a financial success, as eighty thousand households in the United States paid to watch the event, and DVDs of the fights circulated widely (Wertheim, 2009, p. 60). Martial arts periodicals in the United States and elsewhere quickly claimed that the event ushered in a new era in martial arts (Bottenburg & Heilbron, 2006, p. 261).

Global interest in Brazilian jiu-jitsu exploded. Several prominent Gracie family members had already moved to the United States seeking new economic opportunities, Rorion Gracie for instance moving to California in 1978 (Peligro, 2003, p. 73). Many of the initial wave of Brazilians who migrated to the United States and Europe were products of Gracie academies. Reflecting their class backgrounds, many of these Brazilian jiu-jitsu teachers were white, college-educated and spoke English (Rocha et al., 2015). By contrast, Raphael Schapira points out, jiu-jitsu teachers from Fadda's lineage, more likely to not be white, tend to be from poorer backgrounds, and while proficient in jiu-jitsu lack the cultural capital – especially the ability to speak English – needed to successfully migrate to the U.S. and Europe (Schapira 2019).

Along with greater international demand for high-level Brazilian jiu-jitsu teachers also came challenging conditions in Brazil. After the media's attention to the chaos at the Tijuca Tênis Club, jiu-jitsu in Rio gained substantial negative notoriety. By mid-1999, the press in Rio came to associate jiu-jitsu with crime carried out by middle-class youth (Perigosa ameaça, 1999; Pedreira, 2015b, pp. 355-360). Public authorities in Rio responded by threatening to clamp down on academies whose students were involved in street fights (Eles são poucos 1999). This push, along with Brazil's larger economic crisis of the 1990s and the pull of greater profits to be made abroad, produced another flight of Brazilian jiu-jitsu instructors to the United States and Europe (Soares et al., 2022).

While Brazilian jiu-jitsu effectively globalized, luta livre entered a period of economic decline. Tadeu attributes this to the fact that many of those who went on to cover the fight scene in Brazil's sports media were members of Brazil's elite who had come up through Gracie jiu-jitsu academies and clearly favored that fighting style (Tadeu, nd). Also crucial were the underlying class and racial differences: the Gracies, who had already appealed to a wealthier, and generally whiter, set of students expanded their fighting style's appeal in Brazil and globally. Luta livre, which never had such a strong financial foundation, largely went underground, not disappearing, but practiced in Rio's poorer neighborhoods without nearly the same visibility or financial success.

In the end, after decades of rivalry with luta livre, jiu-jitsu in a way absorbed its rival. Despite all the heated talk about animosity, some jiu-jitsu practitioners had long trained with, and learned from, luta livre practitioners. Particularly important in this regard was Carlson Gracie (Drysdale 2023). Carlson was the first-born son of Carlos Gracie and Carmen, who Reila Gracie describes as a 'mulata' (mixed-race) woman of humble origins. For this reason, Carlos's mother found her to be an unacceptable marriage partner (Gracie, 2008, p. 113; Cairus, 2020, p. 39). [14] In 1968, after many years of teaching at the main Gracie academy, and after a series of victories in high-profile fights, Carlson Gracie opened his own, separate jiu-jitsu academy (Peligro, 2003, p. 48).

Carlson Gracie would significantly shift Brazilian jiu-jitsu in at least two ways. First, Carlson broke with the Gracie tradition of teaching jiu-jitsu almost exclusively to wealthy, and hence disproportionately white, clients. By contrast, Carlson opened the doors of his academy to a much broader group of people, often allowing students to train for free or for reduced fees (BJJ Heroes,

14 In keeping with the interconnected relationship between patriarchy, race and gender in Brazilian society, Carlos went on to father many children with darker-skinned women (Cairus, 2012, p. 111).

nd; Drysdale, 2023, pp. 40-47). In the process not only did Carlson Gracie assemble a team that competed at the highest levels, but he also significantly diversified the racial and economic backgrounds of a subsequent generation of jiu-jitsu fighters and teachers (BJJ Heroes, nd; Peligro, 2003, p. 50). Second, along with his half-brother Rolls Gracie, with whom he shared an academy, Carlson altered the nature of Brazilian jiu-jitsu. The two were true pioneers, actively seeking out practitioners of other styles, such as luta livre and American wrestling, and incorporating these styles into their jiu-jitsu. Carlson's proximity to luta livre led to a stylistic blend which, perhaps, was complete when many jiu-jitsu academies began to offer 'no gi' classes of their own.

This final shift is as significant as it is ironic: back in 1931, Carlos Gracie refused to fight against luta livre fighter Rufino dos Santos unless Rufino agreed to wear a judogi, insisting that wearing a judogi was an essential aspect of jiu-jitsu (Gracie, 2008, p. 87). Luta livre fighters, on the other hand, often claimed that the use of the 'gi' was one of the few things that separated the two arts. For instance, when asked what the main difference between jiu-jitsu and luta livre is, Eugênio Tadeu stated: 'one is with the kimono [the Portuguese term for judogi], the other is without the kimono' (Tadeu, nd). When jiu-jitsu schools began to teach classes that did not require a judogi, the main technical contrast between the two arts collapsed. All that remained were underlying and largely unaddressed – though for those able to read the unspoken codes of Brazilian racial formations, implicit but fairly clear – racial and class differences.

CONCLUSION

Once the Gracies took their martial art outside of Brazil, to different cultural contexts with different racial dynamics, much of this complexity was 'lost in translation,' as it were. The assumption that race in Brazil functions in the same way as in the United States may have led people to identify the absence of clear racial segregation in Brazil, and in Brazilian jiu-jitsu, as evidence that the martial art was non-racist. Likewise, the complexities of 'whiteness' in Brazil, and the fact that people who identify as white in Brazil are not always identified that way abroad, might have also made Brazilian jiu-jitsu's whiteness invisible.

In the United States, Brazilian jiu-jitsu is most often seen as a set of techniques divorced from any other larger cultural or social context. This, of course, is rather typical of whiteness, which often presents itself as a 'norm,' against which other races are defined (Dyer, 2017). Cida Bento also points out differences in how white and non-white people are related to Brazil's history (Bento, 2022). The contemporary situation of Black people in Brazil, Bento argues, is often related to the historical legacies of slavery. By contrast, white people, she states, often 'disappear' from the past, and are presented as if they have no connections to historical legacies (Bento, 2022, p.31).

Rather than being seen as connected to Brazilian history and culture, jiu-jitsu is also often talked about in terms of efficiency and effectiveness, again paralleling the way that white masculinity is often associated with rationality, and how whiteness is often invisible. Instead of associating the martial art with a larger Brazilian context, jiu-jitsu is tied to the male members of one family, the Gracies. For instance, Paul, who was 41 at the time that I interviewed him, and who would go on to earn a black belt and open his own martial arts gym told me: 'I first saw jiu-jitsu when it was in the first UFC. I was like: wow, Gracie is beating these guys left and right.' Likewise, James, who at the time I interviewed him was 39, and who had extensive experience with other martial arts before starting jiu-jitsu, told me:

> The first two classes that I took, I had smaller guys choking me out, putting arm locks on me. It was an eye-opener. And it showed me too that there's really like a scientific approach to it. I mean it's really these moves that have been studied over the years ... It's really a scientific approach to the way you can defeat somebody.

Because the Gracies positioned jiu-jitsu's identity, in explicit terms, as 'efficient' and 'effective,' the larger context within which it developed, and the ways it was racialized, could be unspoken. And the very ambiguity of the racial background of Brazilians in the United States – as in Pinho's terms 'white but not quite' (Pinho, 2009) or as sort of 'Latino' but also not – adds another layer of complexity, particularly given that the Gracies have a European last name. Not only were most of the Brazilians who brought jiu-jitsu to the United States and Europe white, but, as I mentioned earlier, people classified as 'white' in Brazil might not be perceived in this way elsewhere, adding another layer of complexity. For instance, in the summer of 2020, a series of tweets and social media posts by a prominent Brazilian who teaches jiu-jitsu in the United States surfaced, including one that approvingly quoted Nazi official Heinrich Himmler. Comments on social media ran the gamut, but quite common were non-Brazilians who seemed unsure about this Brazilian jiu-jitsu teacher's racial identity. One person, on the social media site Reddit, even stated: 'I don't know why someone who isn't of Northern European descent would be pro-Nazi. It's not like he would be considered Aryan.' Through this process of 'false translation' the invisibility of race became complete: not only was Brazilian jiu-jitsu's development within a deeply racially-hierarchal Brazilian context erased, but the art came to be seen as devoid of any larger cultural or social context, and its whiteness did not need to be spoken.

Declaration of competing interests

The author affirms that he has no competing interests relevant to the work underpinning this manuscript.

Declaration of artificial intelligence use

The author affirms that no artificial intelligence applications were used in the preparation of this manuscript.

REFERENCES

Andrade, T.N. (2025). Do Tatame ao Mundo: Jiu-Jítsu Brasileiro um fenômeno midiático entre Apropriação Cultural, Disputa Simbólica e Formação Ética [From the Tatame to the World: Brazilian Jiu-jitsu a media phenomenon between cultural appropriation, symbolic disupte and ethical formation]. *Revista Mediação, 27* (38), 283–295.

Beattie, P. (2001). *The tribute of blood: Army, honor, race, and nation in Brazil, 1864–1945.* Duke University Press.

Belandi, C., & Gomes, I. (2023, December 22). 2022 Census: self-reported brown population is the majority in Brazil for the first time. *Agência IBGE Notícias.* https://agenciadenoticias.ibge.gov.br/en/agencia-news/2184-news-agency/news/38726-2022-census-self-reported-brown-population-is-the-majority-in-brazil-for-the-first-time

Bento, Cida. (2022). *O pacto da branquitude [the whiteness pact].* Companhia das Letras.

Besnier, N., Brownell, S., & Carter, T. F. (2017). *The anthropology of sport: Bodies, borders, biopolitics.* University of California Press.

BJJ Heroes. (nd). *Carlson Gracie.* Retrieved May 29, 2025. https://www.bjjheroes.com/bjj-fighters/carlson-gracie-profile

Bottenburg, M., & Heilbron, J. (2006). De-sportization of fighting contests: The origins and dynamics of no holds barred events and the theory of sportization. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport, 41*(3-4), 259–282. https://doi.org/10.1177/1012690207078043

Cairus, J. (2011). Modernization, Nationalism and the Elite: the Genesis of Brazilian jiu-jitsu, 1905-1920. *Tempo e Argumento, 3*(2), 100–121. https://doi.org/10.5965/2175180303022011100

Cairus, J. (2012). *The Gracie clan and the making of Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu: National identity, culture and performance, 1905-2003.* [Doctoral Dissertation, York University]. ProQuest.

Cairus, J. (2020). Nationalism, immigration and identity: The Gracies and the making of Brazilian jiu-jitsu, 1934-1943. *Martial Arts Studies 9*, 28–42. http://doi.org/10.18573/mas.105

Castilho, L. (2020). Mundo da luta se despede do Mestre Roberto Leitão [The Fighting World Says Goodbye to Master Roberto Leitão] *Folha de S. Paulo.* December 7, 2020. https://agora.folha.uol.com.br/esporte/2020/12/mundo-da-luta-se-despede-do-mestre-roberto-leitao.shtml.

Castro, R. (1999). *Ela é carioca: Uma enciclopédia de Ipanema [She's Carioca: an Encyclopedia of Ipanema].* Companhia das Letras.

Chazkel, A. (2011). *Laws of chance: Brazil's clandestine lottery and the making of urban public life.* Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822394020

Coakley, J. (1989). Sport in Society: An Inspiration or an Opiate? In Eitzen, D. Stanley, (Ed.), *Sport in Society: an Anthology* (pp. 24-20). St. Martin's Press.

Connell, R.W. (1995). *Masculinities.* University of California Press.

Cordeiro, J.H. (1997, September 26). Um desafiante 'cabeça' [A 'brainy' challenger]. *Jornal do Brasil.*

Costa Vargas, J. (2004). Hyperconsciousness of race and its negation: The dialectic of white supremacy in Brazil. *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power, 11*(4), 443–470. https://doi.org/10.1080/10702890490883803

Da Silva, D. (1998). Facts of blackness: Brazil is not quite the United States… and racial politics in Brazil? *Social Identities, 4*(2), 201–234. https://doi.org/10.1080/13504639851807

Degler, C. (1971). *Neither black nor white.* University of Wisconsin Press.

do Amaral, C. (2014). A luta livre no Brasil e o marketing esportivo [Luta livre in Brazil and sports marketing]. *REGS Educação, Gestão e Sociedade: Revista da Faculdade Eça de Queirós, 14,* 1–10.

Drysdale, R. (2020). *Opening the closed guard: The origins of jiu-jitsu in Brazil.* Kindle Direct Publishing.

Drysdale, R. (2023). *The rise and evolution of Brazilian Jiu-jitsu.* Kindle Direct Publishing.

Dyer, R. (2017). *White: Twentieth anniversary edition.* Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315544786

Eles são poucos e vão ser presos: entrevista com Luiz Eduardo Soares [They're few and they'll be arrested: interview with Luiz Eduardo Soares]. (1999, April 2). O Globo.

Ferreira, M. (2019). *O mínimo que você precisa saber sobre a história do jiu-jitsu no Brasil [The minimum that you need to know about Brazilian jiu-jitsu].* Self-Published.

Fight History. (2018, March 27). Royler Gracie vs Eugenio Tadeu Luta Completa [Video]. *YouTube.* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RaQ2IdQDOqM

França Paz, E.V. (2022). Navegando nas evidências históricas do jiu-jitsu brasileiro [Navegating the historical evidence of Brazilian jiu-jitsu]. *Revista Ibero-Americana de Humanidades, Ciências e Educação, 8*(3), 1755–1764.

Frankenberg, R. (1993). *White women, race matters.* University of Minnesota Press. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203973431

Frankenberg, R. (2020). The mirage of an unmarked whiteness. In S. Seidman & J. Alexander, (Eds.), *The New Social Theory Reader* (pp. 416–421). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003060963-69

Garcia, R., da Silva, N., & S. Votre, S. (2016). A luta livre no século XX no Rio de Janeiro [Luta livre in 20th century Rio de Janeiro]. *Movimento, 22*(2), 379–390. https://doi.org/10.22456/1982-8918.56881

Gracie, R. (2008). *Carlos Gracie: O criador de uma dinastia [Carlos Gracie: The creator of a dynasty].* Editora Record.

Gracie Jiu-jitsu Videos. (2004 [1988]). *Gracie jiu-jitsu in action: The original* [Film]. Gracie Jiu-jitsu Videos.

Green, T., & Svinth, J. (2001). Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu. In T. Green (Ed.), *Martial Arts of the World. Volume One: A-Q* (pp. 52–56). ABC-CLIO.

Green, T. & Svinth, J. (2003). The circle and the octagon: Maeda's judo and Gracie's jiu-jitsu. In T. Green and J. Svinth (Eds.), *Martial Arts in the Modern World* (pp. 61–70). Westport. https://doi.org/10.5040/9798400683152.0009

Guardian. (2023, January 24). UFC fighters close to Bolsonaro find themselves in spotlight after riots.. https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2023/jan/24/ufc-fighters-bolsinaro-brazil-riots

Harris, M., Consorte, J.G., Lang, L., & Byrne, B. (1993). Who are the whites?: Imposed census categories and the racial demography of Brazil. *Social Forces, 72*(2), 451–462. https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/72.2.451

Hasenbalg, C. (1985). Race and socioeconomic inequalities in Brazil. In P. Fontaine, (Ed.), *Race, Class and Power in Brazil* (pp. 25–41). University of California Press.

Hasenbalg, C. & N. Silva, N. (1999). Notes on racial and political inequality in brazil. In M. Hanchard (Ed.), *Racial Politics in Contemporary Brazil* (pp. 154–178). Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822382539-008

Lacé Lopes, A. (2002). *A capoeiragem no Rio de Janeiro: Primeiro ensaio, Sinhozinho e Rudolf Hermanny [Capoeira in Rio de Janeiro: First essay, Sinhozinho and Rudolf Hermanny]*. Lacé Lopes.

Laydner, L. (2014). *With the back on the ground: From early Japanese in America to MMA – How Brazilian jiu-jitsu developed*. Translated by John Tabor. Amazon Digital Services.

Lise, R., & Capraro, A. (2018). Primórdios do jiu-jitsu e dos confrontos intermodalidades no Brasil: contestando uma memória consolidada [The beginning of jiu-jitsu and intermodal fights in Brazil: contesting a consolidated memory]. *Revista Brasileira de Ciências do Esporte, 40*(3), 318–324. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rbce.2018.03.003

Lise, R., Capraro, A., Santos, N., & Horton, A. (2018). The beginnings of wrestling in Brazil. In A. Horton (Ed.), *Identity in professional wrestling* (pp. 162–178.) McFarland and Company.

Lovell, P., & Wood, C. (1998). Skin Color, Racial Identity, and Life Chances in Brazil. *Latin American Perspectives, 25*(3), 90–109. https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582X9802500305

Lussac, R. (2019). Agenor Moreira Sampaio, o Sinhozinho, 1891-1962: uma vida pela capoeira e pelo esporte da cidade do Rio de Janeiro [Agenor Moreira Sampaio, aka Sinhozinho, 1891-1962: a life for capoeira and for sport in the city of Rio de Janeiro]. *Caminhos da Educação: Diálogos, Culturas e Diversidades, 1*(2), 159–162. https://doi.org/10.26694/caedu.v1i2.9911

Matthews, C. R., & Channon, A. (Eds.). (2016). *Global perspectives on women in combat sports*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137439369

Messner, M. A. (1990). When bodies are weapons: Masculinity and violence in sport. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport, 25*(3), 203–220. https://doi.org/10.1177/101269029002500303

Messner, M. A., & Sabo, D. F. (Eds.). (1990). *Sport, men, and the gender order*. Human Kinetics Books.

Munanga, Kabengele. (1999). *Rediscutindo a mestiçagem no Brasil [Rediscussing miscegination in Brazil]*. Editora Vozes.

Norvell, J. (2002). A brancura desconfortável das camadas médias brasileiras [The uncomfortable whiteness of the Brazilian middle class]. In Y. Maggie & C. Rezende, (Eds.), *Raça como retórica* (pp. 247–265.) Civilização Brasileira.

NRFight Club. (2015, July 12). Luta Livre Spirit S02 E01: Eugenio Tadeu [Video]. *YouTube*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7xdlvU1TJw8

Paixão, M. (2021). Race and social inequality in 20th and 21st-Century Brazil. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Latin American History*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199366439.013.848

Pedreira, R. (2014). *Choque: The untold story of jiu-jitsu in Brazil, vol 1, 1859-1949*. GTR Publications.

Pedreira, R. (2015a). *Choque: The untold story of jiu-jitsu in Brazil, vol 2, 1950-1960*. GTR Publications.

Pedreira, R. (2015b). *Choque: The untold story of jiu-jitsu in Brazil, Vol. 3, 1961-1999*. GTR Publications.

Peligro, K. (2003). *The Gracie way: An illustrated history of the world's greatest martial arts family*. Invisible Cities Press.

Penglase, B. (2025). The Invisibility of Race in Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu: The Gracies versus Capoeira and Judo. *Martial Arts Studies, 17*, 60–75. https://doi.org/10.18573/mas.281

Perigosa ameaça do bando dos 'pitboys' [The dangerous threat of gangs of 'pitboys']. (1999, September 12). *Jornal do Brasil*.

Pinho, P. (2009). White but not quite: Tones and overtones of whiteness in Brazil. *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism, 13*(2), 39–56. https://doi.org/10.1215/07990537-3697250

Rattansi, A. (2005). The uses of racialization: The time-spaces and subject-objects of the raced body. In K. Murji & J. Solomons (Eds.), *Racialization: Studies in theory and practice* (pp. 271–301). Oxford University Press.

Rocha, A. D., Esteves, F., Mello, R. C. D., & Silva, J. F. D. (2015). Diasporic and transnational internationalization: The case of Brazilian martial arts. *BAR-Brazilian Administration Review, 12*(4), 403–420. https://doi.org/10.1590/1807-7692bar2015150042

Rolnik, R. (1989). Territorios negros nas cidades Brasileiras [Black territories in Brazilian cities]. *Estudos Afro-Asiáticos, 17*, 29–41.

Sanjek, R. (1971). Brazilian racial terms: Some aspects of meaning and learning. *American Anthropologist, 73*(5), 1126–1143. https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1971.73.5.02a00120

Sansone, L. (2003). *Blackness without ethnicity: Constructing race in Brazil*. Palgrave. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781403982346

Sato, S. (2013). The sportification of judo: Global convergence and evolution. *Journal of Global History, 8*(2), 299–317. doi:10.1017/S1740022813000235

Schapira, R. (2019). Mobilities of Brazilian jiu-jitsu coaches from Rio de Janeiro's periphery. *Swiss Journal of Sociocultural Anthropology, 24*, 115–120.

Schapira, R. (2024). Brazilian Jiu-jitsu as a marker of whiteness and anti-blackness. *Mecila: Working Paper Series, 65,* 1–32.

Sheriff, R. (2001). *Dreaming equality: Color, race and racism in urban Brazil*. Rutgers University Press.

Schiller, K. (2020). Masculinities in martial arts and combat sports: An interdisciplinary issue. *Sport in History, 40*(3), 291–295. https://doi.org/10.1080/17460263.2020.1784510

Silva, N. (1985). Updating the cost of not being white in Brazil. In P. Fontaine, (Ed.), *Race, Class and Power in Brazil* (pp. 43–55). University of California Press.

Skidmore, T. (1993). *Black into white: Race and nationality in Brazilian thought*. Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822381761

Soares, H.A., de Mello, R.D & Kogut, C.S. (2002). Internationalization and martial arts: The case of Carlson Gracie's Brazilian jiu-jitsu gym. *International Jornal of Sport Management and Marketing, 22*(5/6), 406–426. https://doi.org/10.1504/IJSMM.2022.128630

Sovik, L. (2004). We are family: Whiteness in the Brazilian media. *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies, 13*(3), 315 pp. 43–55325. https://doi.org/10.1080/1356932042000287044

Tadeu, E. (nd). Entrevista com Eugênio Tadeu [Interview with Eugênio Tadeu] [Video]. *YouTube*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2RITzIKvM9g

Telles, E. (2002). Racial ambiguity among the Brazilian population. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 25*(3), 415–441. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870252932133

Telles, E. (2004). *Race in another America: The significance of skin color in Brazil*. Princeton University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400837434

Telles, E., & Flores, R. (2013). Not just color: Whiteness, nation, and status in Latin America. *Hispanic American Historical Review, 93*(3), 411–449. https://doi.org/10.1215/00182168-2210858

Telles, T.C.B., & Barreira, C.R.A. (2025). Capoeira and Brazilian jiu-jitsu: Race, movement, and cultural exchange in Brazilian martial arts. In A. Rodríguez-Sánchez, J. Piedra & G. Jennings, (Eds.) *Martial arts in Latin societies* (pp. 207–217). Routledge.

Vasconcelos, P.C. (1997, September 30). Vândalos podem ser fichados [Vandals can be booked]. *Jornal do Brasil*.

Wade, P. (2014). Race in Latin America. In D. Poole (Ed.) *A companion to Latin American studies* (pp. 177–192). Blackwell.

Ware, V., & Black, L. (2002). *Out of whiteness: Color, politics, and culture*. University of Chicago Press.

Welko, M., & Silva, E. (2014). The history of Luta Livre and Vale Tudo in Brazil – Parts I-VII. http:// http://lutalivre-academy.de/publications/articles/the-development-of-luta-livre-and-vale-tudo-in-brazil-part-i-1

Wertheim, L. J. (2009). *Blood in the cage*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Zidan, K. (2020, July 7). From Pioneer to Propagandist: Renzo Gracie's history of hate. *Bloody Elbow*. https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2020/7/7/21316034/renzo-gracie-family-brazilian-jiu-jitsu-crime-homophobia-propaganda-bolsonaro-news?fbclid=IwAR1JDlR3QMUBT1lpAK6DjflsCl8ISwyfnuLHDA_udlAUHRwOLw_g0XFQlL0

MARTIAL ARTS STUDIES

ABOUT THE JOURNAL

Martial Arts Studies is the official journal of the Martial Arts Studies Association. Visit https://www.martialartsstudies.org/ to learn more about the Association, including conference details, publications, and memberships.

Martial Arts Studies is an open access journal, which means that all content is available without charge to the user or his/her institution. You are allowed to read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of the articles in this journal without asking prior permission from either the publisher or the author.

ISSN: 2057-5696

Martial Arts Studies is an imprint of Cardiff University Press, an innovative open-access publisher of academic research, where 'open-access' means free for both readers and writers.
cardiffuniversitypress.org