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## Capoeira Angola Center of Mestre João Grande

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### João Oliveira dos Santos - Mestre João Grande

Mestre João Grande was born on Jan. 15, 1933 in the tiny village of Itagi in the south of the state of Bahia, between Ilheus and Itabuna. "Gavião," and "Mestre João Grande" are all appellations referring to João Oliveira dos Santos, best known as "Mestre João Grande." Master of Capoeira Angola with more than 60 years of experience, is a highly respected figure in the world of capoeira and has received numerous awards. These include a *Doctorate of Humane Letters from Upsala College* in East Orange, NJ in 1995, and in September of 2001 at *The White House* in Washington DC, he was awarded the *National Heritage Fellowship* by the *National Endowment for the Arts*, which is one of the most prestigious awards for practitioners of traditional arts in the US. During his time in New York, *Mestre João Grande* has recorded the long playing record album "Capoeira Angola" with his long time comrade *Mestre João Pequeno*. He also recorded the CD, "Capoeira Angola: Celebrating 50 Years Of Tradition." *Mestre João Grande* is also featured on the must have CD, "Capoeira Angola From Salvador Brazil" under *Grupo Capoeira Angola do Pelourinho* and "Roots of Bahia" album produced by *Mestre Deraldo*.

On November 9, 2015 *Mestre João Grande* received yet another prestige award the "Ordem do Mérito Cultural 2015 Grao-Cruz" at *Palácio do Planalto*. This is the official workplace of the President of Brazil. It is located in the national capital of Brasília. The award was presented by the President of Brazil, *Dilma Rousseff*, and the Minister of Culture, *Juca Ferreira*. It was broadcasted worldwide LIVE and featured in all the top news publications in Brazil.

Recently *Mestre João Grande's* and his students happily accepted an honorable invitation by the *United Nations Organization of Staff of Negroid Origin (UNSONG)*, the *Brazilian Mission* and the *United States Missions to the United Nations* on September 26, 2016. He lead his students in a special performance at the *United Nation's International Decade of People of African Descent (2015-2024)* and partook in the debate about positive role models of African Descent. Another memorable experience which he enjoys sharing very much with his students and guests. He engages in performances large and small all with the same passion and dedication.

*Mestre João Grande* first learned Capoeira Angola in Salvador, he entered the *Centro Esportivo de Capoeira Angola* and studied with the great *Mestre Pastinha* as well as the notable *Mestre Cobra Verde*. *Mestre Pastinha*, who continues to be *Mestre João Grande's* primary source of inspiration along with metaphors relating to nature, opened the first Capoeira Angola School, the *Academia De Capoeira Angola*, in 1941 in the city of Salvador, Bahia in the northeast of Brazil. *Mestre Pastinha* dedicated his school to preserving and continuing the long tradition of this African martial art, teaching Capoeira Angola as a path of self knowledge and mastery. *Mestre Pastinha* was the first Capoeira Mestre (master) to write a book on the history, philosophy and practice of Capoeira, simply entitled 'Capoeira Angola.' He went to Africa with his students which included *Mestre João Grande* to participate in the Festival of African Arts and Culture during the 1970's and also produced albums promoting the unique musical component of this martial art. *Mestre João Grande* teaches in the African style, as a way of life, as his teacher *Mestre Pastinha* did before him.

In 1990, *Mestre João Grande* made the decision to emigrate to the United States. *Mestre João Grande* has worked on, and been the subject of, several video and films during his time in New York including, "Joao Grande" and he is prominently featured as the title subject for the film "Mandinga em Manhattan." The video "O Pulo do Gato" displayed many games over the years of friendship between *Mestre João Grande* and *Mestre João Pequeno*, while the video "Capoeira Angola do Mundo" highlights *Mestre João Grande's* games with various other mestres of capoeira. *Mestre João Grande* is also featured on many other television programs, films and videos, including an episode of "Sesame Street," "Pastinha! Uma Vida Pela Capoeira," "Besouro Preto," and the major motion picture, "The Interpreter" filmed in Manhattan. One April 2015 *Mestre João Grande* shared a wonderful celebration and workshop at his current Harlem, Manhattan, New York academy. It was attended by many guests from around the world for his 25 years of teaching in New York City.

While much beloved by his students at his academies in New York, Arizona, Bahia, Finland, Italy, Japan, California, Illinois, and Sebia, *Mestre João Grande* continues to be invited as a special guest at capoeira events around the world, where he is treasured as both an icon of capoeira and a deep well of information on the traditions and creativity of Capoeira Angola.