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**1932: Samba
in
competition**

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When the first official samba school parade took place in 1932 at Praça Onze, samba already had a long history in the city's streets, homes, and terreiros (Afro-Brazilian religious temples). Prior to that, samba was already thriving in samba circles, terreiros, communal homes, zungus (Afro-Brazilian communal houses), ranchos processions, cordões (Carnival troupes) and the streets of Little Africa.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Praça Onze and its surroundings were home to a vital part of Rio's Black culture. There, workers, musicians, women from Bahia, religious practitioners, Samba artists, and Carnival creators preserved traditions that helped shape modern Carnival. Tia Ciata's home, the ranchos associated with community leaders from the State of Bahia, drum sessions, circles, and popular processions laid the foundation for Samba to become increasingly intertwined with the festivities.

The ranchos played a crucial role in this transition. They introduced to the streets a form of parade featuring a theme, costumes, standard-bearers, instruments, and choreographed movements. Hilário Jovino was a pivotal figure in this process, helping the ranchos become more organized and prominent



in Carnival. It was a Black popular celebration that took over the city with music, storytelling, and movement.

In the 1920s, Estácio took another step in this history. Ismael Silva, Bide, Nilton Bastos, and other Samba artists developed a beat better suited for groups to sing and walk together. The so-called maxixe-influenced Samba evolved into a rhythm with a more pronounced cadence, offering a sway for the body and rhythm for collective progression. The surdo bass drum helped lock in this new step.

It was in this context that Deixa Falar emerged, remembered as the first Carnival association to call itself a Samba school. The name was witty and clever: if there was a school to train teachers, Estácio also had its Samba masters. Interestingly, in 1932, the very year of the schools' first official competition, Deixa Falar entered the ranchos category. In other words, it went down in history as the first Samba school and helped create a language for the parade but followed a different path at that decisive moment.

The 1932 competition was organized by

journalist Mário Filho, owner of the newspaper Mundo Sportivo. The goal was to bring together, in an official contest, groups of Samba artists who had previously paraded informally through Rio's neighborhoods. Praça Onze welcomed Samba schools that were still small, formed by communities connected to Samba circles, terreiros (Afro-Brazilian religious temples), and Carnival ranchos. Among the pioneers were Estação Primeira de Mangueira, the first parade champion, and Vai Como Pode, which later became Portela Samba School. The parade was quite different from the Carnival we know today. Participants wore simple clothes, often everyday garments adorned with some Carnival detail. Parade sections were still loosely organized, and the dancing was inspired by swing and improvisation. The public watched up close in the street, without the separation of large grandstands.



The schools' Samba was not yet the samba-enredo (samba theme song) we know today. The composition did not necessarily relate to the proposed parade theme and featured a fixed first part, sung by the lead singer, followed by an improvised second part. Gradually, this practice changed: the Samba began to be fully composed before the parade and more clearly conveyed the story of the theme presented by the school.

As Samba schools became more organized, the Baianas secured a place of their own. The Baianas section was established as a tribute to the “aunts” who welcomed Samba artists, opened their homes, cooked, prayed, and helped protect Samba during times of repression. As the parades became institutionalized, their presence became mandatory, preserving on the parade avenue the memory of these women who were essential to the formation of Rio’s samba. By parading with their Baianas, each school



reaffirms its commitment to memory, ancestry, and the female strength that helped Carnival reach its current moment.

The judges mainly valued harmony, the quality of the Samba song, and the schools' popular authenticity. Visual opulence would take on a different role in the following decades. In 1932, the competition focused on Samba, the community's presence, and the ability to complete the route while singing, playing, and keeping the school together.

From that competition onward, the Rio Carnival began organizing a new form of popular spectacle. At Praça Onze, Samba found a new way to present itself to the city. The public began to realize that these small schools had a great community and cultural strength.

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