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# They Lost **the Title**, but Made **History**

## Learn more They Lost **the Title**, but Made **History**

The list of champions tells one part of Rio Carnival's history. The other emerges in parades that lost by score but remained part of conversations among samba artists, fans, composers, researchers, and school members. Some endured because of the power of their samba. Others, because of the grandstands' response, the boldness of their theme, a particular image, a theatrical solution, or the feeling that the official judging did not have the last word on that parade's importance.

In 1983, Império Serrano returned to the parade avenue after its historic title win with "Bumbum Paticumbum Prugurundum," presenting "Mãe Baiana Mãe" (mother from the state of Bahia). Developed by Renato Lage from a theme by Fernando Pamplona, the parade honored the baiana as a central figure in the samba school, popular culture, and the formation of Carnival. Imperatriz Leopoldinense and Beija-Flor shared the title, while Império finished third. Its placing, however, did not overshadow the presence of Aluizio Machado and Beto Sem Braço's samba in the Carnival repertoire. "Mãe Baiana Mãe" remained one of the decade's best remembered compositions.



In 1984, the year the Sambadrome opened, Vila Isabel presented “Pra Tudo se Acabar na Quarta-Feira” (For It All to End on Wednesday), by Fernando Costa. The theme focused on those who work to build the parade and on the end of the celebration after the scores were announced. The school placed fifth on Monday and did not compete in the Super Championship, won by Mangueira. Even so, Martinho da Vila’s samba outlived the official result. People continued singing it because it recognizes, with precision and affection, the work of sculptors, painters, embroiderers, carpenters, seamstresses, costume designers, illustrators, craftspeople, parade participants, and the other school workers.

In 1985, Caprichosos de Pilares brought “E por Falar em Saudade (And Speaking of Longing)...,” by Luiz Fernando Reis and Flávio Tavares, to the parade avenue. The parade used humor and social criticism to comment on Brazil at the end of the military dictatorship. The school finished fifth, but its samba won strong popular support and helped establish Caprichosos as a school capable of addressing politics with wit, irony,



and direct communication with the public.

In 1989, Beija-Flor presented “Ratos e Urubus, Larguem Minha Fantasia” (Rats and Vultures, Let Go of My Costume), by Joãozinho Trinta. The parade brought a harsh critique of social neglect to Sapucaí and became known for the image of the censored Christ figure, covered by court order. Imperatriz Leopoldinense won with “Liberdade! Liberdade! Abre as Asas Sobre Nós,” (Freedom! Freedom! Spread Your Wings Upon Us), and Beija-Flor placed second. Even without the title win, “Ratos e Urubus” became a reference point for discussing censorship, inequality, aesthetic boldness, and the boundaries between technical judging and public impact.

In 1995, Portela presented “Gosto que me Enrosco” (I Love Getting Entangled), by José Félix. The parade revisited the history of Rio’s festivities through ranchos, blocos, cordões (different forms of Carnival groups), Carnival societies, and popular figures associated with the formation of Carnival. The school placed

second, behind Imperatriz Leopoldinense. The samba by Noca da Portela, Colombo, and Gelson remained in the memories of many Portela supporters and admirers, especially for its direct connection to the celebration's history and Rio de Janeiro's own Carnival identity.

In 1997, Mocidade Independente de Padre Miguel presented "De Corpo e Alma na Avenida" (With Body and Soul on the Avenue), by Renato Lage. The school made the human body its parade theme and created a performance marked by powerful visual solutions, including the heart float. Viradouro won that Carnival, and Mocidade placed second. The parade remained among the school's most remembered for its visual power, its samba, and its creative approach to bringing an unusual theme to the parade avenue.

In 1998, Viradouro sought a second consecutive championship with "Orfeu, o Negro do Carnaval" (Orfeu, the Afro-Brazilian of Carnival) by Joãozinho Trinta. The theme brought the myth of



Orpheus into the world of hillside communities, samba, and urban tragedy. The school finished fourth in a year when Beija-Flor and Mangueira shared the title. The placing fell short of some spectators' expectations, but the parade remained a subject of discussion for its visual ambition, musical power, and Carnival interpretation of a story already associated with Brazilian theater, cinema, and music.

In 2001, Beija-Flor presented "A Saga de Agotime, Maria Mineira Naê," developed by Cid Carvalho, Fran Sérgio, Nelson Ricardo, Shangai, and Ubiratan Silva. The theme told the story of Nã Agotime, an African queen associated with Dahomey, who was enslaved and taken to Brazil, where her story is linked to the founding of Casa das Minas in Maranhão. The school placed second, half a point behind Imperatriz Leopoldinense, but the parade remains one of the most remembered of the Sambadrome era.

In 2004, Unidos da Tijuca presented "O Sonho da Criação e a Criação do Sonho: a Arte da Ciência no Tempo do Impossível" (The Dream of Creation and the Creation of the Dream: The Art of Science in the Age of the Impossible), by Paulo Barros. The school placed second, behind Beija-Flor, but brought about an important change in how the public viewed floats and parade participants. The DNA float defined the parade because the participants' bodies were part of the scene, creating movement, surprise, and visual impact for the grandstands. Unidos da Tijuca lost the championship, but that parade placed Paulo Barros at the center of the debate on theatrical invention at Sapucaí.



In 2018, Paraíso do Tuiuti presented “Meu Deus, Meu Deus, Está Extinta a Escravidão?” (My God, My God, Is Slavery Abolished) by Jack Vasconcelos. The parade addressed abolition, the absence of reparations, and contemporary forms of labor exploitation in Brazil. The school finished second, just one tenth of a point behind Beija-Flor. The sections depicting manipulated protesters and the vampire president figure drew widespread public attention. Tuiuti, which did not usually rank among the title favorites, became central to conversations that Carnival.

In 2020, Grande Rio presented “Tata Londirá: o Canto do Caboclo no Quilombo de Caxias” (Tata Londirá: The Song of the Caboclo in the Quilombo of Caxias), by Leonardo Bora and Gabriel Haddad. The theme honored Joãozinho

da Gomeia, a babalorixá, or Candomblé priest, from Bahia associated with the history of Candomblé, popular culture, and the Baixada Fluminense region. The school tied Viradouro on points but lost the title on the Parade Flow tiebreaker. The runner-up finish reinforced the perception that Grande Rio had found its own language, rooted in research, appreciation for Caxias, and the presence of Afro-Brazilian references on the parade avenue.

In 2023, Viradouro presented “Rosa Maria Egípcíaca,” by Tarcísio Zanon. The parade told the story of Rosa Maria Egípcíaca, an enslaved Black woman who lived in colonial Brazil and is recognized as the first Black woman to write a book in the country. The school placed second, just one tenth of a point behind Imperatriz Leopoldinense. The performance was remembered for its visual finish, the historical power of its theme, and its choice of a figure still little known to the general public.

The scoring determines each year’s champion through marks, criteria, and tiebreakers, but the public continues to assess sambas, images, themes, visual solutions, aesthetic choices, and the response on the parade avenue. That is why many parades without a title are remembered as intensely as championship winners. They help us understand Carnival as competition, artistic creation, collective memory, and an ongoing conversation among the school, the grandstands, and the city.

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