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Book Review: Fighting For Honor: The History of African Martial Arts in the Atlantic World

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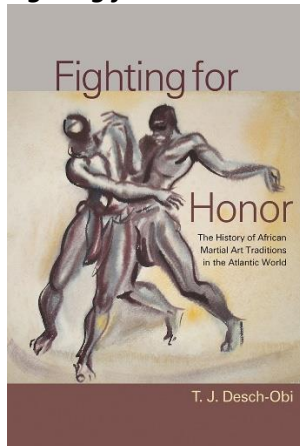
Book Review: Fighting For Honor: The History of African Martial Arts in the Atlantic World

Abstract

Dylan McElroy reviews *Fighting for Honor: A History of African Martial Art Traditions in the Atlantic World*, written by T. J. Desch-Obi.

Keywords

Martial Arts, African-Atlantic Studies, Diaspora

Fighting for Honor: The History of African Martial Arts in The Atlantic World

Thomas J. Desch-Obi

The University of South Carolina Press

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Thomas J. Desch-Obi is a History and Language Professor at Universidad ICESI's Centro De Estudios Afrodiasporicos in Cali, Colombia. He is also a member of the history department at Baruch College in New York City. His main focus of research is in exploring the historical ethnography of pre-colonial Africa and the African Diaspora. In terms of writing style, Thomas J. Desch-Obi's *Fighting for Honor: The History of African Martial Arts Traditions in The Atlantic World*, combines fascination with the culture of various African tribes and their descendants brought over the Atlantic with the origins of their martial arts. By doing this, he contextualizes what the martial arts mean to their practitioners and how they used it in familiar and unfamiliar territory. Desch-Obi covers the range of 1st Century B.C. To the 19th and 20th Century A.D. All of Desch-Obi's writings, including *Fighting or Honor*, deal with the history of the African Diaspora in the Atlantic World and specifically the combat arts that were developed which helped elevate people of African Descent from bondage into communities that exist to this day.

Fighting for Honor: The History of African Martial Arts Traditions in The Atlantic World tells the reader exactly what they are getting into, a new world as well as perspective of the African Diaspora's martial arts. What is interesting about *Fighting for Honor* is that aside from cataloguing the martial arts, Desch-Obi goes into detail on the cultural significance that these techniques have. These can range from having spiritual and religious purposes to methods of distinguishing oneself to attain a sense of freedom even under the constraints of slavery.

South Carolinians, especially those interested in the history, culture, and the identity of the African Diaspora in South Carolina as well as the Atlantic World, will find *Fighting for Honor* to be a meticulously well-thought-out book. The book does address that the Gullah people of South Carolina do, in fact, retain these martial arts and have developed communities from this shared cultural touchstone. South Carolinian readers will also find it fascinating that the African Diaspora's martial arts aided in resisting the indignity of slavery. The African Diaspora used these combat methods as a deterrent from abusive treatment. Displaying their prowess also allowed them to gain respect and honor from their community. The age range for this book is Young Adult to Adult as the book content does contain violence, language, depictions of abuse (slavery), and is not suitable for children.

In conclusion, *Fighting for Honor* is a book that speaks to a way of life readers may not have known about. Readers will also be helped by the way that Desh-Obi contextualizes the time, historical situations, and use of the martial arts covered in the book. *Fighting for Honor* provides perspective on how one encounters obstacles and also creates a sense of self that is reinforced by the community around them.

My name is Dylan McElroy, I have a Masters in Library and Information Science from The University of South Carolina-Columbia. I recently worked as a researcher for a Librarian and am currently seeking work as a librarian/archivist.