

Gumboot Dance from South Africa



CIA World Factbook
Map of South Africa

How did gumboot dancing come to be? The story begins in South Africa.

In the 1900s, the government in South Africa had a system of laws that kept white and non-white people apart. This system was called apartheid. Under the laws of apartheid, most of the land in South Africa was kept for white people. Because of these laws, many black South Africans were forced to leave their land in rural areas. Some of these black South Africans ended up working in gold mines for white bosses.

The conditions in the gold mines were terrible. The work was long, hard, and often dangerous. Workers were treated poorly. Many were forced to wear ankle chains. And the floors of the mines were often flooded with water, which could cause disease. To deal with the water problem, supervisors had the workers wear tall rubber boots - gumboots.

Workers were often not allowed to talk to each other in the mines. So they used their gumboots to communicate. They would slap their boots, stomp their feet, and even rattle their chains to communicate

with each other. This is how gumboot dancing was born.

Gumboot dancing involved rhythmic, percussive moves. The dancers used their bodies as the drum, making noise with their boots and hands. They drew from their traditional dances and rhythms to make new movements and songs. The songs that went along with their dances often had to do with the difficulties of their work lives.

Apartheid ended in the 1990s. Since then, gumboot dancing has thrived in South Africa and beyond. This unique rhythmic dance has inspired dancers and musicians around the world.