

The History of the American Kenpo Belt/Grading systems

The belt levels and teaching curriculum for American Kenpo have changed several times since their original inception by Mr. Parker. During the early 1960's there were only three different colors of belts used; white (four levels), brown (three levels) and black (ten levels). The white belt had brown tips, the brown belt had black tips and the black belt had red tips. The tips represented the color you were working for. Red stood for mastery within the black belt.

Around 1970 the first manual was released, and contained 32 techniques for orange, purple, blue, and green belts, followed orange belt extensions (also called green-orange) for Brown 3, and Long 4, 5, and 6 for Brown 2, 1 and Black 1 respectively (the other extensions did not yet exist). A yellow belt was added in 1971, and had 13 Techniques

In 1981 the second version of the manual was released which restructured the system into 24 techniques per belt. The yellow belt materials removed three techniques; "Intellectual Departure", "Aggressive Twins" and Spreading Branch", and "The Pincher" was renamed "The Grasp of Death".

Another variation of the curriculum also came into existence in the late 80s, its goal being to further decrease/spread out the amount of material the student learned for each belt level. Created by Mr. Brian Duffy and given the "okay" by Mr. Parker for use (although not a formal adoption system wide), a 16 technique per belt curriculum was defined, with the premise being that the student would work more quality and not so much quantity.

Over the years, more extensions were added. Today you will find extensions for orange, purple, blue and green. In the 24 Technique curriculum, these extensions are taught for Brown 1, and Black 1st to 3rd, while in the 16 technique system they are taught for Black 2nd to 5th.

After Mr. Parker's death there were discussions of formally cutting down to 16 technique curriculum, but nothing was universally agreed to. Many instructors and schools revised their requirements to the 16 techniques per belt curriculum, while many continue to teach the 24 technique one.

Whether the 24 or 16, the content and science behind them are identical, the only difference is the pacing of the materials