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Brazil Article: Poverty in Brazil

It will not take long at all for culture shock to set in for Americans traveling to Brazil who have never been outside of the United States. Minutes after arriving and traveling through Brazil, one will most likely pass massive favelas, also known as the shantytowns or the slums of Brazil. However, surprisingly not too far away from these favelas, one can also find the high-class neighborhoods. While Brazil acts as the economic leader in South America, the division of wealth between the rich and the poor within its own country is the most extreme compared to other countries.



Division between the upper and lower class is not at all difficult to see as they are obviously segregated within the same cities and even streets. For example, on the same street one can find the upper class eating at a five star restaurant, one can find an impoverished man buying a two Reis meal, equivalent to about one U.S. dollar, from a small kiosk on a street corner. More interesting is how the Brazilian beaches are also somewhat segregated.

Upon arriving in Rio de Janeiro, one of the first things our tour guide mentioned to the group was how the farther down we go on the beach and farther away from our hotel in Ipanema, the richer and more beautiful the people are. After initially hearing this I was somewhat confused by his comment and thought it was merely a joke. However, after walking on the beach several times in Ipanema, I became more aware of the racial and class difference and could not comprehend why it would matter where someone would want to relax on the beach. It seemed to be that the blacks preferred their own area on the beach, and then next to them would be the lower to middle class, and then a little more farther away the rich. One of the underlying reasons why Brazil still has some racial segregation may be because it was one of the last countries to abolish slavery. While there is obvious racial segregation in Brazil, it is still not as bad as the division among social classes.

According to the Institute of Applied Economic Research (IPEA), about 31.9 percent of Brazilians were poor in 2000 and approximately 53 million Brazilians live

below the government's poverty line. Currently about 6.5 million Brazilians live in favelas (Font, Mauricio A. 77). Furthermore, the Gini coefficient, which measures the inequality in a country's wealth distribution, states that the richest 5 percent of the population received 36.6 percent of the national income, while the poorest 40 percent received only 7.2 percent (Clemens). While the government is trying to employ policies to balance out social classes and power throughout their country, it has a long way to go in order for there to be some sort of social justice.

While for tourists it may be hard to escape and not notice the obvious signs of poverty within the cities, the rich class seems unfazed by it and simply ignores it. For example, at traffic lights it is common to see poor children and even adults showing off some kind of talent and in return asking for a little amount of money. They might do some kind of gymnastic trick, or show off their soccer skills by doing several tricks with their soccer ball. Moreover, many times kids bring in more money than what their parents are making during their day jobs. Consequently, it is not surprising to hear of children in the favelas dropping out of school in order to continue begging for money on the streets.



The beach is also another place you will be bombarded by poor sellers. It is very likely to be disturbed on the beaches by vendors trying to either sell foods and drinks or inexpensive jewelry. As long as the destitute remain occupying trivial jobs such as these, upward class mobility will be a hard goal for them to attain.

With a high unemployment rate of 9.9%, Brazilians are willing to work any kind of job for minimum pay. While there has been some more action in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in trying to redistribute wealth among the poor, Brazil still has a long way to go. Because of its massive debt, health and education programs are being neglected and there is no hope for social reform among the working class. As long as there is a lack of occupational opportunities, social inequality will remain in Brazil and the disparity between the rich and the poor will remain the same. Frustrated impoverished citizens, consequently, attempt to take matters into their own hands by starting street protests and demonstrations as a means to have their voices heard. In almost all cases, however, this form of social action has many negative repercussions. The real key to long-term solutions to Brazil's problem centers on education and the government's

ability to maintain domestic stability by providing the lower classes with a hope for a better tomorrow.

Works Cited

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Clemens, Benedict. "The Real Plan, Poverty, and Income Distribution, in Brazil."

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