

**THE BRAZILIAN PARADOX:
EXPANSE AND EXPENSE**

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A Guide to CRC Resources

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Brazil is a country of great expanse and great expense. The expansiveness derives not only from its physical immensity -- it is larger than the United States' mainland, contains the world's largest tropical rain forest, and has nearly 5,000 miles of coastline -- but also from a diverse cultural heritage and rapid economic growth. The expense derives from its debt, both monetary and human. The expanse and expense form the essential paradox in Brazil. This paradox causes people to question Brazilians and Brazil, and stirs interest in this fascinating country of diversity.

Cultural diversity is one aspect of Brazil's expanse. The main roots of Brazil's cultural heritage are found in the peoples of three continents: South America, Europe, and Africa. The confluence of these three races has led to a degree of tolerance that, according to many Brazilians, can be matched nowhere else. Certainly Brazilians have incorporated elements of all three cultures in their religion, dance and society in general. They have done so in a positive and energetic way, as they demonstrate in their world-famous celebration of Carnival.

Expansiveness also has characterized Brazil's economy that has grown at a remarkable rate. From 1967 to 1979, Brazil's GNP growth rate reached about 9 percent per annum. This growth, which made Brazil the most industrialized nation in Latin America and the eight largest exporter in the world, has enriched some sectors of Brazilian society at a detriment to others.

During President Figueiredo's administration (1980-1985) Brazil experienced a gradual return to democracy from military

rule. In a country where the military is the dominant institution, one waits to see if Brazil's political institutions can mature and keep the military out of politics. Brazil's expanse and breadth envelop every realm and seem to offer a myriad of possibilities.

Brazil is also a country of great expense in both financial and human terms. Brazil has the largest foreign debt in the Third World. In order to expand the economy by developing the natural resources of the Amazon Basin, Brazil borrowed heavily. The foreign debt reached \$121 billion in 1991. Brazil, like other Latin American countries, struggles every year merely to pay off the interest on these loans. The national debt has a human expense, too: crippling poverty. The class that has paid most and received the least from Brazil's huge economic growth was the working class. According to Boletim DIEESE (Departamento Intersindical de Estadística e Estudos Socio-Economicos), a Brazilian worker earning the minimum salary in 1984 had to work 154.5 hours out of an average 156- hour work month just to provide basic nutrition for a family of four. That left 1.5 hours per month to provide for health care, clothing, housing, transportation, entertainment, etc.¹ It is also worth noting that 40 percent of Brazilian workers earn less than the minimum wage. This inability to provide for basic needs leaves many Brazilians in despair. Brazil has incurred a large human debit that damages future generations.

¹Larry Moyer, ed. Brazil: A Primer. Philadelphia: American Friends Service Committee, 1979, pp. 47-48.

Brazil has long touted itself as the country of the future. Some view this portrayal of Brazil as a myth. Others see it as a dream. With half its population under the age of 14, Brazil certainly can count on a large pool of human resources to forge its future, but it must nurture and harness the human potential to shape Brazil's physical and economic resources into profitable, equitable enterprises appropriate to its unique abilities and needs.

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To serve as an introduction and brief history of Brazil, the video Brazil: New World in the Tropics (I-BRA-10-VIDEO; 30 mins.; secondary school/college) is a good visual resource for students. As background information for an instructor, Brazil: A Primer (I-BRA-4-BK; 52 pages; secondary school/college) is an excellent resource on Brazil. It includes a timeline of Brazilian history, a summary of politics and political development, a presentation of the five regions of Brazil and their characteristics, a unit on the people and ethnic heritage of Brazil, a unit on religion, culture and social life, a unit on recent events, including the economic situation; there is also a concise bibliography. It is perfect for those wanting a summary of major considerations with regard to Brazil.

Of the great expanses of Brazil, the people are one of the most intriguing elements. One item, Brazil (I-BRA-3-FLMST; secondary school), contains several filmstrips that provide an introduction to the Brazilian people, especially the filmstrips called The People of Brazil, Coffee Fazenda in Brazil, and Flight to the Cities. The filmstrips show Brazilians from various regions and social classes, common pastimes, educational conditions in both urban and rural areas. Brazil: Rubber and Sugar (DEV-BRA-1-SLIDE; 10 slides; secondary school) briefly shows life in the agricultural sectors of rubber, sugar, and coffee. The video Man of Leather (DEV-BRA-7-VIDEO; 20 min.; secondary/college) illustrates the life of people of the northeast of Brazil, particularly the northeastern cowboy, or vaqueiro. It would present a good point of discussion for students to compare the Brazilian vaqueiro to the American cowboy or the Argentine gaucho.

Another important group in Brazilian society is the indigenous population. The slide packet Indian People of the Amazon (IND-BRA-2-SLIDE; 10 slides; secondary school/college) illustrates the way of life of several Indian tribes in the Amazon basin. Brazilian Indian Feather Art (FA-BRA-1-BK; 76 pages; secondary school) showcases some native handicrafts.

At the time of contact with the Europeans there were about two million Indians in Brazil; now 150,000 to 200,000 remain. Many died of diseases brought over by the Europeans, and European influences have permanently altered the way of life of most Indians as well. Since the Europeans needed a workforce to dig mines and cut sugarcane, Indians were hunted down and forced to work. The

Mission (FF-PAR-01-VIDEO; 125 mins.; secondary school/college) is a full-length film (in English) that portrays the struggle between the Jesuits, the Spanish and the Portuguese over indigenous policy, particularly Indian slavery in the mid-18th century border region of Paraguay and Brazil.

The government assists in resolving disputes between Brazil's native Indians and people encroaching into their environment -- the Amazon region. Agencies, since the turn of the twentieth century, have been established to protect the Indian culture; however, many have been unsuccessful or even detrimental to the protection of the native Brazilians and their culture.

The slide packet Brazil: Future of the Indians of the Amazon (IND-BRA-1-SLIDE; 12 slides; secondary school) examines the question of if and how the Indians and their culture may be preserved. Often it appears that development schemes take precedence over respect for the Indians.

The other major ethnic group of Brazilian society are the descendants of Africans slaves. As the Indians died or escaped into the interior when enslaved, the Portuguese in 1538 began "importing" Africans, primarily to work as slaves on the great sugar plantations of the northeast. Since there were never sufficient workers in Brazil, the reprehensible practice of slavery continued until 1888; however the slaves were not content to accept their plight complacently.

The film Quilombo (FF-BRA-45-VIDEO; 90 mins.; secondary school/college) portrays how many slaves fought this unjust institution by running away and joining quilombos (fugitive slave

communities). Quilombo tells the story of the most famous slave community, Palmares, which existed for 90 years and at one point reportedly had a population of 20,000. After several failed attempts by both the Dutch and the Portuguese, a Portuguese army of several thousand defeated Palmares and executed its leaders in 1695.

Another film, Chico Rei (FF-BRA-19-VIDEO; 115 mins.; college), is a story of a great Brazilian folk hero who despite coming from an African royal family, was captured and taken to Brazil as a slave. The film shows how some slaves, during the eighteenth century discovery of gold in Minas Geras, were able to buy their own freedom. Although, it is in Portuguese without subtitles, Chico Rei illustrates another way that Africans fought and overcame the system of slavery.

The large number of Africans had a significant impact on Brazilian culture. They influenced the way Brazilians talk, eat, dress, and worship. The African influence on religion is particularly notable. As the Africans came to Brazil, the slave owners wanted to convert them to Christianity. The owners felt that by teaching slaves about Christianity, they were saving their souls. It also coincidentally gave the masters an excuse for enslaving the Africans: It was for their own good. However, the Africans already had their own religions and did not give them up easily. By combining elements of both Catholicism and the African religions, the slaves created what are called the Afro-Brazilian religions: candomble, umbanda, macumba, etc.

The video Bahia: Africa in the Americas (R-BRA-4-VIDEO; 58 mins.; secondary school/college) is probably the best resource in the CRC collection for developing a very basic understanding of the Afro-Brazilian religions. It gives clear and articulate explanations of the development and current social significance of these religions in terms that can be easily understood by North Americans.

The religions often incorporated some aspects of Christianity, while retaining certain aspects of the African religions. For example, the practice of going into trances and allowing themselves to become possessed by an orisha, or spirit, is common in Afro-Brazilian religions. Often they would match an African god with a Christian saint of similar characteristics. For example, God in the Catholic religion is also called Olorun by many who practice macumba, Olorun being the god of the heavens of an African religion.

The video Macumba: World of the Spirits (R-BRA-1-VIDEO; 20 mins.; secondary school/college) explores how Afro-Brazilian religions formed and how they are growing in their acceptance and practice by Brazilians. The video The Crucified Continent - South American Journey #6 (R-SA-1-VIDEO; 55 mins.; secondary school/college) has a segment on how the Brazilian Catholic Church is being challenged by the Afro-Brazilian religions. However, the extremely Eurocentric views of the series' narration will need to be addressed by the instructor.

Brazil's famous Carnival epitomizes the inclusiveness and expanse of its culture. Four days of wild revelry, street dancing,

and celebration provide a common link between Brazilians of all races and social standings. The slide packet Brazil: Carnival (DF-BRA-2-SLIDE; 30 slides; secondary school/college) gives background information on the celebration and depicts the dance and pageantry associated with Carnival.

The video King for a Day: Rio de Janeiro -- South American Journey #7 (DF-BRA-4-VIDEO; 55 mins.; college) explains the participation of people from the poorest sectors of Brazilian society. It also notes how the wealthy are taking over the traditionally Black folk festival and are replacing the escapism of the traditional celebration with the commercialism of today. (The slide packet is suitable for all audiences, but the last two videos are somewhat revealing, and some may find the partial nudity offensive.)

The video Samba da criacao do mundo (FF-BRA-35-VIDEO; 56 mins.; college) uses the samba dance to tell the legend of the creation of the world according to the Yuroba culture. The dance is performed by one of the samba schools of Rio de Janeiro during Carnival.

Not only a place of great expanse, Brazil also finds itself with great expenses. The video The Brazilian Connection (HP-BRA-2-VIDEO; 60 mins.; secondary school/college) traces Brazil's economic policies over the last five decades, its status as a significant debtor nation, and its commercial ties to the United States. In spite of tremendous resources, Brazil faces serious poverty for many of its people.

The first segment of the video The Politics of Food (DEV-BRA-3-VIDEO; 30 mins.; secondary school/college) focuses on Brazil's economic development and its ramifications on types of agricultural production and food supply. The video Santa Marta: Two Weeks in the Slums (DEV-BRA-6-SLIDE; 54 mins.; secondary school/college) shows life in the favelas (squatter settlements) and notes how favela-dwellers are victims of unfounded prejudices and are actually people determined to improve their lot in life.

The feature film Pixote (FF-BRA-21-VIDEO; 127 min.; college) presents an intimate, sometimes funny, sometimes saddening view of the life of Brazil's street children. Pixote is a particularly intense film and may not be suitable for all audiences due to the stark portrayal of reality (including some sexual situations). The video Common Table: Basic Christian Communities in Latin America (R-LA-1-VIDEO; 28 mins.; secondary school/college) explains what basic Christian communities are and how their members are involved in identifying and solving problems that face the disadvantaged of society in Brazil and elsewhere.

Recently, the Amazon has attracted much attention and controversy. The Amazon is the world's largest tropical rain forest and largest river basin; it alone produces 20 percent of the world's oxygen. The Amazon is an area of great physical expanse and ecological richness and diversity. Certain species found there are found nowhere else. Scientists believe that thousands of species have not been recorded.

The Amazon is also an area of great expense. Brazilians, looking to develop the Amazon, often use deforestation techniques.

The expense arises from the poor rate of return on deforested land. Often farmers and ranchers move into an area and cut down and burn vegetation in order to plant crops or to graze cattle. However, rainforest soil is very thin; nutrients are contained in the vegetation layer rather than the soil itself. Erosion is also a serious problem. After a few seasons or less of good crops or good grazing, the land can no longer support either activity. The deforested land is not reclaimed by the forest because the tropical rain forest is a fragile and complicated ecosystem.

With the destruction of the forest comes the often permanent destruction and extinction of many species of animal and plant life. The Amazonian question receives excellent, comprehensive treatment in the video The Decade of Destruction (GE-BRA-3-VIDEO; each segment is approx 40 mins.; secondary school/college). This five-part series examines the issue of development of the region and the problem of deforestation from several points of view. Individual viewpoints proffered come from a settler in the Amazon whose sons had been killed and/or kidnapped by Indians, Indians forced off their land by an encroaching and often insensitive civilization, and government workers trying to help protect Indian rights and help make contact between the two worlds in a non-confrontational manner. Professional points of view are offered by government officials who deny the short-sightedness and ill effects of the type of development they are encouraging and Brazilian environmentalists who believe that the kind of development being pursued by the settlers, ranchers and miners is non-productive and costly. This series covers the gamut of issues involved and

provides a clear presentation of a complicated situation.

The Mahogany Timber Shed (GE-BRA-5-VIDEO; 53 mins.; secondary school/college) is an interesting low-budget documentary. Although the narration and camera work are of poor quality, the documentary provides an in-depth look at one aspect of the commercial side of development in the Amazon. The Mahogany Timber Shed traces the process of gathering mahogany timber and its arrival at the lumber mills. The documentary discusses the problems that the people of the region will face after the end of the mahogany boom.

Other documentaries, Part II and III of Jacques Cousteau's Amazon (GE-SA-1-VIDEO; 50 mins. each; secondary school/college) also cover development issues in the Amazon region. Both of these PBS Nature series videos raise questions on how to develop the Amazon effectively and responsibly.

There are also several videos dealing with the wildlife of the Amazon. The video Sweet Fresh Water (GE-BRA-6-VIDEO; 55 mins.; secondary school/college) covers the global importance of the Amazon River, and David Attenborough's Jungle (GE-SA-5-VIDEO; 60 mins.; secondary school/college) illustrates the life of various forest plants and animals.

Of course the Amazon is not the only region in Brazil. In The Pantanal (GE-BRA-8-VIDEO; 60 mins.; secondary school/college), a PBS Nature Series' documentary explores the "world's greatest wetlands." In the southwest corner of Brazil, the southern half of the South American continent drains into a 40,000 square mile area, known as the Pantanal, during the rainy season from October to March. The wildlife region receives extensive coverage, while the

effects of man (cattle raising and agro-export companies that use large amounts of fertilizer) only are discussed at the end.

Another area that the PBS's Nature Series examines is the Planalto, or the high plains of Brazil, in Emas Park (GE-BRA-4-VIDEO; 54 mins.; secondary school/college). Emas Park is named after the South American ostrich-like rhea (which is ema in Portuguese). Like other Nature Series documentaries, George Page narrates almost exclusively on the animal life in the high plains of Brazil.

The great expanse and great expense form the Brazilian paradox that causes people to question Brazilians and Brazil. By questioning others, students may gain insight into their own cultures.