

Migration

B-38
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CATEGORY: BRAZIL: NOW

CONCEPTS: POVERTY, urbanization, economics, social class, urban/rural, migration, race/ethnicity

ACTIVITY: THE FAVELAS OF RIO: A DRAMATIZATION.

OBJECTIVES: Upon completion of this unit the student will be able to:

- 1) recognize and describe a favela and the life of the favelados,
- 2) explain the economic reasons behind the formation of a favela,
- 3) explain the social consequences of life in a favela.

MATERIALS: Copies of the following reading.

PROCEDURE: The reading includes both a general description of the favelas, and a story of two invented but plausible favela children. After your students have had time to read and think about the essay, divide them into groups of 3-4 students. Give them a little time to prepare a dramatized and improvised dialogue that might take place among American students and the favelados. If they write down the points they wish to cover the improvised dialogue will run smoothly.

They will want to include such topics as:

1. what life is like in the favela
2. the favelados' hopes and fears
3. how the American students feel about life in the favela
4. favela life compared to the U.S. students' lives
5. ways of improving the favela or escaping from it

VOCABULARY: favela, favelado, squatters, shanty towns, carioca, base community

RESOURCES: J. Mayone Stycose, Children of the Barriada, New York: Grossman, 1970 (photographs of urban poor including Bahia, Brazil), Dom Hélder Câmara, Revolution Through Peace, New York: Harper, 1971 (one of the founders of the church movement which led to "base communities" in Brazil speaks of the role of the Church in the Third World).

LEVEL: MIDDLE GRADES

Source: Gibbs, Virginia G. *Latin America: Curriculum Materials for the Middle Grades*. Center for Latin America, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. 1985/1989.

THE FAVELAS OF RIO

Rio de Janeiro, like many other cities in Latin America, contains a large population of "squatters," slum dwellers who have illegally built shacks on private or public land. Because these cities have been unable to provide enough housing for the poor, these settlements or "shanty towns" have become a permanent part of the urban scene. In Brazil, they are called FAVELAS, and their inhabitants are called FAVELADOS. There are nearly 300 favelas in Rio, more than in any other city in Brazil. Approximately one of every six "cariocas" (inhabitants of Rio) lives in a favela.

The homes, built on hillsides or swamp lands, are generally made of wood planks, mud, tin cans, corrugated iron and anything else people can find or purchase for next to nothing. Some cling to slopes so steep that the dwellings are in constant danger of being swept away in the heavy tropical rain storms that sometimes sweep through the city. Not many years ago, several hundred favelados were killed in landslides and the authorities were forced to close the most dangerous favelas. With few exceptions, the favelas have no paved roads, no garbage collection and sewerage. Most favela houses are without running water, and some also lack electricity.

The favelas date back to the first wave of migration from the countryside. After slavery was abolished in 1888, many plantation owners either closed their plantations or employed only white labor, rather than pay wages to their ex-slaves. The former slaves from areas near Rio, with no employment opportunities or places to live in the countryside, came to Rio and built a series of shanty towns. These settlements became known as favelas in 1897, when a group of soldiers returning from Bahia, where they had fought rebels, were told the government could not pay them. They settled in a shanty town on Providence Hill and named their settlement "Favela" after the wildflower which had bloomed at their encampment in Bahia. From that time on, the term "favela" was used to designate all shanty towns.

Most of the early favelados were black, and the same is true today, when most favelados are black or of mixed blood. They help to maintain Brazil's strong African traditions and provide many of Rio's cultural gifts: samba and carnival dances, spiritist religions, and African arts. However, their contributions are not often given proper recognition.

The favelas can be dangerous places for the outsider. Professional criminals and carioca "malandros" (cynical ne'er-do-wells with typical wide-brimmed hats who are con men and thieves) hide in the favelas. However, the majority of the favela dwellers are good, well-meaning people who try to make a living and cure their misery as honestly as they can.

One of the largest, and certainly one of the most famous favelas in Rio is Rocinha, which has approximately 34,000 inhabitants. It is located on the slopes between the Tijuca Mountains and the peak called Pedra dos Dois Irmãos ("Rock of the Two Brothers"). In

Rocinha, there is little sense of urban organization: the shacks face all directions. An access road runs along the edge of this favela, but inside people have to move through narrow, winding dirt paths. When it rains, these paths become rivers of mud and ponds of filthy, unsanitary water. Health conditions are very poor.

In order to understand how people live in a favela, here is a short story about two young people from Rocinha.

THE STORY OF JOÃO GILBERTO AND MARIA APARECIDA: TWO FAVELADOS

João Gilberto is 14 years old and has never gone to school. He lives in the Rocinha favela in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. His house is half-way up the favela. It was built partly of brick and partly of wood. The roof is made of large sheets of corrugated iron. The house has two rooms: one is a kitchen and the other a bedroom-living room. The latter contains one big double bed and two double bunks, together with a wardrobe, a cupboard, a radio, an electric fan, and a television set. Eight people sleep in this room: João Gilberto's father, who is currently unemployed; his mother, who earns about \$35.00 a month as a washerwoman for one of the wealthy families in a nearby neighborhood; João's older brother and two younger sisters; his uncle and cousin. Three people sleep in the big bed, five in the bunks. By the door, inside the bedroom, but hidden by a plywood partition, is a ceramic toilet that can be flushed with a bucket of water which is carried from a water fountain nearby.

João Gilberto's house is overcrowded, but it is still better than many others. In the kitchen, there is a gas stove and a refrigerator. Outside, the house is surrounded by a large amount of garbage: old tin cans, bottles, rags and other kinds of litter. The favelas produce a lot of waste and, because there is no garbage collection, large and foul-smelling dumps are found all over. There is simply no place else to put the trash. João Gilberto does not like these conditions, but he has no hope of change. He was born in Rocinha and he will probably spend the rest of his life there.

Maria Aparecida, who is 15 years old, also lives in Rocinha. Her house, made out of wood, is located near the top of the favela. A slippery mud path leads up to her house. The house cost about \$160 to build: there are two rooms plus a kitchen. Six people live in the house. Maria Aparecida's father, who earns about \$80.00 a month as a hospital doorman; her mother, who is a waitress at a restaurant on Copacabana Beach and earns about \$50.00 a month; and Maria Aparecida's sister, brother and grandmother.

The grandmother is originally from Pernambuco, in the northeast of Brazil. She has lived in the favela for 20 years. Maria Aparecida's parents decided to leave Pernambuco 6 years ago; they had hopes of finding a better life and they have not been disappointed. Their life is much better in the favelas than it was in Pernambuco. Coming to live in Rio, even if it means living in a favela, means a step up in life. Rocinha is a cheap place to live, and its inhabitants do not

have to travel too far to get to work each morning. Maria Aparecida and her sister and brother have hopes of leaving Rocinha one day. They are very good students and dream of living in one of the beautiful apartment buildings in Copacabana.

The family is very interested in improving their lives. Maria Aparecida's parents both participate in a "base community" in the favela. This is a neighborhood church organization in which people study the Bible and also look for ways to better their local communities. Last year, they formed a brigade to clean up some of the unhealthy dumps surrounding their homes. They are now preparing a list of things they would like the government to help with: some paved streets, garbage collection, a sewer system, a medical clinic, and other things. It is unlikely that the children's dreams of living in Copacabana will ever come true, but the "base community" may make the favela a healthier, more comfortable, and safer place for them to live when they grow up.

