

# *Favelas*

Rio de Janeiro, like most third world cities, is experiencing a dramatic increase in population. This increase has come mostly in the form of the rural poor migrating to the cities. Because of the high land values and the enormous demand for space, these poor are forced into squatter settlements known as favelas. Named after the location of the first such settlement, the hill Morro da Favela, these settlements usually occur in two areas of Rio: one, along the steep hillsides or, two, along the outer fringes of urban expansion. The most famous favelas are those build along the hillsides (see the picture above). The houses are usually made first from wattle-and-daub, a mixture of sand and clay, and eventually to the use of wood, brick and sheet metal. One can tell the length of time that each family has lived in the favela by the type of material the ir house is made of and its location. Usually the first settle near the bottom of the hills and as time goes by the hill fills upward. Since their is no rent to pay, the money saved is used to purchase stronger materials such as brick and cinder blocks. These are then used to modify and solidify the structure. Houses are only upgraded if the site is safe from landslides and demolition by the city.

The first recorded favela was in the early 1920's, made up of about 839 of these houses, even though squatter settlements have existed in Rio since the late 1800's. The first of these favelas were located on the hillside because of no rent and their central location to the city, utilities and work. Today, there are over 500 favela communities existing within the city of Rio and comprise about a third of the total population. Five-hundred thousand to 1 million are estimated to live on the hillsides directly surrounding the CBD. While the city of Rio is growing at 2.7% a year, the favelas are growing at a rate of 7.5% a year. This massive and uncontrolled urbanization has extended Rio's utilities and infrastructure passed their limit. The favelas are the ones that suffer. Rio is not the only city with these types of squatter settlements, but it was one of the first. What makes the favelas so unique for Rio is their location on the steep hillsides. Here the extremely poor live on the hillside with the scenic views while the rich live along the bottom where conditions are less than favorable. Not only is the direct opposite of city development around the world, but it creates a dramatic contrast between the rich and the poor by putting the two directly next to one another. This is one of the advantages to living in this type of favela. The rich provide many of the jobs, in way of services, that help sustain the the livelihood of the faveladors. Many of the rich rely on the cheap labor and service jobs that the faveladors supply, but this does not quell the criticism and negative image that they evoke.

## *How the People Of Rio View the Favelas*

The image that most people have of the faveladors revolves around their rural origins, supposed lack of urban experience and that they are only leaching off the infrastructure of Rio. Many consider the favelas the source of Rio's urban problems, citing them for crime, violence, promiscuity, family breakdown and the creation of a culture of poverty. The

prevailing view is that the favelas are just a transfer of poverty from the country to the city and are responsible for the negative effects of over-urbanization.

This over-urbanization is seen by some as a positive aspect, creating a perfect atmosphere for new industrial development. Because of the cheap, surplus labor that exists in the favelas, industries could find an easy market for locating and making money. Still others view the favela as just another part of the framework of Rio. It is a natural occurrence of the city and is compared to a weed growing in a garden, there will always be weeds. Despite these views, little is being done to modernize the favelas or even deal with the shortage of utilities.

### ***Shortage Of Utilities***

Though there is much variation from favela to favela, the shortage of utilities is constant. Some favelas have better access to different utilities due to their location. Regardless of this, all are below standard access. Clean water is a must and first and foremost in need. Water is usually accessed by tapping into a water main that runs near the favela. This is always at the bottom of the hill and creates an incredibly difficult journey for those who live near the top. Several journeys a day are sometimes needed to gain enough for a household. Only about 50% of the faveladors have access to an in-house toilet facility. From these facilities, sewerage runs through open ditches and eventually ends up at street level, creating an incredible health hazard. Electricity is scarce and very hard to access. The electric company connects outlets through only a few houses with meters, in the favela, and extension chords are run from these trunks to supply electricity to others. Each household is charged a fee per outlet, per month. This fee is usually much higher than what it would cost if it were metered directly. The demand is much higher than is being supplied and because of this, over-tapped lines do not fulfill the need. When electricity is needed most, the evenings, there is hardly enough to run simple machines need to bring in extra income (sewing machines, power tools, irons, etc.). Garbage is either incinerated on the hill or brought down to the street where the city is supposed to haul it away. If incineration occurs, this can easily ignite many of the wooden houses and cause people become sick due to the smoke. Since the city often does not live up to its obligation to haul away the trash, it can build up on street and also become a source for disease.

### ***The Favela As A Community***

Each favela has its own community complete with grocery markets, clothing stores, pharmacies, repair shops and other types of small businesses. This varies depending on the location of the favela and by the size of its population. These shops are created to serve the needs of the faveladors. Often times, for groceries, the prices are higher in the favelas than elsewhere in the city. This is usually counteracted by selling merchandise in much smaller, affordable quantities and extending credit to customers. There are also community based organizations which people can join to help put pressure on the city government to extend facilities. Most often these are created out of fear that the city will remove the residents from their homes. This is a constant fear that most faveladors live

under, but not all. Since a couple types of favelas exist, each has their own bonuses and drawbacks to locating where they do.

### ***The Different Favelas***

Favelas located in the South Zone have the best chance of finding work. This is due to the infrastructure of the wealthy and their need for people to complete odd jobs. Many times these jobs can lead into positions of housekeeper, nanny or groundskeeper for the wealthy residents. This then leads to another bonus of living in the this type of favela, schooling. In Rio, schooling is divided by address of residency. Because of this, faveladors are not allowed to attend these schools. If a parent has a connection or job with one of the wealthy residents, they can claim that as their home address and allow their children to attend that school. This is not so for residents that are located in a favela in an industrial zone or a suburbio. Neither of these places would have access to such a public service. Because the Brazilian industrial economy is so depressed, factory jobs are very hard to come by. This hurts the chances of a favelador finding steady work living in this area. The poor in the suburbio have it even worse. There is no access to jobs in the area they live so they are forced on long bus rides into the city everyday to find work. This puts a further financial drain on the residents of the suburbio who already have so little. Community coalitions are in constant battles to force the government to give money for a community school. It is nearly an impossible task to get funding of any type for these areas. The government does not feel it is a worthwhile investment to put money into these poor communities. It would rather avoid the whole situation and force these people to figure out other ways to school their children. Despite this, there is an advantage to living further from the city.

Because the land in Rio is so valuable, developers are constantly looking for new land to exploit. This would be mainly in the south and central zones where the higher land values exist. Since the the favelas and suburbios exist mainly away from this development, there is very little worry that they will be removed. More investment is be made in these homes and the local infrastructure. These squatter settlements are also located north of the city where the land becomes flatter and much less susceptible to mud slides and erosion. This in not the case of the favelas closer to the city. Mud slides have been known to wipe out entire favela communities and is very hard to control. The hillsides are very steep and erosion is uncontrolled. Since these favelas are located on marginal land, in a prime location, they live in constant fear that developers will come in and remove their homes to make way for new development. Very little housing for the poor is created by the state. The housing that is created is often located away from their work. There was an attempt to replace some favelas on the same site with three-story apartment buildings that would still allow the faveladors to work where they have been. This was only a limited experiment and was never considered to replace all favelas.

### ***The Favelas Compared To the City***

Unlike innercity poor, the favelas are considered a separate issue. There does exist an innercity poor to in Rio. They are not considered slums and are made up mostly of

Jewish, Spanish and Portuguese families who have live there for quite some time. Because of the high land value rates, there is a very high turnover rate of the poorer areas. There isn't the mass exodus away from the city and the poor moving in, like in the United States, but rather a constant clearing and rebuilding process that keeps new poor from finding existing housing to move into. The migrants who live in the favelas are looked down upon. Part of this is due to the fact that the majority of these migrants are black or mulatto. Over 70% of the faveladors are mulatto or black. This compares to less than a third of the rest of the city. Even though a very large portion of the population lives in the favelas, the government will often times not admit to their existence. There have been maps made recently, by the city, that show vacant land where thousands of faveladors live. It becomes easier to marginalize and forget, than to admit and deal with the situation.

Despite efforts to clear and stop the in migration, people have just kept coming to Rio. As cleared rain forest land becomes unfarmable, farmers give up and move to the city. Despite being marginalized and blamed for all kinds of Rio's social problems, the faveladors have created a society based on cooperation to survive and have found a niche in the overpopulated city. Recently, the populations in the Favelas has leveled off. Much of this is due to the lack of available land and the clearing of favela settlements. Despite this, the migration to the city still continues. In many ways, Rio does not wish to acknowledge the existence of the favelas would rather passively ignores them instead. By doing this the problem only gets worse and the faveladors are still subject to marginalization.

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