

Favelas in rio de janeiro: a hidden crisis essay sample



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Imagine a place where all the houses are constructed from mud, wood, rocks, or maybe sometimes brick. Where the people are dressed in rags and the children are involved in drugs and violence. Imagine a place where shootings occur weekly and practically everyone has lost a loved one. This is no nightmare; it is very real. This is a description of a typical favela in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Plainly, “favela” is the translation of “slum” in Portuguese. There isn’t one specific favela- in Rio de Janeiro alone, there are over 750 located all around the city and on hillsides. The reason why you’ve probably never heard of a favela is because it’s never publicized, and practically no one knows about what really goes around inside the favelas. In Brazil, where there are both very rich people and extremely poor people living side by side, one of the biggest favelas, Rocinha, is actually located directly above one of the most expensive neighborhoods in Rio de Janeiro, and can be seen from the campus of the American School of Rio de Janeiro. Although the people in Rio know about the favelas, they tend to ignore it and consider it outside of their world.

The people who live in the favelas are referred to as “favelados”, which is highly derogatory, and not only means living in a favela, but also someone who is ghetto, poorly mannered, unruly, etc. The Lancet offers an accurate description of the conditions in which these people live in.

“ In Rio, more than 1. 2 million people live in the favelas on less than \$1 per day. The residents lack access to the most basic public services, such as health care, education, and space for recreation. The results, Becker explains, are high incidences of malnutrition, diarrhea, pneumonia,

leptospirosis, skin diseases, rotavirus, hepatitis, gastroenteritis, hypertension, heart disease, and strokes.” (Loewenberg)

As happens in many poor places, poverty leads to bigger problems. Poverty causes drug dealing, theft, and violence. The favelas in Rio de Janeiro are one of the most dangerous places in the world. In a single confrontation in one of the favelas in June 2007, 19 people were killed (Duffy). “ Even by Rio’s standards, 2007 has been an exceptionally violent year; there were some 1, 300 murders in the city in the first three months of the year alone” (Thompson). The violence that goes on in the favelas is not simply people mugging others, or men getting into fights. Since drug gangs control most of the favelas, they cause most of the violence in Rio. These gangs are composed of many well-armed members. There are often shootings between two different gangs, resulting in several deaths of both the people involved and others. Because of these shootings and other acts of violence, the police have intervened, and to some extent even worsened the situation. The people murdered are not only those shot by drug gangs, but many who are killed by the police.

“ A factor of living in third world countries like Brazil is that you can’t usually trust the police” (Roadjunky). Instead of being a force of aid, the police have become a big problem in Brazil. Since they have intervened in the favelas, there are daily gun battles, resulting in even more deaths. The armored car in which police troops travel inside the favelas are bullet proof, and known as “ Caveirão”, which translates to “ Big Skull”. The logo on the side of the armored car represents the terror that the police generate in the favelas: it is a skull pierced by a knife, with two rifles behind it. Police troops are fighting <https://assignbuster.com/favelas-in-rio-de-janeiro-a-hidden-crisis-essay-sample/>

a war instead of protecting a country- the only means they use are violence. Amnesty International is “ a worldwide movement of people who campaign for internationally recognized human rights” (Amnesty International). They have highly criticizing the police’s efforts and actions towards the favelas.

“ It says Brazil’s public security policies have not only failed to reduce levels of violence and crime, but have contributed to their growth. Police kill about 2, 000 people a year in Rio de Janeiro...” (Gibb) The violence that goes on in the favelas does not affect only the drug gangs. The tragedies that occur every day affect everyone. Parents live horrified that their children will be killed or taken away from them. Family members are petrified of their loved ones being tortured by the police. Every day, more innocent people die. I once saw a special on a Brazilian newscast about favelas, where they asked several children who do not live in the favelas what their biggest fear was. Some answered monsters, others said spiders, and others said the dark.

When the children from the favelas were asked the same question, their answer was different. They were scared of stray bullets, death, and mostly of the police. This clearly shows the difference between children growing up in urban areas, in somewhat wealthy families versus those who grow up in fear in the favelas. Most parents are scared of their children staying home alone when they live in a suburb area, usually protected. Imagine the parents of the children in the favelas, who have to worry about explaining the harsh reality that they live in, explaining about drugs and death while trying to teach them morals. One father, Edilson Ferreira de Oliveira relates his experiences of raising his little girls in the dangerous favelas:

“ As he and his youngest continue walking, a man sitting on a step near the sidewalk lights a joint. The smoker is eye-level with the little girl, who is approaching with her hand still firmly inside her father’s. Just after the man exhales, the girl waddles through a dissipating mist of smoke. ‘ It’s hard to raise girls here,’ Oliveira says. ‘ But it’s easier than raising boys.’ He had a son. His name was Gean, and he was shot dead when he was 13 years old during a police raid. Oliveira holds onto his daughters hand, and they walk on.” (Reel) Oliveira’s story reflects not only the tortures and hardships which he faces every day, but it illustrates the lives of most parents who live in the favelas. So, if Brazil, not only Rio de Janeiro, has hundreds of these favelas which are such a problem, why hasn’t anything drastic been done? The first recorded favela was in the 1920s. “ While the city of Rio is growing at 2. 7% a year, the favelas are growing at a rate of 7. 5% a year” (Rio de Janeiro, Many Cities in One). Many Brazilians believe something has to be done about the favelas to better the living conditions of the people who live there, and lower the death rate majorly.

Although the government does a few things to help, Brazil as a whole is more “ selfish”, caring about tourism and money. Therefore, the images that are exported of Brazil are those that many of you have seen- the beautiful beaches, the beautiful women, the great soccer players. All the postcards in Brazil depict the beaches, thousands of tourism articles talk about how exotic and tropical the country is, and of course, when you think of a Brazilian woman you think of the Victoria Secret models like Adriana Lima. Instead of sending images and news of the tragedies, Brazil exports images of it’s wealth in order to benefit the country itself. If people around the world

do not know about the crisis in Brazil, nobody will do anything. Even people who live in Brazil in wealthier neighborhoods feel like the favelas are apart from them, and have no impact on their lives whatsoever. This mentality increases the death rates and the amount of violence that goes on in the favelas.

Thankfully, through the years, the media has found some positive ways to help the favela. Movies such as “ Cidade de Deus”, or City of God, have been produced and exported worldwide. Not that the movie is very positive; it bluntly shows the reality of the favelas, the drugs, the violence and the suffering. However, it is movies like City of God and documentaries such as Favela Rising that create awareness for the favelas. Awareness leads to help, which is what the favelas need. The “ Favela Tour” is another way to increase the awareness of the favelas. This program was introduced in Brazil to allow tourists to actually take a tour of one of the biggest, most developed favelas- Rocinha. As stated on the website, the purpose of these Favela Tours is to be, “ beneficial to the community, informative and surprising, not voyeuristic at all” (Armstrong). A non profit organization has also been instated in Rio de Janeiro, called Instituto Dois Irmaos, also known as The Two Brothers Foundation. Their mission is, “ to provide educational opportunities in the favela of Rocinha in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, through local and international community service and cultural exchange” (Two Brothers Foundation).

There are several other ways in which Brazil, and mainly the “ favelados”, are attempting to increase awareness about their conditions to try to obtain help. Many of these attempts involve communication between the people
<https://assignbuster.com/favelas-in-rio-de-janeiro-a-hidden-crisis-essay-sample/>

who live in the favelas, and the rest of the world. One way that people have found to be helpful is through music. Favelas have a characteristic beat and style of music to them, called “ funk”. “ Funk” has a unique background sound, and usually the DJ, usually known as an MC, raps about the struggles they live through every day. Before, “ funk” was considered trashy and “ poor people music”, however now it has been popularized and plays in clubs around Brazil. One of the most famous funk’s lyrics is translated into the following: “ I just want to be happy, walk calmly in the favela where I was born. And be able to be proud, and have the consciousness that even poor people have their place.” (Doca) By creating these songs with such meaningful lyrics, other people who know very little about the favelas can begin to slightly understand how difficult it is for the favelados.

Another great achievement the people of living in the favelas have made is to create a website called “ Viva Favela”, or “ Hurray for the Favela”. This website is designed to provide an inside look to all the issues in the favelas, including news and radio broadcasts. It includes job opportunities, photo galleries, entertainment- like most newspaper websites. A reporter described the website in the following manner,

“ The Viva Favela team is made up of journalists and “ community correspondents” who are favela residents qualified to act as reporters and photographers. With their “ inside” perspective, they help expose all of the human, historical, cultural, economic, and social dimensions of these lower income communities. Started in July 2001, Viva Favela aims to broaden the digital inclusion of these communities and to reduce social inequality. It is the only Latin American portal of its kind.” (Bastos)

<https://assignbuster.com/favelas-in-rio-de-janeiro-a-hidden-crisis-essay-sample/>

Slowly but surely, more people are becoming aware of the favelas, which is a first step to improvement. For whatever reason, thankfully, some small efforts are being made to help the favelas and the “ favelados”. I believe that if people are informed about what is going on, inevitably they will be affected by the awful conditions in the favelas, and will no longer ignore it. The best way to inform the people is by creating these movies and documentaries, and by showing them images, because simply telling people that there are these huge favelas in Brazil changes nothing. However, when you see an image like a little boy crying next to his father’s dead body because a gang member shot him, people want to help. Images hold the power of expressing the intensity of the situation that is going on in Brazil. Hopefully, one day, people will do more in order to stop all the violence and drug dealing in the favelas, and maybe the death rate in Brazil will decrease. Maybe they will make postcards with pictures of the favelas, and it will be part of the scenery of Brazil. Who knows?

Works Cited

Amnesty International. 2001. 17 October 2007 .

Armstrong, Marcelo. Favela Tour. 8 October 2007 .

Bastos, Maria Ines. “ UNESCO.” 05 November 2004. An Inside Look at Rio de Janeiro’s Favelas. 14 October 2007 .

Doca, MC Cidinho e. “ Rap da Felicidade.” Classicos do Funk. Som Livre, 2003.

<https://assignbuster.com/favelas-in-rio-de-janeiro-a-hidden-crisis-essay-sample/>

Duffy, Gary. "BBC News." 28 June 2007. War on Rio's drug gang slums. 8 October 2007 .

Gibb, Tom. "BBC News." 5 December 2005. Amnesty condemns Brazilian police . 8 October 2007 .

Loewenberg, Samuel. "The Lancet." 11 March 2005. Tackling the causes of ill health in Rio's slums . 8 October 2007 .

Reel, Monte. "The Washington Post." 2006. Life in Rio's Favelas; Youth Torn Between Gangs and the Government. 14 October 2007 .

"Rio de Janeiro, Many Cities in One." Favelas. 8 October 2007 .

"Roadjunky. com." 30 November 2006. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil - Coke and Favelas. 8 October 2007 .

Thompson, Neil. "WorldNomads. com." 21 June 2007. Rio de Janeiro - No end to Gang Violence? 15 October 2007 .

Two Brothers Foundation. 08 October 2007. 08 October 2007 .

"Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia." 8 October 2007. Favela. 9 October 2007 .