

## Chapter 9: The Long Road to a Middle-class Society

Poverty has always plagued Brazil, and is most exemplified in the poverty-stricken north east of the country. The north east is known to be the largest concentration of poverty in the nation, mostly due to unequal landholding, frequent droughts, and corruption and lack of education. The north east was most affected by Brazil's new found democracy. "Drought is a problem on income". Income is as important as food and water, many animals still die but due to income, people now live. The newly found income of the north east enticed investment in commerce and newly founded factories. Income inequality soon fell for the first time since the 1960's. Growth and job creation as well as a heightened minimum wage allowed the gap to shorten. Social programs like Bolsa Familia helped to raise many families out of poverty. Dilma announced that absolute poverty would not exist under her government. She planned on doing this by doing cash payments to poor families, each family found by the active work of social workers and community workers in their home towns.

This massive influx of new income to the poor bolstered the class C in Brazil. Class C has disposable income, and attempts to use it as a status symbol. Vehicle production increased during this time, and Brazil became the 4th largest manufacturer at the time. Many class C peoples still lived in impoverished conditions. There is much difference between class C and middle class who both have disposable income. Class C may still live in shacks or shanties, while middle class enjoy new vehicles and lavish homes. Which this equaling of people came the equating of healthcare. New community health care programs were installed and low cost generic medicines for malaria, tuberculosis, and AIDS were now widely available. No inclusive national program could be found, and private health care benefited only 25 percent of the local population. Dilma noticed a shortage of doctors and extended her hand to countries to recruit

them. These doctors were paid from a 25 percent royalty of Brazil's oil. Education is a key for modern society in which Brazil lacked. Education reform was a must.

On average, Brazilians had less than a 6th grade education. A new reform was needed and education for pre-K through 8th grade was given to the municipalities while high school was kept for the states. An advantage of this is now the work force was more educated and able to perform more demanding tasks. The major problem of the education system was not attendance but learning while at school. The days were broken up and some students would not end school till 11 pm. Education continued to rise to the top of Brazil's problems. With the enactment of the national education plan, educational spending was raised to 10 percent of the national budget. Reform came about since universities were equally disproportionate to other schools and up to half the budgets for schools were spent on pension. A new plan was implemented to embrace performance based incentives. A new curriculum with regular testing was enacted and resources went to the poorest and most violent neighborhoods. College was free to students who in return made almost 4 times more than high school graduates, and the cost was 5 times that of a child in high school.

Brazil has always been described as a melting pot of all cultures and colors, but now seems to be revoked of its title as a racial democracy. Just like the US, racism exists but in its own unique way. Affirmative action caused a rip between the left and right, the main fight being with universities. Universities fought against quotas, but soon Dilma signed a way ensuring half their intake represented the racial makeup of the local population.

The hardest challenge proved to be attitudes. Many Brazilians believed blacks belonged on the bottom of the pile. This began with leadership, where few if any blacks held positions of authority. It wasn't until March 2013 that Congress brought protection of labor laws to poor women working as maids and housekeepers. Favelas were a symbol of racial issues as well as

many others, including violent crime, drugs and lack of policing. In 2007, Jose Beltrame arrested police commanders for corruption and embarked on a new strategy of policing. His concept is to break gang control and increase positive police presence. Non-gang organizations were introduced to favelas in order to persuade the youth away from drugs and violence.

Overall, Brazilian police remained unreformed and undisciplined, and Brazil remained under violent attack. In 2012, the crack epidemic took the country by storm. Guns were easily obtained and were smuggled across the Paraguayan border. The federal police, though well trained, were small in number and unable to control the violent crime, spending most of their time enforcing border security. Violent gangs ran the streets, and a low level war between gangs and the police continues. Brazil's top fear now moved to crime. Society in Brazil changed over the last 2 decades from a poor unequal, uneducated society to a developing modern country. With new steps, democracy will reign supreme and it will become the middle class society it always desired to be.

It is my belief that Brazil, while not perfect, is taking steps in the right direction for education reform, and is making positive progress in shrinking income inequality. The "war on drugs" is key to reducing the fears on the streets as well as moving the country into a more advanced placement, by not falling to the power of the cartels. Just like most aspects of Brazil, the country as a whole needs to keep working to better itself and the lives of their people.