Should rural residents move to Brazil's megacities when faced with dwindling opportunities in the countryside?

Brazil is one of many Latin American countries that have faced a trend of rural-to-urban migration. People in the countryside are poor, and move to try to find a better life in Brazil's urban centers. In cities such as São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, however, these migrants often lack the skills to obtain good jobs, and are forced to live in *favelas* (shantytowns) at the outskirts of the city, which lack basic services like electricity and sewage. Read the following documents to defend your position in the Advocate/Decision-Making Activity.

Reading 1: Testimony from Bishops of Northeastern Brazil
"The Agrarian Problem"

Our peasants, as a general rule, continue to be bound to the plow and to various sharecropping systems which extract more value from their labor for the year than the value of the land that they work. The legal resources to which they may appeal, in practice have little efficacy. In rental arrangements, for example, the peasants are made to pay a percentage of the value of the rented land that is much higher than the percentage fixed by the Land Statute. The landowner almost always demands a higher rate, and if the peasant does not agree, he will deny him use of the land in future years.

The situation of rural wage laborers is not very different. In theory, their working conditions are defined and protected by labor legislation. But observe what happens in the sugar zone, in a monoculture that employs the majority of rural wage-earners of the Northeast. Employers, in order to get around the provision of the labor laws, resort to mass expulsion of the peasants from their lands … The expelled workers then must live in congested conditions in shantytowns near the "evacuated" land, forming a reserve of cheap labor easily available to agricultural employers. Now, recruited as "clandestine workers"—a term derived from the fact that they accept employment without a formal labor agreement—they must accept a wage that is even below the legal minimum …

Condemned to marginality in the countryside, exploited, without access to land, the peasant must either continue his struggle for land or emigrate to the region's urban centers, to São Paulo or some other place where he continues to be exploited …

The city is only a continuation of his odyssey. Disqualified by his lack of skills to compete for the kind of jobs generated by industry, jobs whose number is inadequate to absorb the expansion of the urban labor force, he swells the unemployed in the service sector, trying to find some sort of activity that will enable him to satisfy his most elemental need: to kill his hunger.

His situation, however, does not distinguish him basically from those who are employed, because they, too, are victims of the process of marginalization inherent in the system. The surplus of labor reduces their capacity to struggle for the conquest and preservation of their rights. On top of all this, wages are fixed at a level incompatible with the workers' most elementary needs.

SOURCE: HELDER CAMAR Y OBISPOS DE BRAZIL, *EL GRITO DEL TERCER MUNDO: TESTIMONIOS* (BUENOS AIRES: MERAY EDITOR, 1974). (PERMISSION PENDING.)

Agrarian: *related to farmers, farming, or agriculture.*
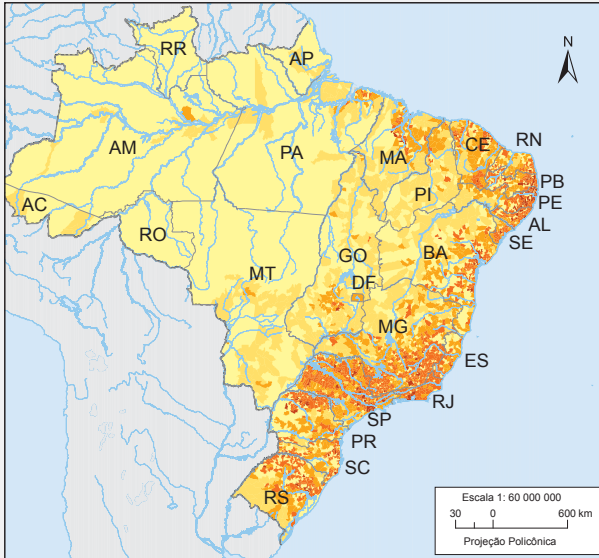**Clandestine:** *something kept or done in secret.*
Marginality, marginalization: *kept on the outside; made insignificant.*
Monoculture: *the use of land for growing only one type of crop.*
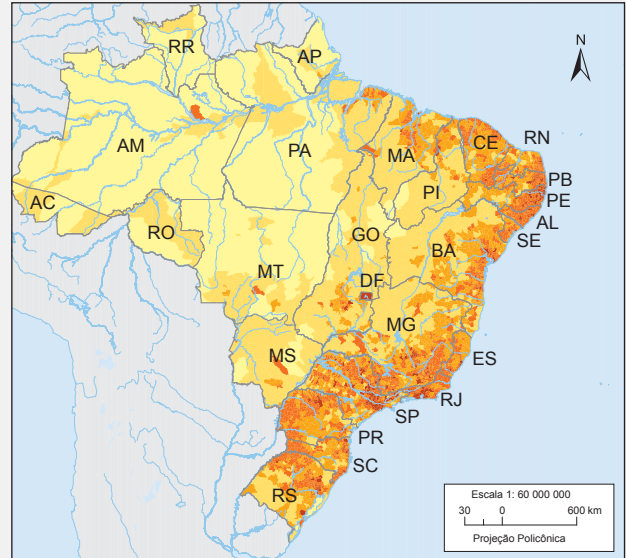**Sharecropping:** *a system in which farmers rent land in exchange for a share of the crops grown instead of paying rent.*

Chart: Population Density in Brazil in 1960, 1980 and 2007

1960

Escala 1: 60 000 000
30   0   600 km
Projeção Policônica

1980

Escala 1: 60 000 000
30   0   600 km
Projeção Policônica

2007

Residents per Square Km

- less than 1
- 1—10
- 10—25
- 25—100
- more than 100

Escala 1: 30 000 000
150   0   300 km
Projeção Policônica
Meridiano de Referência: -54° W. Gr
Paralelo de Referência: 0 °

SOURCE: IBGE (BRAZILIAN INSTITUTE OF GEOGRAPHY AND STATISTICS), DEMOGRAPHIC CENSUS, 1960/1980, HTTP://WWW.IBGE.GOV.BR/
IBGETEEN/ATLASESCOLAR/MAPAS_BRASIL.SHTM.

Reading 2: Life in the Cities

About 10 million people are packed into São Paulo, Brazil's largest city. Adding in the suburbs and *favelas*, the metropolitan area is home to about 16 million people. That makes São Paulo the third-largest city in the world. Rio de Janeiro is Brazil's second largest city and ninth-largest in the world. About 5.5 million people live in the city and about 10 million in the metropolitan area.

Why do rural Brazilians leave the wide-open spaces for the crowded cities? They want better jobs, housing, and living conditions. Cities also offer superior health care and nutrition. Urban residents, young and old, are healthier and live longer than rural people.

Overall, Brazilians are healthier now than ever before. In 1950, when most Brazilians lived in rural areas, the average life expectancy was forty-six years. By 1990, it had risen to sixty-five.

City Problems
In the mid-1990s, there were around 3,500 favelas in Brazil. These big-city slums are overcrowded and unhealthy. People from rural areas keep pouring in every day. Many have no job skills. For housing, they set up cardboard or metal shacks. In some favelas, the government has built public housing. But most of the slums have no electricity, running water, or sewers.

EXCERPTED FROM: ANN HEINRICHS, *BRAZIL*, ENCHANTMENT OF THE WORLD SERIES (NEW YORK: CHILDREN'S PRESS, 1997) 81–82, 88. (REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION.)

Reading 3: Interviews with Migrants

We found most migrants unable to describe their decision to migrate with any precision. It was clear that specific decisions involved complex factors, many of them not even conscious. Often a mixture of motives, involving pushes and pulls, works differently for persons in different life circumstances, as the following vignettes demonstrate.

Adult men with rural backgrounds and families tend to leave their homes only when it seems impossible to stay. For example, Sebastião left a small town in [the state of] Pernambuco's interior at the age of 54. He came to Rio with his wife and three of 16 children, some of whom were already in the city, because, as he put it, "I couldn't make it there anymore.… There weren't any more jobs to be found and the land wasn't supporting us." To make the trip he sold his only possession, one cow, and walked two days to arrive at Recife, where he bought a ticket to Rio for the equivalent of about U.S. $50.00.

Contrasted with this is the case of Amaro, a younger man who came to Rio from [the state of] Minas Gerais at the age of 19 to search for "better opportunities." At 17 Amaro had already left his birthplace, a *fazenda* (Brazilian-style plantation) and moved to the nearest municipal seat because "the situation was lousy and I wanted a better life." He had a brother in Rio who came to visit him and described "all the advantages in Rio, including better salaries and more *movimento*." Shortly afterward, Amaro borrowed money from his mother for the trip and convinced a cousin to go along. Amaro lived in three other *favelas* before settling on Catacumba as his home. The prominent factor in his decision, and that of many like him, was the desire to "be where the action is." In his mind, the countryside was a dead-end where the years plodded on in dull predictability while the city represented the unknown, exciting, and unforeseeable future.

These people, in different life circumstances, came to the city for a mixture of reasons, hardship weighing more heavily for some, the attraction of urban opportunity more compelling for others.

SOURCE: JANICE PERLMAN, "URBAN POVERTY AND POLITICS IN RIO DE JANEIRO," IN *THE MYTH OF MARGINALITY: URBAN POVERTY AND POLITICS IN RIO DE JANEIRO* (BERKELEY: UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS, 1976) 68–69. (PERMISSION PENDING.)

Table: Percent of Urbanization in Brazil by Region, 1980–2000

	1980	1991	2000
Brazil	**67.59%**	**75.59%**	**81.23%**
North	50.32%	59.05%	69.83%
Northeast	50.46%	60.65%	69.04%
Southeast	82.81%	88.02%	90.52%
South	62.41%	74.12%	80.94%
Center-West	70.84%	81.28%	86.73%

SOURCE: IBGE (BRAZILIAN INSTITUTE OF GEOGRAPHY AND STATISTICS),TENDÊNCIAS DEMOGRÁFICAS: UMA ANÁLISE DOS RESULTADOS DA SINOPSE PRELIMINAR DO CENSO DEMOGRÁFICO 2000, WWW.IBGE.GOV.BR/HOME/ESTATISTICA/POPULACAO_DEMOGRAFICA/ANALISE_RESULTADOS/SINOPSE_CENSO2000.PDF.

Urbanization: *the process by which cities grow.*