Sesmaria Land Grants and the Origins of Brazilian Inequality

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History

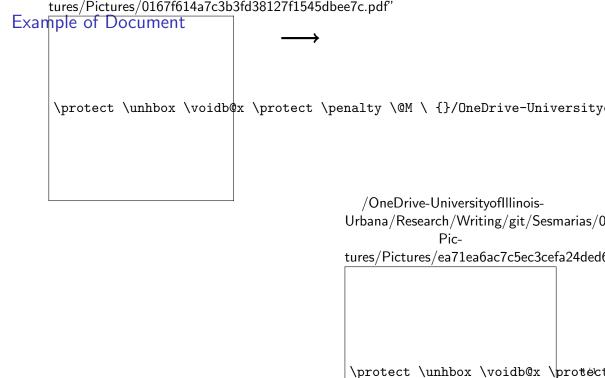
- Originally a medieval Portuguese Law used to grant lands to be used and developed.
- ► First mention of it in Brazil was in 1530, and it often favored the Portuguese aristocracy (Lobb1976-mc)
 - It led to the development of the "economic aristocracy of the colonial society" and the "principal cause of the latifundio" in Brazil (Lima2002-kd; Da'Costa Porto1979-dz).
 - Officially stopped being granted in 1822, however, sesmeiro who had owned land and had developed it would be able to retain their lands.

Research Question

- ▶ What are the long-term economic effects of the sesmarias land grants in Brazil?
 - ► Land inequality ⇒ only those with financial conditions were granted *sesmarias*, and were often granted large plots of land.
 - ▶ Income inequality ⇒ land was wealth, fewer people with land lead to wealth accumulation by the few.

Data

- ► Brazilian Censuses (1872-2010)
- ▶ Location of sesmarias from SILB.



Possible Sources of Variation

- ► Geographical Variation
- ► Time Variation
- ► Type of Settler to whom it was granted
- Concessions vs. Applications

Other Relevant (?) Information to Add

Sesmarias caused land uncertainty in colonial times as often poor people would settle, develop land, and then lose the right of the land because a richer person would claim it (Da'Costa'Porto1979-dz).

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