## Sesmaria Land Grants and the Origins of Brazilian Inequality

Vinicius Okada da Silva

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

# History

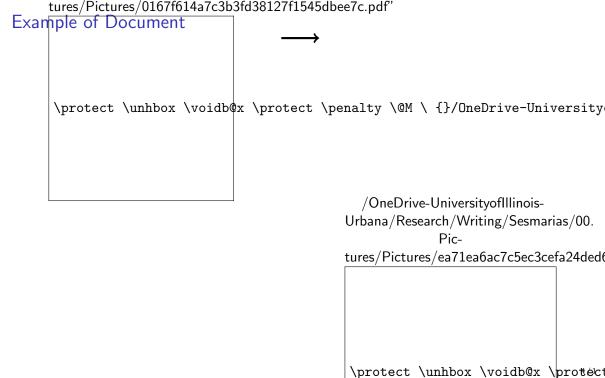
- Originally a medieval Portuguese Law used to grant lands to be used and developed.
- ► First mention of it in Brazil was in 1530, and it often favored the Portuguese aristocracy (Lobb1976-mc)
  - It led to the development of the "economic aristocracy of the colonial society" and the "principal cause 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).

## References I