

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 \Rightarrow only those with financial conditions were granted *sesmarias*, and were often granted large plots of land.
 - ▶ Income inequality \Rightarrow land was wealth, fewer people with land lead to wealth accumulation by the few.

Data

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

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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 Porto 1979-dz**).

References I