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Carnival In Rio: Beneath the Flare, There Are Major Social Issues

By **Jeff Fong**
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Tuesday marked the last day of Carnival in Brazil. The holiday draws around 500,000 foreign tourists to Rio de Janeiro alone. But underneath the revelry, the country still

As Brazil has become more prominent on the world stage, it has sought to clean up its image and indeed, things have gotten better. The percentage of Brazilians who who are considered middle-class has gone from 34% in 2004 to 54% as of 2011. Having the majority of the population qualify as middle-class is a new development and a major milestone for the country.

Despite the gains, however, drug violence, police corruption, and poverty still form an iron triangle in Brazil. Youths born into poverty are drawn to drug gangs for lack of better options. Corrupt police form symbiotic relationships with the gangs. The resulting violence between factions vying for control of the drug trade hinders economic development, reinforcing the poverty that encourages further criminality and corruption.

The country's slums, or *favelas*, make up fiefdoms for Brazilian traffickers. Within the favelas, gangs like the *Comando Vermelho* or *Amigos dos Amigos* are the government. The gangs have been known to protect social workers providing community services,

host street parties known as *Bailes Funk*, and even provide transportation. This, of course, is alongside selling narcotics and enforcing control over their territory by force of arms.

To put the size of these territories into perspective, the largest favela, Rocinha, is home to 69,356 people according to the Brazilian Institute for Geography and Statistics (IBGE). Other favelas easily number in the tens of thousands as well.

The gangs that control these territories are well staffed, well armed, and as well-organized as any corporation or government bureaucracy.

In anticipation of the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympics, the government has embarked on a program of "pacification." Pacification involves invading a favela with paramilitary forces and, after the traffickers have been ousted, putting special community police in place. These police are meant to maintain an official presence while services like electricity, sewage, and garbage disposal are brought in. The official hope is to have generations of favela dwellers grow up without the traffickers' influence and thereby break the cycle of violence.

But there are a number of criticisms.

If the structural causes that make life as a *traficante* attractive aren't addressed, all the government's efforts will be for nothing. Cyclical poverty and social exclusion of the favela dwellers will inevitably breed more gang members. Recent trends in the war on drugs look to make matters worse as Brazil becomes a global hub for narcotics.

Official corruption will also get in the way if police continue to facilitate the drug trade or simply take it up themselves. Fifty-nine police officers were recently arrested in Rio de

Janeiro for aiding the city's drug dealers. This wasn't the first time officers have been brought in on corruption charges, and it most likely won't be the last.

Just as simply rounding up drug dealers may be ineffective in the long-term, periodic corruption probes will find limited success as well. Structural causes make it easy to fall into a life of crime for anyone.

Brazil's problems are less about the gang members or corrupt police officers themselves and more about the circumstances that create new examples of each.

As long as these perverse incentives remain, so too will the cycle of poverty, violence, and corruption.



What you should consider before shopping at a store where workers are on strike

By **Melissa Kravitz**

7 days ago

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At a supermarket near my home the workers are on strike. “Don’t shop Key Food,” they call out, as passersby look on, some taking the printed fliers the striking employees of said store are passing out. The paper one-sheets list the reasons the employees are outside with sandwich boards folded across their bodies, everything from lack of healthcare to living wages, and urge neighbors to call the store’s corporate headquarters and demand a fair union contract for the workers. Some potential grocery shoppers are deterred from entering the store (there are several similar supermarkets just blocks away), while others ignore the protestors, entering through the automatic doors.

In late afternoon, two men exit the store, holding plastic bags presumably full of sandwiches, chips and a beverage. A striker pleads with them to stop supporting the grocery store until the worker's contract demands are met. "But we needed lunch," one of the men protests, waving his bag. The smells of Taco Bell and a falafel cart waft in the distance. The striking employee tries to politely explain what the lunch these two men chose to purchase signifies, and how yes, we all need lunch, but should also be entitled to a living wage, fair benefits and compensation.

The practice of striking as we know it dates back to ancient Egypt, when builders banded together to protest Ramesses III's unfair treatment and demand better conditions and payment. More modernized labor unions started in the late 19th Century, following the Industrial Revolution, a time when employers became significantly more detached from their workers, increasingly viewing laborers as disposable rather than valuable assets at any level. Unions representing a variety of industries, from food to shipping to acting and

other creative careers began to form, allowing workers from various companies within the same industry to band together and negotiate for better labor standards.

Now, strikes take place across America, outside of grocery stores and school districts, writers' rooms and berry farms. A strike, which implies that workers are not reporting to work until their demands are met or negotiated, is different from a boycott, in that a boycott is supported by community members and consumers, who can refuse to purchase goods or services from the company the workers are striking.



Even if you're not an employee or union member of a specific corporation, spending money at the business while workers are on strike is considered crossing a picket line. Here's what that means:

"Crossing a picket line to buy groceries at Stop & Shop [for example], while workers are on strike indicates that you're okay with those workers not being able to afford to feed their families. It indicates that you're okay with corporations mistreating regular people, and that you're okay with the inexcusable level of income inequality in this country," says Alesa Mackool, president of ACM Strategies, a firm that specializes in digital strategy and communications, particularly for labor unions and other pro-worker organizations. "When you see workers picketing, you should recognize that something is very, very wrong and do what you can to become informed."

First off, you can speak to workers on strike to hear their side of the story first hand — have their wages not been raised in year or are their healthcare policies being taken away? If you support the reasons the workers are requesting their employer treat them a certain way, not crossing the picket line is a way to vote with your dollar. "Consumers have an incredible amount of power," Mackool says. "It's one thing for a corporation to ignore the demands of workers, but that becomes a lot harder when the corporation's bottom line starts hurting because community members take their dollars elsewhere."

In addition to not crossing a picket line, consumers can directly contact a corporation, as a customer, and state support for its workers. "If we want to preserve good, middle-class jobs in this country, we have to be in this together," Mackool says.



Most strikes end with a contract between workers and their employers

Source: Hanna Kuprevich/Shutterstock

So why would someone cross a picket line deliberately? It often comes down to a matter of convenience, lack of support or a dire situation. “Strikes, by design, are disruptive and inconvenient to entire communities. Generally speaking, there’s no good reason to cross a picket line outside a real life-or-death emergency,” Mackool says. “Crossing a picket line undermines the striking workers’ ability to negotiate a fair deal.” And if you accidentally cross a picket line? Mackool recommends apologizing to the workers and considering contributing to a workers’ strike fund.

Unionizing and striking are one of few ways workers can use their collective power to bargain and negotiate with their bosses (or, realistically their boss’s boss’s boss, a president, CEO or owner of a company). “Striking is one of the few ways workers can push back against wealthy, powerful interests and a system that disadvantages ordinary people,” Mackool says, “These workers and their families are disrupting their daily lives and giving up their financial security in order to say their work and contract conditions are no longer tolerable. It’s not a decision any union or worker takes lightly.”



Why Burning Man attendees are worried new regulations could change the festival forever

By **Tebany Yune**

7 days ago

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The U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the organizers of the infamous Burning Man event in Nevada are clashing over new environmental regulations that could create an “astronomical cost increase” with expenses estimated to rise by nearly 60%, said Burning Man representatives to the *Wall Street Journal*.

Every year in Black Rock Desert, Nevada, organizers of Burning Man set up a temporary city to host the Burning Man community (known as “Burners”) in an annual experiment “dedicated to radical self-expression and radical self-reliance,” as stated by their website. For one week, the temporary community comes together to encourage and celebrate creativity through art pieces such as “art cars,” connect with other members, and ensure eventgoers clean up after themselves.

However, in an environmental impact statement used to evaluate the effect of events on natural landscapes, the BLM found Burning Man's efforts insufficient. The agency has proposed additional requirements to the event organizers to increase public safety while reducing the event's impact on Nevada's natural environment. In order to renew their 10-year permit to continue using the area, the BLM requires Burning Man to comply with suggestions that include constructing barriers to protect attendees, providing dumpsters around the site, and banning certain lights that may disturb wild birds.

Burning Man organizers have lashed out against the new requirements through their official website, stating the requirements are an example of "beyond-excessive government oversight" that will hurt ticket sales, raise the cost of the event, and place attendees under government scrutiny.

The organizers refute many points in the BLM's report, claiming the area does not have many wild birds during the event season to disturb. Their post also insists that their current rules requiring members to clean up after themselves are sufficient and that supplying dumpsters will be "logistically and financially crippling." Burning Man organizers are encouraging members of the Burning Man community to submit their comments to the government.

However, Burning Man's clean-up claims are refuted by residents living in nearby towns. Users on Twitter spoke up about the after-effects of the event, when Burners take their trash from the event and dump them into nearby towns. This includes enormous art pieces, such as the 747 airplane art car left behind in the desert after the 2018 event.

There is still time for BLM and Burning Man to make a decision or reach for a compromise. ABC News stated the new requirements will not effect event goers this year, but could create roadblocks for next year's Burning Man.