

MEGA-EVENTS AND MARGINALIZATION: FORCED DISPLACEMENT AND FAVELA RESISTANCE IN BRAZIL

DANIELLA SCOTT

**Leadership in Action,
Summer 2026**



Understanding Favelas

Favelas cannot be equated with 'slums', 'shantytowns', or 'squatter settlements'; They are the unique name for informal settlements in Brazil. Favelas, whose name can be traced back to a bush native to the Canudos hills, originally began as squatter settlements after mainly rural migrants and descendants of slaves could not afford to live in the city, opting instead to construct their own homes and communities in the hills. Despite marginalization (militarization of favelas and frequent displacement) and persistent state neglect (lack of investment into infrastructure, healthcare access, and civil land titles) favela communities have helped develop strong housing rights nationwide (including an adverse possession clause in Brazil's 1988 Constitution which has resulted in most favela residents legally occupying their land), establish permanent structures to reside in, and is considered the birthplace of some of Brazil's greatest cultural contributions (samba, funk, Carnival).

Contextualizing the 2016 Rio Olympic Games

In 2009, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) designated Rio de Janeiro as the host site for the 2016 Olympics. During celebrations, Rio Mayor Eduardo Paes announced that Vila Autódromo, a favela of around 700 families, would be the only community removed for the Games despite original plans leaving the favela untouched. Residents were not surprised as forced removals and evictions had long been part of the city policy that had worked to cultivate a relationship characterized by tension and distrust. In 2010, the Metrô-Mangureira favela had been completely removed for World Cup preparations, largely opting to relocate due to fear of homelessness, the proliferation of rodents, illness, and drug addicts (a consequence of the city demolishing homes and failing to clean up the rubble) and intimidation. Vila Autódromo was determined to not meet the same fate as Favela Metrô, opting to collectively negotiate with the city and collaborate with public defenders offices and urban developers at nearby universities, attracting international observers to this struggle. Despite these efforts, the city once again resorted to violence and intimidation, eventually removing all but 20 families from the favela, despite most residents possessing rights to the land. These devastating stories were not unique and reflective of a broader trend of marginalization that aimed to "beautify" Rio and justify the segregation of low-income (which notably, is largely composed of racial minorities and migrants) and high-income communities.

Catalytic Communities

For my LiA, I spent the summer in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil working with the NGO, Catalytic Communities. The organization operates three main projects: the Sustainable Favela Network (which aims to cement the role of favelas as a part of the sustainable urban future through implementing community-based socio-environmental initiatives into community practice and city policy), the Favela Community Land Trust (which seeks to prevent gentrification and land speculation and re-development in favelas through recognizing that the land belongs to the community), and Rio on Watch (ROW). I spent my summer working with ROW, which seeks to reverse the stigma surrounding favelas through accurate reporting by focusing on the perspectives of favela residents, researchers, and community organizers. I spent the first half of my LiA researching the origins of favelas, how racism has contributed to neglect and over-policing of favelas, the stories of Vila Autódromo and Metrô-Mangureira, and assisting with translation. The second half focused on applying this research to interviews with residents who had been evicted as a result of the series of mega-events the city hosted throughout the 2010s.

Interview Insight

Despite the original plan aiming for six interviews with residents across different favelas, it proved difficult to find volunteers to talk about their experience with eviction, understandably. In the end, I interviewed one of Vila Autódromo's former residents, Conceição, about her relocation to Parque Carioca. I also had the chance to meet less formally with a resident of Cantagalo and one of the only remaining families of Vila Autódromo. Across these meetings, I learned what favela resistance has looked like over the years, from art made from the rubble of demolished homes, countless City Hall protests, working with universities to develop urban planning strategies that include and affirm the humanity of informal settlements, discussion circles that travel across the city to strengthen connection among and recognize the similar struggles between different favelas, and through recounting both traumatic and cherished memories to keep these legacies of resilience alive. Though my original plans were not executed in the way I had initially envisioned, I am beyond grateful to Catalytic Communities, Conceição, Marcia, Luiz, and Maria for their vulnerability, kindness, and support on this project.

I will re-upload this poster with a QR code linked to my interview with Conceição when it was released.