Brazilian Immigrants in South Florida

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Abstract

In this paper I discuss immigration trends from Brazil to the U.S. since the late 1990s to then focus on Brazilian immigration in South Florida. I discuss their immigration status and causes, categories of admission, and main areas of concentration. I analyze their socioeconomic and cultural impact in South Florida and reasons to leave Brazil. While most articles tend to focus on Brazilian tourism in South Florida, we seldom find analyses focusing on immigration issues. This paper partially fills this gap.

Introduction[1]

There is an estimate of 371,015 Brazilians currently living in the United States, with 73,529 (about 20 percent) living in Florida.[2] Approximately 60 percent of Brazilians are located in South Florida; specifically in Broward, Miami-Dade, and Palm Beach Counties, which have a Brazilian population of 18,786, 17,929, and 7,340 respectively.[3] The aim of this paper is to discuss important demographic, economic, and cultural aspects of Brazilian immigration to South Florida. I argue that several factors have contributed to the dramatic increase of the Brazilian population of the area; they range from searching for jobs to escaping from inflation, violence, and social instability in certain areas of Brazil. In South Florida, Brazilians have found greater safety, jobs, business opportunities, and cultural openness. Brazilian immigration has been beneficial for the State of Florida, boosting the economy as workers, consumers, and investors. Culturally, they have introduced the Portuguese language, Brazilian cuisine and music. However, Brazilians in South Florida also face similar challenges as other immigrant groups, including the fact that a segment of the population lacks legal status in the US.

Brazilian Immigrants in the United States

Graph 1 illustrates the growth trends of Brazilians admitted as legal permanent residents (line format). It can be noted that the admission numbers significantly increased from 1999 to

2001 and then decreased in 2002 and 2003, post 9/11. However, in 2003, the admission numbers

raised dramatically, reaching its peek in 2006. After 2006, the numbers of admissions were not

consistent and there was a sharp decline from 2006 to 2008. In 2009, admissions increased, but

then slowly decreased again in the following years, 2010 and 2011. In comparison, the growth

trends of nonimmigrant admissions of Brazilians (bar format) slowly decreased from 1999 to

2003, the opposite of permanent residents admission in 1999, 2000, and 2001. However, the

numbers increased consecutively from 2003 to 2011, when it reached its highest point. The

increasing number of nonimmigrant admissions shows a reflection of Brazil's growing economy.

There are more Brazilians on the I-94 admitted in the US in 2011 than it has in the previous

decade. As Graph 3 will later illustrate, the majority of Brazilians admitted on I-94 are tourists.

Graph 1**:** Brazilians Admitted as Legal Permanent Residents and Nonimmigrant (I-94 only) Admissions (1999-2011)
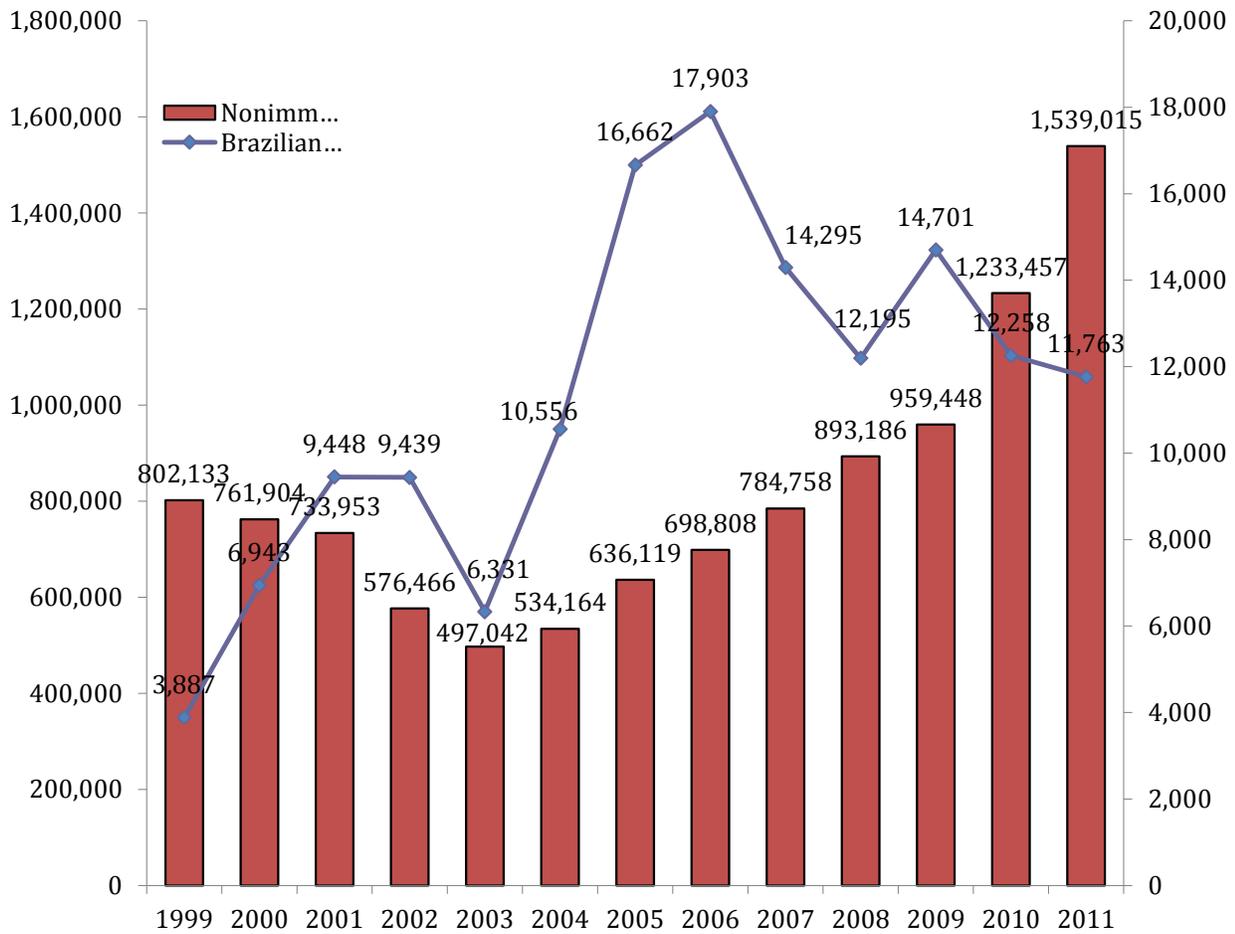
Sources: U.S. Department of Homeland Security. (2009). 2008 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics. Office of Immigration, 12 & 67; U.S. Department of Homeland Security. (2012). 2011 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics. Office of Immigration, 12 & 67

Graph 2 illustrates the comparisson of Brazilian non-immigrants admitted as legal permanent residents in the years 2000, 2006, and 2011. It can be noted that from 2000 to 2006 to 2011, the number of refugees, asylees, and immediate relatives of US citizens increased. On the other hand, the numbers of those admitted with employment based preferences decreased over the years.
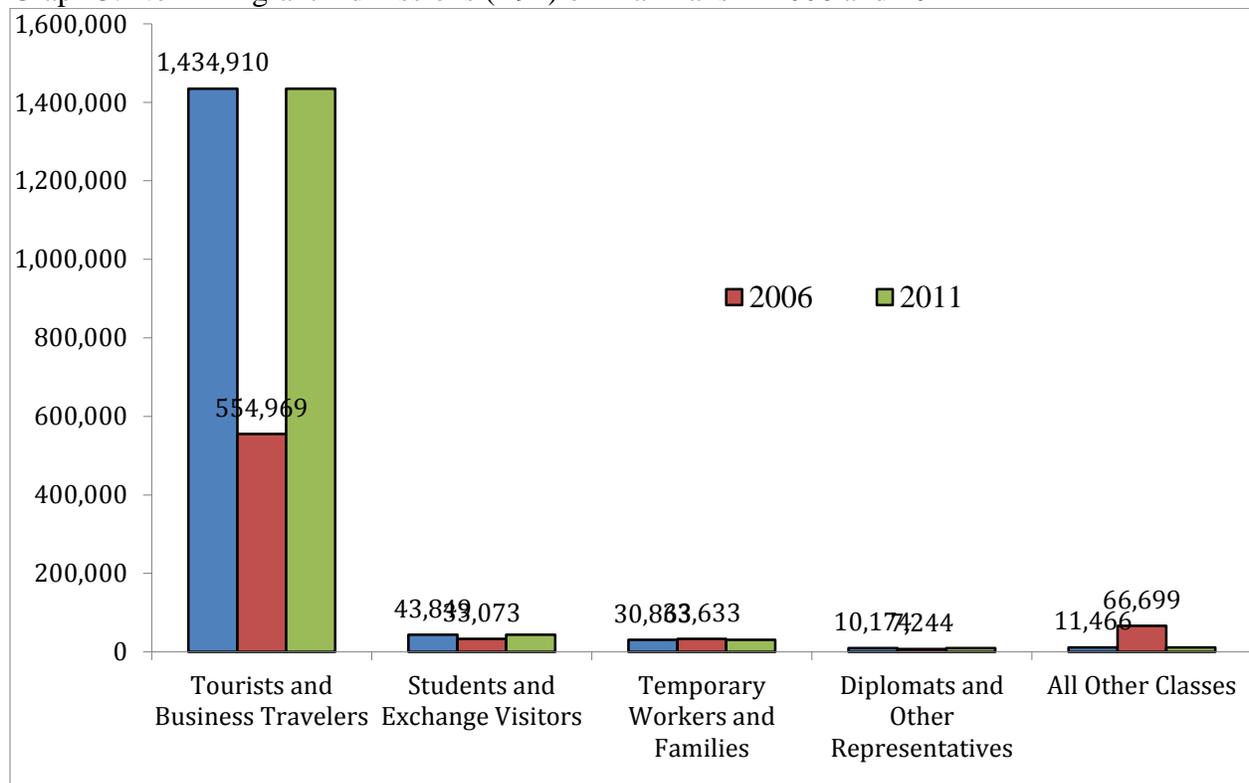
Graph 2: Brazilian Non-Immigrants Admitted as Legal Permanent Residents in 2000, 2006, and 2011 (in %)
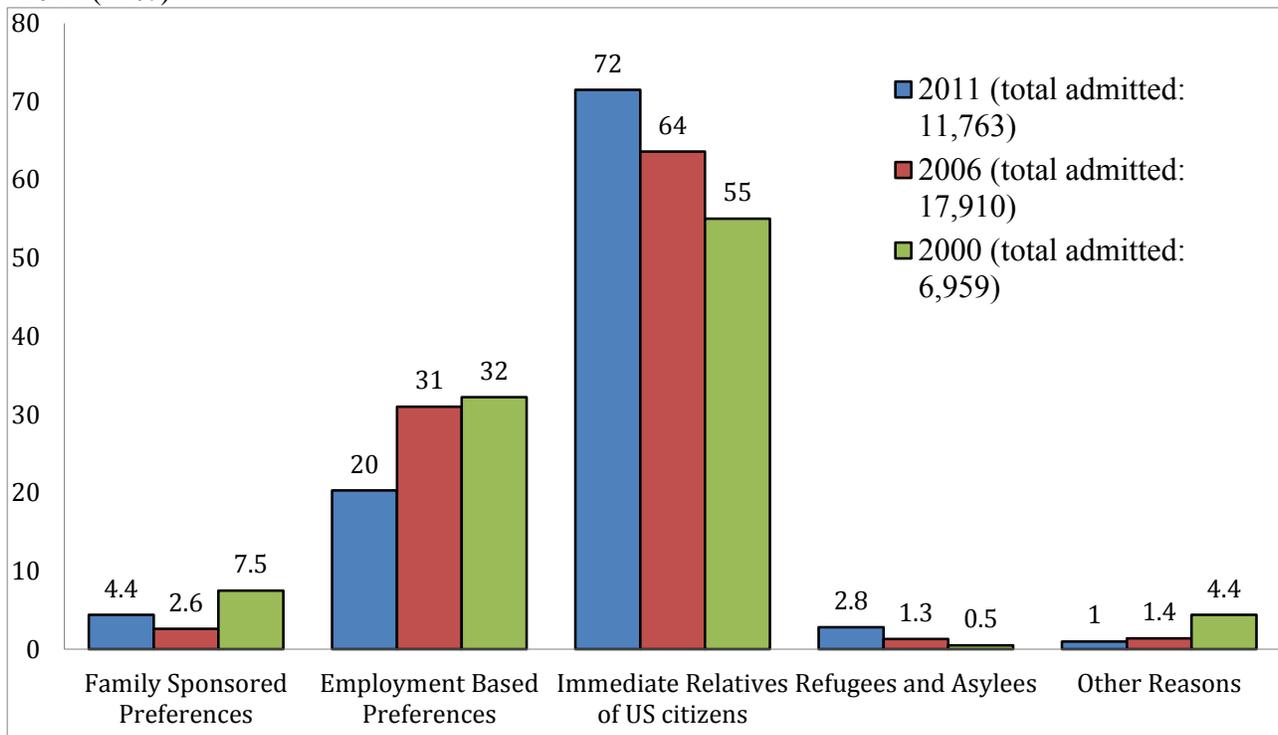
Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security. (2002). 2000 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics. Office of Immigration, 47, U.S. Department of Homeland Security. (2007). 2006 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics. Office of Immigration, 27 and U.S. Department of Homeland Security. (2012). 2011 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics. Office of Immigration, 27.

Graph 3 illustrates the comparisson of Brazilians admitted as non-immigrants in the years 2006 and 2011. It can be noted that the number of tourists and business travelers more than doubled in the period of 5 years. The number of students and exchange visitors, and diplomats and other representatives also increased.
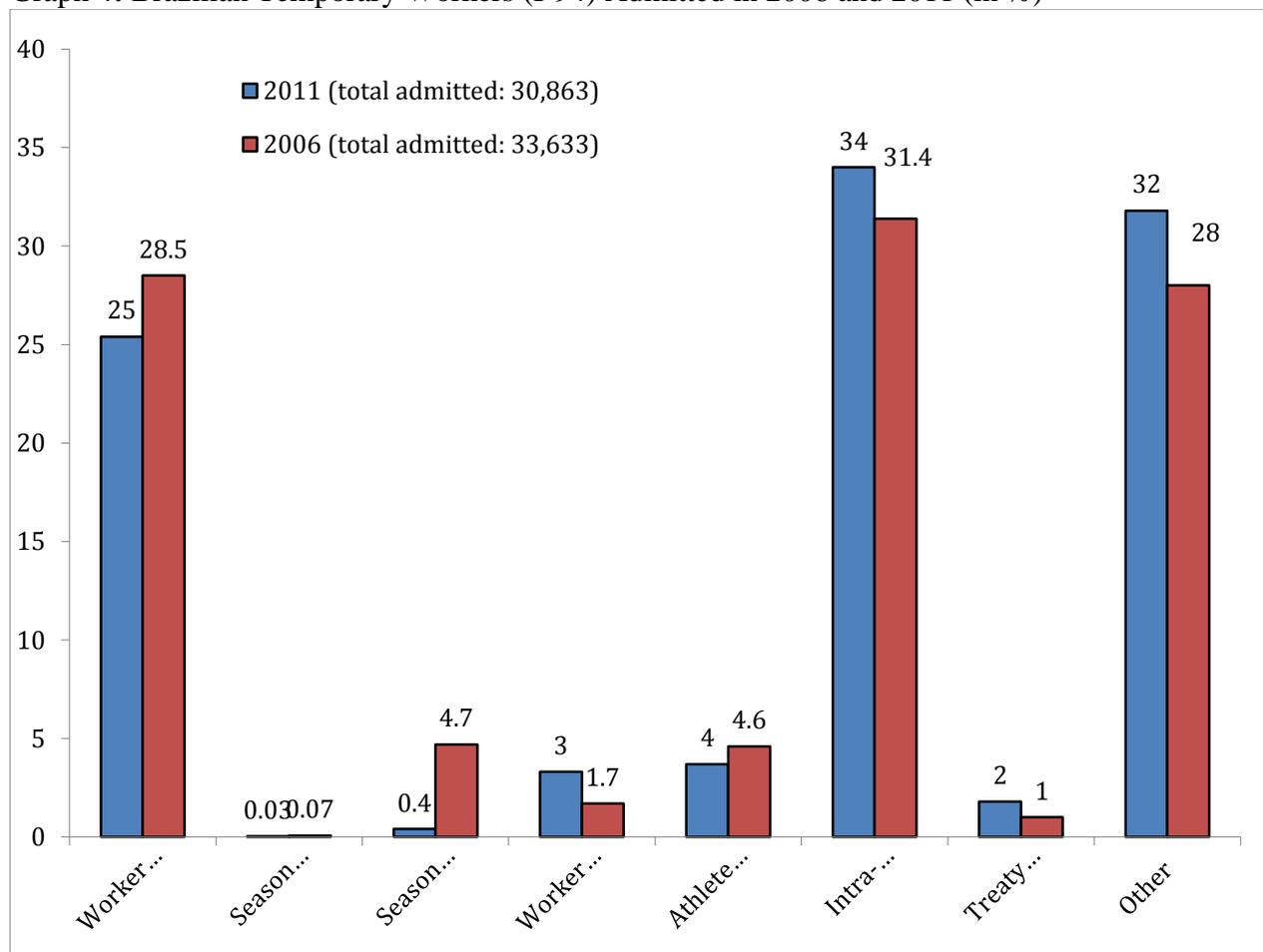
Graph 3: Nonimmigrant Admissions (I-94) of Brazilians in 2006 and 2011

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security. (2007). 2006 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics. Office of Immigration, 77 and U.S. Department of Homeland Security. (2012). 2011 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics. Office of Immigration, 76.

Graph 4 illustrates the breakdown of Brazilian temporary workers admitted in 2006 and 2011. In both years, the majority of temporary workers were intra-company transfers, non-immigrants admitted under the group classified as "other", and workers in specialty occupations. The number of "seasonal non-agricultural workers" and "workers with extraordinary abilities" also experienced an important increase between 2006 and 2011.
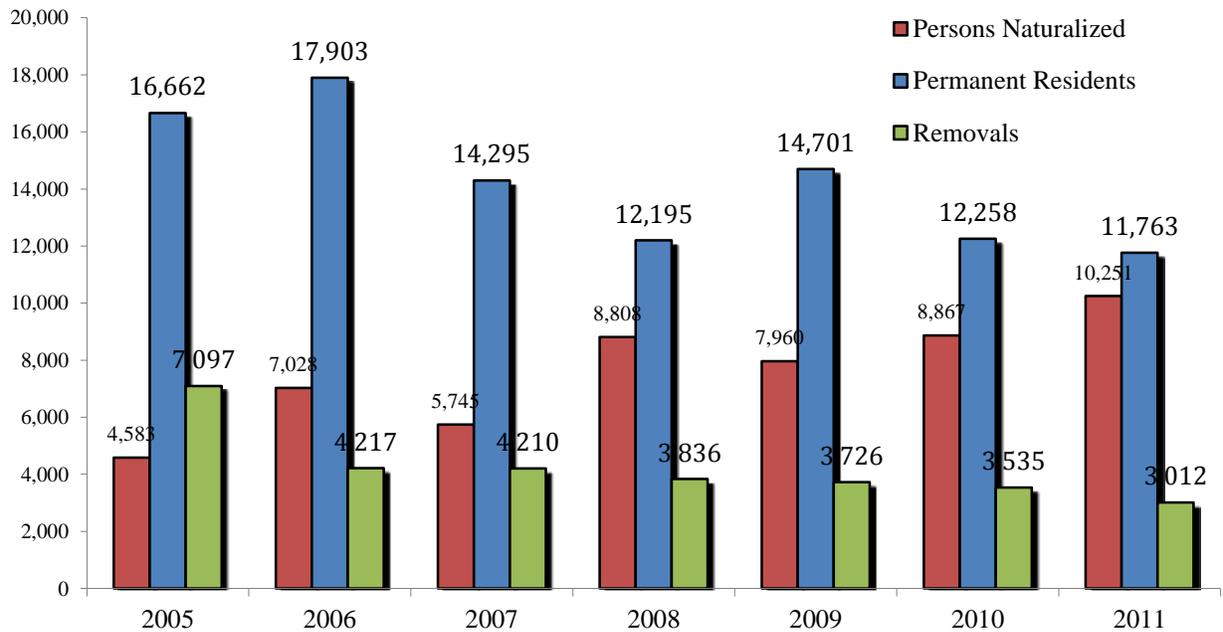
Graph 4**:** Brazilian Temporary Workers (I-94) Admitted in 2006 and 2011 (in %)

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security. (2007). 2006 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics. Office of Immigration, 85 and U.S. Department of Homeland Security. (2012). 2011 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics. Office of Immigration, 84.

Graph 5 shows the numbers of Brazilians naturalized as American citizens, immigrants admitted as permanent residents, and removals in the years 2005 to 2011. Contrary to a general trend indicating an increase in the deportation in the last decade, the number of removals decreased in the case of Brazil along the six years from 2005 to 2011. As it has been noted (see for example, Margarita Rodriguez, 2013) calculating the deportation rate gives us a better idea of the actual trend in deportations. The rate can be calculated as the proportion of number of deportations over the number of immigrants admitted.[4] In the case of Brazil, the highest deportation rate was in 2005, where removals represented 43% of admissions. In 2011, the rate dropped to 25%. Although much lower than in 2005, the rate is still relatively high because, numerically, what we have is that Brazilians who were deported in 2011 represented 25% of those who were admitted as permanent residents. The graph also shows that the numbers of persons naturalized increased along the years for the most part. The number of immigrants admitted as permanent residents reached its highest point in 2006 and has decreased since then without following a regular pattern. The year 2005 had the lowest number of persons naturalized, the highest number of removals, and the second highest number of permanent residents. On the other hand, 2011 had the highest number of persons naturalized and the lowest number of removals.

Graph 5: Brazilians Naturalized as American Citizens, Immigrants Admitted as Permanent Residents and Removals (2005-2011)

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security. (2012). 2011 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics. Office of Immigration, 12, 53, 106, 109, and 112.

Graph 6 illustrates the employment status of Brazilians in the United States in the years of 1990, 2000, and 2007. The numbers of Brazilians employed was significantly higher than the numbers of unemployed in all three years, which demonstrates that the majority of Brazilian immigrants found work in the US. Compared to other race-ethnic groups, Brazilians have the highest employment rate in the US.[5]

Graph 6: Employment Status of Brazilians in the United States 1990, 2000, and 2007 (in %)
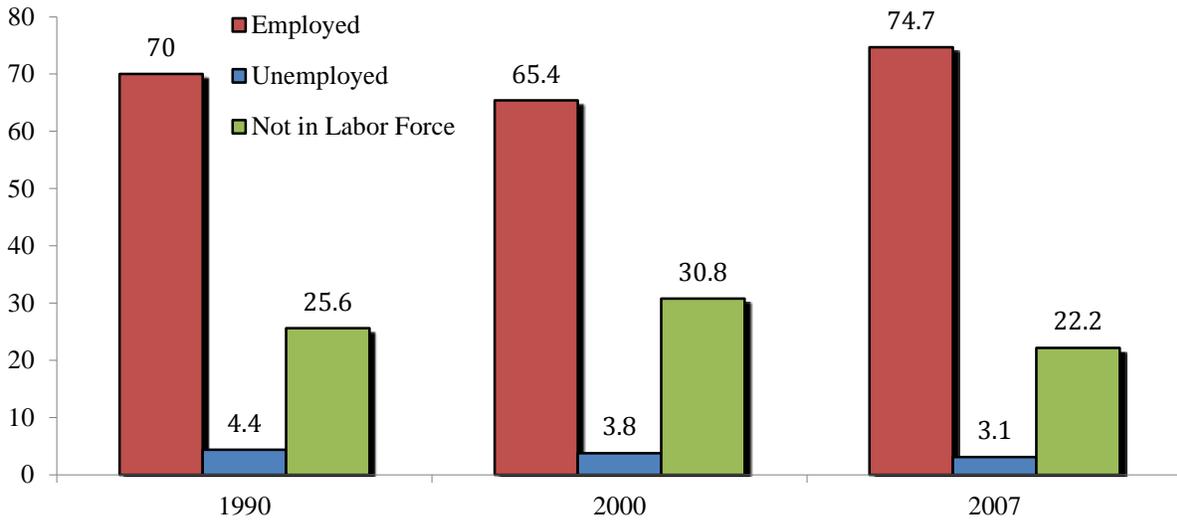
Source: Laird W. Bergad (2010). "Brazilians in the United States 1980-2007," *Center for Latin America, Caribbean & Latino Studies*, (see endnote 2).

Many Brazilians migrate to the US to work the same job they would work in Brazil, but for a higher salary. Despite the economic growth of the country, Brazil still faces problems of income distribution, and most of the wealth is concentrated among the elites, which represents 5%-10% of the population. Low salaries prevail in Brazil in almost any occupational category.[6]

Brazilian Immigrants in Florida

The data collection presented below is only an estimate of the real number of Brazilian immigrants in Florida and the United States. Many Brazilians who are currently residing in Florida are classified as illegal. Official data exists as a formality,[7] but the numbers are inaccurate because it fails to capture illegal migrants who did not participate in the census.[8]

Graph 7 illustrates the top three cities in the US with most Brazilian residents. The overall number of Brazilians in the country increased. Florida and Massachusetts have been the main destination over the years. In 1990, FL, MA and NJ had relatively the same number of

Brazilian migrants. In 2000 FL, became the main destination. However, while MA was the main destination in 2005, FL surpassed it in 2007, and became relatively close to it in 2011.

Graph 7: Distribution of Brazilian Population in the United States in 1990, 2000, 2005, 2007, and 2011
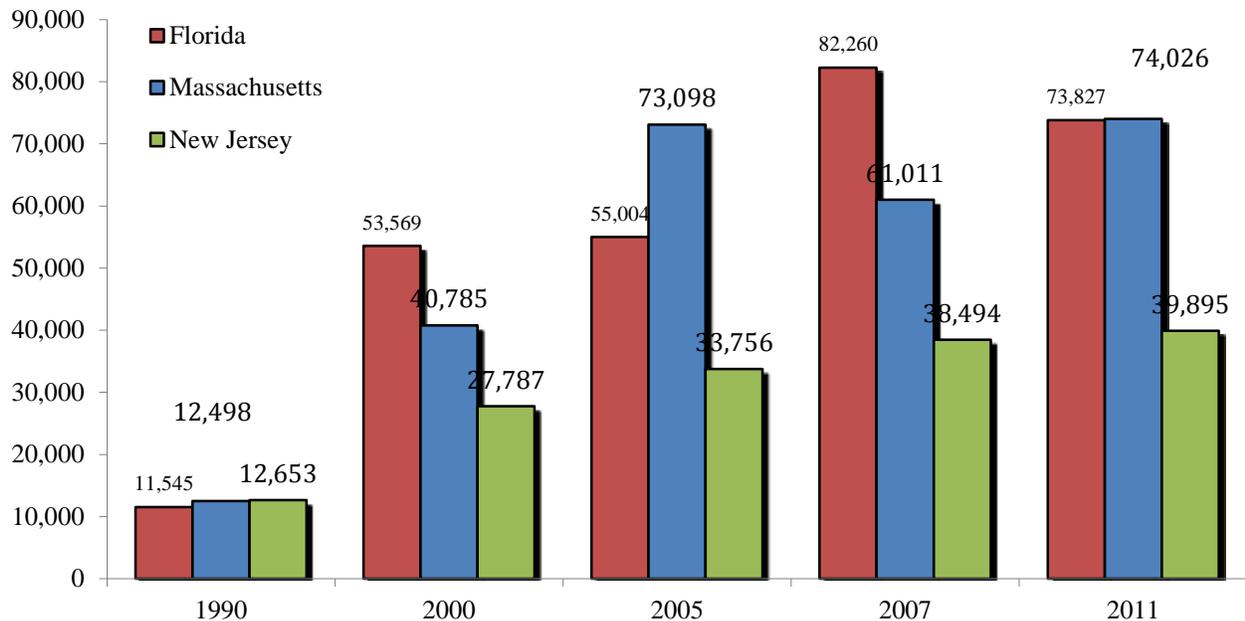
Source: 1990 and 2000 (Laird W. Bergad 2010). "Brazilians in the United States 1980-2007," *Center for Latin America, Caribbean & Latino Studies*, (see endnote 2); 2005, 2007, and 2011. U.S. Bureau of the Census, American Community Survey, 2006-2010 estimate, selected population tables

Graph 8 illustrates the top 7 Florida cities, also within the top 22 Nation wide, with the most residents born in Brazil. The city with the largest Brazilian population is Loch Lomond (also known as Pompano Beach).

Graph 8: Top 7 Florida Cities with the Most Residents Born in Brazil (2010)
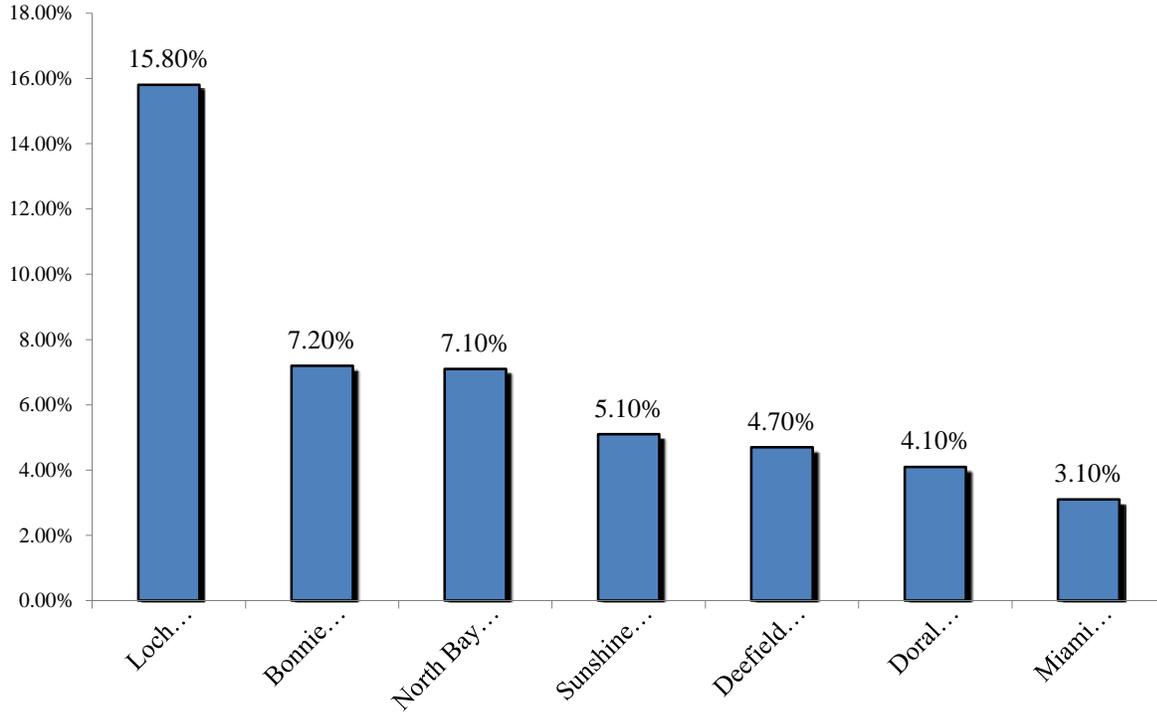
Source: "Top 101 Cities With the Most Residents Born in Brazil (Population 500+)," Citytoplists. [9]

In order to narrow down the profile of Brazilian migrants in Broward County, Graph 9 below presents data from interviews conducted by Miller Strategies. Of the 1000 Brazilian migrants interviewed living in Broward County, the majority is undocumented.

Graph 9: Brazilian Immigrants in Broward County (2011)
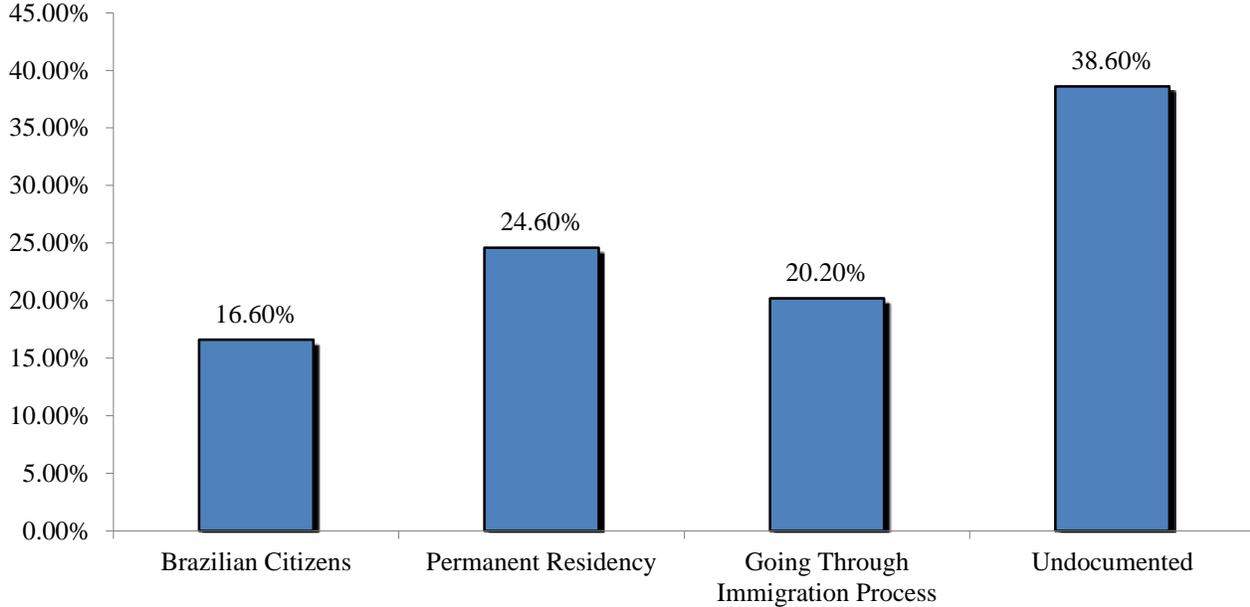
Source: "Pesquisa Revela Perfil dos Brasileiros dos Condados de Broward e Palm Beach," Linha Aberta.[10]

Despite ongoing issues of illegality, several changes have occurred during the years of Brazilian immigration to the United States, including their demographic profile, projects of return, and methods of entry. For instance, middle class Brazilians and the elites are moving to South Florida with money to spend and invest. Generally, new incoming Brazilian migrants are people with money searching for a better quality of life.[11] Wealthy Brazilians who wish to have the legal right to reside in the US also have the option to invest an amount of $500,000 to $1 million in a U.S. business in order to obtain a visa.[12]

Students have also opened a new gate to immigration. As previously noted on Graph 3, the numbers of students and exchange visitors in the US has increased. Highly educated Brazilian immigrants compose large part of the immigrant population and many Brazilians aspire to acquire college degrees in the US.[13] In the years 2009 and 2010 there were 8,786 Brazilian students in the US, which is the most of any South American country.[14] According to the

International Students and Scholars office at University of Miami, it is estimated that an average of 56 undergraduate Brazilian students enroll every fall semester.[15] Brazilian undergraduate students are in the top 6 countries represented at the University, falling behind Colombia, India, Saudi Arabia, Venezuela, and China.[16] Moving to South Florida with a student visa opens many gates for young adults to seek permanent residency or citizenship.

Why Brazilians Leave Brazil

Inflation

One of the biggest problems with Brazil is that the prices are too high and it is cheaper to live in America than Brazil. For instance, a condominium that costs $300,000 to $400,000 in Miami would cost $600,000 to $700,000 in Brazil.[17] In addition, Brazil's "high-end real estate is around $1,000 per square foot, while in Miami, you can find high-end oceanfront property… for only $500 per square foot."[18] Cars also have a significant difference in price, according to an article from Forbes magazine:

> One might think that paying $80,000 for a Jeep Grand Cherokee means it comes with wings and gold plated rims. But in Brazil, it comes standard. The 2013 Jeep Grande Cherokee cost Brazilians a stellar R$179,000, or roughly $89,500. Import duties and other taxes make it so that the Brazilian buying a muscular Jeep Cherokee could have bought three of them if they were living in Miami. In the U.S., the 2013 Jeep Grand Cherokee will run you about $28,000. That's nearly half the median American income, but $89,500 is light years away from median Brazilian incomes.[19]

Due to the high cost of living in Brazil, prices are better in South Florida for Brazilians to shop and leads to a more convenient and comfortable lifestyle.

Safety

Safety is another increasing issue in Brazil, especially in the bigger cities. Many immigrants that reside in Florida are from Sao Paulo, Brazil, which is one of the biggest and

most unsafe cities in the world.[20] An average of 13 homicides are recorded in Sao Paulo every day.[21] However, Sao Paulo is not the only dangerous city in Brazil. Rio de Janeiro, Recife, among others are also high on the list.[22] In 2011, it was reported by the Brazilian police that the murder rate in Brazil is four times higher than the US.[23] People in Brazil are often advised to "dress down" while walking on the streets and be careful showing expensive and flashy accessories to avoid getting robbed.[24] Living with fear of being mugged, robbed, or assaulted is what many Brazilian migrants are currently running from.

Why Brazilians Migrate to South Florida

Affordability and Cultural Proximity

In addition to having better prices in real estate, electronics and other durables, South Florida, being diverse and friendly to immigrants makes Brazilians feel as though they are at home. As noticed by Bryn E. Haffemeister (2005) "Miami has the highest proportion of foreign born residents of any major metropolitan area in the United States."[25] The city and most of South Florida are not only places where immigrants can comfortably adjust to American culture, but also where Americans comfortably adjust to immigrant cultures. Miami, she notices, is one of the few cities in the US where Americans will engage in "reverse acculturation" and make an effort to embrace immigrants from diverse cultures, which also shows "an important symbol in the shift in power relations" that is not seen elsewhere.[26] South Florida stands out from the rest of the country because of the strong Latin impact. Brazilians tend not to feel discriminated against coming from Latin America, and they mesh with other Hispanic groups of immigrants.[27] Other places such as Deerfield Beach and Pompano are considered home for Brazilians. There one can

find Brazilian restaurants, bars, shops… Every aspect of Brazilian culture.[28] According to

residents from those areas "Brazil is the country of the sun, and Florida is the state of the sun."[29]

Organizations and Resources

There are several organizations in South Florida that facilitates Brazilians' lives abroad

and promotes their culture in America. For instance, Brazilians residing in South Florida have

access to Florida Brasil.com, a website with a complete list of services of Brazilian products and

resources in Florida[30] including Brazilian stores, doctors, dentists, mechanics, courses, realtors,

restaurants, translators, newspapers, insurance, churches… among many other services. The

website was created by Brazilians in Florida, with the purpose of facilitating the search for

Brazilian products and services within a community. Having access to Brazilian items makes

migrants feel closer to their roots.

Another important aspect to highlight is the existence of the Cultural Center Brazil-USA,

which is an organization created to bring Brazilian and American cultures closer together in

Miami-Dade and Broward Counties.[31] The purpose of this Cultural Center is to introduce

Portuguese language to the community, organize Brazilian festivities, and create scholarship

funds for Brazilian students at Miami-Dade College.[32] The Brazilian Cultural center is important

for the Brazilian community, for it brings Brazilians closer and provides them with benefits

while living in the US. In 2003, the volunteers of the Cultural Center also established the first

bilingual and bicultural program in the public school system, at the Ada Merritt School in

Miami, where students learn subjects in English and Portuguese. This is a powerful tool that

helps maintain the national roots of Brazilian students, and at the same time promotes Portuguese

language and Brazilian culture among students of diverse nationalities.[33]

Brazilians Economic and Cultural Impact on South Florida

The increasing establishment of Brazilian businesses in South Florida has brought a need for a business exchange forum between Brazilian and US firms.[34] The Brazilian-American Chamber of Commerce of Florida exists in order to advance business relations between Florida and Brazil and increase trade and investments between the countries.[35] Members of the Chamber are always informed of political, social, economic, and technological developments that may affect trade and investments in both countries.[36] The existence of this Chamber highlights the importance of Brazilian business in South Florida.

Brazilians also have helped improve South Florida's real estate in the past couple of years. According to data provided by Florida Realtors 2012: Buyers from Brazil were 9% among all foreign buyers. About 61% of Brazilian buyers purchased condominiums, and 21% chose detached single family homes. Furthermore 59% of Brazilian buyers purchased homes located in central city/urban areas. Also, Brazilians tended to purchase higher priced homes in the range of $200,000- $ 299,000, above the overall Florida international median price of $194,700. About 78% of Brazilian buyers paid in cash, and 19% were able to obtain U.S. mortgages. About 42% of homes were for vacation, while 15% were purchased solely for rental/investment purposes.[37] According to this data, it can be argued that Brazilians helped boost the real estate market in South Florida with the amount of real estate purchased in the last couple of years.

South Floridians also have become increasingly interested in learning Portuguese due to the high volume of Brazilian immigrants and tourists. Hence, there is a high demand for employees to learn Portuguese, especially in businesses involving Brazil and Florida.[38] Learning Portuguese helps people in South Florida to understand and relate to Brazilians better.[39] In addition, Brazil's influence on South Florida will keep on increasing since events such as the

2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Summer Olympics will be happening in Brazil. Many

people want to learn Portuguese to travel to Brazil for those events.[40] Furthermore, Brazilians

add to the state of Florida their culture, food, music, and spirit. The presence of Brazil is evident

around South Florida. For instance, in steak houses, malls, bars, clubs...[41]

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to shed light on Brazilian immigration in South Florida

and its implications. I analyzed Brazilian immigrants in the U.S. before focusing on South

Florida, in order to determine their immigration trends throughout the years. I argued that their

migration to South Florida is explained by several factors ranging from job search to escaping

from inflation, violence, and search for a better quality of life. Brazilian immigrants have been

beneficial to the development of South Florida with the introduction of the Portuguese language

and economic opportunities.

Endnotes

[1] I started my research for this paper in Dr. Margarita Rodriguez's International Migration and Development class, Fall 2012.

[2] U.S. Bureau of the Census, American Community Survey, 2011 estimate, selected population tables.

[3] U.S. Bureau of the Census, American Community Survey, 2011 estimate, selected population tables.

[4] Margarita Rodriguez. 2013. "Uneven Development: The logics of Fractured Transnationalism." In Alejandro Portes and Patricia Fernandez-Kelly. *Long-Distance Development*. New York: Sage Foundation. Even though this comparison is numerical ("because sociologically the numbers are not necessarily coming from the same universe of people" (ibid), it provides a sense of proportion.

[5] Laird W. Bergad, "Brazilians in the United States 1980-2007," *Center for Latin America, Caribbean & Latino Studies*, accessed March 10, 2013,
https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&q=cache:7mUncVOS0ocJ:web.gc.cuny.edu/lastudies/latinodataprojectre
ports/Brazilians%2520in%2520the%2520U.S.%25201980%2520-
%25202007.pdf+Brazilian+in+the+united+states+1980-
2007+cuny&hl=en&gl=us&pid=bl&srcid=ADGEESiZM94vltsii1z1iplF1HXSmXyszpiyhIxruJF6GMlJG6pxT
HHMRIfXt3xllkzcH5nDooxTQ_ScNl6nOQkhl3TkBhJX0yEYfcz6f2gdwNzbqsaPQ0MmkvP0uZD_dxovPW
w3YdGB&sig=AHIEtbRIEwRRmZCuLqSY-LjIR4f-6SnmJA.

[6] Ibid.

[7] José C. S. B. Meihy, *Brasil Fora de Si: Experiencias de Brasileiros em Nova York* (Parábola Editorial: Sao Paulo, 2004), 40.

[8] Alvaro Lima, "Brazilians, Who Are We? How Many of Us Are There? Where Do We Live? What Do We Do? How Much Do We Contribute? What is Our Future Here?" (presentation, meeting Brasileiros no Mundo, Florida, 2008), accessed February 22, 2013, http://www.slideshare.net/alvaroelima/brazilians-in-theus.

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[10] "Pesquisa Revela Perfil dos Brasileiros dos Condados de Broward e Palm Beach," Linha Aberta, accessed February 22, 2013, http://linhaaberta.com/magazine/2011/04/pesquisa-revela-perfil-dos-brasileiros-dos-condados-de-broward-e-palm-beach/.

[11] "Brazilian Immigration," accessed February 22, 2013, http://www.vernonjohns.org/plcooney/brimmig.html.

[12] Marcia H. Pounds, "South Florida Leads Nation in Immigrant Small Business Owners," *McClatchy Tribune Business News*, accessed February 22, 2013,
http://search.proquest.com/docview/1021053577?accountid=14585.

[13] Bergad "Brazilians in the United States 1980-2007."

[14] Patricia Chow and Gale Charles, "Expanding US Study Abroad to Brazil: A Guide for Institutions," *Institute of International Education. IIE Study Abroad White Paper Series,* (11). pdf.

[15] ISSS, e-mail message to author, February 19, 2013.

[16] "International Applicants," *Undergraduate Admission*, accessed February 22, 2013,
http://www.miami.edu/admission/index.php/undergraduate_admission/apply/international_applicants/.

[17] Mike Vogel, "Floridian of the Year: Brazil A Real Benefit," *Florida Trend*, accessed February 22, 2013,
http://search.proquest.com/docview/919994445?accountid=14585.

[18] John Couwels, "Florida's Tourism Gets a Boost From a Brazilian Invasion," *CNN Travel*, accessed February 22, 2013, http://www.cnn.com/2012/01/24/travel/brazilian-tourist-invasion/index.html.

[19] Kenneth Rapoza, "Brazil's Ridiculous $80,000 Jeep Grand Cherokee," *Forbes*, accessed February 22, 2013, http://www.forbes.com/sites/kenrapoza/2012/08/11/brazils-ridiculous-80000-jeep-grand-cherokee/.

[20] Vania Ceccato et al., "The Geography of Homicide in Sao Paulo, Brazil," *Environment and Planning* 39 (7) (2007), accessed November 24, 2012, doi:10.1068/a38283.

[21] Ceccato et al., "The Geography of Homicide in Sao Paulo, Brazil"

[22] "Travel.State.Gov," *A Service of the Bureau of Consular Affairs U.S. Department of State*, accessed February 23, 2013, http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1072.html

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Bryn E. Haffemeister, "Identity and Adaptation of Brazilian Immigrants in Miami." (MA thesis, University of Miami, 2005), 1.

[26] Ibid, 5.

[27] Ibid, 43.

[28] Tal Abbady, "Almost Ever After: Venezuelan, Guatemalan and Brazilian immigrants have made South Florida their home," *Blogspot*, accessed March 10, 2013,
http://almosteverafter.blogspot.com/2007/12/venezuelan-guatemalan-and-brazilian.html.

[29] Ibid.

[30] FloridaBrasil.com, accessed February 22, 2013, http://www.floridabrasil.com/.

[31] Adriana R. Sabino, "Mensagem da Presidente," *Centro Cultural Brasil USA*, accessed February 23, 2013, www.centroculturalbrasilusa.org.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid.

[34] "Brazilian-American Chamber of Commerce of Florida," accessed March 10, 2013,
http://www.brazilchamber.org/.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid.

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[38] Marc Freeman and Sun Sentinel "Brazilians' Clout Brings Push for Portuguese Classes in Broward" *SunSentinel.com*, accessed February 23, 2013, http://articles.sun-sentinel.com/2012-07-14/news/fl-portuguese-programs-schools-broward-20120714_1_portuguese-language-adriana-sabino-portuguese-classes.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Abbady, "Almost Ever After"