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It was exactly one hundred and twenty years ago. As history, now thoroughly intertwined with legend, has it, downtrodden soldiers, poverty-stricken and scarred after the long, bloody battle of Canudos, Brazil’s deadliest ever civil war, headed from Bahia to the nation’s capital at the time: Rio de Janeiro. The soldiers, formerly slaves who’d just been freed and then immediately drafted for the fight, had been promised land there for serving in battle.¹

Rio de Janeiro was one of the world’s largest cities in 1897 and certainly the largest in Brazil, with over half a million inhabitants. Brazil urbanized relatively early for a developing nation, and Rio was the first major city to do so. Due to its importance as both the nation’s fastest-growing city and federal capital, land there represented a major opportunity.

(Re)Introducing Favelas

But as they arrived, soldiers found no such land set aside for them, so they squatted outside the Ministry of War in downtown Rio, awaiting
what would turn out to be an empty promise. Weeks later, a colonel with some land on a nearby hill in Rio’s downtown port area gave them permission to squat on his hillside. And so they climbed up the hill and settled, naming their settlement Morro da Favela, or Favela Hill, after the robust, spiny, oily, and flowering Favela bush that had characterized the Canudos hills where they had served in battle, hills also named after the Favela plant and where some of them had met their wives. They thereby coined *favela* as the go-to word to describe Brazil’s informal settlements, which became the mainstay of affordable housing in Brazilian cities during the century to come.

Over the subsequent decades, more and more rural migrants and former urban and rural slaves and their descendants joined the Canudos soldiers in occupying Rio’s hills, and all of Rio’s informal settlements became known as *favelas*, so Morro da Favela changed its name to Morro da Providência, or Providence Hill. Despite attempts at eviction throughout its history, the residents of Providência have resisted, and the community celebrates its 120th birthday this year.

Sprouting initially on central hillsides and later in peripheral low-lying areas as the city expanded—nearly always on public land—favelas came to be such an integral part of the city that, by 2012 when Rio’s landscape was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site, UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing Raquel Rolnik declared “Rio’s favelas between the mountain and the sea” an integral part of that world heritage status. Georgetown University’s Brazil historian Bryan McCann explains: “about the only things that today’s Vidigal (a favela in Rio’s South Zone) has in common with the same neighborhood in 1978 is the absence of property title and the continuing discrimination against its residents, yet everyone still recognizes it as a favela.”

The century in between was marked by a number of policies toward Rio’s favelas, the primary policy being one of neglect that led to these communities’ marginalization. Descendants of slaves who comprised the bulk of the favela population were not deemed full citizens and favelas were, as a result, described as “backward, unsanitary and over-sexualized.” They were deemed “illegal” occupations and thus it was argued they were not entitled to urban improvements. Yet they were
also not terminated for the most part and were even encouraged at

times because they “offered cheap labor nearby,” as a municipal of-

cial informed a Rio audience in April 2014; as he also explained, this

was “convenient, until now.” Thus, one can summarize policy toward

favelas historically as one of finding ways to maintain the structure

of a slaveholding society, even post abolition.

Three other broad and interrelated policies were applied toward

Rio’s favelas in the twentieth century. The first is a policy of forced

eviction, which was mainly applied under Governor Carlos Lacerda
during the military regime between 1962 and 1974, when 140,000

people were removed from their homes, though the fear of eviction

has characterized favela residents’ experiences from day one until

now. Second were sporadic, incomprehensive, and insufficient up-

grading policies, intended to provide minimal infrastructure in some

favelas, with the most robust program, Favela-Bairro, taking place in

the 1990s. Third has been a policy of criminalizing and repressing

the urban poor, with Rio’s Military Police as its principal enforcer,
dating back to the institution’s founding in the first decade of the 1800s

and compounded during the institution’s history. Today, favela resi-
dents regularly criticize the occupation of favelas under the current

Military Police’s Pacifying Police Units program as the only arm of the

state residents experience, when they “always demanded long-term pol-

icies” and what they “want [is] the end of open sewers and of electricity

and water outages.”

Over a century, however, favela residents did not all remain passive

recipients of such policies. Instead, they have increasingly organized

and reacted. Vidigal, in Rio’s South Zone, is notable in its early resis-
tance to eviction during the military regime, which essentially halted the

regime’s forced eviction campaign in 1978. And housing groups that

grew out of the decades of insufficient affordable housing and poor poli-
cies led a movement that secured adverse possession as a clause in Bra-
zil’s new “People’s Constitution” of 1988, and other forms of housing

rights in state and municipal laws to follow. In addition, by the 1990s

a trend began which is now widely held, among the Brazilian architec-
ture, engineering, and urban planning establishments, to view com-
prehensive and participatory favela upgrading as the correct policy

approach to improving the lives of residents.
As a result of this history, today Rio de Janeiro is the Brazilian city with the largest number of people living in favelas. Approximately 1,000 individual favelas, ranging in size from hundreds of residents in small communities like Recreio II, which was removed for the TransOeste bus corridor and highway in the West Zone, to 200,000 in Rocinha in the city’s South Zone, comprise the 1.5 million favelados, or 24 percent of the city’s population, living in favelas.

And in fact, despite significant challenges to comprehensive upgrading that would guarantee quality public infrastructure and services in these communities, there are numerous qualities—urbanistic, economic, and sociocultural—that have developed out of informality in Rio’s favelas. Favelas naturally tend to be characterized by a number of qualities that urban planners around the world are currently working to integrate into sustainable communities but often have a hard time building into already-consolidated urban centers: affordable housing in central areas, housing near work, low-rise/high-density construction, mixed-use developments, pedestrian-first roads, high use of bicycles and transit, organic (flexible) architecture, high degree of collective action and mutual support, cultural incubators, and a high rate of entrepreneurship, among other factors. In fact, during Brazil’s recent ten-year boom, favelas fared better in developing than society as a whole on average.

Unlike other developing regions, namely in Africa and Asia, which have been urbanizing in recent decades, Brazil’s population has been more than 80 percent urban since the 1990s. Given their presence in Brazil’s fastest developing early city, favelas in Rio are thus some of the most long-lived informal settlements (still seen as such) in the world today. Their struggles, successes, and challenges thus offer incredibly rich sources of wisdom and knowledge, inspiration and warnings, about what can happen when communities are left to develop themselves over a long period of time. Urban planners and international development practitioners are starting to pay attention to what can be learned from these communities, what sort of innovative new treatments are necessary to ensure their effective integration without compromising community attributes, and how their stories can inspire a new approach to city-making in the decades to come.
Despite this reality, a deeply biased and inaccurate narrative dominates the view of Rio’s favelas locally and around the world. In the early 1900s, shortly after their settlement, favelas were labeled “backward and unsanitary.” Such views quickly found their way into the monopolistic Brazilian media’s narrative, where they were consolidated over many decades through to the present day. Maintaining a public perception of favelas as inherently illegal, criminal, precarious, and unmanageable allowed for the perpetuation of an image of these communities as temporary and in need of dramatic punitive intervention, whether that be through evictions or policing, and has allowed the authorities to maintain a policy of neglect and poor upgrading, which further exacerbates community challenges, keeping favelas in a never-ending spiral of legitimized neglect. Meanwhile, as an important world city and tourist destination for two centuries, Rio has always been of interest to international news outlets, though not important enough to dedicate significant resources to it. As a result, historically the global media picks up on the dominant local media narrative and amplifies it via telephone or parachute journalism, quoting authorities or citing press releases issued by authorities or local newspapers, which are deeply committed to maintaining the status quo. Sensational and big stories are the only ones deemed important enough to cover, so the global narrative on these communities has produced intense prejudice, which further justifies societal stigma among elites who care about global perceptions of their city and depend on them for investment, in another vicious cycle.

INTRODUCING VILA AUTÓDROMO

It is in this complex context that the inspiring and rich story of the small, punch-above-their-weight favela of Vila Autódromo unfolds. As with virtually all favelas, the community ties its founding to a subsistence or employment opportunity, in this case one that generated on the shores of the Jacarepaguá Lagoon. Settled by fishermen in 1967, fifty years ago, the small favela around eight kilometers southwest of City of God began just one year after the founding of its (in)famous regional compatriot (City of God is perhaps the prime example of a
favela made famous over sensationalized violence with the 2002 film by the same name). But whereas City of God was settled initially as public housing—hours from the employment hubs of the time, filled with military regime evictees globed together against their will despite originating in different communities—Vila Autódromo was settled by a small group of fishermen choosing the location for their subsistence and to settle, uninvolved with the lack of development in the region at the time. In fact, the entire region was characterized by what were seen by many as impenetrable wetlands.

In 1971, workers came to the area to build the Nelson Piquet International Autodrome, Rio de Janeiro’s Formula One racetrack, which would occupy the bulk of the peninsula on which Vila Autódromo was located. This is when the small community took its name, Vila Autódromo, or “Racetrack Village,” as those workers joined the original fishermen in expanding the community’s footprint. Again, the favela expanded around employment, as is typically the case.

Over the subsequent decades Vila Autódromo consolidated itself into a favela of some 700 families, filling all the potential lots available between the lagoon on one side, the racetrack on a second side, and a canal on the third. Original settlers eventually sold what were considerably large favela lots, allowing for some homes, decades later, to occupy 400 square meters of land on the edge of the lagoon or within what became the core area of the favela, nearer the Ambassador Abelardo Bueno Avenue. In some cases, large lots allowed families to grow, from one small home to two or three on the same compound, with several generations of a single family benefitting from their individual homes located on a family compound with trees and space allowing for an active outdoor private family life within the compound. Others grew their houses into quite large individual homes. Some used the outdoor space to plant fruit trees, open mechanic repair shops for Formula One cars, or establish Candomblé terreiros for Afro-Brazilian spiritual rituals requiring intense relationships with the land. Still others opened businesses in front of or below their homes, and churches were established, both Catholic and evangelical. Eventually, many also subdivided their plots, so the community also hosted a number of small, more precarious dwellings of those who moved in more recently and were beginning the process of iterative
development that characterizes favela consolidation and informal development. Meanwhile, a small subset of fishermen continued living on and off the water throughout the decades.

Some twenty-five years after it was founded, in the early 1990s, Vila Autódromo faced its first battle against eviction. This was when the up-and-coming neighboring area of Barra da Tijuca began expanding into the wetlands nearby. Barra da Tijuca was a response of real estate developers to high levels of crime in the wealthy South Zone of the city and redemocratization after the fall of the military regime: the whole region developed since the 1980s as thousands of gated community condominiums that were packaged for exclusivity and exclusion. The pretext for eviction at the time was environmental. Rio would host the UN Earth Summit, the UNCED (United Nations Conference on Environment and Development), in 1992 and the city administration used this as justification for removing the favela, which it said posed a visual and environmental threat to the area.

Residents organized, however, via their highly active Vila Autódromo Residents, Fishermen, and Friends’ Association (Associação de Moradores, Pescadores e Amigos da Vila Autódromo, or AMPAVA). The recent adverse possession clause in the federal constitution, combined with Rio state’s own 1989 constitution’s similar determination that land must fulfill a social function, were key to the community’s victory. They worked with public defenders and, in the early 1990s, were able to secure two leases from Rio governors. Termed Concessão de Direito Real de Uso, these “real use concessions” were provided by the state government because the peninsula on which Vila Autódromo sat was state-owned land. The more robust concession, delivered in 1998, provided occupancy rights for ninety-nine years, with the right to renewal for another ninety-nine.

Vila Autódromo then continued its self-styled development for another two decades, further consolidating itself with each passing year, residents being well employed given the labor opportunities associated with the Barra da Tijuca region’s boom over this period. During this period, the community also fought for public investment in sewerage infrastructure, road paving, and other upgrades. But at no point did the city government invest there, even despite the community’s now-official status. The only investment made by a public
official was when a political candidate running for office provided resources for a small playground in an attempt to attract votes. The poor-quality equipment was thereafter maintained by residents.

One date stands out in Vila Autódromo’s story like no other. On October 2, 2009, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) voted on which city would win the bid to host the 2016 Summer Olympic Games. Rio, unlike Chicago, had suffered no public protest in response to the bid, and along with other elements of planning and projection that had been “fixed” in relation to its three earlier bids, appeared a solid choice. In Rio’s traditional wealthy South Zone, a state-sponsored celebration had been organized on Copacabana beach with 100,000 in attendance. When Rio was declared “winner,” the crowd erupted in elated joy in a way that only a party city marked by three decades of stagnation and finally getting a glimpse of life postlimbo could experience. The excitement and hope was palpable across the city.

Meanwhile, Vila Autódromo artisan and director of the residents’ association, Jane Nascimento, was dozing off later that night in front of her television. In a drowsy haze she heard a press conference taking place. Rio de Janeiro Mayor Eduardo Paes, elected just a year prior, was responding to questions about Rio’s successful bid. In one of his responses, he announced that Vila Autódromo would be “the only community removed” for the Olympic Games.

Nascimento had fought eviction threats before. In addition to the threats of the early 1990s, Vila Autódromo had also resisted eviction in the lead-up to the 2007 Pan American Games nearby. The mayor’s announcement shook her to her core, and once again, Nascimento, together with Altair Guimarães—the popularly elected president of AMPAVA—other directors, and dedicated community members from across the favela, began organizing, starting by reaching out to the state’s public defenders’ office, for legal protection.

VILA AUTÓDROMO’S STORY AND RISE AS A SYMBOL OF OLYMPIC RESISTANCE

I first visited Vila Autódromo two weeks later. Catalytic Communities—the NGO I founded in 2000 that supports favela organizing and development of homegrown solutions as well as ad-
vocating for favela-led urban planning policies—was partly inspired by the community of Asa Branca, the closest favela to Vila Autódromo, due to their extensive community planning programs. When I read about Vila Autódromo being slated for eviction in the newspaper, I reached out to the president of the Asa Branca Residents Association, and he introduced me to Guimarães.

On my first visit to Vila Autódromo in early November 2010, Guimarães provided a rundown of the community’s history, his own incredible personal struggle with eviction—Guimarães had been removed by the government from his homes in two other favelas—and walked me around the calm and livable, family-centered community. Guimarães explained how he’d chosen Vila Autódromo due in part to its peace and quiet when he was evicted from City of God in the 1990s.

As we walked, Guimarães pointed out that the residents’ association headquarters had a stack of recently purchased, long, thin steel reinforcement beams carefully piled up. He explained that these were acquired thanks to weekly fundraisers the community had been holding, and they would allow the association to cover the soccer pitch on its property, guaranteeing an enclosed space for community events. Their other dream for the plot of land, he told me, was a neighborhood day care center. Eventually, he said, the plot would host the association, an enclosed soccer pitch and event hall, and a day care center.

This dream was completely shoved aside in the months and years that followed, and those reinforcement beams eventually grew rusty, as the residents’ association and a wide gamut of community members stopped living their everyday lives, instead dedicating themselves exclusively to resisting the City of Rio’s campaign to evict them. Hearing of their ensuing fate through media channels—rather than from the mouths of municipal officials—residents were confused. Planning maps submitted by the city government to the IOC in the bidding process and later—those approved by the architecture firm AECOM for the final works—maintained Vila Autódromo in place. After all, the favela was not located on the land assigned for the Rio 2016 Games—that land was where the Nelson Piquet Racetrack was—but simply adjacent to it. Yet Rio’s main media channel, O Globo, reported occasionally about the community’s pending removal “for
the Games,” and, as they began to visit the community and increasingly did so, municipal workers claimed the same.

Without a moment to waste, Vila Autódromo residents began organizing. In early 2010, association members met weekly with lawyers representing the community from Rio state’s public defenders’ Land and Housing Nucleus (Núcleo de Terras e Habitação or NUTH). The NUTH was on firm ground in claiming the community’s rights, given Vila Autódromo was one of few favelas where residents held written documentation conceding the right to use the land. In 2005 Vila Autódromo had also been declared an Area of Special Social Interest (Área de Especial Interesse Social or AEIS) via Municipal Law 74, thus recognizing the community’s role as a site of affordable housing, protecting the community from speculative development, and declaring it a priority area for investment in infrastructure and public services.36 With these legal supports in hand, the community’s case was as solid as is possible for any favela in Rio de Janeiro.

In addition to opening a case against the City of Rio, the NUTH prepared an eighty-page memorandum to the IOC, describing the human rights and broader legal violations being witnessed in Vila Autódromo. The letter attempted to bring to the IOC immediate, direct knowledge of the nature of the unsettling behavior being exhibited by Mayor Paes’s administration toward Vila Autódromo, its legal ramifications, and context about what was at stake. The history and nature of the community was at risk. At the end of 2010, the IOC responded with a direct inquiry to Rio de Janeiro State Governor Sérgio Cabral, who proceeded to “resolve” the problem by disbanning the NUTH, reassigning all the public defenders from the office elsewhere in the state, and temporarily closing the office.37

Over the course of 2011, municipal workers increasingly visited the community and attempted to knock on residents’ doors individually, but they were barred entry by organized residents who insisted that any negotiations had to be done collectively. The city’s “divide and conquer” eviction tactic had by this point been well documented in communities that experienced sudden evictions in 2010 and were caught unprepared to react, such as Recreio II and Favela do Metrô.38 Municipal workers were therefore ineffective in reaching individual households during this period.
While some residents held watch, barring entry by municipal agents, others took extroverted organizing roles. Early on Nascimento, Guimarães, and Inalva Mendes Brito were a sort of all-star team of organizers, each entirely dedicated to the community’s permanence yet characterized by a unique skill set and audience. Nascimento, a soft-spoken militant and mother of two teenage girls, was exceptional at building emotional bonds and often left the community for meetings with human rights and church groups and broader networks of communities suffering eviction. Guimarães held his ground in the residents’ association, generally always there when not at his construction job, often flanked by his young daughter Naomy, welcoming visitors and sharing his story of repeated eviction and thus his absolute determination to not allow the same to happen in Vila Autódromo. Brito, a school teacher who had been able to build her home up over decades, into one of the community’s largest with an organic tropical fruit garden near the lagoon, was a popular speaker on university and school campuses as well as academic conferences. All worked together to host community-wide meetings, engage with NUTH attorneys, and generally make strategic decisions.

During 2011 the government’s determination to remove Vila Autódromo became explicit. Not only in the governor’s dismantling of NUTH but in the constant reinterpreting of the “need” to remove Vila Autódromo. Justifications for eviction vacillated constantly and continued to do so over the subsequent years. Initially, in 2009 it was said the community actually occupied the future media center needed for the Games. When the future media center’s location was moved, the new justification became a “security perimeter” around the Olympic park. The community, via legal counsel, quickly defended against this justification, citing the towering condominiums being built across the street from the future park as a much greater risk. And indeed, statistically they were right: not only were the hundreds of new high-rise condos on that land more difficult to police, offering high platforms from which to execute threats, but Vila Autódromo, in its nearly five decades, had coexisted next to Formula One races and massive events like Rock in Rio (on the neighboring plot) without a criminal incident.

At this same time, left in the lurch while awaiting the reestablishment and preparation of a new group of lawyers at NUTH, leaders
of Vila Autódromo’s resistance began working with urban planning partners at Rio’s two top universities, the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro or UFRJ) and Fluminense Federal University (Universidade Federal Fluminense or UFF). They summoned their help to respond to a 2010 comment by Mayor Paes in which he challenged the community to “come up with an alternate plan (to removal).”

In what constituted the city’s next chess play, however, Rio de Janeiro’s housing secretary, Jorge Bittar, called a meeting in Vila Autódromo for Sunday, October 16, 2011, not to negotiate, but to make an announcement. No high-ranking city official had yet set foot in the community since declaring its removal two years earlier. And neither did Bittar, as his staff set up the “circus” (the meeting literally took place in a circus tent) just outside the community’s entrance that morning.

Citing simply a vague “we need this area for the Olympics,” Bittar shared a thorough PowerPoint presentation with a packed audience of well over one hundred residents and an equal number of supporters and journalists, displaying flashy sketches and blueprints of the Parque Carioca housing development that would be built especially to house the residents of Vila Autódromo. A bright blue swimming pool with a toboggan waterslide was promised and afforded much attention on the shiny brochures. A map showed the housing project would be just one kilometer away on the well-transited Estrada dos Bandeirantes. Apartment sketches included state-of-the-art appliances, including an espresso machine. The presentation was clearly intended to seduce while also sending the message that this was a done deal. He then opened the floor to questions and reactions.

Residents got up, one after the other, posing a number of questions. Some simply wanted more information about the diagrams and maps. Others gave deep testimonials about why they would not consider the city’s proposal and would resist to the end, citing the community’s legal defenses. Still, a few got up and angrily fired back at their resisting neighbors, saying they were eager to learn more and would accept the city’s plans. I recognized these residents—they tended to live in the newer, more precarious area of the community near the lagoon and canal’s intersection. These residents, at their peak equaling some
10 percent of the community, indeed had reason to consider the city’s proposal better than their current conditions, and they felt unrepresented by their resident association.

In previous months, however, with technical support from UFRJ’s Experimental Nucleus of Conflictual Planning (NEPLAC by its Portuguese acronym) and Institute of Urban and Regional Research and Planning (IPPUR) and UFF’s Nucleus of Housing and Urban Studies and Projects (NEPHU), AMPAVA and these technical experts had been leading a series of broadly attended public meetings in the community, debating, developing, and fine-tuning an alternate plan that would allow for the community’s full upgrading and integration with the Olympics site next door. Named the Vila Autódromo Popular Plan, the first thirty-two-page report was completed in December 2011 and launched in mid-2012, demonstrating how, for R$13,526,000 ($6,627,700 at the time), the entire community could be upgraded, including providing affordable housing on site for those in precarious dwellings while making final improvements on established homes and integrating sewerage, lighting, paving, and even the community’s sought-after day care center and enclosed soccer pitch, all outside the boundaries of the Olympic park.43

Bittar’s office, the Municipal Housing Secretariat (Secretaria Municipal de Habitação or SMH)—which became known internationally for marking homes for eviction without warning in a Naziesque fashion, with the famous “SMH” and a number—had uncovered an opportunity through the public display of vulnerability at the October event. Now the SMH argued that the community could not block access from the office visiting individual homes because some residents were clearly interested in the public housing option. So in the weeks and months that followed, while urban planners from the federal universities were holding public meetings debating the Popular Plan, which included community-based affordable housing for those more vulnerable families, SMH workers began going door-to-door, collecting information from residents allegedly interested in the public housing option.

The SMH notably sent large, intimidating groups of workers door-to-door, in many cases pressuring residents into allowing entry by saying if their information was not captured they would have no claim to eventual compensation should relocation take place or claiming
they were registering residents for the Bolsa Família federal welfare program or simply asking questions about the home’s size to register something on their spreadsheets. This process went on for many months, throughout 2012 and into 2013, while a large group of residents increasingly organized their resistance.

Meanwhile, in 2012 Vila Autódromo began making its way into the global media spotlight. The first major visibility came from the New York Times in March under the headline “Slum Dwellers Are Defying Brazil’s Grand Design for the Olympics.” Thus, the stage was set for what would grow into one of the key narratives in coverage of the Rio 2016 Olympic Games: how this small peaceful favela resisted the largest of corporate interests, interests represented not only by the IOC but especially by Brazil’s mega–real estate developers who were the ones investing in the Olympic park next door with massive government subsidies and who would thus reap the post-Games benefits of inheriting what was once prime public land. After 2016, the Olympic park would be converted to luxury housing and moguls such as Marcelo Odebrecht and Carlos Carvalho were set to gain.

By the end of 2012 all of the ingredients were thus in place for what would unfold over the next critical year. Vila Autódromo’s resistance was on a very strong footing and continued expanding in early 2013. The compelling Popular Plan was being distributed, a strong network of community leaders assembled and organized, a diverse range of partners engaged, the global media beginning to pay attention, and the community’s legal battle firmly unresolved. Legally speaking, the mayor would not be able to remove the community without their consent or a justification for the application of eminent domain. And given the community’s visibility and organizing, a violent forced lightening eviction was increasingly out of the question politically.

In April 2013 urban planning professor Lawrence Vale at MIT published the first extensive summary of the Vila Autódromo struggle, comparing it with the Atlanta Olympics, in Places, The Design Observer. Entitled “The Displacement Decathlon: Olympian Struggles for Affordable Housing from Atlanta to Rio de Janeiro,” the article’s publication made clear the international reach and reputation
of Vila Autódromo’s resistance. That same month, Vila Autódromo made its compelling case on Australia’s Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) via the short documentary “Reshaping Rio.”

At this point the mayor of a city in an advanced democracy might have stopped and negotiated collectively or recognized the political damage that insisting on the eviction of a small, well-supported community like this would cause and might have changed course. But in Rio, Mayor Eduardo Paes instead buckled down in his approach, obviously committed to the behind-the-scenes demands of the real estate moguls who would ultimately benefit from the eviction and who were responsible for building the Olympic park.

What had started in late 2011 only intensified in the early months of 2013, when the municipal housing secretariat expanded its door-to-door pressure over the community. Municipal workers used a variety of means to fill out forms on which they listed everything from resident names and addresses to how interested they were in relocation and how large their homes were. Some residents testified that they refused to speak to these workers, while others said that relatives provided information without realizing what was at stake or that they responded in fear that they would be left out of an eventual forced resettlement.

The purpose of this extensive and highly questionable surveying process was made clear on July 1, 2013, at OsteRio, an exclusive debate series hosted by the Institute for the Study of Labor and Society (Instituto de Estudos de Trabalho e Sociedade or IETS), a well-respected labor and urban economics think tank in Rio. At the event, to an audience of some sixty executives, journalists, researchers, and NGOs, the mayor announced that 70 percent of Vila Autódromo’s residents wanted to leave. Having had their names added to the survey forms, regardless of their reason for doing so, effectively served as an admission of willingness, or even desire, to relocate, according to the mayor’s claim.

Vila Autódromo residents followed up by organizing a large protest on July 20, 2013. The competing narratives were coming to a head when, in early August, Mayor Eduardo Paes called a meeting with Vila Autódromo’s leaders, municipal secretaries of environment and housing, submayors for Barra da Tijuca and Jacarepaguá, a
representative of the Municipal Olympic Corporation, and the city’s attorney general.

At the meeting on August 9, 2013, Vila Autódromo was represented by a number of community leaders and residents, public defenders, the Catholic Church’s favela outreach group, and technical partners from UFRJ and UFF who had helped draw up the Popular Plan. Leaders left the meeting hopeful, declaring themselves victorious, after the mayor had publicly acknowledged mistakes in how the community had been treated and agreed to open a round of collective negotiations to upgrade and “guarantee the community’s permanence,” stating that eventual cases of resettlement would be made only “in the same area, if a resident so desires.”

Over the next month, into September, a working group composed of residents and their university technical aids worked with the city’s environment secretary, housing secretary, and municipal architects over a series of weekly meetings to agree on the upgrading plan. Vila Autódromo’s working group was clear in its commitment to permit no evictions and used the jointly developed Popular Plan as the basis for negotiation. City officials, however, came to these meetings with an entirely different set of plans, requiring significant removals, which they would not relinquish. They refused to speak of other details without agreeing to some removals. As a result, community organizers did not negotiate further. They knew of the city’s common tactic, using scattered removals to initiate larger evictions in other communities. In these cases, the demolition of a handful of homes resulted in a domino effect, with frightened neighbors giving up one by one and entire communities eventually dismantled. From such divergent positions, the meetings were inconsequential, and by mid-September it was clear to community members that the mayor had made his public statements in bad faith, “for the English to see.”

Within two weeks of these negotiations, approximately one hundred Vila Autódromo residents received an invitation from the mayor for a closed-door meeting to be held down the road in Rio’s convention center, RioCentro, on October 6, 2013. These one hundred residents were decidedly not those elected by residents to represent the community in the public negotiations. Nor were they among the hundreds of resisters. It was clear that the SMH workers’ data on those
Not Everyone Has a Price

willing to negotiate formed the basis of whom would be invited to the big event. The city had selected only those willing to negotiate, and the mayor would see just them.

The small rift in the community exposed at Bittar’s event in late 2011 thus ultimately proved catastrophic to the community as a whole two years later. Sunday morning, hundreds of Vila Autódromo residents who had not been invited to the meeting were joined by an equal number of journalists and supporters when they stormed Rio-Centro, barging through a fence across a security outpost, traversing a pool, and finally accessing the building, where they were barred entry from the large hall where Paes addressed invited residents for over half an hour. Not only were uninvited community residents and their elected leadership barred entry but the BBC was too, as were all the alternative and freelance journalists in attendance.

Meanwhile, inside the mayor had nearly a full hour’s private audience with those one hundred residents. The only media outlet allowed in during this time was O Globo, and executives of Olympic park construction companies were also in the room. After several Vila Autódromo residents were injured by private security guards in their attempts to enter, unable to accept the idea that such a closed-door meeting would decide their future, the mayor finally approved entry of community residents, one of the university planners assisting them, and a handful of professional journalists. All other supporters and media were forced to remain just outside the double doors.

Inside, those who had received invitations to attend were given priority in taking the microphone, and very few others had an opportunity to speak. During his long presentation highlighting plans for rehousing the community in Parque Carioca, the public housing project advertised with a toboggan waterslide “especially for Vila Autódromo,” Mayor Paes made announcements that broke with his previous statements and with standard protocol regarding public housing rules. He stated, for example, that owners of multiple properties in Vila Autódromo would be compensated with several properties, when public housing is supposed to be issued on the basis of need and not speculation. He also stated that residents would be permitted to sell their new public housing units immediately, when normally there would be a ten-year permanency requirement, and that renters in
Vila Autódromo would be given apartments in Parque Carioca, when renters normally would not receive any compensation during eviction. Finally, he declared that more valuable homes could opt for “market rate” compensation. Those residents that asked for upgrading according to the Popular Plan were told by the mayor that they could make their way to the city’s regional office to sign up for relocation or compensation.

By this point it had become clear that the mayor found himself caught between a rock and a hard place. His personal interests and political promises to developers were his sole commitment, yet the legal system was not concluding the case in the city’s favor, and time would eventually run out to meet those commitments. Otherwise, there would be no need to negotiate separately—he could have kept his August promise to relocate only those who wanted it while upgrading the remainder of the community. If his goal was to remove the entire community, something that could be argued to be “consensual relocation” would be his only viable option, so identifying and convincing those families that had not participated in the broader community resistance and which were living in precarious situations to leave first was his most viable strategy.

So beginning with this meeting, and despite Vila Autódromo’s Popular Plan being chosen from among 170 Rio de Janeiro–based projects as winner of the December 3, 2013, prestigious Deutsche Bank Urban Age Award, the city entered a phase of mixing endless and diverse forms of intimidation with negotiations family by family, detecting what would convince each to move instead of upgrading their neighborhood. The administration even went so far as to forge a protest in favor of relocation, hiring two buses to carry twenty residents to city hall where they “protested” to be assigned to public housing. That same night, community organizers were hosting a community meeting with nearly 200 residents signing a commitment to staying.

And so it happened, one by one, families living in more precarious situations, attracted by the glossy ads, were the first to go, taking apartments in Parque Carioca. Once their homes were demolished, fear began settling in among their neighbors, with one wave after another of residents taking various levels of compensation over the course of
2014, with the largest wave following the Evangelical Church’s settlement offer. The community’s Evangelical Church had received a very large offer to relocate, leading its parishioners to follow suit. Offers began at just one apartment, but shortly after families began receiving two or even multiple apartments. Once no one was willing to take an apartment, the city began offering financial compensations, which increased from tens of thousands of reais to their peak at R$3 million ($1 million), delivered to a colonel who owned a property there.59 These offers, in the context of a community crumbling under bulldozers, dust, cut services, and other forms of duress, led even some who had declared themselves utterly committed to staying to ultimately leave.

In May 2014 at a second OsteRio event, just as the university planners and community residents issued a map showing that hundreds of residents remained committed to staying,60 Mayor Paes told the audience that it was “difficult to prepare an upgrading plan when there [were] so many people coming to [them] looking to leave” but that they would “see what remains of the community [after compensations were all provided to those leaving], and that of what remain[ed] . . . so long as they [were] not in access areas [for the Olympic Park], [they would] upgrade as promised.”61

One year later, even with Rio de Janeiro’s first-ever market-rate compensations to favela residents, even under so much physical and emotional stress, by May 2015 the mayor had reached that limit and was unable to convince 170 of the remaining families to leave.62 Rather than upgrading what was left of the community to permit the smaller portion of remaining residents to remain, however, Paes had shifted to an entirely new approach.

On March 20, 2015, fifty-eight homes had been marked for removal via an eminent domain decree, with future decrees offering the possibility of more homes suffering a similar fate.63 It was by way of this decree that all of the community’s earlier leaders were eventually evicted, and as a result of the eminent domain decree stipulating that the courts determine the value of the land in question, their compensations were a fraction of those provided to residents who had taken prior compensations. Thus, those most committed to the community, who fought so hard on its behalf and wanted so deeply to remain,
were ultimately those who received the worst compensations, a form of searing revenge by the mayor. Guimarães, Nascimento, and Brito were all removed in August, in one excruciating eviction after another, as were numerous other organizers who had come to represent the cause.

Perhaps the single most critical turning point in the community’s struggle came during this period. Building a home, particularly in a favela, can take decades. Tearing it down takes a matter of seconds. Municipal workers targeted homes covered by the eminent domain decree in those weeks, assigning houses for attention by hungry bulldozers following compensations being deposited in the bank accounts of their owners. And so there was a gaping threat that homes that had not yet been compensated for would be torn down. To protect themselves from ending up homeless, residents formed groups to watch over demolitions.

On June 3, 2015, such a scenario unfolded. Two homes that had not yet been compensated for were targeted for demolition. Residents formed a ring around the houses as they attempted to explain that the demolition could not go forward. Public defenders and supporters were regularly in the community during those weeks and months and joined them. Yet on this fateful day the municipal guard reacted violently, using rubber bullets, pepper spray, and batons on the protesters and injuring several residents. Some required surgery. The images of the municipal guard’s barbarity circulated on Brazil’s TV networks, in newspapers, and around the world.

This day was a game changer for the resistance movement remaining in the community. One of those most injured was Maria da Penha Macena, a small, agile woman in her fifties and one of the friendliest people one will ever meet, beaming with positivity and optimism steeped in her Catholic faith. Penha had by now assumed a leadership position in the community’s struggle and was widely known by media outlets covering the resistance.

Penha was nearly the only hopeful person left in Vila Autódromo by the time of this incident. Morale had been at an all-time low. But the violent clash propelled remaining residents to recommit to the struggle. Over the ensuing months, and through to today, the community and its supporters have led campaigns, including cultural oc-
ocupations, festivals, and the launch of the Evictions Museum, expanding on Vila Autódromo’s sense of community to include the now tens of thousands who were following and supporting them in their struggle.\textsuperscript{66}

By the time the most symbolic community structure was demolished—the residents’ association—on February 24, 2016, Vila Autódromo was no longer felt by its remaining residents or their supporters to be simply the original blueprint of their community. The concept of Vila Autódromo had expanded to represent a broad, even global, social struggle reflected in one of the community’s many slogans,\textsuperscript{67} which was stamped on its walls: “Not Everyone Has a Price.” Penha coined the slogan, summarizing the movement for visitors and the press. And it was exactly that notion that captivated so many who grew to embrace the community as their own.

The eminent domain decree ultimately led to the eviction of almost all of the community’s remaining inhabitants. The two final houses demolished within the decree belonged to Maria da Penha and Heloisa Helena Costa Berto. Berto was a Candomblé priestess whose home had served as a spiritual center and who was chronically mistreated by city workers, even receiving death threats.\textsuperscript{68} Berto and Penha along with two other women, Sandra Maria de Souza and Nathalia Silva (Penha’s daughter), became Vila Autódromo’s best-known leaders in the final stages of the community’s resistance and have since received widespread recognition and awards from city and state governments, as well as international human rights organizations.\textsuperscript{69}

The final eminent domain evictions took place during the last week of February and the first week of March 2016, witnessed and documented by remaining residents along with support from dozens camped out overnight in the community on those final weeks. Vila Autódromo was now down to twenty families that were both outside the decree and had remained steadfast in their unwillingness to negotiate with the city throughout the entire process.

The final stage of Vila Autódromo’s pre-Olympics struggle now began. It was clear that the city would not leave the area looking like a war zone come August 5 and the Olympic Games’ opening ceremony. And, of course, at least a couple of months would be needed to prepare the site. So whatever was to happen to Vila Autódromo’s
twenty remaining families would have to be decided by early June. This was just two months away.

Once again taking control of the broader narrative and keeping spirits high during those few remaining demolitions, on February 27, 2015, Vila Autódromo residents and supporters launched the #UrbanizaJá (#UpgradesNow) social media campaign, calling on supporters to post videos on social media using the hashtag and declaring why they wanted Vila Autódromo to be fully upgraded now. On the same day, they launched an updated version of the Popular Plan, considering the reduced nature of the community.

Mayor Paes had declared publicly over the years, on numerous occasions, that he would not remove anyone who didn’t agree to relocation. His administration had sent in municipal workers to do the dirty work of “convincing” residents through a variety of means and then made use of a questionable eminent domain decree. But now no such option was left. The final twenty families had never even entertained the idea of negotiating, and nothing short of a violent eviction would remove them.

The #UrbanizaJá campaign quickly produced dozens if not hundreds of videos on social media, including high-visibility posts from Brazilian celebrities Camila Pitanga, Gregório Duvivier, and Bruno Gagliasso, as well as internationally known figures like David Harvey.

On March 8, 2016, the same emotional day that the home of Maria da Penha was demolished and she went on to receive a major award from the Rio State Legislative Assembly, Mayor Paes held a press conference that community members were restricted from to announce his plan for the community. The mayor’s plan ignored recommendations made in the updated Popular Plan and instead proposed not the upgrading of the community but the construction of a set of new homes on a single street, maintaining only the Catholic church from the original community’s blueprint. Residents insisted on a meeting with the mayor to discuss the proposal directly, and it took place on March 15. On that day, the community and mayor reached a tentative agreement, based mainly on the city’s proposal. The final agreement would come to be the first collectively signed relocation agreement in favela history.
As a result of their extraordinary resistance efforts, and with supporters and the media watching, over the subsequent months the remaining residents held firm, watching and waiting, then actively participating, in relocating to their new homes. Several lived in temporary trailers on the site for a number of weeks, while others remained in their original homes as the new houses were prepared. Maria da Penha had the opportunity to speak of the community’s struggle to the United Nations in Geneva. Media outlets from around the world made daily visits, reporting on the community’s struggle and relative success. Technical partners from the federal universities watched over construction quality. The entire original community was paved over, parts became parking; others became access roads (the final justification used by the city for demolitions). But the bulk of the community’s land was paved over with no apparent purpose. The hundreds of trees Vila Autódromo residents had planted over decades were toppled at some point during the demolition process, leaving the area barren and synthetic, like its modern neighbor, the Olympic park.

Vila Autódromo launched the Evictions Museum on May 18, 2016, and kept up weekly cultural events and meetings in the months building up to the Games, during the Games, and afterward. The original 700-family, relatively bucolic and green favela with large-lot homes by the lagoon exists only in the memories of those who lived there or visited prior to the onset of 2014 demolitions. In its wake are twenty small, identical, white homes lining a wide street, named Vila Autódromo Street, surrounded by asphalt and pounded by the hot sun. One resident, Delmo Oliveira, caught in a legal battle with the city that excluded him from the twenty units built prior to the Games, has managed to maintain his original home.

In the end, the drawn out and painful eviction of Vila Autódromo’s residents cost the city of Rio over R$327 million, as compared to the Popular Plan’s budget, which would have upgrated the original community for under R$14 million. More than R$105 million was spent on the Parque Carioca public housing complex alone. At least another R$220 million was paid out in financial compensations. And the city’s final rebuilding of Vila Autódromo cost at least R$2.9 million. Today, the city also faces a lawsuit: 110 of the families
that received compensations are suing the city over the unjust natures of those compensations in relation to those of their neighbors.\textsuperscript{84}

While not the victory residents fought for, and certainly not the victory those evicted under eminent domain (and even many who took compensations) longed for, the fact that those who held out succeeded in staying on their original land in the face of such tremendous pressure and power is an unequivocal success. And these community members have gone on to represent Rio’s favelas in international forums like Habitat III and the United Nations,\textsuperscript{85} and their archives delivered to Brazil’s National Historical Museum during a ceremony on International Museum day, May 18, 2017, one year following the founding of the Evictions Museum. The story of the community’s steadfast early Residents’ Association President, Altair Guimarães, evicted during the eminent domain period, was in April 2017 recognized in a documentary titled “One Man, One City, Three Evictions: The Human Cost of Rio’s Growth.”\textsuperscript{86}

Vila Autódromo’s illustrative story serves as a glowing example and inspiration to communities in Rio and around the world. The small favela forged a path that communities facing eviction in the name of the Olympic Games or any other megaevent or megainvestment project can look to for inspiration or strategic lessons and on which they can base their movements. And the residents who succeeded in remaining on the new Vila Autódromo Street have set the community up to host and support such organizers.\textsuperscript{87}

\textbf{VILA AUTÓDROMO IN THE CONTEXT OF RIO’S OLYMPICS EVICTIONS}

Unfortunately, Vila Autódromo represents just one of dozens of communities that suffered forced evictions in the lead-up to the 2016 Olympic Games. In all, nearly 80,000 people were removed.\textsuperscript{88} Two to three thousand of these were from Vila Autódromo. By some estimates more people were evicted in the pre-Olympics years in Rio than in both previous Rio administrations associated with evictions combined: those of Francisco Pereira Passos in the first decade of the 1900s and Carlos Lacerda in the 1960s.\textsuperscript{89}
The Olympic Games offered the perfect pretext for eviction. Over the previous century, favela residents had acquired basic land rights, and their communities were being slowly upgraded under the growing conclusion that this was the only way to justly integrate them. Opportunities for mass eviction would no longer be justifiable—that is, until the Olympics deadline provided a state of exception. The city’s population yearned for investment. There was a broad assumption that municipal decisions were being well made in the public interest. And there were few checks to make sure they were.

So as city workers pulled up at favelas from Recreio II to Metrô, Manguinhos to Harmonia, Tanque to Restinga, few residents resisted. Most did not know they had any rights to claim, often struggling to make ends meet from multiple jobs or hampered by little education. Twenty-six percent of evictees during this period were in and near the rapidly expanding upper-class Barra da Tijuca region, despite this region only housing 12 percent of the city’s favela residents. Evictees were generally bused to distant housing projects in the extreme West Zone of Rio de Janeiro, in neighborhoods like Cosmos and Santa Cruz, two hours from employment opportunities and now at the mercy of vigilante cop mafias, known in Rio as milicias. In other cases, the government offered rent subsidies of R$400 per household (about $120) per month, insufficient to rent a favela home in most of Rio de Janeiro.

This broader context helps put Vila Autódromo’s remarkable resistance into perspective. The community carved out a strategy to resist greed of Olympic proportions that relied on seven keys to successful resistance: the community’s relative unity in its commitment to stay, access to information, legal defense, diverse and resolute leadership, broad networks of support ranging from peer communities to technical partners, creative responses such as the Popular Plan and Evictions Museum, and early and ongoing documentation and visibility.

Residents will attribute the success at each moment of their struggle to one or the other of these keys to resistance. For example, in the first year the community’s legal defense was the most critical, in particular allowing the community time to organize on other fronts. And as the struggle went on, creative responses allowed them to solidify their commitment, become more united, and get over
psychological hurdles while attracting partners and media attention. And finally, mass attention from the global media and broad networks of support emboldened residents during their most trying period,\(^9^3\) when so many of their neighbors had been removed, services were cut, and demolition debris left morale low. And all along, it was the community’s diverse and resolute leadership, able to evolve and adapt among a large number of compelling community members as the struggle continued, that resulted in the relative success of the final outcome.

Though ultimately dismantled in virtually its entirety, Vila Autódromo’s victories in the broad context of the history of Rio de Janeiro’s favelas and housing rights in Brazil as a whole (and perhaps ultimately around the world) are many and its lessons far-reaching.

Vila Autódromo was up against the most powerful real estate interests in Brazil, one of the world’s most unequal societies. Yet its battle was uniquely successful on numerous levels. Oversold as some sort of paradise,\(^9^4\) Parque Carioca was nonetheless one of the better examples of public housing built under the Paes administration, and those who moved there were able to remain in the same region as their jobs and schools. In many cases, families moving to Parque Carioca received multiple apartments—one per adult child plus the parents and grandparents, for example. And there were those who received market-rate compensation, the first-ever favela compensations recognizing land value in Rio’s history.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, those twenty families who remained to the end were able to prove to those who gave up—perhaps ultimately more importantly to communities at threat elsewhere—that firm, creative resistance pays off. And they signed their agreement collectively, rather than individually with the city.

The Rio Olympics proved that, at least somewhere, not everyone has a price. The Games have also inadvertantly spread that gospel.\(^9^5\)

APPENDIX: VILA AUTÓDROMO TIMELINE

Before 2009
1967 Construction of homes begins
1992 Struggle against eviction begins
1993 Court battles over removals begin
1994 Residents are granted ninety-nine-year titles to land
2005 Community is declared Zone of Special Social Interest

2009
October 2 Rio is awarded the 2016 Olympics and residents learn of the mayor’s plan to evict them

2010
February 10 Protest against city-wide evictions
March 3 Residents meet mayor and propose plan for remaining
March 11 Rock in Rio site construction begins in “Protected Area” that includes Vila Autódromo

2011
February 27 Court authorizes demolitions of some homes
May 3 Competition to design Olympic Park begins
August 22 Winning AECOM Olympic park design maintains Vila Autódromo

2012
January Judge suspends private bids for Olympic Park
March 4 New York Times first covers Vila Autódromo
June 6 Four thousand–strong protest in Vila Autódromo
July 26 Popular Plan created
August 16 Residents present Popular Plan to mayor
November 8 Public meeting about BRT highways planned for Vila Autódromo area

2013
March 4 City employees go door-to-door to convince residents to leave
March 5 Evictions discussion with threatened communities across Rio
April MIT report “Displacement Decathlon” published
May 15 2013 Popular Committee Human Rights dossier is launched
June 5 Vila Autódromo team participates in Evictions Cup
June 24 Five homes marked for removal
June 28 Confrontation between residents and city officials
June 30 Protest against evictions in Rio
July 17  Vila Autódromo and Horto team up for antievictions vigil
July 20  Protest against evictions begins in Vila Autódromo
August 9  Mayor agrees to permanence of Vila Autódromo
September 27  Communities threatened with evictions discuss strategies
October 2  Residents prepare for meeting with mayor
October 6  Mayor meets some residents; other residents insist on attending
October 30  City sponsors protest with twenty residents who want to leave
November 7  One hundred residents protest removal tactics and city-sponsored protest
December  Popular Plan wins Deutsche Bank Urban Age Award for Vila Autódromo
December 3  Public hearing on Rio removals

2014
March 19  Mayor states no families will be forced to leave and residents demand release of plans for proposed roads
March 21  Demolitions are temporarily suspended
March 22  Phase with marked cases of City pitting residents against each other
March 25  Injunction preventing demolitions is overturned
March 26  Five families sign contracts to leave and their homes are demolished
April 28  Mayor: Residents who want to stay can stay but majority “want” to leave
May  In Vila Autódromo, 187 families confirm they want to stay
June 15  2014 Popular Committee Human Rights dossier is launched
September 24  Residents hold solidarity and protest breakfast
November 7  Vila Autódromo residents share experiences at dossier launch
November  Vila Autódromo documentary screening

2015
March 11  More houses demolished
March 19  City declares eminent domain, marks the houses of fifty-eight families for eviction
March 24  Protest and barricade at Vila Autódromo
April 2  *International Business Times* coverage
April 16 Final resident of Vila Autódromo Avenue, Tadilmarco Peixopo told his house will be demolished imminently
May 14  *O Globo*: R$95 million has been released to compensate 116 people
May Jane Nascimento testifies to Human Rights Commission
May 20 Demolition of one house damages another
June 3 Attempted demolition leaves residents injured and draws international media coverage; Maria da Penha is injured during attempted eviction
June 8 Residents protest June 3 eviction attempt
August 15 #OcupaVilaAutódromo festival and light show
August Neighborhood association president Altair Guimarães evicted; Jane Nascimento is evicted
August 15 *BBC*: Mayor says people who want to stay can stay
September 12 Federal University of Rio de Janeiro’s MediaLab presents residents with aerial map of changes taking place in Vila Autódromo
September 17 Heloisa Helena Costa Berto publishes first open letter on eviction terror
October 2 Jane Nascimento speaks at Museu da República
October 23 Lightning evictions include long-time resident Dona Mariza’s home while she was out at the doctor in the early morning; she returns to find her home and all her possessions on the ground
October 25 *O Globo*: Mayor says people who want to stay can stay
November Photographer Guilherme Imbassahy launches Evictions Have a Face campaign
November 9 Jane Nascimento speaks at Getúlio Vargas Foundation
November 14–15 Residents and supporters revitalize the community park
November 21 New leader, Sandra Maria, leads visiting groups around Vila Autódromo
November 28 Residents host second Cultural Festival
December 9 2015 Popular Committee Human Rights dossier launched
December 11 Photo coverage of eviction struggle published in *The Guardian*
December 12 Residents plan day care center
December 26 Solidarity soccer tournament
December 27 *Time* magazine coverage
2016

January 11 Heloïsa Helena Costa Berto receives death threat
January 13 Municipal guard builds wall dividing community
January 14 Municipal guard removes community barricade; Heloïsa Helena Costa Berto’s house is surrounded by guards and bulldozers
January 19 Mayor says only one more family needs to go
January 21 Shock troops enter in force
January 21 Opening of Olympic Favela exhibition in Studio X
January 25 Screening of Olympic Favela documentary in Vila Autódromo
January 27 Protest march outside Olympic Park
February 6 Popular Committee and Vila Autódromo residents release video defending human rights dossier
February 11 Three homes are demolished behind residents association
February 12 Mayor confirms houses isolated in Olympic Park cannot remain
February 13 A burst water pipe causes flood
February 22 Residents put out SOS; suspension of residents’ association demolition order is overturned; supporters camp overnight in Vila Autódromo
February 23 Heloïsa Helena Costa Berto publishes second letter on eviction struggle
February 24 Residents’ association building and Heloïsa Helena Costa Berto’s house demolished
February 24 Amnesty International highlights Vila Autódromo evictions as human rights abuse
February 27 Latest version of Popular Plan is launched along with #UrbanizaJá campaign
March 5 Former UN Special Rapporteur on Housing Raquel Rolnik launches book in Vila Autódromo
March 5 Former Vila Autódromo residents express discontent with Parque Carioca public housing
March 8 International Women’s Day; Maria da Penha’s house demolished and Penha receives award from state assembly; Mayor releases upgraded plan to invited press
March 15 Residents demand mayor present plan to them directly
March 23 Heloïsa Helena Costa Berto writes letter to the UN from the United States
March 26 Olympics Poverty torch event
April 13 Residents agree to terms of upgrades with mayor
April 19 Residents announce plans for an Evictions Museum
April 23 Work on Evictions Museum begins
May 11 Heloisa Helena Costa Berto receives Dandara Award from state assembly
May 18 Evictions Museum opens
May 28 Vila Autódromo hosts Favela Literary Festival (FLUPP) workshop
May 28 Vila Autódromo mourns loss of tree coverage resulting from demolitions and destruction and reflects on Olympics Environmental Legacy
June Construction of new homes proceeds quickly
June 25 Traditional June festivities celebrate memory of Vila Autódromo
June 27 Vox video released: City of Rio’s project to hide the poor
June Report of death of former Vila Autódromo resident in public housing project
July Ten-meter banner by Pontifical Catholic University (PUC) students documenting seven years of urban transformations displayed in Vila Autódromo
July 5 Maria da Penha speaks at the United Nations in Geneva
July 25 The Fighter film launched about Naomy, a child who was evicted
July 26 HBO’s Real Sports with Bryant Gumbel features Vila Autódromo’s story
July 28 Heloisa Helena Costa Berto recognized by Front Line Defenders as a Front Line Defender
July 29 Remaining twenty families receive keys to new homes
August 5 Rio Olympics begins
August 11 UOL reports on the heavy psychological cost of Olympic evictions
August 12 Resident of last standing original home in Vila Autódromo tells foreign media of “terror”
August 19 Vila Autódromo “occupies” Olympic Park with celebration and protest
August 21 Rio Olympics closing ceremony
September 15 Olympic film featuring Vila Autódromo launched
September 25 Cultural occupation in Vila Autódromo celebrates memory, resistance, and hope
October 6  Vila Autódromo mother describes how children’s education has been impacted by eviction
October 17–20  Sandra Maria represents Vila Autódromo at Habitat III conference in Ecuador
November 23–26  Vila Autódromo participates in UrbFavelas seminar on favela upgrading
December 15  Sandra Maria speaks on panel at Favelas in the Media report launch

2017
March 110 families take the City to court over just compensation
April 24  Reuters publishes documentary featuring Altair titled “One Man, One City, Three Evictions: The Human Cost of Rio’s Growth”
May 18  Evictions Museum archive transferred to Brazil’s National Historic Museum on International Museum Day

NOTES

4. Rio was the largest slave port in world history, and slaves constituted some 40 percent of the city’s population in the nineteenth century prior to Brazil abolishing slavery in 1888; it was the last nation in the Western hemisphere to do so. Stephanie Reist, “Mapping the Slave Trade and Growing Black Awareness in Brazil,” RioOnWatch, November 20, 2015 (www.rioonwatch.org/?p=25458); Rosana Barbosa, Immigration and Xenophobia: Portuguese Immigrants in Early 19th Century Rio de Janeiro (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2009).


29. Adverse possession refers to when one occupies an area for a given period without contest and is thus permitted to file to acquire the land. The Brazilian constitution stipulates this at five years in urban areas, for up to 250 square meters. Robertson, “What Does the Brazilian Constitution Say?”


32. Yet, behind the scenes Paes’s administration had already been setting the public stage for the relaunch of 1960s-era eviction policies, working to
remove what he labeled “the taboo” on favela evictions. On April 12, 2009, just three months into his administration, Rio’s most influential and largest newspaper, *O Globo*, firmly associated with Rio’s right wing since the military regime, published the final of several articles, this one on its front page, declaring, “Since the 1980s, favela evictions were stigmatized as an authoritarian practice of the past,” thus heralding the return of an evictions policy. Mario Brum, “Favelas e remocição ontem e hoje: Da Ditadura de 1964 aos Grandes Eventos,” *O Social em Questão* 16, no. 29 (2013), pp. 179–208 (http://osocialemquestao.ser.puc-rio.br/media/8artigo29.pdf). Torrential rains on previous days had led to a number of landslides in favelas, which were used as a pretext for this campaign. “Death Toll Climbs in Rio Landslides,” *New York Times*, April 9, 2010.


54. An expression arising in the early nineteenth century in Brazil reflecting the cultural tendency to engage in empty public promises—even law-making—that is not truly intended for implementation but rather to buy time, mask over true motives, or otherwise permit unpopular actions to take place, as was done with the Canudos soldiers who were promised land in Rio. Patrick Ashcroft, “Two Centuries of Conning the ‘British’: The History of the Expression ‘É Para Inglês Ver,’ or ‘It’s for the English to See’ and Its Modern Offshoots,” RioOnWatch, May 28, 2015 (www.rioonwatch.org/?p=21847).
58. “Rio’s City Hall Forges Resident Protest to Remove Vila Autódromo.”
62. Berta, “Apesar de indenizações milionárias.”


73. Meg Healy and Stephanie Reist, “Vila Autódromo Residents Reach Tentative Agreement with City on Upgrades,” RioOnWatch, April 9, 2016 (www.rioonwatch.org/?p=27988).


82. Queiroz, “Residents Evicted by the 2016 Olympic Park Fight for Just Compensation.”


84. Queiroz, “Residents Evicted by the 2016 Olympic Park Fight for Just Compensation.”


86. Griffin, “One Man, One City, Three Evictions.”


91. Brum, “Favelas e remocionismo ontem e hoje.”

92. Information that bolstered the community included knowledge of their rights and organizing strategies, as well as the fundamental awareness to distrust what would turn out to be empty political promises, and a firm sense of the consequences and what would be lost were they to be evicted.


View of Rio showing Sugarloaf Mountain, which marks the entrance to Guanabara Bay. Cleaning up the heavily polluted bay was one of the key promises in Rio’s Olympic bid and one that, if accomplished, would have left a very positive legacy for the millions of citizens who live along or near its edges. Despite this promise and the fact that several Olympic events were held in its waters, the bay remains heavily polluted. (Credit: O Estado de S. Paulo)

A waste picker along a dirty beach with the polluted Guanabara Bay and the city of Rio de Janeiro in the background. Gross inequality in Brazil forces some citizens, such as this one, to the margins of society. (Credit: O Estado de S. Paulo)
Complexo do Alemão, a group of favelas where the government installed cable cars in lieu of the sewerage system residents had requested at public meetings. It is widely believed the government did this to please construction interests and because it saw the cable operation as valuable “visual” marketing of the Olympics and the city. The project cost R$210 million and was not popular among residents, although some did grow to depend on it. Operation was suspended in September 2016, however, shortly after the Paralympic Games closed. Meanwhile, the government is contemplating turning the few cable car stations into military police bases. (O Estado de S. Paulo)

Protest banner—Jogos da Exclusão (Exclusion Games)—at a protest organized by the Comitê Popular at Praça Sáenz Peña in August 2016. (Credit: Jules Boykoff)
Massive anti-government protest near Copacabana beach with a leading sign, “Kick Out Brazil's Money Vampires.” (Credit: O Estado de S. Paulo)

Militarized security monitoring a protest at Praça Sáenz Peña, a public plaza close to the Maracanã stadium. Hours later the stadium would be the site of the opening ceremony for Rio 2016, August 2016. (Credit: Jules Boykoff)
Scene from violent protest outside Rio’s Legislative Assembly. (Credit: O Estado de S. Paulo)

Vila Autódromo before its destruction in 2012. Nearly 700 families were evicted and relocated or compensated. Twenty families refused to negotiate and finally remained in simple, newly built public housing units (see chapter 5, p. 108).