Imaginary Prompt: Having read “Salvation in a Slave Society” by Stuart Schwartz, “The Devil in the Land of the Holy Cross” by Mello e Souza, and “Ruling an Empire” by Johnson/Burkholder, provide an analysis of the role of space in determining religious belief and behavior. Then brainstorm possible legacies of Brazil’s spatial hierarchies.

In his work All Can Be Saved, the scholar Stuart Schwartz uncovers the diversity of religious beliefs in colonial Latin America and uses inquisition records to consider the limits of catechism and colonial authority. The evidence and anecdotes that he uncovers—supplemented by facts from scholarship of Lyman Johnson and Mark Burkholder—then speak to the role that space played in influencing religious practices. Specifically, we see that it was space both real and imagined that set the limits for what types of religious behavior were possible.

In terms of real geographical space, Burkholder demonstrates that the length between the Brazilian colony and the Portuguese crown made it almost impossible to police religious practice. Even politics was hard to police: Burkholder shows that colonial officials could respond to imperial orders with the phrase “Obedezco pero no cumplo” meaning “I obey but do not comply.”¹ The time required to traverse the Atlantic (Burkholder reports 67 days from Havana to Sevilla) meant that top-down changes could indeed take months or even years.

Something similar occurred with religion in Brazil, where the Portuguese empire never established a permanent office of the Inquisition and historically only set up two tribunals. This meant that, effectively, such accused persons as Domingos Nobre could “repent” from his sins and then continue to live his own life when the Inquisition abandoned the colony.²

¹ Burkholder and Johnson, “Ruling New World Empires,” 99.
Brazil’s own geography reinforced such Atlantic policing problems on the local level. Returning to the example of Domingos Nobre, Schwartz tells us that in Brazil’s interior (away from such colonial port cities as Salvador and Recife) there were more possibilities for non-Catholic religious ceremonies and other forms of unchecked behavior (such as homicide, hallucinogenic drug use, and sexual liaisons).

There were also religious consequences to space as it was imagined. Historian Laura de Mello e Souza, in her monograph *O Diabo e a terra da Santa Cruz* informs us that many writers in Portugal and Brazil saw the colony as a real-life purgatory. This became a master metaphor of the colony, and the economic sugar industry seemed to validate that it was a reality: the mill was the main “engine” of production (literally called an *engenho*) and it actually had a fire burning coal that people saw as the purgatorial engine of the Portuguese economy. For some this helped justify the institution of slavery; the enslaved were being tortured like lost souls in the afterlife. For others, the image infiltrated the view of their daily realities: one slaveowner (denounced to the inquisition) had pointed to his sugar and shouted to the enslaved, “This is your God, treat him thusly!” While certainly that seems a disturbing case, Mello e Souza argues more broadly that the institution of slavery was so horrible that it made people even more convinced of Satan and of hell. Which meant more belief: “Satan played the role of confirming that God in fact existed.”

I can think of one potential legacy of this colonial “imagining” of space: perhaps governing officials continue to maintain distrust for those living outside of urban areas. It is possible that the colonial vision of urban space as a space for policing means that there is an automatic assumption that groups in rural areas lack discipline and civilization. This could apply...
to those first nation groups living on reservation, or those living in areas that used to be historic quilombos.

To whatever extent this is true, it might contribute to prejudice of rural immigrants coming to live in a big city. Maybe there is the idea migrants bring licentiousness, lack of hygiene, and a refusal to commit to a Christian ethics. This certainly seems to resonate with what we discussed in class about the contemporary Bolsonaro administration, which has catered to the evangelical lobby in Congress and to the broader public, while Bolsonaro has used tweets to slander not only the indigenous living on reservations but also the organizations working to protect them. Time will tell what happens with groups such as the Awá and Guajajara who might have to migrate to large cities if their lands are demarcated and invaded. And if Mello e Souza is right, then these groups will no doubt start believing in God: loggers have given them sufficient proof that hell exists.

If you can’t imagine dropping the mic after the final sentence of your essay, then your conclusion needs to be stronger ;)