

Brazil's Cinta Larga Indians and Miners: A Bloody Relationship

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The Roosevelt Reservation in Brazil, home to the Wide Belt ("Cinta Larga") Indians, has already been the stage of bloody disputes among Indians and prospectors over illegal diamond extraction.

Among recent incidents, the most prominent involved the murder of 29 prospectors who were engaged in clandestine mining activities in the region near the city of Espigão d'Oeste, in the state of Rondônia.

According to the Indian Missionary Council, the conflicts go back a long time and led to a drastic decline in the Wide Belts' numbers.

Their population fell from 5,000 members in the decade of the '60's, when their contacts with outsiders began, to its present 1,300. The conflicts are usually violent.

The most well-known occurred in 1963 and was denominated "The 11th Parallel Massacre," when an entire village was wiped out, with a child as the lone survivor.

The Wide Belts received this name for their custom of using a strip of tree bark at waist level.

They speak a tongue that belongs to the Mondé family, of Tupí stock. They are now the inhabitants of the lands referred to as Rossevelt, Serra Morena, Aripuanã Park and Aripuanã, in the southern part of the state of Rondônia.

All of these lands, which together sum 2.7 million hectares (nearly the same size as Belgium), have been homologated by the federal government.

It was not until the 20th century that precise information about the so-called Wide Belts began to circulate.

The first official contact with the National Indian Foundation (Funai) took place under the guidance of the Indian affairs expert Apoena Meireles, who was a key figure in the resolution of disputes involving Indians.

Meireles was killed on November 9, a victim of armed robbery.

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