

The Portuguese in America

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by

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The Portuguese in America

Immigrants have been coming to America's shores since this country was first discovered; the Portuguese are just one of many such immigrant groups. Yet they are also one of the most ignored, some even go as far as to call the Portuguese an invisible minority.¹ I saw the truth of this when I visited local libraries and historical societies and found that they had next to no information on their Portuguese communities despite the long standing of these communities and how active they have been in local industry.

The strong Portuguese presence in California can be seen in many areas particularly in the dairy industry, at one point in time the Portuguese owned 75% of the dairies in California.² There are also the festas which have been celebrated in Portuguese communities in California for over 140 years, really as long as there have been strong Portuguese communities in the state.³ Yet despite these annual celebrations of Portuguese culture we still see little recognition for the Portuguese as an ethnic group in America. This seems especially unfair when you consider that the number of people of Azorean descent in California alone is more than twice that of the population of all nine of the Azorean islands, as of 1996 the population of the Azores was 240,000 yet there were nearly 1 million people of Azorean descent in California.⁴ While I would not go as far as others and say that the Portuguese are on invisible minority I would say that we are defiantly an under recognized one. Few people in California even realize that this state was discovered by a Portuguese man Joao Rodrigues Cabrilho or our importance in many of the industries that make California great like farming, fishing, and especially the dairy industry.

¹ Ioannis Bennis Baganha, Portuguese Emigration to the U.S, pg 1. Francis Millet Rogers, Americans of Portuguese Decent, pg.5. Eduardo Mayone Dias, Portugal in Development, pg. 115. Miguel Moniz, Shadow Minority, pg. 9. Alvin Ray Graves, The Portuguese in California, pg. 2.

² Walton John Brown, Portuguese in California, pg. 75

³ Tony Goulart, Holy Ghost Festas, pg. 10

⁴ Sue Fagalde Lick, Stories Grandma Never Told, pg. 42

As a person of Portuguese descent I have always been interested in the history of the Portuguese in America and especially in California. It was not until writing this paper however that I really began to explore this history and as I began my research I was surprised to discover just how little information there was to be found. Already knowing the importance of the Portuguese in the California dairy and farming industries I was expecting to find a wide range of sources and information on the history of the Portuguese in this state. Especially since in the past twenty years or so there has been such a surge of interest in ethnic histories in the United States, this interest however seems to focus only on a small number of ethnic groups and sadly the Portuguese do not number among those. It seems that if a person like me wants to learn more about their cultural heritage it is up to that individual to do the research themselves. It was with that thought in mind that I started this project and I think that if nothing else the research done here has given me a deeper appreciation for my own cultural heritage.

Before looking at the Portuguese in America I think that it is important to first look at where they emigrated from. It is interesting to note that the Portuguese immigrants to this country in large part did not emigrate from mainland Portugal but rather from the Azores, a group of nine islands in the Atlantic. In fact 90% of Portuguese immigrants to the United States came from the Azorean islands.⁵ The Azores are made up of nine islands: Santa Maria, Sao Miguel, Terceira, Graciosa, Faial, Sao Jorge, Pico, Flores, and Corvo. The Azores are in the Atlantic ocean about 930 miles from Lisbon and 2,400 miles from the east coast of the United States. The Azores have a total area of 910 square miles with the island of Sao Miguel being the largest at 290 sq. miles and Corvo being the smallest island at only 7 sq. miles.

⁵ Portuguese Historical and Cultural Society, Portuguese Pioneers of the Sacramento Area, pg 5

Less than 40% of the surface area of these islands is suitable for agriculture.⁶ This has not surprisingly led to hard times for Azoreans throughout their history on these islands. Food has at times been hard to come by on the islands and attempting to produce enough food to feed their population with such a small area of farm land was never an easy task. Being about a thousand miles from anywhere it was not until recently that importing foodstuffs became a real possibility for the people of the Azores.

What it lacks in location and arable land however it makes up for in climate. The climate of the Azores is much like that found on California's central coast, meaning that the weather is very moderate with highs usually in the seventies and lows normally in the fifties. This moderate climate has not always been a blessing for the Azoreans however, many Azorean immigrants used to mild weather found it difficult to adjust to the harsh winters found on the east coast and the scorching summers experienced in California's central valley. In fact there was a folk saying among the Azoreans that went "California... is heaven for the women, purgatory for the men and hell for the burros".⁷ While I'm sure most immigrant women did not in fact find California to be heaven on earth it's easy to imagine that the men who found themselves working outside in hundred degree heat, after a lifetime spent in a more moderate climate, began to question their decision to immigrate to California.

The Azores were discovered during the Portuguese age of discovery, when the Portuguese took to the sea and eventually formed colonies as far away as Macao in China. The exact date that the Azores were discovered is hotly contested, some say they were discovered as early as 1147, they were officially discovered in fourteenth century by Goncalo Velho Cabral.

⁶ Portuguese Historical and Cultural Society, Portuguese Pioneers of the Sacramento Area, pg 9

⁷ Alvin Ray Graves, The Portuguese Californians: Immigrants in Agriculture, pg. 82

The Portuguese began to establish colonies there in 1433 but it was not until the sixteenth century that serious efforts were made to colonize the islands. The first colonists were from southern Portugal and Flanders. As the population of the islands grew there limitations, especially in terms of land, became more and more apparent. It only took a few hundred years for the islands to become severely overcrowded. As a result poverty increasingly became an issue on the islands. A thousand miles from anywhere with nowhere to expand Azoreans began to immigrate to the United States in force in the early 1800's.

Considering the geography of the islands it is not hard to see why people chose to leave the Azores. The islands were small and isolated and little of the land could be used for agriculture. Overpopulation has been a problem throughout the history of the Azores; in 1890 the Azores had a population density of 314.9 to the square mile,⁸ in comparison as of 2002 the population density of the Azores was 274.5 to the square mile. It was impossible for the Azores to meet the needs of its people with its limited resources and land availability; there simply were not that many opportunities for the people living there. Jobs were scarce and at times so were the basic necessities like food. The Azores, being volcanic islands, also suffered from occasional earthquakes and volcanic eruptions which could destroy entire villages, when disasters like these occurred it was not uncommon for all the surviving members of the destroyed village to set out for America or Brazil to start a new life.

Conscription also drove many young men to flee their home land. Portugal required compulsory military service from its young men. They were conscripted at sixteen and required to serve for several years, eight years in the 1880's⁹. They were usually sent to fight in

⁸ Christian John Bannick, Portuguese Immigration to the U.S., pg.4

⁹ Portuguese Historical and Cultural Society, Portuguese Pioneers of the Sacramento Area, pg. 10

Portugal's African colonies, such as Portuguese Angola where unrest was frequent and a strong military presence was required. Understandably these young men were not particularly eager to go fight in Africa, especially when you consider the amount of money a soldier was paid, during WWI they were paid the equivalent of eight cents a day minus the cost of their uniforms and required to do three years service in the army.¹⁰ The Portuguese government did its best to stop young men of military age from leaving the islands. However that only led many of them to stow away on any boat that happened to be heading to America, some boats took thirty or more at a time. In fact of the over 1 million Portuguese who left Portugal between 1885 and 1930 thirteen percent were illegal immigrants and most of those illegal immigrants were young men avoiding conscription into the army.¹¹

When you consider all the problems that the Azores had: overpopulation, lack of land for farming, poverty, isolation, natural disasters and the conscription of its young men it is no wonder that so many Azoreans left the islands to seek a better life elsewhere. It is also no surprise that many of those who left came to look for a better life in America. After all this was a time period in which immigrants were pouring into the United States from all corners of the globe, the Portuguese simply became a part of that great tide of people who came to America looking for a better life for themselves and their families.

The east coast was for many years one of the predominant destinations for Portuguese immigrants coming to the United States, as the Azores are in the middle of the Atlantic ocean it was easier and cheaper for Portuguese immigrants to go the east coast. In order to get to California they would have to go overland or around South America, neither option was

¹⁰ Portuguese Historical and Cultural Society, Portuguese Pioneers of the Sacramento Area, pg. 8

¹¹ Maria Ioannis Bennis Baganha, Portuguese Emigration to the U.S., pg 21

particularly easy or cheap for these new immigrants. As a result of this the east coast has an older Portuguese community than we find on the west coast and grew to a considerable size much quicker. Of the over 1 million people claiming Portuguese ancestry in the United States in 2000, 43% were resident in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut and 33% were situated in California.¹²

Many of the earliest Portuguese immigrants to the east coast came on whaling ships, it was common in those times for captains to have large parts of their crew jump ship at some point along the way and the Azores became a popular place to pick up new crew members. As a result one of the earliest Portuguese communities in the United States developed in New Bedford Massachusetts. New Bedford was the hub of the whaling industry in the United States. When whaling ships came into port it was not uncommon for Portuguese crew member to jump ship, just as their predecessors in the whaling crew had done, and as a result a strong Portuguese community began to develop in New Bedford. In fact at one point 65.3% of the Portuguese living on the east coast lived in New Bedford¹³ and in 1910 ten percent of the population of New Bedford was foreign born Portuguese.¹⁴ Who knows how many second and third generation Portuguese were living in the city at the time. It's hard to say but if the number of foreign born Portuguese was so high and considering there had been a Portuguese community there for over a hundred years the real number of people of Portuguese ethnicity living in that community must have been considerable.

On the east coast Portuguese immigrants usually found jobs working in factories or to a lesser extent in the fishing industry. As the whaling industry began to decline New Bedford

¹² Alvin Ray Graves, *Immigrants in Agriculture*, pg. 3

¹³ Jerry R. Williams, *And Yet They Come: Portuguese Immigration from the Azores to the United States*, pg. 21

¹⁴ Christian John Bannick, *Portuguese Immigration to the U.S.*, pg. 21

became a center of the textile industry and many Portuguese immigrants and their families, in need of a new means of employment, found work in these factories. Factory work really was one of the only employment options for the Portuguese living on the east coast at this time. Land was simply too expensive on the east coast for these new immigrants to afford it and as a result few Portuguese went into farming, though some did become farm hands. In fact of all the Portuguese immigrants living on the east coast only 1% became agriculturalists.¹⁵ This is a stark contrast to the situation of Portuguese immigrants in California, California has accounted for 87% of all Portuguese farmers in the United States.¹⁶ With land being beyond their reach and most Portuguese immigrants being unskilled labor those immigrants who lived on the east coast had few options but to take jobs in factories.

As a result of their work in factories most Portuguese on the east coast lived in cities and this resulted in the development of Portuguese communities within those cities. As of 1892 there were no less than seven Portuguese enclaves on the east coast consisting of more than twenty thousand people, these enclaves were New Bedford, Boston, Taunton, Fall River, Provincetown, and Gloucester.¹⁷ As a result of the Portuguese living in these enclaves on the east coast they were able to form arguable stronger Portuguese communities there than can be found anywhere else in the U.S. In the beginning however these Portuguese enclaves were not really anywhere anyone would want to live. Like most immigrant communities found in cities at that time the people living in these enclaves lived in what we would today call tenements. It was necessary for every member of a family to take work in a factory simply for a family to get by. As a result the children of these Portuguese immigrants worked instead of attending school. Considering this it

¹⁵ Alvin Ray Graves, *The Portuguese Californians: Immigrants in Agriculture*, pg. 3

¹⁶ Alvin Ray Graves, *The Portuguese Californians: Immigrants in Agriculture*, pg. 4

¹⁷ Leo Pap, *The Portuguese-Americans*, pg. 55

is not surprising to discover that for many years Portuguese immigrants had the highest percentage of illiterates among all the ethnic groups arriving in the United States.¹⁸ This illiteracy and lack of education kept the Portuguese living on the east coast in the role of unskilled labor until fairly recently and as a result the Portuguese living on the east coast had little opportunity for advancement.

Though the number of Portuguese in California is large the Portuguese there have almost always made their living in agriculture or dairying and as a result have lived spread out in rural areas, therefore in California there are no real Portuguese neighborhoods that can compare to those on the east coast. On the east coast, as a result of the Portuguese finding employment mainly in factories and therefore living in cities, there are whole communities of Portuguese with shops that are run by Portuguese and cater to them, selling Portuguese foodstuffs etc. While you can find the occasional Portuguese bakery in California those sorts of things are much rarer there. Some say that there is a stronger sense of community and heritage in the Portuguese enclaves found on the east coast than in California but I would disagree. While Californian cities may not have the Portuguese neighborhoods that they have on the east coast we still have a very strong sense of community. In cities here that have a large population of people of Portuguese descent the Portuguese halls are active and the people proud of their heritage. Our communities are just as strong as those on the east coast; they are simply more spread out and smaller in size.

Looking at the number of foreign born Portuguese living in communities on the east coast in a given year can give us a better understanding of how these communities grew over the years and during what time period we saw the largest influx of Portuguese immigrants.

¹⁸ Maria Ioannis Bennis Baganha, Portuguese Emigration to the United States, 1820-1930. Pg.90

County	Town	1885	1895	1905	1915
<i>Massachusetts</i>					
Barnstable		848	1,318	1,801	
	Provincetown	698	962	1,003	962
Bristol		2,506	7,263	17,938	
	New Bedford	1,445	3,861	7,352	15,145
	Fall River	313	1,707	7,020	13,360
	Taunton	276	536	1,425	2,772
Essex		621	1,020	1,379	
	Gloucester	466	711	758	943
Middlesex		538	1,523	2,814	
	Cambridge	351	825	1,237	2,216
	Lowell	43	310	924	1,930
Suffolk		1,150	1,266	1,289	
	Boston	1,122	1,215	1,233	1,507
Dukes Nantucket Norfolk Plymouth		420	852	2,642	
Total Massachusetts		6,118	13,298	27,937	52,133
<i>Rhode Island</i>					
	Providence	363	981	2,173	3,737

	East Providence	16	81	403	1,097
	Portsmouth	121	251	537	510
	Bristol	83	205	659	1,333
	Middletown	57	176	237	396
	Newport	22	99	256	657
	Tiverton	21	74	219	563
Total Rhode Island		814	2,241	5,293	10,449

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As you can see the influx of Portuguese immigrants grew steadily over the years and reached its peak between 1905 and 1915. Portuguese immigration fell off after this time period because the United States government implemented stricter regulations on the number of Portuguese immigrants who were allowed into the country. In 1921 a quota act was passed that limited the number of Portuguese immigrants allowed to enter the United States in a year to 2,520.²⁰ It was not until the Azorean Refugee Act was passed in 1958 after a volcanic eruption on Faial that Portuguese immigrants once again began to enter the United States in significant numbers.

In California, as in Massachusetts, Portuguese immigration began with whaling crews. By the 1850's and 60's there were several Portuguese owned and operated whaling stations along the California coast such as Portuguese Bend, Monterey, the bay of Carmelo, and some in L.A. and San Diego. Besides being run by Portuguese these whaling stations were also entirely operated by Portuguese. The age of whaling along the California coast was short lived however,

¹⁹ Leo Pap, The Portuguese-Americans, pgs. 56-57

²⁰ Maria Ioannis Bennis Baganha, Portuguese Emigration to the United States, 1820-1930. Pg 93

it reached its peak in the 1850's and early 1860's and by the 1880's the whaling stations that had previously dotted the California coast had pretty much ceased to exist.

In California, unlike on the east coast or in Hawaii, the Portuguese were very involved in agriculture, particularly the dairy industry. At one point the Portuguese controlled 75% of the dairies in California.²¹ The dairy industry in California gave the Portuguese immigrants there a chance to thrive that they did not find in other states. Because of the dairy industry the Portuguese immigrants in California had a better chance at upward mobility than Portuguese immigrants living in any other state. In fact by the early 1900's Portuguese immigrants in California were able to increase their land holdings 300% from what they had been when they had first arrived in California while Portuguese immigrants on the east coast and in Hawaii owned no real land to speak of.²² Of course as immigrants the Portuguese did not have the money to purchase land when they first arrived in California, many started out working as hired help on farms or dairies, often owned by Portuguese immigrants who had arrived earlier, until they saved up enough money to start their own farm or dairy. Though the farms and dairies owned by Portuguese immigrants were not the largest in the state by 1920 the Portuguese ranked third in land ownership in California and fourth in value of farms.²³

The Portuguese were among the most rural of all national groups in California; in 1920 56% of all Portuguese in California lived in locales with a population of less than 2,500 by 1930 that percentage had climbed to 59%.²⁴ Considering that most Portuguese worked in the farming or dairy industries these figures are not surprising. A result of the Portuguese living in such rural

²¹ Walton John Brown, *Portuguese in California*, pg. 75

²² Christian John Bannick, *Portuguese Immigration to the United States: Its Distribution and Status*, pg. 68

²³ Manuel Cardozo

²⁴ Alvin Ray Graves, *The Portuguese Californians: Immigrants in Agriculture*, pg. 4

areas however is that those Portuguese living in California were unable to form the sort of communities and enclaves that they did on the east coast. That is not to say that they did not form their own communities, simply that the communities they formed were not on the scale of New Bedford or other such Portuguese communities on the east coast. Though they did not live in large communities the Portuguese in California did tend to congregate together, dairy or farm owners hired newer immigrants to work as farm hands and they tended to congregate near people from the same island from which they came.

Looking at the numbers of Portuguese in a given region of California can give us a better idea of how Portuguese communities in California were spread out, where Portuguese tended to congregate, and how the size of those communities compared to those on the east coast.

**Persons of Portuguese Ancestry in California, 2000,
By Major Geographic Regions**

Geographical Subdivision	Total Population	# of Portuguese	% of Portuguese
North Coast	240,290	5,278	2.20%
North Central	220,579	3,749	1.70
Northeast	64,101	841	1.30
Central Coast	7,404,806	127,388	1.70
Sacramento Valley	2,230,317	34,725	1.60
San Joaquin Valley	3,302,792	82,578	2.50
Sierra Mountain	679,577	13,490	2.00
Southern California	19,729,186	63,025	0.30
The State	33,871,648	331,074	1.00%

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Of course these numbers are really only an approximation, no one in my family puts Portuguese down on their census and I'm sure that many other people of Portuguese descent also refrain from declaring their ethnic heritage on their census form. Nonetheless this table clearly shows us that Portuguese immigrants chose to congregate in areas conducive to the farming and

²⁵ Alvin Ray Graves, *The Portuguese Californians: Immigrants in Agriculture*, pg. 104

dairying that the majority became involved in. We can also see that the Portuguese in California are pretty evenly spread out across the state, while in other states like Massachusetts and Rhode Island they are predominantly located in a few coastal areas. This is undoubtedly because the Portuguese on the west coast compared to those on the east coast found themselves involved in vastly different industries, farming or dairying as opposed to factory work. The Portuguese in California needed to own their own land in order to find success in that state while for those on the east coast the purchase of land was not an option, therefore they had no choice but to take work in factories and as a result formed their own ethnic enclaves and neighborhoods.

Looking at the numbers of Portuguese farm owners in various places around the United States can give us a better appreciation of the prevalence of Portuguese farm owners in California, and the lack of Portuguese farm owners in other states. It shows us how much greater the opportunity for upward mobility, as a result of their ability to buy land, was for Portuguese immigrants when they came to California as compared to other states.

Portuguese Farm Population in the United States, 1960, By State and Major region

State or Region	Total Portuguese Population	% Rural Farm	# Rural Farm
California	97,489	15.60%	15,208
SE New England	134,413	1.00	1,338
New York/New Jersey	20,430	0.41	84
Hawaii	9,325	2.70	252
All Others	15,745	3.77	594
Total	277,402	6.30%	17,476

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As we can see the Portuguese in California accounted for almost all of the Portuguese owned farms in the United States. Looking at this table gives us a better understanding of why

²⁶ Alvin Ray Graves, *The Portuguese Californians: Immigrants in Agriculture*, pg. 4

Portuguese immigrated to California not just from the Azores but also from other states like Massachusetts or Hawaii. In the Azores most people made their living as farmers and thus the ownership of land had a great deal of cultural significance to Azoreans. If an Azorean immigrant wanted to fulfill their dream of owning land in the United States it is clear California would really be the only place for them to go. The number of farms owned by Portuguese in California may not seem that significant on its own but when compared to farm ownership by Portuguese across the country it really gives you an understanding of how and why Portuguese immigrants found more success in California than in any other place in the country.

As time went on and technology became more advanced it became possible to get more milk from fewer cows causing the price of milk to drop and making the dairy industry less profitable. As a result there has been a huge decrease in the number of dairy and farms owned by the Portuguese since the 1940's and 1950's. As the following table will show the changes have been quite dramatic.

**Farms, Milk Cows, and Production of Milk Cows in California
1950 - 1970**

	1950	1970	# Change	% Change
# Farms	19,428	4,473	14,955	-77%
# Cows	777,000	755,000	22,000	-3%
Cows/Dairy	40	169	129	322
Milk Per Cow(LBS.)	7,710	12,384	4,674	61
Total Production (Million LBS.)	5,991	9,350	3,359	56%

As we can clearly see it is not only the number of dairies that has decreased over the years, the number of cows in the state of California have also seen a significant decrease over the years, while the amount of milk produced has seen just as significant an increase. This might be good for the consumer because it has caused the price of milk to decrease but it has driven thousands of dairy owners out of business and the Portuguese have been no exception. That being said the Portuguese are still an important part of the California dairy industry as the following table will show.

**Dairy Ownership or Operation, California,
By Counties, 2002**

Geographical Subdivision	All Dairies	# Portuguese	% Portuguese
North Coast	66	14	21%
North Central	2	1	50%
Northeast	0	0	0
Central Coast	132	23	17%
Sacramento Valley	147	66	45%
San Joaquin Valley	1,427	847	59%
Sierra Mountain	1	1	100%
Southern California	306	31	10%
The State	2,087	979	47%

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As we can see though Portuguese dairy owners no longer account for 75% of the dairies in the state as they did in their heyday they still account for a significant number of dairies in the state, almost 50%. When you consider how severely the dairy industry has downsized over the past fifty years or so the ability of the Portuguese to keep such a strong presence in the dairy industry is really quite impressive. The dairy industry has been very important to the Portuguese

²⁷ Alvin Ray Graves, *The Portuguese Californians: Immigrants in Agriculture*, pg. 92

²⁸ Alvin Ray Graves, *The Portuguese Californians: Immigrants in Agriculture*, pg. 106

in California; it is probably the sole reason that the Portuguese found more success in California than any other state.

In fact Portuguese immigrated to California not just from the Azores but from Massachusetts and Hawaii where they had earlier immigrated. Between 1911 and 1914 twenty-six hundred Portuguese emigrated from Hawaii to California.²⁹ They were undoubtedly drawn to California by the success that their fellow Portuguese immigrants found in that state. It was the ability to become self-employed that allowed Portuguese immigrants to find the success in California that they did not find in other states. The vast majority of Portuguese immigrants were unskilled labor and as a result they ended up working in factories on the east coast and on sugar plantations in Hawaii, neither type of employment is the kind that offers any room for advancement. In California however it was easy for them to find work as hired help on dairies and then, when they had saved enough money, they could buy their own land and start their own operation. It was this opportunity for self-employment that gave the Portuguese immigrants to California such opportunity for success.

While the Portuguese has the greatest chance of upward mobility in California they had they had the lowest chance of upward mobility in Hawaii.³⁰ Hawaii was the state with the third largest percentage of Portuguese immigrants in the United States. The lack of upward mobility of Portuguese in Hawaii was undoubtedly caused by the fact that Portuguese immigrants went to Hawaii on a contract labor basis to work on sugar plantations. Portuguese immigration to Hawaii on a contract labor basis began on the large scale in 1878; by 1888 almost 12,000 Portuguese had

²⁹ Walter John Brown, *Portuguese in California*, pg. 68

³⁰ Maria Ioannis Bennis Baganha, *Portuguese Emigration to the U.S*, pg.319

gone to Hawaii to work on the sugar plantations.³¹ In fact the government of Hawaii sponsored solicitation of contract laborers for Hawaiian plantations in the Azores and Madeira.³²

Portuguese Stock in the Hawaiian Islands, 1872-1920

Year	Born in Portugal	Hawaiian-Born of (all-) Portuguese Parentage
1872	395	
1878	436	
1884	9,377	
1890	8,602	4,117
1896	8,232	6,959
1900	6,512	9,163
1910	7,585	14,716
1920	5,794	21,208

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While the number of Portuguese immigrants to Hawaii may seem insignificant when compared to the number who immigrated to the east coast and California they actually made up a much larger percentage of the population in Hawaii, over 8%, then they did in any other state. In fact the Portuguese are still the fourth largest ethnic group in Hawaii. The Portuguese have left their mark on Hawaiian culture in both cuisine and music. It was the Portuguese who introduced the ukulele, the instrument most commonly associated with Hawaiian music and culture, to Hawaii. The ukulele originated in the Madeira's and when people from those islands immigrated to Hawaii they took it with them. Portuguese food has also found a place in Hawaiian culture particularly in the form of Portuguese sweet bread and malasada, a sort of Portuguese donut. Malasada have become so popular in Hawaii that there are bakeries devoted to nothing else but the making of malasada. Though the Portuguese might not have found great economic success in

³¹ Leo Pap, The Portuguese-Americans, pg. 73-74

³² Leo Pap, The Portuguese-Americans, pg. 74

³³ Leo Pap, The Portuguese-Americans, pg. 77

Hawaii they did succeed in making themselves a part of Hawaiian culture in a way that they did not in any other states where they settled.

Portuguese immigration was limited to only a few states yet the Portuguese communities that developed within those states were radically different from one another. On the east coast as a result of their working in factories and therefore living in cities the Portuguese were able to form enclaves, but while factory work enabled them to form strong communities it offered little opportunity for advancement and as a result even the youngest children were forced to go to work rather than going to school. The Portuguese already had the lowest literacy rate of any immigrant group so without an education the children of these immigrants really stood no chance of escaping poverty and building a better future for themselves. In California the Portuguese found work on farms or dairies, living in rural areas kept them from forming the enclaves that they had on the east coast but they were still able to form strong communities of their own. The business ownership that they were able to achieve in California gave Portuguese immigrants to that state a greater chance for economic advancement than their fellow immigrants in Hawaii and on the east coast found. Though their children still needed to work on the farm or dairy they had the opportunity to go to school and thus bring about even greater opportunities for themselves and their families. Portuguese immigrants to Hawaii fared the worst, undoubtedly because most came to that state as contract labor to sugar plantations. Many of those who went to Hawaii failed to put down roots and later immigrated on to California. Though Hawaii offered little in the way of economic advancement to those who immigrated there the smaller population and greater ethnic diversity found there allowed the Portuguese culture to become part of Hawaiian culture as a whole, something that failed to happen in any of the other states that the Portuguese immigrated to. When all three regions of immigration are compared it seems like California was

the best bet for those Portuguese who were considering immigration to the United States.

Considering that fact you might wonder why more Portuguese immigrated to the east coast than to California? The reason behind that is simple when you consider that the Azores are in the middle of the Atlantic. Many Azoreans simply did not have the means to immigrate further once they arrived in the United States.

It was not until researching this paper that I learned how typical the story of my family was. Like so many other Portuguese my great-grandfather, Manuel Pereira Silveira, chose to flee to the United States rather than risk conscription when he was a young man of seventeen. He left the island of Pico with nothing more than the clothes on his back, the sandals on his feet, and a bag of food. He never saw or communicated with his family again. When my aunt and her family went to the island of Pico for a vacation a few years again they met a sister of his, she had been a young child when he left but she could still remember the last time she saw him. She cried upon meeting my aunt and cousins, and said that their family had never known what happened to him.

He arrived in San Francisco in 1901, two years after his arrival he found work at the Oso Flaco dairy of the man who would eventually become his father-in-law, Manuel Azevedo. Oso Flaco was the area in which most Portuguese immigrants congregated after their arrival in the Santa Maria valley. Upon arriving in the U.S. he changed his last name from Silveira to Pereira. The reason behind his name change was his fear of deportation. He felt that if he changed his name it would decrease his chances of being discovered as an illegal alien. His fear of deportation also kept him from ever seeking citizenship or even getting a drivers license.

In 1914 he married the daughter of his employer Mary Azevedo, she was fifteen, and he was thirty. Like the many Portuguese immigrants to the central coast Manuel Pereira started his own dairy as soon as he saved enough money to buy land. The first dairy he owned was on Donavan road and it was there that my grandfather was born in 1932. Later that same year they sold that dairy and bought another on telephone road. They operated that dairy from 1932 until 1961, two years before Manuel died. My grandfather was the youngest of seven children and the family needed all seven to work on the dairy. They did not get electricity until 1950 and they milked their cows by hand until 1955. By the time my great-grandfather sold the dairy in 1961 all his children had already left and moved into town. As previously stated this was a time in which many dairies were going out of business. Mary and Manuel Pereira had a love of their Portuguese heritage that they passed on to future generations. They were very involved in the local DES hall and our family has continued that involvement ever since.

The inclusiveness and openness of the Portuguese community can be clearly seen in the instance of my Grandma Pereira. Grandma Pereira is not Portuguese by birth but she has completely adopted the Portuguese culture as her own. She converted to Catholicism soon after her marriage to my grandfather and she has been a faithful catholic ever since, attending mass at least once a week. She is the one who taught to make sweet bread and malasada among other Portuguese foods. She is an active member of our local Portuguese hall. I think it is safe to say that without her encouragement my family might not have the appreciation for our culture that we are so lucky to possess.

In any town with a significant Portuguese population you are bound to find a Portuguese hall. The role of these halls is to give people a place to celebrate their Portuguese culture and pass it on to future generations. One of the most important events that a hall hosts is the festa.

The biggest festa that the Portuguese in California commemorate is that of the Holy Ghost.

Festas have been celebrated in California for over 140 years, longer than in any other state.³⁴ Though the number of festas has gone down over the years there are still around a hundred celebrated in California each year.

All festas are typically celebrated in the same manner, featuring a queen, a procession, a mass, and a celebration. The first order of business is for the local hall to pick the queen and her court. The queen is usually around fifteen years old and she has the responsibility of representing her hall at various festas. All halls own a crown, usually made of silver, for their queen to wear at the festa. The crown is kept at the queen's house the week before the festa and throughout the festa season, which lasts from April to September, before the first celebration a priest comes to the queen's house to bless the crown. The princesses walk beside the queen and carry a scepter and pedestal, at the front of each group is carried a banner with the halls name, committee member names, city name and date embroidered on it. Each group also has its own Holy Ghost flag made of silk with a dove and crown embroidered in it.

The festas itself consists of a procession from the local Portuguese hall to a church where a mass is held, after the mass they return to the hall where there is a celebration where sopas and other traditional Portuguese foods as served, Portuguese music is played and the chamarrita is danced. An important part of the celebration is the donations that are made to churches, besides being made directly donations are also given through raffles and auctions. It is traditional for halls to invite halls from other cities to attend their festa and take part in their celebration; this can result in some heated discussions as halls struggle to decide which invitations to except and which to turn down. The number of people who attend a celebration can vary from the hundreds

³⁴ Tony P. Goulart, The Holy Ghost Festas, pg. 10

to the thousands. The festa not only gives people of Portuguese descent a chance to celebrate their culture but it also gives them a chance to share their culture with the world at large and for that reason the festa is one of the most important events that a Portuguese hall takes part in. If it were not for the festas people of Portuguese descent would have no real way to celebrate their culture and as a result many would probably lose any sense of connection with their background. For that reason the importance of the festa in the Portuguese community cannot be overstated, it is not going to far to say that the festa is in fact the glue that holds the Portuguese community together.

Like most immigrant groups the Portuguese have not always had an easy road in America. Like so many other ethnic groups the Portuguese have faced discrimination in their attempt to become a part of America's cultural landscape. Despite being of European descent and therefore being classified as white by the U.S. government the Portuguese have been seen as "colored" by the larger U.S. population for much of their history in this country and have consequently suffered the marginalization that goes along with that categorization. Azoreans have a multicultural background and because of this there is a great deal of variety in the skin tones found in Azoreans. Some Azoreans have what you would consider to be typical Caucasian coloring but many others are darker complexioned. My family comes from that darker Azorean stock and as a result my father and sister, like so many other people of Azorean descent are often mistaken for Mexican or Hispanic. It was undoubtedly because of this variation in skin tone that those Portuguese who lived in South Carolina found themselves, despite being white by law, suffering from segregation. Portuguese children living in that state were not allowed to attend white schools though they were not required to attend African American schools, which begs the question, exactly what schools were they expected to attend? In Hawaii up until the 1940's the

Portuguese had their own separate category on the census as opposed to being classified as “White” or “other Caucasian”. It was not always Americans who acted with prejudice against Azoreans; they also faced prejudice from other Portuguese. The Portuguese continental union “the largest Portuguese-American fraternal organization in the east” excluded darker-skinned Azoreans from joining until 1931 and excluded Cape Verdeans from joining the club until 1959. Although not as common as they were in my parents’ day “portagee” jokes are still surprisingly popular in areas with a Portuguese community of any size, a sign that even if not always malicious some prejudice still exists against the Portuguese.

As time has progressed we as a nation have gotten more and more accepting of peoples of other ethnicities but despite this fact the Portuguese still face discrimination as an ethnic group. Even in this day and age the Equal Employment Office continues to address systematic discrimination against people of Portuguese descent.³⁵ One of the most recent cases they investigated involved a company in Massachusetts that despite having many employees of Portuguese descent systematically denied them any sort of promotion or advancement. As sad as it is to say this case makes it clear that prejudice against the Portuguese is still alive and well in the United States.

The question of the minority status of the Portuguese is something that has been hotly debated in recent decades. In the seventies there was a move by the U.S. government to have the Portuguese recognized as an official minority group. The question raised a lot of debate in the Portuguese community as some fought for this recognition and even more fought against it. It might be surprising to some but the majority of Portuguese in the United States did not want to be seen as minorities.

³⁵ Miguel Moniz, *Shadow Minority*, pg.424

A large part of this has to do with how people of Portuguese descent see themselves. The majority of people of Portuguese descent see themselves as white and therefore find the idea of being categorized as a minority offensive. Through their protests the Portuguese communities were able to keep themselves from being federally categorized as minorities. But while they were able to stop federal categorization of themselves as a minority group there are now several states where they Portuguese are officially recognized as a minority, those states include Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Indiana, Kentucky, Colorado, Florida, Washington, and Illinois.³⁶ In all but the first two the Portuguese are included in certain definitions of Hispanic, although the Justice Department has officially announced that the categorization of Hispanic does not include the Portuguese. Some universities, including Brown, explicitly include people of Portuguese descent as a preferential group for admissions.³⁷ So it would seem that despite their desires to the contrary the Portuguese in America have been unable to escape categorization as a minority.

The Portuguese may not be among the largest ethnic groups in America but that is not to say that they are irrelevant. Though the Portuguese presence in America is most strongly felt in just a few states, in those areas where there is a Portuguese presence they have defiantly left their mark. This can be seen clearly in the Portuguese neighborhoods on the east coast, the Portuguese dairies found in California, and the elements of Portuguese culture that have been incorporated into Hawaiian culture. Yet even in these states there is no real recognition or celebration of the Portuguese contribution that has helped to make these states great. Even in California few are aware that this state was discovered by a Portuguese man, or even have any awareness of the prevalence of the Portuguese in the California dairy industry, something that Californians are so proud of.

³⁶ Miguel Moniz, *Shadow Minority*, pg. 423

³⁷ Miguel Moniz, *Shadow Minority*, pg. 425

When the hundreds of years of Portuguese history in the United States are taken into consideration it becomes all the more surprising that the history of the Portuguese in the United States is not more commonly taught in schools in the United States. The Portuguese have contributed just as much to this country as any other ethnic group and even if that history is not taught throughout the United States it should at least be taught in those states with the largest Portuguese presence. I think that it is time for us as Americans to start showing more appreciation for the wide variety of peoples that make up this country.

While I do not think that the Portuguese are the invisible minority that some claim, I do believe that they are under recognized. If my research has done nothing else it should prove that the Portuguese have made many contributions to our country, especially in the case of California, and they deserve to be recognized for that fact. Doing this research project has not only given me a greater appreciation for my own culture heritage but made me wonder how many other ethnic groups there are in the United States whose contributions and very presence in this country have gone unrecognized.

In the United States, a country that prides itself on its cultural diversity, we should celebrate that diversity and the only way to truly do that is by having a greater understanding of the cultures that make up our country. I have begun to do this by learning about the history of my own people in this country and I would encourage other people to do the same. Learning about your own cultural history gives you a better appreciation for exactly how far your family has come and a deeper sense of appreciation for those who have come before you.



The Azevodo Family.

The Young woman in the white hat is my Great-Grandma Pereira. A the time this picture was taken they had a dairy at Oso Flaco.



My Great-Grandpa Pereira and Grandpa Pereira flying a kite on the dairy.



My father as a child, when they still lived on the dairy.



My cousin's daughters as princesses in a festa parade.



My cousin Shannon represented our hall as Queen for this festa. As Queen it was her responsibility to take part in celebrations up and down the central coast.