

THE PORTUGUESE IN THE 2000 CENSUS

by

Maria Glória de Sá, Ph.D.

Department of Sociology/Anthropology
Center for Portuguese Studies and Culture
University of Massachusetts Dartmouth
(508) 910-6888

mdesa@umassd.edu

Introduction

The previous section of this book explored Azorean identity, a concept that can be defined as “the state or fact of being the same one as described.”¹ But sometimes the concept we have of ourselves is not necessarily the way others describe us; our social identity is in large part determined by the way others see us or portray us. This section looks at how the U.S. Census of 2000 describes the Portuguese in the U.S. How are the Portuguese portrayed by the Census? What are their general characteristics? Are they a homogeneous group or do they differ according to place of settlement? In pluralistic societies like the U. S., ethnic identity is also affected by the group’s standing relative to other groups, especially the dominant ones. How do Portuguese compare with other groups in terms of basic socioeconomic indicators like education and income? These are some of the questions addressed by this chapter.

Although the U.S. Census provides the most reliable and detailed information available on the Portuguese as a group, it has, like most secondary sources of data, significant limitations. A major one is that the data do not permit us to distinguish between Azoreans and other Portuguese. Thus, the portraits presented here are for the Portuguese as whole. Whenever the data allow it, I will distinguish between immigrants and those born in the U.S., as well as between men and women. It is also important to point out that the figures presented are not based on actual counts; they are estimates based on sampling procedures and, therefore, subject to sampling error.

Numbers and Geographical Distribution

According to estimates of the U.S. Census Bureau, there were 1,176,615 persons of Portuguese ancestry² living in the U.S. in the year 2000. Of these, 240,780 or 20.5 percent were born outside of the United States. Although persons of Portuguese ancestry

¹ "identity." *Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1)*. Random House, Inc. 10 Sep. 2007. <Dictionary.com <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/identity>>.

² “Ancestry” refers to a person's self-identification of heritage, ethnic origin, descent, or close identification to an ethnic group.

were found in all states of the Union, they were far from being evenly distributed (Table 1).

Table 1

Portuguese of the U.S. by Nativity and State of Residence: 2000				
State of Residence	Total Number of Portuguese Residents	Percentage of Total U.S. Portuguese	Percentage Foreign Born	Percentage of the Total Population
California	330,810	28.1	11.7	1.0
Connecticut	44,695	3.8	31.6	1.3
Florida	48,957	4.2	30.2	0.3
Hawaii	48,521	4.1	1.2	4.0
Massachusetts	279,513	23.8	24.7	4.4
New Jersey	72,193	6.1	54.4	0.9
New York	43,829	3.7	40.3	0.2
Rhode Island	91,387	7.8	21.8	8.7
All Others	216,710	18.4	12.3	0.1
Total U.S.A.	1,176,615	100.0	20.5	0.4
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000: American FactFinder, Fact Sheet for a Race, Ethnic or Ancestry Group				

The state with the least number of Portuguese was South Dakota with an estimated 343 persons of Portuguese ancestry, while the state with the most was California, with 330,810 or about 28 percent of the total Portuguese in the U.S. Massachusetts came next with 279,513 or close to 24 percent. Rhode Island occupied the third place with 91,387 or nearly eight percent, and New Jersey was fourth with 72,193 or about six percent of the total. Connecticut, Florida, Hawaii and New York each accounted for about four percent of the total.

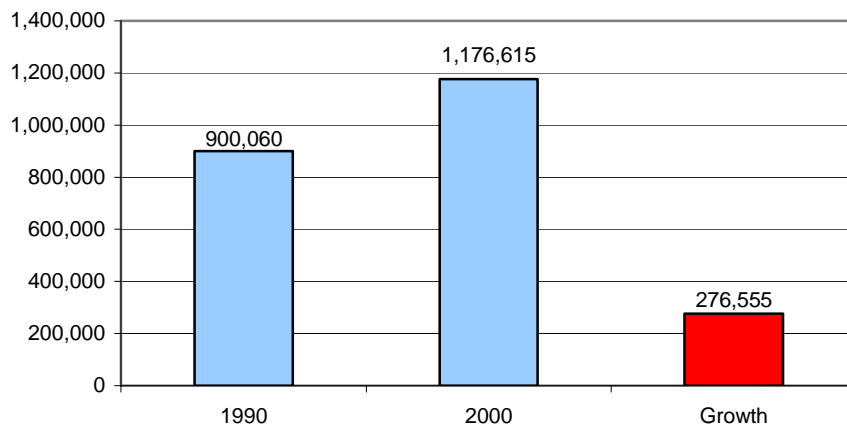
Just as they were at the beginning, at the end of the 20th century, the Portuguese continued to be characterized by a high degree of residential concentration with 82 percent of the group living in only eight of the 50 states. In fact, more than half lived in only two states—California and Massachusetts (Table 1).

In general, immigrants were much more common on the East Coast than in the West. In California, for example, immigrants were only about 12 percent of the total Portuguese of that state, while in Massachusetts they were almost 25 percent. The state with the lowest proportion of immigrants was Hawaii—one percent, while the state with the highest was New Jersey where more than 54 percent of all persons who identified themselves as Portuguese were foreign-born. New York came in third place with 40 percent of all Portuguese immigrants. Other states with large proportions of immigrants were Connecticut (31.6 percent) and Florida (30 percent).

Although California was the state with the largest number of Portuguese, it was in Rhode Island, that the relative presence of the Portuguese was strongest. Whereas in California the Portuguese constituted only one percent of the total population, in Rhode Island they made up almost nine percent of the total residents and about 17 percent of the total foreign-born population.

Figure 1

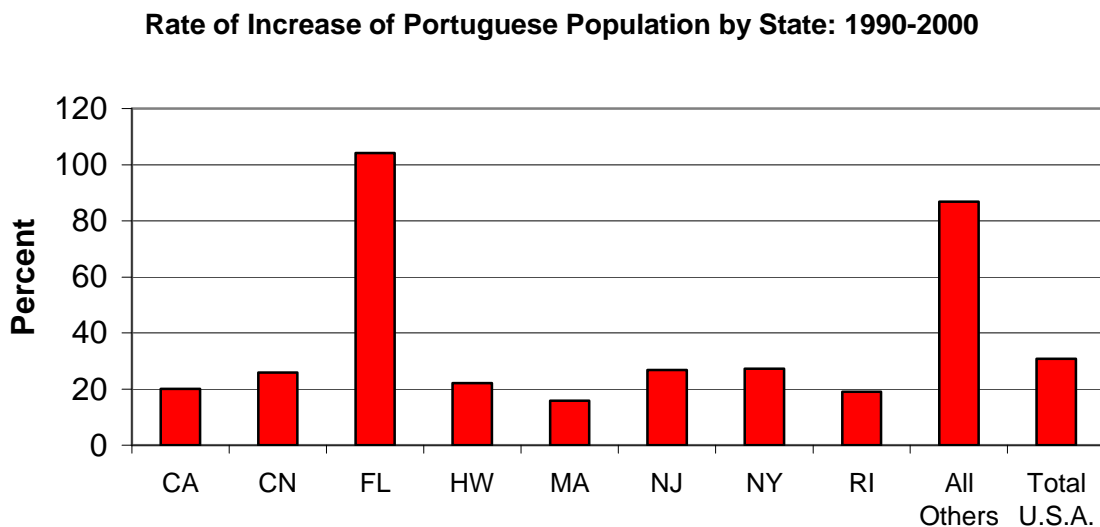
Persons of Portuguese Ancestry: 1990-2000



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990 (Detailed Tables, STF3) and 2000 (American FactFinder)

Despite the fact that immigration from Portugal has been declining since the 1970s (U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2006), the number of U.S. residents of Portuguese ancestry has kept growing. From 1990 to 2000, for example, even though only 25,497 legal immigrants entered the U.S.³, the group grew by 276,555 (Figure 1)—an increase of almost 31 percent (Figure 2). This remarkable rate of growth, in the absence of significant gains in immigration and fertility, seems to indicate that an increasing number of Americans of Portuguese background are identifying themselves as Portuguese probably as a result of growing Portuguese ethnic pride. Interestingly, this apparent growth of Portuguese ethnic pride coincides with a shift in residential patterns away from traditional places of settlement and greater group dispersal.

Figure 2



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1990 (Det. Tables, STF3); 2000 (Amer. FactFinder)

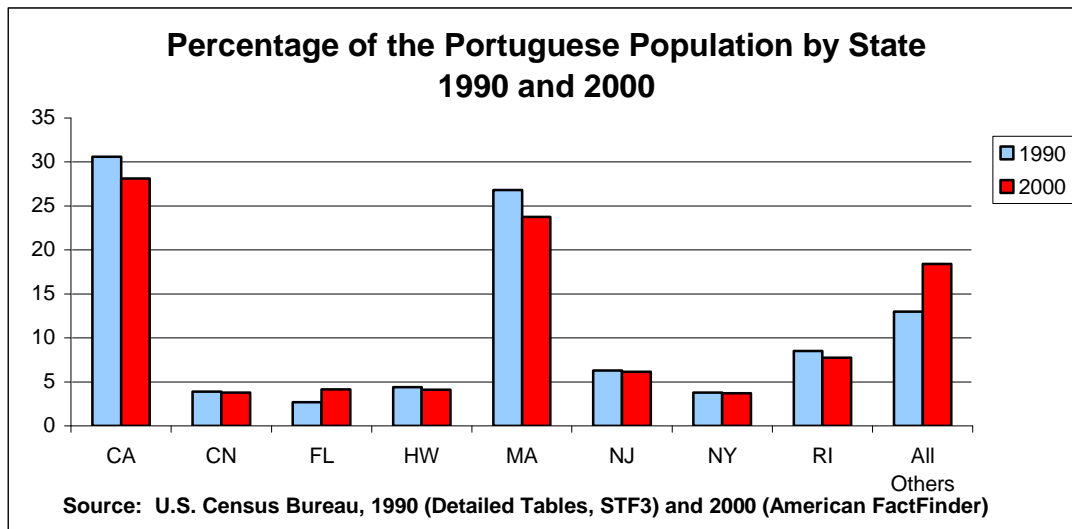
Although it is true that from 1990 to 2000, all the major states of traditional Portuguese immigration experienced increases in the absolute number Portuguese ethnics, with California and Massachusetts gaining the largest number (Figure 2-A), the rate of growth in traditional states was nevertheless modest when compared with other areas of the country (Figure 2). Among the major states, Florida, a relative newcomer to the group, registered the highest rate of growth. In this state, the number of Portuguese

³ See Figure 1-A in the Appendix for details

increased by 104 percent, whereas in Massachusetts it grew by only 16 percent and in California by 20 percent. Even states like New Jersey and New York, which have a relatively large percentage of Portuguese immigrants, experienced only moderate rates of growth (27 percent). In contrast, outside of the eight major states, the population of Portuguese ancestry grew by 87 percent during the same period.

Figure 3, which shows the percentage of the total Portuguese population of the U.S. residing in each of the top eight states in 1990 and 2000, provides further evidence of this residential shift. With the exception of Florida, all the top eight states saw their proportion of the total Portuguese decrease over the last decade of the 20th century, with Massachusetts and California sustaining the largest losses. Meanwhile, the percentage of Portuguese living outside the top eight states went from 13 to 18 percent of the total.

Figure 3



Still, these recent residential shifts have not been sufficient to change the overall residential distribution of the Portuguese. The patterns established at the beginning of the 20th century, were reinforced with the second wave of immigration and lasted until today. In 1900, California and Massachusetts were home to 32 and 37 percent of the Portuguese, respectively; at time when the first Capelinhos immigrants arrived, the equivalent figures were 35 and 34 percent (Williams 2005, p. 106); and in 2000 it was 28 percent for California and 24 percent for Massachusetts. The change in the number of Portuguese in

the U.S., however, underwent a tremendous transformation over the same period. From 48,099 in 1900, it rose to 277,402 in 1960, and by 2000 it had reached 1,176,115.

Demographic Characteristics

As Table 2 indicates, in 2000, the major demographic difference between the Portuguese and the population of the U.S. as whole was the proportion of the foreign born. Among the Portuguese, almost 21 percent were immigrants or foreign born, compared with only 11 percent of the total population. This difference reflects the impact of the second wave of Portuguese immigration initiated by the Capelinhos refugees and is responsible for the other slight differences in demographic composition.

Table 2

General Demographic Characteristics of Persons of Portuguese Ancestry		
2000		
Total Population	1,176,615	281,421,906
Percentage under age 5	6.2	6.8
Percentage Male	49.2	49.0
Percentage Foreign Born	20.5	11.1
Percentage Female	50.8	51.0
Percentage age 65 and over	10.6	12.4
Median Age	35	35
Demographic Characteristics	Portuguese	Total U.S. Population
Average Family Size	3	3
Source: U. S. Census Bureau, 2000, American FactFinder: Fact Sheet for a Race, Ethnic or Ancestry Group.		

As rule, immigrant populations tend to have a preponderance of males of working age and lower proportions of females, children and elderly than native populations.

These patterns are not very salient among the Portuguese because immigration to the U.S.

has traditionally consisted of the movement of families rather than unattached individuals and movement of families tends to balance the sex and age distributions. Thus, it is not surprising that median age and average family size were the same for the Portuguese as for the general population. Nevertheless, in 2000, there were relatively more men (49.2 versus 49.0) and fewer children (6.2 versus 6.8 percent) and elderly (10.6 versus 12.4) among the Portuguese than among the general population, reflecting the recent immigration of so many of them.

Educational and Economic Characteristics

If demographically the Portuguese did not differ much from the general population of the U.S. educationally and economically they presented quite distinct profiles (Table 3). Relatively low levels of education, concomitant with relatively high economic success has long been one of the defining characteristics of the Portuguese. Table 3 shows that, to a large degree, this was still the case in 2000.

Table 3

Educational and Economic Characteristics of Persons of Portuguese Ancestry: 2000		
	Portuguese	Total U.S.
Percentage High School Graduate or Higher	75	80
Percentage with Bachelor's Degree or Higher	19	24
Median Family Income in 1999	\$55,100	\$50,046
Per Capita Income in 1999	\$22,368	\$21,587
Percentage of Individuals Below Poverty	8	12
Median Value of Single-Family Owner-Occupied Home	\$160,100	\$119,600
Source: U. S. Census Bureau, 2000, American FactFinder: Fact Sheet for a Race, Ethnic or Ancestry Group.		

The data on educational achievement indicate that the Portuguese are no longer very different from the rest of the population in terms of finishing high school, but still have a lot of ground to cover in relation to college graduation. In 2000, 75 percent of the Portuguese had finished high school compared to 80 percent of the total population,

which means that the proportion of high school graduates among the Portuguese was only six percent lower than among the general population. However, while among the general population the proportion of college graduates was 24 percent, only 19 percent of the Portuguese had a bachelor's degree. In other words, the proportion of college graduates among the Portuguese was only 79 percent of the national average, at a time when most well-paying jobs required that credential.

This substantial educational gap has been a major concern of those interested in the group's integration into American society. Without attaining educational parity, it is argued, it will be difficult for the Portuguese to become successfully integrated into American society (cf. Barrow et al 2002, Borges 2005, Marinho 2002, Moniz 1979, Smith 1974). While some have proposed that this low educational achievement has its roots in a typically Portuguese cultural disregard for education (e.g., Almeida 2007, McGowan 1976, Sharkansky 1960, Taft 1969) and that little has changed in almost a century (McGowan 1976, Marinho 2002), others (de Sá and Borges forthcoming, Gilbert 1989) contend that low educational attainment has been, at least in part, a rational response to the economic and social conditions encountered by the group in particular places of settlement and at particular times (Mulcahy 2003, de Sá and Borges forthcoming). What is frequently perceived as ethnic culture is not something essential and immutable that groups bring with them, but rather something that is socially constructed and affected by particular historical contexts.

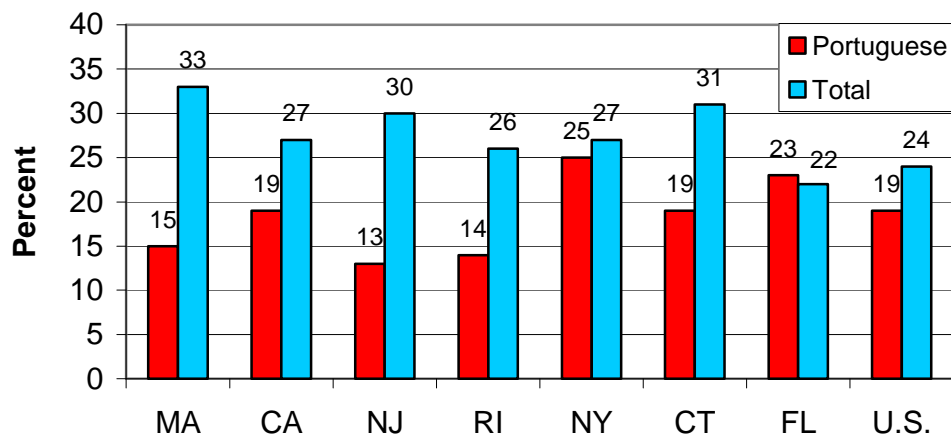
Comparing educational data for the Portuguese across space and time lends credence to the latter hypothesis. Census records indicate that indeed the educational characteristics of the Portuguese have changed more than is commonly believed, and vary considerably from place to place. For example, in 1990, only 11.9 percent of the Portuguese of the U.S. had a bachelor's degree or higher⁴ compared to 19 percent in 2000 (Table 3)—a gain of 58 percent in one decade. However, these gains were not evenly distributed and in some areas, the proportion of college graduates in 2000 was not much

⁴ U.S. Bureau of the Census (CPH-L-149 Selected Characteristics for Persons of Portuguese Ancestry: 1990), <http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/ancestry/Portuguese.txt>

higher than ten years prior (de Sá and Borges Fig. 4). The educational attainment of the Portuguese and their position relative to the total population varies considerably from state to state, ranging from 13 percent in New Jersey to 25 percent in New York (Figure 4).

Figure 4

Bachelor 's Degree by Place of Residence: 2000



Source: U.S.Census Bureau, 2000, American Factfinder

Some of this variation is related to differences in the proportion of immigrants among the Portuguese population of each of the states. This is probably the case of New Jersey, where 54 percent of the Portuguese are foreign-born. Since most immigrants come to the U.S. to work after having completed their education in Portugal, which has traditionally provided very little education to its citizens, the large percentage of lower-educated foreign-born individuals depresses the overall educational average for the whole group. But differences in educational achievement between native and foreign-born Portuguese don't tell the whole story. For example: the percentage of immigrants is greater in New York and Florida than in Massachusetts and Rhode Island and yet, the percentage of college graduates in the last two states is much higher than in the first two.

While some of the explanation may be related to internal and international migration patterns such as the movement of the most educated Portuguese out of economically depressed areas of traditional settlement, and the preference of more recent and better educated Portuguese immigrants for global cities like New York and Miami, regional differences cast serious doubt on the view that the Portuguese have low education attainment because they do not value education. Although it may be true that the Portuguese did not bring with them from Portugal a culture of scholarship, it is also true that the culture and the economy of the communities that have traditionally received them did not encourage it.

Until recently, most Portuguese were able to find fairly good-paying jobs in the factories of New England and the ranches of California without much education. In these particular contexts, there were very few opportunities to get an education and very few jobs for educated people. There were few affordable colleges and universities and those who did go to college did not always fare better than those who did not (Pereira 1985; Borges 2005). Besides, going to college often meant leaving the family and the comfort of the ethnic community since access to the few middle class jobs available was often reserved for members of the dominant ethnic groups (Barrow 2005, Gilbert 1989, Silvia 1976).

Despite their relative disadvantage in terms of education, and higher than average proportion of immigrants, the 2000 Census shows that the Portuguese were doing fairly well on most measures of economic achievement. Portuguese families, which as we saw before (Table 2) are on average the same size as those of the general population, had median incomes that were 10 percent higher (\$55,100 versus \$50,046) and lived in homes that were worth almost 34 percent more (\$160,100 for the Portuguese and \$119,600 for the total population) than those of the general population. In addition, they had higher per capita income and a lower percentage of individuals living in poverty. Nationally the poverty rate of the Portuguese was only three quarters of the national average (8 percent for the Portuguese versus 12 percent for the country as a whole).

This relative wealth may be due to the fact that despite continuing to be primarily blue-collar workers (Mulcahy 2003) the Portuguese as a group have traditionally been found in sectors of the economy that are relatively well paid, like manufacturing and construction (Borges 2005). In 1970, for instance, factory work was the number one occupation of the Portuguese--men, women, natives and immigrants--and despite the ongoing process of deindustrialization that characterizes the American economy since the 1970s, in 2000, a large proportion of the Portuguese population was still working in factories (Table 1-A in the Appendix).

However, with the disappearance of the factory-based economy, the Portuguese are being forced to seek alternative employment opportunities. In 2000, factory work was no longer the number one occupation for the group as a whole; only for immigrant women. For men (both native and foreign-born) the number one occupational category was “craftsman” a category that comprises skilled manual workers, like electrician or mechanic. For native women the number one occupation was “clerical,” just like the rest of their European-American counterparts (Mulcahy 2003). Although a large percentage of those displaced from factory work have entered low-paid service jobs like cleaning and taking care of the elderly⁵ the proportion of those in more prestigious work, such as professional, technical and managerial has also increased substantially since 1970. In 2000, about 17 percent of immigrant men and 27 percent of those born in the U.S. were found in these occupations (double the 1970 figure). For women, the equivalent figures were 17 percent for immigrants and almost 35 percent for those born in this country, compared to only one percent for immigrants and 10 percent for natives thirty years earlier.

Conclusions

Returning to the initial questions, what does the 2000 U.S. Census tell us about the Portuguese of the U.S.?

Examination of census data paints a complex picture of the Portuguese. To a certain degree, the Portuguese still conform to the century-old image of a hardworking,

⁵ In 2000, 23 percent of immigrant women and 17 percent of those born in the U.S. were doing this type of work (See Table 1-A).

blue-collar, educationally disadvantaged group. However, the census also shows that this portrayal does not apply to all Portuguese in all places. Although this image may still apply to traditional communities of immigration in New England states, which have not quite recovered from the shock of losing their industrial base, and to areas of heavy recent immigration, like New Jersey, in other parts of the country, like New York, Florida and California, the Portuguese are doing better than the general population, even when it comes to education. More importantly, the censuses indicate that a significant process of transformation is underway. Nationwide, from 1970 to 2000, the educational attainment of the Portuguese increased substantially for both immigrants and natives. Rates of high school graduation among immigrants increased by a factor of almost three for men, and by a factor of more than four for women. For Portuguese-Americans, the rate of high school graduation more than doubled, placing them very close to other European-Americans. Rates of college completion also increased significantly during this period. While in 1970, only two percent of the women and five percent of the men had graduated college, by 2000, about seven percent of immigrants and 19 percent for those born in the U.S. had college degrees. Occupationally, there has been a nationwide movement into more prestigious, skilled jobs, with native women having become virtually indistinguishable from other European-Americans. Economically, they are also doing relatively well. Median household, family, and per capita income are higher for the Portuguese than for the general U.S. population, and so is the average value of their homes. Overall, the 2000 Census indicated that although for most of the 20th century the Portuguese of the U.S. remained trapped in the ranks of the working class, they entered the 21st as members of the middle class.

REFERENCES

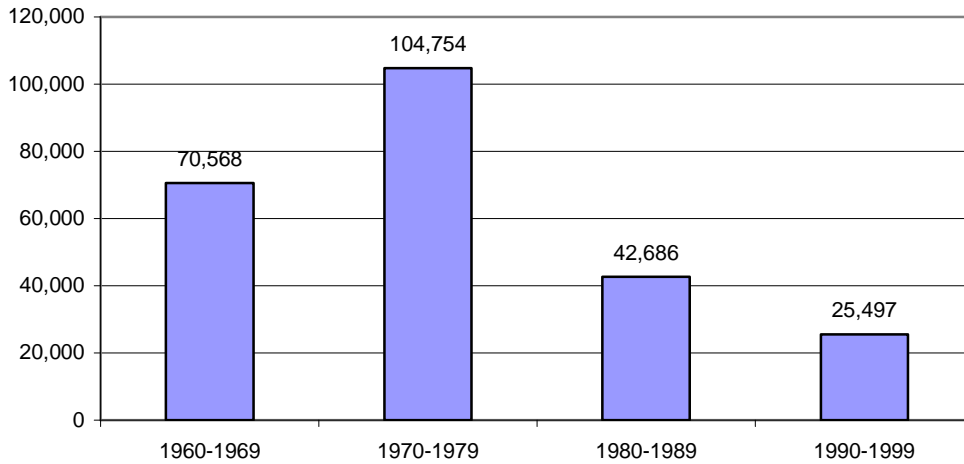
- Bannick, Christian. *Portuguese Immigration to the United States: its Distribution and Status*. San Francisco: R&E Research Associates, 1971.
- Barrow, Clyde. "Portuguese-Americans In the Massachusetts Power Structure: A Positional Analysis." Dartmouth, MA: University of Massachusetts Dartmouth: Center for Policy Analysis, 2005.
- Borges, David. "Ethnicity and Education in Southeastern Massachusetts: 1980-2000 (A Continuing Challenge)." Paper presented at "Portuguese Americans and the 2000 U.S. Census," University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth, MA, September 2005.
- Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1)*. Random House, Inc., 10 Sep. 2007. <Dictionary.com <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/identity>>
- de Sá, Maria Glória and David Borges. "Context or Culture? Portuguese-Americans and Social Mobility." In *Fashioning Ethnic Culture: Portuguese-American Communities Along the Eastern Seaboard*. Kimberly DaCosta Holton and Andrea Klimt, Editors. Dartmouth, MA: Center for Portuguese Studies and Culture, University of Massachusetts, forthcoming.
- Gilbert, Dorothy A. *Recent Portuguese Immigrants to Fall River, Massachusetts: An Analysis of Relative Economic Success*. New York: AMS Press, 1989.
- Greer, Collins. *The Great School Legend*. New York: Viking Press, 1972.
- IPUMS site: <http://usa.ipums.org/usa/>
- Marinho, Rita. "Portuguese-Americans in the Political Process: A Quarter-Century Retrospect." In *Portuguese-Americans and Contemporary Civic Culture in Massachusetts*. Clyde Barrow, Editor. North Dartmouth, MA: Center for Portuguese Study and Culture, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, 2002.
- McGowan, Owen T. P. "Factors Contributing to School Leaving among Immigrant Children: The Case of the Portuguese in Fall River, Massachusetts." Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Catholic University of America, 1972.
- Moniz, Rita. "The Portuguese of New Bedford, Massachusetts and Providence, Rhode Island: A Comparative Micro-analysis of Political Attitudes and Behavior." Ph.D. dissertation, Brown University, 1979.
- Mulcahy, Maria. "The Portuguese of the U.S. from 1880 to 1990: Distinctiveness in Work Patterns Across Gender, Nativity and Place." Ph.D. dissertation, Brown University, 2003.
- Pap, Leo. *The Portuguese Americans*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981.
- Pereira, Maria da Glória P. *A Posição Socioeconómica dos Imigrantes Portugueses e Seus Descendentes nos Estados de Massachusetts e Rhode Island (U.S.A.)*. Porto, Portugal: Secretaria de Estado da Emigração, Serie Migrações Sociologia, 1985.

- Sharkansky, Ira. "The Portuguese of Fall River: A Study of Ethnic Acculturation." Honors Thesis, Wesleyan University, 1960.
- Silvia, Philip T. "The Position of 'New ' Immigrants in the Fall River Textile Industry." *International Migration Review*, 10(2):2221-232, 1976.
- Smith, M. Estellie. "Portuguese Enclaves: The Invisible Minority." In *Social and Cultural Identity: Problems of Persistence and Change*. Thomas Fitzgerald, ed. Athens: Southern Anthropological Society, University of Georgia Press, pp.81-91, 1971.
- Taft, Donald R. *Two Portuguese Communities in New England*. New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1969
- U.S. Census Bureau. "Census 2000 Demographic Profile Highlights: Selected Population Group: Portuguese (084-086), <http://factfinder.census.gov/>
- _____. "CPH-L-149 Selected Characteristics of Persons of Portuguese Ancestry: 1990" Internet Release, 1998.
- U.S. Department of Homeland Security. *2005 Yearbook of Immigrant Statistics*. Washington, D.C.:U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics, 2006.
- Ruggles, Steven, Matthew Sobek, Trent Alexander, Catherine A. Fitch, Ronald Goeken, Patricia Kelly Hall, Miriam King, and Chad Ronnander. *Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 3.0* [Machine-readable database]. Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota Population Center [producer and distributor], 2004.
- Williams, Jerry R. *In Pursuit of Their Dreams: A History of Azorean Immigration to the United States*. North Dartmouth, MA: Center for Portuguese Study and Culture, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, 2005.

APPENDIX

Figure 1-A

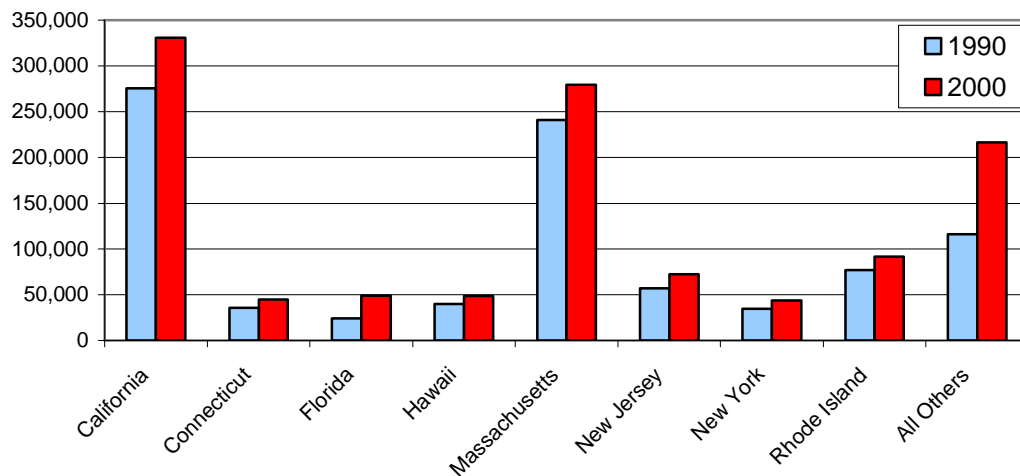
Portuguese Immigration by Decade: 1960-1999



Source: 2005 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics, Table 2

Figure 2-A

Portuguese Population By State: 1990-2000



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990 (Detailed Tables, STF3) and 2000 (American FactFinder)

Table 1-A

Occupational Distribution of Persons Age 16-70 by Gender, Group and Year

	MALES								
	Professional & Technical	Farmers	Managers	Clerical	Sales	Craftsmen	Operatives	Non-Professional Services	Laborers
Portuguese Immigrants									
1970	3.2	1.9	4.5	2.6	1.7	20.7	33.1	11.8	20.4
2000	6.5	1.2	10.2	6.4	3.1	26.2	21.7	8.2	16.5
Portuguese Americans									
1970	7.7	3.7	6.0	5.2	6.0	24.0	26.1	9.5	11.7
2000	15.1	1.6	11.5	10.4	7.3	20.2	14.3	11.6	8.0
European Americans									
1970	13.5	3.3	9.9	7.1	7.0	24.0	18.9	7.4	9.1
2000	21.7	2.1	14.6	7.7	7.2	18.9	12.7	8.9	6.1
	FEMALES								
Portuguese Immigrants									
1970	1.2	0.3	0.3	7.8	3.3	2.4	72.4	11.4	0.9
2000	11.9	0.3	5.0	21.4	5.0	5.2	25.6	23.4	2.2
Portuguese Americans									
1970	7.8	0.2	2.5	28.1	8.0	2.4	29.9	19.8	1.4
2000	26.2	0.4	8.5	33.9	7.1	1.0	4.6	17.2	1.2
European Americans									
1970	15.6	0.3	3.0	36.4	9.1	1.8	13.9	18.2	1.8
2000	29.7	0.4	9.6	30.2	7.1	1.6	5.0	15.3	1.2

Source: IPUMS (U.S. Census Bureau), 1970 and 2000