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*Community, Culture
and the Makings of Identity:
Portuguese-Americans along the Eastern Seaboard*

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**THE SHADOW MINORITY: AN ETHNOHISTORY OF PORTUGUESE
AND LUSOPHONE RACIAL AND ETHNIC IDENTITY IN NEW ENGLAND**

MIGUEL MONIZ

In the late spring of 1973, during a peak period of popular political awareness of ethnic and racial identity in America, a group of Portuguese activists, community leaders, educators and business interests convened the “Portuguese Congress in America” at Harvard University to take a wide-ranging look at the issues facing Portuguese immigrant communities. Participants discussed issues related to education, migration and citizenship, economic successes and struggles, and a prominent topic of the day: federal recognition of Portuguese minority status.¹

The 1964 Civil Rights Act had initiated the creation of federal agencies such as the Equal Employment and Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to monitor compliance with anti-discrimination law. Essential, however, in policing discrimination against minority groups, was defining in law which groups were to be protected. Among federal-level deliberations defining protected minorities was the 1972 Ethnic Heritage Program which arrived at the classification of minority groups that exist in federal and state statute today—African-American, Hispanic, Native American, Native Hawaiian, Native Alaskan, Pacific Islander (Harney 1990, 117). There was another group, however, that was determined by the Ethnic Heritage Program to be a minority group and deserving of federal non-discrimination protection: the Portuguese.

How the Portuguese later came to be eliminated from the list of federally-defined minority groups, provides a little-known story in the ethnohistory of the Portuguese in America. The case also offers insight into the malleable nature of Portuguese ethnic and racial categorization, providing a departure point for a discussion of how social constructions of race and ethnicity intersect with the law.

New England's Portuguese communities were deeply involved in deliberations about the legal recognition of Portuguese minority status. The most public stance in the course of this debate was taken at the Harvard Portuguese Congress. Pointing to the difficulty of social integration, social marginalization, and discrimination against the group, participants at the concluding session of the Congress passed a key resolution by an overwhelming five hundred to three vote insisting that local, state and federal authorities recognize the Portuguese as a legal minority. Another resolution passed at the Congress defined the Portuguese minority as a unitary group regardless of race. According to congress co-organizer, Ruben Cabral, all Portuguese "would be welcome—whether they are Black or White."²

Not all of those present, however, were enamored with defining "the Portuguese" as a legal minority group. Leading the charge against minority status was Harvard University Professor and Dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Francis M. Rogers. Of Portuguese/Azorean and Irish descent, Rogers was a broadly influential academic and one of the key figures in the founding of Portuguese Studies in America, writing various books, including some prominent English-language historiographies of Portugal, the Azores, and Madeira (Rogers 1979; 1992). Although his intellectual legacy may have been subsequently eclipsed, Rogers' effect on the emergence of Portuguese Studies within American academia cannot be discounted, and many of his former students—as well as adversaries—now lead the field.

Rogers was joined in his efforts by others, including the prominent Portuguese-American attorney, Joseph Freitas.³ Using political connections with Congressional representatives, they worked to successfully derail Portuguese minority status. Part of the argument made to the local Congressional delegation was that the Portuguese should not be considered a minority group because the Portuguese were not Hispanics and, unlike other minority groups, they were "white."⁴ Rogers' ability to shape the debate was certainly due to his political contacts, but, as influential as he may have been, his efforts were also facilitated by large numbers within the Portuguese-speaking communities who shared his opposition to Portuguese minority status.

Although the Portuguese were ultimately removed from the list of federally-recognized minority groups, the issue of Portuguese minority

status has never been definitively settled in the law. The Portuguese are, in certain contexts, defined and treated as a minority by other federal and state-level statutes and programs, explicitly enveloped into the definition of Hispanic, and protected by the anti-discrimination apparatus of the federal government.

The other fascinating aspect of the Portuguese case is that locally-grounded discourses about racial and ethnic identity have been, and continue to be, rife with ambiguities, disagreements, and contradictions. Even the seemingly simple questions of who—according to immigrants from Portugal and their descendants, as well as academics—is and is not “Portuguese” and who does and does not belong in which racial category yield murky answers. Assertions and arguments about identity are shaped by geographies of origin, individual biography and community dynamics, as well as historical shifts in the contours of the Portuguese state and American discourses about race and ethnicity.

The discussion offered in this paper aims to trace the debates over Portuguese racial and ethnic identity in the U.S. and make sense of the historical and contemporary contradictions in legal definitions and popular conceptualizations of Portuguese minority status. The intersection between self-definitions and definitions created by outsiders offers a unique opportunity for investigating the relation between codified state classification of identity—such as census categories, legal definitions in statutes protecting and offering entitlements to minority groups, and other forms of state-level codification through social policies, on the one hand, and on-the-ground ethnic and racial discourses on the other. The Portuguese example thus offers insight into the complex relationship between the law and social identity and moves us towards an understanding of how discourse and social practice are shaped by the law and vice versa. Understanding how migrants from Portugal and their descendants have forged and argued about group-specific social identities; how these groups have, or have not been codified by state-level laws and policies; as well as how these ethnic and racial categories have been debated and utilized over time reveals the instrumental nature of social identities,⁵ the relevance of state policy for migrant social adaptation, and how collective social actors both work within and struggle against the confines of law and policy. The emergence of “the Portuguese” as a category in New England is, I will argue, a part of broader instrumental

and socio-economic processes that involve exclusion from social power and attempts to mitigate the consequences of that exclusion.

Relational identities

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Variability seems to be the only constant in how Portuguese ethnic and racial identity is perceived by non-Portuguese, how law and governmental policy codify this identity category, and how those who consider themselves “Portuguese” conceptualize their own categorization vis-a-vis other ethnic groups in the U.S. Immigrants from Portugal and their descendants have been treated in discourse, practice, and the law as both “white” and “non-white,” as something betwixt and between the binary categories characteristic of discourse and legal codification in the U.S. Since the first significant numbers of Portuguese national citizens began arriving in New England in the 1890s and continuing over subsequent waves of migration to the present—with each historical period reflecting different political and social realities—the contradictory status of the Portuguese in U.S. legal statute has been informed by contradictory discourses playing out in the region’s various ethnic communities. The perceptions by Portuguese immigrants and their descendants of their own racial and ethnic identity and how they have been identified by others has depended upon broader historical, political and economic circumstances that have shifted over the past century, causing Portuguese racial and ethnic identity to shift as well.

The “Portuguese” in New England are comprised of individuals of different backgrounds, socio-economic status, educational levels, geographic origins, and even preferred languages of expression. Most interesting for this treatment is that the population under discussion is also comprised of individuals of diverse phenotypes that situate them within different locally-defined and historically contingent racial categories.

Although definitions of “the Portuguese” are readily offered, there is no clear-cut consensus—amongst Portuguese themselves or amongst outsiders—on the group’s racial identity and boundaries, especially in relationship to Cape Verdeans but also including the relationship to other Lusophone populations in the area, such as recent migrants from Brazil. This is reflected in the lack of agreement among ethno-historical treatments of the Portuguese in New England, in media accounts, and

in popular discourse. These differences can depend upon the historical period under examination or the year of publication.⁶

A clear shift in the realities and discourses around identity occurred after the national independence of Cape Verde in 1975. Contemporary Cape Verdean racial identity (Halter 1993; Lobban 1995; Sánchez-Gibbau 2005a, 2005b) is situated both in contrast to African-American and Portuguese identities, where being “Cape Verdean” exists—using Halter’s oft quoted descriptor—“between race and ethnicity.” “The Portuguese”—a post-1975 gloss for non-Cape Verdeans usually from the Azores, but also from Madeira or continental Portugal—are generally treated as if their race—white—is an unquestioned given.

There has been little discussion of the complex and often contradictory construction of “white” identity among Lusophone migrants. Of particular interest is how Cape Verdean and “Portuguese” racial identities are historically and relationally dependent upon one other—how they have been defined in New England by reference and in contrast to each other, including state-level codification. The key dynamics in the communities in which migrants settled involve how shifts in national identity and citizenship have intersected with articulations of racial difference. Settlement and work patterns of migrant groups from these various destinations also play into how racial and ethnic identities were forged in New England.

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National identity and group affiliation

The contours of Portuguese citizenship have evolved over the 20th century in complex ways and included, at various points in time, people living in continental Portugal, the Azores and Madeira, Cape Verde as well as the colonies in Africa and Asia. With the independence of Portugal’s colonies after the colonial wars and the 1974 Revolution, those contours shifted dramatically. One of the challenges in defining the “Portuguese” in the diaspora is that people who were Portuguese nationals under colonialism were no longer considered Portuguese after the disintegration of the empire. Citizenship codes also created an inclusive category for geographically dispersed populations that included a wide range of phenotypes. The intersection of collective identities around race, ethnicity and nationality within the American context was thus quite convoluted.

Only a relatively small percentage of the migrants come from continental Portugal: most originated from the Azores, with smaller numbers coming from Cape Verde and Madeira. Constructions of Portuguese identity in the archipelagoes have historically been shaped by economic and political disputes with continental Portugal, with discordant relations sometimes exhibited among islanders and those from the mainland, even in diaspora. The disputes culminated in the independence of Cape Verde and the emergence of the autonomous political status of the Azores and Madeira.⁷ Despite political articulations of identity that favored regional identities over “Portuguese,” migrants arriving in the U.S. prior to 1974 from these places all held Portuguese passports. They were all thus officially “Portuguese” regardless of geographic location and divergent sentiments about their connection to Portuguese cultural or ethnic identity. Even though self-perception and perception by others are essential in social constructions of identity, national identity cannot be overlooked as a primary marker, especially in a migrant context where rights to entry and residence derive from official designations of citizenship.

The national citizenship of incoming migrants provided one basis on which others in the U.S. tended to perceive of the Portuguese as a collective, regardless of internal differences of geographies of origin and phenotype. That “Portuguese” migrants tended to settle in similar locales and work for the same companies or in the same professions also contributed to the salience of national identity in the migrant context.

Racial identity of the Portuguese migrants

Historical documents from the first half of the 20th century but ranging until the 1980s reveal that local populations classified Portuguese migrants as non-white, in contrast to Anglophone populations and other European migrant groups. Leo Pap, the foremost mid-century scholar of the Portuguese in America writes, “the popular impression of many New Englanders earlier in this century was that the Portuguese ethnic group in general, including the Azorean majority, was more or less ‘colored’” (Pap 1981, 114). Pap himself describes the “‘racial’ traits” of the Portuguese, writing of the “light skinned individuals along with the Negroid of Cabo Verde” and the “Negroid admixture [that] is present in the Azores” (Pap 1981, 113). Articles in various popular magazines

in the U.S. during the early 20th century also described the Portuguese in California, New England, and Hawaii as all belonging in a “colored” category. Robert Harney (1990) compiled first-hand accounts from a range of sources, demonstrating that the Portuguese were considered to be a non-white racial group in the U.S. and Bermuda. Jack London, for example, referred to “these small brown skinned immigrants” (1913, 10). An article in *Cape Cod Magazine*⁸ stated, “Now the whole Cape Cod is dark with the dusty skins of the Portuguese ‘White man’...” (note the author’s inverted quotes around “White man”). Pap also cites newspaper reports of a 1920s soccer match in which a fracas erupted between the Lusitania club of Cambridge and an Irish team after a blond woman was quoted as shouting at the Portuguese, “You goddamn Negroes” (Pap 1981, 160). Harney (1990, 117), citing the *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, calls attention to a 1976 classification in Barnstable, Cape Cod, that divided resident ethnic groups into white and non-white: the Portuguese were on the non-white side (see also Pap 1981). Other writing from the period treated the Portuguese as the exotic other, such as Mary Heaton Vorse and the “beautiful dark-eyed girls,”⁹ while an official U.S. Government document entitled *Hawaii and its Race Problems* referred to the Portuguese as a “dark and handsome group.”¹⁰

In other reaches of the Portuguese diaspora among Anglo populations, the Portuguese were also considered to be non-“white.” In Hawaii, for example, where some 30,000 Portuguese, mostly from Madeira, also from the Azores, had migrated over the turn of the century, native Hawaiian islanders place the Portuguese in a separate category from Europeans and Americans. *Haole*, a term meaning any foreigner, but one that came to be used specifically to define “whites,” was not used in reference to Portuguese migrants. This Portuguese non-white status in Hawaii is clear from sources cited in both Pap and Harney, as well as elsewhere, noting that in the Hawaiian Census between 1910-1940, the Portuguese were not classified as “white” nor as “other caucasians,” but rather had their own separate category. This status was mirrored in Bermuda, where the Portuguese were also not classified as white but again had their own category (Pap 1981, 114; Harney 1990, 114-115; Lamm (1933-1934); Felix and Senecal (1978); Rogers (1976, 54). Local perceptions of Azoreans and Madeirenses as racially diverse (DuPuy 1932, 105), and patterns that found Portuguese marrying and

working in plantations alongside native Hawaiians, Chinese and East Indians placed the Lusophone migrants in a non-white category in local Hawaiian constructions of racial identity.¹¹

One of the more authoritative academic voices defining racial perceptions of the Portuguese came from Donald Taft, whose 1923 Columbia University Ph.D. dissertation (*Two Portuguese Communities in New England*) examined, among other issues, the cause of high infant mortality rates among Portuguese populations living in New England. Although he collected a broad range of extraordinary demographic data, including rates of infant death, occupational distribution, arrest rates, literacy rates, level of education, etc., his problematic analysis hypothesizes that the negative trends characterizing a Micaelense-American community resulted from high levels of “black blood.” Taft can be rightfully critiqued for positing that “Negroid blood” was the cause of a whole host of social problems, rather than the low-paying, long-hour, sweat-shop, factory jobs and the unhealthy living conditions created by poverty. Shoddy analysis aside, the Portuguese phenotype described by Taft¹² (he devotes an entire chapter in an analysis of Portuguese racial composition) and others demonstrates the perception of Portuguese as non-white.

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“Black” Portuguese, “White” Portuguese and instrumental adaptation

Mechanisms of state control over racial groups and national identity were codified in U.S. statute beginning with the Constitution. During the late 1800s and early 1900s, however, an unprecedented expansion of state codification of social identity emerged as the influx of migration to industrial centers caused nativist reactions against the new arrivals. This resulted in enactment of a number of well-known statutes designed to bar migrants (i.e. the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882), or to slow migration from particular locales, such as the Emergency Quota Act of 1921, followed by the even more restrictive Immigration Act of 1924, which limited southern European immigration while allowing for immigration from northern and central European countries such as England, Scotland and Germany.

In both local popular discourse as well as academic analysis, Portuguese migration to America is seen as part of broader patterns of southern European migration. The case of the Portuguese is often

lumped together with that of Italy or Greece without, however, much by way of critical analysis as to the comparability of these various migratory streams. It is important to note that this southern European gloss, along with supporting perceptions of the Portuguese as “white,” obscures several important distinctions. One key difference between these migrations from Southern Europe is the much later date of Portuguese arrival in North America. Portuguese migrated in repeated waves, the largest of which arrived during the 1960s and 1970s; whereas Italian migration, with the exception of 1921, began to abate after 1914. Secondly and significantly, Portuguese migration was considered “European” largely as a result of geopolitical considerations that enveloped the Atlantic islanders from Madeira, Cape Verde and the Azores into the Portuguese “nation,” despite the fact that these island groups are geographically far-removed from continental Europe. Another important distinction is that Portugal, unlike other European nations, stood as a geographic and cultural frontier between North Africa and Europe, having been part of the Moorish Empire for half a millennium. And only Portugal had extensive migratory, economic and political contacts with South America, Asia and Africa at the time of migration to the U.S. Another significant difference from other southern European migrant groups, to which the Portuguese are often compared, was the racial diversity of the Portuguese migrants who self-identified as Portuguese and who settled within a tightly circumscribed geographic area in southeastern New England.¹³

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The relationship between race and nationality current in discourse and codified in federal statute reinforced the notion that those from European nations were “white” (see for example, Haney-Lopez 1996). However, the Portuguese in New England, given the range of phenotype and diversity of geographic origin, presented perceptual conflicts for articulations of nationality writ as race. Migrants from the Atlantic archipelagoes of the Azores, Madeira and Cape Verde were, until 1975, treated for the purposes of migration quotas to the U.S. as Portuguese. One effect this had on articulations of Portuguese migrant identity was that U.S. immigration law did not allow migrants from Africa to become U.S. citizens until changes in the Immigration Act of 1952 abolished the prohibition. The bar on African migrants obtaining U.S. citizenship would of course not affect a Portuguese national citizen. This meant that immigrants from Cape Verde who might be considered African as a

result of point of origin or phenotype would, in this case, have a prominent instrumental interest in asserting a Portuguese national identity.¹⁴

From the outset, local definitions of Portuguese racial and social identity were at odds with the law, given that a Portuguese passport meant that one was European and so was classified—at least under the polemic codified in law—as “white” in America. In local discourse, however, as pointed out in the examples above, the general perception of the Portuguese was as non-white. Discrepancies between Portuguese self-perceptions of racial identity and the perceptions of non-Portuguese led to interventions on the part of the state. One such issue arose in the early 1900s when census-takers, who were then responsible for filling out respondents’ demographic information, including racial characteristics, were challenged by certain Portuguese who, upon their classification as both Portuguese and black, disagreed with the census-taker’s ascription. Many disputes arose, given that Portuguese definitions of racial identity differed from that of the American census-takers (Halter 1993).

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As various social theorists dealing with census categories and other forms of state-level identity codification point out, ethnic and racial categories on a census may reflect a particular social reality, but they may also contribute to the creation of that social reality.¹⁵ Social identities are, of course, not reducible to state codification—and of course codification was not solely responsible for the racialization of the Portuguese category. Portuguese and non-Portuguese alike confronted definitions of racial identity that cast individuals who happened to be “Portuguese” as both white and non-white, whether concomitant census categories existed or not, and whether the broader perception of the Portuguese as a group was consistent with more localized definitions. What the Portuguese treatment in the census provided, however, was a prominent means of codifying racial classification, adding one more source defining Portuguese racial identity that was confronted in practice.

In early 20th century America, the implication of being classified as non-white, whether through legal codification or discourse, was not unimportant. Although overt apartheid existed to a lesser degree in the North than elsewhere, racial segregation and discrimination nonetheless existed, and classification as non-white carried with it serious ramifications. Certainly there are prominent structural differences when examining the causes and function of discrimination levied against former black African slaves and

their descendants when compared to voluntary migrant groups classified as non-white (see Fuchs 1990; Halter 1993). These differences notwithstanding, as the Portuguese migrants were treated as non-white in southeastern New England and marginalized as a result, they were subject to exclusion from factory jobs, from promotions, from housing, and confronted various apartheid policies such as segregated seating in movie theaters and the like.¹⁶ Political rights were also at stake as those classified as non-white were denied “full social and political citizenship,” barred from juries, participating in civic organizations, and holding public office, etc.¹⁷

Although contemporary discourses promote a collective “Cape Verdean” racial identity as distinct from that of all other Lusophone populations, racial distinctions were not always congruent with geographic origins. Depending on phenotype, many Cape Verdeans in the early 20th century were placed in the “white Portuguese” category, both in state discourse and social practice, even as migrants from the Azores and Madeira were considered non-white. Even individuals within the same family had, at times different relations to phenotypically defined racial classifications. Those who were not able to be classified as “white” used their inclusion in the racially fluid Portuguese group to allow for the greatest malleability in their racial classification—individuals classified as black could mute stigmatization in law and social discourse by articulating a Portuguese, i.e. European identity. Another fascinating example of the ambiguity of the Portuguese category is found in Southern segregation policy. The apartheid policy of the so-called separate but equal principle initiated by the Supreme Court’s 1896 *Plessy vs. Ferguson* decision provided the legal standing for the creation of separate black and white schools. Prior to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, “Portuguese” were barred from attending white-only schools in North Carolina as they were considered to be non-white. Interestingly, however, the statute deemed that the Portuguese would also not be required to go to black schools.¹⁸

Assertions of Portuguese identity were often used by individuals of African and Native American descent in the South from the late nineteenth through the first half of the 20th century in court trials as a way to escape being classified as “Negro” and to “prove” their whiteness, necessary to secure citizenship and inheritance rights (Gross 2007). Considered Free Persons of Color in many southern states, Portuguese were nonetheless provided legal status as “white,” given Portugal’s stand-

ing as a European nation. The nebulous nature of Portuguese racial identity—as non-white in discourse and white in the law—were essential aspects of this strategy. The transcript of a trial in Tennessee, for example, noted that “Samuel Bolton never claimed to be white, he claimed to be Portuguese....” (*Jack v. Foust.*, deposition of Rev. D. D. Scruggs, 315, 318. Quoted in Gross 2007). And by articulating his Portuguese identity, Bolton hoped to “prove” he was not black. Narratives of Portuguese identity were also essential to the efforts of certain groups of Native-American and African-American descent in the Carolinas and Tennessee, notably the Melungeons and the Croatans, to counter racial stigma.¹⁹

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As other groups used Portuguese identity to escape classification as black, Portuguese migrants and their descendants went to great lengths to define themselves as white. Given local readings of phenotypes, Portuguese claims to “being white” were tenuous at best. A strategy followed by some Portuguese to support the argument for inclusion in the white category was to distance themselves from Portuguese of other regions through racist discourses and to mobilize local readings of phenotypes. Gross (2007) describes this phenomenon among bi-racial descendants of Native-Americans and African-Americans where non-whites could “pass” through a performance of “whiteness,” which in part depended upon the creation of distance from other lower status (read darker) groups. Conflicts arose, even within families, about segregation by phenotype and the discrimination from others to which most Portuguese had been subjected was wielded by some against compatriots. Continental Portuguese treated Azoreans as non-white; Azoreans treated Cape Verdeans as non-white; and even islanders from one island treated people from another island in the same archipelago as racially different and socially inferior (e.g. Faial and São Miguel). For example, 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 (Pap 1981, 161).

The Civil Rights Act, Cape Verdean Independence and changing discourses of identity

The 1964 Civil Rights Act provided many African-Americans who had suffered through both overt and covert apartheid practices with a posi-

tive sense of collective racial identity. The concomitant entitlement and affirmative action programs were put into place to break down the barriers to socio-economic advancement and educational opportunities. These changes in U.S. law—in conjunction with the disintegration of the Portuguese colonial empire—created dramatic shifts in the dynamics of Portuguese ethnic and racial identity.

The cultural and political proto-nationalist movements begun earlier in the century in Cape Verde and Portuguese Africa culminated in national independence and political autonomy for Portuguese overseas territories, including the Azores and Madeira after Portugal's 1974 revolution. Residents of the erstwhile colonies were given the choice of maintaining Portuguese citizenship or adopting the citizenship of the newly formed nations. Cape Verdean nationalist discourses de-emphasized Portuguese identity and focused on articulating the cultural and political connection between the independent Cape Verdean nation and Africa. These discourses found their way to New England via migrants' connections with relatives and friends in their homeland and through literature and reports on the war appearing in Portuguese-language newspapers in New England.

Positive expressions of black identity in America, together with Cape Verdeans' distancing themselves from Europe in favor of Africa, led to the fixing of discourses around a geographic basis for racial difference. Many Cape Verdeans, some of whose parents and grandparents had identified as white or as Portuguese, articulated black identities for themselves. Furthermore, embracing a "black" identity facilitated access to state entitlement programs designated for African-Americans.

It is in this context that participants in the Portuguese Congress in America described at the beginning of this paper overwhelmingly argued for designating the Portuguese as a minority. Access to state-level protection and Congressional assistance via Civil Rights legislation and inclusion in the 1972 Ethnic Heritage Program were seen by many as effective ways to ameliorate Portuguese marginalization and social exclusion.

Some Portuguese however—especially those who were able to assert themselves as "white Portuguese" by distinguishing themselves from "black Portuguese"—were strongly opposed to minority classification of the Portuguese. As pointed out earlier, even though Professor Rogers spearheaded the move against minority status, other Portuguese sup-

ported his argument regarding the detrimental impact of such a designation. Escaping racial stigmatization by “being white” through asserting connections to other “white” ethnic groups such as the Italians or Greeks was, from this point of view, much preferred over being a “minority” and, through association with other minorities, being seen as “non-white.”

As both Professor Rogers and Joseph Freitas have passed away, the published comments by Rogers’ daughter, Sheila Ackerlind Rogers, a Professor of Spanish and Portuguese languages at West Point, help us better understand the debate about Portuguese minority status. In response to a piece summing up Rogers’s role in the debate, Professor Ackerlind Rogers characterized her father’s opposition in the following terms:²⁰

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[...]what prompted Prof. Rogers to speak out against minority status was [...] an abhorrence of any form of ethnic or racial classification. Such classification, in his opinion, only serves to divide what should be one American people and to fuel the fires of condescension and prejudice. [...] [M]y great-grandfather’s name was [...] “Da Rosa,” which an immigration official changed to Rogers when my great-grandfather immigrated to America in the 19th century.[...] [H]ow difficult it was, until the late 1940’s for a person with an “ethnic” surname to rise socio-economically. By giving my great-grandfather a WASP surname, the immigration official unwittingly did him the considerable favor of enabling him to enter and flourish in mainstream American society. Both my grandfather, Frank Rogers, and my father were convinced that Portuguese surnames would have hindered their pursuit of a quality education and of their respective professional careers. If their surname had been “Da Rosa,” my grandfather would not have been admitted [sic] to Georgetown college, and my father might not have been admitted to Harvard Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (of which he eventually became Dean). It might be incomprehensible to young students, raised in an environment of multiculturalism, that an “ethnic” surname could have been a factor in shaping one’s destiny, but such was the sad reality of American society until after World War II. Although it can be argued that multiculturalism has tended to divide Americans rather than unite them, it has been instrumental in diminishing the social stigmas attached to “ethnic” names (Rogers Ackerlind 2001).

According to Rogers Ackerlind, it was not her father's "abhorrence of any form of ethnic or racial classification," but his opposition to what he considered to be the *wrong kind* of ethnic and racial classification that led him to argue against Portuguese minority status. According to Rogers Ackerlind, if the Portuguese Da Rosas had not been given "the considerable favor" of deceiving influential individuals into thinking they were WASPS, they would have had a hard time making it.²¹ Her comments underline Francis Rogers' belief that a perceptual inclusion in the dominant white group—and concomitantly downplaying one's Portugueseness and subsequent non-white status—was the most efficacious way of entering "mainstream American Society."²² Many Portuguese, having witnessed the problems of social exclusion over the century and craving social and economic success in America, were reluctant to accept what amounted for them a legal status as non-white. For these Portuguese, to do so would invite discrimination, not redress it.

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Continuing Ambiguities in Portuguese Racial and Ethnic status

Current laws as well as popular discourse continue to perpetuate the ambiguous status of the Portuguese. They are, in some contexts, declared to be white and a non-minority group, in others as non-white and a legally-sanctioned minority group.

According to the laws and programs of several states, the Portuguese are officially a minority. In Rhode Island and Massachusetts, for example, the Portuguese are included on a list of minorities eligible to participate in business development programs. A "minority" anti-smoking campaign organized by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts specifically targets the officially codified minority groups *and* the Portuguese. In the states of Indiana, Kentucky, Colorado, Florida, Washington and Illinois, the Portuguese are included in certain definitions of "Hispanic" and eligible for minority business program preferences.

On the federal level, the Portuguese are also at times declared to be a minority in their own right or incorporated into the definition of other officially recognized minority groups. Data on "minority" groups in the Philadelphia metropolitan area presented at a 2002 U.S. Census Bureau conference, for example, included statistics on Portuguese and Brazilians in the Latino category. The American Red Cross programs to encourage

minority bone marrow donations reaches out to all of the officially designated minority groups *and* the Portuguese. The Equal Employment Office also continues to address what the office holds as systematic discrimination against the Portuguese. For example, the affirmative action department of Rhode Island's largest non-government employer hired me to conduct research on reasons for the lack of advancement on the part of their Portuguese employees. They were mandated to address a federal report that found eighty percent of Portuguese male and ninety-nine percent of Portuguese female employees remained in the lowest level positions in the company without advancement for upwards of thirty years. Another example comes from the U.S. Congress's Republican Hispanic Conference, entitled "We the (Hispanic) people." It is penned by five "Hispanic" congressmen, one of whom is the Azorean-American California Representative, Devin Nunes. The goals of the caucus are to "promote policy outcomes that serve the best interests of Americans of Hispanic and Portuguese descent" and promote "principles that are of real importance to Hispanics and Portuguese in the U.S."²³

Other forms of codifying the Portuguese as non-white are found in film and television. During the 2004 Presidential campaign, for example, the bi-racial actress Maya Rudolph played the role of Democratic nominee John Kerry's Portuguese wife (and 2005 Portuguese-American Women's Association "Woman of the Year"), Teresa Heinz Kerry,²⁴ on the comedy program *Saturday Night Live*. In the John Travolta film, *Phenomenon*, an Azorean agricultural laborer is thought to be Mexican until it becomes clear he is speaking Portuguese. And one of the more frequent character actors in American film and television who has built a successful career out of playing Latin American villains with roles in *Miami Vice*, Robert Rodriguez's *Desperado*, along with numerous others, is the Portuguese actor Joaquim Almeida.

In both popular discourse and legal codification, the Portuguese are often incorporated into or placed side-by-side the Hispanic category. For example, Luso-Canadian pop star, Nelly Furtado, who articulates a conscious Portuguese and Azorean identity,²⁵ was invited to perform at the Latin Grammy awards, an award show for Latino (and Brazilian) musicians. In the same show, Hispanic actor and host Jimmy Smits explained that Latinos include everyone from the Spanish-speaking countries, Portugal and Brazil. (Incidentally, Smits' character on *NYPD Blue* is "half"

Portuguese.)²⁶ General opinion, on the topic is given a rich airing (at least among those with internet access) on a fascinating website that poses the question “Hispanic or Portuguese?” (<http://www.portugueseoundation.org/hispanic.htm>). The varied responses alternately articulate agreement and disagreement with the posed question, as others argue for a separate minority status for the Portuguese. Taken as a whole, the comments provide insight into the thinking reflecting the dichotomies around discourses that would characterize the Portuguese as both white and non-white.

Another example of how advantages offered by official group codification can shape social action is the process of university admissions. According to an article in the *Boston Globe*, Lusophone populations including Portuguese and Brazilians sought and were granted university admission and scholarships as “Hispanic” or “Black,” even though they did not otherwise identify themselves with these categories (Rapoza 2001). Some universities, including for example, Brown University, explicitly include the Portuguese as a preferential group for the purposes of admissions. The practical ramifications of being classified as a non-white minority is, for students, quite clear.

An odd Federal government document from the Attorney General acknowledges the disparities between participant-level discourses and state-level policy. The Justice Department noted in its official announcement of a recruiting drive for Hispanic applicants that, “Hispanic... does not include persons of Portuguese culture or origin.”²⁷ The policy statement, used also for other governmental agencies, is clear enough; however, the Portuguese were the only group necessitating explicit exclusion from the definition of “Hispanic.” There is no analogous statement that “Hispanics” do not include “White Anglo-Saxon Protestants” or “Italians” or “Greeks,” as there are simply no discourses that treat WASPS or Italians or Greeks as Hispanics—whereas the classification of the Portuguese is ambiguous and inconsistent enough to warrant specific mention.

Whether Portuguese minority status or incorporation into the categories of Hispanic or Latino is accepted or rejected, the ambiguities and contradictions in both everyday discourse and action and state and non-governmental codified policy continue to shape contemporary Portuguese ethnic and racial status. Similar ambiguities and contradiction characterize the definitions and discourses around Cape Verdeans—who, in certain contexts are classified as neither black nor white nor

Portuguese. They are recognized, at least in Massachusetts and Rhode Island, as a minority racial group, not as African-American, but specifically as Cape Verdean. Another complexity is introduced into contemporary definitions of Portugueseness by the recent influx of large numbers of Brazilian migrants into the region.²⁸ Shared points of reference include, of course, language, as well as work and residence patterns and socio-economic networks. The interplay between the ethnic and racial identities of Brazilian and other Lusophone migrants and how on-the-ground identities are articulated and formed with state-codified categories remain key questions for future research.

Integrated and relational identities

Although prevailing wisdom suggests that state-level codification defining ethnic and racial groups merely recognizes a reality that already exists; in fact, the very act of codification works to create the social reality itself. State-defined social identities are not a natural given. The current definition of the Hispanic category, for example, came about through lobbying efforts on the part of activists and cultural elites who worked to expand earlier legal definitions that included only those born in Puerto Rico or Mexico (see Choldin 1986), to currently include anyone with a Spanish surname or with ancestry in a Spanish-speaking country. Hispanic identity, in contradistinction to the Portuguese case, has come to be categorized as a politically unified and undifferentiated group, even though both populations encompass a similarly wide range of phenotypes and geographic origins.

The process excluding the Portuguese from minority status was no less political and the contours of ethnic or racial categories relevant to immigrants from Portugal and their descendants have come into being through a fluid process of social definition characterized by the interplay between state-created definitions and the strategies of social actors. The ethnohistory of Portuguese identity categories offers insight into how social actors strategically utilize and respond to these codified definitions of categorical identity. In various contexts, in various historical periods, individual actors have used the ambiguities in how their social identities have been construed to maximize their ability to respond to both state-level mandates and the challenges of their every-day lives.

If there has been little consensus over definitions of Portuguese social identity, given the differences in its participant-level construction and analytical treatment in different historical periods (with the perception that contemporary expressions of identity have always been so), this paper has argued that articulations of social identity among Lusophone migrants emerged through a relational and co-dependent social process that made the existence of a “white” Portuguese category dependent upon the existence of a “black” Portuguese category and vice versa. Contemporary racial and ethnic identities among Lusophone migrants and their descendants, both at the level of participant discourse and the law, have been shaped around this dichotomy.

A defining feature of Portuguese social identity is the ability to maintain multiple ethnic and racial identities that can be contextually articulated to either mark one as a member of the group, or conversely to remove one from it. The relationship between Azorean islanders, Madeirans, Continentals and Cape Verdeans and the broader construction of a Portuguese category is neither inclusive nor is it binary. The same individuals who separate themselves from the Portuguese category by engaging in social networks and political and economic interest groups based on their belonging in one category also find themselves sharing political and social institutions within a broad Lusophone migrant group in other contexts.

The connections among Lusophone migrants also serve as counter-points in the process of establishing distinct identities. Despite the post-independence rejection of Portuguese identity, it is, for example, the historical link to the “Portuguese” that allows Cape Verdeans in the present to maintain a separate non-African-American identity. The identities and networks of migrants from Brazil also are developed in relationship with, and in counterpoint to, the already well-established Lusophone population and pre-existing discourses around Portuguese racial identity. And being Azorean is what makes one Portuguese, but being Azorean is also used, in certain contexts, to define an identity in opposition to being Portuguese.

The law requires clear-cut definitions of social groups even though in discourse and practice the categories are not so clear-cut. Social actors are required to engage with state-level definitions of identity. One of the interesting features of the Portuguese case is the way the state itself

helps create contradictions, providing in certain contexts codification that explicitly denies Portuguese minority status, while treating the Portuguese as a recognized minority in others.

Lusophone migrants and the social groups formed by their descendants today constitute a kind of “shadow minority.”²⁹ That is, they have been subjected to the same kinds of social exclusion faced by legally codified minority groups (Barrow 2002), yet they lack the concomitant legal framework and political vocabulary that “minority” classification confers. This has been one result of Portuguese minority status undone. From a political standpoint, it is difficult to argue that the lack of minority status has been beneficial to the Portuguese efforts to address issues of economic, political and educational marginalization. Rejecting minority status, however, maintained for those articulating belonging in the Portuguese category the legal status as white, which provided many with a means to avoid a perceived subordinate status.

Notes

¹ Ethnographic data collected for the bulk of this paper was conducted through interviews and participant observation research among the Lusophone migrant communities in Southeastern New England over 2001-2004, where I have also worked as an anthropologist on issues of Portuguese migration for several decades and where I have lived for much of my life.

² *Boston Globe*, June 4, 1973.

³ Freitas achieved notoriety in the trial of Dan White, who shot down San Francisco Assemblyman Harvey Milk and Mayor George Mascone in plain sight. DA Freitas failed to convict White of murder in the 1st degree when his case was beaten by the infamous “Twinkie Defense.”

⁴ Onésimo Almeida, personal communication 2002.

⁵ Instrumentalism here is situated in the anthropological tradition that views ethnic group formation as situational, contextual, and ultimately adaptive. See Barth (1969); Cohen (1969); Colson (1967); Eller and Coughlin (1993); Gluckman (1958); Mitchell (1956); Moermon (1965). See Hicks (1977a), Eriksen (1993) and Banks (1996) for a summary of debates and approaches to contingent and instrumental social identities.

⁶ The term “The Portuguese” is not treated as a static category that always includes the same individuals, but is intended to refer to the group named in statutes regarding minority status and other forms of legal codification by the state, including those whose lives are affected by such classifications. As such, the “Portuguese” includes those individuals who self-identify as Portuguese, or who are classified as Portuguese by others. It is important to note that the composition of this group is malleable, depending upon historical period or instrumental context, including (or conversely excluding) those from diverse geographic points of origin (i.e. Cape Verde).

⁷ Political autonomy in the Azores and Madeira provides the archipelagoes, respectively, with their own president and parliament, yet simultaneously envelops them through law and national identity within the Portuguese state.

⁸ *Cape Cod Magazine*, Wareham, MA. no 16. (cited in Pap 1981).

⁹ *Time and the Town*. A Provincetown Chronicle. New York, Dial Press 76, 1942.

¹⁰ Dupuy, William Atherton. Washington DC. U.S. Department of the Interior, 1932.

¹¹ An example from Harney (1990, 115) makes this status clear. In impaneling the jury for a 1930s rape trial of Hawaiian and Chinese defendants, a dispute over fairness was settled by splitting the jury among “six white men” and six non-whites (two Japanese, two Chinese, one Hawaiian and

one Portuguese).

¹² First published in 1923 by Columbia University, the dissertation was reprinted in 1969 just prior to the legal debates around codified minority identity.

¹³ Of course Portuguese pre-migration racial categories differed from the non-Portuguese in the post-migration period. For example, as Bastos (2002) points out, given a lower status in certain contexts, Cape Verdeans had a privileged status vis-à-vis those from Moçambique or Angola. See also Boxer (1969).

¹⁴ Haney-López (1996) demonstrates various instances in which migrants from certain nations attempted to “prove” that they were white in U.S. courts of law for the purposes of naturalization.

¹⁵ Benedict Anderson (1993) broached the role of the Census in defining social identity in the reprint of his seminal work. However, the topic was treated in depth in a theoretically groundbreaking collection of essays, Kertzer and Arel (2001). Choldin (1986) examined the topic with the Hispanic category.

¹⁶ See Halter (1993, 165-172) for a number of examples; for other patterns of discrimination and social exclusion, including against Azoreans factory workers, see Lauck (1912), Rodrigues (1990), Silvia (1976).

¹⁷ See Gross (2007). Skilled Anglophone mill workers, for example segregated themselves from the Portuguese, refusing to Unionize with them (Lauck 1912).

¹⁸ The policy was also mirrored in Bermuda, which also gave the Portuguese their own racial classification (Pap 1981).

¹⁹ Two of anthropology’s so called “tri-racial isolates.” Hicks (1977a) and (Hicks and Kertzer) 1972 offer a thorough discussion of the topic. See also Clifford 1988.

²⁰ The quotation is part of an exchange in the *Portuguese Times*, (a Portuguese-American weekly newspaper in New England) in response to a piece I wrote about the Harvard Conference and Rogers subsequent role. Her full response and my rebuttal can be read in the *Portuguese Times* (May 23 and June 13, 2001).

²¹ Rogers desire to mute his association with Portuguese extended to other areas. Kenneth Maxwell, the eminent historian, political scientist and frequent contributor to *The New York Review of Books*, recounted a story about Rogers from a professional meeting of Historians in America at which Rogers proposed banning all Portuguese (Kenneth Maxwell, personal communication, 2001).

²² These attitudes were also reflected by Joseph Freitas, who told a young scholar at another Ivy League university, “you aren’t getting anywhere with a vowel at the end of your name” (Onésimo Almeida, Personal Communication, 2001).

²³ It is perhaps counter-intuitive that Republicans would form a caucus linking Hispanics and Portuguese, arguing for their interests as a unified group, while Democrats—who have been traditional advocates of Portuguese constituents and minorities—make statements on the topic as Massachusetts Representative Barney Frank did to me in an interview in his Fall River office saying, “the Portuguese have never been discriminated against in systematic ways”; or as another Portuguese Democratic State representative told me “the Portuguese are not a minority like the Spanish and the Blacks.”

²⁴ An interesting example of the ambiguities of Portuguese racial identity in America in her own right, Heinz-Kerry is the wealthy daughter of a Portuguese Medical Doctor and an Italian-French mother born in Mozambique. Various news fonts have referred to Heinz-Kerry as an “African-American” both in reference to her own self-identification or as a description (ie “Out of Africa,” Maureen Dowd, *New York Times*, July 18, 2004, p 13; “A Whole lot of woman,” Deborah Simmons, *Washington Times*, March 5, 2004 p A19; “Group runs anti-Kerry ads on Black radio stations,” Thomas B. Edsall, *Washington Post*, August 12, 2004, A01; “Not a simple matter of black and white,” Ruth Walker, *The Christian Science Monitor*, October 8, 2004, The Home Forum section p 18.) According to a spokesman, Heinz-Kerry refers to herself as “African American” as a geographic rather than a racial identity (“Pan Africa; an ‘African’ First Lady for the US?” *Africa News*, March 16, 2004). This “African American” identity raised some issues as the potential First Lady was introduced to America during the 2004 Presidential campaign. The campaign relied upon Heinz-Kerry’s background in an appeal to black and Hispanic voters with various levels of success, prompting one nationally syndicated columnist to remark, “She may not be black but she’s a lot more African than most Americans are” (Clarence Page, “Blacks eye that John Kerry guy,” *Chicago Tribune*, March 10, 2004, 21).

²⁵ As examples, the singer, called out to her father in Portuguese on the *Late Show with David Letterman* and plays an Azorean flag-painted guitar, surrounded by Hortensia flowers (a frequent

Azores metonym) in a music video.

²⁶ The question of whether or not the Portuguese should or should not be incorporated into the Hispanic category was under debate at the Harvard Portuguese Congress in America

²⁷ "Race and national origin identification." Standard Form 181 (Rev. 5-82) (EG), U.S. Office of Personnel Management, FPM Supplement 298-1; <http://66.102.9.104/search?q=cache:bAYTg43fCOcJ:www.fsis.usda.gov/OM/HRD/pubform/SFForms/sf0181.pdf>.

²⁸ 250,000 Brazilians reside in Massachusetts alone, often living in the same communities as earlier Portuguese-Speaking migrants. In one study, Marrow (2003) examines racial and ethnic identity among the Brazilians in relation to other Portuguese-speaking migrants as Brazilians fit and do not fit into participant and State-level definitions of Latino, Hispanic and Portuguese identities.

²⁹ The use of "shadow" is intended to evoke the opposition "Shadow Cabinet" of a parliamentary system or the "Shadow Representative" used to refer (usually erroneously) to the non-voting Washington D.C. delegate in the House who participates in debate but has no legal standing to vote.