

"Oh Famous Race!"

Imperial Heritage and Diasporic Memory in the Portuguese American Narrative of North America

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ABSTRACT: This article examines the transnational and international politics and motivations behind the Eurocentric campaigns of Portuguese American heritage advocates to memorialize the sixteenth-century navigators Miguel Corte-Real and Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo as the "discoverers" of the United States' Atlantic and Pacific coasts, and how those campaigns were framed by the advocates' "ancestral" homeland's imperialist propaganda. It argues that the study of public memory and heritage politics can offer valuable insights into the processes of diaspora building and helps reveal the asymmetrical power relations often missing in discussions about cultural hybridity.

KEY WORDS: diaspora, imperialism, heritage, ethnicity, Portuguese American

To you, oh famous race! There shall not fail.

Honor, fame, valor, glorious in tale.

Luís Vaz de Camões, *The Lusiads*: Canto X-73¹

Introduction

Long before the identity politics and white ethnic revivalism of the 1960s, Portuguese American leaders had engaged in heritage commemoration campaigns that involved preserving historical sites, building monuments, and prompting political officials to acknowledge the early presence of Portuguese migrants in North America. Beginning in the 1930s, Portuguese American elites embraced their homeland government's historical myths and tropes and openly supported its imperial policies and propaganda whenever they confirmed their "European," "Western," and "white" pedigree. This article focuses on the memorialization of Miguel Corte-Real

¹ Quoted in a Portugal Day pamphlet distributed by the Miguel Corte-Real Memorial Society in 1956, PEA M181, Historical-Diplomatic Archive of the Portuguese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Lisbon, Portugal (henceforth HDA), my translation (henceforth m.t.).

and Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo, Portuguese navigators who landed on North American shores in the sixteenth century. By celebrating these men as pioneers of Portuguese transatlantic migration, ethnic elites inserted their hyphenated stories into the foundational European mythology of the United States, hoping to shed the stigma of foreignness attached to their immigrant community while holding on to their group distinctiveness. This effort was especially significant given the complex racial status of Portuguese Americans, long seen as an “in-between” group, either as “black Europeans” or “white Africans.”²

The physical characteristics, geographic origins, national history, and low entry status of Portuguese immigrants in the labor market did not fit the neat hegemonic white/black framework of American society. Adding to their racial ambiguity was the presence of a sizable mixed-race Cape Verdean community in New England that self-identified as “Portuguese,” hence “European,” hence “white.” Those who could pass as white avoided racial prejudice by concealing their “Portagee” background and steering away from ethnic identifiers. Like other racialized European groups,³ those who failed to pass as WASP Americans or who wished to retain their cultural heritage engaged in a “process of adaptation and legitimization” through which they became “white” by contrasting themselves with “black” Cape Verdeans and excluding the latter from their ethnic communities.⁴

The ethnic hagiographic narrative of the kind surrounding Corte-Real and Cabrillo was not unique to the Portuguese. Arguably the most famous example of ethnic filiopietism in North America is the Italian American Columbus Day, first proclaimed as a civic holiday in Colorado in 1907; its Canadian imitation, Giovanni Caboto Day, was instituted in Ontario in 1998.⁵ As Robert Harney argued, “Ethnic history, as the story of each people’s participation in the development of North America, has also become a weapon in the individual and group struggle to ‘make it’ in the United States and Canada.” A pioneer of “new migration history” in Canada, Harney criticized the elitist efforts of Italian Canadian intelligentsia to uncover and celebrate the “*Italianità* of warriors, priests and explorers of Italian descent serving

2 James P. Barrett and David Roediger, “Inbetween Peoples: Race, Nationality and the ‘New Immigrant’ Working Class,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 16, no. 3 (Spring 1997): 3–44.

3 See, for instance, Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (London: Routledge, 1995).

4 For more, see Robert Harney, “Portygees and Other Caucasians’: Portuguese Migrants and the Racialism of the English-speaking World,” in *Portuguese Migration in Global Perspective*, ed. David Higgs (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1990): 113–35; Marilyn Halter, *Between Race and Ethnicity: Cape Verdean American Immigrants, 1860–1965* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1993); and Gilberto Fernandes, “Of Outcasts and Ambassadors: The Making of Portuguese Diaspora in Postwar North America” (PhD dissertation, York University, 2014).

5 Italian Canadian campaigns to memorialize Giovanni Caboto (John Cabot) as the “discoverer” of Canada (where he landed in 1497 carrying the British flag) were initially promoted by Mussolini’s diplomats in the 1920s. Newfoundland, Labrador, and the Yukon also officially celebrate Caboto’s arrival on “Discovery Day.” A senate bill calling for a Caboto Day federal holiday celebrating Italian Canadian heritage was introduced in 2011 but gained no traction. For more, see Roberto Perin, “Making Good Fascists and Good Canadians: Consular Propaganda and the Italian Community in Montreal in the 1930s,” in *Minorities and Mother Country Imagery*, ed. Gerald L. Gold (St. John’s: ISER, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1984), 137–58.

New France” and find “Italians a place as an auxiliary founding people,” alongside the British and the French. He particularly opposed their “tendency to see history as a therapeutic tool for contemporary interethnic relations,” for it distorted the history of Italian migration “into the history of nation-states and notables.”⁶

Harney’s criticism must be understood within the historiographical context of his time, when social history was beginning to dominate the field. Other migration historians have since qualified its “bottom up” emphasis on the agency of common immigrants and highlighted the importance of middle- and upper-class ethnic leaders in shaping their communities’ civic and cultural life, and of the intersecting political ideologies of these immigrant elites and their homeland patrons.⁷ Although panegyric narratives of so-called early modern migrant ancestors counter sound historical research about modern migrant experiences (especially those of the working-class majority), they also represent competing political agendas that help shape ethnic, national, and diasporic identities and therefore are worth examining.

Collective memory and historicity are integral parts of diasporic consciousness. From classic to postmodern understandings of diaspora, memories of the “ancestral homeland” have been a central source of “authentic” group identity. Anne-Marie Fortier, who revisited Harney’s discussion on the Italian Canadians’ efforts to remember Caboto, raises important questions about the concepts of nation and diaspora and the role of memory in shaping them. Fortier challenges “the logic of dualities that underpin many geographically-based definitions of diaspora,” namely *homeland/hostland*, *here/there*, and *indigenouness/migration*. According to her, “these dualities are not so easy to maintain when assessed in relation to locally specific strategies of identity formation.” Moreover, “diasporas are not always already beyond nationalist norms of identity.” For instance, because definitions of national belonging in Canada are founded on genealogical and geographical notions that exclude experiences of displacement, some migrant groups have sought to ground their national membership on the intersection of mobility and indigenouness.⁸ In this sense, by tracing their genealogy to Caboto, Italian Canadians forged an identity for themselves as the “indigenous other,” thus testifying to “the inherent malleability of the past [and] of the very criteria upon which national

6 Robert Harney, “Caboto and Other Parentela: The Uses of the Italian-Canadian Past,” in *Arrangiarsi: The Italian Immigration Experience in Canada*, ed. Roberto Perin and Franc Sturino (Montreal: Guernica Editions, 1992), 37–61.

7 See, for instance, Kathleen Conzen et al., “The Invention of Ethnicity: A Perspective from the U.S.A.,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 12, no. 1 (Fall 1992): 3–41; Carmela Patrias, *Patriots and Proletarians: Politicizing Hungarians in Interwar Canada* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1994).

8 By “indigenouness” Fortier meant “a political claim of national membership founded on past political realities that give some historical right to actually be there.” Anne-Marie Fortier, “Bringing It All (Back) Home: Italian-Canadians’ Remaking of Canadian History,” in *Communities across Borders: New Immigrants and Transnational Cultures*, ed. Paul Kennedy and Victor Roudometof (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 35.

membership is defined.” According to Fortier, the recovery of Caboto was not meant as an attempt by Italian Canadians to naturalize their allegiance to an *other* place, but to emphasize their “roots” in Canada by way of national memory. She concludes that “memory, rather than territory, are the principle grounds of identity formation.”⁹

Postcolonial thinkers have described diasporic identity as a form of hybrid consciousness, contrasting with national, ethnic, and other essentialized belongings, which are seen as antiquated, reductive, and ultimately harmful paradigms. Homi Bhabha, for instance, asserts that, “the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity . . . is the ‘third space’ which enables other positions to emerge.”¹⁰ However, as this article argues, the “third space” created by Portuguese American ethnic leaders has not displaced “the histories that constitute it,” as Bhabha claimed it would.

During the *Estado Novo* (1926–74), the right-wing authoritarian and colonialist regime that ruled over Portugal under dictators António Salazar (1932–68) and Marcello Caetano (1968–74), these ethnic heritage advocates were boosted by the historical narrative advanced by their homeland’s propaganda, which invoked Portugal’s “glorious” seafaring past as a teleological source of national identity and sovereign legitimation for its empire.¹¹ Since the Colonial Act of 1930, which stated that Portugal’s “historic function” was to “colonize its overseas domains and to civilize the native populations contained therein,” the regime had actively tried to impress an “imperial mentality” on its citizens.¹² Portuguese people learned that theirs was “not a small country” since it extended “from Minho to Timor.” After 1951, Lisbon asserted Portugal’s “historical rights” over its “overseas provinces” (no longer “colonies”) more emphatically and claimed that the Portuguese empire was exceptional in its multiracial fraternity, pro-miscegenation stance, and humane treatment of natives, as proposed by Gilberto Freyre’s *Lusotropicalismo* thesis, officially embraced by the *Estado Novo*.¹³

In the Cold War period, and especially after the outbreak of the colonial war in Angola in 1961, Lisbon directed its propaganda machine towards counteracting its international image as a backward, poor, fascist-like dictatorship with an archaic settler colonial empire. Much of this propaganda targeted the American public and their political representatives, who were increasingly opposed to the undemocratic and colonialist policies of their NATO ally. At this juncture, Portuguese American

9 Fortier, “Bringing It All (Back) Home,” 32–36, 41–42.

10 Homi Bhabha, “The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha,” in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 211.

11 During the *Estado Novo*, the Portuguese empire comprised Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau (then Portuguese Guinea), Cape Verde, and São Tomé and Príncipe in Africa; Dadra, Nagar Haveli, Goa, Daman, and Diu in India (lost in 1961); Macau and East Timor in East Asia.

12 “Colonial Act,” Art. 2, Decree 18,750, July 8, 1930, cited in Valentim Alexandre, “The Colonial Period,” in *Modern Portugal*, ed. António C. Pinto (Palo Alto: SPOSS, 1998), 48–49.

13 For more, see Gerald J. Bender, *Angola Under the Portuguese: The Myth and the Reality* (Berkeley: University of California, 1978).



"Portugal Is Not a Small Country," map for the 1934 Colonial Exhibit in Oporto. National Library of Portugal, C.C. 381 R.

leaders, whose power (in numbers) increased with the resurgence of Portuguese mass migration in the late 1960s, began receiving more aid from Lisbon to promote their group's Western civilizational heritage in the United States and elevate themselves as representatives of their humble yet "brave," "industrious," and "cosmopolitan" people.

These efforts to increase Portuguese American national and ethnic pride gained momentum at the same time that the civil rights movement achieved great political victories for racial minorities and established a legal language of group rights. By the mid-1960s, Black Power activists also began urging their brethren to look to their African roots as a source of cultural identity and political strength, so as to overcome their historical anonymity and redefine their place in American society. Simultaneously, John F. Kennedy's "nation of immigrants" ideal began taking hold of the minds of white Americans, a large swath of whom turned away from the once reigning ideal of the "melting pot" and (re)connected with their ancestors' "bootstraps" immigrant stories and Old World cultures. Though inspired by African American movements and cultural phenomena, such as Alex Haley's 1976 book, *Roots*, this collective shift in national identity towards greater pluralism did not decentralize whiteness as "the key to American belonging and power relations," but, as Matthew Jacobson argues, simply "relocated that normative whiteness from

what might be called Plymouth Rock whiteness to Ellis Island whiteness.” In the 1970s, after becoming orthodoxy, the “nation of immigrants” paradigm moved further to the right. Conservative politicians regularly deployed the European immigrant mythology of triumph through “hard work” and “self-reliance” to criticize the “welfare dependency” of black Americans and decry the “insularity” of non-European immigrants arriving in larger numbers since 1965.¹⁴

After the Carnation Revolution of April 25, 1974, which toppled the *Estado Novo* dictatorship and put an end to the centuries-old empire, Portuguese democratic officials and intelligentsia resolved the “crisis of national identity” resulting from the loss of the violent empire by replacing it with the peaceful diaspora and extending the romanticized virtues of early modern explorers to their supposed emigrant descendants. This interpretation allowed the Portuguese state to uphold the fiction that theirs was a “pluricontinental nation” and maintain some of its former geopolitical relevance in an increasingly globalized world. President Ramalho Eanes launched this new deterritorialized vision of the nation in his address at the June 10 holiday celebrations, renamed in 1977 from “Day of Portugal, Camões and the *Portuguese Race*,” to “Day of Portugal, Camões, and the *Portuguese Communities*”:

What distinguishes the Portuguese from other men is his exceptional capacity for making the whole world his land and every human being his brother. . . . [D]ecolonization, far from meaning that Portugal has lost its ecumenical perspective, has, on the contrary, reclaimed its historical vocation in a purer state. . . . Thus, a new concept of Fatherland emerges from our authentic national tradition: the man matters more than the ground he lives on.¹⁵

In the 1980s, Portugal’s national and regional governments strengthened links with their emigrant communities by introducing various institutions, policies, and programs serving and empowering their expatriate citizens. Although Lisbon’s commitment to its emigrants waned after it joined the European Union in 1986, the country continued to reap the financial, economic, political, and cultural benefits of having a large diaspora. The government continued to endorse inexpensive symbolic acts that improved the profile of Portuguese communities in their host nations, including those that promoted imperial heritage.¹⁶

¹⁴ Matthew F. Jacobson, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 7–9, 65, 389–96. See also David Colburn and George Pozzetta, “Race, Ethnicity, and the Evolution of Political Legitimacy,” in *The Sixties: From Memory to History*, ed. David Farber (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1994), 119–42; and Nancy Foner, *From Ellis Island to JFK: New York’s Two Great Waves of Immigration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

¹⁵ President António R. Eanes speech (m.t.), *Comunidade*, June 1977, 5, York Space Institutional Repository, Clara Thomas Archives and Special Collections, York University Libraries, Toronto, Canada.

¹⁶ Bela Feldman-Bianco, “Multiple Layers of Time and Space: The Construction of Class, Ethnicity, and Nationalism among Portuguese Immigrants,” *Annals of the New York Academy of*

This article examines the local, transnational, and international politics behind the twentieth-century Portuguese American memorialization of Corte-Real and Cabrillo. It seeks to answer the questions: Who articulated, promoted, and subscribed to these historical narratives? How did they relate to the larger white ethnic revivalism of the post-civil rights era? How were these campaigns shaped by the geopolitical contexts of their time? And how were they related to Portugal's imperialist and diasporic projects? It also introduces a transnational perspective to the field of public history and the study of heritage politics, which remain largely grounded in the classic national paradigm. This article adds an important ethnic viewpoint to discussions on American public memory, which often fail to take into account the marginal yet active (re)interpretations of the nation's past by its diverse immigrant communities.¹⁷ Finally, it argues that the study of public memory and heritage politics can offer valuable insights into the processes of diaspora building and help reveal the asymmetrical power relations often missing in discussions about cultural hybridity.

Preserving Massachusetts's Dighton Rock

Some of the leading theories of the early historiography on the Portuguese maritime explorations lent themselves to the kind of crypto-history and historical romanticism that fed the filiopietism of ethnic elites. Early twentieth-century historians often drew their conclusions under the general assumption that the Portuguese Crown had maintained a tight policy of secrecy about its explorations and deliberately manipulated the records of its voyages in order to conceal its discoveries and ensure its advantage over competing empires. Although it is possible that such a policy of secrecy existed, the thesis has given license to various unverifiable historical hypotheses. As Darlene Abreu-Ferreira argues in reference to the myths inflating the role of the Portuguese in Newfoundland's early cod fisheries, "these affirmations are usually shrouded in nationalistic garb, and most fail to provide adequate evidence for their claims. The reason for this lack of evidence is quite simple: none exists."¹⁸ European historiography also agreed about the important contribution of the Portuguese towards advancing Christian humanism in the Western world. This notion was conveniently harnessed by the *Estado Novo* to claim that its empire was a benign experiment on which Western civilization had been partially founded.

Sciences 645 (July 1992): 145–74; Caroline Brettell, "The Emigrant, the Nation, and the State in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Portugal: An Anthropological Approach," *Portuguese Studies Review* 2 (1993): 51–65.

¹⁷ Some notable exceptions are John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); and Jacobson, *Roots Too*.

¹⁸ Darlene Abreu-Ferreira, "Portugal's Cod Fishery in the 16th Century: Myths and Misconceptions," in *How Deep Is the Ocean? Historical Essays on Canada's Atlantic Fishery*, ed. James E. Candow et al. (Sidney: University College of Cape Breton Press, 1997), 31.

Among the most recurrent themes in the Portuguese narrative of North America are the travels of the members of the Corte-Real family and their presumed “discovery” of Newfoundland and Labrador. The little-known details about their travels have sparked people’s imagination for decades, not only because the ultimate fate of the Corte-Real brothers remains unknown, but also because their story has the makings of a fascinating tale of sibling devotion. Gaspar and Miguel Corte-Real were navigators from the Azorean island of Terceira who participated in a joint Portuguese-Danish expedition to Greenland in 1473. Some evidence suggests that their father, João Vaz, may have explored what is today Newfoundland. In 1501, Gaspar embarked on a second expedition and explored the coast of Labrador. After capturing a group of natives, Gaspar sent two ships back to Portugal and continued sailing southwards. The next year, having received no news of his brother, Miguel set out to find Gaspar with three ships. Once in North America, the search fleet separated to cover a larger area. When they reconvened, not only had they not found Gaspar, but they had lost Miguel’s ship as well. Since then, many history enthusiasts have continued the search, looking for clues of the brothers’ whereabouts along the Atlantic coast.

The most famous and controversial artifact linked to the Corte-Reals’ presence in North America is the Dighton Rock. Originally located on the riverbank of the Tauton River, in Berkley, Massachusetts, where it was submerged twenty hours a day, the forty-ton boulder is remarkable for the carved inscriptions that cover its surface. For centuries, the Dighton Rock has been the subject of speculation by many archaeology aficionados, who have cited it as compelling evidence for a range of historical theories regarding the arrival of the first Europeans to North America. As Douglas Hunter has recently argued, this fascination belonged to the long European tradition of erasing the history of indigenous people (who most likely created the carvings) and asserting “white supremacy.”¹⁹ In 1913, Edmund Delabarre, a professor of psychology at Brown University, claimed to have discovered the Portuguese coat of arms on the rock’s surface, along with a Latin inscription that translates to “Miguel Corte-Real, by the will of God, here chief of the indians, 1511.” Delabarre, who had a summer home in the rock’s vicinity, spent thirteen years studying its carvings and trying to prove its link to the Portuguese navigator. He published his findings in 1928, capturing the attention of Portuguese officials, who in 1933 awarded him with an honorific title for outstanding services to the nation in the realm of sciences and culture. This and other accolades were not always forthcoming, as scholars in the United States and Portugal rebutted Delabarre’s findings and methods. For example, Harvard professor Samuel E. Morison noted, “I always felt that with a little work I could as easily find ‘Kilroy Was Here’ or ‘To

19 The earliest known theory about the origins of the inscriptions dates back to 1783 and attributed them to the Phoenicians. Another theory in 1837 proposed that Vikings had carved them. The consensus today is that indigenous peoples likely made the petroglyphs. For more see Douglas Hunter, “Stone of Power: Dighton Rock, Colonization, and the Erasure of an Indigenous Past” (PhD dissertation, York University, 2015).



The Dighton Rock, 1893. Photo by Davis. (Wikimedia Commons)

Hell With Yale' on the rock." By 1935, Lisbon municipal officials rejected an offer to place a replica of the Dighton Rock in one of its main streets, after various Portuguese archaeologists alerted them to the lack of evidence supporting Delabarre's claims.²⁰

Delabarre's theories captivated Portuguese American leaders in Massachusetts and Rhode Island, however, who took it upon themselves to elevate the Corte-Real brothers from obscurity and ensure the Dighton Rock's preservation. Among these were professionals, politicians, and Catholic priests. These heritage advocates organized community events to publicize their cause among Portuguese and American officials and the general public. One of their first events took place on a snowy December day in 1930, when over one hundred people gathered on the remote Taunton riverbank and, one by one, shoveled earth into two chests covered with the Portuguese and American flags, which were later sent to Lisbon and Terceira to be placed in local museums.²¹

Of the various committees dedicated to this cause, the most active in the 1930s was that of the Portuguese American Civic League of Massachusetts (PACL). Although primarily dedicated to organizing citizenship drives and raising the political profile of Portuguese Americans, the PACL occasionally coordinated campaigns

²⁰ *Providence Journal*, July 28, 1935, and *Boston Herald*, May 24, 1954, cited in Joseph Frago, *A Historical Report of Twenty-Eight Years of Patriotic and Dramatic Efforts to Save Dighton Rock* (New Bedford, MA: self-published, 1954), Dighton Rock papers, Old Colony Historical Society's collection (henceforth OCHS). The author thanks Douglas Hunter for sharing some of the records he copied during his own research on the Dighton Rock.

²¹ *New Bedford Standard-Times*, December 29, 1930, cited in Frago, *Historical Report*, 14.

celebrating the memory of co-ethnic veterans and other notables. Since 1934, the PACL had sought to purchase the land surrounding the Dighton Rock, which was owned by Taunton's Old Colony Historical Society (OCHS). Privately, Professor Delabarre pleaded with the OCHS not to sell the rock or its adjacent land to a Portuguese organization, as he feared it would turn the rock into a "shrine," as some community priests had proposed, or emphasize the "foreign nationality" of its members.²² The OCHS complied and was resolute in its unwillingness to sell the property. This did not stop the PACL from requesting financial aid from American officials to offset the costs of its preservation project. Private individuals also offered to finance this project, for example Joseph H. Rich, director of the [Daniel] Boone Memorial Association, whose goal was to celebrate the memory of that frontiersman through a trail highway of small monuments (some of them in places Boone never visited). However, some PACL members rejected Rich's offer, arguing they ought to be self-reliant. Curiously, "self-reliance" was not an expressed concern of the PACL when it accepted a \$5,000 grant from Massachusetts governor James M. Curley in 1935.²³ The differing responses seem to have been motivated by a desire to limit the Dighton Rock's memory to Corte-Real alone and prevent its overshadowing by a better-known folk hero of American settler history.

After this initial bout of public interest, efforts to rescue the Dighton Rock waned during the Second World War, but resurfaced in the 1950s. Driving this new campaign was the Miguel Corte-Real Memorial Society. Founded in October 1951 by a group of Portuguese Americans from New York and New Jersey, this organization aimed to erect a monument to the "glorious deeds" of the Corte-Reals, who, according to society cofounder Manuel L. Silva, had "sacrificed their lives for the benefit and progress of all humanity by enlarging the perimeter of our civilization among the tribes of this Continent." The society also set out to zealously defend against any public statement "offending the historical deeds of our people." Its zealotry was proven when the society lambasted a children's encyclopedia (*The Book of Knowledge*) for referring to an episode in which Gaspar Corte-Real captured a group of natives and sent them to Lisbon to be sold as slaves. They viewed the discussion of this incident as an insult to all Portuguese, believing that it implied their countrymen were "murderers, robbers, rapists and slave-traders."²⁴

The society launched a public fundraiser in the Portuguese communities of New England and New York aimed at purchasing a large swath of land near the Dighton Rock, where it planned to build a park. This was to include a grand avenue lined by a row of life-sized bronze statues of Portuguese navigators, leading into a large rotunda encircling a dome supported by thirteen marble columns representing the original American states. There were also plans to build a large-scale

22 Edmund Delabarre to Secretary of the OCHS, December 11, 1934, OCHS.

23 By 1937, part of this money had paid for a land survey by a team of state engineers and the remainder was unaccounted for (*Fall River Herald-News*, January 18, 1935, April 4, 1935, and April 8, 1937, cited in Fragoso, *Historical Report*, 21, 24, 35–36).

24 Manuel L. Silva to Ambassador Luis Fernandes, October 27, 1951, PEA M181, HDA.

replica of the Tower of Belém, one of the most famous symbols of Portugal's nautical history, situated on the shores of the Tagus River in Lisbon.²⁵

Like its predecessors, the Memorial Society sought the sponsorship of Portuguese and American officials, with the latter being more solicitous. Much of this support came in the form of ceremonial gestures, such as the "Dighton Rock Day" proclamations by the mayors of Taunton and Fall River, Massachusetts, in 1951. Although they did nothing towards improving the lives of ordinary Portuguese Americans, these proclamations were treasured by community elites since they granted official approbation to their ethnic group as a distinct yet deeply connected constituent of American society. To the delight of Portuguese diplomats, the illustrious American guests who addressed the crowd at these celebrations often echoed the *Estado Novo's* mantra by referring to Portugal's contributions towards advancing Western civilization. For example, Joseph E. Warner, a Massachusetts superior court judge of mixed Portuguese descent, contended that Portugal had "never subjected the inhabitants of those [imperial] regions to its political or military system against their will," and that "the ideals of Prince Henry [the Navigator] demonstrated the superiority of the spiritual over the material power" in his efforts to promote Christianity and human science against the "weight of the mahometans [sic] against our civilization." He went on to say that Miguel Corte-Real carried this civilizing mission to North America, 140 years before the arrival of the first white settlers.²⁶

By 1952, the Memorial Society had raised enough money to buy fifty acres of land in the rock's surrounding area. Still, the OCHS was steadfast in its decision not to sell.²⁷ The communities' enthusiasm began to dampen as people learned about this stalemate, and about the controversial nature of the society's front man, Joseph D. Fragoso. Born in São Miguel, Azores, Fragoso had worked as a cobbler before moving to the United States in 1919. Later he became a lecturer at New York University and launched a Portuguese-language magazine. Besides his longstanding interest in Delabarre's thesis, Fragoso was known for his occasional outbursts against Salazar, the *Estado Novo's* diplomats, and their Portuguese American clients. In 1944, he interrupted a community dinner celebrating the elevation of Portugal's diplomatic office in Washington to full embassy status and condemned what he saw as disrespectful "fanfare" at a time when Americans were making all kinds of war sacrifices and denounced the event's organizers as infiltrated agents of Lisbon's "fascist government."²⁸ Many of those ethnic leaders who had previously campaigned for the Dighton Rock's preservation, some of them allies of the *Estado Novo* and its diplomats, refused to cooperate with Fragoso, whom they dismissed as a "mental case" and a "communist." Fragoso, in turn, engaged in the public shaming of those "failed" heritage advocates who preceded him and compared himself to

25 Consul Vasco A. Villela to Ambassador Luis Fernandes, January 2, 1954, PEA M181, HDA.

26 Joseph E. Warner's address at Taunton High School Auditorium, June 10, 1951, printed in *Portuguese World*, December 1951, PEA M181, HDA.

27 W. Wallace Austin, OCHS, to J. Rocha, *Diário de Notícias*, March 10, 1952, OCHS.

28 Consul Vasco Villela to Ambassador Luis Fernandes, March 14, 1952, PEA M181, HDA.

“Christ and the Christian martyrs” in his quest to elevate the memory of the Corte-Real brothers.²⁹

Fragoso’s idiosyncratic methods led people in the Portuguese American community to question his intentions. He was reluctant to create local committees in New England and insisted on keeping full control of fundraising matters from his home in New York. Those who had pledged donations became worried upon realizing that the land the Memorial Society had purchased did not contain the rock itself.³⁰ In 1953, following allegations that Fragoso’s fundraiser was a scam, the Portuguese American state senator Edmundo Dinis, of New Bedford, introduced a bill in the Massachusetts legislature proposing the creation of a state park in the area of the Dighton Rock, which called for the expropriation of a portion of the land purchased by the society.³¹ Two years later, despite Fragoso’s objections, the state recognized the Dighton Rock as a national relic and began plans to build the park. After this, Fragoso started a public war against Dinis, which lasted many years, each man taking the other to court multiple times. Fragoso eventually quit his university job and moved to New Bedford to continue his battle with Dinis on the latter’s home turf. He even ran for state representative and mayor of New Bedford simply to attack his rival in the local media.³²

Despite his ire towards the dictatorship, Fragoso regularly asked its diplomats in the United States to support his plans for the Dighton Rock, to no avail. During his many visits to Massachusetts, and despite repeated invitations, the Portuguese ambassador always avoided visiting the rock—sometimes awkwardly, as was the case in 1956, when his car absconded from an official motorcade escorting him to the rock’s site, prompting criticism from the Portuguese American media. Although unwilling to publicly endorse the Memorial Society’s efforts, the embassy recognized the political value of celebrating the Corte-Reals’ explorations in the United States. In Ambassador Luís Fernandes’s estimation, this heritage campaign was “of great benefit to improve the perception of the epic Portuguese discoveries in this country.” However, he regretted that this project had been maligned by Fragoso, whom he dismissed—in the *Estado Novo*’s elitist fashion—as someone of “little financial means and very modest social status.”³³ Also of concern to Portuguese authorities was the controversy surrounding Delabarre’s interpretations. Fernandes

29 Fragoso, *Historical Report*, 10–11.

30 Abílio Águas to João Rocha, New Bedford, March 17, 1963, SC: Correspondência, 1960–61, Comité Pro-Democracia em Portugal fonds, Centro Documentação 25 de Abril, University of Coimbra (henceforth CD25A).

31 Fragoso challenged the state’s plan to build the park by refusing to sell the land bought by the Memorial Society, which was within the prospected eighty acres earmarked for the park, and offered a one-hundred-foot-wide right-of-way through its property. The Department of National Resources rejected this compromise, convinced that it would invite private interests to build a “hot dog stand paradise” in the area (*New Bedford Standard-Times*, April 27, 1955, PEA M181, HDA).

32 “The War between Dinis and Fragoso,” Manuel L. da Silva, http://www.dightonrock.com/seventh_round.htm.

33 Ambassador Luís Fernandes to Portuguese Foreign Affairs Minister, June 23, 1958 (m.t.), PEA M181, HDA.



Portuguese embassy's press officer Bernardo Teixeira with teacher Osceloa T. Crew and "Portuguese" student. Photo taken in March 1958 for the Portuguese embassy's files, PEA 71, Historical-Diplomatic Archive of the Portuguese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Lisbon, Portugal. (Used with permission.)

advised officials in Lisbon not to pronounce upon the inscriptions' authenticity until they sent an archaeologist to study them. His doubts about the rock's archaeological value, however, did not stop him from declaring at a community event in Boston, in 1958, that the North American voyages of the Corte-Real brothers were "now a matter of history, not mere speculation."³⁴ At the same time, the ambassador instructed the officers of two Portuguese frigates visiting New England on that occasion to stay away from the Dighton Rock.

As Portuguese Americans in New England increasingly celebrated their ancestral ties with their "multiracial" seafaring homeland, in North Carolina another group of "Portuguese" Americans tried hard to conceal that racial label. In January 1958, the *Virginian-Pilot* had reported that "Portuguese" children in the small township of Gaston, in Northampton County, were being segregated based on a "century-old stigma." As the press described it, there were sixteen destitute rural families in Gaston thought to be descendants of white migrants from the north, Native Americans, and free blacks, who had mingled some time in the antebellum period. Their relation with Portugal, however, was a mystery, as their ancestors left no written

34 Speech by Ambassador Luís Fernandes in Boston, June 1958, PEA Mr83, HDA.



Young female student at Gaston's "Portuguese" school. Photo taken in March 1958 for the Portuguese embassy's files, PEA 71, Historical-Diplomatic Archive of the Portuguese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Lisbon, Portugal. (Used with permission.)



Teixeira, a Northampton County official, and the "most prosperous of the 'Portuguese' farmers." In his report, Teixeira noted with irony that some "Portuguese" students looked "whiter" than their "pure white" teacher. Photo taken in March 1958 for the Portuguese embassy's files, PEA 71, Historical-Diplomatic Archive of the Portuguese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Lisbon, Portugal. (Used with permission.)

records. Despite being fair skinned and Methodist, and having Anglo surnames, these “Portuguese” families had long been ostracized by the county’s “pure whites,” who in 1923 banned “Portuguese” children from attending white-only schools. Because “Portuguese” parents refused to send their children to black-only schools, the state allowed them to build a Portuguese-only primary school in Gaston, which only taught up to eighth grade. The *Pilot*’s reporter interviewed the school’s teacher, Osceola Crew, a “pure white” Northampton resident who tried to instill in her students a sense of pride in their supposed heritage by teaching them about Vasco da Gama, Ferdinand Magellan, and other heroes of Portugal’s explorations.³⁵

The daily newspaper *Diário de Notícias* of New Bedford, the foremost Portuguese American organ from 1919 to 1973, ran this story for months, expressing outrage over the ignorance of North Carolina’s legislators and the “misuse” of the label “Portuguese.” Its director, João Rocha, suspected these families had no real connection with his own ethnic and religious ancestry and were instead “simply an unfortunate group of people, without roots nor [sic] history, living adrift in a hostile world.”³⁶ In a letter to the *Pilot*’s editor, he asked:

Are they really Portuguese? . . . If they came from continental Portugal, the Azores or Madeira and their fathers were Portuguese, they are Caucasians—WHITE. . . . However, there are Portuguese CITIZENS who might well be negroes. They came from Portugal’s African territories. . . . There are, too, Portuguese CITIZENS who [are] Mongolians (the “yellow” race). They obviously must come from Portugal’s Asiatic colonies. . . . What may be difficult for [North Carolina’s legislators] to comprehend is that . . . the Portuguese are proud of them all.³⁷

This was not yet an “evasion of whiteness,”³⁸ since it pointed to the supposed multiracial make-up of Portugal’s imperial citizenship and not the mixed-race origins of “WHITE” Portuguese, as celebrated by Lusotropicalism. In Rocha’s view, all the schoolteacher had to do to boost her students’ ethnic pride was tell them about the feats of “Caucasian Portuguese mariners” and the contributions of famous Portuguese Americans, such as the Revolutionary War hero Peter Francisco or the composer John Philip Sousa, to their nation’s history. However, as Crew told the Portuguese embassy’s press officer—sent to Gaston to investigate the matter—the children recoiled in their seats every time she tried to teach them about

35 Luther J. Carter, “Century-Old Stigma Remains. ‘Portuguese’ Youngsters Segregated in Carolina,” *Virginian Pilot*, January 26, 1958; “A Situação Difícil da Colônia ‘Portuguesa’ de Northampton,” *Diário de Notícias*, February 4, 1958; *Diário da Manhã*, February 24, 1958; *Diário Ilustrado*, March 4, 1958, PEA 71, HDA.

36 João Rocha, “Comentário do Dia,” *Diário de Notícias*, February 14, 1958, 1, Portuguese-American Digital Newspaper Collections, Claire T. Carney Library, University of Massachusetts-Dartmouth (henceforth DN-UMASS).

37 “Ainda o caso das famílias ‘Portuguesas’ segregadas . . . Carolina do Norte,” *Diário de Notícias*, February 24, 1958, DN-UMASS.

38 Jacobson, *Roots Too*, 2.

Portuguese history, as it reminded them of their supposed “inferiority and isolation.” She once invited a former missionary to Brazil to give a presentation on Portuguese architecture in that country, during which many of the children cried in shame, some skipping class the next day. The teacher added that the press coverage had been painful for the students, as it drew attention to their “Portuguese” label and “horrified” their parents, who worried that those relatives who had managed to escape the “Northampton siege” and were now living as “normal whites” in other states would be exposed.³⁹

Meanwhile, scholars gathered at the Lisbon Geographic Society debated the origins of these Gaston families and arrived at the simplistic conclusion that, because they were born in North Carolina, they were not Portuguese but American.⁴⁰ Following Ambassador Fernandes’s appeals, the US State Department pressured Northampton’s state representatives to remove the term “Portuguese” from their segregationist legislation and use some other designation to discriminate against those Gaston families. North Carolina’s legislature finally included the “Portuguese” in the same electoral lists as “whites” in June 19, 1959.⁴¹

In New England, community efforts to boost ethnic pride through the celebration of Portuguese nautical heritage continued, now with greater support from Lisbon. In the 1960s, a disappointed Fragoso exited the public stage and an even fiercer proponent of Delabarre’s thesis emerged: Dr. Manuel Luciano da Silva. Born into a family of humble means in a small rural town in the northern mainland, Silva first heard of the Dighton Rock and the Corte-Real brothers as a high school student in Portugal. In 1946, at age nineteen, Silva and his mother joined his migrant father in Brooklyn. Later he became a student at New York University, where he met Fragoso. Sharing a fascination for the Dighton Rock, they cofounded the Memorial Society with other partners in New York. In 1952, Silva returned to Portugal to attend medical school. While there, he deepened his knowledge of the Portuguese explorations by reading extensively on the subject. Silva returned to the United States in 1958 after obtaining his degree and settled with his new family in Bristol, Rhode Island, where he opened a medical clinic. Learning that Fragoso had

39 According to the semi-legendary memories of local elders, these families descended from crewmembers of a Portuguese merchant ship, wrecked on North Carolina’s shores sometime before the Civil War, who later settled in that county and had sexual relations with black slave women and the creole daughters of white plantation owners. The embassy’s officer believed, instead, that these were offspring of Portuguese laborers who migrated from Pennsylvania in the early twentieth century to work on the building of a nearby canal. Whatever the case, none of these individuals had a connection to Portugal, which they knew little about (report, Bernardo Teixeira, Washington, March 1958, PEA 71, HDA [m.t.]). More recently, amateur researchers have associated Gaston’s “Portuguese” with the mixed-race Melungeon people of the Appalachia region; see for instance Manuel Mira, *The Forgotten Portuguese* (Franklin, NC: Portuguese American Historical and Research Foundation, 1997).

40 “Não São Portuguesas as Dezasais Famílias que Vivem Segregadas nos Estados Unidos,” February 25, 1958; “O Embaixador de Portugal protestou junto do Governo dos Estados Unidos,” March 17, 1958, *Diário de Notícias*, DN-UMASS.

41 Ambassador L. Fernandes to Portuguese Minister of Foreign Affairs, April 3 and March 11, 1958; Luis Norton the Mattos to Ambassador L. Fernandes, April 11, 1959, PEA 71, HDA.

withdrawn from public life, he took it upon himself to single-handedly ensure the preservation of the Dighton Rock, prove its connection to Miguel Corte-Real, and convince the world that the Portuguese had been the first Europeans to settle in what became the United States.

Although he had similar outreach methods and style as Fragoso, Silva had a decisive advantage over his predecessor: the times had changed. In the 1960s, public interest in European American heritage rose, launching the creation of various societies dedicated to its study and commemoration. At the same time, the *Estado Novo* escalated its pro-Western imperialist propaganda in the United States, persistently pushing historicist myths about Portugal's "glorious" seafaring past. Silva was in the right place at the right time—a constant throughout his heritage-making career.

While fervently Portuguese, Silva was also a proud American patriot, who strongly believed in his host nation's liberal-democratic ideals. In fact, he became one of the most dynamic Portuguese American civic leaders, spearheading a number of causes, not all of them concerning heritage.⁴² Nonetheless, Silva was a divisive figure in the community, largely because of his outspoken and quirky personality, domineering ways, conceit, and affected erudition. These attributes underscored his chauvinist ethnic memorializations and also were cause for embarrassment to other Portuguese American public figures. Moreover, like Fragoso, Silva occasionally voiced his criticism of the *Estado Novo* and its diplomats, whom he accused of incompetence, discrimination, and lack of concern for the emigrants. This outspokenness often infuriated his fellow expatriates, who sent angry letters to newspaper editors, urging Portuguese officials to respond accordingly. But because of Silva's polemical temper, and the fact that his community organization efforts served Lisbon's overall interests, Portuguese diplomats remained grudgingly silent so not to fuel his ire, although they sometimes instructed others to respond for them.

Silva's flamboyant personality made him a favorite of the media, who gave him the attention he seemed to crave. In an interview to the *Boston Sunday Globe* in 1966, he claimed to have found additional inscriptions on the Dighton Rock, confirming that the Portuguese, not the Pilgrims of Plymouth, had been the first Europeans to settle in New England. "This is Portuguese until proven otherwise," he asserted. He also claimed that, since presenting his findings at the first International Conference on the History of the Discoveries in Lisbon in 1960, no one had yet disproved him. The reason for this, the reporter implied, was because no one took him seriously enough to bother. Nonetheless, the acclaimed Harvard historian Oscar Handlin weighed in on the matter: "If you start reaching for little bits of

⁴² Silva founded and presided over various community organizations, and spearheaded a number of social causes, including the elimination of Cape Verdean discrimination from Portuguese American civic life. He was also one of the leaders of the Portuguese American Federation, a national umbrella organization founded in 1966 following the *Estado Novo*'s call for greater political mobilization among its expatriates.

information, you can attempt to prove anything.” Asked what he thought of the dismissal by such a renowned scholar, Silva replied: “I use the bullfight technique . . . I say, harrooomph, let her go, (he whisks an imaginary cape through the air) ha, ha, until she cools off. . . . This is a great country, because, you know, if you have the facts at hand and you have the proof, you have nothing to fear from Harvard professors.”⁴³ More frustrating to Silva was the fact that his thesis failed to garner attention in Portugal, where historians he admired were also quick to dismiss him.

Silva’s most recurrent detractor was Professor Francis M. Rogers. A well-respected Harvard professor of Portuguese and Irish descent, Rogers had challenged Silva’s thesis at the Lisbon conference and then became a recurrent critic of his methods and findings. The grandson of an Azorean whaler arrived in Connecticut in 1853, whose family name was changed from “da Rosa” by an immigration officer, Rogers was a firm believer in assimilation, viewing ethnic and racial identifiers as divisive and fuelling “the fires of condescension and prejudice.” Like his paternal forebears, Rogers saw his family’s Anglicization as a blessing that had enabled their social ascension within mainstream America. At the same time, his grandmother, an Irish famine immigrant, raised him to appreciate his Portuguese background, which he did, to the point of making a career of it as the most prominent Portuguese studies scholar in the United States and also through involvement with various Portuguese American cultural organizations.⁴⁴

In January 1961, Rogers and Silva had another “heated exchange” during a public hearing at the Massachusetts State House, where lawmakers met to discuss a bill proposed by the latter requesting the construction of a \$250,000 cofferdam to protect the Dighton Rock from the sewage infested waters. Speaking to a reporter, Rogers, who stated being “just as proud of his Portuguese heritage” as Silva, dismissed the inscriptions but agreed that the rock should be preserved. However, he opposed Silva’s ethnic chauvinism and believed the rock “should not become the property of any hyphenated group.”⁴⁵ In the end, the bill did not pass. Recognizing the weight of the Harvard professor’s opinion, Silva proposed a second bill in 1963 and, according to him, arranged for its public hearing to be held while Rogers was away on vacation. His plan worked, as the bill eventually passed. That year, the Massachusetts Department of Natural Resources raised the Dighton Rock from the Taunton riverbed and placed it on a pier built for that purpose. The same department then commissioned Silva to set up a display in which he interpreted the Corte-Real inscriptions with a piece of chalk.

43 *Boston Sunday Globe*, August 14, 1966, PEA M333, HDA.

44 Sheila Ackerlind, ed., *Internationalism and the Three Portugals: The Memoirs of Francis Millet Rogers* (New York: P. Lang, 1992); Miguel Moniz, “The Shadow Minority: An Ethnohistory of Portuguese and Lusophone Racial and Ethnic Identity in New England,” in *Community, Culture and the Making of Identity: Portuguese-Americans along the Eastern Seaboard*, ed. Kimberly DaCosta Holton and Andrea Klimt (Dartmouth: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009), 410, 422–23.

45 *Boston Globe*, January 25, 1961, in “Fiery Young Dr. Manuel Luciano da Silva,” Manuel L. da Silva, <http://www.dightonrock.com/fieryyoungdrmanuellucianodasilva.htm>.

This official endorsement irked some of Silva's critics, such as the former vice consul of Portugal turned anti-Salazar activist Abílio O. Águas, who had been one of Delabarre's assistants and first proponents of his thesis.⁴⁶ Águas had played an important role in convincing the OCHS to deed the Dighton Rock and the acre of land where it stood to the state of Massachusetts. But now he feared that Silva's unsupported claims would damage Delabarre's "scientifically demonstrated decipheration" and its "corresponding economic potential as an attraction." Although he continued to offer his consulting services to state officials as they built the park, Águas later avoided being publicly associated with the rock, after recognizing the *Estado Novo*'s growing interest in the relic for its propagandistic potential.⁴⁷

The Dighton Rock State Park was finally inaugurated on November 17, 1963, with marching bands and speeches by various dignitaries. The highlight of the event was when a Taunton state representative read a telegram from Salazar aloud, in which the dictator commended the PACL for its efforts in preserving the historical boulder. Afterwards, the politician opened a small bronze box sent by the Lisbon government containing soil from the Azorean town where Miguel Corte-Real was born and scattered it near the base of the rock. The next day, the *Diário* published a brief history of the community's efforts to preserve the rock, which lauded the contributions of Delabarre, Dinis, and Águas. The article made no mention of Fragoso, Silva, or their Memorial Society, other than an admonishment of the pseudoscientific methods of "those" who armed themselves with chalk and cunning imagination. It also argued that the Dighton Rock was "a national monument" (presumably American) that should not be used "for political purposes or intentional parochialism."⁴⁸

Shortly after the park's inauguration, the Portuguese minister of public works visited the Dighton Rock, the first high-ranking *Estado Novo* official to do so.⁴⁹ Despite the controversy surrounding its inscriptions and the polemical nature of its champions, the rock's appeal as a medium for imperialist propaganda proved too great to be ignored by the Portuguese regime trying to improve its image in the

46 As the vice consul of Portugal in Providence in the mid-1920s, Abílio Oliveira Águas earned the reputation of being a friend of the downtrodden for his solicitude in helping newcomers deal with American officials. He was removed of his duties after denouncing the shipping company Fabre Line (endorsed by Salazar) for transporting Cape Verdean immigrants in their ships' cargo holds. After this, Águas became the most dynamic and influential of anti-Salazar activists in the United States, first as a member of the Portuguese republican opposition in exile, and later as leader of the Newark, New Jersey Committee Pro-Democracy in Portugal. He was also one of the most respected and well-connected Portuguese immigrants in Washington's political circles, with many illustrious friends in the Democratic Party. In 1934, he married Delabarre's daughter. For more, see Fernandes, "Of Outcasts," 301–45.

47 Letters from Abílio Águas to Gordon M. Owen, OCHS; Abílio Águas to Walter Hackett, *Christian Science Monitor*, August 26, 1969, OCHS; A. Águas to Eduardo Covas, Committee Pro-Democracy, May 17, 1961, CD25A.

48 *Diário de Notícias*, November 18, 1963, 4 (m.t.), DN-UMASS.

49 This visit followed Minister Eduardo A. Oliveira's agreement to send an architect from Portugal to devise plans for a museum dedicated to the Dighton Rock and the Portuguese explorations, as requested by Silva. A. Águas to E. Covas, May 16, 1964, CD25A.

United States. Now that the relic had received formal approbation from American authorities, it was safe for Lisbon to throw its full support behind the campaign to preserve the rock. This volte-face was confirmed in 1968, when the Portuguese government awarded Silva with an honorary medal for his services in the expansion of Portuguese culture, history, and values. Silva's theories on the pre-*Mayflower* Portuguese settlement of America were granted further credence by reputed publications such as the *Christian Science Monitor*, which divulged his findings in 1969.⁵⁰ This was not without controversy, as Águas wrote the author of the article alerting him to Silva's unscientific ways and rich imagination and argued that the latter "persevered, apparently on the theory that persistent repetition will garner for his theory the credibility and publicity which articles such as yours implicitly endorse."⁵¹

The Portuguese "Discovery" of California

On the West Coast, another Portuguese American heritage campaign centered around the navigator João Rodrigues Cabrilho—or Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo in Spanish, as he is best known in the United States—who landed on San Diego Bay on September 28, 1542. Although generally accepted today as being Portuguese born, the popular assumption until the 1930s had been that Cabrillo was Spanish, since he was at the service of Castile when he "discovered" California. Not many records of Cabrillo's voyage survived, but we know he was based in what became Guatemala when New Spain's viceroy tasked the former *conquistador*-turned-shipbuilder and trader with leading an expedition up the Pacific coast of North America. At San Miguel Bay (later San Diego), Cabrillo was greeted by a group of natives (likely Chumash or Kumeyaay). After this, his fleet continued to explore and name other landmarks along the coast. In November, while mooring at Santa Catalina Island for the winter, Cabrillo's men engaged in a series of battles with local natives. During one such attack, Cabrillo splintered his shin as he jumped ashore from his boat and later developed a deadly infection; he would die on January 3, 1543. Known to be buried somewhere on the coast, Cabrillo's gravesite remains a mystery.⁵²

California and San Diego, in particular, have embraced Cabrillo as their patron European "discoverer." His name identifies schools, streets, freeways, bridges, and other public spaces across the state. Much of this recognition resulted from the memorialization efforts of the Cabrillo Civic Clubs, a network of Portuguese American organizations dedicated to assisting in the integration of fellow newcomers and elevating their group's profile in California. The first of these clubs was

⁵⁰ Walter Hackett, "Were Portuguese the first white settlers in New England?" *The Christian Science Monitor*, August 20, 1969, 17.

⁵¹ A. Águas to W. Hackett, August 26, 1969.

⁵² "Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo," National Park Service website, <http://www.nps.gov/cabr/learn/historyculture/juan-rodriguez-cabrillo.htm>.



Cabrillo National Monument, Point Loma, San Diego, California, July 6, 2008. Photo by Kanan H. Jani. (Wikimedia Commons.)

founded in San Francisco in 1934. By the mid-1960s, the network had sixteen branches and close to three thousand members.⁵³ In response to their appeals, the state legislature introduced Cabrillo Day in 1935, celebrated every year since on September 28. The Cabrillo clubs were also behind the inauguration of the Cabrillo National Monument in 1942 (originally proclaimed by Woodrow Wilson in 1913), after they convinced the Lisbon government to donate a statue of the navigator commissioned for the 1939 World's Fair in New York. The statue stands atop a cliff on Point Loma, overlooking the San Diego Bay. The prominent *padrão* (place marker with the Portuguese coat of arms) emerging behind Cabrillo emphatically conveys his ancestry, thus claiming his exploits for Portugal, provided that the public recognizes its meaning.⁵⁴ The statue's configuration suggests a strong, devoted, and inquisitive man, eager to step forward into the unknown, seemingly more interested in science than in war. Missing from any of this imagery is the fact that Cabrillo was in the service of the Spanish Crown, as was, of course, Columbus.

⁵³ Consul V. Pereira to Minister M. Mathias, Lisbon, May 17, 1961, PEA M307, HDA.

⁵⁴ The *padrão* is a tall stone post with a Portuguese coat of arms and a cross on top. Explorers placed these markers in the lands they "discovered" as a way of claiming them for the Portuguese.

The Portuguese American communities of California were especially appealing to the *Estado Novo*, given their large size, affluence, and political clout in what was quickly becoming one of the most powerful regions in the world. Attesting to this interest were the many visits to California by homeland government and Catholic Church officials, who joined forces to ward off the emigrants' cultural and religious assimilation into American Protestant society.⁵⁵ Such was the importance attributed to these communities that the much-solicited Ambassador Vasco Garin travelled to San Diego three times during his four-year tenure in Washington. Believing this relationship could bring significant political benefits, the consul in San Francisco and the *Secretaria Nacional de Informação*, the regime's propaganda agency, coordinated two visits to Lisbon by Cabrillo Club delegations in 1958 and 1961, where they were received by the homeland's highest dignitaries, including President Américo Thomaz and the dictator Salazar himself. The visitors requested permission to hold a special Cabrillo club assembly and press conference in the sumptuous Foz Palace (the *Secretaria's* headquarters) located in the heart of the nation's capital. As the consul noted, "the session had an undeniable symbolic value since it was the first time a Luso-American Organization held [a meeting] in Portuguese territory."⁵⁶

San Diego's Portuguese Americans wove themselves further into their city's identity with the Cabrillo Festival. Founded by the San Diego Junior Chamber of Commerce in 1964, the festival, still held every September, came under the purview of a group of Portuguese American associations and businesses the following year, when it assumed a more multicultural character. Besides the "discovery" of San Diego, the annual event celebrates the city's ethnic diversity, in particular the contributions made by Portuguese immigrants, beginning with Cabrillo. One of the festival's highlights is a theatrical reenactment of Cabrillo's landing, in which actors representing the explorer, a Catholic priest, and a group of soldiers row onto the shores of the bay and stake a Castilian flag on the beach.⁵⁷

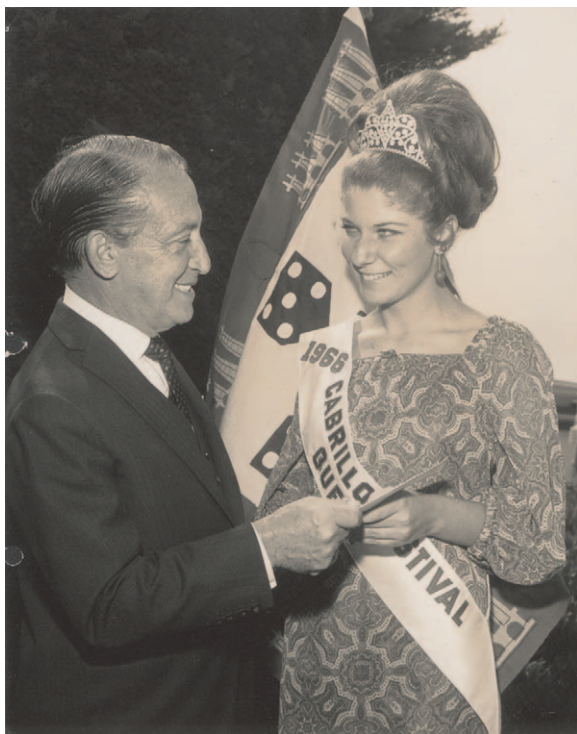
Every year, Portuguese *ranchos* (folk dance troupes) liven these celebrations with the "flair and magic of Old World customs." Curiously, in the 1960s, they shared the stage with "Lakota Indian Dancers," a Sioux people of the Great Plains with little connection to California, who were meant to represent the "traditions discovered by explorers in the New World." This friendly cameo by Native Americans in the Portuguese American festival corresponded with the narrative promoted in the memorialization of Cabrillo's landing in California. In brochures and other

Crown, much like the modern-day flag planting. Today the *padrão* is one of the most recognizable symbols of Portugal's presence around the world and a recurrent element in its monuments.

⁵⁵ Fernandes, "Of Outcasts," 127–67.

⁵⁶ Consul V. Pereira to Minister M. Matias, April 17, 1961 (m.t.), PEA M307, HDA.

⁵⁷ This type of memory-making theatrical reenactment was common in California. For instance, the Ramona Pageant, inspired by Helen Hunt Jackson's popular 1884 romance novel *Ramona*, is the longest-running outdoor play in American history, dating back to 1923. For more, see Phoebe S. Kropp, *California Vieja: Culture and Memory in a Modern American Place* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).



Portuguese consul Joseph Sigal awards a trip to Portugal to Jeanette Correia, “Miss Cabrilho Queen” 1966. Photo published in the *San Diego Tribune*, September 29, 1966. PEA M334, Historical-Diplomatic Archive of the Portuguese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Lisbon, Portugal. (Used with permission.)

publications, the emphasis has always been placed on Cabrillo’s initial cordial encounter with the Chumash/Kumeyaay natives at San Diego Bay, and the later skirmishes leading to his death (described simply as an accident) are rarely mentioned. One coloring book even referred to Cabrillo as “a brave soldier” who had “fought the Aztec Indians to bring peace to Mexico.”⁵⁸ Also noteworthy has been the absence of Native American protests against the celebration of this European *conquistador*, unlike those that have marked Columbus Day since the 1990s.⁵⁹

Another regular feature of the festival is a beauty pageant for young Portuguese American women, who compete for the title of Miss Cabrillo Queen, likely inspired by San Francisco’s own Columbus Day “Queen Isabella,” introduced in the 1920s. The prize for the winner and her chaperone (usually the girl’s mother) was a trip to Portugal’s mainland, paid for by the Lisbon government. In the 1960s and ’70s the regime’s propagandists took advantage of these visits to arrange photo opportunities with government officials, including dictator Caetano, where the older statesmen were seen charming the attractive debutants. These young women were also put on display for the American public, as was the case during San Diego’s bicentennial anniversary in 1969, when the *Estado Novo*’s tourism information bureau in New York (*Casa de Portugal*) organized a showcase of Portuguese

⁵⁸ 1966 Cabrillo Festival pamphlet, PEA M334, HDA; Lionel Bienvenu and Harold Casey, *Cabrillo Color Book* (San Diego: Cabrillo Historical Association, 1964), PEA M405, HDA.

⁵⁹ Jacobson, *Roots Too*, 337–41.

exports in which the smiling “queens” posed alongside corks, canned fish, wines, cheeses, and other consumer products.

The *Estado Novo*’s involvement in the Cabrillo celebrations expanded as their popularity grew, sometimes sending high-ranking navy officials and ships to participate in the festivities. In these and other community celebrations, the agendas of ethnic leaders, American politicians, and Portuguese diplomats intersected in a relationship of convenience motivated by mutual self-interest. Political differences were momentarily set aside, as all reaped benefits from participating in such events. For community leaders, to be seen mingling with state dignitaries elevated their elite status and reputation as brokers. For the American politicians, it was important to be seen supporting a potentially useful ethnic constituency in their increasingly multicultural polities. And for Portuguese diplomats, these festivals were excellent opportunities to meet with influential people in less formal and more candid settings, survey the mood in their government agencies with respect to Portuguese interests, and try to win their favor.

As was the case in New England, local politicians in California enjoyed the opportunity provided by these international celebrations to represent their nation and often got carried away in their diplomatic exultations. For instance, during a Cabrillo event in 1959, the mayor of Oakland praised Prince Henry the Navigator for having spread happiness and prosperity in the world “in the Portuguese fashion,” that is, without seeking to dominate “by terror—fear or threat; but rather by kindness—affection—respect and friendliness.”⁶⁰ Such slanted revision of Portugal’s colonialist history certainly pleased Lisbon’s diplomats, although it may have also raised a few eyebrows for its emasculating interpretation of Lusotropicalism.

Portuguese officials speaking at these events warped the historical significance of Cabrillo’s explorations in accordance to the regime’s Cold War message. In a speech delivered at Sacramento’s Cabrillo Day festivities in 1964, Ambassador Garin reminded the audience that, since “Russia’s expansionist and sinister designs were later witnessed . . . in Alaska instead of California’s shores, one can say that we owe to Cabrilho the securing of California for the Western World . . . and that with his superhuman exploit he came to serve well the future cause of free men.” Garin added that the Portuguese empire was defined by a deep respect for “human dignity and social justice and for equal rights for all, regardless of race, creed or colour,” and was “a fountain of inspiration for many of those countries who criticize us and who are looking for solutions for some of the problems that beset them.” This indirect reference to America’s racial tensions certainly did not go unnoticed by the crowd who had seen the landmark Civil Rights Act introduced just a few months before.⁶¹

The California government indirectly endorsed the *Estado Novo*’s imperial administration by appointing the former governor of Portuguese Guinea and

60 *O Jornal Português*, April 17, 1959 (m.t.), PEA M183, HDA.

61 Ambassador Vasco Garin to Minister F. Nogueira, Lisbon, September 18, 1964, PEA M609-A, HDA.

Mozambique, and former minister of the colonies, Admiral Sarmento Rodrigues, as the 1970 Cabrillo Festival's commissioner general. The legislature also claimed that California's prominent position in the United States was "attributable in great measure to the strength and continuing contributions of Californians from many foreign lands. . . . The oldest and most significant of these contributions [being] those of the Portuguese people and their great nation."⁶² To mark the state's bicentennial anniversary, Lisbon sent two navy frigates to be part of a commemorative flotilla of ships from around the world. Governor Ronald Reagan expressed his appreciation for Portugal's contribution, adding, "While men around the world are searching for a common ground of understanding and purpose, I am pleased that our mutual interest in the explorer Juan Rodrigues Cabrillo is providing the opportunity for an exchange of dialogue and ideas in the name of friendship."⁶³ Portuguese authorities were all too happy to maintain an open dialogue with such powerful American politicians, especially when they shared the *Estado Novo's* views on colonialism, as was the case with Reagan.⁶⁴

Postimperial Epilogue

Much to the chagrin of his critics, Manuel L. da Silva's theories not only persevered but also thrived after the fall of the Portuguese empire. A decade after the state park's inauguration, the government of Massachusetts built a small pavilion to house the boulder, now encased in a large glass display. In 1974, the state turned that structure into the Dighton Rock Museum and placed its stewardship in the hands of Silva, who dedicated it to celebrating Portugal's maritime explorations. Meanwhile, he continued to claim other sites in Rhode Island as evidence of early Portuguese settlement in the region, including Fort Ninigret in Charlestown and the Newport Tower.

Like other immigrants proud of their "rags-to-riches" stories, Silva sought recognition in his homeland for his achievements abroad, and he got it. In 1977, Anthony Marques, a fellow immigrant who had amassed considerable wealth in the construction industry in Newark, New Jersey, built the "Rock of Dighton" hotel near Vale de Cambra, Silva's hometown. In 1983, almost half a century after a similar proposal was rejected by municipal officials, a replica of the controversial rock was unveiled outside the Maritime Museum of Lisbon, in Belém, where all the major national monuments to the explorations are located—a "sacrosanct site" in Silva's eyes. The amateur archaeologist delivered the keynote speech at its unveiling, attended by the mayor of Lisbon and some of the traditional stewards of

62 California legislature, Resolution 62, relative to the Cabrillo Festival, February 24, 1969, PEA M334, HDA.

63 Governor Ronald Reagan to Admiral Sarmento Rodrigues, May 27, 1970, PEA M334, HDA.

64 In 1968, Governor Reagan confided to Ambassador Garin that he thought it "inexplicable that anyone could consider Angola a colony, where [the Portuguese have been] for over 500 years" (cited in letter from Ambassador V. Garin to Minister Nogueira, January 5, 1968, PEA M425, HDA).



The Dighton Rock Museum, Dighton Rock State Park, Berkley, Massachusetts. Photo by Marchela, March 6, 2010. (Wikimedia Commons.)

Portugal's memory of the "discoveries." Five more replicas have been unveiled in Portugal since then, four of them after 2001.⁶⁵

That year, Vale de Cambra opened the Dr. Manuel Luciano da Silva Association Library and Museum, the most modern building in that rural city. Popular attractions in its programming were the free medical consultations that Silva offered through web conference from his home in Bristol, which were particularly welcomed among the city's lower-income residents. Such was the success of these virtual medical sessions that a popular morning show on one of Portugal's most watched television stations included them as a regular feature in its live programming. Besides giving medical advice, the transnational doctor marketed his trademark remedies, some of them with quirky patriotic names, such as the "Portuguese flag diet."⁶⁶

Another significant tribute to Silva and his lifework came in 2007 from Manoel de Oliveira, one of Portugal's most acclaimed filmmakers, who loosely based his film *Christopher Columbus, The Enigma* on the doctor and his wife's journey to prove that Columbus was Portuguese. Paradoxically, Silva had previously criticized Italian Americans for memorializing Columbus as America's "discoverer," arguing

⁶⁵ "Museus Irmãos," Manuel L. da Silva, <http://www.dightonrock.com/museusirmaos.htm>.

⁶⁶ Video clip, "Querida Júlia," broadcast on December 15, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LpuPJVmnZok>.



Replica of the Dighton Rock's face outside the Maritime Museum of Lisbon, July 24, 2011. Photo by Carlos Luis M. C. da Cruz. (Wikimedia Commons.)

that the navigator had never set foot on what became the United States and that the only reason why his voyage was celebrated there was because of Italian American's political leverage. Silva received other accolades in recent years, including an induction into the Rhode Island Heritage Hall of Fame in 2010 and an Order of Merit medal from the Portuguese government in 2011.

Some in the Portuguese American community dared resist the widespread praise for the idiosyncratic man who was now admired on both sides of the Atlantic as an influential historian, civic leader, and philanthropist. Brown University professor Onésimo T. Almeida, himself a popular Azorean public intellectual, is one such critic. As a board member of a prominent Portuguese American organization, Almeida fought against awarding an honorary title to Silva by that body, arguing that the amateur archaeologist had no credibility, was aggressive in his handling of criticism, and was disdained by professional scholars everywhere. For Almeida, honoring Silva would be "applauding obscurantism, fanaticism, blind nationalism as well as lending support to those who readily associate those and lots of other unsavory traits with the word 'Portuguese' in the United States."⁶⁷ To once again be dismissed by an Ivy League professor surely evoked bad memories for Silva, who unleashed a foul public campaign against Almeida. However, this time he was reassured by the many accolades and the public admiration he had craved all his life, and by a diasporic audience that wallowed in postimperial nostalgia.

67 "My Enemy Number One!" Manuel L. da Silva, <http://www.dightonrock.com/myenemy/numberone.htm>.

By the time he died in October 2012, Silva had achieved his dream of rescuing the Dighton Rock and elevating the memory of Miguel Corte-Real in Portugal and the United States. Fittingly, Silva's friends and supporters have committed to memorializing the man, with efforts currently underway to name a street near his hometown after him and place his bust on Bristol's Mosaico Park.⁶⁸

Conclusion

Before Ellis Island displaced Plymouth Rock as the pivotal stepping-stone of white America, Portuguese American elites had already replaced it with the Dighton Rock in their own foundational mythology of North America. Their filiopiestic memorialization efforts predated the white ethnic revivalism of the post-civil rights era and the immigration memory "industry" that followed. Their heritage campaigns were also infused with politics and ideology. This should be of little surprise to public historians, who usually take into account the political implications of competing historical narratives and representations of the past.⁶⁹ What has been less emphasized in public history scholarship is the extent to which this political dimension can be transnational, especially when it involves diasporic communities. This transnational dimension can also introduce complex international political dynamics, which elevate the stakes of what may seem to average Americans to be small, parochial, and peripheral affairs of marginal ethnic minorities. In fact, if not for the promise of diplomatic and military pageantry provided by the Portuguese government, one of Europe's oldest nations and a NATO ally, the leaders of this otherwise humble immigrant community would hardly have been able to lure governors, senators, state representatives, admirals, and other American dignitaries to their heritage events.

Political and heritage ventures are often the domain of elites. Indeed, Portuguese American leaders, the vast majority of them middle- and upper-class men, had the most to say about their group's identity. As businessmen and professionals catering to the ethnic market, they also had the most to gain from reinforcing their shared cultural heritage. Despite espousing different and sometimes contradictory interests, these ethnic leaders converged with host and homeland officials in their use of the past as a mobilizing force and of public memory as a space for assigning and substantiating power.

Although they sought to improve their ethnic status within the limited latitude conceded by white American society, these heritage advocates did not seek to erase the cultural borders separating non-European ethnics from the nation's center of

68 *Correio de Azemeis*, November 6, 2012; *O Jornal*, April 4, 2014.

69 See for instance Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997); James Green, *Taking History to Heart: The Power of the Past in Building Social Movements* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000); Edward T. Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); Ian McKay and Jamie Swift, *Warrior Nation: Rebranding Canada in an Age of Anxiety* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2012).

power. Instead, they stretched them just enough to make room for themselves as “indigenous others,” as Anne-Marie Fortier termed it. In order for their aspired insider status to count for something, others had to remain outsiders. In this Eurocentric narrative of North America’s “discovery,” Native Americans were, by default, the contrasting others. Their remembering of the “heroic” deeds of Portuguese explorers as harbingers of European civilization to the New World continued the longstanding hegemonic process of forgetting the violent history of indigenous dispossession by white settlers. By relying on the narratorial subjugation of indigenous peoples and other subjects of colonialism, such as the “savage” Africans of Portugal’s imperial propaganda, Portuguese American elites were involved in a less violent but still exclusionary project similar to that of other European immigrant groups, who managed to “become American” by reinforcing racial distinctions and asserting their own “whiteness” as a condition for full citizenship.

The Portuguese case offers clear examples of how racial identities are historically constructed and deeply contextual. The ethnic elites’ patriotic embrace of their homeland’s glorious history in New England and California contrasted with the “Portuguese” of North Carolina’s abhorrence of that racial label and its supposed heritage. The promotion of a Portuguese American founding mythology of North America in the context of these states’ emerging ethnic politics worked to legitimize the groups’ historical and cultural whiteness. At the same time, the visible “whiteness” of Gaston’s “Portuguese” was tainted by local historical hearsay, which was enough to justify their segregation. The racial “backwardness” of the American South further vindicated the heritage campaigns of Portuguese Americans in the “advanced” North, since it allowed them to rise above their host nation’s racial divide and preach their homeland’s Lusotropicalist principles of racial pluralism. At the same time, Portuguese intellectuals were quick to dismiss the supposed ancestry of Gaston’s “unfortunate people” and demand that American officials stop misusing their national identity to describe these poor, illiterate, isolated, rural, mixed-race, and somehow assimilated families whose association with their much-vaunted pro-miscegenation and versatile Portugueseness they deemed insulting.

The ethnic heritage campaigns of Portuguese Americans seem to confirm Fortier’s argument that “memory, rather than territory, are the principle grounds of identity formation.”⁷⁰ Still, the distinction between memory, territory, and identity is not always as clear as Fortier seems to suggest. The same imperialist mantras of Portugal’s seafaring past, deployed by Portuguese Americans to recast the cultural borders of their host nation, were hard at work reinforcing the political borders of Portugal’s colonial territories. After rejecting the racist violence of its former empire, it became easier for the postrevolutionary nation to engage in a seemingly apolitical but also less critical postimperial nostalgia. However, as various anthropologists have noted, Portugal’s deterritorialized “global nation” discourse has perpetuated racial-, gender-, and class-based inequalities in the

70 Fortier, “Bringing It All (Back) Home,” 34

Lusophone world.⁷¹ Furthermore, as evinced in the Azorean dirt deposited on the base of the Dighton Rock, in the Cabrillo clubs' desire to convene in Lisbon, or in Silva's Dighton Rock replicas sent to Portugal, to stand on homeland soil had important symbolic power towards validating expatriate identities as full members of Portugal's diasporic nation. An interesting permutation of this necessity to root public memory was the sending of American soil to Portugal by those claiming the Taunton River's shore as the first chapter in the Portuguese American story. As these examples show, the roles played by memory and territory in the formation of diasporic identities are not necessarily hierarchical or mutually exclusive; they can be codependent.

The formation of diasporic identities is a messy process, full of juxtapositions, contradictions, and situational strategies. The memorialization efforts of Portuguese Americans were paradoxical. They were equally nationalist and transnationalist, simultaneously challenging and reproducing hegemonic discourses of nationhood while pursuing inclusion in both home and host nations through the celebration of a shared Western imperialist heritage. Although this reflects the complexity of hybrid identities, as described by postcolonial scholars such as Homi Bhabha, the Eurocentric narrative of the Portuguese American heritage advocates discussed in this article sought to perfect, rather than displace, the national and imperial histories that constitute both home and host lands. Though often seen as benign and empowering, hybrid diasporic identities contain within them constructed "ancestral" memories that may embrace and perpetuate asymmetrical power relations. As this article demonstrates, the study of ethnic heritage and transnational public history can help us reveal those relationships.

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⁷¹ See, for instance, Feldman-Bianco, "Multiple Layers."