

New England

Lusophone migrants – predominantly from the mid-Atlantic archipelago of the Azores, along with those from Cape Verde and Madeira – have been settling in New England in significant numbers since the late 1800s. Mainstays on the crews of whalers, the Portuguese abandoned the ocean for lives as farmers upon landing in America. (It is no accident that the largest Azorean and Cape Verdean migrant communities in New England have either currently and/or historically been located in America's great whaling cities, such as New Bedford.) Although most contemporary studies of Portuguese migration in the United States tend to highlight the urban migrant populations (usually working in textile and other factories), the Portuguese also dominated certain mid twentieth century agricultural activity on both coasts. Although many still toil in factories and industrialized work, in New England, older and contemporary migrants from the Azores, Madeira, continental Portugal and Cape Verde and their descendents, along with newer arrivals from Brazil, currently predominantly hold positions in construction and the service industry, as subsequent generational demographic changes in life conditions take place.

The history of Lusophone migration to the US is understood as a narrative of economic, political and natural-disaster-escaping refugees; unravelling the complexity of ethnic group formation among this group of 'Portuguese' and related social processes as they have evolved over the twentieth century, however, is a fascinating exercise in understanding overlapping contextual and instrumental identities. Foremost, although they are termed 'Portuguese', only a relatively small percentage of the migrants in the United States come from continental Portugal: most have as their point of origin the mid-Atlantic Azores islands. Constructions of Portuguese identity in both the islands and among the contemporary migrant communities have historically been shaped in part by economic and political disputes among various factions in the Azores and continental Portugal over the 500 years since the islands' population. This intensified at various points over the past 30-plus years with the independence movements in the African colonies having a counterpart in the Azores and has continued, given the Azores unique autonomous political status, which provides

the islands with political and economic autonomy, their own President and parliament, yet simultaneously has them enveloped through law, national status and discourses of cultural belonging within the Portuguese nation. The process is mirrored in Madeira, and although the situation is somewhat more complex in Cape Verde, given its political status as an independent nation, for migrant Cape Verdeans who maintain Portuguese passports, the situation is also similar.

Migration has been a key structural element of economic and political adaptation in both the sending and receiving communities of the majority population island Portuguese, as well as among the pockets of continental Portuguese migrants. TO be certain there is a relation among these migrants independent of geographic origin coming together as they all do within the North American concept of "Portuguese".

One school of study of the Portuguese experience in North America has ben to examine the concrete and discursive links among these migrants that continue to affectively link them to a homeland that can be as close as a skype conversation or that mornings catch, flown in on the five hour plane ride, or as far as several generations removed.