



**SOCIEDADE
CRISE E RECONFIGURAÇÕES**

VII CONGRESSO PORTUGUÊS DE SOCIOLOGIA

19 a 22 Junho 2012

Universidade do Porto - Faculdade de Letras - Faculdade de Psicologia e Ciências da Educação

ÁREA TEMÁTICA: MIGRAÇÕES, ETNICIDADE E RACISMO

**THE INCORPORATION OF PORTUGUESE AMERICANS INTO THE POLITICAL SYSTEM OF RHODE ISLAND:
AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW**

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Resumo

Este estudo analisa a incorporação política de luso-americanos, particularmente da cidade de East Providence, na Assembleia Geral do estado de Rhode Island, nos Estados Unidos. Enquanto alguns relatos jornalísticos e acadêmicos têm caracterizado esta população como sendo apolítica, uns poucos estudos acadêmicos têm demonstrado que na presença de certas condições estruturais, os luso-americanos têm atingido níveis elevados de incorporação política nos Estados Unidos e no Canadá. Neste estudo, concluímos que factores estruturais, incluindo a existência de um sistema eleitoral bipartidário competitivo em Rhode Island, o envolvimento dos portugueses no movimento sindical, a presença de organizações comunitárias fortes e a concentração populacional, criaram um ambiente conducente a altos níveis de incorporação política de luso-americanos na cidade de East Providence. Membros deste grupo étnico começaram a ser eleitos para a Assembleia Geral do estado em 1941, tendo mantido em mãos luso-americanas o mesmo assento poderoso no Senado desde 1959. Numa cidade como New Bedford, no estado vizinho de Massachusetts, que adoptou um esquema eleitoral não-partidário em 1938, condições propícias à incorporação política dos luso-americanos não surgiram e, como resultado, esse grupo populacional continua sub-representado por co-étnicos em posições de poder político.

Abstract

This study examines the political incorporation of Luso-Americans, particularly from the city of East Providence, into the General Assembly of the state of Rhode Island in the United States. While some journalistic and academic accounts have portrayed this population as apolitical, a few academic studies have shown that under certain structural conditions, Luso-Americans have attained high levels of political integration in the United States and Canada. In this study, we conclude that structural factors, including the existence of a competitive bipartisan electoral system in Rhode Island, the involvement of the Portuguese in the labor movement, the presence of strong community organizations, and population concentration, created an environment conducive to high levels of political incorporation of Portuguese Americans in the city of East Providence. Members of this ethnic group began to be elected to the state's General Assembly in 1941 and have held the same powerful senate seat since 1959. In a city such as New Bedford, in the neighboring state of Massachusetts, which adopted a nonpartisan electoral scheme in 1938, conditions conducive to political incorporation of the Portuguese did not emerged, and, as a result, this population group remained underrepresented by co-ethnics in elected political office.

Palavras-chave: incorporação política de imigrantes; luso-americanos na política; luso-americanos em Rhode Island.
Keywords: immigrant political incorporation; Luso-Americans in politics; Luso-Americans in Rhode Island.

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THE INCORPORATION OF PORTUGUESE AMERICANS INTO THE POLITICAL SYSTEM OF RHODE ISLAND: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

1. INTRODUCTIONⁱ

There are few academic studies on Portuguese American political participation in the United States. Journalistic and some academic accounts have portrayed this population as not being politically inclined.ⁱⁱ Some studies, however, have shown that in some cities and under specific structural conditions the Portuguese have attained considerable levels of political incorporation into the political systems of the United States and Canada (cf. Barrow & Borges, 2005; Bloemraad, 2009; Cornwell, 1980; and Marinho, 2002). Recent studies conducted within the context of the Portuguese American Citizenship Project have also shown that once the Portuguese are registered to vote, they vote at higher rates than other ethnic groups, (apud: <http://www.portugueseamerican.org/>). In this paper, informed by insights derived from existing studies of immigrant political incorporation into American society, we analyze the historical, structural factors that have led to an unusually high level of political incorporation of Portuguese Americans into the Rhode Island General Assembly, and predominantly from the city of East Providence. Personal interviews and archival sources, including the annual Rhode Island Manual, published by the RI Secretary of State, provided the data utilized in this study.

Among the structural conditions examined in this paper are the structure of political systems and political parties as well as labor unions and their impact on the incorporation of new immigrants. The role of community organizations as training grounds for leadership and as spaces where immigrant communities can come together to engage in collective action is also examined. We argue that a favorable conjuncture of these phenomena, along with population concentration in small electoral districts, led to a high degree of incorporation of Portuguese Americans in the state of Rhode Island and particularly the city of East Providence. In other areas of high Portuguese American concentration, such as the city of New Bedford, in Massachusetts, where similarly favorable structural conditions did not emerge, the Portuguese remained underrepresented in positions of power (cf. Barrow & Borges, 2005).

2. THE INCORPORATION OF PORTUGUESE AMERICANS IN THE RHODE ISLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Senator Claiborne Pell once said that the Portuguese community was a sleeping political giant. Well, the giant has awakened! The President of the Senate, the Senate Chair of Finance and the House Chair of Finance are of Portuguese descent. There are ten elected officials in the Rhode Island General Assembly who are of Portuguese origin and the Speaker of the House has roots in Cape Verde.

(Excerpt from a speech made by Senate President, attorney Teresa Paiva-Weed from Newport at the Day of Portugal Celebrations, 2011, RI State House).

Today the Portuguese control the most powerful positions in the Rhode Island General Assembly, but their incorporation into the political system of the state is not a recent phenomenon. Through our examination of the official annual publications of the RI Secretary of State, the Rhode Island Manual, we have been able to ascertain that the Portuguese began to be elected to Rhode Island's State Assembly in 1937, holding multiple seats continuously since then (see Chart 1). We have been able to identify 58 people of Portuguese ancestry, 6 with Cape Verdean roots, and 1 Brazilian who have held elected office in the state General Assembly since 1937 (some as representatives, others as senators, and still others as both).ⁱⁱⁱ

Since 1941, there have been 20 Portuguese American senators in Rhode Island's General Assembly (see Tables 1 and 3). The Portuguese have also been able to win three statewide elections: Barbara M. Leonard,

although she did not acknowledge her heritage, was elected Secretary of State (1993-1995); Paul Tavares, in addition to serving as senator from East Providence, (1993-1998), was also elected to the office of General Treasurer, (1999 to 2007); and A. Ralph Mollis, former Mayor of North Providence, has been serving as Secretary of State since 2007.

Presently, with three senators and eight representatives, Luso-Americans, including those of Portuguese and Cape Verdean descent, hold close to 10 percent of Rhode Island's General Assembly seats, while together, according to Census data, they constitute just over 11 percent of the state's population (Portuguese close to 10 percent and Cape Verdeans around 1.5 percent). In some years, representation by Portuguese elected officials exceeded the Portuguese proportion of the population (see Chart 1). For example, in 2008, with four senators and ten representatives, 12.4 percent of the General Assembly seats were held by people of Portuguese or Cape Verdean descent.

Over time, people of Portuguese descent have also attained political leadership as mayors, city council and school committee members, among other positions in areas of Portuguese spatial concentration in the state of Rhode Island. They have also served as members of numerous state and municipal boards and commissions. The current chairman of the RI State Democratic Party (former Representative Edwin Pacheco) and high-profile leaders in the labor movement are also of Portuguese origins. Portuguese Americans have additionally achieved some incorporation into public administration positions, such as Director of Labor and Training and Administrator of the Workers' Compensation Court. Some moved on to the judicial system such as former Senator Gilbert Rocha as Family Court Justice, former Middletown Representative Arthur A. Carrellas as Associate Justice of the Superior Court, former East Providence Representative Antonio SaoBento as Associate Justice of the District Court, and former East Greenwich Representative Ernest C. Torres as a federal justice for the U.S. District Court in Rhode Island. This year, on May 15, 2012, Governor Lincoln D. Chafee nominated Luis Matos, who emigrated at a young age from Portugal, for a Judgeship on Rhode Island's Superior Court.

Portuguese American representation from East Providence, with 6 senators and 18 representatives (3 Cape Verdean) since 1941, and with control of the same powerful senate seat since 1959, has far outpaced the participation from other areas of Rhode Island (see Tables 1 and 2)^{iv}. Such a high level of political incorporation of Luso-Americans in local offices and in a state assembly begs the question: How did this level of political success come to be and what were the conditions that supported it?

Chart 1. Percentage of Members of Rhode Island's Legislative Assembly who are of Luso Descent



Table 1. Senators from East Providence

<i>Name</i>	<i>Party</i>	<i>Date in Office</i>	<i>Occupation</i>
Gilbert Rocha	Democrat	1959-1966	Attorney
William Castro	Democrat	1967-1983	Terminal Manager, Bonanza Bus Lines
John F. Correia <i>Born in Azores</i>	Democrat	1983-1992	Plumber
Paul J. Tavares	Democrat	1993-1998, General Treasurer, 1999-07	Banker
Paul E. Moura	Democrat	2007-2008 Senate 1985-2006 House	Health Safety Fund Representative, Laborers' International Union of No. America
Daniel DaPonte	Democrat	1999-present	Investment Consulting

Table 2. Representatives from East Providence*

<i>Name</i>	<i>Party</i>	<i>Date in Office</i>	<i>Occupation</i>
Frank Maciel, <i>Born in Portugal</i>	Republican	1941 -1944	Grocer
Anthony S. Lamb, Jr.	Democrat	1941-1942	Trucking
Julio F. Rocha, <i>Born in Madeira</i>	Democrat	1945-1956	Supplyman, Union leader
John L. Lewis	Democrat	1949-1956	Highway Surveyor, Union leader, Campaign manager for US Sen. Claiborne Pell (RI-D)
Joseph Perry, Jr.	Democrat	1957-1966	Funeral Director
Augusto W. São Bento	Democrat	1957-1966	Attorney
Peter J. Coelho <i>Cape Verdean</i>	Democrat	1967-1978	Executive Director of Homes for Hope Foundation
Alfred Travers, Jr. <i>Providence/EP**</i>	Democrat	1967-1978 (Rep. since 1961)	Industrial Engineer
Antonio São Bento, Jr.	Democrat	1977-1986	Attorney
Joseph M. Lima <i>Providence/ EP**</i>	Democrat	1979-1984 (Rep. since 1977)	General Foreman, Davol Inc.
George S.Lima <i>Cape Verdean</i>	Democrat	1985-1988	NAACP President in RI, Public Programs Director
Edmund S. Pereira	Democrat	1987-1992	Insurance agent (retired)
Maria J. Lopes <i>Cape Verdean</i>	Democrat	1989-2000	Consultant
Raymond C. Coelho	Democrat	1993-2000	Construction Co.
Henry C. Rose	Democrat	1993-2008	Retail Furniture Dealer
Helio Melo <i>Born in Azores</i>	Democrat	2005-present	Training Manager, The Jan Companies
Roberto Da Silva	Democrat	2009-present	Police Officer

*Officials who served as both representatives and senators are listed only in the Tables pertaining to Senators.

**In 1967, redistricting resulted in East Providence districts increasing from 4 to 5 ½ districts. Providence House District #1 became District #2, which included part of Providence and part of East Providence. The State Legislature, subsequent to reforms implemented following census 2000, was reduced in size from 50 to 38 senators and from 100 to 75 representatives, further affecting district boundaries.

Table 3. Senators from other areas of Rhode Island

<i>Name/City</i>	<i>District</i>	<i>Party</i>	<i>Date in Office</i>	<i>Occupation</i>
Leonard Sylvia <i>Father from Azores</i>	Little Compton	Republican	1937-1940 House, 1941-1958 Senate	Carpenter, Steam Engineer

Frank Almeida	Portsmouth	Republican	1951-1952 House, 1953-1960 Senate	Dairy Farmer
Antonio DaPonte <i>Born in Azores</i>	Bristol	Republican	1955-1956	Furniture Business
Francis R. Costa	Jamestown	Democrat	1963-1966	Golf Course Owner
Joseph J. Chaves	Middletown	Democrat	1967-1983	Plumbing and Heating Business
Thomas J. DaPonte	Bristol	Republican	1973-1974	Retail Furniture
George C. Lima	Bristol Bristol/Warren	Democrat	1957-1960 House, 1975-1983 Senate	Funeral Director
Richard Manuel Alegria	Bristol	Democrat	1983-1992	General Contractor
William Enos	Tiverton	Democrat	1987-2002 Senate, 2003-2004 House	Service Station Owner
Helen M. Mathieu	Portsmouth	Democrat	1987-1996	Senior Software Engineer, Raytheon Corp.
Stephen D. Alves	West Warwick	Democrat	1990-1992, 1995-2002	Stock Broker
M. Teresa Paiva Weed	Newport	Democrat	1993-present, Senate President	Attorney
W. Michael Sullivan	South Kingstown	Republican	1993-1997	Professor, Appointed To Governor's Cabinet
Bethany Moura	Cumberland/ Lincoln	Republican	2011-present	Real Estate Agent

Table 4. Representatives from other areas of Rhode Island

Name/City	District	Party	Date in Office	Occupation
Henry Alfred	Bristol	Democrat	1939-1956	Wire worker
Arthur A. Carrellas	Middletown	Republican	1947-1948	Attorney, Assoc. Justice of RI Superior Court 1959
Joseph I. Mello	Providence	Democrat	1949-1954	Electrician
Antonio Mendes	Smithfield	Democrat	1955-1960	Textile Overseer
Sylvester Perry <i>Born in Brazil</i>	Providence	Democrat	1955-1960	Owner, Liquor Business
Emil F. Nunes	Portsmouth/Mi ddletown	Republican	1961-1962	Insurance and Real Estate
Alfred Travers, Jr.	Providence	Democrat	1961-1978	Industrial Engineer
Henry W. Pacheco	Bristol	Democrat	1967-1972	Asst. Sales Manager (autos)
Frank L. Nunes	Middletown	Republican	1971-1974	Public Accountant and Real Estate
Thomas J. Rodrigues	Middletown	Democrat	1975-1978	Service Station and Landscape Owner
Ernest C. Torres	East Greenwich	Republican	1975-1980	Attorney; Chief Judge, US District Court for RI
Christopher Boyle,	Newport/ Middletown	Democrat	1981-1992	Attorney
George A. Castro <i>Cape Verdean Heritage</i>	Providence	Democrat	1981-1998	Public Relations Media, Radio and TV
Jesse T. Ferreira	Portsmouth	Democrat	1981-1988	Self-employed

William L. Alves, Jr.,	West Warwick	Democrat	1987-1992	Sales Representative
Antonio J. Pires	Pawtucket	Democrat	1987-2002	Insurance agent/owner
Joseph N. Amaral	Tiverton	Republican	1997-2008	Educator/ Asst. Principal
Joseph L. Faria	Central Falls	Democrat	1993-2006	Self-employed
Gordon D. Fox <i>Cape Verdean Heritage</i>	Providence	Democrat	1993-present, Speaker of House	Attorney
Charlene M. Lima	Cranston	Democrat	1993-present	Retired Educator
Joseph S. Almeida <i>Cape Verdean Heritage</i>	Providence	Democrat	1999-2010	Bar Owner
John H. Maher	Portsmouth/Middletown	Democrat	1999-2002	Director, Rehabilitation Facility
Edwin H. Pacheco	Gloicester/Burrillville	Democrat	2005-2010	Executive Director, Education in Action
Deborah A. Fellela	Johnston	Democrat	2007-present	Secretary to School Principal
Agostinho F. Silva <i>Born in Azores</i>	Central Falls	Democrat	2007-present	Operations Manager
Michael A. Rice	South Kingstown	Democrat	2009-2010	Professor of Fisheries and Aquaculture
Lisa P. Tomasso	Coventry/West Warwick	Democrat	2011-present	Fitness Trainer, Director of various community organizations
Jared R. Nunes	Coventry/West Warwick	Democrat	2011-present	Self-employed Construction

3. GETTING ELECTED: WINNING THE ETHNIC AND THE INTER-ETHNIC VOTE: THE CASE OF EAST PROVIDENCE

As stated by Cruz (1998, p.18), “No single study, however representative its focus and comprehensive its range, is capable of considering the full extent of variables that influence and cause political action, and rarely, if ever, does analysis exhaust the possible interpretations of processes and outcomes.” In this section, however, based on existing literature on the integration of immigrant groups into America’s political system, archival research, and insights from interviews conducted with Portuguese political leaders, we focus on structural factors--such as the role played by political parties, labor unions, community organizations, and other mediating factors--which have had a positive impact in the political careers of Portuguese Americans from East Providence.

3.1 The Incorporation of New Immigrant Groups: The Role of Political Parties in Partisan and Non-partisan Electoral Systems

Several studies have documented the importance of political parties in the incorporation of new immigrant groups into the American political system, e.g., the Irish and the Italians (cf. Cornwell, 1968; Dahl, 1961; Glazer & Moynihan, 1963; Luconi, 2004; Marger, 1979; Wolfinger, 1968; among others). In various American cities, immigrant political incorporation declined after the Progressive Era (1890-1920) reforms, which, among other factors, including the New Deal in the 1930’s, demolished urban political machines (cf.

Marger, 1979). In many cities, the adoption of non-partisan political systems led to a permanent decline in political party involvement in local elections.

In cities with non-partisan, individualistic electoral systems, and without the financial and organizational support of the parties, immigrant newcomers were much less likely to muster the resources that would permit them to defeat well established incumbents.^v As Cornwell (1980, p.12) stated, in “the absence of any mechanism for planning and coordinating strategy on behalf of a group, its voting strength is likely to be fragmented, giving an easy advantage to a member of some other group.” Political parties, by slating or sponsoring a candidate of a given ethnic group, were also instrumental for the mobilization of the inter-ethnic vote on behalf of the candidates they sponsored.

Cornwell (1980) brings to our attention the structure of the electoral system as a key factor in the incorporation of Portuguese immigrants into the political systems of New Bedford and Providence. In Massachusetts, Boston adopted non-partisan elections in 1909 and New Bedford in 1938. Parties came to play a minimal role in elections.

An examination by Cornwell (1980, p. 16) of Ward 6 elections in New Bedford, showed that prior to the reforms, from 1906 until 1936, the Portuguese were included as candidates in 62 percent of the party slates, which were often ethnically balanced, “and as a result won a seat in each of twelve (or one half) of the council contests. Cornwell considered these results to be outstanding given that as the most recently arrived ethnic group in New Bedford, the Portuguese voting strength was still minimal, not reaching its maximum until the 1940's or 1950's. The only explanation for this result, according to the author, lay in a “combination of party activity in slate-making and, obviously, of an election system that allowed partisan labels on the ballot” (Cornwell, 1980, p. 16).

The data presented by Cornwell (1980, p. 18) for the period ranging from 1938 to 1977, after the adoption of a non-partisan election system, which eliminated party activity and identifying labels from the ballots, show that although thirty-nine Portuguese Americans ran for City Council in Ward 6, only eight managed to go past the preliminary election, and of those, only two won the general election. In Ward 6, Portuguese candidates had to contend with an influential French-Canadian family, which had managed to construct its own powerful individual political machine. Without the resources of political parties behind them, Portuguese candidates could not defeat this machine.

In Providence's Ward #1, on the other hand, where competitive partisan elections remained the norm, the Portuguese began to be included in party lists in the 1930's (Cornwell, 1980, p. 20). Over time, the Portuguese gained complete control of the Ward #1 committee, its two council seats, and the House seat.

In Rhode Island, before the second decade of the 20th century, politics were dominated by the Republicans. Economic changes in the state and a series of structural reforms, led to a permanent decline of the Republican Party and a corresponding rise of the Democrats (cf. Moakley & Cornwell, 2001). Nevertheless, the state's political machines survived the Progressive Era reforms, particularly the Democratic urban machines, remaining influential until the late 1970's. Accordingly, writing in 1980, Cornwell (1980, p. 8) stated that the “party tradition in Rhode Island, and in its capital city in particular, has been one of strong, active organizations that have tended to dominate the electoral process.” Both the Republicans and the Democrats competed for the immigrant vote and both engaged in ethnic “ticket-balancing” as a way of attracting that vote (cf. Cornwell, 1960; Luconi, 2004).

During the first half of the twenty century, the Portuguese, being more recent immigrants and much less numerous than the Irish, Italian and French-Canadian populations, were not included by the political parties in their statewide tickets (i.e., for Senator, Congressman, Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Secretary of State, Attorney General and State Treasurer). However, as shown by Cornwell (1980), the Portuguese were included at the local level, in areas where they were concentrated.

The inclusion in the 1940's of Portuguese leaders in Party electoral lists for higher political office at the General Assembly may have been facilitated by the occurrence of WWII. In a personal interview, former

senator and state treasurer, Paul Tavares, noted that office vacancies during the war created opportunities for the election of Portuguese officials to state's General Assembly.

The party affiliation of Portuguese elected officials in Rhode Island reflects the dominance of the Democratic Party in this state in the last 70 years. The majority of Portuguese Americans (forty-six) and all Cape Verdeans (six) elected to Rhode Island's General Assembly have been Democrats (see Tables 1, 2, 3, and 4). In addition to being elected through Democratic Party lists, several Portuguese elected officials have played key roles at different levels of the Democratic Party structure.

In East Providence, only the first elected official (Frank Maciel, 1941-1944) ran as a republican. His election indicates that both political parties in this city included Portuguese people in their electoral lists. This assumption is sustained by the recollection of some elder elected officials, including former Senator William Castro (1967-1983), who stated in a personal interview that,

In those days, East Providence was sort of a Republican city...Back then, Phillips Street Hall only allowed the two parties to use the hall once per year for fundraising purposes... Later on, they began to provide much more support.

Former president of Phillips Street Hall, Mr. Manny Sousa (2004-2011), confirmed that once there were divisions among republican and democratic members, and that the Club had to establish rules. Eventually, however, by the 1960's, the Hall's membership became predominantly democratic, leading the Club leaders to assume a more open stance in its support for the political endeavors of co-ethnics.

An analysis of the party affiliation of senators and representatives from other parts of the state (Tables 3 and 4) also shows evidence that both political parties included people of Portuguese descent in their electoral lists. Altogether, there have been 12 Portuguese Americans who have served in the state legislature as republicans. The first three Portuguese American senators, who served from 1941 to 1956, representing Little Compton, Portsmouth, and Bristol, were also republican. That the first senators elected from areas outside of Providence were Republican is not surprising given that the Republican Party had "created a system of rural political machines that allowed the gop (*sic*) minority to retain power through the 1930's," (Moakley & Cornwell, 2001, p. 26-7). In subsequent years, Portuguese Democrats prevailed, but another republican from Bristol, Thomas J. DaPonte, served as senator from 1973 to 1974, and then Michael Sullivan, from South Kingston, also served as a republican senator from 1993 to 1997. Bethany Moura, who began her career as senator from Cumberland/Lincoln in 2011, is also a Republican.

By the time the dominant Democratic machines, entered into decline in Rhode Island in the 1970's, the Portuguese were well integrated into the political system and had laid the organizational groundwork in East Providence that would facilitate their continued victory at the polls. By the time a new wave of immigrants from Portugal began to arrive, at the end of the 1950's, the earlier immigrants had already established the structural conditions that would facilitate the political integration of the newcomers to the city of East Providence.

The political parties in Rhode Island, by sponsoring or slating Portuguese candidates, might have contributed to the emergence of other structural conditions, such as the mobilization of Luso-American community groups on behalf of political candidates, all of which have played a role in bringing about high levels of political incorporation by Portuguese Americans in Rhode Island, and particularly in East Providence. The political parties also contributed by providing visibility and name recognition to Portuguese candidates in their communities and those of other ethnic groups in Rhode Island.

3.2 The Role of Labor Unions

After the American civil war, Rhode Island became the most densely populated and the most industrialized state in the United States (McLoughlin, 1986, p. 149). The rapid industrialization of the state in the second half of the 19th century brought to Rhode Island successive waves of immigrants who sought employment in the expanding textile industry (cf. Lucioni, 2004, among others). The labor movement in Rhode Island began to evolve in the 1930's within the context of this industry. While social divisions and political cleavages

existed among the different ethnic groups, most “ultimately coalesced around the labor movement...” (Moakley & Cornwell, 2001, p. 28). Grestle (1989) provides an account of the rise of labor unions in Woonsocket, once a heavily French-Canadian and republican town, which was home to a booming textile industry. Describing the birth in 1931 and the subsequent growth of the powerful Industrial Trade Union (ITU) in Woonsocket, the author writes that it more than doubled in size between 1936 and 1941. Examining the names of ITU leaders, Grestle (1989, p. 200) states that each “ethnic group was represented in numbers roughly proportional to its numerical importance in the Woonsocket population,” with French-Canadians comprising 75 percent of the leadership. He also states that the Portuguese, among other smaller groups within the city’s population, gained visibility and leadership within the unions, coming to comprise an increasing portion of the 25 percent of the leadership that was not French-Canadian.

At this time, a study of the rise of the labor movement in East Providence does not exist, but we can assume that people from different ethnic groups in this city coalesced around union activity in the factories where they worked, as they did in Woonsocket. The unions provided a space where early Portuguese Americans developed leadership skills and gained visibility across ethnic groups. After the post-Capelinhos immigration wave, which began in the late 1950’s, the labor force in some local factories became up to 90 percent Portuguese (interview with labor leader). With the traditional association between the labor movement and the Democratic Party, it was not uncommon for labor leaders to be included in party electoral lists in Rhode Island. Two of the Portuguese American politicians elected from East Providence in the 1940’s and 1950’s, as indicated in the Rhode Island Manual, were labor leaders:

Julio Rocha—Democrat, Representative, 1945 to 1956, former President of Local 17 Union of Associate Workers of Printing and Allied Industries.

John Lewis—Democrat, Representative, 1949-1956, former President of Local 1561, U.S.A. (CIO), vice-president of the Rhode Island Industrial Union Council, C.I.O, steelworkers agent.

Like political parties, labor unions can function as organizational structures that can mobilize and channel the ethnic vote, and, importantly, the inter-ethnic, vote for a specific ethnic candidate. They can provide much support for candidates, from financial resources, to volunteers to telephone banking services. As related by a top AFL-CIO leader of Azorean origins:

Our members are well-organized and they go out and support the candidate that we have endorsed... We notify all of our membership... We had members helping people file citizenship papers... We register members; we educate them about the candidates. We do mailings to all the members ...

In summary, labor unions contributed to the political incorporation of Portuguese Americans, first by being organizational spaces where people of Portuguese ancestry were able to rise to positions of authority and to be perceived as leaders by co-ethnics and members of other ethnic groups. Secondly, through support of campaign activities, the dissemination of information about political candidates, citizenship drives, and getting out the vote efforts, the labor unions have played and continue to play an important role in the electoral success of many Portuguese Americans. Although over time the strength of industrial unions declined, labor, through the associationism of the public and service sectors of the economy, continues to be an important political force in Rhode Island.

3.4 The Role of Community Organizations: Leaders and Networking

Through community organizations, would be political candidates may assume leadership positions that will train them in the democratic decision making-process and bring them recognition as leaders by co-ethnics. Reflecting on this topic, the president of Phillips Street Hall from 2004 to 2011, Mr. Manny Sousa, said that it has to be within the Portuguese organizations— and not within the Irish or the Italian—that Portuguese candidates have the opportunity to prove themselves and build their curriculum as leaders. Community organizations also provide spaces where people of the same ethnic group can come together, network, and organize collective action, such as the grassroots efforts involved in successful political campaigns.

The concept of social capital, although still lacking conceptual clarity, is generally understood as benefits (both individual and collective) derived from the social networks and internal solidarity of a given community (cf. Sanders, 2002).^{vi} The process of incorporation into American society, as suggested by the sociological literature, is highly influenced by the existence of networks and bonds of solidarity among co-ethnics. Portes (2000, p. 5) writes, “Recently arrived foreign groups depend greatly on their networks and bonds of solidarity in order to adapt and move ahead in American society.” Likewise, (Sanders, 2002, p. 330) states that “Sociologists have found the concept of social capital to be useful in explicating how ethnic-based forms of social organization and collective action are embedded in interpersonal networks, and how these forms of organization and action generate and distribute resources.”

The East Providence Portuguese community has been organized around two major community organizations:^{vii} Phillips Street Hall (Holy Ghost Beneficial Brotherhood of Rhode Island-HGBB) and Saint Francis Xavier Church. Both of these organizations were created by the late 19th and early 20th century immigrant generations.

3.4.1 Phillips Street Hall.

As stated on the HGBB website,^{viii} Azorean immigrants created the Brotherhood of the Divine Holy Ghost in 1900. Its sole purpose was to give continuity to their traditions “of faith and charity,” by celebrating an annual Holy Ghost feast, which included a procession and a dinner for the poor. At that time, the incipient community of East Providence did not yet have its own church, and people had to travel across the bridge “by foot or horse to celebrate in their native tongue at our Lady of the Rosary church, which had been established in 1886 in the Fox Point section of Providence.”

In 1914 a small group of immigrant workers created a self-help mutual aid organization, a Voz do Operário (Voice of the Workers), which would provide members with some income during illness as well as funeral funds.

According to information provided in the HGBB website, in 1925 community leaders, went before Rhode Island’s Secretary of State to file the documents that would permit the creation of an organization, Irmandade de Beneficencia Espirito of Rhode Island, which would consolidate as one the Brotherhood of the Divine Holy Ghost and the Voice of the Workers. In 1944, the name of the new organization was changed to Holy Ghost Beneficial Brotherhood of Rhode Island. Over time, HGBB came to be informally identified as “the Phillips Street Hall” to distinguish it from the Holy Ghost Brotherhood of Charity on Brightridge Avenue, also in East Providence.

The following excerpts from the HGBB website show how this organization functioned as a space where people could come together to network and support each other in civic and political endeavors:

Throughout its history, H.G.B.B. members have distinguished themselves in public service. In most instances these men served their apprenticeship in community service under the umbrella of this organization.

Among the many officers and appointments are: the first Portuguese-American elected to statewide office in Rhode Island; two Presidents Pro Tempore of the Rhode Island Senate; five state senators serving East Providence center city ...; nine members of the House of Representatives; two East Providence Mayors; two Assistant Mayors; ten members of the City Council and five members of the school committee.

Appointed offices include: a Director of Labor and Training; Administrator of the Workers' Compensation Court; A Chief of Police in East Providence; and a Director of Civil Preparedness in the District of Columbia; an East Providence City Mayor and countless members of state and municipal boards and commissions.

HGBB leaders were also involved in the organization of sporting events, sponsoring baseball matches against the team fielded by the Portuguese American Athletic Club. With the arrival of the post-1950 immigrants, the clubs, which now also came to include the Luso-American Soccer Association, began to sponsor soccer matches. HGBB has also served as headquarters for “all activities of East Providence Central

Little League.” The sporting events provide opportunities for leadership, name recognition among co-ethnics, as well as opportunities for candidates to make themselves visible and campaign among the large audiences in attendance.

3.4.2 Saint Francis Xavier Church.

Phillips Street Hall and Saint Francis Xavier Church have always been closely intertwined and both have functioned as spaces where the Portuguese community of East Providence can come together and engage in collective action. In 1914, Bishop of Providence Matthew Harkins asked Father Joseph Lopes to conduct a census of the growing Portuguese population in East Providence to determine if it was feasible to establish a new parish in that city.^{ix} It was.

Phillips Street Hall was used as a provisional church and the first Mass was celebrated at the Hall on January 10, 1915, and continued to be celebrated there while the new congregation waited for the construction of the church. Funded in part by fundraisers held at Phillips Street Hall, the new Portuguese church was formally dedicated by Bishop Harkins on May 21, 1916.

All currently elected officials from East Providence are members or have strong connections to both the church and the club. The senators from East Providence going back to the late 1950’s were all Hall presidents or directors. As stated by Senator Daniel DaPonte:

... both Saint Francis Xavier Church and Phillips Street Hall, ... have always been foundations for ... the relationships, the support and the individuals that people need and benefit from when they run for office... Many of the people that were involved in the political scene were also active in the parish and the different events they held throughout the year, such as the annual feast ...

Portuguese American elected officials have had high levels of involvement with community and political organizations. Several early elected officials also served in WWII. For example, according to information provided by the Rhode Island Manual:

John Lewis, representative E. Providence (1949-1956), was former financial secretary of the Portuguese-American Democratic Club, former president of the Portuguese-American Athletic Club, former member of the War-manpower Commission, member of the East Providence Democratic Town Committee, Young Democratic League of Rhode Island, Holy Ghost Brotherhood of Charity, and Holy Ghost Beneficial Brotherhood. He was also a former labor union leader and was campaign manager of Senator Claiborne Pell’s first senatorial campaign.

Alfred Travers, Jr., representative from East Providence and Providence (1961-1978), was First Ward Democratic chairman (1962-1965), past president of the Portuguese-American Democrats of Rhode Island (1963-1964) and Fox Point Rod & Gun Club. He was also chairman of the Board of Directors of the Portuguese Sport Club, member of Theophilo Braga Club, Fraternal Order of Rehabilitated Disabled, Portuguese-American Social Club, and Fox Point Boys Alumni Association. He was treasurer of the Portuguese Sport Club—Fishing Division and past president of the Fall River Soccer Association. He was active in Boy Scouting for twenty-five years.

The turn of the 20th century immigrants built strong community organizations and churches in East Providence and other areas of Rhode Island, through which they replicated their culture, networked, engaged in collective action, and provided self-help and mutual aid to community members. As the post 1950’s immigrants arrived, their adjustment to a new society and their socioeconomic and political integration was facilitated by the extant community organizations. In return, the new immigrants provided a renewed *raison d’être* to the old organizations.

3.5 District Size and Population Concentration

With a population of 1,053,209, Rhode Island is one of the smallest states in the Union. Portuguese candidates in this state have benefitted from high ethnic population concentration in smaller electoral districts. Portuguese immigrants to the greater Providence area, initially settled in the waterfront area of Fox

Point, but many moved on to East Providence, where by 1915 nearly 5,000 had settled. In 2000, according to Census data, the total population of East Providence was 48,688, of which 15,006 (31%) were of Portuguese descent and 2,383 (4.9%) had Cape Verdean roots. Former East Providence Senator, William Castro, in an interview, concurred that the concentration of the Portuguese population in the center of East Providence contributed much to the electoral success of the Portuguese in that city.

Although, Luso-Americans are beginning to move out of the center of East Providence, the geographical concentration of the Portuguese population is still an important element in the campaign strategies of current political leaders. As stated by Representative Helio Melo:

East Providence has a large Portuguese population, which is getting to be more second generation, and it was a tremendous help to be in a Portuguese community. In my district, I'd say that about 34 percent of the population is Portuguese and Cape Verdean, but we have to go above and beyond and represent everyone... Italians, Irish, Hispanics and so on...

Population concentration and small district sizes, in addition to the structural factors presented above, contributed to a history of successful political integration of Portuguese Americans in Rhode Island and particularly from the city of Providence.

4. CONCLUSION

In Rhode Island, Portuguese Americans, and particularly those from East Providence, have achieved a high level of integration into the political system of the state. By contrast, in Massachusetts, the Portuguese remain politically underrepresented by co-ethnics (Barrow & Borges, 2005).

In this paper, we focused on structural factors, which, through our archival research, in-depth interviews, and insights provided by existing studies of the political integration of immigrant groups in American society, we were able to identify as having been conducive to high levels of political incorporation in Rhode Island. We focused more specifically on the election of Portuguese Americans to the State's General Assembly from the legislative districts of the city of East Providence.

We began by analyzing the structure of the electoral system, which in Rhode Island remained bi-partisan after the Progressive Era reforms. Portuguese elected officials, starting in the late 1930's, were affiliated with both the Republican and Democratic parties, and both parties competed at the local level for the Portuguese vote, as they did with other prominent immigrant groups in Rhode Island (cf. Cornwell, 1960, 1968, 1980; Luconi, 2004; among others). The existence of vacancies at the state level during WWII may then have provided the opportunity for the first Portuguese candidates from East Providence to be incorporated into electoral lists for higher state level offices. This early incorporation within the existing political parties may have put in motion processes of leadership training and the acquisition of political know-how, which concurrently led to the mobilization of community organizations on behalf of the political endeavors of co-ethnic candidates. Although the Republican Party, once the dominant party in the state, went into decline after the 1930's, the Democratic Party machine remained strong and dominant until the late 1970's. It continued to play a critical role in the campaign efforts of slated or sponsored candidates, including the Portuguese.

In a city like New Bedford, which adopted a non-partisan electoral scheme in 1938, Portuguese candidates could not benefit from the financial, organizational and logistic support of an overarching political organization. As asserted by Banfield & Wilson (1963, p.158), "Minority-group candidates are disadvantaged by non-partisanship." Overtime, in New Bedford, due to lack of political mobilization of the Portuguese behind a co-ethnic candidate, this population remained politically unorganized and fragmented.

Secondly, we took into consideration the role played by labor unions in Rhode Island, where the union movement became very strong in the 1930's. With the traditional association between the Democratic Party and the labor movement, it was not unusual for labor leaders to be slated or sponsored by the party as candidates for political office. Leadership in the unions for some Portuguese American elected officials, then, became the vehicle through which they also rose into leadership positions within the ranks of the

Democratic Party. Both the unions and the Party played key roles in support of the candidates and in bringing out both the ethnic and non-ethnic vote in favor of the Portuguese candidates that they sponsored.

A dialectical relationship between Portuguese politicians and community organizations may then have ensued. The community organizations (the Church and the Clubs) benefited and were strengthened by members who knew how to navigate the political system of Rhode Island. In turn, the political activities of Portuguese candidates were facilitated by the existence of strong community organizations. They provided spaces where leaders could emerge and the Portuguese population could network, engage in collective action, and organize grassroots political activities. The five senators who have held the same senate seat for the past fifty-three years served as past presidents or held positions of high visibility within Phillip Street Hall. Since its inception, Saint Francis Xavier Church has shared a deep connection to Phillip Street Hall, particularly in the joint effort to put together the annual Holy Ghost feast. The Church, a place where the community meets for worship, allows Portuguese candidates to attain visibility among the congregants.

Last but not least, the smaller size of electoral districts in Rhode Island, and a high concentration of the Portuguese population in East Providence, may have facilitated the mobilization and channeling of the ethnic vote on behalf of Portuguese American candidates.

At this stage in our research efforts, we cannot affirm for certain that the political incorporation of the Portuguese in a city such as New Bedford would have reached levels similar to those achieved in East Providence had the former city not adopted a non-partisan electoral system in 1938. Yet, our study suggests that a deep historical study of the interplay between political parties, labor unions, community organizations, as well as of the capacity of the Portuguese to muster, on their own, the resources necessary to win elections in an individualistic, non-partisan electoral system needs to be studied in order to understand the incorporation, or lack thereof, of Portuguese Americans into the political system of the states in which this population is concentrated.

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ⁱ A more extensive paper on this topic, which includes an analysis of current factors not addressed in the present paper, is currently in press (cf. Scott & Fraley, in press).

ⁱⁱ Lacking space in the present paper to review various essays, both academic and journalistic, we remit the reader to Bloemraad (2009) in which the author cites existing essays on this topic.

ⁱⁱⁱ We thank former RI State Treasurer, Paul J. Tavares, for compiling the first list of Luso-American Senators and Representatives serving in the RI General Assembly.

^{iv} Due to how district lines were set up when they were first elected, three elected officials represented parts of East Providence and Providence simultaneously.

^v See Wright (2008) for a brief review of existing studies on the consequences of nonpartisan ballots. Among the consequences noted are lower levels of voter turnout and a greater electoral advantage for incumbents.

^{vi} For a critical overview of the use of the concept of social capital by American scholars, see Portes (2000).

^{vii} There are other Portuguese groups and organizations in East Providence, but Phillips Street Hall and Saint Francis Xavier Church are among the oldest and most prominent community organizations.

^{viii} Apud: <http://hgbb.org/clubhistory.html>.

^{ix} Apud: <http://saintfrancisxavierchurch.com/WebPages/history.html#history%20portuguese>