

a distinctive feature of Brazilian life for centuries, traditions from each of the three groups have spread to the population as a whole. Within this mixture, Portuguese culture is usually the easiest to identify, but only because there are actually many different cultures and languages within the African and native groups. A Portuguese colonist from southern Brazil would have had little difficulty understanding his counterpart hundreds of miles to the north, while two Brazilian natives or two slaves in the same situation — with their different customs and languages — would probably have had some difficulty understanding each other. Portuguese culture is not stronger than native or African cultures, but it is the glue that binds the enormous nation together.

Not all Portuguese settlements outside Portugal have followed the pattern of Brazil, however. In the United States, for example, many Portuguese speakers work to maintain a distinct and vibrant community even as they participate in the larger culture. The two largest Portuguese communities in this country are in northern California and southeastern New England. Every August, the coastal city of New Bedford, Massachusetts, is the site of one of the world's largest celebrations of Portuguese culture. The Feast of the Blessed Sacrament began in 1915, when four Portuguese immigrants organized a religious festival of the sort they remembered from their youth. In 2007, more than 300,000 people attended what is now one of the country's oldest and most distinctive ethnic festivals and a colorful reminder of a small nation's large legacy.

R. Anthony Kugler lives and writes in Madison, Wisconsin.

Vida Portugu

by Cynthia Levinson

“Stewed pig ears. Yum!” That’s what 17-year-old Pedro Fernandes, from New Bedford, Massachusetts, says every summer when he and his 10-year-old brother, Rafael, visit their grandparents in Caravalha, Portugal. In addition to eating *carne de porco a Alentejana* (pig ears stewed with clams), Pedro and Rafael play “football” (soccer), listen to *fado* music (see “Art Connection” on page 43), and perfect their Portuguese. Back home during the school year, they attend Portuguese school two afternoons a week.

Most kids descended from Portuguese immigrants do not get to visit relatives in Portugal. They carry out traditions in other ways.

When 14-year-old Natalie Silva and her family go to the beach in Provincetown, Massachusetts, they fly a Portuguese flag so that friends can find them. “On the way,” she says, “we blast Portuguese music, and the second we arrive, there’s delicious food.” These foods include her favorite, *linguica* (sausage) rolls. Why does Natalie, who also volunteers at Provincetown’s annual Portuguese Festival, feel attached to Portugal? Because her great-grandfather was born in Olhão, and,



esa em Massachusetts

like many Portuguese immigrants, he brought traditions to Massachusetts, where, also like them, he became a fisherman.

Winds and Whaling

For 175 years, beginning in 1730, whaling ships sailed from Boston, New Bedford, Provincetown, and other Massachusetts ports to Africa. After the crews spent weeks at sea, prevailing winds steered them to their first landfall in the Portuguese islands of the Azores. There the mariners went whaling and obtained more crew members and supplies. Then they sailed to Madeira and Cape Verde, Portuguese islands off the coast of Senegal. Finally, the ships returned to their home ports, sometimes stopping first in Brazil.

Although the work was hard, dangerous, and underpaid, Portuguese sailors were anxious to come to America. By the 1860s, 60 percent of Massachusetts' whaling crews were Portuguese, and their families filled towns along the coast. They became so prominent that American writers such as Herman Melville and Mark Twain wrote about them.

Even after the decline of whaling, immigrants continued to join their relatives on the East Coast, to escape Portugal's earthquakes and volcanic eruptions.

They also came to work in textile mills. New Bedford — which has a neighborhood named Fayal for an Azorean island (Faial) — became known as “the Portuguese capital of the United States.” Today, about 800,000 Massachusetts

descendants of people from Portugal speak the language, making it the second most common language in the state.

Feasts and Blessings

Immigrants brought not only food and language but also literature, music, and their Catholic faith. All of these provide ways for their descendants to celebrate their culture.

Many communities hold an annual Portuguese festival during June, which the Massachusetts State Legislature designates “Portuguese Heritage Month.” In Provincetown, celebrants carry a life-size statue of St. Peter from church to the wharf for the Blessing of the Fleet.

The Feast of the Blessed Sacrament parade in New Bedford includes young “folclórico” dancers who wear traditional red-, black-, and yellow-striped skirts called *saias* and embroidered caps called *carapuchos*. Musicians play accordionlike concertinas. Marchers carry baskets of flowers on their heads, and flowers are scattered along the route, which spectators line with embroidered tablecloths and carpets. Rafael and Pedro also celebrate October 5, the date in 1910 that Portugal became a democracy. On Dia de Liberzad, April 25 — the date of the Revolution of the Carnations — they give carnations to honor their parents.

Boston's Portuguese Festival lasts three months and includes a flag ceremony at the Massachusetts State House, films, concerts, boat regattas, and parades. Last year, high school students in Cambridge held a marathon reading of *Os Lusíadas*, an epic poem by Luís Vaz de Camões about Portugal's discoveries. Hearing young people read in the language of her homeland, an older immigrant said, “It was very moving.”

Swirl your skirts!

A dancer from Cambridge, Massachusetts, performs during Provincetown's Portuguese parade.

Cynthia Levinson lives in Austin, Texas, and Boston, Massachusetts, where she writes fiction and nonfiction for young readers.