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Migrants, inequalities and social research in the 1920s: The story of *Two Portuguese Communities in New England*

Cristiana Bastos 

ABSTRACT

In this article, I analyse the production and reception of a 1923 social monograph on migrant communities in New England and in doing so: (1) outline an archaeology of the social sciences in the U.S., by analysing aspects of their development, dynamics, institutional politics and research agendas; (2) discuss the tensions between social, racial and cultural interpretations of inequalities in the political economy of the 1920s; (3) analyse the pervasiveness of racist thinking in science, society and politics, its impact in the hierarchization of groups for purposes of border control, and how the targeted groups responded to it.



KEYWORDS

History of social sciences;
race; migration; labour;
health; Portuguese

A science of society in times of racialism and racism

In this article I address the production and the mixed reception of Donald Taft's *Two Portuguese Communities in New England*. Originally a doctoral dissertation submitted at Columbia University in 1923, it was published that same year by Longman, Green and Company in New York. The book got positive reviews in academic journals, one of them signed by no less than Robert E. Park (1925), the central reference of the Chicago School of sociology. But elsewhere the book was loathed. The Portuguese community leaders throughout Southern New England responded to it with anger, claiming that the book was offensive to their nationality. They encouraged meetings to protest against the book and called for the drafting of an official note of disapproval about the way in which the Portuguese were depicted. When community associations, consuls and other representatives scheduled a meeting to make a formal protest in March 1924, the extraordinary number of 6000 people allegedly turned up for the demonstration, forcing it to be held outside.

To understand the scale and intensity of that protest, we need to discuss the core tensions of the book, of the communities it depicted and of the society that produced it. In this, the concept of co-production of science and society, borrowed from science and technology studies (Jasanoff 2004; Hagendijk 2015), is useful. 'Science' corresponds here to the early social sciences, particularly as practised in Columbia University at the time, in the wider context of the institutionalization of sociology and anthropology. It also stands

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for the racialist knowledge that hierarchized human types into complex taxonomies of colour, nationality, belonging, customs, intelligence, aptitude and other features under the category of 'race' (e.g. Ripley [1899] 1913; Dillingham 1911; Stoddar 1920). 'Society' stands for a tense, unequal socio-economic system that relied on an industrial development that was mostly supported by immigrant labour. Immigrant groups entered the mills of New England in the lower positions and eventually moved into better jobs; historically, they also moved from racialized positions as non-white to ethnic white and, eventually, mainstream white (Roediger 1991; Ignatiev 1995; Jacobson 1998). Yet, at the very moment Taft was exploring and writing about the Portuguese communities in New England, the U.S. was about to regulate its borders and distinguish those groups who were allowed to move freely into the country from those who would be subject to severe restrictions through the Immigration Act of 1924. This fact provides a key to explaining the passion and number of demonstrators in New Bedford: they were highly anxious about the place allocated to them in the racial hierarchies, which provided a measure of their distance from full citizenship. And while they regarded themselves as white, Taft had candidly said that they were not.

To analyse that tension, we ought to revisit the sort of racialism – and racism – that pervaded in society and academia in the 1920s. We tend to think of those times as the moment that the social sciences came of age. It is a time often associated with the narratives of founders who promoted epistemological and methodological shifts: Franz Boas and students guiding anthropology through the shift from race to culture at Columbia (Stocking 1968)¹; Robert Park and fellows guiding sociology into community studies in Chicago (Park, Burgess, and McKenzie 1925; Wirth 1928); Malinowski defining ethnographic fieldwork at the London School of Economics (Kuper 1983); Marcel Mauss establishing a new paradigm for social relations with his essay on the gift (Mauss 1925). But the history of anthropology and sociology is far more complex. And, at that time, even the scholars most committed to explaining the social with social and cultural variables were not immune to the racialist ideas that prevailed.

At the turn of the century, a repertoire of racial categories had been added to the old, established black/white racialism. While that had gone hand-in-hand with plantation economies supported on the traffic of enslaved Africans into the Americas and had lingered afterwards in inhuman actions, beliefs and laws, the new racialism was adjusted to the demands of an industrial economy based on immigrant labour recruited from the poorer fringes of Europe (see Jacobson 1998). Elaborate taxonomies about European races became 'science' through works like Ripley's *Races of Europe* ([1899] 1913), the Dillingham Commission's *Dictionary on the Races and People of Europe* (1911) and Lorthrop Stoddar's *The Rising Tide of Color* (1920), a radical manifesto for white supremacy. Although dynamic – for the groups moved along the colour line when moving up in the labour hierarchies – these racialized taxonomies and hierarchies were naturalized and internalized via somatic, anthropometric, psychological and cultural criteria affecting different groups.

In this article I argue that the new racialism was omnipresent and easily enmeshed in the early works of social scientists. Donald Taft's *Two Portuguese Communities in New England*, which intended to study the determinants of different health patterns in migrant communities, is a good example of the contamination of social knowledge by racialism. The author explicitly aimed to address the social structures of inequality. He defined infant mortality rates as his central research problem, outlined the social variables that

could account for the variation in infant mortality and studied extensively those indexes and variables in two actual communities of Portuguese background in Southern New England. Most of the time, he kept the analysis at a sociological level. But he also used Ripley's racialist literature and ended up assigning race the same heuristic powers as he ascribed to the carefully researched social variables, implying that migrants themselves – with their constitutions and their ways – were at least as responsible for their fate and their poor health as were the dreadful conditions in which they lived and worked.

Columbia's quantitative sociology

At the time Donald Taft was working on his dissertation at Columbia University, sociology had already gone a long way to affirm its importance as a discipline within the Faculty of Political Science. History, economics, law and political theory had been established as independent departments in the 1890s (Wallace 1992, 497). Social science had gained independence from economics in 1904 (Wallace 1992, 506). Sociology at Columbia was slow to take off, particularly when one considers that the University of Chicago had been founded in 1890 with an independent department of that discipline. At Columbia, both its president, Seth Low, and the economics professor and statistics pundit Richmond Mayo-Smith agreed on the importance of the discipline, which they saw as a subject 'that dealt with questions of public concern', albeit with a somewhat fuzzy description of what it entailed (Wallace 1992, 500). Dean Burgess was more explicit about its contents, suggesting that sociology covered issues like ethnology, penology, charity and poor-relief, and he began requesting a chair in the discipline from 1891 (Wallace 1992, 498). That same year Franklin Giddings came from Bryn Mawr, Philadelphia (PA), where he had started his academic career in 1888 by taking Woodrow Wilson's position when he moved on to Wesleyan. Giddings temporarily replaced Mayo-Smith at Columbia during the latter's leave of absence. Giddings's position was renewed on a temporary basis until, finally, in 1894 he received the newly founded chair of sociology (Gillin 1926, 201), thanks to negotiations conducted by Low (Wallace 1992, 502). Giddings was a charismatic, argumentative character who supervised dozens of students and explored his own original views on society in his courses and seminars – some would say in a more experimental than scholastic mode.² Like Durkheim across the Atlantic, Giddings was interested in what held society together and also developed his own conceptual tools (Giddings 1896, 1897, 1901). His student Taft, when addressing labour organizations in his MA thesis, chose the concept of 'sympathy' rather than Durkheim's 'solidarity' (Durkheim [1897] 1968; Taft 1915).

Columbia contributed significantly to the development of sociology in the United States. Its trademark was a quantitative and statistical orientation (Camic 1995), while the Chicago school was famous for its ethnography-inspired, and inspiring, community studies (Park, Burgess, and McKenzie 1925; Wirth 1928; Frazier 1932), and Harvard became known for the all-encompassing theories of social action and social structure produced by its sociologists (Parsons 1937; Merton 1938, [1949] 1968). Aldon Morris' recent account of the history of American sociology has highlighted the role of yet another school, mentored by W. E. B. Du Bois in Atlanta. Morris argues that academic racism was responsible for the erasure of Du Bois from the history of the discipline and that, more than being simply credited as the first black sociologist in the country, Du Bois – who had studied in Germany and developed his own original thinking (Du Bois 1903) – should

be acknowledged as the inspiration for the Chicago school and the true ancestor of the discipline in America (Morris 2015).

Donald Taft was a long way from the influence of Du Bois and, for that matter, from the Chicago school. He adopted the positivist type of sociology practised at the time in New York. We can speculate whether Taft had some exposure to the race/culture epistemological tensions that were at the core of the neighbouring discipline of cultural anthropology and that evolved exactly at that time in Columbia around the influential Franz Boas. However, we do not know if the influence of Boas reached further than his chair at the American Museum of Natural History to inspire, formally or informally, the students of Franklin Giddings and other sociologists.³ *Two Portuguese Communities* does not reveal the influence of the embryonic cultural anthropology growing across campus: the book is filled with references to 'nation', 'people' and 'race' rather than 'culture'. It should be noted that Boas and his students pursued the potential of the concept of culture mostly among exotic indigenous societies (Boas 1911; Mead 1928; Benedict 1934), while sociologists addressed migrants and urban communities, whether ghettos or middle towns, in the United States (Thomas and Znaniecki 1918; Wirth 1928; Lynd and Lynd 1929; Frazier 1932).

A scientist in the making

Although Donald Taft used the sort of proximity fieldwork that characterized ethnography and anthropological research, *Two Portuguese Communities* is a work of sociology – a discipline that was still struggling to establish itself as a science. In his 1924 article about the emergence of sociology in the United States, Albion Small referred to the discipline as 'in the process of becoming' (Small 1924, 323). Like other social disciplines, sociology demanded legitimacy, institutional space and acknowledgement as a specific branch of knowledge that could qualify as science and have its own academic space. During that process of becoming, the social sciences 'lacked stable corporate identities' (Camic 1995, 1010); in the absence of a stable identification with a disciplinary status, it is understandable that Donald Taft referred to himself somewhat non-specifically as of 'the author' or 'the writer' in his dissertation (Taft 1923).

Regardless of whether he qualified himself as a sociologist or simply as an author, Taft was an experienced scholar when he conducted the New England research. He was in his mid-thirties and had already seen some of the world. He had worked in the economy of his native Massachusetts; attended college in Massachusetts and graduate school in New York City; taught in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Massachusetts and New York; and spent years reading theory, compiling data, formulating problems. He had been born in Worcester, MA, in 1886. Between the time he finished high school and entered college, he worked for 8 years in the paper business and for the Whitney Manufacturing Company (Taft 1923, 359). He graduated from Clark University in 1914 and moved on to Columbia on a Bancroft scholarship. In 1915, he was granted a Master's degree for his thesis *Sympathy in Labor Organizations* (Taft 1915). The following year he remained at Columbia on another fellowship and worked towards his doctorate. He attended the sociology seminars of Frank Giddings and Alan Tenney, plus their lectures and those of Robert Chaddock, Henry Seager, John B. Clark, James Robinson and James Stowell (Taft 1923, 359).

Taft promoted the social sciences also in other settings: at the Carnegie Institute of Technology in Pittsburgh, PA (1916–1917), at Ohio State University in Columbus (1917–

1919), at the Wellesley College in Massachusetts (1919–1920), and at the Wells College in Aurora, NY (1920–1928). He moved to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 1928 and remained there for good, retiring in 1955 (Hullet 1971, 186).⁴

Tools for social analysis and intervention

For many of the aspiring social scientists at that time, interest in a science of society coincided with an interest in intervening on its problems – be that via social reform or via social eugenics. The labouring classes lived in extreme conditions, as documented in Jacob Riis’s photojournalist account of New York tenements at the turn of the century, *How the Other Half Lives* (Riis 1890). And, while there is no American equivalent to the depictions of the English working classes during their industrial revolution presented by authors like Engels (1845) and Dickens (1854), some poignant novels like *The Jungle*, which was about Lithuanians in Chicago’s slaughterhouses (Sinclair 1906), and *Out of this Furnace*, which focused on Slovaks in the steel industries of Pennsylvania (Bell 1941), provide a close approach to the harsh conditions endured by U.S. labouring immigrants at that time.

Many of the students worked towards the mitigation of such suffering by engaging with progressive churches and other social-oriented organizations; they aspired for reform, not necessarily for a revolution of the kind that was happening in Soviet Russia at the time. But not all of those who worked towards the scientific understanding of social inequalities dreamed of an equalitarian society. Nor were all of them ready to engage with the philosophical, sociological and political consequences of the assumption that inequalities between humans were an effect of social constraints. Some actually endorsed the principles of white supremacy and other variations of racist and racialist worldviews. In sum, motivation for social intervention could be backed by progressive humanism or by its very opposite, as epitomized by eugenics.

It is not entirely clear which one of the tendencies appealed the most to the author of *Two Portuguese Communities*. In part he emphasized the devastating impact of harsh labour and living conditions on the health of the communities, allowing for sympathy towards progressive policies that could improve their lives. But he also accepted that their lower destiny was conditioned by their own racial constitution, even while allowing the possibility that it worked as a social stigma rather than a fatality of biology. It should be noted that Taft’s supervisor, Giddings, held a Spencerian attitude regarding the limitations for the improvement of the disenfranchised (Gillin 1926, 204). In fact, Bonilla-Silva and Baiocchi (2007, 82) depict Giddings as nothing less than a racist sociologist. We can speculate whether Giddings’ influence pushed Taft towards racist options, neutralizing other possible analytic choices the doctoral student might have had. With no access to Taft’s field notes, diaries, chapter drafts, preliminary analyses, revisions, advisor’s criticisms or other materials that might help us go further in the analysis of his choices and constraints, we can only speculate on the matters behind and beyond the published book.

The structure, contents and social life of the book

Taft designed his research project around the problem of health inequalities, as represented by infant mortality rates. Statistics showed that some migrant communities

had higher infant mortality rates than others. Such was the case for the Portuguese, which was why Taft chose to study two New England communities with significant populations of Portuguese migrants: Fall River, MA, and Portsmouth, RI, situated next to each other along the state line. Both sites were marked by the presence of recently arrived Portuguese islanders from the Azores. The social, cultural and material circumstances in the two sites were, however, very different. In rural Portsmouth, the Portuguese had mostly old-stock white American families as neighbours (Taft 1923, 207). In industrial Fall River, they co-existed with other groups of migrants who had arrived earlier to supply the labour-intensive cotton industry: French Canadians, Irish, Italians, Russians, Syrians, Poles, and so on. At the time of the research, the Azorean Portuguese were at the lower strata of the textile mill hierarchies, had low-paying jobs and lived in the least attractive parts of town. 'In Fall River they can expect but low real wages, albeit higher than those they have been accustomed', notes Taft (1923, 247), adding that, 'if they marry they must live on a very low plane and expect their wives and children to continue to work outside the home', with little chance of advancement in the mills (Taft 1923, 247). He also mentions that 'the Portuguese are the lowest paid nationality in Fall River with the exception of the Poles' (Taft 1923, 254; see also McCabe and Thomas 1998; Williams 2007; De Sá and Borges 2009). As for their housing, Taft notes that 'the sections of the city where most of the Portuguese live are unattractive' (1923, 225) and that, in general, 'housing conditions of mill workers in Fall River are not ideal', being unattractive, without a bath, sometimes with a toilet in the corner of the pantry separated only by a curtain, and owned by landlords who hardly ever undertook much-needed repairs. In that aspect, life in rural Portsmouth seemed easier than that of the city dwellers (1923, 227).

Taft used the appropriate research tools to approach the subject. He talked to people, combed the historical and economic sources, used all statistical data he could find, crunched numbers and tested hypotheses to explain the high rates of infant mortality in those communities. He observed and evaluated their living headquarters, labour conditions, surrounding environment, nutrition patterns and education levels. In other words, he measured, counted, mapped and described with fair accuracy the lives in those communities. He sorted out indicators of social, economic and environmental constraints associated with ill health, such as poor housing, low wages, extensive working schedules, illiteracy, toxic atmospheres and the pervasiveness of tuberculosis. His research was sound: he consulted multiple sources, compiled statistics, explored possible answers and depicted the harsh work conditions that people endured in the cotton mills of Fall River and the farms of Portsmouth. All in all, Taft performed a proficient social analysis, combining qualitative observations with the heavy statistical work that was the trademark of sociology at Columbia (Camic and Xie 1994). The resulting monograph, *Two Portuguese Communities*, was a typical academic work of the time, filled with references, sources, numeric tables, graphs and maps.

The book was organized into seven chapters: (I) a short 'Introduction' (pp. 17–20); (II) 'The Racial Composition of the Portuguese Nationality' (pp. 21–50); (III) 'The Continental and Island Background' (pp. 51–87); (IV) 'Immigration and Distribution in the United States' (pp. 88–136); (V) 'Infant Mortality of the Portuguese' (pp. 137–193); (VI) 'The Portuguese of Portsmouth, R.I., and Fall River, Mass.' (pp. 194–342); and a final chapter (VII) on 'Limitations and Conclusions' (pp. 343–350). The bulk of the empirical research was concentrated in Chapters V and VI, which were also the lengthiest, comprising approximately

50 pages each. Chapter V addressed and analysed the data on infant mortality among the Portuguese, and Chapter VI presented the detailed results of the empirical research conducted in the field and among archival resources. In these two chapters, the author emerges as a sociologist, as someone with a predominantly quantitative orientation but who does not shy away from dense and accurate descriptions and comments based on the field research he had conducted through visiting Portuguese homes and interviewing the residents with the assistance of a nurse who could speak their language.

The other chapters are thinner in size and lighter in data. In them, Taft mostly discusses the literature that provides the background to the problem and to the subject of study, and presents a brief introduction to the problem, the specificities of the Portuguese nationality and the differences between mainlanders and islanders, plus an overview of immigration to America. However, after presenting his research, Taft's final remarks are frustrating and do not explore the findings. Instead, he returns to the racialized themes of the introduction and ends with a short and deceptive set of inconclusive conclusions.

Overall, there is a tension between two different analytic and interpretive directions – each of them with different political implications – in the book. In Chapters V and VI, the author identifies social variables related to infant mortality that were along the lines of those followed by pioneers of public health and that are still valid in contemporary studies of the social determinants of health and illness today: housing and working conditions, environment, hygiene, economic status and parental education levels, and so on. But throughout the book, particularly in Chapters I, II and VII, Taft interweaves his analysis with fixed racial categories. In spite of his sound empirical and analytical work, he starts and ends with racialist comments, suggesting that if the Portuguese in New England exhibited health patterns that were closer to those seen in black communities than to those in white communities, then this was perhaps not unrelated to the fact that the Portuguese were not really white to begin with, that they were – as one of Taft's (non-Portuguese) informants claimed – 'half negroes anyhow' (Taft 1923, 139). For Taft and his white interlocutors from the mill-owning classes of Fall River and from the academic world, the Portuguese were another dark migrant group who came from a dark corner of the world, just like the Irish and Italians who came before them.⁵ He used the racialist authors of the moment as sources and depicted the Portuguese as non-white: 'not only are they Southern Europeans but, as we shall show, some of them seem to be of a semi-negroid type' (1923, 18). He made clear that this was not just the case for the 'Bravas' (from Cabo Verde), who had Portuguese nationality and were classified as coloured in the U.S. census, but also for the 'so-called white Portuguese' (1923, 18).

Taft eventually confronted the possibility of framing race as a social operator of inequalities when he questioned what the consequences of 'this infusion of negro blood' would be for the Portuguese's social welfare and admitted that being perceived as 'negro' could lead to being 'relegated to ostracism' (1923, 18). Nonetheless, he still used race as a biological entity in spite of the evidence on social disadvantages that he collected and addressed in the analytic chapters of the book. He went to the most exquisite lengths – supported by existing bibliography and a mix of prevailing perceptions regarding the Portuguese in general and the islanders in particular – to argue that the Portuguese had a racial type with African blood. He made an exception for those from the island of Fayal in the central cluster of the Azores, who were supposedly 'whiter' than the other islanders due to 'special infusions of Northern European blood' via a reputedly Flemish influence.

This was an Azorean motif that Taft took at face value. Had he been a contemporary anthropologist he might have elaborated on island rivalries and seen the people of Fayal as claiming a Flemish ticket to whiteness vis-a-vis their Mediterranean counterparts from the main island of S. Miguel.⁶ But although he paid attention to this particular ideological trait among the communities, he did not explore much further the contrasts between the health patterns of the S. Miguel-descent Portuguese of Fall River and the Fayal-descent Portuguese of Portsmouth, as the data was hardly comparable (Taft 1923, 287). Taft indicated an occasional appreciation of the more suitable living conditions offered in rural Portsmouth, where the Portuguese could excel in farming and interacted only with native-born Americans, as opposed to the harsh urban dwellings of Fall River, where they had to compete with many other migrants. He also referred to a micro-racial differentiation between islanders, as suggested by Hoffman (1899), and indulged ambiguously with what the implications of a contrast between Micaelenses and Western islanders might be (Taft 1923, 303). But in the end that was not the point and it did not affect the general racialization of the Portuguese.

The ease with which Taft racialized the 'so-called white Portuguese' also evokes a tradition in English literature – epitomized by Lord Byron's poetry and Richard Burton's colonial adventure narratives – that represented the Portuguese as some sort of mongrel people. It was a perception perhaps shared by Taft and other New England white Protestants, including the Fall River mill owners with whom he interacted during fieldwork. Portuguese leaders who later contested Taft's findings blamed his distorted views on the fact that he had interacted with the wrong people: local authorities and mill owners who were highly prejudiced about the Portuguese. The racist assumptions about the Portuguese were shared throughout the English speaking world. Writing on the former British Caribbean, Harney (1990) noted that there was an ingrained Anglophone tradition of regarding the Portuguese as non-white and it is likely that a sense of this was also shared by the predominantly white academics that were Taft's main audience.⁷ It was outside the walls of academia that the racial categories used in the book were contested, precisely by those who were its subjects.

In the decades that followed the publication of *Two Portuguese Communities*, Taft shifted his interests towards other subfields of social science, such as criminology and the broad patterns of international migration (Taft 1936, 1942; Taft and Robbins 1955). We do not know if he ever returned to Fall River and Portsmouth or if he considered revisiting his data, but there was no major publication as a result if he did. The original book, however, was republished almost 50 years later, in a double reprint (1967 and 1969) within the *American Immigrant Collection* series (Taft 1967, 1969). This was an epic collection promoted by the New York Times as showcasing the contributions of Afro-descendants and different European nations to the making of contemporary America. It is an ultimate irony that *Two Portuguese Communities* was chosen to stand for a community that, as we shall see, disliked it so much.

We do not have data on the impact of the 1960s editions, other than the fact that they made the book more easily accessible in the second-hand market supplied by libraries discarding dormant volumes. But we do have elements on the reception of the original 1923 edition. *Two Portuguese Communities* had positive reviews in academic journals (Kirkpatrick 1924; Park 1925; Wätjen 1925). Clifford Kirkpatrick from Brown University recommended the book enthusiastically 'to social workers in contact with the Portuguese'

and to all students of social science not only for its valuable material but also for its exemplary application of the scientific method (1924, 451). He also observed that 'a dominant note in the book is the unanswered question as to whether the social inadequacy is due to lack of native intelligence or to environmental causes' (1924, 450); converging data on the Californian Portuguese inclined him to believe in the inferior intelligence of the Portuguese (Kirkpatrick 1924). Robert Park accepted easily that the Portuguese were racially admixed, and that they were 'a low-grade people, and one that responds very slowly to supposedly better economic and living conditions of the American environment' (1925, 272). Yet, he acknowledged that the inferiority could not be explained in racial terms: 'Inferiority in physical stamina, in culture, and in living conditions seems to be less due to fundamental racial than to local and historical factors' (1925, 272). In other words, Park could detect an argument for social determinants of health and illness beneath Taft's racist paragraphs. In summary, for the academics who read *Two Portuguese Communities*, Taft had done a great job in the scientific study of a group that was clearly seen as remote from mainstream America. The Portuguese in New England, however, had other ideas on the matter.

The Portuguese response

Who were the Portuguese depicted by Taft, and who were the Portuguese in New England that ultimately contested his findings? For centuries, Portuguese migrants came to the shores of New England to engage in a number of activities, from whaling and fishing to cranberry picking and other farming chores, and to work in a range of environments, from the cotton mills to construction work and from smaller and larger businesses to education, music, recreation and food industries. The Portuguese became an important component of Southern New England's population, particularly in the New Bedford area (Carvalho 1931; Rogers 1974; Pap 1981; Almeida 2006; Williams 2007; Leal 2009; De Sá and Borges 2009; Feldman-Bianco 2009; Holton and Klimt 2009; Warrin 2010; Leal 2011).

They came from different regions of mainland Portugal and from the Atlantic islands of Azores, Madeira, and Cabo Verde. Place of origin, time of arrival, community of residence, all contributed to distinctions, differences and potential antagonisms among the Portuguese. Some of those rivalries continue to be played out today. Oppositions are relational, playing islands against mainland, one archipelago against another, Western islands against Eastern islands, and a number of other possibilities that are about the present yet use the language of an imagined place of origin.⁸

The complex history of the islanders, in particular, would contribute to confusion within the U.S. as officials tried to classify Portuguese migrants according to racial categories. Before the arrival of Portuguese sailors in the Fifteenth century, none of the three archipelagoes (Azores, Madeira, Cabo Verde) had indigenous populations. The Azores and Madeira were settled predominantly by mainland Portuguese peoples, occasionally by Northern Europeans (reputedly Flemish and French). Some of the islands had highly stratified plantation systems, such as the main island of Madeira and S. Miguel in the Azores. Throughout the Nineteenth century, rampant poverty pushed large numbers of Madeirans into Caribbean and Guianese plantations (Harney 1990; Bastos 2008); later, both Madeirans and Azoreans were contract labourers in Hawaiian sugar plantations (Williams 2007). Towards the end of the century, many Azoreans joined the labour force in

New England’s mills and other places in North America (Lamphere 1987; Warrin 2010). The islands of Cabo Verde, off the coast of Guinea, had served as a platform in the Atlantic slave trade and its population had both European and continental African ancestry. Capeverdeans had crossed the Atlantic into New England as whalers and sailors since the Eighteenth century. Known as *Brava* after the name of one of the Western Cabo-Verde islands, they challenged the racial and social classifications in the U.S. by being free African migrants and also black Portuguese. For census purposes, they counted as ‘coloured’ (Halter 1993). Anthropologist Miguel Moniz suggests that such plural identifications definitely distinguished the Portuguese migrants from other Southern Europeans (Moniz 2009, 415). So complex and unsettling was the matter that there is even evidence of ambiguities in census data collection at that time. The Portuguese qualified as white for official purposes, but some data collectors for the 1920 U.S. household surveys thought otherwise. Many filled the box for ‘race’ for Portuguese households with a handwritten ‘O’ (for ‘other’). This was later overwritten, presumably by a supervisor, with a ‘W’ (for ‘white’) (see Figure 1).

New Bedford was the one place where Portuguese from all backgrounds – mainlanders, Azoreans, Madeirans, Capeverdeans – had settled. It was home to Portuguese whalers, sailors, tailors, mill labourers, shopkeepers, health professionals and musicians. And it was there that the anti-Taft voices were most strident.

Fall River was different, and Taft had chosen it as the centre for his study because of the homogeneous character of the Portuguese community there: it was predominantly Azorean and comprised of recently arrived labourers. The industrial development of Fall River started later than its Northern counterparts of Lowell and Manchester. At the time of Taft’s research, Fall River was an industrial hub with a large number of cotton mills

Relationship of this person to the head of the family	Sex	Age	Color or race	Place of birth	Year of immigration	Year of naturalization	Year of arrival in U.S.	Place of birth	Year of immigration	Year of naturalization	Year of arrival in U.S.	Place of birth	Year of immigration	Year of naturalization	Year of arrival in U.S.
Head	M	70	M	Portugal	1848	1878	1848	Portugal	1848	1878	1848	Portugal	1848	1878	1848
Wife	F	70	M	Portugal	1848	1878	1848	Portugal	1848	1878	1848	Portugal	1848	1878	1848
Daughter	F	57	S	Portugal	1852	1882	1852	Portugal	1852	1882	1852	Portugal	1852	1882	1852
Brother	M	59	S	Portugal	1851	1881	1851	Portugal	1851	1881	1851	Portugal	1851	1881	1851
Servant	F	14	S	Portugal	1894	1914	1894	Portugal	1894	1914	1894	Portugal	1894	1914	1894
Servant	F	14	S	Portugal	1894	1914	1894	Portugal	1894	1914	1894	Portugal	1894	1914	1894
Servant	M	19	S	Portugal	1894	1914	1894	Portugal	1894	1914	1894	Portugal	1894	1914	1894
Head	M	47	M	Portugal	1852	1882	1852	Portugal	1852	1882	1852	Portugal	1852	1882	1852
Wife	F	39	M	Portugal	1844	1874	1844	Portugal	1844	1874	1844	Portugal	1844	1874	1844
Son	M	14	S	Portugal	1894	1914	1894	Portugal	1894	1914	1894	Portugal	1894	1914	1894
Daughter	F	14	S	Portugal	1894	1914	1894	Portugal	1894	1914	1894	Portugal	1894	1914	1894
Daughter	F	12	S	Portugal	1894	1914	1894	Portugal	1894	1914	1894	Portugal	1894	1914	1894
Daughter	F	10	S	Portugal	1894	1914	1894	Portugal	1894	1914	1894	Portugal	1894	1914	1894
Daughter	F	7	S	Portugal	1894	1914	1894	Portugal	1894	1914	1894	Portugal	1894	1914	1894
Daughter	F	5	S	Portugal	1894	1914	1894	Portugal	1894	1914	1894	Portugal	1894	1914	1894
Son	M	3	S	Portugal	1894	1914	1894	Portugal	1894	1914	1894	Portugal	1894	1914	1894
Daughter	F	13	S	Portugal	1894	1914	1894	Portugal	1894	1914	1894	Portugal	1894	1914	1894
Head	M	43	M	Portugal	1851	1881	1851	Portugal	1851	1881	1851	Portugal	1851	1881	1851
Wife	F	42	M	Portugal	1851	1881	1851	Portugal	1851	1881	1851	Portugal	1851	1881	1851

Figure 1. U.S. census. Portuguese immigrant families. Note the ‘race’ column, with ‘o’ for ‘other’ replaced by ‘w’ for ‘white’. Photograph of microfilm, New Bedford Public Library.

and a wealthy class of Yankee families who owned them (Comforti 2013). The cotton industry devoured human labour and, by that time, it had already depleted local generations around the main industrial poles of Lowell, MA, and Manchester, NH. It had attracted English and Scottish men and women whose lives had already been affected by the rise and fall of the cotton industry of Northern England (Eno 1976; Dunwell 1978). These were followed by Irish workers making their way across the Atlantic and impoverished French Canadians coming down from Quebec. The vibrant economy of New England had also made room for Poles, Russian Jews, Syrians, Italians and, ultimately, the Portuguese. The migrants were employed in a range of unskilled and skilled tasks: as weavers, doffers, spinners, spoolers, scrubbers, sweepers, card-strippers, speeder-, slubber-, warper-, beamer- and slasher-tenders, loom-fixers, trimmers, and dyers amongst others (Taft 1923, 212, 214, 253). Mill owners and managers were not shy of employing underage children, both in some of the above positions and as table boys, bobbin boys, braiders, winder tenders, fillers, harness makers, cloth handlers and sometimes as office boys (Taft 1923, 232). In the 1910s Lewis Hine photographed child labourers from several sectors of the economy, including from the cotton mills of Fall River. His photographs from Fall River reveal no shortage of Portuguese names among the children depicted (see Figure 2).

The waves of European migrants that fed the cotton industry in New England moved through categories of colour as they moved up the ladder of the mill economy and of the social hierarchies outside the mills. Jews, Italians, Irish and others faced a long path to whiteness, itself a dynamic entity (Roediger 1991; Ignatiev 1995; Jacobson 1998; Burkholder 2010; Painter 2010). Groups could rise in the hierarchies only once others came

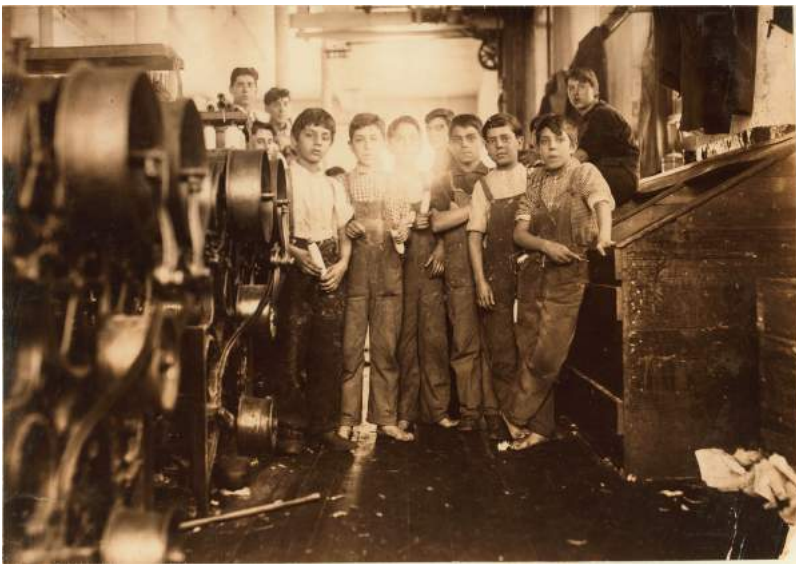


Figure 2. Working boys, some of them Portuguese, at a Fall River mill, photographed by Lewis Hine in January 1912, with the legend 'Young doffer and spinner boys in Seaconnet Mill. The youngest are Manuel Perry, 111 Pitman St. John E. Mello, 229 Alden St. Manuel Louis. None of these could write their own names. The last couldn't spell the street he lives on. They spoke almost no English. Location: Fall River, MA'. Collection of Lewis Wickes Hine (1874–1940), photographer,

in to fill the lower positions. In Fall River's industrial economy in the 1920s, the Azorean Portuguese were the late arrivals. When Taft conducted his research, they were stuck in the lower strata and appeared as a homogeneous group. The Portuguese of New Bedford would have been far more challenging to depict, to measure and to assess due to the wide variety in their provenance, time of arrival, identifications, professions, socio-economic class and education.

Contested knowledge: the book, its author and the subjects

Two Portuguese Communities was applauded by academics as an exemplary research and as a potential resource for social workers, but it was utterly disliked by the Portuguese communities in New England. The book became the target of public disputes and was loathed on the streets and in the newspapers of Southern New England. Community leaders declared war on its author out of indignation at the way in which he represented the Portuguese. In New Bedford alone, on 23 March 1924, allegedly 6000 people gathered in the streets with the sole purpose of demonstrating against a book that they might not even have read but that they still found offensive to their own sense of self.

The meeting was originally supposed to be held indoors on the assumption that it would attract a restricted number of participants. However, so many people sent letters and telegrams of support for the cause, and so many people expressed their desire to participate, that the meeting was relocated to successively larger venues, until finally scheduled at the large headquarters of the *Club Recreativo Portuguez*.⁹ On the day of the meeting, however, more and more people flocked into the place, forming a crowd so big that it had to move outdoors. It was most likely a typically cold March Sunday as the crowd gathered in Grove Park, by the waterfront of the city's South end. The following day's papers reported on the event. The page-wide front headline of the *A Alvorada's* newspaper referred to the 'big protest demonstration of the New Bedford Portuguese colony', while its subhead reported that 6000 Portuguese people came to state their protest against the insulting book by Dr. Taft: 'Cerca de 6.000 Portuguezes acorrem a lavar o seu protesto contra o livro insultuoso do Dr. Taft.' Later that day, the English-language *New Bedford Evening Standard* also reported on the demonstration, albeit on the last page: 'Portuguese Government asked by 6000 to answer to Dr. Taft.'

Support for the demonstration came in all forms. Mrs. Simão, resident and owner of 402 Front Street, for example, offered her porch as a podium for the speakers. The prestigious philharmonic City Band began the day with the national anthems of the United States and of Portugal. The crowd cheered and applauded. The consul of New Bedford, Madureira e Castro, made an inspired speech, claiming that the book had wounded and offended the Portuguese but that no insult or offense should follow in return. He declared that, as the committee in Fall River had suggested, the book should be sent to the Portuguese universities so that Portuguese academics – whom he praised very much – could respond to it word by word. Before an enthusiastic crowd, the consul read aloud the motion:

The Portuguese of New Bedford, with no distinction of class, political affiliation or religious beliefs, gathered in Grove Park, made the deliberation of protesting against some of the statements of Professor Donald Taft in his recently published book "Two Portuguese Communities in New England", in which the Portuguese race is considered inferior and ignorant – something that not only hurts an entire race that proved itself along the centuries as a race of

brave conquerors, explorers, navigators, colonizers, as is proved by the great republic of Brazil, by the vast colonies that make for the third empire in the world, a race to whom the civilization owes so much, which has an epopee that is pair to Eneida and Ramayana, translated in 23 languages, now creates dissent among the races that constitute the great nation of the United States of America; [and also of] sending to the Portuguese government via its representative in Washington the will of New Bedford that our government takes the task of responding to the book in question, either as suggested by the colony of Fall River or other, to raise up the morals amongst the Portuguese and give moral support to the targeted communities of Fall River and Portsmouth.

The next speaker, Dr. Pitta, was met with cheers as he took issue with the book's approach to fertility, mortality, the care of the mothers and, of course, the racist criteria. After a digression on the shades of the Latin (Mediterranean) peoples, their exposure to the sun and their sailing habits, he questioned Taft's generalizations as being the private opinions of a restricted number of Fallriverites who were prejudiced against the Portuguese. He added that a memo of protest should also be addressed to Columbia University because of this shameful work written by one of its associates.

Many other speakers followed, praising the Portuguese community and invoking the most valued aspects of Portuguese identity – literary epics, pioneering sea discoveries and the glorious distant past. Last to speak was the teacher of Portuguese in Fall River, Mr. Sá Couto, who had been actively involved in writing newspaper articles against Taft. He called for a scientific reply from Portuguese academics that could unequivocally dismiss Taft's statements. The crowd cheered the speakers, using the opportunity to boost their national pride. Yet, throughout most of the speeches and actions there was a racist credo that they all shared with the very book they loathed. The speakers did not reject racism and racial thinking; they just demanded a better place in the hierarchy it implied.

That this usually low-profile community gathered to rally against one academic dissertation is remarkable. Understanding the reasons why they did so leads us to the complexities they lived in Southeastern New England at the time: the class structure they were part of, their inner divisions, the prejudice they were subject to, the harsh labour and living conditions endured by many of them, the high infant mortality rates that captured the sociological interest of Donald Taft in the first place, and their struggles over colour, race, class and access to citizenship. While the protests reveal disputes over representation and authorship – in some ways anticipating debates that would flourish in academia in the late Twentieth century – the passion that carried them suggests that Taft's use of racial categories triggered social anxieties that were particularly intense at that political moment. Indeed, the U.S. was about to produce the Immigration Act that established quotas according to a hierarchy of nations.

Disputes over representation

Two Portuguese Communities stirred the ground and angered the communities, which asked who was this sociologist who spoke of them and got it all wrong. More than half a century later, anthropologists engaged in a wave of self-criticism regarding the limitations and authoritarian character of ethnographic (or sociological) writing; the very notion of representing other peoples via ethnography had been anchored on the social and geographical distance between the author and the subject, itself an echo of a past

world of empires that created 'natives', 'races' and 'cultures' (Marcus and Fischer 1986). But the 1924 New Bedford demonstration against Taft was not just an outburst about who is entitled to speak for whom, who can represent and be represented in narratives and in sciences. It was above all about clashing understandings regarding the place of the Portuguese in the racial hierarchies of that place and time, a problem of no little importance at that troubled moment in border governance and immigration law. They wanted to make sure they were not left out.

In other words, New Bedford's anti-Taft demonstration was not solely the dismissal of a product of knowledge by subjects of that knowledge who happened to know otherwise. The passionate response of the communities revealed the intensity of New England's social fractures at that moment and the enmeshment of the pseudoscience of race in the political debates regarding immigration. As one analyst pointed out years later, Taft's book 'reflects the pseudo-scientific racism of the times to a point that verges on the pornographic' (Harney 1990, 123). The book turned out to be the ultimate catalyst for the public expression of the feelings of a community on edge.

To summarize, race was a very sensitive issue for the Portuguese in New England. It was not simply that their classification in an unwanted position in the racial hierarchies of the day was like adding insult to the injuries endured in the past and present (Felix 2004; Comforti 2013). It also threatened their future as migrant communities. What followed, thus, was not an anti-racist demonstration, but a racialized display of the Portuguese as a worthy 'race' that deserved a better place in the symbolic hierarchies. The speakers at the demonstration referred to the Portuguese in New England collectively, but they were far from being a homogeneous community. Some of them had settled in the circles of mainstream whiteness, or so they thought, and some hadn't, or so claimed Taft. Had the book been titled 'Two Azorean Communities', perhaps the demonstration would not have taken place.¹⁰ It was not the Azorean mill workers from Fall River or the farmhands from Portsmouth who spoke out at the demonstration, but the upper crust of their representatives – consuls, teachers, journalists – most of whom came from mainland Portugal. Everyone was affected by Taft's depiction of the Portuguese – not just the people from Fall River and Portsmouth, not just the recently arrived Azoreans who worked in the worst paid jobs. Everyone including the white collar leaders who took up the stage and spoke out. And while they rejected Taft's comments, they did not reject his hierarchized understanding of a society that cultivated white supremacy; they just disagreed with the place assigned to the Portuguese nationality.

At the time, there was no incipient articulation of what became later the lusotropicalist claims regarding the colour-blindness of the Portuguese and their multiracial, pluricontinental nation, which euphemized a late empire.¹¹ The offended Portuguese spoke of their nationality using raw imperial signs and evoked a mythical epic past. Nor was there any anti-racist, pan-continental drive for solidarity; the repertory of the disenfranchised was meagre and the bonds between the different groups in the community were volatile.

The community's demand for an official response from Portuguese scientists would never be met. Perhaps the impressionistic and laudatory monograph about the Portuguese of New England written a few years later by Boston's Portuguese consul Eduardo Carvalho (1931) was thought of as a reply to Taft, but it in no way matched Taft's solid empirical research (Cordeiro and Vidal 2012). In years to come, the identity struggles of

the Portuguese in New England persisted and took many forms (Almeida 2006, 2010; De Sá and Borges 2009; Feldman-Bianco 2009; Moniz 2009).

Final remarks

Two Portuguese Communities did not make it into the canon of early works of American sociology, nor did its author enter the pantheon of pioneer social scientists, in spite of the laudatory comments on his work by sociology's tsar Robert Ezra Park (1925). We can speculate whether the crude and racist passages that marked the beginning and end of the book condemned it to obsolescence in the very academic settings of which it was a product, as times changed and the social sciences moved away from racialism. Interestingly, however, it was precisely its crude and racist component that gave the book a parallel life – albeit an infamous one. Even today, the book figures in scholarship on the Portuguese in America more for its offensive elements than for its knowledge about past communities (Harney 1990; Moniz 2009; Almeida 2010).

We could also speculate on what other life the book might have had if it had been solely composed of the analytic chapters V and VI, with a minimalist introduction on the capacities and limitations of quantitative sociological analysis. It might have turned into a reference for the history of those communities, it might have led to further sociological studies on a fairly invisible migrant group.

Either way, *Two Portuguese Communities* had a complex life, achieved a second edition, and every now and then gets renewed attention. From today's perspective, it is worth revisiting the book for the tension it leaves open. On the one hand, there is an accomplished effort to identify social variables, sound statistical work around them and a sophisticated formulation of social hypotheses that could account for the problem of high infant mortality. On the other hand, there is an upfront adoption of race as biology, as fate and as explanation for ill health.

That tension opens two meaningful avenues for analysis. By reading Taft's description of the working and housing conditions of the migrants and adding to them other sources of local history, we can enumerate a variety of hazardous factors that influenced their ill health: toxic work environments (e.g. in the production of the cotton print calicoes that Fall River was so famous for); toxic living quarters with still waters and other vehicles for infection; mothers' inability to maintain regular breastfeeding due to long working hours; difficulties in communication in a new social and cultural setting; the breaking of community structures and support, and so on. In spite of the racist introduction and conclusion, the descriptive chapters provide enough good material for us to get to know the materiality of life and health problems in the communities in the 1920s.

The other reason to revisit this obscure book is that used in the present article: *Two Portuguese Communities* offers a magnified historical parallel to contemporary trends of re-inscription of race in the health sciences (Maio and Monteiro 2005; Reardon 2005; El-Haj 2007; Palmié 2007; Anderson 2008; M'Charek, Schramm, and Skinner 2014; Duster 2015; Fullwiley 2015). *Two Portuguese Communities* is particularly revealing of how society and knowledge co-produce each other in given circumstances. At that time and place, racialism and immigration control were co-produced in ways that become more distinctively clear when we look back at them from today. Even Taft – a well-equipped social scientist who pointed out all the reasons for ill health among migrant communities – did not

prevent his book from letting racialism in. In a way, it spoke louder than the book's accurate passages of social analysis.

Almost a 100 years later, at another moment of troubled border governance – particularly in Europe – race is back in the sophisticated language of the molecular sciences. While studies of science, technology and society remain alert to the co-production of these newer forms of racialism and the associated exclusionary policies, the study of a comparable past case contributes to expanding the scope and depth of today's analytical – and political – work.

Notes

1. The prospect of using 'culture' instead of 'race' to account for differences between human groups was the keystone of cultural anthropology since its early days in North America, having its most visible expressions in the nurture vs. nature debates (Boas 1911, 1940; Lowie 1917; Benedict 1934, 1943; Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1952; Mead et al. 1968; Stocking 1968; Burkholder 2010). Indeed, the departure from racial or other biological and psychological explanations for social facts was a goal shared by the different social disciplines seeking epistemological autonomy and academic maturity in the early Twentieth century.
2. Giddings's correspondence and personal papers, kept at Columbia Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, reveal an active, engaged and hard-working professor and researcher, who supervised dozens of students at the same time, taught his courses and led his seminars, while also promoting empirical research and publishing. Some of the papers suggest that his classes were exciting and passionate but occasionally lost structure and focus as the speaker elaborated freely on new ideas rather than reciting established knowledge (see also Northcott 1918; Shenton 1932). Scholars who later analysed the development of sociology in the United States suggested that Giddings was known for anti-Semitic remarks, which could have been behind his uneasy relationship with Seligman at Columbia (Wallace 1992): Bonilla-Silva and Baiocchi (2007, 82) described Giddings as the epitome of racist sociology.
3. Brazilian scholar Gilberto Freyre, who was at the time an MA student at Columbia, claimed that Boas's classes were hard to follow but that the master interacted profusely with students and informal audiences in coffee shops and bars around campus. (Interview given by Freyre to Elide Rugai Bastos in the 1980s. I am thankful to Elide Rugai Bastos for sharing with me this information and insight in August 2015.)
4. After retiring he would take visiting professor positions in different places, maintaining a base in Illinois until his death in 1970. He had become a specialist on criminology and international migrations. He also worked at length on a book on the sociology of international conflict that aimed to be a major theoretical contribution but the outcome was never satisfactory enough to be sent out for publication (Hullet 1971).
5. Sicilians and other Southern Europeans were classified at the bottom of the hierarchy. Jacobson narrates a telling episode from the same period: a black man who was accused of the crime of inter-racial sex ended up being acquitted as it was proved that the women in question was Sicilian, thus they were not from different 'races' (quoted in Jacobson 1998, 4).
6. A few short periods of residence in Southern New England made me aware of this tension. When in 2013 I engaged in the project of revisiting Taft's monograph, I had two different invitations for local TV programmes and both interviewers raised the (unsupported) issue that Taft would have favoured the residents of Portsmouth over those of Fall River on a racist basis.
7. At the time Taft graduated from Columbia, comments and jokes with explicit racist contents were a common presence in the literature that circulated on campus. Alumni reunions at commencement ceremonies featured costume parties and parades, which might include anything from orientalist phantasies to uniformed prisoners to the Ku-Klux-Klan burning a straw dummy. Reported as enjoyable, funny moments of recreation and celebration in terms that

are shocking to contemporary readers, those parades reveal much of where the students and alumni of those years stood. I am thankful to the Rare Books and Manuscripts collection of Columbia University for giving me access to the university's yearbooks and other relevant documents.

8. See Notes 6 and 10.
9. Data extracted from the collections of the Ferreira-Mendes Portuguese Archives at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth; New Bedford Public Library; New Bedford Whaling Museum Library.
10. For this point I am thankful to the discussion on a talk at Casa dos Açores da Nova Inglaterra (New England House of Azores) in 2013, hosted by its president Nélia Alves.
11. That ideology would be developed by Freyre (1953) after touring the Portuguese colonies in Africa and was later adopted by the Portuguese government as a way to embellish the colonial governance; the core idea was that the Portuguese were more prone to inhabit the tropics, less racist than other Europeans and more suited to having friendly and amenable relationship with peoples around the world. The mantra of the inexistence of racism among the Portuguese was so thoroughly diffused that many Portuguese people continue to swear by it.

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