

MINUTES
of the
Planning Meeting
for
A National Conference on the Portuguese-American Experience

Date: May 20, 2006, 9:30 A.M.

Place: Library of Congress, Jefferson Building, Room 240, 10 First St., Washington, DC

Participants: Deolinda Adão (U.C. Berkeley), Onésimo Almeida (Brown University), Pedro Belo (Millennium BCP), Elmano Costa (C. S. U., Stanislaus), Al Dutra (Portuguese Historical Museum), José Galaz (Embassy of Portugal), James McGlinchey (F.L.A.D.), Gloria Mulcahy (B.C.C.), Manuel Pereira (Embassy of Portugal), Alda Pettiti (P.A.L.C.U.S.), Paulo Soares (Business Professional) and Frank Sousa (UMD).

1. Vote on agenda, chairperson and secretary for the day

After a brief discussion in which the participants agreed to go ahead with a meeting to plan a conference to celebrate “things Portuguese” and address the needs of the community, Paulo Soares made a motion to approve the agenda for the meeting provided by Frank Sousa. The motion was seconded by Alda. All in favor.

Motion by Al Dutra to nominate Frank Sousa to chair the meeting. Seconded by Elmano Costa. All in favor.

Gloria Mulcahy volunteered to record the minutes. No one opposed.

2. Presentation by each of the participants

Al Dutra distributed a written version of his report, which was based on consultations he had with various members of the Portuguese-American community in California. He stated that the consensus is that the community is undergoing rapid assimilation and that the younger generation is in danger of losing touch with its culture of origin. In his view, the need for instruction in Portuguese language and culture is the only issue with the potential to mobilize the community and asserted that, at the present time, there is “no coherent strategy (or strong leadership) for providing education on Portuguese language and culture at the various educational levels throughout the state of California.”

Deolinda Adão reported that the Portuguese Program at U.C. Berkeley is experiencing great success, with over 200 students enrolled. However, hardly any of these students are of Portuguese descent. In her opinion, the biggest challenges facing the Portuguese of California are:

- Lack of Portuguese language instruction at below-college levels.
- Documenting the Portuguese presence in the U.S. (e.g., in film, literature)
- Increasing Portuguese visibility

Paulo Soares, a second generation business professional living outside of Portuguese ethnic communities, talked about the barriers in remaining connected the Portuguese

culture encountered by people like him—the difficulties of being able to pass the language to their children and take an active role in the building of Portuguese community.

Onésimo Almeida commented that the issues and challenges that face the community now are not new; nor are the attempts to put together a national agenda to resolve them. He gave the example of the meeting of the Portuguese American Congress at Harvard in 1973, where a national agenda was discussed but produced no significant results. In his opinion, it is difficult to carry out a national agenda because the community is geographically divided and each region has different characteristics and needs. He stated that issues need to be resolved at the regional level.

On the issue of Portuguese language and culture programs at the college level, he pointed out that there is a need to push the issue with Catholic universities, like Boston College and Providence College, which are favored by Portuguese parents who send their children to private schools. He shared some of his views on how that can be accomplished by giving an example of how behind-the-scenes negotiations by Portuguese governmental institutions and grass-roots organizing by the Portuguese community of New Jersey pressured the administration of Rutgers University into creating a Portuguese studies program.

Frank Sousa pointed out that a national conference could be used to showcase successful strategies and develop models, such as the one described by Onesimo, that can be put to use at the local level (e.g., how to mobilize parents to demand Portuguese language instruction in the elementary schools of Fairhaven).

Alda Pettiti reported that P.A.L.C.U.S has conducted various forums in order to ascertain what are the major issues facing the community. According to the feedback received they are as follows:

- Portuguese culture for future generations
- Keeping the Portuguese language alive
- Little value placed on education
- Failure of ethnic clubs to work with young people
- A national organization to address these issues

Gloria Mulcahy commented that, on the East Coast, the future of Portuguese language and culture is threatened not only by Americanization, but also by Brazilianization. The large influx of Brazilians into traditionally Portuguese communities is changing the character of these areas away from a European and Catholic matrix. Unless the Portuguese are able to negotiate strategies that ensure the survival of their culture, they run the risk of becoming even less visible than in the past. From her perspective, social mobility is the biggest challenge facing the community and a national agenda for the Portuguese should focus on:

- Improving educational achievement
- Promoting entrepreneurship
- Solving the generational divide (i.e., getting the immigrants and the American-born to work together)

Elmano Costa distributed a comprehensive memorandum in which he outlined his concerns. His presentation focused on three major issues:

- Education and its importance for “economic advancement and political empowerment.”
- Teaching/learning the Portuguese language (lack of offerings, qualified teachers and effective teaching strategies)
- Community development (job opportunities, adult education, retraining, community safety).

Jim McGlinchey talked about some of the lessons learned through the challenges and successes he encountered in carrying the Citizenship Project sponsored by the Luso-American Foundation. He proposed that one of the main issues facing the community is its lack of cohesion. He stated that this lack of cohesion is the result of the low levels of education of the majority and the fact that the educated elites do not interact with the common people. He voiced his concern about generating a national agenda that “does not speak to local issues.” He stressed the need for:

- The agenda to be generated locally.
- Self-reliance in terms of funding for the event (move away from asking the Portuguese government or organizations based in Portugal to sponsor the conference).

Frank Sousa prefaced his proposal for a conference program by saying that his idea for a national conference came out of extensive research on groups that are similar to the Portuguese. Many of these groups have annual national conferences that can be viewed as part of a process of ethnic affirmation. They tend to mobilize around issues of past victimization or the celebration of a glorious past/culture and are very effective in fundraising and lobbying politicians in support of their causes. Frank said that he envisioned this conference as a stepping stone to achieving similar results. He distributed a hypothetical program for the conference (see attached) that included celebratory activities and presentations (e.g., visit to Monticello with a focus on the relationship between Jefferson and the Abbé Corrêa) along with sessions that focused on the challenges facing the Portuguese-American community (e.g., “The Future of Portuguese Language in American”) and strategies for overcoming them (e.g., “Getting Involved in Politics at the Local Level”)

3. Open discussion of presentations and vote on whether to move ahead with the planning of a conference.

An animated discussion ensued following the presentations of the participants. Although there were different ideas about the relevance of particular issues and about the best approach to address them at the level of a national conference, all those present agreed that:

- a. Despite geographical differences, there are issues that are common to both the East and the West coast communities.
- b. The main issue is education; both Portuguese Language instruction and general educational achievement.

- c. There should be a national conference targeting community-based groups and individuals who are likely to take an active role in carrying out the strategies/best practices identified at the conference.
- d. The conference should include some sort of lobbying component, be it in the form of having politicians present at the conference or in the form of having a group or groups of delegates visit particular legislators in their offices following the conference.
- e. There should be some provision for follow-up and accountability after the conference (e.g., a “Jim McGlinchey model”)
- f. The theme for the conference should be civic participation.

4. Discussion of Topics Related to the Conference

Timetable: Although no decision was made, there seemed to be some agreement about having it in September 2007, in part, to take advantage of the closing events for the exhibit “Encompassing the Globe: Portugal and the World in the 16th and 17th Centuries” at the Smithsonian.

Structure/topics for the conference: No final decisions made. Participants seemed to favor some combination of presentation of findings and policy implications with models for implementing the identified policies.

Speakers to be invited: Not discussed in detail.

Fundraising: Frank Sousa estimated the event to cost between \$100,000 and \$150,000. Jim McGlinchey stressed that at least some of the funds should be raised from the community or American organizations. Others pointed out the difficulty of raising that amount locally. It was suggested that participants try to get support from the institutions that they represent and that those who have the means pay out of pocket. However, it was also recognized that some participants may need to be subsidized. Jose Galaz encouraged the organizers to submit a proposal for funding to the Ministério das Comunidades. Other sources of funding, like F.L.A.D. and Portuguese organizations, were also discussed.

Publication of Proceedings: Frank Sousa said that under the right circumstances, the Center for Portuguese Studies at UMD would consider editing and publishing the proceedings.

Leading Organization: After much discussion about which organization or organizations should take the lead in putting together the conference, those present seemed to agree that, given the focus of the event, P.A.L.C.U.S. is the logical choice. However, it was also agreed that P.A.L.C.U.S. does not have the organizational capacity to put together an event of this nature. As a compromise, the group agreed that P.A.L.C.U.S. will be the umbrella agency and fiscal agent, for now, and Frank Sousa and Elmano Costa will co-chair the setting up of the agenda for the conference. Elmano Costa will put together a tentative program by June 2, 2006.

- 5. Adjournment**: The meeting adjourned at about 4:30 P.M. by unanimous decision.