

Portingale to Portugee

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For Victor Mendes

Abstract. Still employed derisively, particularly in certain locales and in specific situations, the variously spelled term “portagee” has a long history. Beginning with a relatively naïve confusion over the English pronunciation and spelling of the singular and plural forms of “português” and “portugueses,” the word “Portuguese” turned (by a sort of back-formation) into “Portugee.” Significantly, the term “portagee” seems not to have started out as a derisive ethnic slur, but became one, almost exclusively, over three or four centuries. It was even used, interchangeably with the term “Dago” at times, to refer to “dark” foreigners, usually taken to be of southern European origin.

Vagrancy is a crime unknown in the Azores, it being the natural habit of the population.

“Winnowings.” *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer* 14 April 1872: 2.

Evening Bulletin [San Francisco] 20 April 1872: 4.

Of one very noticeable feature of the present commercial convulsion, we really have some reason to be, as a people, ashamed. After vaunting, for years, in the face of all mankind, our wonderful “practical sense,” and our unparalleled cleverness in regard to things material, we no sooner find ourselves in the midst of a financial

storm, than we lose our wits and set up a confused outcry of incoherent exclamations, which would disgrace a Portuguese crew driving on a lee shore. Nobody can be found to take or to hold the helm....

"The Clergy and the Crisis." *New York Times*
14 Oct. 1857: 4.

The Spaniards and Portuguese have, more perhaps than any other people, been the subjects of that John Bull-ish kind of prejudice which looks upon all foreigners as "outland dogs," whom the honour of their own country requires them to despise and misrepresent.

"Portuguese Hospitality." *Cincinnati Literary Gazette*
5 Feb. 1825 [3]: 42.

Strip a Spaniard of his virtues and the residuum will be a Portuguese.
Hartford Courant 16 Oct. 1900: 18.

The word 'Gee (g hard) is an abbreviation, by seamen, of *Portuguese*, the corrupt form of Portuguese.

Herman Melville. "The 'Gees.'" *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* Mar. 1856 [12]: 507.

The Captain says, "Curs don't grow out of lions' cubs; you can't turn a white boy into a nigger; and a Portugee, as every sailor knows, is a Portugee by birth."

Walter Besant and W. J. Rice. *By Celia's Arbor*,
Appletons' Journal Mar. 1878 [4]: 237.

The swarthy skins and dark, glancing eyes that betokened the Portuguese or the "greaser" were there in plenty, while here and there throughout the crowd could be seen the heavier forms and duller features of the German and Swede.

Viola Bruce. "On the Gonzales Ranch." *Overland Monthly* Oct. 1899 [34]: 327.

"Look at all the children!" Saxon cried. "School's letting out. And nearly all are Portuguese, Billy, not Porchugeeze."

Jack London. *The Valley of the Moon*. New York:
Macmillan, 1913: 303.

The Anglos called this zone the Portuguese Flats (*Porta-geeze* was the way they said it), which may have meant some Portuguese once had lived there, or may simply have implied that it was filled with greasers.

Richard Ben Cramer. *Joe DiMaggio: The Hero's Life*.

New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000: 17.

One Frenchman will beat two Portugee / And one Englishman will beat all three.
English Sailor's Phrase (1824).¹

The Captain of a whaler to his mutinous crew: "I haven't a bit of confidence in Portugese. Good wages and kind treatment have no effect on them. They are born cutthroats. There is not a man of you that would not disgrace a yellow dog by his company."

Biloxi Herald 15 Oct. 1892: 3.

"Even if I placarded my name on my back and what I did, 'taint likely I'd have to face a grand jury for running a knife into a mongrel Portugee way out in the South Sea a score of years ago."

Louis Becke. *The Ebbing of the Tide*, quoted in *The Book Buyer* [New York] 1 July 1896 [13]: 370.

If the Bermuda farmer is a "Portagee" (which he frequently is when he's not a Saban or a Turks Islander, or a colored person), when the weeding takes place, all the family from the cradle to the grave assist at the ceremonial.

Hanna Rion. "A Few Kind Words about the Bermuda Onion."

The Craftsman 1 June 1911 [20]: 326.

"I have sailed the high seas, touched the coast of Africa, went up the Amazon when I was a cabin boy, talked with frog-eaters, Portogees, Lascars, greasers, spigoties and one-eyed Swede captains...."

Richard Washburn Child. "The A and B of Little Jess."

Hampton Magazine [New York] Feb. 1912 [27]: 14.

"Yup, I don't care much for whale's meat ... fer eatin' purposes ... it's almost as bad as jellyfishes which no animal will eat ... except a Portygueese, and they goes bughouse about 'em...."

Glenn H. Mullin. *Adventures of a Scholar Tramp*.

New York & London: Century, 1925: 264–5.

We once discussed which were the cleanest troops in trenches, taken by nationalities. We agreed on a descending-order list like this: English and German Protestants, Northern Irish, Welsh and Canadians; Irish and German Catholics; Scots, with certain higher-ranking exceptions; Mohammedan Indians; Algerians; Portuguese; Belgians; French. We put the Belgians and French there for spite; they could not have been dirtier than the Algerians and the Portuguese.

Robert Graves. *Good-bye to All That*. 1929. New York: Anchor Books/Doubleday, 1985: 182.

The community is eminently Portuguese—that is to say, it is slow, poor, shiftless, sleepy and lazy.

“Mark Twain’s Description of the Azore Islands.”
San Francisco Daily Bulletin 22 Aug. 1867: 1.

Ev’ry time I write some Portugee
The wise ginks start to kinnin’ me.
Don’t matter if ’taint the best there be.
They all wanter stop a-kiddin’ me.
I could slip you many a wheeze
If I’d be let do it in Portugeez.
So tell them guys they’d better cheese
Diggin’ into my Portugeez.
M. G. “Stop Kidding Mack-Gaffney’s Portuguese.”
Chicago Daily Tribune 17 Mar. 1912: C1.

The Buffalo *Express* in a ribald spirit remarks: “Judging from the way Dom Pedro scooted through Chicago, we fancy he had heard of King Kalakaua’s experience with Mayor Colvin and the Board of trade. There’s no telling what Colvin would have said, but the playful young men of the Board of trade would undoubtedly have hailed him as ‘Old Brazil-Nuts,’ and have urged him to ‘pull down his vest,’ in the choicest Portugee.”

Chicago Daily Tribune 23 Apr. 1876: 4.

The White Dawn follows the adventures of three American whalers trapped on Canada’s frozen Baffin Island after their boat capsizes and their companions drown. The three are an odd lot: Billy, a roughneck, impetuous brawler; Daggett, a sensitive, inquisitive young man and Portagee, a good-natured black.

Gene Siskel. "Truth Blows in On Gale-Force Wind." *Chicago Tribune* 23 Aug. 1974: B1.

I know they call Spanish-speaking people Spicks. But what do you call the Portuguese?—
We call them Pricks, of course.

Anonymous [1968].

In the state of New York newspapers offer references to "Henry Portugee" (*The Cabinet* [Schenectady] 10 Feb. 1824: 4), "William A. Portugee" (*Kingston Daily Freeman* 26 Nov. 1883: 2), and "Eliza Portagee" (*Kingston Daily Freeman* 4 Jun. 1923: 1).

The Elizabethan Age knew the name of the country running down the western side of the Iberian peninsula as Portingal and its denizens as Portingales, terms that over time turned into Portugal for the nation, Portuguese for its inhabitants. The latter soon became problematic to some, who seemed unable to negotiate the fact that the word "Portuguese" was both singular and plural, with the upshot being, by some sort of back-formation, that while Portuguese retained its value as a plural, Portugee became the colloquial term for the singular. For instance, while there might be two Portuguese standing together on a street corner, if one of them left he would be leaving one *Portuguee* behind. Inevitably, the second "u" dropped out of the spelling (the American poet, Elizabeth Bishop, who spent nearly two decades living in Brazil, invariably spelled the word "Portugese"), and the term was spelled in various ways, running through all the vowels and then some—Port(*a*)gee, Port(*e*)gee, Port(*i*)gee, Port(*o*)gee, Port(*u*)gee, Port(*y*)gee, Porteg(*h*)ee (as in Charles Dickens's novel *Little Dorrit*), and Portag(*h*)ee. And to form the plural of this colloquial singular all that was necessary, naturally, was the addition of the final "s." What is important to note is that there is no evidence to indicate that the word was first coined as a pejorative term, one meant to slur or insult natives of Portugal. In fact, its use in stories and essays throughout the centuries is descriptively neutral at least as often as it is pejorative. Of pertinence here is the following paragraph, published in 1910:

"Portuguese" is one of those words which have been a constant pitfall to our English tendency toward false singulars and plurals, says the *London Chronicle*. To the sailor man one Portuguese is inevitably a "Portugee," just as one Chinese

individual is a “Chinee.” And before the end of the seventeenth century our forefathers seem to have been unable to speak of several Portuguese at once other than as “Portugeses” or “Portuguezes.” Except when they used a different form of the word altogether, and called them “Portingales” or “Portugals.” It is rather a pity that “Portingale” has not survived so that neither a single nor plural Portuguese should worry the English.²

“Portingale” (with or without the “e” at the end) has a long English life. “Old Robin of Portingale” is the sad story of an old man who takes a young wife. It survives as a child ballad. Chaucer, in the fourteenth century, knew the country at the western end of the Iberian peninsula as “Portyngale.” Impressed by the “intrepid Portingals who had sailed with Ferdinand Magelhaens” and who “had brought back strange tales of Patagonia and the inhabitants of those storm latitudes,” Shakespeare may have conceived of his Prospero (*The Tempest*) as “a Portingale Merchant.”³ It was recalled that well before the Pilgrims landed in Massachusetts “Portingals”—Portuguese fishing vessels—visited the Isles of Shoals off the coast of what is now called Maine.⁴ By 1824, however, when “Portingale” shows up in his poem *Don Juan* (xvi, 14), Lord Byron’s use of the word can be described only as quaint or antiquarian, although articles about the Elizabethan Age continued to quote Holinshed, the sixteenth-century chronicler on “delicates ‘wherein the sweet hand of the sea-faring Portingale is not wanting.’”⁵ Rare exceptions were Dorothea L. Ramsbottom, who, in letters to *The Albion* in the 1820s and 30s, insisted, somewhat anachronistically, on referring to Portugal as “Portingal.”⁶ Bravely quixotic, then, is the only way one can describe the effort in 1981 to resurrect the term by the Fall River–born poet, Thomas J. Braga, who chose to call his first, *saudoso* book of poems, *Portingales*.⁷

The subject of this article is not “Portingale,” however, but “Portugee,” a term with shadowy beginnings and, as we have seen, various spellings.⁸ One can only speculate that, at least at first, “Portugee” was based on a misunderstanding of the term Portuguese. In the Portuguese language “Portugueses” is the plural for “Português”; in English, however, the term “Portuguese” serves as both singular and plural, though there is evidence that the Portuguese originals were, rather awkwardly, translated directly into English. In 1708 the translator of Bartholomeu Leonardo de Argensola’s *History of the Discovery and Conquest of the Molucco and Philippine Islands* valiantly, if clumsily, referred to the “Portugueses.”

What seems to have happened, however, as I have already indicated, is that with the term “Portuguese” (understood as plural, ending in “s”) came “Portugee”

as a popular form of the singular, with, eventually, “Portugees” becoming a plural. As the *Oxford English Dictionary* explains, “Portagee” represents “a spurious ‘singular’ form of ‘Portuguese’” (adjective and noun), “this being regarded as a plural.” In due course, however, its common, pejorative function—both as singular and plural—was to express disdain for the Portuguese.

“I read that novel—*The Portygee*—and there wasn’t one Portuguese native or Portuguese descendant in the whole book,” a colleague once complained. Published in 1920, *The Portygee* was the work of Joseph C. Lincoln (1870–1944), a prolific writer of fiction with a Cape Cod setting. What my colleague had missed then, evidently (but was clearly implied in the novel), was that Lincoln’s choice of title was based on the then common usage among Cape Cod sea captains of the term “Portygees” to refer to all foreigners. Since for Lincoln the term was generic, as he indicates in the dust-jacket blurb, he could use it precisely without worrying about its ultimate derivation. As a generic term for “foreigner,” moreover, Portygee was even broader in coverage than the term Dago, which several decades ago referred commonly not only to Italians but to other southern Europeans as well, particularly the Spanish and Portuguese.⁹ It was “a crowd of ‘Dagos’” that English visitors to Madeira encountered when they went ashore, according to an English ship’s chaplain in 1872.¹⁰ In Jack London’s novel *The Valley of the Moon* (1913), one of the characters boasts: “I can lick any Dago that ever hatched in the Azores.”¹¹ And in W. H. Macy’s “Leaves from the Arethusa’s Log” (1868), the terms Portuguese and Dago are used interchangeably, the latter mainly in the dialogue.¹² Certainly a high point in the use of the term came when in the 1920s the noted American writer Malcolm Cowley referred honorifically to the sacrificed Italian anarchists, Sacco and Vanzetti, as “dago Christs.”¹³

It is clear that, like the word “Dago,” “Portugee” often lost its denotative specificity as a term employed exclusively for the Portuguese. Thus, at times, “Portugee” came to be used to refer to any foreigner or outsider subject to suspicion, derision, disdain, and inferior status precisely because of his “outsiderness.” It was not only the word “Portugee” that was used to “put down the Portuguese,” however. “Dagos” was also so employed. One observer, writing in the *Southern Literary Messenger* in 1852, notes:

Monuments of Portuguese glory stand prominently on almost every chart or map of any portion of the southern hemisphere, in the Portuguese names borne by islands, capes, coasts, towns or cities; but neither these names, nor those of the

Albuquerque, of Vasco de Gama, who led the way round the Cape of Good Hope; of Magellan, whose starry clouds attract the gaze of the southern voyager, whose vessel was the first to circumnavigate the earth; nor *Os Lusitadas*, the epic of Camoens; nor the *poesias* of Antonio Ferreira have been enough to secure respectful consideration for the Portuguese by Anglo-Saxons of the present day. Whether in Europe, Africa, India, China, or Brazil, members of the mass of the Anglo-Saxon race, when visiting Portuguese settlements, speak of the inhabitants among themselves under the name of Daygoes, "Diogos" that is—Jimmies, somewhat contemptuously used, as the epithet "Yankee," or "Jonathan," was once freely applied to all Americans by the English, the term Yankee is not now very frequently employed in that sense.¹⁴

More commonly, however, "Dago" was used to include the members of several different ethnic groups. In *Forest and Stream* in 1894, for instance, we read: "The occupants this morning [on the wharf in Biloxi] were a couple of dagos, as all Italians, Sicilians, Spanish, Portuguese, and Austrians are indiscriminately called hereabouts, who were dozing in the sunshine."¹⁵ In Los Angeles in 1908, we read of complaints of "the market seiners, mostly Portuguese and other 'Dagoes,'" who "have made sad havoc with the alongshore fishing by destroying the young of corbina, yellowfins, croakers and other breaker-loving varieties wholesale."¹⁶

It was with this more generalized meaning, possibly, that Mark Twain employed the term in naming two characters in minor works "Portugee Joe" ("American Claimant") and "The Portygee" ("My Debut as a Literary Person").¹⁷ It is unlikely, however, that it is with this broader reference that the servant Abel Stebbins employs the term in Oliver Wendell Holmes's novel *Elsie Venner* (1861) when he voices suspicion, "I can't help mistrustin' them Portagee-lookin' fellahs."¹⁸ The Mormon prophet Joseph Smith employs the term "Portugee" as a pejorative in a letter from Illinois, where Portuguese from Madeira had settled.¹⁹ When the novelist Henry James employs a variant of the term in *The Ambassadors* (1903), moreover, there can be no mistake. "I think I make out a 'Portagee,'" one of his characters says, referring, seemingly and rather casually, not simply to a native of Portugal but, probably, to a Sephardic Jew.²⁰

In addition to the examples from Mark Twain and Holmes, American writing offers a wealth of evidence of the presence of the term "Portugee" in the culture. In essays and stories there are characters whose identity carries with it the nickname—"Portege John," "Portugee Jake," "Portugee Frank,"

“Joe, the Portugee,” “Portugee Joe,” “Portugee Manuel,” “John the Portugee,” or “Peter Portugee.”²¹ A sailor out of Saybrook, Connecticut, one who has seen Portugal, might be called “Portagee Jack”; and in Fort Lee, on the New Jersey side of the Hudson River, there was a legend, with the ruins of a house to lend it credence, about one “Moll Portagee” (or “Portuguese Moll”).²² And, of course, there was the western territory’s John “Portugee” Phillips—an Azorean immigrant born on the island of Pico—who became famous for having made the long and dangerous “ride to Fort Laramie” to report on “the Fetterman disaster” perpetrated by warring Indians in 1866.²³ That “Portugee” may have been the accepted term to refer to the Portuguese in Wyoming is suggested in the statement, made in 1918 in the Wyoming *State Tribune* that the “sardines of the Portugee” are packed in tin-plate “made in America.”²⁴

Other figures were known only as “Portugee,” constituting, thereby, a type, in fiction, essay, or news account, one not calling for further identification by given or family name. In Savannah, Georgia, in 1781, there was a slave named, simply, “Portagee.”²⁵ It was “an unfortunate Portugee” who stayed behind at St. Urbes, reported an American sea captain in 1811.²⁶ One Brazilian coffee-planter was described as a “greasy Portugee.”²⁷ Sometimes a seaman was worse than a “Portugee”—he was a coward—or sometimes it was the “Portugee” who was the coward or he was a thieving, murderous villain; at other times he was merely an “unprincipled” being, “a Loafer,” a “wild” one, or an incompetent.²⁸ Of the last named, consider the views of the satisfied housewife living in “Blank Falls, Massachusetts,” whose account of her “Portugee” female help deserves quoting at some length:

I have tried having help and tried doing my own work, and have decided that it is cheaper to have help. I get a “green Portugee” (as we call them) girl for two dollars a week. That is \$104 a year. That sounds cheap to some that pay three or four dollars a week to help, but the patience that is needed to get on with these green girls can’t be calculated in dollars and cents. None of them know anything about cooking, most of them never saw a stove, and I have had some who had never seen stairs, and would only go up and down them on their hands and knees. Of course they don’t know any English, and as soon as they have learned a little they generally think they are worth more wages and leave me. I do almost all my own cooking, but the “Portugees” are good at washing and ironing, first-rate scrubbers, and like to work in the garden, so that, having all the heavy work done, I can give my time to sewing.... I do like my house to look well, and to

keep things up, so every year I allow \$35 for repairs. One year the money will go mostly for a new carpet for the sitting-room, and the next year for something else. It always all goes, for the "Portugees" are great smashers.²⁹

Besides being ignorant, the "Portugee" was also superstitious.³⁰ But occasionally, a "Portugee" was capable of being helpful, even if the captain of "a Portugee whaler" was guilty of "a big Portugee swear."³¹ Or a "Portugee" might act out of loyalty or heroism; one had manned a lighthouse under extremely dangerous conditions, for example.³² At times a "Portugee" might even warrant consideration as just "a real good feller."³³ "Portugees" might even be praised and admired for their canniness, as were the Azoreans who, making the best of their indentured service in Hawaii, left for the city when their contracts were up, or he might be valued for his skill and dependability as a farmer or as a cook aboard ship.³⁴ A "Portugee" might come from many different places: the island of Brava (as he does in Herman Melville's sketch about the Capeverdean presence in American whaling) or Jamaica, Fayal or, more generally, the so-called Western Islands.³⁵

It was rather late in the "Portugee" naming-game when John Steinbeck put forth his morally deficient "Portagee Joe" in *Tortilla Flat* (1935)—a characterization that enabled the actor Spencer Tracy, who had learned the term "Portugee" for his role as a Gloucester fisherman in *Captains Courageous* (1937), the film based on Rudyard Kipling's 1897 novel, to bring it to perfection in the movie version of Steinbeck's novel in 1942. For what it's worth, let me throw in something from the reviews of three other movies. In *Primrose Path* (1940), Ginger Rogers is faced with "'Portugee' rivals for the coveted attention of Joel McCrea"; in *Deep Waters* (1948), Caesar Romero is rather "silly" as "a light-hearted Portugee fisherman"; and in *The World in His Arms* (1973), Anthony Quinn plays a character "called 'Portugee,'" who smiles a lot and says things like "'Heh, Heh, Heh, some day I keel you, Boston Man.'"³⁶

The term "Portugee" also appears as a modifier in ethnic references—not always pejoratively. The "Portuguese-man-of-war"—"any of several large marine organisms, having long, stinging-tentacles hanging down from a bladderlike float"—finds itself referred to as "Portigee men-of-war"; further, a magazine article in 1879 ("Bush-Life in Queensland") gushes, "How charming to watch the minute 'Portugee men-o'-war,' each little bark cruising on its own account, and commissioned in the admiralty court of nature, in the name of nature's God!"³⁷ More amusing is the version of the expression "a la

Portugaise” that appears in an advertisement in the *New York Times* in 1854 routing a book called *Forecastle Yarns*. One chapter is called “A Portugé Breakfast.”³⁸ In the 1840s one “Dr. A. M. Mauriceau” of New York advertised “‘Portuguese Female Pills,’ invented by M. Desomeaux, M.D., of Lisbon, Portugal, which never fail in effecting a cure in all cases of irregularities, stoppages, or retention of the menses.”³⁹

There are, of course, many less neutral or poetic uses of “Portugee” (or “Portuguese”). A “Portuguese parliament,” according to sailors, is a gathering where everyone talks but nobody listens.⁴⁰ Seamen defined a “Portugee devil” as someone “when good, too good.”⁴¹ When a person is confused and doesn’t know where to begin telling his story, he is said to be in a “Portuguese pigknot.”⁴² A “Portagee gate” is a lazy man’s version of a gate—a rope thrown over a stake.⁴³ “Portugee time,” translated from Portuguese *a hora portuguesa*, singles out the national inclination—it is believed—for arriving late for appointments, solemn occasions, etc. “Portugee colonial” (or “Immigrant Chic”) refers to poorly-made “modern” furniture foisted on the unsuspecting recent immigrant; and a goat is “a Portugee lawnmower.” “Portagee overdrive” is the “gear” used when coasting downhill in neutral to save fuel. In California “Portugee lift” is a longshoreman’s way of criticizing anyone who avoids carrying his share of the load.⁴⁴

The social import of such combinations has not been gauged. Yet while “the derisive adjective, either as a term or pattern is not important,” it has been noted that, when “placed within a cultural context,” it “may indicate qualitatively, long-held prejudices and cultural antagonisms.”⁴⁵ This is manifestly so, for example, in the case of the “Portagee lift.” Heard on San Francisco docks for as long as anyone could remember, the term popped up in 1977 in a TV documentary about Eric Hoffer, a well-known writer at the time, who used the expression with no sense of its prejudicial nature.⁴⁶ The “Portugee” longshoreman appears in references by the comic Johnny Carson, who pretended to insult a person in his audience by describing him as having seen “his mother in a stag movie with five Portuguese longshoremen” (“Tonight Show” 22 May 1979). Dick Martin told a similar joke involving an Aunt Martha who was delighted to find herself the only female shipwrecked with a boatload of Portuguese sailors (“Tim Conway Show” 19 April 1980). Heading Steve Martin’s list of things to be thankful for on the eve of Thanksgiving Day in 1981 is “the Atlantic Ocean because without it a lot of Portuguese would be walking into my living room” (“My Best Show Ever” 25 November 1981). Here the joke also

reflects the xenophobic feelings about immigration overall. On another occasion Martin presented as one of the “Bizarre Oddities of the World” a bit about the Portuguese dentist. Standing before two persons jumping up and down on a trampoline and speaking into a hand mike and wearing a trench coat, Martin reports: “If you are thinking of going to Portugal this year, be sure to have your cavities filled because here in Portugal they still practice the art of trampoline dentistry” (“Comedy Is Not Pretty” 23 January 1982).

Then there is the “Portugee joke.” Let us end this survey, not with a bang but a few groans.

- (1) There is a five-dollar bill on the ground. Three people come along—Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, and a smart Portugee. Who, of the three, will get to it first?—Nobody. There is no Santa Claus, there is no Easter Bunny, and there is no such thing as a smart Portugee.
- (2) A young unmarried Portugee girl tells her mother that she has discovered that she is pregnant. Her mother, concerned, asks hopefully (if desperately), “But are you sure the baby’s yours?”
- (3) Want to sink a Portugee ship? Put it in water.
- (4) Portugal is the only country in the world where a Portugee’s mistress is uglier than his wife.
- (5) Hear about the new Portugee bank? You give them a toaster and they give you \$500.
- (6) “Put two Portygees on a rock in the ocean and they’ll be rich in ten days. How? By stealing from each other.”⁴⁷
- (7) “A Portuguese poet asks: ‘How do I love thee?’ and concludes, in his last line, ‘I shall love thee better after death.’ He must have seen her in a bathing suit.”⁴⁸
- (8) What is the longest bridge in the world? The Braga Bridge—it links Portugal to the U. S. of A. That same slippery span over the Taunton River connecting Somerset with Fall River is known to truckers as the “Portugee slide.”

Oddly, even when the intention has been to defend the Portuguese in America something will go awry. Consider the following paragraph culled from the *Boston Transcript* in 1910:

“Three men and a Portagee” was the description of his schooner’s crew by an old Cape Cod “cap’n,” the implication being that the “Portagee” was somewhat less

than a full man. This provincial ignorance and conceit, however, have been pretty well worked out of the Cape Cod Yankees by this time. They now see all about them the best, it might almost be said the only, farming worthy of the name, as fitted to the peculiar situation—namely, the intensive cultivation of small fruits and early vegetables—done by the skilled and industrious Portuguese, although the “Bravos” may first have arrived on the New England coast as sailors and fishermen. In many of the old towns of the cape, and, indeed, all down along the coast to the farthest “harbors” of Maine, the best places in the town, and in some instances the larger part of the land, are now the proud and prospering possessions of the little dark people. Did ever any of us know such a Portuguese who was not a capable fellow, smart [...], but smart in figure—if a woman, what the French mean by “chic”—neat in working clothes, even and neat handed in work, quick to apprehend and industrious and faithful in sticking to and finishing up a job?⁴⁹

There’s little need to italicize for emphasis the vestige of the “Portagee” epithet in the well-meaning description of the Portuguese as these “little dark people.”

Perhaps the best way to conclude this survey of the term “Portugee” and its various appearances is with a personal anecdote. Once while my cousin Manny Cabral was recovering from heart surgery, he was visited in the hospital by two of his non-Portuguese golfing buddies. I was witness to this exchange. As his friends were taking their leave, one of them said: “Well, we miss you out there on the golf course; so you better get better fast, Portugee.” To which Manny replied, amiably but pretending to take the high road, “Thanks; but to you—I am *Mr. Portugee*.”

Notes

General editor’s note. Unless otherwise noted, the reference “Print” is implicit in all bibliographical items.

¹ “L’Hermite en Italie.” *Museum of Foreign Literature, Science, and Art* 1 Apr. 1824 [4]: 308. A similar bit of doggerel is explained as “the comfortable lie”—with increased numbers—that “one Englishman, by reason simply of being an Englishman, was the equal of two Frenchmen, three Spaniards, or five Portugee” (Hamilton Drummond, “How Martin Hughes found Manoa-land,” *English Illustrated Magazine* July 1899 [190]: 323). See also: “Pungent Salts,” *All Year Round* 7 Nov. 1868 [20]: 526; “Napoleonic Caricatures,” *New York Times* 17 Aug. 1884: 9; “Some Old British Ballads,” *Chambers’s Journal* Aug. 1888 [5]: 504; and “Our Naval Increase,” *Chambers’s Journal* May 1896 [13]: 328.

² “Portuguese in English,” *Dallas Morning News* 13 Dec. 1910: 11.

³ “Stories of Adventure—Shakespeare,” *New York Times* 11 Nov. 1894: 22; M. D. Conway, quoted in *The Critic* 23 Apr. 1893 [17]: 531.

⁴ John Scribner Jenness, “The Isles of Shoals,” *The Friend* 25 Oct. 1873 [47]: 74; Jenness, *The Isles of Shoals*, Cambridge: Hurd and Houghton, 1873: 12.

⁵ “The England of Elizabeth” [from the *Edinburgh Review*], *Littell’s Living Age* [5th series] 8 Sept. 1877 [19]: 585; Charles Dudley Warner, “The People for Whom Shakespeare Wrote,” *Atlantic Monthly* June 1879 [43]: 738; “Strange Food” [from the *Cornhill Magazine*], *Littell’s Living Age* [5th series] 17 Aug. 1889 [67]: 432. See also the poem: “Mr. Barney Maguire’s History of the Coronation,” *The Albion* 15 Sept. 1838 [6]: 296.

⁶ Dorothea L. Ramsbottom, “Letter from Mrs. Ramsbottom,” *The Albion* 30 Aug. 1828 [7]: 92; 6 Dec. 1828 [7]: 205; and 10 Dec. 1831 [10]: 215.

⁷ Thomas J. Braga, *Portingales*, Providence, RI: Gávea-Brown, 1981. See also: Alison Macleod, *The Portingale*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1976.

⁸ Except in direct quotations I shall use “Portugee” throughout. Different plays on the word “Portuguese” include “Pork Chops,” “Porkacheese,” “Pork & Cheese,” and “Portugoose.” The last of these terms has a history going back to the nineteenth century at least. The following exchange is reported in the *Chicago Tribune* in the nineteenth century:

“Would you say ‘Portugee’ if you wanted to speak of one inhabitant of Portugal?” asked the golf editor, looking up from his work. “You wouldn’t call one a Portuguese, would you?”

“Of course not,” said the tiddledewinks editor. “You’d call him a Portugoose.” (“Another Question Settled,” *Philadelphia Inquirer* 26 Apr. 1896 [134]: 35)

“Porta-goose” and “Portageese” were favored terms of derision employed liberally by the American poet Ezra Pound; for a list of examples taken from Pound’s *Cantos* see: Norwood Andrews Jr., *The Case Against Camões*, New York: Peter Lang, 1988: 53. “Portugoose” also appears in A. A. Roback’s *A Dictionary of International Slurs*, Cambridge, Mass: Sci-Art Publishers, 1944: 59; reissued in facsimile by Maledicta Press, Waukesha, Wisconsin, in 1979. Common, too, is “Pork Chops.” Which brings us to Frank “Porky” Vieira, a legendary athlete and long-time baseball coach at the University of New Haven, in Connecticut, who explains that his enduring nickname evolved out of “Portugee,” his original nickname. Portuguese water-dogs, lately receiving general attention due to the Obamas’ interest in them as pets, are known as “Porties”—a nickname that is not hostile but skirts dangerously close, as I hear it, to “Portugees.”

⁹ Roback’s opinion that “Dago” was “originally a nickname for Spaniards only, deriving from *Diego* (James)” (*Slurs* 26) is supported by information from the *New Orleans Times Picayune* in 1896: “The word ‘Dago,’ now commonly applied to the Italians all over the country, came originally from Louisiana, where it at first referred only to people of Spanish origin, but was later applied to Italians and Portuguese as well. The word is a corruption of ‘Diego,’ (James,) which is a common Spanish name, San Diego being the patron saint of the Spaniards” (“Origin of Popular Phrases,” *Times Picayune* 24 Feb. 1896: 2).

¹⁰ “Leaves from a Chaplain’s Log,” *Zion’s Herald* 4 Jan. 1872 [49]: 2.

¹¹ Jack London, *The Valley of the Moon*, New York: Macmillan, 1913: 310.

¹² W. H. Macy, “Leaves from the Arethusa’s Log,” *Flag of Our Union* 4 July 1868: 430. The following joke was culled from the London journal *Puck*:

Little Tim—Father, I’m going to take up manual training.

Murphy—Don’t ye dere! Ye see what happened to him, don’t ye? Ye kin follow Emp’ror Willyum or the Mike-doo of Chiny, but Oi’ll not have ye imitatin’ that Portygesse dago—Manuel. (*Evening News* [San Jose, California] 21 Aug. 1911: 6).

¹³ Quoted in: Barry Werth, *The Scarlet Professor*, New York: Anchor Books, 2002: 40.

¹⁴ “Notes and Commentaries, on a Voyage to China,” *Southern Literary Messenger* July 1852 [18]: 393–94.

¹⁵ L. J. M. “How ‘Ras Fools the Divers,” *Forest and Stream* 24 Mar. 1894 [42]: 244. This reminds me of a “Portugee” riddle current some twenty or more years ago: “What do you call a guy who sleeps in a car? A ‘car-dosa.”

¹⁶ Edw. L. Hedderly, “Southern California Fishing,” *Forest and Stream* 23 May 1908 [70]: 820.

¹⁷ Notably, however, in his first letter on the Azores when the excursion ship Quaker City stopped there in 1867, Mark Twain referred to “a Portughee of average intelligence,” a reference that, when he converted his travel letters into the book *The Innocents Abroad*, he changed to “a Portuguese of average intelligence.” See: *Traveling with the Innocents Abroad: Mark Twain’s Original Reports from Europe and the Holy Land*, ed. Daniel Morley McKeithan, Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1958: 5, 10.

¹⁸ Oliver Wendell Holmes, *Elsie Venner—A Romance of Destiny*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1889: 424.

¹⁹ Joseph Smith [Letter from Nauvoo, Illinois], *Deseret News* [Salt Lake City, Utah] 1 Apr. 1857 [7]: 4.

²⁰ Henry James, *The Ambassadors*, ed. Leon Edel, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960: 127. See the *OED*.

²¹ William M. Turner, “Daisy’s Mission,” *Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine* Dec. 1873 [11]: 515; Henry S. Brooks, “The Crazy Professor,” *Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine* Aug. 1884 [4]: 130–31, 137; Ninetta Eames, “Staging in the Mendocino Redwoods,” *Overland Monthly and Out West* Sept. 1892 [20]: 274; “The Romance of a Post-Office: The Story of a Mining Camp,” *New York Times* 18 Dec. 1898: SM14; Luella Pierce Churchill, “Vailima, the Home of Stevenson,” *New York Times* 26 Feb. 1899: IMS12; “A Professor’s Holiday,” *New York Times* 5 Oct. 1924: BR8; Lieut. Thomas W. Symons, *Report of an Examination of the Upper Columbia River and the Territory in its Vicinity in September and October, 1881, to Determine its Navigability, and Adaptability to Steamboat Transportation*, Washington: Government Printing Office, 1882: 119; “A Roving Printer” [J. D. Jones], *Life and Adventure in the South Pacific*, New York: Harper & Bros., 1861: 34; “Boiler Let Go,” *Grand Forks Daily Herald* 14 Sept. 1897 [16]: 1; “Lost in the Jungle,” *All the Year Round* Oct. 1861 [6]: 88; “The Log of the Wanderoo,” *London Society* Sept. 1882 [42]: 288; “Up a Tree,” *All the Year Round* July 1870 [4]: 130.

²² Henry M. Lyman, *Hawaiian Yesterdays: Chapters from a Boy’s Life in the Islands in the Early Days*, Chicago: McClurg, 1906: 71–72; Thomas Dunn English, “Fort Lee on the Hudson, Second Paper,” *Appletons’ Journal* 16 Dec. 1871 [6]: 690.

²³ Hoffman Birney, “Round-Up on the Western Range,” *New York Times* 7 Oct. 1951: 234; and “Marine List,” *Connecticut Gazette* 9 Feb. 1792 [29]: 3. See also: A. M. Anderson, *Portugee Phillips and the Fighting Sioux*, Chicago: Wheeler, 1956.

²⁴ “Tin Plate Tariff Tale,” *Wyoming State Tribune* 31 July 1918: 4.

²⁵ “Georgia,” *Royal Georgia Gazette* 8 Feb. 1781 [102]: 2.

²⁶ “Extract from a Letter from an American Captain, at St. Urbes, to the editor of the Repertory,” *Concord Gazette* 23 Apr. 1811 [4]: 3.

²⁷ K. and Hesketh Prichard, “The God of the Lagoon,” *Windsor Magazine* Dec. 1899 [11]: 58.

²⁸ *Biloxi Herald* 15 Oct. 1892 [9]: 3; Virginia W. Johnson, “A Palace of Cobweb,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* July 1875 [51]: 270–71, 274; *The Athelings; or, The Three Gifts* [from *Blackwood’s Magazine*], *Living Age* 20 June 1857 [53]: 730; “Sketches in the East Indies—Pulo Pantang,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* Aug. 1855 [11]: 330; Jones, *Life and Adventure*: 34; G. H. Ballow, “Monomy,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* Feb. 1864 [28]: 309; A. D. H. “Some Incidents on a Whaler,” *Forest and Stream* 29 Mar. 1877 [8]: 110.

²⁹ Mary Dash, "A New England Letter," *Harper's Bazaar* Aug. 1906 [40]: 756.

³⁰ W. Burt Foster, "The Bo'Suns Pipe," *Duluth News Tribune* 4 Dec. 1897 [17]: 6.

³¹ Joseph M. Rogers, "The Yarn of the Ancient Mariner," *Philadelphia Inquirer* 10 Feb. 1895 [132]: 2.

³² Gustav Kobec, "Life in a Lighthouse (Minor's Ledge)," *Century Magazine* Jan. 1894 [47]: 369.

³³ H. C. Bunner, "Crazy Wife's Ship," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* Dec. 1892 [86]: 117; W. H. Bishop, "Fish and Men in the Maine Island," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* Sept. 1880 [61]: 505.

³⁴ Haole, "Sunshine and Shadows of Hawaii: A Bird's-Eye View of America's Blighted Paradise," *New York Times* 18 Feb. 1906: SM1; "Sea Cook Tries Mutiny," *New York Times* 9 Jan. 1903: 2.

³⁵ Herman Melville, "The 'Gees,'" *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* Mar. 1856 [70]: 507–9; Frank R. Stockton, "Pomona's Bridal Trip," *Scribner's Monthly* Mar. 1879 [17]: 693; Sarah Orne Jewett, "The Foreigner," *Atlantic Monthly* Aug. 1900 [86]: 154; Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "The Haunted Window," *Atlantic Monthly* Apr. 1867 [19]: 434; Bishop, "Fish and Men" 505.

³⁶ "Concerning Certain Cinematic Chat," *New York Times* 24 Mar. 1940: 111; "Missed the Boat," *New York Times* 23 July 1948: 12; Caryl Rivers, "I Fell in Love with Montgomery Clift," *New York Times* 2 Sept. 1973: 7.

³⁷ Lauchlan Bellingham Mackinnon, *Atlantic and Transatlantic; Sketches Afloat and Ashore*, New York: Harper, 1852: 222; "Bush-Life in Queensland" [from *Blackwood's Magazine*], *Littell's Living Age* 24 Jan. 1880 [144]: 219.

³⁸ *New York Times* 7 June 1854: 5.

³⁹ An example of this advertisement by "A. M. Mauriceau, Professor of Diseases of Women," with an office on Broadway, taken from the New Orleans *Times Picayune*, reads: "The celebrated 'Portuguese Femal Pills,' invented by M. Desomeaux, M.D., of Lisbon, Portugal, which never fail in effecting a cure in all cases of irregularities, stoppages, or retention of the menses, (for which Dr. A. M. Mauriceau has the exclusive agency for this country,) can be sent by mail to any part of the United States. Price \$5 a package—postage 10 cents. All letters must be post-paid, and addressed to Dr. A. M. Mauriceau, Box 1224, Post Office, N. Y." (27 April 1847: 3). See also: Ely van der Warkle, "The Detection of Criminal Abortion," *Journal of the Boston Historical Society* 1870: 4–5; qtd. by Malcolm Potts, "History of Contraception," *Gynecology and Obstetrics*, ed. John W. Sciarra, Philadelphia: Harper & Row, 1982: 7.

⁴⁰ Roback, *Slurs* 59; Frank Shay, *A Sailor's Treasury*, New York: Norton, 1951: 178. See the *OED*.

⁴¹ "Steam on the Proponitis and Hellespont," *London Saturday Journal* Jan. 1840 [3]: 26.

⁴² Roback, *Slurs* 59. He also lists "Portuguese pumping," but does not define it, saying only that it is "a phrase of uncertain but unquestionably questionable meaning, in the opinion of both Ware and Partridge" (59).

⁴³ Charles Reis Felix, *Through a Portagee Gate*, Dartmouth: Center for Portuguese Studies and Culture/University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, 2004.

⁴⁴ These last two terms are listed, respectively, by Hanley and Green. Roberta Hanley, "Truck Drivers' Language in the Northwest," *American Speech* 1961 [36]: 273. Archie Green, "John Newhaus: Wobbly Folklorist," *Journal of American Folklore* July-Sept. 1960 [73]: 211.

⁴⁵ Ed Cray, "Ethnic and Place Names as Derisive Adjectives," *Western Folklore* Jan. 1962 [21]: 34.

⁴⁶ "Eric Hoffer: The Crowded Life." P.B.S.-TV.

⁴⁷ Horace P. Beck, "Folklore in Rhode Island," *Northeast Folklore* Fall 1959: 37. The basic joke was told in the nineteenth century at the expense of others—not the Portuguese. (1) "Two Mississippi River gamblers who began one night with a dime each [...] before morning had won

from each other a hundred dollars apiece." John Hay, "Kane and Abel," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Magazine* 22 Apr. 1871: 86. (2) In Irving Bacheller's novel *Eben Holden: A Tale of the North Country*, there is a reference to big talkers among the Yankees who, when alone, succeed in out-talking themselves (Boston: Lothrop, 1900: 139).

⁴⁸ "Local Items," *Chicago Tribune* 6 Apr. 1884: 15.

⁴⁹ "Portuguese Cape Codders," *Colorado Springs Gazette* 25 Dec. 1910: 30.

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