

Joe Machado, Ferreira Moreno, and José do Couto Rodrigues. *Power of the Spirit: A Portuguese Journey of Building Faith and Churches in California*. San José, Calif.: Portuguese Heritage Publications of California, 2012.

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Motivated by the desire to valorize the accomplishments of Portuguese immigrants in the state of California, *Power of the Spirit: A Portuguese Journey of Building Faith and Churches in California* seeks to demonstrate how religion, in particular Catholicism, is at the core of the Portuguese immigrant experience and how it is ultimately inseparable from questions of identity and memory. It does so by narrating in detail the construction of churches throughout the Portuguese communities over a period of a century and honoring the clergy who guided and influenced generations of Portuguese immigrants – mostly Azoreans – in one of the United States’ largest and most diverse states.

Similar to other works concerned with the Portuguese immigrant experience in California, such as *The Holy Ghost Festas*, *The Portuguese Californians-Immigrants in Agriculture* and *The Portuguese Shore Whalers of California*, all edited by the Portuguese Heritage Publications of California, this project’s stated purpose “to research, preserve and disseminate vanishing memories” (viii) points to the effacing power of time and distance and the need for continuous publications that counteract the ever growing invisibility of the Portuguese community in the United States. As immigration rates drastically declined in the

last decades and the more recent generations – whether through pressures to assimilate or mixed marriages – are no longer able to speak Portuguese, a deep sense of religiousness is in many ways the last link to the homeland. It is worth pointing out that this work chooses a monolingual, English version, arguably specifying its target audience as the fully assimilated younger generations of Americans of Portuguese descent.

Written by Joe Machado, Ferreira Moreno, and José do Couto Rodrigues, with the support of dozens of both researchers and photographers, the book is divided into eleven chapters. Each of the first ten chapters narrates the construction of an extensive list of churches, grouping them into ten geographical areas, while simultaneously providing an account of the gradual integration of the Portuguese immigrant community into the fabric of Californian society. Each chapter is filled with a series of older and newer pictures, mostly of exterior and interior views of the churches, that both illustrate the endeavors narrated and serve as an effective visual reminder of the immigrants' deliberate attempts to replicate the religious communities they had left behind. The last chapter is dedicated to the Portuguese clergy, listing over 100 short biographies of members of the Portuguese-American clergy who served in California over the last 150 years.

In the aftermath of the scandals surrounding the Catholic clergy in the United States, including in California, this project stands as an alternate, perhaps rescuing, view of the Portuguese clergy and even an exaltation of their leadership and guidance among the Portuguese immigrant community. As a result, the narrative is a biased, religiously committed view on the part of the authors, who appear to be too close to the subject matter to be able to provide a critical account of both successes and failures of the Catholic building endeavor. To be fair, the authors never claim such objective. It is unquestionably an openly pro-Catholic view, one which unabashedly glorifies the Portuguese immigrants in California in as much as they have all remained faithful members of the Catholic faith. There is no consideration in this historical account for those who have not remained actively involved in their religious community. In a way, these stories are erased from the history presented here. As the absence of the word "Catholic" before "Churches" in the title of this work clearly demonstrates, for the authors and collaborators,

to be Portuguese means to also be Catholic. What stands out in this account is a profound sense that to narrate the constructions of churches is a way to comment on the Portuguese communities' desire to sustain its heritage and tradition.

One of the major strengths of this project is certainly its comprehensive nature, since according to its authors, every effort has been made to include all churches built by the Portuguese in California, including those that have already been demolished, such as the temple dedicated to St. Joseph in Oakland built in 1892 but demolished in 1965 to give place to the Nimitz freeway, lending itself to a discussion, albeit not tackled in this project, of how urban projects erected for the well-being of majorities have resulted in forcible displacements and uprooting of minority communities. *The Power of Spirit* succeeds in covering the Portuguese immigrant community dispersed throughout the vast Californian state from the Church of Immaculate Conception, in Hawkinsville, the first church in California built for and by Portuguese immigrants in 1878, to the Church of St. Agnes in San Diego, 765 miles away, offering an insight into how religion served and continues to serve as a point of communion, both literal and figurative, to generations of Portuguese immigrants and how it continues to be *the* determining characteristic of Portuguese identity.

Awarded second place in the non-fiction, multi-author category of the International Latino Book Awards in May 2013, *Power of the Spirit: A Portuguese Journey of Building Faith and Churches in California* is a well-written, accessible, straight-forward historical account, yet it lacks significant critical analysis of the descriptions provided. It makes a contribution to the growing body of work on Portuguese immigration to the United States, in particular to California, as well as providing information to those interested in the history of the Catholic church, and the history of less studied immigrant communities in California. Similar work has yet to be done concerning the other large Portuguese-American immigrant community in New England, which through a comparative approach could possibly result into a more complete picture of Portuguese immigration to the United States.

