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From Immigrant to Ethnic: Interview with Fernando Amaro by Joseph Conforti

Fernando Amaro

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Rhode Island College

ETHNIC STUDIES PROJECT

Oral History Interview # 7

with

Fernando Amaro

April 16, 1976

By Joseph Conforti

Tape 1 Side 1

- 7 Came from mainland of Portugal. Came to U.S. when 25. Has fond memories of childhood. No matter how good life is in America, he'll always want to return to Portugal.
- 22 When he does go back he wants to return to U.S. Others feel the same way.
- 35 Life as child: worked in field at 5-6 years old, tended sheep.
- 44 Few went on to high school, but he did. Respect given to high school students. During those years he was reluctant to work.
- 61 Farms were small plots of land, often subdivided.
- 69 Family: 3 girls, 2 boys, close in age. Close-knit family. Still correspond weekly. One sister here, some in Portugal.
- 88 Village: 200 families, all farmers, shepherds, market every 2 weeks, socializing.
- 124 Raised potatoes, corn, wheat--most produce used for family. Sold cheese, at market.
- 158 Life in village: everyone knew everyone else, social pressure to conform. Successful families treated with more respect--many claimed kinship with you. This happened to him when he became teacher. All have feeling of belonging. People respected teenagers more there than in U.S.--respected for their education.
- 250 Family always lived in that village. Description of village, feeling of continuity as opposed to life in U.S. which is always changing.

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- 300 Church important, accepted but also criticized.
- 355 Entertainment: mostly dances on special days, especially in summer. Sense of community hard to get in U.S.
- 410 He had high school education, family had to sacrifice to send him.
- 444 Went to another town for schooling. Graduated then went to normal school and became teacher. Disliked working in fields.
- 483 He had more education than rest of family because his teacher thought he had talent and encouraged him to continue his schooling. Became teacher in nearby village, frequent visits home.

Tape 1 Side 2

- 2 Taught elementary school for 1 year then was drafted in 1962, war in Angola. Taught soldiers, then sent to Angola. Out of army at age 25.
- 24 Began corresponding with future wife who lived in Cumberland. She was from his village. She came to U.S. in 1963.
- 47 They were married in Portugal. She tried to discourage him from coming to U.S. She had worked in clothing factory here and found life here difficult. He felt he was used to hard life but he was surprised at how hard life here really was. He also worked at clothing factory.
- 82 Quit job after 6 months, felt job unsuitable.
- 85 After marriage, returned to teaching but salary insufficient so they came to America.
- 108 Wanted to come here to have good things in life but people don't realize how hard it is to get those things here.
- 118 Was hard for him to leave family but he had made decision and went through with it. He expected to return to Portugal after making money in U.S. Work for 5-10 years and then go back to Portugal as rich man.
- 147 Wife came to Cumberland because grandmother was here. Her father came because he thought America was land of opportunity. Came with his 3 children. He stayed 10 years then returned to Portugal. He came seeking better life for his children. Was considered rich man in Portugal but still had to borrow money to come to U.S.

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- 182 Most of people considered rich in his village had come to U.S. or other countries, made money and then returned home.
- 192 Every year people from his village who are here hold a reunion--represents 60 families out of 200 in his village.
- 201 Most from his village are in Cumberland and Pawtucket. He came because of relatives in area. Same social life as in Portugal maintained--club established.
- 222 Sense of community continues here.
- 280 When he arrived, he felt like returning immediately but didn't because of pride. Went to college here, took correspondence courses.
- 330 Classmate at college encouraged him to continue his education.
- 365 Got job teaching after graduation, then director of a bilingual program.
- 380 Involved in center which aids recent Portuguese immigrants.
- 420 At first, he was not really helped or accepted by established Portuguese community.
- 490 He thinks Portuguese community as a whole is now working together better. Portuguese radio station in New Bedford helpful in creating unity. Also a weekly newspaper in Fall River.

Tape 2 Side 1

- 2 Radio station, newspapers and immigrant aid society have developed in last few years. Community now feels they can reach their objectives. Previously, the older established elements didn't encourage newcomers, didn't instill confidence, held out no hope for betterment. But he got help from outside the community and was able to make progress.
- 26 People coming now are more educated than older, earlier immigrants.
- 36 Established Portuguese have worked hard, are now secure and they resent the new immigrants who have more education, who become influential in the community.
- 56 Now Portuguese are becoming more active, response from community still disappointing.

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- 75 He's hopeful that publicity will make community more aware of problems and more willing to cooperate.
- 80 Lived in Cumberland when he first came--in wife's father's house. He bought his own home after a few years in Central Falls. He now lives in a Polish neighborhood.
- 115 He hasn't kept much of old world culture. He still goes to church regularly. His daughter feels she is an American, not Portuguese. She doesn't want to visit Portugal. She does speak Portuguese. They still celebrate some feasts. Food similar. Club--compromise between old country and U.S. Adaptation to American lifestyle. When people came earlier and were discriminated against, they tried to Americanize themselves quickly, downplay differences. Now some traditions are beginning to be revived, ethnic pride.
- 240 He hopes to establish some roots in his community, probably won't go back to Portugal to stay. Hard for him to get a sense of belonging here.