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## **Eula Mendes: The life behind a legacy of migrant labor activism**

By **Lurdes C. da Silva** / O Jornal editor

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UMass Dartmouth lecture to focus on Portuguese migrant labor activism and the criminalization of protest

DARTMOUTH — Portuguese immigrant Eulalia “Eula” Mendes, who was 18 at the time of the 1928 New Bedford Textile Workers Strike, became a key figure in — and ultimately a martyr of — the fight for not only workers but also for migrant civic rights.

On Thursday, Jan. 30, Dr. Miguel Moniz, a visiting professor in Portuguese Studies at Brown University, will look at her life and deliver a talk at UMass Dartmouth on how she and other migrant labor leaders from Portugal contributed to the American labor movement.

“The story of migrant activists in the labor movement is rarely told,” Dr. Moniz told O Jornal. “Eula Mendes was an important if forgotten woman from Gouveia, Portugal, who began organizing workers and served as an officer in the Textile Mill Committees during the New Bedford Strike of ’28. Her activism continued afterward until her eventual deportation as part of anti-communist laws that silenced and imprisoned many who fought for labor rights, and in the case of Eula and other migrants led eventually to their deportation from the U.S.”

Titled “Eula Mendes: Portuguese migrant labor activism and the criminalization of protest,” the talk will be based on archival sources at the Ferreira-Mendes Portuguese American Archives at UMass

Dartmouth.

Dr. Moniz, a researcher at Center for Anthropological Research at ISCTE-Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, Portugal, has been studying racialization and ethnic group formation, with a special focus in histories of migrant mobility, settlement, marginalization and efforts at civic inclusion among Portuguese-speaking geographies in New England.

Hailing from Cape Cod, Dr. Moniz received his Ph.D. in Anthropology from Brown University and has been living in Lisbon since 2005.

“I had been aware of Eula Mendes as a result of work done by [UMD Professors] Daniel Georgianna and Penn Reeve, and knowing that the Strike of 28 archive and Ferreira-Mendes Portuguese-American Archives at UMass Dartmouth’s library contains a wealth of material on the strike and other migrant labor activism, I began a deep dive researching Eula Mendes life and work, which helps to chronicle the importance of migrant voices in labor activism; and places the treatment of Eula Mendes and other politically active migrants in a context of the intimidation and repression of civic and labor rights for all migrants,” Dr. Moniz told O Jornal.

Hosted by the Ferreira-Mendes Portuguese-American Archives in coordination with the Center for Portuguese Studies and Culture/Tagus Press at UMass Dartmouth, the talk will take place from 11 am to 12:30 p.m. at the archives.

“Eula Mendes sounds like an extraordinary individual,” said Dr. Paula Novera, the faculty director of the Ferreira-Mendes Portuguese-American Archives, in a prepared statement. “I look forward to hearing about her life and her role during the 1928 New Bedford strike.”

At the time of the 1928 New Bedford Textile Workers Strike, Mendes had been doffing spindles in the carding room of the City Mill textile factory as her family’s wage earner since she was 14.

At the onset of the strike, she began attending meetings run by regional and national labor organizers.

“Promoting Portuguese industrial migrant worker participation in the strike made Eula a leader in her mill and in the community and she would eventually become a member of the strike’s executive committee,” according to a press release announcing the lecture.

During the strike she was arrested several times and her prominence as a leader left her blackballed from working in the mills after it was settled. Instead, she went to work for the labor movement as a textile worker union secretary, and as an organizer, along with her husband Joe Figueiredo, for the Communist Party in New Bedford and the region.

Dr. Victor K. Mendes, director of the Center for Portuguese Studies and Culture hopes Dr. Moniz’s talk will be as successful as his previous trips to UMass Dartmouth.

“Dr. Moniz’s scholarly visits to UMass Dartmouth are becoming a productive habit,” Dr. Mendes said. “He was here for a week in 2007 teaching, researching, community-networking, under the auspices of the Hélio and Amélia Pedroso/Luso-American Development Foundation Endowed Chair in Portuguese Studies at UMass Dartmouth and his public lecture at the Center for Portuguese Studies and Culture/Tagus Press was a huge success. My hope is that Dr. Moniz’s upcoming lecture will be an even bigger success.”

The lecture is free and open to the public. For more information about the lecture, contact 508-910-6888 or send an email to [prioux@umassd.edu](mailto:prioux@umassd.edu).....