

DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

<http://dichp.bnportugal.pt/>



DUFFY, James (Elkton, Maryland, 1923 - Arlington, Massachusetts, 1999)

Born on 1 May 1923 in Elkton, Maryland, James Edward Duffy was one of the forerunners in the systematic study of African history in the United States. His contributions to the development of modern historiography on contemporary Portuguese colonialism were highly significant, as he was among the first to analyse various aspects of the Portuguese colonial system in Africa. His work particularly focused on indigenous politics and race relations between the Portuguese and Africans.

Duffy studied at the University of North Carolina, where he completed his BA in 1944. He briefly worked there as a Spanish tutor. Before 1946, he married Chase Duffy, who, like him, was a graduate of the University of North Carolina. Chase later achieved distinction as an editor, holding positions at the University of North Carolina Press, Harvard University Press, the Philips Academy's Peabody Museum (Andover), and Digital Press. She was also a prominent political activist in the Democratic Party until her death on 16 May 2011.

In 1946, James Duffy moved to Guatemala, where he and his wife worked as English teachers at the *Instituto Guatemalteco Americano* [Guatemalan American Institute], a cultural centre funded by the US State Department. During his time in Guatemala, he earned an MA in Spanish from the University of San Carlos de Guatemala in 1947. This period also marked the beginning of his friendship with another eminent Africanist, Philip D. Curtin, who later became his doctoral colleague at Harvard (Philip D. Curtin, *On the Fringes of History...*, 2005, pp. 48, 52-53). His time in Guatemala allowed him to explore and travel extensively across Latin America—a passion for travel that he would revisit years later in Africa, always accompanied by his wife. Back in the United States, after concluding his work with the State Department, James Duffy pursued a doctorate in Portuguese Literature at Harvard University, one of the most prestigious academic institutions in the country. During his doctoral studies, he was mentored by Francis M. Rogers, a leading scholar of Portuguese language and culture in North American academia and the director of the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures at Harvard. Upon completing his doctorate in 1952, Duffy embarked on a career in academia, dedicating most of his professional life to teaching. He served as a professor of Romance Languages, specialising in Spanish, at Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts. Notably, in the late 1950s, Duffy declined an offer from his friend Philip D. Curtin to join the University of Wisconsin, opting to continue teaching at Brandeis instead.

In 1955, at the age of thirty-two, he published his first book, *Shipwreck & Empire: Being an Account of Portuguese Maritime Disasters in a Century of Decline*, through Harvard University Press. This work, while focusing on Portuguese maritime history during the 16th and 17th centuries, had a more literary orientation.



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Duffy's interest in contemporary Portuguese colonial history emerged—or at least solidified—after an extended visit to Angola and Mozambique in 1955 and 1956. During this visit, James Duffy gained firsthand experience of the Portuguese colonial system, particularly the economic, social, and political subjugation of African populations. His direct encounters with the harsh realities of Portuguese colonial exploitation—especially the violations of fundamental rights suffered by the black population subjected to the Indigenato system and legally obligated to perform forced labour—led him to adopt a critical stance. He became an outspoken critic, denouncing the injustices and inequities inherent in the Portuguese colonial regime.

In this context, Duffy emerged as one of the foremost critics of Portuguese colonialism within North American academia. Through his books and writings, he vehemently opposed and exposed Portugal's policies of discrimination and repression against the indigenous populations of Angola, Guinea-Bissau, and Mozambique. For instance, in 1962, at a programme organised in New York at the invitation of the Carnegie Foundation, Duffy candidly presented his criticisms and denunciations of Portuguese colonialism in Africa (James Duffy, *Portugal's African Territories: Present Realities*, 1962).

Despite his overt anti-colonial stance, Duffy was a meticulous and skilled historian, producing several significant works on Portuguese colonialism in Africa. In 1959, he published *Portuguese Africa* through Harvard University Press, a project sponsored by the Ford Foundation. A few years later, in 1962, he authored *Portugal in Africa*, published by Penguin Books. This work, which has been reissued multiple times, includes an editorial by Ronald Segal focusing on the theme of "illiberal colonial policies," setting the tone for the critical content within. In these two books, James Duffy offered a critical and historiographically grounded assessment of the Portuguese colonial presence in Angola and Mozambique, spanning from the 16th century to the 1950s. Rejecting myths and politically constructed "fantasies" about Portuguese colonialism, he presented a contextualised historical analysis of Portugal's so-called "colonising mission"—often referred to as a "civilising mission"—in Africa. Duffy examined a broad range of issues, not just political but also economic, social, and cultural. These included indigenous policy, white settlement, the economic, social, and cultural development of African populations, and the exploitation of natural resources in territories under Portuguese administration. In his overall evaluation, Duffy argued that Portugal had not been "successful" in improving the living conditions of the colonised populations, questioning whether such improvement was ever the genuine aim of Portugal's "colonising mission." While Duffy acknowledged Portugal's claims of racial tolerance, particularly when compared to more overtly segregationist regimes like apartheid South Africa, he concluded that Portugal left the majority of the African population in poverty and ignorance. They were subjected to continuous exploitation, particularly in the realm of forced labour.

In 1967, Duffy published one of the most scathing critiques of contemporary Portuguese colonialism. This work, *A Question of Slavery: Labour Policies in Portuguese Africa and the British Protest 1850-1920*, focused on the enduring issues of slavery and forced labour within the Portuguese Empire, making it the central theme of his critique. Published by Oxford University Press, this pioneering book continues to inspire contemporary debates about the nature of Portuguese colonialism in Africa, particularly regarding racism and the exploitation of indigenous labour. It highlights how the African population, legally subjected to forms of forced labour until at least 1961, endured conditions that often amounted to slavery—or semi-slavery—in Portuguese colonies well into the early 20th century.



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In addition to these influential works, which are widely recognised by Portuguese academic audiences, James Duffy authored several other texts on African history and politics. For instance, in 1961, alongside Robert A. Manners, he co-authored the collective work *Africa Speaks*, which focused on African political issues, particularly European decolonisation and the struggles of African nations for independence. This book was published by the D. Van Nostrand Company and released simultaneously in the United States and Canada. Another notable contribution was Duffy's participation in *Africa: A Foreign Affairs Reader*, edited by Philip W. Quigg in 1964. This volume featured 24 contributions from international academics and prominent figures in politics and culture, including African leaders such as Leopold Sedar Senghor, Sékou Touré, and Kwame Nkrumah.

Due to his expertise in African history, Duffy was frequently consulted by the US State Department on matters relating to Portuguese Africa. He was also among the founding members of the African Studies Association (ASA). Founded in 1957, the African Studies Association (ASA) initially brought together only North American academics but has since become one of the most reputable global associations for Africanists. Between 1967 and 1968, James Duffy served as President of the ASA and later as its Executive Secretary from 1969 to 1980. Thanks to Duffy's leadership, the ASA not only overcame a significant crisis that had shaken its structures in the late 1960s but also expanded its membership and grew into a worldwide organisation, despite its base being in the United States. On 16 October 1980, at the final meeting of the ASA chaired by Duffy, Larry W. Bowman, another prominent Africanist, publicly honoured him, recognising his crucial role in the consolidation, affirmation, and growth of the association.

Given the pioneering nature and scientific rigour of his work, James Duffy is rightfully considered one of the key figures in the historiography of contemporary Portuguese colonialism. Many of the topics he explored continue to be subjects of study and reflection in academia today. Duffy passed away on 2 December 1999 in Arlington, Massachusetts.

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