

# Portugal and England: A Historical Overview of Relations from Medieval Times to the Present

Richard Murdoch Montgomery\*

University of Sao Paulo, Brazil

## \*Corresponding Author

Richard Murdoch Montgomery University of Sao Paulo, Brazil.

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## Abstract

*The relationship between Portugal and England spans centuries, encompassing political alliances, economic cooperation, cultural exchanges, and significant periods of tension and exploitation. This article provides a comprehensive and critical overview of the historical relations between Portugal and England from medieval times to the present, highlighting both the cooperation and the conflicts that have shaped this complex alliance. It explores key events, treaties, and figures that have influenced the trajectory of the relationship, including the heavy indebtedness Portugal accumulated with England and how this debt was transferred to Brazil in exchange for its independence—a factor that perpetuated social distortions such as slavery and inequality in Brazil. The article also discusses the contemporary context of Portugal-England relations, emphasizing the continued importance and challenges of this partnership in the modern world.*

**Keywords:** Portugal-England Relations, History, Economic Exploitation, Brazil Independence, Slavery, Inequalities

## 1. Introduction

The relationship between Portugal and England is one of the oldest alliances in European history, often referred to as the Anglo-Portuguese Alliance. While it has been marked by periods of mutual support and cooperation, it has also been characterized by significant difficulties and friction. These challenges include economic exploitation, political manipulation, and social consequences that have had lasting impacts on both nations and their former colonies [1,2]. This article aims to provide a detailed historical overview of Portugal-England relations, tracing their development from medieval times to the present, and critically examining the complexities and contradictions inherent in this long-standing alliance.

## 2. Discussion

### 2.1 Medieval Origins of the Anglo-Portuguese Alliance

The origins of the Anglo-Portuguese Alliance date back to the 14th century with the signing of the Treaty of Windsor in 1386. This treaty established a mutual defense pact, committing both nations to support each other in times of war [1,3]. However, even in its early stages, the alliance was not without tension. The political motivations behind the treaty were complex, involving power struggles not only between Portugal and Castile but also among European powers vying for influence [4]. The marriage of King John I of Portugal to Philippa of Lancaster further solidified the

alliance but also introduced English influence into Portuguese affairs, which was sometimes met with resistance and suspicion [4,2]. Philippa's English retinue and customs had a significant impact on the Portuguese court, leading to cultural shifts that were not universally welcomed [4]. The cultural exchanges that followed were a double-edged sword, promoting mutual enrichment but also leading to cultural impositions and conflicts of interest.

### 2.2 The Age of Discovery and Economic Exploitation

During the Age of Discovery in the 15th and 16th centuries, Portugal emerged as a leading maritime power. However, the relationship with England during this period was marked by economic exploitation and competition. English merchants sought to capitalize on Portugal's new trade routes and colonies, often negotiating trade agreements that were disproportionately favorable to England [5,6].

The Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494, while primarily a division between Portugal and Spain, indirectly affected England by restricting its access to new territories, leading to underlying tensions [7]. England's attempts to circumvent Portuguese and Spanish monopolies sometimes resulted in piracy and unauthorized trade, exacerbating conflicts [8]. Notable figures like Sir Francis Drake engaged in acts that the Portuguese considered piracy, attacking Portuguese ships and colonies [6].

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Moreover, the establishment of the English Factory in Lisbon in the 16th century allowed England to dominate certain sectors of the Portuguese economy, leading to significant economic imbalances [5,9]. The factory facilitated the export of English woolen cloth to Portugal while importing Portuguese wine and other goods. However, the trade terms often favored England, contributing to a trade deficit for Portugal [10]. Portugal's reliance on English manufactured goods hindered the development of its own industries, creating a dependency that would have long-term consequences [11].

### **2.3 The Napoleonic Wars and Political Manipulation**

The Napoleonic Wars in the early 19th century brought new challenges. While England supported Portugal against French invasion, this assistance came at a significant cost. The British military presence led to increased control over Portuguese affairs, and the war efforts plunged Portugal into heavy debt to England [12,13]. The British demanded favorable trade concessions and exerted political influence, effectively turning Portugal into a British protectorate during this period [14].

When the Portuguese royal court relocated to Brazil in 1808 to escape Napoleon's forces, it was under British escort and influence [14]. This move significantly impacted Portugal's economy and governance, as the administrative center shifted to Brazil. England leveraged this situation to secure favorable trade agreements and further its own interests in both Portugal and Brazil, often at the expense of Portuguese sovereignty and economic stability [15]. The opening of Brazilian ports to British trade in 1808 diminished Portugal's control over its colony and benefited British merchants [16].

### **2.4 The 19th Century: Debt and the Independence of Brazil**

In the 19th century, Portugal's indebtedness to England became a critical issue. The loans taken during the Napoleonic Wars strained Portugal's economy, and England used this leverage to dictate economic policies [1,17]. The 1810 Treaty of Commerce and Navigation, signed under British pressure, significantly favored England by reducing tariffs on British goods entering Portugal while maintaining high duties on Portuguese exports [1,18]. This one-sided agreement exacerbated Portugal's economic woes and stifled its industrial development, as domestic industries could not compete with cheaper British imports [17].

The situation culminated during Brazil's quest for independence. In 1825, Portugal recognized Brazil's independence but, under British mediation, transferred its massive debt to the new nation [19,16]. The Treaty of Rio de Janeiro not only acknowledged Brazil's sovereignty but also stipulated that Brazil assume Portugal's debts to England [19]. This transfer placed a heavy financial burden on Brazil from its inception, hindering its economic development and perpetuating social inequalities, including the continuation of slavery [20,21].

England, on the other hand, benefited from new trade opportunities with an indebted Brazil, furthering its own economic interests [22].

British investments and exports flooded the Brazilian market, and Brazil's dependency on British capital and goods grew [23]. The manipulation of Portugal's and Brazil's economic dependencies ensured England's dominance in international trade during this period.

### **2.5 The 19th and Early 20th Centuries: Slavery and Inequality**

Despite England's official stance against the slave trade, economic interests often took precedence. British industries relied heavily on raw materials like cotton and sugar produced by slave labor in Brazil and other colonies [24,25]. England's naval efforts to suppress the transatlantic slave trade were inconsistent, and loopholes allowed the trade to continue under different flags [22]. British merchants were sometimes complicit in financing and insuring slave voyages, undermining abolitionist policies [20].

The perpetuation of slavery in Brazil contributed to deep social inequalities that persisted long after abolition in 1888 [26]. The economic policies imposed by England limited Brazil's ability to develop diversified industries, reinforcing a reliance on agricultural exports produced by an oppressed labor force [23,21]. Post-abolition, the lack of support for former slaves led to systemic racism and socioeconomic disparities that continue to affect Brazilian society [27].

### **2.6 The 20th Century: Declining Influence and Contemporary Relations**

In the 20th century, both World Wars shifted global power dynamics. Portugal's neutral stance in World War II, while maintaining the Anglo-Portuguese Alliance, reflected a desire to assert its own interests independently of British influence [1,28]. Under the Estado Novo regime led by António de Oliveira Salazar, Portugal sought to preserve its colonial empire and national sovereignty [29]. However, economic dependencies persisted, and Portugal continued to grapple with the legacy of past imbalances. The decolonization process further strained relations. England, adjusting to a post-colonial world, sometimes conflicted with Portugal's attempts to maintain its African colonies, leading to diplomatic tensions [30,31]. International pressure, including from England, eventually contributed to the Carnation Revolution in 1974 and the subsequent independence of Portuguese colonies [32]. The loss of the colonies had significant economic and social repercussions for Portugal, including the return of thousands of Portuguese settlers [33].

In contemporary times, Portugal and England have navigated a complex relationship within the European Union. While economic cooperation has improved, historical grievances linger. The UK's departure from the EU (Brexit) introduced new uncertainties but also opportunities for Portugal to redefine its position in Europe without relying on traditional alliances that have sometimes been sources of friction [34]. Additionally, both nations face common challenges such as immigration, economic inequality, and adapting to globalization.

### 3. Conclusion

The historical relationship between Portugal and England is multifaceted, characterized by both cooperation and significant challenges. Economic exploitation, political manipulation, and the transfer of debt have had lasting impacts on Portugal and Brazil, contributing to social inequalities that persist today. Recognizing and understanding these difficulties is essential for a realistic assessment of the alliance's legacy and for fostering more equitable relations in the future. Moving forward, both nations have the opportunity to build a partnership based on mutual respect and shared interests, learning from the complexities of their shared history.

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