

Education
Narrative, Bibliography, and Archival Resources
by
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The Greek American community has a long history of attributing great value to education as a means of establishing itself in American society while preserving and transmitting, at the same time, the Greek heritage to the new generations of Greek Americans. In order to better comprehend the significance of education in shaping Greek American identity we should briefly acknowledge the two, not necessarily mutually exclusive, forces that have diachronically been at work: First, the Greek “centripetal” force that negotiates the cultural and historical aspects of the Greek identity in America and, second, the “centrifugal,” American, force that shapes the cultural and social prospects of the Greek Americans.

Centripetal Force

Migrants in the US have ranked the teaching of the Greek language and culture as one of their top priorities ever since leaving Greece to look for new life prospects abroad. According to historic data, the first known Greek school to have ever been built in the US was in 1776 in St. Augustine, Florida, when a carpenter from the original “New Smyrna” colony, Ioannis Yiannopoulos, used his house as the local school, with Yiannopoulos taking up teaching. To date, the historic house is well preserved and is a cultural attraction to everyone visiting the town, since it is the oldest recorded school that has been built in the US – it is, yet, questionable whether we are talking about America’s “Oldest Wooden School House”, the building that has been traditionally associated by Greek Americans as Yiannopoulos’ school house.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tqo0L3tz980>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rpi5XXpofJo>

In the 19th century, at the college level, Alexander Negris became the first Instructor of Modern Greek in 1828, succeeded by Evangelinos Apostolides Sophocles (c. 1807-1883), both at Harvard University. During that time, between 1823-1830, more than 30 Greek “orphans” from the war-torn Greece, attended some of the best private schools and universities in the US (Harvard, Yale, Brown, Princeton, Columbia etc.).

In the 20th century, after the influx of over 350,000 Greek immigrants during the first great wave of mass migration from Greece between 1901–1921, various Greek communities under the auspices of their churches opened many afternoon and Saturday schools. Modern Greek language community-based parochial schools provided thus one of the oldest models of heritage education in the US. Such schools allowed the uneducated Greeks, the Ottoman Orthodox subjects and the kids of the first generation immigrants to be introduced to the language, culture and history of Greece. At the beginning, the language of instruction in day schools was Greek with English taught as a foreign language. In time, as the need for accreditation arose, English became the main language for instruction, but the Greek language, religion, history, and culture continued to be heavily stressed. The perennial problem for all these Greek schools is that they never managed to create a solid, conducive to the education of the Greeks/Greek Americans, curriculum and language program, wasting thus an opportunity to truly shape the identity of thousands of Greeks in the States, over the last 100 years, in a positive way!

[Below, rare recordings from Greek school preparations/celebrations in St. Augustine and Tarpon Springs, FL in 1939-1940, including: alphabet recitation, the Greek national anthem, popular Greek kid songs, Greek-American Song, etc. Lessons in afternoon and Sunday Greek schools were undertaken after the early 1930's by the newly formed (1931) Ladies Philophochos Societies of the Greek communities/parishes and other clergy and staff members of the Greek Orthodox Churches (the role of the presbytera and the church cantor was also very important)]

<https://www.loc.gov/item/flwpa000304/>

<https://www.loc.gov/item/flwpa000337/>

<https://www.loc.gov/item/flwpa000303/>

<https://www.loc.gov/item/flwpa000340/>

<https://www.loc.gov/item/flwpa000342/>

<https://www.loc.gov/item/flwpa000263/>

<https://www.loc.gov/item/flwpa000479/>

<https://www.loc.gov/item/flwpa000236/>

<https://www.loc.gov/item/flwpa000339/>

<https://www.loc.gov/item/flwpa000341/>

<https://www.loc.gov/item/flwpa000316/>

It could be interesting to compare the above celebrations with a similar Greek school celebration that took place in New York 75 years later, in 2016:

https://macaulay.cuny.edu/eportfolios/ioannides16_astoriaproject/institutions/education/

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-YaV52fdiM0>

In Lowell, MA, the Hellenic American Academy was formed on March 4, 1906. It was first called the Greek Parochial School. The academy was first located in the basement of the church. It was the first Greek Orthodox school in America and was established by some of the same Greek immigrants who founded the church.

<http://www.hellenicaa.org/history-about>

http://library.uml.edu/clh/Exhibit/story_11.pdf

In 1907, the Cadmos school opened in Boston, but it closed later on. About the same time, two new Church schools opened in Chicago: “Socrates” in 1908 and “Koraes” in 1910. The legendary Hull House in Chicago should also be mentioned here since it functioned as a multipurpose space for cultural, social and educational events and was the melting-pot of various ethnic groups of Chicago. In 1911 the first Modern Greek day school, the Greek American Institute, which is still in operation, was established in the Bronx, NY.

<http://www.lib.niu.edu/2003/iht1010323.html>

<http://fordham.bepress.com/dissertations/AI9975357/>

In the 1920s and after the strong pressure by the dominant notions of nativism and assimilationism within the American society, the Greeks founded two associations whose main goal was to ease the tensions and prepare the immigrants for their American experience: the AHEPA, with an Americanized educational perspective (prioritized the English language and promoted the Hellenic/Classical Greek heritage and history over that of Modern Greece); and the GAPA, that insisted on the Modern Greek orientation for the education and on significance of the Greek language for the immigrants.

[AHEPA Mission statement: *To promote the ancient Hellenic ideals of education, philanthropy, civic responsibility, integrity, and family and individual excellence through community service and volunteerism.* From <https://ahepa.org/>]

An increased number of such schools operated during the 1930s and 1940s in order to cover the educational need of the second generation of Greek Americans. By 1932 there were 284 afternoon schools with 12,712 students and 330 teachers; in 1942 there were 500 schools with 21,834 students and 553 teachers.

The strong connection between the Greek Orthodox Church and the Greek (parochial) schools was evident right from the beginning and the educational space and pedagogy was for the most part annexed and often dominated by

the religious one -- where students learned the rudiments of the Greek Orthodox faith along with that of the Greek language and culture. [Note that the space played a very important role during this symbiotic relationship between the Church, the Greek culture and the Greek education; they didn't all start from one single space –sometimes there were 3 different spaces – but slowly the space of the Greek *koinotis* (including other important sociocultural subspaces, like the *kafeneion*) and the space of the Greek school “submerged” under the sacred space of the Greek Church and it is quite common nowadays that the social space for Greek events and classes for the Greek afternoon or Sunday schools to be located in the underground premises of the Greek Orthodox Churches, a layering which is semiologically quite loaded and significant!]

In 1945 the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese founded St. Basil's Academy in Garrison, New York, in order to prepare teachers to serve within the Archdiocesan school system. After the Academy was moved to the campus of Hellenic College in Brookline, Massachusetts, in 1978, students followed a more rigorous, accredited program leading to a B.A. degree in education. In addition to teachers trained in America in this way, a number of teachers from Greece and Cyprus have also served the Archdiocesan school system over the years.

Meanwhile, in order to reinforce the connection of the Greek youth with the Orthodox faith, GOYA (Greek Orthodox Youth Association) was founded in 1951 and its main purpose was the orientation and implementation of a well-rounded program of religious, cultural, athletic and social activities that reflect the Orthodox Christian Faith. GOYA still shapes (and changes the order, prioritizing the Orthodox aspect and reducing the visibility of the Greek part) today the Orthodox (Greek) identity of most kids that want to go through the Greek afternoon or Sunday school education.

<https://gocnj.org/general-information/goya-history/>

Three events in the late 1960s occurred together to present the Greek community with an unprecedented opportunity with regard to the public school system and American higher education institutions. The first was the

passage of the Immigration Act of 1965 that enabled a new wave of Greek immigration; the second was the Bilingual Education Act and related Supreme Court decision in 1974; and the third was the creation of the Modern Greek Studies Association in 1968. The first two events meant that for the first time, Greek language and culture received massive amounts of federal and state aid and was legitimized within the bilingual/multicultural educational establishment that was created throughout the nation. While all of this Greek education-related activity was taking place in the public and private sectors of the U.S. Educational system, similar developments were occurring in colleges and universities. The Modern Greek Studies Association (MGSA) was founded in 1968 and listed its original purpose as an:

“American-based, non-profit, tax-exempt organization of scholars, students and other interested persons, established for the purpose of promoting modern Greek studies, particularly in the United States and Canada, but also wherever else interest exists and support is needed.... The Association sponsors symposia and seminars devoted to Modern Greek subjects: language, literature, history, the social sciences, and the fine arts. It issues and supports publications in the areas of its interest. It also serves as a center for information on programs and activities in the field of Byzantine and Modern Greek studies.”

[Quoted from the MGSA Bulletin, volume VIII, No. 1, September 1976, Princeton, N.J., page 10. Over the years, there have been some slight, but important for our purposes, changes to its mission statement – for example, the 2008 issue of the MGSA Bulletin, vol. XL page 3, adds under Goals and Activities: “Interdisciplinary in orientation, it seeks to stimulate the discovery and diffusion of knowledge about the language, literature, arts, history, politics, economy and society of modern Greece and the **Diaspora**.” *emphasis mine*.]

<http://www.mgsa.org/About/goals.html>

At the same time, because of the increase in Greek immigration in the 1960s and 1970s, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese increased the number of

Greek-American day and afternoon Schools throughout the U.S., especially in large urban centers, and attempted to infuse them with new resources. By 1966, with changing demographics, an increase in mixed marriages, a desire to compete with the American public education system, and the influx of Greek-American priests and principals, the parochial Greek schools' philosophy expanded once again. They were now more concerned with offering students the best in Greek and American education so that students would be expertly prepared for entry into university and beyond. Around the same time, during the Clergy-Laity meeting in New York in 1972, Archbishop (of the Greek Orthodox Church in America) Iakovos raised the issue of the use of the English language in the Liturgy, which perhaps due to the ambiguities left unresolved, caused a storm of reactions. This resulted, however, to an increased number of Greek Orthodox Churches to be offering a bilingual or English only mass service, something that hit the number of Greek Americans attending Greek schools. Eventually, the introduction of English in the Greek Orthodox faith created an extra layer of identity ambiguity and although it initially attracted the 2nd Generation Greek-Americans with limited knowledge of Greek (and the non-Greek members of mixed ethnic families) back to the Church, it soon increased the process of Americanization of the 2nd Generation while, at the same time, it distanced the 1st Generation Greeks who had recently arrived to the States, during the second wave of mass migration after 1965.

However, the noticeable decrease of the Greek immigrational movement over the last 4 decades, along with the fact that the current student population of Greek-American schools includes Greek students of 2nd and 3rd generation has resulted in the domination of the American language. The Greek-American community, however, never developed an extensive day school system. Not only did budgetary problems were overwhelming, but especially before 1960, it was felt that the Greek-American schools might not properly prepare children for American higher education. This was one of the major disputes that broke out in the early 1970's especially in Chicago when bilingual (in Greek and English) education was introduced in the school system of the Greek-American neighborhoods in the city. Although many educators, promoters of bilingual/multicultural education and Greek-

American organization welcomed such changes, most Greek-Americans (especially 2nd generation) reacted to the changes, fervently arguing that the new system could affect the quality of education for their children and that Greek language (and all courses taught in Greek) could be to the detriment of other “important” courses their kids could attend instead.

Certain mitigating factors, like the employment of more qualified teachers and the increase of charter schools have left some room for hope. Currently, the Greek-American schools follow the same curriculum that all public American schools do, with the difference that they provide their students with courses on the Greek language, culture and religion.

In 1978 there were about 400 afternoon schools under the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, with an enrollment of over 30,000 students. In the 2001–2002 school year the number of day schools was still only eighteen with 4,104 students, whereas afternoon schools numbered approximately 300 with 25,000–30,000 students. Finally, in the 2010–2011 school year the Archdiocese had thirty day schools with 4,492 students. The corresponding number for the afternoon schools was more than 340 with approximately 22,650 students. In addition to these Church schools there were also a number of private schools/academies, public schools, some Language Institutes and several charter schools teaching Modern Greek in the USA, quite aside from Modern Greek instruction in numerous universities.

<https://www.goarch.org/-/archdiocesan-day-schools-directory>

<https://www.goarch.org/departments/greekeducation>

Centrifugal Force

Proper public education in the American school system was, according to early American sociologists, the easiest way to achieve the desired assimilation of the large multi-ethnic and multi-cultural body of immigrants during the first decades of the 20th century. The American school, thus, functioned as the Ur-melting pot and the Dillingham report invested

considerable time in trying to identify the necessary changes needed in order to attract the young immigrants into the American classrooms.

[According to the Dillingham report below, only about 1,000 Greek kids were attending public schools in the major 37 American cities by 1910, while a great number of them (tenths of thousands is a rough estimation) worked extended hours (mainly as boot blacks) and remained completely illiterate! There is a mortgage (notary) contract in the Dillingham report of a father in the city of Corinth in Greece who received a sum of money in order to pay back his land loan in Corinth and who “leases”, in return, his young son of 11 years, to a Greek “agent” in the US to work there for several years with only room and board offered to the kid].

We should mention here that many adult Greek immigrants attended Night schools where they received English language lessons as well as various rudimentary courses (math, merchant law and taxation). These Night schools/courses were not only places where Greeks bonded (and at times made professional affiliations), in a more loose environment, with immigrants from other countries (Italians, Eastern Europeans etc.), but were also the reason for the entrepreneurial explosion of many aspiring Greek professionals and proprietors [a subject that has not been studied at all; Spyros Skouras, among others, for example, has confessed repeatedly how such courses allowed him to develop the entrepreneurial (and language) skills and the professional acumen he needed in order to built his entertainment empire].

<https://archive.org/details/abstractsreport01benngoog>

[A very rare photo of Six Greek boys posing on the stairs of Laclede (public) School in St. Louis (1904)]

<http://collections.mohistory.org/resource/382254>

The Greeks, however, quickly understood the importance of education and the need for their kids to learn English and so the numbers of young Greeks attending daily public schools quickly rose. This was one of the main

reasons for the expedited social mobility that the Greeks (of the second generation) enjoyed, a reason that ranks high in Moskos' explanation for the ethnic group's success (there are several articles discussing/comparing the social mobility of the Greeks vs. the Italians and almost all scholars concur that the reason the Greeks surpassed the Italians was the importance the first placed on education). After the 1930's and 1940's, many Greeks, especially in the Midwest, sent their kids to military academies/schools that offered a better preparation for their sons in order to face their mandatory military service. The subsequent WW2 allowed many young (second generation) Greeks not only to be fully assimilated through their service in the American army, but also due to the subsequent perks that the US Army offered to all returning soldiers (I'm referring here to the G.I Bill), most Greeks now had an open road and a paid scholarship for their tertiary, university level, education. Many of them chose to study in some of the most prestigious schools around the country and a great number of them graduated with degrees in engineering, medicine and other professional fields, allowing them to be actively pursue the American Dream that their parents, for the most part, had not fully realized!

In the universities the Greeks made acquaintances with Americans of the established society, they fraternized in the Greek letter societies and paved their path towards professional and social recognition not only within the confines of the Greek-American community, but in the expanded now American social landscape. We should mention here that in 1911 Aristides E. Phoutrides, a Harvard under-graduate, and other Greek students from the Boston area founded *Helicon*, the first Greek-American intellectual association; while in 1918, in New York City, the Hellenic University Club (known as the Greek- American Intercollegiate Club until 1945) was established by Dr. George N. Papanikolaou. In addition, the increased number of world-class Greek academics in the US Universities after WW2, like George Papanikolaou (test pap), George Mylonas (famed archaeologist), Michael Dertouzos (Director of the MIT Laboratory for Computer Science), not only gave added prestige to the Greek community, but quite often (and that holds true for all three of the above mentioned professors), these scholars became the voice and the moving force of the Greek-

American communities they belonged to by prioritizing aspects of the Greek language and culture and by bringing closer the community to the academic and cosmopolitan milieu they subscribed to. Since the 1970's and with the inauguration (with the financial assistance of the Greek state) of the Seferis Chair in Modern Greek Studies at Harvard University, a whole such fleet of endowed Modern Greek chairs and programs started flowering in some of the major academic and research institution in the United States (Ohio State University, Michigan, NYU, Columbia, Princeton etc.). These programs attempted to promote both a more methodologically sound study of the (Modern) Greek language and culture and to introduce students to a more diverse and multicultural appropriation and appreciation of the Greek culture and identity. The crucial issue, however, the connection/relationship of Modern with Classical Greek language and culture in academic programs, as well as the cultural manifestations and identity preferences among the diasporic subjects based on one or both of these notions, is still an unresolved matter that seems to be going through a new round of criticism/discussion.

<https://moderngreek.classics.fas.harvard.edu/>

<https://lsa.umich.edu/modgreek/about-us/what-is-modern-greek-studies.html>

Modern Greek Studies programs around the country, especially after the 1990s and the rise of multicultural and post-ethnic studies, increased the number of Greek courses, gave more opportunities to Greek-Americans to study their language and Culture, and offered summer study-abroad programs that brought many Greek-American students (and Greek-American adult volunteers in archaeological expeditions around Greece), back to their ancestors' homeland, connected them with the Greek language and landscape and immersed them in the authentic Greek culture – an experience which for many young Greek Americans has been catalytic in (re)inventing their forefathers' homeland.

Finally, we should mention here that women from the ranks of the Greek-American community also started to rise, through education, and there are several examples of remarkable such stories.

[Aprhodite Jannopoulo, for example, who became the first female (not just Greek female) to be admitted to an elite medical school in 1919, at Washington University in St. Louis]:

<http://cdm.sos.mo.gov/cdm/ref/collection/mowohealth/id/331>]

Other notable such early Greek female graduates are Venette Askounes Ashford from Chicago: <https://windycitygreek.com/womens-history-greek-american-women/>

And Harriclia Eliades from Lynn, MA:

<https://books.google.gr/books?id=fxYTDEpDObQC&pg=PA81&lpg=PA81&dq=lowell+first+greek+school&source=bl&ots=s-nWd1GPuP&sig=f0zLHygkpITYq5tU11vkD55JLWM&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjXwLfgrO3UAhWP0RoKHZwBB9w4ChDoAQgoMAI#v=onepage&q=eliades&f=false>

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See also, Greek American Studies Resource Portal,
<https://www.mgsa.org/Resources/port.html>

Ergon: Greek/American Arts and Letters under Bibliography]