One Greek scholar has attempted to document the proposition that Christopher Columbus was a Byzantine nobleman. While that hypothesis remains dubious at best, it is likely that some Greek mariners sailed in Columbus's flotilla. Most certainly there was a Greek caulker named Theodoros on board a Spanish expedition headed by Panfilio de Navarez, which anchored in present-day Pensacola, Florida in 1528; and there were some five hundred Greeks, mainly from Mani, among the 1,400 colonists who founded the ill-fated community of New Smyrna, in Florida, in 1768. During the subsequent hundred years, however, Greek involvement with North America was minimal. There were many years when fewer than fifty identifiable Greeks immigrated to America. That pattern began to change in the 1890s. Of the 19,000 Greeks who immigrated to North America in all of the nineteenth century, fully 16,000 arrived during its last decade. This figure swelled tenfold to 167,500 in the first decade of the new century, and by 1940 no fewer than a half-million Greek immigrants had put down roots in the United States.

The history of the 1890-1950 period has been slow to emerge. By the time the first professional histories began to appear in the 1960s, Greeks had become among the most prosperous of the immigrant groups, enjoying a reputation as hard-working, clever, and patriotic folk. In some ways, the Greek-Americans were the prototypical rags-to-riches European immigrants and, unlike the

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group they most resembled, the Jews, they had a "public relations" advantage because they were Christian. Writing out of that reality, ethnic histories have tended to emphasize those groups and trends which came to dominate what became the formal community; and, as a consequence of this hindsight approach, such accounts have neglected or misrepresented the vigor of dissenting movements and the often turbulent history of the Greek working class.

Few Greek Americans of the post-war generations are aware that the pioneer Greek immigrants were among America's most despised minorities, considered to be unruly and unpatriotic quasi-Europeans who frequently resorted to violent means to settle personal—and political—disputes. While aware that Greek immigrants served as strikebreakers, Greek Americans are usually not aware that, subsequently, those same workers were often leaders in American trade union struggles. Greek Americans who identified automatically with white America during the civil rights turmoil of the 1960s did not know that the first wave of Greeks had often fought, gun-in-hand, against the Ku Klux Klan and state militias in order to establish their political rights. A group of Greeks in the 1920s even went so far as to burn an American flag as a gesture of political outrage.3

Modern Greek immigration falls into four general periods: 1890–1922, 1923–1939, 1940–1959, and 1960 to the present. The first of these periods was, by far, the most trying and remains the least understood. At that junction in time, at least ninety percent of the immigrants were male, and the community was consumed with a passion to liberate unredeemed Greece (those Greek-speaking areas of the Mediterranean, Thrace, Epirus, Macedonia, and Asia Minor that were still under non-Greek rule, dominated primarily by the Ottoman Empire). Coincident with the Asia Minor Disaster of 1922, which largely fixed the boundaries of what became the contemporary Greek state, the Greek community in America became more stabilized, and a steady increase in female immigration produced a new family orientation. The major issue that came to face Greek men and women was the

3Helen Papanikolas, "Greek Workers in the Intermountain West—The Early Twentieth Century," Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, Volume 5, 1979, p. 212.
degree to which Greeks would assimilate into American culture, a question which blurred some of the earlier political and class divisions as the community overcame its initial poverty—a decisive forward momentum that was checked by the Great Depression.

When Greek peasants wrote *OXI* on the mountainsides of Greece in 1940 and the Greek nation rallied to defeat Mussolini's forces, the Greeks in America were profoundly affected in terms of both their public image and self-image. The "quarrelsome" Greeks, with their complex political problems and uneven military record, were suddenly transformed, becoming the first nation in the world to militarily defeat a fascist power. Patriotic fervor swept Greek America. An all-out effort to defeat the Axis Powers and to assist the Greek resistance produced a temporary, but dynamic, Greek American community leadership run by a coalition of liberal and radical forces. That alliance fell apart as a consequence of the Civil War in Greece (1946–1949) and the rise of McCathysim in the United States. Liberals distanced themselves from their former radical associates, some of whom were actually deported or jailed, and most of whom were systematically silenced.

Concurrent with this political fragmentation on the left, the community consolidated and extended the economic gains it made in the war years. A new era in Greek American life was clearly evident by the 1960s. The formal community was now dominated by the Greek Orthodox Church, business interests, and politicians who accepted the premises of the Cold War. The military dictatorship in Greece (1967–1974) and a new immigrant wave eventually revived some traditions of protest, but Greek American dissenters and radicals remained a distinct minority.

The changing nature of the Greek community, the controversies which periodically inflamed it, and the trends which ultimately dominated it can be followed in the development of four major institutions: the Greek Orthodox Church, the Greek-language press, the national Greek social organizations, and the ethnic centers known as "Greektowns." Central to the change in these institutions remained the issue of whether Greeks, like other European immigrants, were to be Americanized as soon as possible, or whether, like the Greeks of Alexandria, they would be part of a permanent diaspora—a diaspora in which they would function as loyal citizens of the United States while retaining a distinctive culture. Their
mother tongue would be Greek: they would be Greeks in America, not Greek Americans, and, most certainly, not Americans.

The Greek Orthodox Church

For nearly fifty years, the most persistent champion of the concept of a Greek diaspora was the Greek Orthodox Church. Its schools promoted the Greek language, its activities were conducted in Greek, and its priests railed against marriage to non-Greeks as well as any other behavior which threatened the “Greekness” of the community. As an inevitable consequence of this policy, the greater the degree of Americanization among the children and grandchildren of immigrants, and the higher their education, the more likely they would be distant from the Church. For such Greeks, the Church epitomized the rigid preservation of a peasant culture spiritually rooted in Byzantine theology. Marriage to non-Greeks frequently meant loss of the children to the Church, and even when there was nominal baptism or marriage within the Church, active membership was rare.

The perspective of the Church changed dramatically after the Second World War. Clergy born or educated in the United States began to dominate not only the American hierarchy, but also the hierarchy throughout the world, a process capped by the naming of Athenagoras as patriarch of Constantinople. This new, more highly educated clergy understood that if the Church were to survive in the United States, English must become its language. Theologians began to argue that the Orthodox Church in North America must speak the native language, just as Orthodox churches in all nations spoke the dominant national tongue. Services as well as sermons began to take on a heavier and heavier English component. The concept of the Greek diaspora was not explicitly dropped, but in absolute terms disappeared. The new emphasis on Americanization became evident in the successful effort to have Orthodoxy recognized by the federal government as a Christian subdivision of faith, coequal with Protestantism and Catholicism. Such recognition allowed for the presence of Orthodox clergy in various state processes, including chaplains in the military.

Americanization also became evident in the daily interaction
of clergy and laity. Just as public education in urban areas declined in quality and safety, the Church created parochial schools which emphasized general education in English as their major mandate. Instruction in Greek language and culture remained important, but was secondary. Church parishes took on an American hue through the sponsorship of athletic teams, boy/girl scout groups, senior citizen activities, cultural circles, and the like. Rather than discouraging cross-marriages, the emphasis shifted to welcoming Christian non-Greek partners and making them comfortable within Orthodoxy.

An administrative metamorphosis accompanied the policy changes. Originally, any individual Orthodox church was under the strict control of its local secular church board. This group hired and fired priests, many of whom had no more education than the board members. The political and even theological views of the board dominated the parish: a royalist priest would not be tolerated by a republican parish and vice versa. The churches functioned much as independent city-states, and, while catholic theologically, they were structurally congregationalist.

The prevailing power ratio was reversed in the post-war era, with religious ecumenism playing a major psychological role. The Church renewed its ties with Episcopalians and made a historic reconciliation with the Roman Catholic Church. The mutual embrace of pope and patriarch and the lifting of centuries-old anathemas made international headlines. Orthodox Church leaders also became increasingly visible in national affairs: Greek prelates marched with Martin Luther King in the South, and were seen flanking mayors, governors, senators, and even presidents. Such prestige, and the growing administrative acumen of the clergy, particularly under the astute leadership of archbishop Iakovos, brought local church boards under a more centralized authority. New accounting procedures increased total church revenues, with much of the increased income falling under the direct control of the clergy. The secular boards still existed, but in the new relationship became the junior partners. By the 1980s, the Church had established itself as the fulcrum of the formal community, and its many educational and cultural initiatives positioned it to continue in that role for the foreseeable future.
The Greek Language Press

If the Orthodox Church was the original shield for the concept of a diaspora community, the Greek-language press was its sword. The first Greek-language newspaper appeared in 1892, and from 1905 onward at least one national Greek-language daily and usually two or more were published. In addition to the national dailies, local dailies and scores of weeklies and monthlies have flourished. The vast majority of these have been dedicated to a specific political point of view; a smaller number have been satirical and or cultural publications.

The major division within the Greek-language press has always been along a broad conservative-liberal axis, with the immediate touchstone being support of or opposition to the existing Greek government. *Atlantis* (1894–1973) was always a royalist bastion which generally supported the Republican Party in the United States; however, during its first twenty years of existence, its royalist designation was not as meaningful as it would be later. Many immigrants identified the monarch as the rallying figure for all Greeks who wished to liberate unredeemed Greece, but were not necessarily economic or social conservatives. Immigrant interest in the Balkan Wars pushed circulation of *Atlantis* to over 30,000 in 1914, a figure higher than any Athenian daily of the period.

The dominance of *Atlantis* was challenged in 1915 with the founding of *Ethnikos Keryx (The National Herald)*. The new paper backed Eleftherios Venizelos, prime minister since 1910 and head of the Liberal Party in Greece. Supporting the Democratic Party in the US, *Keryx* was the voice of a republican movement that wished to couple social reform with national liberation. *Keryx* was soon circulating over 20,000 copies, and for the next decade the two newspapers would share equally about 70,000 readers. With the Great Depression, *Keryx*, which supported the New Deal, saw its circulation fall to 13,000, while *Atlantis* held steady with a circulation of just over 20,000.

In relation to the relative strength of the republican and royalist movements, the circulation of the newspapers was deceptive. Reports in the Greek and American press attest to the greater
strength of the republicans. An American trip by Venizelos in the early 1920s became a personal triumph when he received tumultuous welcomes everywhere he appeared. Republican rallies could bring out over 10,000 sympathizers, while royalist affairs were lucky to achieve half that figure. Despite this disparity in numbers, the bitterness between the factions was intense, often erupting in fistfights that had to be quelled by the local police.

Following the Asia Minor Disaster, support for the monarchy waned. It hit a low during the late 1930s, when the monarchy/military alliance under the Metaxas dictatorship was viewed correctly as being pro-German. The Second World War resurrected the old antagonism in a new form. Atlantis supported the government-in-exile in the Middle East, which had shed most of its visible Metaxas connections and was agreeable to Anglo-American plans for post-war Greece. Keryx, in contrast, supported the national armed resistance in occupied Greece, more particularly the radical EAM-ELAS (National Liberation Front/National Popular Liberation Army) alliance. Reports filed by the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) of the US State Department, forerunner of today's CIA, stated that a new republican/radical coalition was clearly the most popular among Greek Americans. This situation changed dramatically when the Greek Civil War pit the Communist Party of Greece and its sympathizers against an odd alliance of liberals, monarchists, and former collaborators. Atlantis supported the government, while Keryx began a long drift to the right. When McCarthyite repression hit the Greek American community, neither paper defended the trade unionists, scholars, and former government employees who were its major victims. Both papers, anxious not to be tainted with charges of Communist sympathies, strove to be identified with American foreign policy.

Although the Atlantis-Keryx rivalry became legendary, the two national dailies did not have the publishing arena entirely to themselves. Especially in Chicago, the bastion of Greek republican-
ism, an active local press existed. The first wave of Greek immigrants to Chicago had been greatly influenced by Jane Addams and her Hull House staff;\(^6\) as a result, Greeks felt free to make political demands on local and state governments, and they passed into the trade union movement as a matter of course. And the Chicago Greek press gained the distinction of being, arguably, the most shrill in North America, from the anti-royalist *Hellas*, which was particularly militant, to the first major English-language Greek press.

Newspapers published outside New York or Chicago tended to be more concerned with local needs or served some regional group, ethnic subdivision, or other special audience. The liveliest of Greek periodicals were the satirical publications which appeared everywhere but were more prevalent in the Northeast. Their irreverent puns, cartoons, and sketches carried on an unceasing attack on all established order, including the monarchy, the Church, the military, and the super-rich. Among the most long-lived of these were *O Daimonios (The Demon)*, published in Lynn from 1908–1923, and *Satyros (The Satyr)*, published in New York from 1917–1947.

The conservative drift begun during the Civil War years became so pronounced that no major Greek-language newspaper in the US raised an outcry when a group of colonels, allied with the king, established a dictatorship in Greece in 1967. Only at the tail end of the junta did *Keryx*, among others, begin to express disapproval. Three years after the junta's fall in 1974, *Proini (The Morning Daily)* was founded, and generally supported the socialist movement headed by Andreas Papandreou, who became prime minister in 1981. Probably neither *Proini* nor *Keryx* could have survived without the new influx of immigrants who settled in the Astoria, Queens section of New York City, where both newspapers were published.\(^7\) But despite these new readers, both newspapers were aware of the linguistic handwriting on the wall:

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in the 1980s, *Keryx* produced the English-language bimonthly magazine *Greek Accent*, and *Proini* brought out an English-language weekly newspaper which eventually took the name *The GreekAmerican* in 1986.

Standard histories of Greeks in America have been so taken with the royalist-republican struggles that the labor-oriented and socialist presses have been almost totally ignored. Among the earliest newspapers were *Ergates* (*The Worker*), published in New Hampshire before the First World War, and *Organosis* (*The Organization*), a newspaper of the Socialist Labor Party which began during the First World War and continued irregularly thereafter for a decade. The dynamic Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) issued two organizing pamphlets in Greek which seem to have circulated primarily in areas west of the Mississippi.\(^8\) Full-length books addressing labor and socialist issues in Greek also appeared relatively early during the immigration cycle. Two of these were Maria Sarantopoulou Ekomonidou's *The Greeks of America As I Saw Them* (New York, 1916), a devastating account of the horrible working conditions faced by Greeks in the American West, and George Katsiolis's *The Crimes of Civilization* (Chicago, 1922), a broad survey of socialist alternatives in the United States.\(^9\)

From the 1920s onward, radical publications in Greek were almost always produced by individuals associated with the Communist Party of America. The most extraordinary of these was a succession of newspapers published in New York City: *Phone tou Ergatou* (*Voice of the Worker*), 1918–1923; *Empros* (*Forward*), 1923–1938; *Eleftheria* (*Freedom*), 1938–1941; and *Hellenos-Amerikaniko Vema* (*Greek-American Tribune*), 1941 through the early 1950s. This remarkable forty-year span of continuous publication indicates the existence of a significant Greek-speaking audience for Marxist ideas. In the 1940s, the 10,000-reader weekly circulation often reached by *Vema* was not very distant from either the 13,000-daily circulation of *Keryx* or the 16,000-daily circulation of *Atlantis*. OSS figures show the combined circulation

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8Available in the Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI. Titles are: "What is the IWW?" and "Economic Interpretation of the Job."

9Available in the John Poulos Collection, Tamiment Library, New York University.
of all radical and republican papers greatly exceeded the combined circulation of the royalist press.  

_The Social Organizations_

The social organizations established by Greeks tended to have a narrow focus, uniting immigrants from a region, subregion, or even a single village. Political concerns were usually secondary, unless the society involved itself with an issue such as the union of Cyprus with Greece or the redemption of Greek-speaking areas in Albania. The two national organizations which eventually emerged, the American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association (AHEPA) and the Greek-American Progressive Association (GAPA), were of a different nature, but focused on life in the United States as each's major concern.

As Theodore Saloutos pointed out in his deeply-flawed but landmark study, _The Greeks in the United States_ (Harvard University Press, 1964), the first letters of the AHEPA and GAPA acronyms tell all—A for America, and G for Greece. AHEPA, founded in 1922, was unabashedly assimilationist. Its organizational language was English, and its programs were created to obtain full constitutional rights for Greek Americans. Of immediate concern to AHEPA's programs was the racism faced by so many Greek immigrants: of the original thirty-three chapters, all but three were in the South and Southwest, where Greeks frequently fought with the Ku Klux Klan. And, from the start, AHEPA attracted Greek professionals and businessmen who were as comfortable with their American colleagues as they were with their ethnic comp-

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10 Various O.S.S. reports of the 1940s put the circulation of the _Vema_ at between 5,000 and 8,500. Demosthenes Nikas, an editorial board member of the newspaper, stated in a 1987 interview on file with the Oral History of the American Left project at Tamiment Library, New York University, that circulation reached 10,000. As most Greeks familiar with publishing, he believes the circulation figures of the Greek dailies were inflated. Although Nikas's long involvement with the Communist Party was well known, he served as an organizer for the United Steel Workers—CIO in the 1930s, organizing both Greeks and non-Greeks. His radical activism began with a brief membership in the IWW during the mid-teens.

11 The most accepted theory on the history of AHEPA is that one of the factors behind its launching was that it would oppose the Ku Klux Klan and similar groups. Some individuals have argued, however, that AHEPA consciously imitated
patriots. In contrast, GAPA, founded in 1923 as a conscious response to AHEPA, extolled “Greekness.” Its organizational language was Greek, and at one point it contended that anyone not of the Greek Orthodox faith was not truly Greek. GAPA charged that AHEPA was actually anti-Greek, and that its policies would result in the destruction of Greek culture in America.

The Greek Orthodox Church in the 1920s clearly preferred GAPA to AHEPA. Traditionalists of all stripes, in fact, rallied to GAPA, but there was no neat reproduction of the royalist-republican split. Many republicans were cultural traditionalists, and many royalists were aggressively pro-Americanization. Both GAPA and AHEPA spun off female and youth affiliates, but the tide was clearly against GAPA. As late as December 19, 1939, only months before Greece became embroiled in war, the Tribune of GAPA reiterated that its organizational priorities were “the preservation and dissemination of Greek ideals and especially of the immortal Greek language and of the life-giving Orthodox faith.” A year earlier at its 1938 convention, AHEPA had addressed more immediate issues. Positions were adopted denouncing fascism and antisemitism, and resolutions were passed advocating democracy for all nations, while speakers warned that Metaxas might drag Greece into an alliance with Nazi Germany. AHEPA vowed to do everything in its power to save the Greek people from “the miasma of fascism.”

AHEPA’s orientation received the greater response from Greek Americans. By 1940, AHEPA had three hundred chapters, about the same as the number of Orthodox churches at the time, and 20,000 members. GAPA had approximately half as many chapters and members. The difference in power was even greater than the numbers indicate, because AHEPA’s membership was better educated, more affluent, and more influential. With the change in Church policies after the war, and the triumph of Americanization, AHEPA easily retained its dominance.

the Ku Klux Klan in structure, sought its approval, and was itself racist in terms of discriminating against blacks. Another factor in the founding of both AHEPA and GAPA was the health and life insurance benefits usually associated with ethnic societies.

12Yavis, op. cit., p. 30.
As in the case of the press, there was a leftist alternative to both AHEPA and GAPA which had a brief period of impact. This was the Greek section of the International Workers' Order (IWO), a social welfare organization created by the Communist Party which included many non-Communist members. At its peak in the 1940s, the Greek IWO had thirty lodges in various industrial areas and a thousand dues-paying members. A unique aspect of the IWO was its working-class character. One IWO lodge in Brooklyn consisted entirely of restaurant workers; one in Manhattan was an extension of a Greek fur workers union; and there were six lodges in mill towns in Massachusetts. This orientation gave the IWO a voice in American trade unions which became heard in positions and activities underwritten by various CIO and AFL unions regarding Greek-related issues.

Greektowns

The history of Greektowns parallels the shifting fortunes and perspectives of the Greeks in America. At the turn of the century, Greektowns were true ethnic ghettos where immigrants spent almost the whole of their non-working day. Conditions were among the worst of all American slums, and municipalities offered few public services. The heart of these communities were always its coffeehouses, usually replicas of the traditional village kafenion. In the Lowell of 1910, for example, there were more than twenty coffeehouses in the few blocks of ethnic commerce; other establishments included seven restaurants, twelve barber shops, six fruit stores, eight shoeshine parlors, seven bakeries, twenty-two grocery stores, and four candy shops.

Using the kafenion as headquarters, the few bilingual and literate Greeks handled correspondence with the homeland and negotiations with new world institutions. Here, a man could ask about employment and marriage opportunities, enjoy a game of cards, and debate political issues. Many kafenions had regional or political constituencies which were reflected in names such as

14IWO files in the Poulos Collection, Tamiment Library, New York University.
"The Peloponnesian," "Spartakos," and "The Constitution." These kafenions slowly lost their central place in Greek life, but they remained important male bastions even as late as the 1950s. By this time, Greektowns were meeting places for Greeks who had scattered throughout a city or region, centers in which to buy ethnic products and to enjoy ethnic entertainments. Married men used Greektowns as homes-away-from-home, where they could meet old friends over a cup of Greek coffee or in a Greek barber shop. For the unwed immigrant males who populated the rented rooms of Greektowns, the kafenion remained a communal living-room.

Always coexisting with the kafenion were establishments many American commentators also dubbed coffeehouses, but which actually were tavernas. These establishments offered live music and the opportunity to dance. They might also feature female dancers, singers, karaghiozis shows, weightlifting exhibitions, and even wrestling matches. In the back room were serious games of chance and occasionally, prostitutes. From such tavernas emerged various types of nightclubs which became familiar to Americans of the post-1960s; their most obvious successors were honky-tonk cabarets catering to sailors and conventioneers. These could be found in port cities like New Orleans and in tourist attractions such as New York's Eighth Avenue of the 1970s.

The dominant music in Greek clubs was bouzouki and, in some cases, the soulful, bluesy music called rembetiko. Legendary players from Greece performed in Chicago and New York for years on end. During the greater part of an evening they played standard fare, but certain periods were set aside for them to play in their distinctive, individual styles. Recordings of these and traditional folk musicians began to be made in New York early in the century, and are now considered collectors' items by aficionados of Greek music.

Music, in fact, proved to be the most important cultural legacy of the immigrants who created little Greek-language literature or Greek-oriented visual art. Even after most nightclubs began to cater to American tastes, there remained those which featured authentic sounds or explored new trends. In the post-junta period, major performers such as Mikis Theodorakis filled large concert halls on their American tours, and small cabarets offered music
every bit as good and innovative as their Athenian counterparts. At the non-commercial level, the community which had spawned musical talents as varied as those of the Andrew sisters and Maria Callas continued to maintain choral and dance groups with cross-generational participation. One irony of this rich musical continuity was that Greeks in America preserved certain traditions more faithfully than their homeland counterparts whose habits were ravaged by world war, then civil war, and, finally, dictatorship. (An example of such a phenomenon involves Epirote musician Periklis Halkias, a resident of Astoria. Halkias and his musical cohorts were invited by the government of Andreas Papandreou not only to tour Greece, but also to perform and teach traditional music).16

The taverna environment had other social spinoffs. Wrestling was the major sport of the pioneer immigrants, and many Greeks became professionals. The two most famous were Jim "The Golden Greek" Londos, who became a world champion in the 1930s, and George Zaharias, who wed the woman who became America's most celebrated female athlete: Babe Didrikson. An unsavory aspect of the sport was its underworld links. As a rule, Greeks were not much attracted to organized crime—but they did have a real passion for gambling, whether dice, cards, horses, numbers, or sporting events. The general attitude was that, far from being a crime, gambling was a natural right the state should not interfere with. Poker player Nick the Greek became an American legend in the 1930s, and was later installed as an official host when Las Vegas was opened as the center for legalized gambling.17 In the 1970s and 1980s, Jimmy the Greek, a Las Vegas odds-maker, became a celebrity on national television and radio sports programs. Behind the glamorous names was a Greek presence in the gambling syndicates. Greektown restaurants were often rumored to have "hot" money behind them, and raids on gambling operations in the back rooms of Greektowns made an occasional local headline.

A fundamental change in the nature of Greektowns took place

17 Dan Georgakas, "The Story Teller," Greek Accent, September/October, 1983, p. 50, contains a discussion with Harry Mark Petrakis about Nick the Greek. Petrakis did extensive research on the subject before writing a novel of the same name.
The Greeks In America

in the 1960s. The motion picture Never On Sunday (1960), directed by American Jules Dassin and featuring an all-Greek cast headed by Melina Mercouri, proved to be a cultural blockbuster. Non-Greeks flocked to Greektowns to hear bouzouki, break dishes, and eat Greek food. The success of Zorba the Greek (1965) reinforced the trend. As real estate values soared, kafenions, specialty shops, and single-room rentals began to disappear. Tavernas which might have featured clarinets and santouris were doomed if they did not switch to amplified bouzouki. Flaming cheese dishes were introduced by restaurant operators who switched their focus to a new, non-Greek clientele. By the 1980s, only Astoria remained as a genuine ethnic community; elsewhere, Greektowns became tourist centers. In Chicago, glitzy restaurants were all that remained of the once vibrant North Halstead community, which now lived only in the English-language short stories and novels of Harry Mark Petrakis. An even more complete integration with American commerce took place when non-Greek urban shopping malls were constructed in the centers of the major Greektowns in Detroit and Tarpon Springs. Greektowns became little more than a delightful spice consumed by the omnivorous American melting pot.

The Far West

The most violent episodes in Greek American history involve the thousands of Greek males who worked throughout the West in the early decades of the twentieth century. The exact number of these workers has not been established, but by 1910 in the intermountain states of Utah, Montana, Colorado, Wyoming, and Idaho there were at least 11,000 Greek workers. Proportional numbers of Greeks appear to have worked in California, Oregon, and Washington. Almost all of these men were part of an army

18 Dan Georgakas, "Detroit's Greektown: Endangered Species," Weekly Review (Proini), May 4, 1984, page 1. This report outlines the struggle of Greektown merchants against non-Greek developers. The struggle eventually was lost.

19 Dan Georgakas, "Tarpon Springs," Greek Accent, January, 1982, p. 21, discusses community efforts to prevent the old Sponge Exchange from being made into a mall by Greek developers. The mall was eventually built.

of unskilled itinerants that supplied the American labor scene with workers during that era. Greeks worked in the lumber, mine, and construction industries, and for a time were predominant in the laying of railroad tracks. In the late teens, Greeks made up nearly twenty-two percent of the work force on the nine western railroads. A decade later, that percentage fell to two percent, with Mexicans becoming dominant in numbers.

Wages were so meager for the itinerant worker that an individual could count it a good month when he did not accumulate new debts. Working conditions were hazardous, and immigrants generally received the lowest compensation while being assigned the most perilous chores. An additional burden for Greeks was that nearly all were hired under the labor agent system. This schema provided for workers to be hired in major cities, such as Chicago and New York, and then transported as part of work gangs to worksites in the West. The worker paid a fee to get the job, and then a percentage of all subsequent wages. Labor agents also instructed immigrants that they were not allowed to strike or join unions. The first jobs offered were often as strikebreakers or union busters in disputes where the abolition of labor agents, improved working conditions, and better wages were the issues. Labor agents who worked with Greeks frequently recruited Christian Albanians and Lebanese as well, and those groups often could be found working alongside Greeks.

The most infamous Greek labor agent was Leonidis G. Skliris. He operated out of Salt Lake City, Utah, and was dubbed "Czar of the Greeks." His underlings recruited in Greece as well as America. In addition to job fees, agents often took commissions on money sent home by their clients: all too often, the agents pocketed the entire sum. Other swindles involved persuading illiterates to sign contracts in which they gave up their ownership of property in Greece. These schemes were most effective with the newly-arrived. When workers realized how they had been created or exploited, physical assault and even murder of the most unscrupulous agents was not uncommon—incidents which gave Greeks a poor reputation among Americans. Although these attacks curbed the avarice of labor agents, Greeks quickly understood that only an assault on the entire hiring system would end their woes permanently. The turning point in this struggle came
in 1912, when Cretan copper miners took on none other than Czar Skliris himself.

The Western Federation of Miners (WFM) had been trying to organize the Bingham copper miners, just outside Salt Lake City, for years. Greeks had been attracted only minimally until getting rid of labor agents was added to the list of WFM demands. At that point, Greeks joined in huge numbers and virtually took over the leadership of the strike. A good many of the miners had fought against the Turks in Crete, and they now applied the techniques of guerrilla war to the strike. Their first move was to occupy the higher ground around the mine; any strikebreaker who attempted to enter was warned off by accurate rifle fire. Armed company guards and local police forces could not dislodge the Greeks. An attempt to starve them out failed when Greek daredevils, under cover of darkness, resupplied the strikers, who were willing to exist on the scantiest of provisions. Eventually the mine owners had to capitulate. Although the WFM was not recognized as a bargaining agent, the labor agent system was ended, wages were raised, and improvements in safety standards were made.

The 1912 gunplay at Bingham was not untypical. The new Greek immigrants readily adapted to what was the last of the frontier West. Their willingness to use rifles and dynamite in labor confrontations was not as unusual in the West as it would have been in the East or Midwest. The WFM had long organized worker militias and stockpiled arms, and the IWW advocated industrial sabotage. There was also a tradition of violence in the American Federation of Labor (AFL) construction unions and the United Mine Workers (UMW).

A racial factor spurred the organizational fervor of the Greeks. As far as most Americans were concerned, the Greeks were the scum of Europe. Consequently, Greeks were often barred from labor camps for “whites” and were forced to bivouac with racial minorities. Frequent neighbors in mining camps were the Japanese, a group with whom Greeks also shared dangerous dynamiting assignments. The two groups became quite cordial with one another, an affinity enhanced by their joint fondness for gambling and wrestling. The Greeks were constantly surprised that the generally smaller Japanese were usually able to best them
in the martial arts, but liked to brag they were the better drinkers and gamblers. In job actions, Greeks usually were more aggressive, but, as at Bingham, the Japanese invariably followed the Greek lead.

The racial antagonism toward Greeks was omnipresent. Among the most well-documented incidents were the burning of the Greek section in South Omaha, Nebraska, in 1909,21 and the expulsion by boat of Greek lumber workers from Gray’s Harbor, Washington in 1912.22 More common were city ordinances which discriminated against Greeks, blacks, and Mexicans. In Pocatella, Idaho, for example, Greeks were restricted to segregated seating in theaters and could not live in most neighborhoods. Greeks early in the century had already begun to make inroads into the California restaurant industry; the reaction of many native-born Americans was expressed in a sign displayed in one restaurant window: “Pure American. No Rats. No Greeks.”23

Greeks inadvertently fed anti-Greek passions with their unwillingness to learn English or accept Americanization. For most, the time spent in America was to be a brief interlude during which they accumulated cash for prosperity in Greece. In the Utah of 1910 there were only ten females among 4,072 Greek inhabitants. Americans justly asserted that the nomadic Greeks were much more interested in unredeemed Greece than in the United States. Some 20,000 Greeks from the United States went back to fight in the Balkan Wars, and at least 40,000 fought in the First World War and the subsequent campaign in Asia Minor. Americans were upset when Greeks refused to volunteer for the American army until promises were made about the future of Greek areas still under foreign rule. Nor could Americans fathom Greek music, or the habits of males so traditional that they often arrived with foustanelas, headbands, and sashes in their bags.24

Helen Papanikolas, a major researcher of the intermountain Greeks, has argued that the Western Greeks were mainly motivated

21Saloutos, op. cit., p. 66.
23Saloutos, op. cit., p. 269.
by feelings of *philotimo*: pride in their region and in Greekness. But her own work undermines her thesis, showing that Greeks fought most of their battles along economic lines, frequently leading large numbers of non-Greeks. A case in point was the Greek role played in the Colorado coal strike of 1913–1914, an action led by the UMW and involving national figures such as the legendary socialist, Mother Jones.\(^{25}\) At Ludlow, the local leadership fell to a group of about fifty Greeks headed by Louis Tikas, a Cretan. After months of turmoil in which there were numerous violent incidents, the military assaulted the tent colony of strikers and their families in an effort to drive them out with flames and machine-gun fire. An exact toll of the dead was never made, but the known dead totaled over thirty men, women, and children. Among the murdered was Louis Tikas, who had saved countless lives by repeatedly rescuing individuals trapped during the attack. The Ludlow Massacre provoked investigations and national and international outrage, but the guilty were never punished. Ludlow took its place in American labor history, alongside events such as the Haymarket Square Affair and the Triangle Fire, and Louis Tikas entered the pantheon of American labor martyrs.\(^{26}\)

The Ludlow Massacre proved to be a major setback in organizing the coal fields, but it did not mark the end of Greek militancy. For another twenty years and more, Greeks were highly visible in working class struggles, and, quite often, they were singled out as the most militant of the militant. They were referred to as “indomitable” and “experienced veterans of the Balkan Wars.” The *Salt Lake City Herald* of September 19, 1912 described Cretans as “famed as men who, when the spirit moves them to fight, are difficult to control.”\(^{27}\) A year later, a newspaper in the Ludlow area quoted a Greek striker as saying, “The miners’ union is greater than the United States government and


\(^{27}\)Helen Papanikolas, “Greek Workers in the Intermountain West,” *op. cit.*, p. 205.
when the union gives the word to fire upon soldiers, we will obey the order." Whether the story is apocrypha or reality, it accurately reflected the militant image of the Greek miner.

The strong degree of truth in that image is seen in activities of the Greeks in Utah during the 1920s. Some 3,000 Greeks were involved in a national strike called by the UMW in 1922. During the course of the conflict, a Greek striker was killed, setting off angry demonstrations which culminated in the burning of an American flag. Such anger was linked to the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan, which had identified all immigrants as inferior and placed Greeks at the top of the not-wanted list. Greeks met the Ku Klux Klan head on. In one incident, Greeks forcibly disrobed Ku Klux Klan members in a Salt Lake City park and discovered they were prominent citizens. To protect themselves from such "respectables," Greeks joined with Italians and Slavs to form armed defense committees. During this period in the mid-1920s, at least one black was lynched, and many Greeks believed that Mormons were using the Ku Klux Klan to intimidate labor. If the Ku Klux Klan was so being used, the tactic backfired. Greeks bonded together as never before, and forged strong links to other ethnic groups. There were no cross burnings or whippings in their ethnic centers and, eventually, the Ku Klux Klan threat waned.

A small but persistent influx of Greek women slowly brought some stability to the Greek communities. Some Greeks opened businesses or began to herd sheep, but the majority remained common laborers. Formal institutions like the Greek Orthodox Church were slow to develop, and the circulation of Greek-language newspapers was spotty. Church dues and other community records indicate the Greeks in the West were still relatively poor when the Great Depression struck. How many Greeks might have left the region and shipped for home at that time is unknown. Nor is it known how many married non-Greeks and had families without passing on a Greek heritage to their offspring. What is certain is that a considerable number of males never married and drifted to the fringes of society, living out their lives in run-down hotels and meeting at kafenions and diners. These marginal men might account for the marked Greek presence in much of the

28 Ibid., p. 201.
The Greeks In America

hard-boiled popular fiction of the 1930s, most notably in the work of Dashiel Hammet as well as in the fiction of James Cain, Ellery Queen, and Nelson Algren.²⁸

The Greeks in the West have left few written records, and the oral tradition has been poorly preserved. What does exist reveals workers speaking the language of militant industrial unionism. Before the inception of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), Greeks were likely to belong to the UMW, but there was also interaction with the WFM and IWW. The Gray's Harbor Strike of 1912, which also involved Austrians and Finns, was called the IWW-Greek Strike, and Greeks were involved in IWW actions from the Mesabi iron ore range in Minnesota to California's agricultural areas such as Wheatland.³⁰

Louis Theos (Theodoropoulos) has been identified as an IWW organizer who worked undercover in the Colorado strikes of the 1910s, and Nick Boorhus, a seaman, emerged as an IWW cartoonist in the 1930s. But the main impact of the early years of struggle was a trade-unionist rather than a radical orientation. The Communist Party and left-wing press received a minimal response from Greeks west of the Mississippi, even in the 1930s and 1940s.

Lasting prosperity for the Greeks in the West did not come until the 1940s, and it was only then that American patriotism and the English language went unchallenged. The terms on which Greeks finally merged with mainstream America, their continuing role in the workplace, the influence of marginal men, and the strength of alliances with other ethnic groups remain unresolved issues. What is clear is that for the first four decades of the twentieth century, Greeks in the West mounted courageous struggles for trade unionism and civil rights, and, in doing so, often provided dynamic leadership for other ethnic and racial groups.


³⁰Philip S. Foner, The Industrial Workers of the World: 1905-1917, op. cit., pp. 262 and 492. Papanikolas, op. cit., p. 287 notes that Nick Spanudhakis was one of the IWW pickets killed by Colorado state police outside Lafayette, Colorado in 1927. This was the first coal strike in Colorado since the Ludlow Massacre, and it suggests a fifteen-year continuity in Greek participation in radical working-class movements in the coal mining industry.
New England

The first employment for many Greek immigrants at the turn of the century was found in the mill towns of Massachusetts. The unskilled work demanded by textile manufacturing was well-suited to newcomers from unlettered agrarian backgrounds. By 1912, the Greek population of Lowell had swelled to approximately 10,000, making that city the third largest Greek center in the United States. This was at a time when unions were mounting massive efforts to rid the textile industry of child labor, to raise wages, and to improve working and living conditions that kept the average lifespan of the mill worker to under thirty years. While Greeks, like other immigrants, might be introduced to a specific mill as strikebreakers, they invariably joined the swelling tide of protest. Between 1900 and 1920 there was rarely a year in which Greek workers were not striking at one mill or another in Lowell. Each action was followed heatedly in the kafenion culture of the predominantly male society.31

A special problem was faced by Greeks in New England. In a region that had not yet recognized Italians and Hungarians as truly civilized people, Greeks were considered Orientals. Many early strike actions and other community protests were undertaken to achieve racial equality, and Greeks often served as the leadership for the smaller communities of Syrians, Armenians, Albanians, and even Turks who faced the same discrimination. These activities were a dynamic fusion of class and cultural solidarity.

Greeks were active participants in the momentous strike wave of 1912/13, during which the IWW won substantial gains for more than a quarter-million workers. The key strike was the 1912 battle at Lawrence, involving no less than twenty-four nationalities speaking twenty-two major languages. Greeks were on the strike committee, and Greek language posters were visible in the extensive photographic coverage of the tumultuous strike. Lawrence was known as the "strike that sang," and one of the strikers' songs refers to the Greeks as among the more militant nation-

alities. Sung to the tune of "In The Good Old Summer Time," the song's first stanza is as follows:

In the good old picket line, in the good old picket line,
The workers are from every place, from nearly every clime, The Greeks and Poles are out so strong, and the Germans all the time, But we want to see more Irish in the good old picket line.32

Following the victory at Lawrence, strike euphoria swept the mill towns. In Lowell, the position of Greeks was pivotal. Some previous strikes had been lost, in part because the Greeks had not participated. As the 1913 action evolved, the Greeks remained ambivalent. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, the IWW's Joan of Arc, asked to speak with the Greek workers. A meeting was arranged at a church, but, at the last minute, the priest balked at letting a woman speak from the altar. He finally acquiesced on the technical grounds that Flynn was not to appear as a female, but as a labor organizer. The twenty-three-year-old orator, addressed fifteen-hundred Greeks with the passion that was making her an American legend. Her words were translated into Greek as she spoke. Her account of that night tells all: "The intensity with which they listened was touching. It was their first experience of an American taking the trouble to explain everything to them and asking them for their support. They gave it with enthusiasm and became the backbone of the second strike, which was speedily won."33

The arrival of Greek women occurred earlier in New England than in other regions, making for communities with a keen interest in public education and civic improvements. Despite what grew to be a considerable role in business and the professions, most Greeks remained in mass industries where they responded favorably to unionization until at least the 1940s. The New England area was characterized by high circulation of newspapers, frequent political gatherings, and intense community organization. Haverhill was one of only three cities north of the Mason-Dixon line

to join in the founding of AHEPA in 1922. The strong Venizelist current in the community generally benefited the Democratic Party and became a tidal wave with the New Deal.

The 1930s showed that the passing years had not slackened community militancy. A case in point is Greek participation in a 1933 strike of shoemakers in Peabody. Although one of the struck firms was Greek-owned, a petition signed by 220 Greek merchants, proprietors, and civic leaders came down solidly behind the strikers and demanded that "an immediate stop be put to the most inhumane practice in the civilized world—strike-breaking."  

Similar continuity in working-class attitudes is visible in the career of James Ellis (Boutsellis). In 1938, at the age of nineteen, Ellis went to work at Merrimac Manufacturing in Lowell, a factory employing 3,000 persons, including many Greeks. In an interview published in 1982 through the Lowell Museum, Ellis stated that Greeks had fought and struck at this particular plant for years. Between 1938 and 1940 Ellis was prominent in three successful strikes at Merrima; in all three, the Wagner Act was invoked. After serving in the Second World War, Ellis was a CIO organizer in Lawrence, Lowell, and Haverhill from 1946–1947, and then participated in Southern organizing in the hectic years of 1948 and 1949. Upon his return to his home state, Ellis advanced in the union hierarchy and in 1955 became State Director of the CIO.

The fur workers union, led by social democrats and Communists, was further to the left than Ellis. In the late 1930s, the fur workers union organized New England leather workers, a group whose numbers and decentralization were such that unionization had always been problematic. The new Fur and Leather Workers Union brought some of the best wages and working conditions in the country to what had been a severely exploited sector of labor. In 1940, John Vafiades, the leading Greek figure in the union, personally worked in Lynn, using his Greek language skills to consolidate the new locals. Another indication of radical

strength was that in 1943, the IWO had lodges in Peabody, Lowell, Boston, Worcester, Haverhill, and Springfield, as well as in neighboring New Haven and New Britain, Connecticut.

Still another example of the progressive continuity in Greek community life involves the careers of John and Constantine Poulos of Lynn. Their father, George Poulos, was vice-president of the major Venizelist organization in New England. John Poulos remarked in later years that he often observed his father politicking in coffeehouses. The elder Poulos, whose personal hero was Papanastasiou, the founder of the Farmer-Labor Party in Greece, preferred a one-on-one approach rather than public meetings. If an individual could not be directly recruited into the Venizelist organization, the fallback goal was to seek a principled united front against the royalist-led conservatives. John Poulos also noted the influence of individuals who had belonged to the Greek section of the Socialist Labor Party, and of Italian anarchists who had been fervent supporters of Sacco and Vanzetti.36

While still in his twenties, John Poulos, himself a food worker, organized Food Workers Local 701-AFL. Acting as the union's business agent, Poulos led the fledging union of a few thousand members into the emerging CIO. He was soon appointed CIO director of the North Shore. This brought him into contact with tens of thousands of workers in cities such as Lynn, Peabody, and Salem. Poulos was also a delegate to the 1938 founding convention of the CIO.37

Poulos's trade union work would be pertinent in and of itself, but it is also significant that Poulos was a Marxist militant. Never attracted to the Communist Party, Poulos did belong to the Socialist Workers Party and the Workers Party, groups that advocated the ideas of Leon Trotsky. While his CIO work was strictly on a trade-union basis, he brought to it some of the most extreme radical sensibilities of the era, and found a ready response. In the 1940s, he worked with distinction in UAW unions, but in the 1950s he was permanently blacklisted. In the 1970s, Poulos became an activist scholar of Greek studies, and set up an archive

86Unpublished interview with Eric Poulos (son of John Poulos), 1936.
87John Poulos Biographical Files, Poulos Collection, Tamiment Library, New York University.
Constantine Poulos was to have an even more visible public image. Although familiar with Marxist ideology because of his close ties with his older brother, Constantine remained a liberal. In 1940, he became the founder and editor of *The Hellenic Spectator*, an AHEPA monthly geared to the coverage of politics and the arts. While Poulos published radical as well as liberal writers, the liberal viewpoint was dominant, and most of the articles assumed a tone and language that appealed to the broad progressive spectrum of people attracted to AHEPA. Early issues dealt with the rights of the foreign born, and offered extensive coverage of Greek-authored poetry, fiction, and drama.

The outbreak of the Second World War brought dramatic changes to Poulos's life. He took a job as a journalist for the Overseas News Agency, and although he had never been to Greece, he was eventually assigned to report on the Greek resistance. He left Cairo in 1943, on a small boat, and made a perilous voyage that ended in his being the first correspondent to enter occupied Greece. He quickly made his way to the mountains, where he came into contact with EAM-ELAS. He soon concluded that EAM-ELAS was a genuinely democratic united front that was conducting a vigorous effort against the Nazis, while bringing social justice to the countryside.

Poulos poured out factual reports that were picked up by hundreds of American newspapers, including the *New York Post*. The articles were frequently translated into or paraphrased in the Greek press. Poulos also wrote interpretive essays which appeared in *The Nation*. At war's end, Poulos served as a liaison between the American officials and individuals who had been active in the

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38The dual purpose of this collection was to provide an archive for the personal papers of Constantine Poulos and to create an archive of Greek Trotskyism. In the course of fulfilling these objectives, John Poulos collected any and all material he could find on Greek radicalism. The resulting collection is housed in four large boxes and includes clippings from non-Trotskyist sources such as *Vema*. There is extensive material from both the US and Greece on EAM-ELAS, and a good collection of anti-junta materials (1967–1974). The collection is augmented by some forty books, mostly in English. The collection continues to expand and strives to be a general archive on Greek radicalism. Tamiment Library also houses the Oral History of the American Left project, which contains tapes of Greek radicals active in the US.
resistance. Behind the scenes he urged that EAM-ELAS be given at least an equal voice in the government being formed to rule post-war Greece. While freely acknowledging the Communist leadership of EAM-ELAS, Poulos felt that the resistance fighters were Greece's best democrats and that even the Communists would function honorably in a regime which guaranteed their political rights. This view ran counter to that which became American foreign policy, and Poulos was soon expelled from Greece under the vague charge that he was "pro-Communist."

Poulos soon found that he was now on a gray list of undesirables, and assignments as a journalist became so scarce that he was forced to return to the US. His efforts to publish a book on Greece proved unsuccessful, and evidence found recently shows that the Department of State undertook an active role in discouraging publishers from accepting his book proposal. Eventually, he bought a weekly newspaper in Jamestown, NY, where he was to win a Pulitzer Prize for community journalism; but his writing would not receive national exposure again until the 1960s, when he was called upon by The Nation to write about the Greek junta. In 1965, Poulos was able to get an editorial post at Holiday magazine.

The silencing of the Poulos brothers reflected a phenomenon occurring throughout the Greek community in the post-war years. Individuals firmly grounded in the traditional republican movement and active in American groups such as the CIO were not allowed to actively oppose US policy in Greece. Perhaps the most vivid example of this emerged from within the State Department itself. During the war years, leading Greek scholars were hired to analyze events in Greece and Greek American reaction to these events. Among those called was Professor L. S. Stavrianos of Northwestern University. As he and his colleagues examined the pertinent data, they came to the same general conclusions that Constantine Poulos had. Advocacy of their scholarly conclusions, the very job they had been hired to perform, led to massive dismissals and resignations when the war ended.

Upon leaving the State Department, Professor Stavrianos

went to work on a book which he eventually entitled, *Greece: American Dilemma and Opportunity*. His manuscript was turned down by every commercial and university press he contacted until it came to the attention of Regnery. Ironically, Regnery was a right-wing publishing house; but its isolationist view of foreign policy left it open to a critique of the Truman Doctrine. The book was published in 1952 and has since been recognized as a classic of the period.

The reward for such intellectual candor on Professor Stavrianos's part was red baiting and harassment. The president of Northwestern University personally attempted to have him dismissed, and his efforts were thwarted only by a strong Illinois tenure law. Until a change of university presidents took place, Professor Stavrianos did not receive either a raise or a promotion. Greek academics offered scant public support, and nearly two decades passed before Professor Stavrianos was semi-officially rehabilitated and honored at the 1971 convention of the Modern Greek Studies Association.

The fate of both Stavrianos and Poulos is significant in that membership in the Communist Party was never an issue. Their major offense was to disagree with American policy in Greece. But the real loser in this ideological battle was Greek America, which became temporarily severed from its progressive traditions and was deprived of opposing opinions. The pervasive intimidation of dissenters in the 1950s had a gripping effect on Greek American intellectual and political life that did not slacken until the Colonels' coup of 1967.

Few of the established Greek American institutions opposed the dictatorship, and many Greek Americans were active or tacit supporters of the military junta, but oppositions to the Colonels emerged spontaneously in most major Greek communities. Young people influenced by the New Left movement of the 1960s and reactivated veterans of the EAM-ELAS era formed the basis of the coalition that opposed the dictatorship. This small but vigorous movement had a Massachusetts component that was led by intellectuals in the Boston area, and it spread its views through a radio program, publications, and public meetings.

The progressive impulse in the Greek American community of Massachusetts had remained far from dormant. Having had
embraced the New Deal, the community found the New Frontier of John F. Kennedy most congenial. In 1974, the very year the junta was overthrown, Greek-American Michael Dukakis was elected governor of Massachusetts on a program of liberal reform. That same year, Paul Tsongas, a future Massachusetts senator, was sent to Congress from the Lowell district, and Nicholas Mavroulis consolidated a base in Peabody that would send him to Congress in 1970. Tsongas and Mavroulis were firmly identified with the most liberal segment of the Democratic Party, and the more moderate Dukakis was thrice-elected governor of, arguably, the most liberal state in the Union. The immigrants of the early 1900s would have been astounded at such a Greek presence in state and national politics, but there was a thread of continuity between them and the liberals of the 1970s and 1980s.

The East and Industrial Midwest

New York was the port of entry for the majority of Greeks. Many patterns developed in New York City would be reproduced in other metropolitan areas, but New York was unique as the cultural capital for the Greek language in the US. The city produced the two major national Greek-language dailies; the first Greek-language records were produced in New York, as was the first Greek-language motion picture. The city also acted as a gateway for Greek artists making tours of North America.

In addition to the lively cultural scene, New York quickly bred two often antagonistic trends: a dynamic commercial community and the most militant Greek trade unionists. Greek entrepreneurs often began their businesses by offering ethnic wares and services, or by acting as American agents of international shipping concerns. The favored form of business was the "hands-on" enterprise, but there were also larger concerns, such as Greek participation in the mass exhibition of motion pictures. As Greeks grew increasingly comfortable with American business practices, they became a force in real estate development and began to function in the corporate world. By the 1980s, it was not unusual to find a Greek heading a major international or local corporation: General Dynamics, Mobil Oil, and the Long Island Lighting Company are only three examples.
The profits of pioneering Greek firms usually stemmed from the exploitation of Greek workers. Given the awful working conditions generally prevalent before the New Deal, this made for acrimonious struggles between Greek labor and Greek capitalists. The prosperity which characterizes the post-1960s community has dimmed the memory of how much of that affluence came about.

The first wave of immigrant Greek males paid a particularly dear price for entry into the American system. Their first jobs were likely to be as bootblacks, fruit vendors, candymakers, floral assistants, street peddlers, waiters, or common laborers. Most were employed in what was called the padrone system. First developed by Italians, this system involved labor being exchanged for food, lodging, a small salary, and repayment of a loan. The loan was usually the money advanced for passage to America, or money sent to relatives in Greece. The padrones confiscated all tips, prohibited education, and enforced dawn-to-dusk working hours. Such practices made loan repayments all but impossible and kept the worker in perpetual debt—a modern form of indentured servitude. Living conditions for the young men, frequently youths under the age of seventeen, were criminal. Early death and permanently impaired health were common. Exact details on how the system exploited Greeks were revealed when Greek physicians in Chicago worked with American reformers to expose the system. For the Greek worker, however, the usual escape from this economic bondage was neither social legislation nor outside intervention, but, quite simply, running away.

Many commentators on the plight of Greek workers in this early period have left the impression that Greeks did not fight back; more specifically, a general consensus has been advanced that Greeks were never attracted to radical ideology. Even Theodore Saloutos, the single most authoritative historian of Greek America, insists, "Marxism made no appreciable progress among Greek Americans. The rank and file were bitterly opposed to it and could be counted upon to fight it with all the power at their command." With the exception of Charles Moskos, nearly all subsequent historians of Greek America have repeated this judg-


Saloutos, op. cit., p. 332.
ment uncritically. The reality is that Greeks were neither particularly prone to radicalism nor particularly antipathetic to it. Their pattern of response was very similar to that of nearly all other ethnic groups.

Greeks began to own restaurants quite early in the immigration cycle, but it has always been true that more Greeks worked in Greek establishments, hotels, and deluxe restaurants than owned them. From the teens onward, these food workers constantly fought to advance themselves economically. The extent of Greek participation in strikes and the radical edge of that participation can be seen in two New York events during the Depression: the police murder of Steve Katovis in 1930, and the general strike of hotel workers in 1934.

The biography of Steve Katovis offers rare insight into the life of a rank-and-file Greek Communist. Born in 1890 in Thessaly, Katovis went to sea at age sixteen. He arrived in New York in 1913, where he became an avid reader of anarchist and IWW literature. He participated in the maritime strike of 1920, before shipping for California where he worked as a taxi driver and laborer. He had joined the Communist Party by the time he returned to New York in 1927. A writer for Empros and a minor official in the Party, he went to Jersey City every fifteen days and tried, with his older brother, to organize restaurant workers. Katovis was also a member of an informal group of six Greeks who went to night school to become expert technicians. Their goal was to migrate to the USSR, once they were fully trained, "to build socialism." To support himself while going to school, Katovis was a food handler in the Bronx. On January 16, 1930, hearing that strikers at a nearby market were in trouble, Katovis rushed to help. He arrived in time to be caught in police gunfire. Eight days later he died of his wounds.

Katovis's comrades turned his martyrdom into a political event. More than 20,000 workers of all ethnic backgrounds viewed his corpse at the Workers Center on Union Square, and some 50,000 workers demonstrated in his name on January 28. His funeral entourage was led by his best friend, George Mastopelos, and his brother, Paul Katovis, read the eulogy. Shortly after his burial, thousands of copies of a 31-page biography of Steve Katovis
Steve Katovis was not a solitary figure in the Greek community. Greeks had been prominent in a New York cafeteria workers strike in 1929, which ended with a considerable number joining the Communist Party. Greeks were again visible when hotel workers closed virtually every New York deluxe hotel in 1934. At the head of the strike was B. J. Field and Aristodimos Kaldís. Field, who was fluent in French, organized the chefs; Kaldís, born in Asia Minor, was the leader of the Greek waiters.

The fact that Aristodimos Kaldís was a strike leader is unknown to most Greek Americans, who correctly identify him as an internationally renowned painter. His second career obscured his past when, in the 1960s, Kaldís was featured in major exhibitions. Even earlier, Kaldís had attracted attention with twelve lectures at Carnegie Hall entitled, "The Key to Modern Art." These were based on his personal contacts with Matisse, Giacometti, Picasso, de Chirico, Leger, and, most importantly for him, Diego Rivera.

This late flowering of artistic talent hardly seemed what destiny had in store for the seventeen-year-old Kaldís who arrived in Boston in 1906. Soon active as a local journalist and labor agitator, Kaldís achieved local notoriety for his work on behalf of Greek rubber workers. Through the years, he continued to earn a living as journalist while performing political services as needed. He was drawn into the Communist movement but broke with it in the 1920s, thereafter supporting the positions of Leon Trotsky. In 1930, now living in New York, Kaldís became editor of *The Communist*, a monthly Greek-language newspaper. His first editorial asked Greek workers to break with Stalin and fulfill the original aims of the Bolshevik Revolution.

The strikers of 1934 were motivated by bread-and-butter needs, not ideology, but they were not naive. Field and Kaldís were both known Trotskyists, and they and other radical orators of various persuasions spoke to rallies which brought together

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some 2,000 to 10,000 persons in what became the biggest strike action of its kind to date. The chefs were the key to the strike’s success, because they were not easily replaced; and the Greek social halls became the major centers of the strike’s organization. The walkout was a front-page story for days, and ended with substantial gains for the workers. Shortly after the strike ended, Field and Kaldis quarreled, and the union they had led affiliated with the AFL. The strike, in fact, turned out to be Kaldis’s last political hurrah. He had met his future wife, Laurie Eglington, who was the editor of the influential *Art News*, and he began to paint in earnest. Three years later he befriended Diego Rivera, who was then working on his Rockefeller Center mural. Kaldis never disavowed his politics, but never again was he to be associated with a political party.

Kaldis was not alone among Greek artists and intellectuals who became intrigued with radical ideas in the 1930s. Theodore Stamos, one of America’s most celebrated abstract expressionist painters, was born of Greek parents in New York City in 1922. At age ten, he received a scholarship to the American Artists School, the original John Reed Club and an agency of the Communist Party. He has recounted that in the 1930s he participated in May Day parades and in Communist picketing. Although he became disillusioned with the Communist Party after the Hitler-Stalin Pact in 1939, Stamos continued to think of himself as a democratic socialist. Nicholas Calas, a world-famous art writer and lecturer, arrived in New York in the late 1930s and attempted to create a magazine that would fuse surrealism and Trotskyism. The project failed, but Calas continued to regard himself as an unaffiliated leftist and remained quite friendly with the most famous of all Greek Trotskyists, Michael Raptis (also known as Pablo). Kimon Friar, the best known translator of Greek poetry into English, was also attracted to the left in the 1930s, being particularly passionate on the subject of Spain while journalist Paul Denis headed a “Greeks for Norman Thomas” committee. These connections between the left and Greek intellectuals and artists were quite typical of the times, and are noteworthy.

44 Ibid.
only because so many Greek American commentaries have failed to point out that such connections existed.

While exact figures are always difficult to confirm, there appear to have been five hundred Greek members of the Communist Party in the 1920s. This was about the same number as other Southern European ethnic groups, but considerably smaller than the number of Jews or Eastern Europeans. The Greek Communists were concentrated in major industrial cities east of the Mississippi River. The strongest unit was the Spartakos group of New York City, which had formed in a restaurant by the same name. Spartakos was especially important in maintaining the Greek-language Communist press.

The major working-class organization controled by the Greek Communists was the Greek local of the fur workers union. Although the fur industry was dominated by its Jewish owners, there were three hundred Greek furriers employing 1,500 Greek workers by the 1920s. During the same period, a power struggle within the Fur Workers Union ended, and a coalition led by a Communist, Ben Gold, emerged as the dominant force within the union. This new dynamic leadership was able to secure significant gains for its members, but further gains were threatened by the lack of Greek participation. Not scabs in the technical sense because they had never been approached to join the union, Greeks in Greek shops could take up the slack during any strike and severely handicap the union.

Ben Gold made it a union priority to organize the Greeks. His first move was to confer with Greek Communists and set up meetings with Greek workers where his speeches could be translated, much as Elizabeth Gurley Flynn's speech had been translated in Lowell in 1913. By August, 1925, five hundred Greeks were attending special meetings where they learned that their wages and conditions of work were considerably lower than elsewhere in the industry. Initiation fees were cut by a third to encourage membership, and the emerging Greek leadership felt confident enough to call a strike for October 27. The response was sensational. Every Greek fur shop was closed. Although there was some intimidation by police and hoodlums, the workers triumphed in what turned out to be a ten-day strike. When it was over, they shared the industry standard: a forty-four-hour week,
ten legal holidays, time-an-a-half for overtime, and a minimum wage.\textsuperscript{46}

A year later, a strike involving the entire union was called. Unlike in 1912 and 1920, when Greeks had worked during strikes, the Greeks in 1926 proved to be stalwart strikers. Huge rallies and vigorous picketing were the union's major tactics. The owners replied by hiring thugs to beat strikers, a practice that would continue for another fifteen years wherever there was labor unrest. The hirelings of the furriers were among the most vicious in New York, including the infamous Louis Lepke, who was later associated with Murder Inc. In 1926, as in subsequent strikes, the fur workers had to slug it out, and sometimes shoot it out, with the thugs. The New York papers often carried photos of workers or mobsters lying bloodied in the streets. In some areas of the garment industry, the hoodlums prevailed; in others, the union hired its own thugs to fight company thugs. Among the fur workers, the union was able to defeat the mob with its own muscle, and Greeks developed a reputation as being among the boldest fighters. A fictional account of these events can be found in \textit{Quitting Time}, a novel by Leonard Kriegel.

If struggling with police, scabs, and thugs were not difficult enough, the Greeks also had to contend with ethnic criticism from some fellow Greeks. The conservative press was shamelessly antisemitic, and derided workers for thinking they had more in common with Jewish coworkers than with Greek bosses. Workers were also berated for belonging to a union which gave full rights to blacks. Much was made of the fact that there were hundreds of Greek women in the shops who should not have to associate with Jews and blacks. Such verbal assaults had little effect on the fur workers, most of whom came from the Kastoria region of Greece, and who remained loyal to their union and to all other fur workers. The Greek local became so strong over the course of time that it was able to support organizing efforts in other states. The militancy of the union can be seen in the statistics from Newark, NJ, where Tom Galanos, a Greek, was the major leader for all the ethnic groups. During the period 1936–1939, there were no less than fifty-six strikes and 121 weeks of shutdowns.

\textsuperscript{46}Philip S. Foner, \textit{The Fur and Leather Workers Union}, op. cit., pp. 160-162.
The Communist leadership of so many Greeks over the decades might be perplexing from the perspective of the post-1960s Greek Americans. It is essential to note that the Communist Party, popular or not, has always been legal in the United States, and in the 1930s the Communists were an active and legitimate force in American labor. They paraded down Fifth Avenue on May Day and held huge rallies in Madison Square Garden. Groups such as the fur workers were part of a radical tide that would not be spent until the advent of the Cold War. Even then, the fur workers were somewhat unique. Unlike most Communist-led unions, the fur workers were always openly leftists: Ben Gold had never made a secret of his membership in the Communist Party. Although the executive board of the union was under the domination of his clique, socialists and liberals had served for decades with no complaint of unfair treatment. When other Communist-influenced unions were booted out of the CIO after the war, accommodations were made for the fur workers to remain, primarily because of the union's long record of internal democracy and militancy.

The Greek Communists also tried to create broad coalitions within the community. The Greek Workers Federation was a popular front effort which sought to translate anti-Metaxas sentiment into an anti-monarchist, anti-fascist, and anti-imperialistic direction. The group published a newspaper, Protoporos (Pioneer) from March 1935 to June 1937. Greeks fighting for the Spanish Republic were among the non-labor topics frequently covered. The movement renamed itself the Greek American Union for Democracy in 1937, and this and other initiatives laid the cooperative groundwork for the vibrant radical-liberal alliance of the 1940s. At that time all sectors of the community became involved in the effort to defeat fascism and to support the Greek resistance. What might be thought of as the Vema-Keryx coalition became dominant in New York and other major cities. Rallies, war-bond drives, social events, and a vigorous publishing program were all part of a campaign aimed at Greeks, non-Greeks, and the American government. The success of the effort is documented in reports compiled by the OSS.47

Greek labor showed its power by creating the Greek American Labor Committee. Twenty-two AFL and CIO locals with a membership of over 100,000 workers were represented, and there were observers from twelve other unions. The committee acted as an effective pressure group within the union hierarchy and in the Democratic Party. It fought for aid for the Greek resistance and Greek war relief. At the end of the war, the Committee appeared at hearings in Washington, DC in an unsuccessful bid to alter American policy in Greece. Greek radicals were also involved in unions that were not active in the Greek American Labor Committee. Among these were the United Electrical Workers, the United Mine Workers and Smelters Union, the United Steel Workers, and the National Maritime Union.

Yet another Communist-led organization that played a significant role in Greek American life during the 1940s was the Greek Maritime Union, which until 1941 had been known as the Greek Seaman's Union. The membership of six hundred was composed totally of Greek nationals; after Greece's occupation, union headquarters were divided between London and New York. The New York chapter had close ties to the Spartakos group, the fur workers, and its American counterpart, the National Maritime Union. Its perspective in the 1940s was twofold. As fervent anti-fascists, the seamen volunteered to man ships that carried armaments from America to Murmansk, the most dangerous of all the Atlantic runs. Their heroism was so extraordinary that the union won commendations not only from Stalin, but also from Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt. While waging this war effort, the union also fought Greek shipowners in a successful effort to upgrade conditions and wages of Greek nationals to meet American standards. During the war years, the New York local published its own newsletters and was involved in all the social activities of the Greek American left. Not a few marriages were one by-product.

As civil war enveloped Greece, the status achieved by the Greek Maritime Union was turned upside down. The heroes of the Second World War became instant villains. Membership in the union was considered treasonous by the Greek state, and its

and O.S.S. files in the John Poulos Collection, Tamiment Library, New York University.
allies shipped back Greek nationals who were union members to face certain imprisonment. The union's activities were terminated in New York and its leadership was expelled under the McCarren-Walter Act. In spite of this situation, the union was to survive and eventually prospered. A number of individuals active in New York during the war years gravitated to leadership roles in the Greek Communist Party, the most notable among them being Tony Ambatielos, who became a member of the Greek parliament during the post-junta years.

The anti-Communist hysteria which struck the Greek Maritime Union took a heavy toll on naturalized Greek Americans as well. Scores were stripped of their citizenship and deported, and hundreds more underwent judicial hearings throughout the 1950s. Among the most prominent of the deported Greeks was John Valsiades, the leader of the Greek fur workers. But the very first to go was Gus Polites, a retired Detroit restaurant worker. Accounts of the Polites case and others in Detroit reveal that most of the men were already in their sixties and had been politically inactive for years, but as young men they had been Communists who organized restaurant and auto workers. Three of the men threatened with deportation, Leo Syrakis, Leftherios G. Zgournouis, and George S. Zembeles, had been residents of Detroit for nearly thirty years. Frequent mention was made of their association with a Greek workers club located in Detroit's Greektown. They were never accused of any subversive acts, and their only police records had to do with arrests for picketing. Their technical offense was that they had not admitted to membership in the Communist Party at the time they became naturalized. Given the advanced age of the men and their records in organized labor, the real aim of the anti-Communist campaign appears to have been to intimidate all of the foreign-born, a replication of the Palmer Raids which took place at the conclusion of the First World War.

American-born radicals were also pressured. Although they could not be deported, many were forced to switch careers, particularly if they were involved in education, labor, or communications. The exact number of individuals harassed is not known, but a considerable number of Greeks who had participated in various dissident movements were affected. Dean Alfange, for
example, had been a 1942 candidate of the American Labor Party for Governor of New York, and Alexander Karanikas was a Congressional candidate for the Progressive Party of New Hampshire in 1949. Many such persons were rendered politically inactive by the pressures of the 1950s.

Greek Americans were more vulnerable to McCarthyism than most ethnic Greeks. The majority of the community had supported the Communist-led EAM-ELAS, but the American government had determined that EAM-ELAS would have as small a post-war role as possible. The persecution of resistance fighters by royalists who now accepted Nazi collaborators as allies was bewildering. The advent of full civil war was unfathomable. The issues did not seem nearly so clearcut as the conventional press asserted, but discussions of alternatives, proposals for compromise, and the formation of pressure groups was rendered impossible by the specter of McCarthyism. Any sentiment that could be interpreted as pro-Communist put a foreign-born Greek American in danger of deportation. For the native-born, there was the prospect of the blacklist. Support for American policy which might have developed naturally was brutally commandeered.

As a consequence of this process, Greek America developed a kind of amnesia. It forgot its own turbulent history in America. Illusions grew: that the transition from impoverished immigrant to affluent American had been relatively brief and painless, that America had always loved its Greeks. Events in the old country were stripped of their national aspects and understood only as part of the global struggle between the US and the USSR. This largely inaccurate and incomplete view went unchallenged until the Greek dictatorship of 1967–1974 revived all the old questions—and memories.

The South

The first Greeks to set foot on what became the United States did so in the South. The rosters of Spanish expeditions, such as the one led by the conquistador Coronado, are filled with names followed by the designation “greco” or “griego.” Greeks also were active in the pirate fleets of the Caribbean. One of the first
Greeks in Texas, for example, was a "Captain" Nicholas who had sailed with the famous Jean Lafitte from Savannah, Georgia aboard the pirate ship Jupiter. The first Greeks to settle in Chicago arrived in the 1840s after starting their voyage in New Orleans and traveling up the Mississippi River. New Orleans also gave birth to the first Greek Orthodox Church (1864) in the New World.

Despite these early adventurers, immigration by Greeks in the South, as in the North, did not become massive until 1900. No Southern center ever grew as large as those in Chicago, New York, or Lowell, but almost every major city had an identifiable cluster of Greek families. The history of these immigrants is poorly documented, but what records have surfaced indicate they made a rapid entry into small businesses, usually eating places, shoeshine parlors, confectionery shops, and food stalls. A handful enjoyed early prosperity, but the majority did not become financially secure until the Second World War.

Casting a dark cloud over the business success stories reported in local newspapers and ethnic magazines was the padrone system. The Southern manifestation of this form of ethnic self-exploitation was widespread and appears to have lingered on after falling into disrepute in other parts of the nation. Individuals caught up in the system were more easily controlled in smaller cities with conservative traditions than in the anonymous urban centers that teemed with reform and revolutionary sentiments. Many Southern cities were to draw the majority of their Greek population from a very specific region of the old country, intensifying their isolation. The padrone often might be a relative or a person to whom the family in Greece was deeply indebted. And the South lacked a vigorous trade union movement and reformers such as the Hull House progressives who so greatly aided Chicago's Greeks—a situation that worked to the advantage of the padrones. It is also rarely noted that the five hundred Greeks who were brought to New Smyrna in 1767 came as indentured laborers to a Scottish entrepreneur.

A most unfortunate consequence of the spotty history of the Greeks in the South is the resultant vagueness about the founding of AHEPA at a 1922 meeting in Atlanta, GA. While it is well known that Southern racists were extremely hostile to Greeks, it
is not clear how much of this feeling was specifically aimed at Greeks or how much was a spillover of the anti-foreign sentiment so prevalent at the time. One would like to know who the allies of the Greeks were. Other ethnic communities? Jews? White Southern liberals? Business associates? What was the relationship between the Greek communities and the most exploited of all—the Southern blacks?

The kinds of harassment Greeks faced ranged from physical assaults and racial segregation to all manner of petty annoyances. A restauranteer from Charlotte, North Carolina is on record about Ku Klux Klan tactics of the 1920s. She states that Ku Klux Klan members liked to go into Greek restaurants and order huge meals. When it came time to pay, they would insist they had given the cashier a ten-dollar bill when, in actuality, they had only handed over five dollars. To avoid confrontations, the restaurant owner usually acquiesced to what amounted to a free meal.48 Such incidents raise the question as to what happened when restaurant owners resisted intimidation. It is not known to what extent there were threats of or actual whippings, cross burnings, or lynchings—all standard Ku Klux Klan behavior of the time.

Southern history underscores that the Americanization policy adopted by AHEPA was, in part, a self-defensive measure. Greeks found it necessary to assure their new compatriots that they were "modern," and that their allegiance was not to Greece, but to the United States. Learning English quickly and adopting American customs were self-evident means to that end. The frequent Americanization of Greek names during this era served a similar purpose.

Thoroughly documented local histories that might address such issues by providing details do not exist. What do exist are accounts by merchants who happened to become the most successful Greeks in town, and stories concerning the emergence of the local parishes and, particularly, the men who paid for the first bell or cornerstone. Nearly totally absent are accounts of the lives of the ordinary people who made up the parish populations, the political and social issues they argued about, and the many individuals who were not involved in the formal community at all.

The point to be made is not that the merchants and church founders are unimportant, but that they should not be allowed to substitute for a genuine history of the entire community. Topics which rarely are hinted at include what percentage of Greeks were employed in Southern textile mills, or how many had contacts with the militant seaman's unions which occasionally showed strength in various Southern ports. The Greeks who left America are yet another component of history usually ignored. US statistics show that Greeks had one of the highest return rates to the old country of any ethnic group—at least thirty percent. Unless we are to believe the returnees had struck it rich, they obviously soured on America. What role did the padrone system, labor agents, and racism play in this alienation?

A glimpse of what hidden riches a full history of the Greeks in America might reveal is found in the saga of the Greeks who settled in Tarpon Springs, Florida. Tarpon Springs is unique because it stands alone as a community dependent on the sponge industry, and that industry is unique because, prior to the arrival of the Greeks, it was technologically backward. By the late 1880s, Greek divers in the Dodecanese islands, along with other European spongers, were using pressurized diving suits to harvest sponges. American spongers continued to use hooks attached to long poles, which greatly limited the area that could be worked. In 1905, John Cocoris, a Greek immigrant who had first visited Tarpon in the late 1890s, arranged for six divers from Aegina to use their diving gear on a Tarpon boat. The entire craft was filled in a few hours and the exhilarated divers announced that there were enough sponges in the Gulf of Mexico to supply the whole world. Within a year, there were fifty Greek sponge boats using Tarpon Springs as their home port. Native Floridians, mainly sailing out of Key West, were determined to retain the hooking method, and pressed their views by fighting with the Greeks on land and sea. The confrontations ranged from fistfights to shootouts and boat-burnings. The Greeks gave back better than they got, quickly establishing themselves as a community that would not be intimidated. Assaults by the Ku Klux Klan and, sometimes, by local police sympathetic to non-Greeks also had to be countered.

One reason that the Greeks eventually prevailed and developed what became a de facto monopoly in the sponge industry was that diving with suits was far more perilous than hooking. If a diver surfaced too rapidly, or stayed under water too long, he might become paralyzed or even die. Diving cut short a man’s lifespan, and all divers eventually suffered from such a pronounced disorientation affecting their sense of balance that they swayed when walking and dancing. An American commission in the 1940s concluded that there was no work more hazardous in America than sponge-diving. Like their Greek compatriots in textiles and mining, the sponge divers performed work most native-born Americans rejected as too dangerous.

Divers went into the gulf in 43-foot boats designed like those used in Greece for a millennium. The boats traveled as a fleet, staying at sea for months at a time. A mother schooner coordinated the positions of the diving boats and acted as a floating warehouse. When the schooner filled with sponges, a process which took from three to four weeks, it returned to Tarpon to unload them and take on mail and fresh food for the men at sea. Later, when motors became more efficient, the time divers had to spend in the gulf was significantly reduced.

The organization needed to coordinate a fleet was replicated within each individual craft. The boats were run as modified cooperatives; all payment came from profits which were divided on a share basis. A craft might, for example, have sixteen shares. Each diver received three shares. The engineer, captain, and owner received two shares; the cook, lifeline handler, and deckhands were given one share. However, a captain who doubled as a diver would receive five shares, and if he also owned the craft, seven shares. Because so much time was spent together, and because the work was so dangerous; the crew developed a profound comradeship that was reinforced by shared family, village, and island ties.

The democratic ethos which characterized the intercommunal relations of Greek fisherfolk was also evident when dealing with outsiders. Although white Floridians did not allow blacks on sponge boats, Greeks employed them as needed, and under the very same terms which applied to Greeks. This infuriated the Ku Klux Klan, but the Greeks would not budge from their co-
operative system to indulge in racism. Blacks proved to be appreciative workers. Many of them learned Greek, and some were such able divers, crew members, and savers that they eventually bought their own boats. The Greeks of Tarpon also refused to practice racially segregated seating on public transport. Rather than having buses, the transportation system involved a fleet of jitneys. Riders sat wherever they wanted in the small vehicles. In the Tarpon Springs Museum today, the all-black sponge crews and the occasional black face in the midst of a Greek crew attest to this unusual moment in American race relations.

The close-knit Tarpon community was not without its frictions, however. The Tarpon Springs Sponge Exchange was across from the docks, and there was frequent acrimony between the fisherfolk and the sponge traders. The men who had spent so much time at sea and taken so many chances with their health felt that the traders received too large a share of the ultimate profits. Various efforts were undertaken to set up sponge trading cooperatives that would give the fisherfolk enhanced profits. These struggles were fictionalized by Don Tracy in *Bazzaris* (1965), a novel in which two sides become involved in violent class warfare that includes murder.

A richer source of Tarpon lore than Tracy's fiction is *Strangers at Ithaca* (1962), a memoir of Tarpon written by George T. Frantzis. The author, who was also a founder of the local historical museum, details how Greek divers won out over the hook spongers, and he deals with the more unsavory characters and aspects of the Tarpon port—the moonshiners who picked up whiskey coming from Cuba or Nassau during Prohibition, and the systematic smuggling of illegal aliens into the United States.

Almost all the Greek inhabitants of Tarpon Springs came from the Dodecanese islands. The major riverfront street in the Florida community is called Dodecanese Boulevard, and on many islands in the Aegean there are corresponding routes to the sea called the Tarpon Road. Contact between the Dodecanese and Tarpon Springs was, and is, more common than contact with either New York or Athens.

Funds generated by the ever-expanding sponge trade facilitated an early arrival of Greek women. They had the usual stabilizing effect on community life, and the subsequent birth of children
generated an enormous interest in public education. Because men were at sea for long periods, women enjoyed an unusual status in the community. They took over the management of families, including finances; boys as well as girls were under maternal care for most of the year. Many women also came to own shares in boats and in associated enterprises as husbands, fathers, uncles, and sons included women as direct heirs in their estates.

Sponge prices moved upward in the 1910s and 1920s, and even during the Great Depression. In 1936, for example, sponge sales finally hit the million-dollar mark. While the rest of the country was in economic crisis, only two-hundred-fifty out of a Greek population of 4,000 in Tarpon Springs were unemployed. The community was so well organized and financed that the few unemployed and others in need of social assistance were helped by community agencies rather than by government.

The 1930s also brought the first positive recognition from prominent non-Greeks. When ex-President Calvin Coolidge visited Florida in 1930, he proclaimed Tarpon Springs to be the most interesting stop on his visit. Two years later, Hollywood made The Diver, the first of five films about Greek divers, on location in Tarpon. Filmmakers would also use the city as background for non-Greek films such as The Wake of the Red Witch (1940), which starred John Wayne. The only Greek to make a film in Tarpon was Elia Kazan, who directed Sixteen Fathoms Deep (1948). Kazan is also the only Greek author to write a novel about Tarpon Springs. His Acts of Love (1978) includes a sponge boat captain as a major character.

The Greeks of Tarpon Springs thought their good luck was permanent, but three post-war events brought sudden and permanent changes in their lives. The first of these developments was the renaissance of sponging in Europe, where wages and other costs had hit rock-bottom. More devastating was the "red tide," a plague of sea fungus which destroyed sponge beds in 1947. Although there had been previous episodes of red tide, none had been so devastating. The third blow came when du Pont marketed the first synthetic sponges late in the decade. Financial collapse was swift and, despite periodic hopes for a revival, permanent. There had been more than two hundred boats and a thousand seamen in the Tarpon Springs of the 1930s. By the 1970s, the number of
boats in its fleet could be counted on one hand, and not a single fisherman could be guaranteed a livelihood.

Cushioned by nearly four decades of economic growth, the Tarpon Greeks were able to survive the death of the sponge industry. The American-born were already becoming part of various professions, the civil service, and business. And the films of the 1930s brought tourism to Tarpon Springs: it ultimately became the city's major industry. The rituals of Epiphany in Tarpon Springs—an annual blessing of the fleet and the diving into one of the bayous for a jeweled crucifix—became a major event for non-Greeks as well, attracting tens of thousands of visitors. While the ceremony retained its spiritual importance for the community, it also served as an important tourist attraction for an annual festival.

Presently, the Tarpon Greeks comprise about a third of the city's population of 18,000. They have retained a remarkable cultural continuity, and wield enormous influence in the city government. Greek as well as American holidays are observed, and an excellent bilingual Greek program is considered a community treasure. Dance groups and other community organizations preserve with great attention to authenticity the dances and costumes of the islands. Perhaps more than any other Greek community in the United States, Tarponians feel an intense connection with the pre-1940 generation. Every time one of its elders dies, the community feels it has lost a hero. A sentiment heard over and over again when the pioneering generation is spoken of is, "Those men seem like giants to us."

Conclusion

The richness of the Tarpon Springs material indicates how much might lie hidden in the stories of other Greek communities. Whole regions and entire classes have been neglected, and even major cities have only been partially researched. While every census since 1960 has shown Greek Americans to have the second highest economic level of any ethnic group, and the highest education level, the process by which this affluence arose from the arduous early decades remains poorly understood.
What has begun to emerge from the better local histories is that many common assumptions about the Greeks in America are misleading or untrue. The period of low wages, poor public acceptance, and marginal economic viability was decades-long, lasting until the 1940s for most families in most communities. Thought of as extremely individualistic, Greeks, in fact, are among the best-organized ethnic groups in the United States in every area of interest: commerce, labor, religion, community, and native region. Similarly, the supposedly parochial Greeks have shown considerable cultural sophistication in working positively with a wide range of racial groups, ethnic groups, and native-born Americans. Justly famed for dominance within the restaurant industry, Greeks have risen to visible positions of power in virtually every area of the American economy. The community of the 1980s is proud of its moderate and patriotic image, but its present comfortable position was built upon a tradition of reforming zeal that was unaccepting of America's shortcomings, at home or abroad.

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