
*Review by Elaine Thomopoulos*

I had been waiting for years for the third edition of *Greek Americans, Struggle and Success*, the book that Charles Moskos told me he was going to write with his son Peter. Finally, the third edition I had long awaited was out, 26 years since the second edition of the book had been published by his father, a sociology professor at Northwestern University. This interesting, well-researched, and well-written book was worth the wait. Despite Peter’s misgivings about taking on the project, which wasn’t in his field of criminal justice, he has done an excellent job of bringing the history, sociology, and culture of the Greeks of America up-to-date and adding his own perspective. I think Charles, who died five years before the book was published and didn’t have a chance to work on it, would have been proud of his son’s accomplishment.

**Early Struggles: the Greeks Come to America**

In his first chapter, “Early Struggles: the Greeks Come to America,” Peter Moskos sums up the heart of this book: “The sociological and historical portrait of what are today more than 1.2 million Americans of Greek descent is one of an ethnic group that has maintained a remarkable degree of communal and family cohesion, while also accommodating itself to and succeeding in larger society. This self-congratulatory best-of-both world’s adaptation of a relatively small group . . . that had a disproportionately large impact on American life may well be the distinguishing quality of Greek Americans.”

This book thoroughly covers the history of the Greeks of America, starting with the person Greeks believe is the first Greek to come to the new world – Christopher Columbus. In 1528, Don Teodoro, who was in the crew of a Spanish explorer, went
ashore as a hostage and was presumably killed by the natives. In 1768, 1,403 indentured laborers, 400 to 500 who were Greeks, were brought to America by Scottish doctor Andrew Turnbull to establish a colony in Florida. Turnbull named the colony New Smyrna after the place where his Greek wife was born. More than half of the settlers died in the first two years. Just a few other Greeks, many merchants and sailors, came during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the early part of the 19th century, the immigrants included merchants and sailors. In addition, about 40 orphans were adopted by Americans during or shortly after the Greek War of Independence. Two thousand Greeks arrived from 1870 to 1889, mainly from Sparta.

The Great Wave of Greek migration started in the 1880s and reached its peak in the early 20th century. From 1900 to 1915, one in four Greek males between the ages of 15 and 45 had departed for the United States. Moskos estimates that if you add Greeks from outside Greece proper, including the Ottoman Empire, the Balkan countries, Egypt, and Cyprus, 400,000 arrived in the United States from 1900 to 1920. From 1924 until after World War II, immigration virtually ceased because of the United States' restrictive immigration policy. From 1947 to 1967, 100,000 came and from 1968 to 1979, 122,000. Since the 1980s, there has been a sharp decline in immigration, with only 82,000 coming from 1980 to 2011. The use of bar graphs and charts makes it easy to see at a glance the ebb and flow of immigrants to the new world.

*Greek Americans: Struggle and Success* uses historical examples, immigrants' stories, and excerpts from literature and films to convey the difficulties the Greeks faced in America. It gives examples of ill-treatment by Greek labor agents, poor working conditions, and death in the mining camps, strikes, and anti-Greek nativism during the early years. Anti-Greek demonstrations took place in several cities. The most infamous and deadly took place in South Omaha, Nebraska in 1909.

Prior to World War I, 90 percent of the community consisted of men who came to the United States as laborers with little education. They wanted to earn money and return to Greece. Moskos reports that between 1910 and 1930, the immigrants sent $650,000 back to Greece. About 40 percent of those who came to America prior to 1930 returned to Greece. Moskos gives a vivid description of how the Greeks fared in the West, in the mills towns of the Northeast, and in the big cities of “Nea Yorki” and “Sikago.”

**From Brawn to Brains**

In the second chapter, “From Brawn to Brains,” Moskos traces the development of the community after the arrival of Greek women. It includes sections on the establishment of the Greek American family and role of women as housewife and
mother. Because of a dearth of Greek women, some of the men married non-Greeks. Moskos doesn’t mention how many married non-Greeks or how these families fared.

He mentions the separation of families caused by young Greek men leaving Greece to seek work in America, but he doesn’t capture the sorrow. For example, my mother-in-law didn’t reunite with her siblings until 41 years after she left Greece. She never saw her parents again. Immigrant husbands could be absent for years, at times more than a decade, and children would grow up without a father to guide them. The psychological toll this took on families isn’t covered in this book. The numerous existing oral histories, literary works and memoirs can better capture the heartache.

Moskos writes of the transition from a “Greek in America to Greek American.” The immigration laws of 1921 and 1924 closed the open door policy for immigration. If a Greek wanted to go back and forth to America or to bring family members here, he realized he needed to become a citizen. Moskos points out that a dramatic shift occurred after this law was enacted. Where in 1920 only one in six had acquired citizenship, by 1930, half had become American citizens. With very few new immigrants arriving, by 1940, those born in America became more numerous than those born in Greece.

Peter Moskos, building on his father’s second edition, does a commendable job of covering the Greek American institutions: the Greek Orthodox Church, Greek language schools, the press, national organizations such as the American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association (AHEPA) and Greek American Progressive Association (GAPA), as well as village and regional associations. He brings us up-to-date: “Whereas past volunteer associations were heavily focused on Greek American identity in an American context, contemporary Greek American organizations take such identity for granted and focus more on ‘philanthropic good’.” He gives several examples of such modern-day organizations, such as the PanHellenic Scholarship Foundation, which provides scholarships to Greek American students.

This chapter outlines the ascent of the Greeks to the middle class, how they adapted to America, and how America perceived them. During World War II, when Greece’s troops pushed back Italian invaders in the mountains of Northern Epirus (Southern Albania), Greece got “laudatory coverage in the American media and Greek Americans basked in unaccustomed glory.” Through AHEPA, the Greeks of America sold five hundred million dollars worth of war bonds. Moskos says: “World War II was a watershed moment in Greek America: the war effort became a matter that combined Greek ethnic pride with American patriotism.”

Moskos compares the second wave of immigrants who arrived between 1965 and 1980 with the first wave of immigrants. The immigrants of the second wave tended to be better educated, were equally divided between men and women, and often came as
family units. The newly arrived Greeks called the old-timers “bootblacks” and “dishwashers” referring to their humble origins. Moskos says, “The older generation immigrant was put off by what seemed to be an anti-American if not Socialist tendency among some of the new Greeks. The old Greeks often described the new arrivals as being adverse to toiling long hours and unwilling to appreciate the privations that had led Greek Americans into the middle class …. The old Greeks would say of the new that they expected too much for nothing, ‘they found the table all set.’” In this third edition, the pejorative “D.P.” (displaced person) is not mentioned, although it was in the second edition. The first wave of immigrants and their children used “D.P.” to describe the second wave of Greek immigrants. It bothers me as much as the “N” word does. I still hear it used today, although not as much as I did 10 years ago.

Moskos covers a lot of ground well but not everything can be studied in a book of this length. Nevertheless, the following topics could have been explored further, particularly in this chapter:

- A more thorough coverage of the men and women of the second wave of immigrants who came to pursue higher education; many received advanced degrees.

- An in-depth discussion of how both the first and second waves of immigrants were shaped by what had happened to them prior to their arrival in the United States. For example, I did not realize the traumatic effects that War II, the Axis occupation, and the Civil War had on the second wave of immigrants until I heard the immigrants’ stories told via interviews or memoirs. There was death, famine, massacres, destruction of homes and whole villages. The old-timers felt the newcomers did not understand the hardships they had to go through. Did they, on the other hand, understand what kind of horror the newcomers had suffered during the wars and how this shaped their identity?

- How the Genocide of the Greeks of Asia Minor by the Ottomans affected the survivors even 100 years later. The Asia Minor and Pontos Hellenic Research Center, formed by members of the Pontian Greek Society of Chicago, is currently making efforts to research and educate Greek Americans and Americans about the Greek genocide begun in the waning years of the Ottoman Empire and continued by the new Turkish republic following World War I.

- The interaction between the Greeks of the United States and the Greeks of Greece. Moskos writes about the Greek American’s support of the Greek War Relief effort during the Axis occupation during World War
II, and the strong American lobbying effort to stop the sale of arms to Turkey following Turkey’s invasion of Cyprus. However, he doesn’t address the efforts Greece has made to maintain strong ties to the Greeks of the diaspora, for example Greece’s support of Greek language schools for children and Greece’s attempt to build a bridge from the United State to Greece through the World Council of Hellenes Abroad, organized in 1995 as an advisory body to the Greek state. Also, for many years Greek lobbying organizations, such as the American Hellenic Institute, have reached out to the Greeks of America to ask for their support and to educate them about matters important to Greece.

- Whether the ease of travel back and forth to Greece for the second wave of immigrants resulted in an even stronger identification and interaction with the old country than had been the case for the first wave of immigrants, who did not have the luxury of jet planes and who for many years could not return because of World War II and the Civil War.
- The influence of the Internet (e.g., Skype, Facebook, Twitter, email, blogs, and websites) and Greek television in maintaining ties to Greece and influencing ethnic identity.

The Greek Orthodox Church in the Secular World

The chapter on “The Greek Orthodox Church in the New Secular World” discusses the church’s difficult first years, as well as the progress made under the direction of Archbishops Athenagoras (1949-58), Michael (1949-58), and Iakovos (1959-96). Athenagoras quieted the troubles within the Church that had been caused by the politics of the old country, with those supporting the king at odds with Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos. Michael made the church more accessible to the second generation by establishing the Greek Orthodox Youth of America, with English its official language. Whereas Michael allowed English in the sermons, Iakovos went further and permitted the use of English in the liturgy. He supported Dr. Martin Luther King and the civil rights movement. An iconic photo of him and Dr. King appeared on the cover of Life Magazine. Moskos says, “There is little question that the archbishop’s actions at the time were far more progressive than the majority of his flock.” Archbishop Spiridon followed Iakovos. Of his three-year term, Moskos says it was “a time of acrimony in the church.”

Under Archbishop Demetrios, there are now 529 parishes. This compares to the 200 in 1930. Moskos outlines how the Church has changed in regard to use of English, the role
of woman, and growing number of converts. By 2010, three in ten church members were not raised in the Church, with the vast majority joining through marriage. Moskos mentions church-affiliated organizations, such as St. Basil’s Academy for children and St. Michael’s Home for the Elderly. In a footnote, he names two predominately Greek American nursing homes, the Holy Trinity Nursing and Rehabilitation Center in Worcester, Massachusetts, which is a joint venture of the Council of Eastern Orthodox churches of Central Massachusetts, and the non-church affiliated Greek American Rehab[ilitation] [and] Care Centre in suburban Chicago. He omitted the first nursing home that was established, the Hellenic Nursing and Rehabilitation Center in Canton, Massachusetts, a non-church affiliated facility.

There were 27 new congregations formed between 2000 and 2010 and attendance during the past decade increased 11 percent. Moskos cautions that “despite this increased church attendance, a bit of pessimism is in order. Of the more the 1.2 million Americans who claim Greek ancestry, fewer than half are adherents of the Church and less that 10 percent are regular attendees.” He doesn’t compare these numbers to those of previous years, so it is difficult to tell if this is a huge change. But he does bring forth other statistics indicating a “church in decline.” For example, in 1987, the ratio of baptisms to funerals was 3:1; the corresponding figure in 2011 was 1.6:1. He concludes that “the church’s role in overall Greek American life—although significant—is less significant than at any time since Greeks first arrived on American shores.”

Moskos mentions Greek Americans who follow religions other than Greek-Orthodoxy. They include Jehovah’s Witnesses, Protestants, Catholics, and Jews. Unfortunately, he doesn’t explore this segment of the community or secularists further, probably because there has been very little research done regarding them.

Greek American Ideology, Politics, and Success

The fourth chapter, “Greek American Ideology and Politics” and the fifth chapter, “Success in America” deals with the conservatism of the Greek Americans, the nature of their involvement in the labor movement, the formation of the Greek American lobby after Turkey invaded Cyprus in 1974, Greek American elected officials, and the rise of Greeks into the middle class.

A section is devoted to the story of Michael Dukakis, his family, and his failure to win the bid for the presidency of the United States, in his own words, because of “a lousy campaign.” The sketch of Dukakis complements the Foreword, where Dukakis reflects on how his parents and the Greek American community influenced him. He emphasizes the enthusiasm and support he got from the Greeks when he announced his candidacy for president.
Despite the hardships the immigrants faced, including not knowing the language and having very little education, within a short time the Greek immigrants had made their way from laborers in the mines, mills, railroads, and factories into the middle class. By the 1930s, many had established themselves in small businesses. They, like the rest of the country, suffered hardship during the Great Depression. Moskos points out that at that time, more returned to Greece than entered the United States. By the 1940s and 1950s, the Greek community rebounded. Peter Moskos includes his father’s use of 1960 and 1970 census data to show how Greeks achieved well academically and financially. He uses 2006 census data to indicate that Greeks continue to be high achievers, i.e., 39 percent have graduated from a four-year college, compared to 28 percent of all Americans, and they earn 22 percent more than other white households.

To his credit, Moskos also looks “at the other side of the ledger,” telling of criminals and racists. He could have told of much, much more of the less than honorable things that Greek-Americans have done. The discussion of the literature of the immigrants and their children, as well as movies depicting the Greek American experience, gives the book more depth. For example, Moskos uses Theano Margaris’s short story “Suspended Ones” from her book Chronicles of Halsted Street to illustrate the identity crisis that many of the Greek immigrants experienced. In that story, Leo, after spending many years working in America, leaves for Greece at 49 years of age. He returns to the United States unexpectedly and tells his friends, “Over there, boys, I felt more like a stranger than here.” Six months later, Leo is back in Greece. The story continues, “But the other day we got a letter saying that he’s coming back again. To stay here definitely, that’s what he says!”

Moskos recognizes the diversity of the Greek community. He writes, “One must be cognizant of the differences and conflicts within Greek America. A sizable number of immigrants, probably a majority, never escaped from the working class. Too much attention on middle-class Greek American organizations obscures the fact that large numbers of Greek Americans are not part of them.”

Moskos describes immigrant values such as respect for elders, filial loyalty, closeness of the generations, and affection for children. He says: “In certain discernible ways ... old-country values have permeated the American-born generations. The traditional philotimo has been transfigured but is still recognizable in the appreciation of the grand gesture, displays [italics are mine] of personal generosity, and a demeanor that mixes respect for those high in the prestige ladder with an inner sense of low distance.”

This reviewer agrees with the first sentence but not with the second sentence. Earlier Moskos defined philotimo as “honor, dignity, self-esteem, integrity, respect, and fulfilling one’s obligations.” I don’t think it is the “grand gesture,” (which implies it is
being done for show), nor do I think it is “respect for those high in the prestige ladder . . . .” An immigrant who I spoke with about this stated he thought that the latter definition was “bull shit.” Moskos implies by the word “transfigured” that those born in the United States are not as philotimi as the immigrant generation. Moskos doesn’t cite any research. I don’t think there is any.

**Maintaining a Greek American Identity—Past and Future**

The sixth chapter, “Maintaining a Greek American Identity—Past and Future,” addresses the issue of the future of the Greek American community. Moskos points out that statistics from the census show that the number of Americans who identify themselves as being of Greek ancestry has grown in the past three decades, although in 2009 it peaked. He explains that prior to 1980, the census asked a question about the birth country of the parents and grandparents. Since 1980, the US census and American Community Survey have asked people to write in their ethnic ancestry, thus including those whose parents or grandparents were not born in Greece. Moskos writes, “The census records up to two ethnic identities per person. Since the ethnicity listed first is not random and split fifty-fifty, one could assume that the first listed identity holds more importance for the respondent. When a person claims two national ethnic identities, not only is Greek listed first two-thirds of the time, it is listed first more often than almost any other ethnicity.” 15 After doing a thorough job of exploring the statistics, he reports, “Given lack of immigrants from Greece and generally small Greek American families, intermarriage is the most likely explanation for the increase in Greek Americans. Greek identity must act as a sort of ‘trump’ ethnic identity in which Greek plus non-Greek equals Greek . . . . This contrary hypothesis posits that intermarriage represents a kind of stealth secular proselytization that expands the ranks of Greek America. Indeed, children of mixed marriages, at least more than half the time, consider themselves to be Greek.” 16 The “trump identity” concept is one of the most important to emerge from this book.

Moskos uses the movie *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* to further explore Greek identity issues and the role of Greeks in America. He writes, “All families have their eccentricities, but what you don’t see in the movie is the kind of American angst based on concepts unfamiliar to most Greek Americans: unloving parents, sibling rivalry, bad food, and an overall sense of aimlessness.” 17 I may be reading more into Moskos’ quote than he meant, but to me it implies that Greeks are better than generic “Americans.” But what is an American? We are of various nationalities and many of the ethnic groups contributing to our national character have the same characteristics as the Greeks, including Irish Americans, Italian Americans, and Mexican Americans. Certainly White Anglo-Saxon Protestants (WASPs) love their children and take care of them as much as
any immigrant group. And all nationalities have problems. With the Greeks this includes spouse abuse, gambling, and more recently substance abuse. Especially interesting to me is that Peter believes that sibling rivalry is unfamiliar to most Greek Americans. I have certainly seen this in many Greek families, even to the point of siblings not speaking to each other. Also, what Peter considers “bad food” is subjective. My children would consider most Greek dishes, with exceptions like avgolemono soup and saganaki, “bad food,” and a bundt cake “good food.” My son, a vegetarian like Ian Miller in the movie, doesn’t eat any of the Greek meat dishes, including lamb. He would probably consider them “bad food.”

Moskos ends the chapter by asserting, “The elements that have so defined the Greek American for almost a century – family, hard work, entrepreneurship, food, and religion, represent, to many, an idealized set of traditional Americans [sic] values. Despite the insecurities inherent to any ethnic minority, My Big Fat Greek Wedding not only affirmed Greek American values but embraced them as quintessentially American. My Big Fat Greek Wedding could be said to represent the successful completion of the marathon of the Greek American immigrant experience,”18 This reviewer doesn’t agree. The marathon is still being run. Even if the Greeks embrace “traditional American values” what will happen in future remains to be seen.

Moskos profiles several efforts to study and preserve the history and culture of the Greeks in America. He includes the research of individuals such as Steve Frangos and Dan Georgakas, as well as initiatives undertaken by institutions such as the National Hellenic Museum (NHM), formally known as the Hellenic Museum and Cultural Center. The NHM has had a longer presence than Moskos reveals. Founded in 1983, for decades it has collected artifacts and oral histories, presented programs and exhibits, and maintained a library. The NHM opened its first facility in downtown Chicago in 1991. In 2004, it moved to a Greektown location on Adams Street and then in 2011 to their present 40,000 square foot Halsted Street facility in the midst of Greektown. There are another six Greek American museums located throughout the country. Moskos mentions the Modern Greek Studies Association Portal regarding Greek Americans, which has amassed a wealth of information under the guidance of Yiorgos Anagnostou.

Unfortunately, despite the growing number of universities who have initiated Modern Greek Studies programs, not many courses exist regarding Greek Americans. Academia hasn’t encouraged courses or research regarding Greek Americans. Neither has the Greek American community stepped up to fund academic programs on Greek American studies.
Becoming Greek American: A Family and Personal Memoir

“Afterword: Becoming Greek American: A Family and Personal Memoir” by Peter Moskos tells the story of his family and how he embraced his Greek identity. By telling his story, he illustrates the “trump” identity, with Greek trumping German (his mother’s ethnicity). He embraced his Greekness after he took classes in the Hellenic Studies Program at Princeton, and especially after he spent a year in Greece. He speaks of the positive nature of being Greek, including good food and willingness of Greek strangers to help him out just because he is Greek. He says, “It is as if Greek identity is a club, and one with rather loose membership requirements at that!” He refers to Greek American culture as something we choose to adopt, a symbolic ethnicity.

His concluding sentence is Pollyannaish, “As long as Greek Americans represent the best of the American ideal – the filotimo of basic honesty, decency, and a hospitable nature (and delicious food doesn’t hurt) – Greek America will continue to thrive.” Moskos, like me, has a tendency to glorify the Greeks. He believes that these values are prevalent, and I think so too, but another concept important to Greeks is poniria, which means being clever enough to outsmart the other person, or “pull a fast one” through cunning or wit. Moskos alludes to this value when he notes, “If Greek American characters in fiction often behave like rogues, and they nevertheless possess the qualities of bravery and quickness of wit, qualities that Greeks seem to admire more than principled behavior.”

The two concepts are contradictory. How important and prevalent are they in the Greek American community? No one, to my knowledge, has researched this. No one really knows.

Even if we are philotimi, will that be enough to sustain the Greek American community? All of my four adult children take pride in their Greek heritage. But they don’t particularly care about things Greek, even though they had a Greek-speaking immigrant grandmother living with them, their parents are active in the Greek American community, and they have visited Greece, which they loved. My children’s friends are not Greek, and they don’t speak Greek, don’t like most Greek food, don’t dance Greek, don’t attend church regularly, and don’t participate in any Greek organizations. My youngest daughter feels the strongest pull toward Greece. Attending the local Greek Orthodox church camp for several summers, as well as the summer she spent at the Ionian Village, the church camp in Greece, made a difference.

Closeness of family is very important to my children. But does that make them Greek? They are philotimi, but does that make them Greek? My eight grandchildren, who are of mixed ancestry, will probably have weaker ties to their Greek heritage than did my children. How Greek will they be even if they identify Greek first on the census question about ancestry?
I, like Peter Moskos, want to see the continuation of our Greek heritage in America. Yes, we have the phenomenon of the “trump identity?” But are those who pick Greek as the trump identity primarily children of a Greek immigrant mother or father? Will Americans of Greek descent onto the third, fourth, and fifth generations continue to choose Greek as their ancestry? And if they do, what meaning will that have for them?

Moskos has done an outstanding job of covering a lot of territory on the journey to discovering what it means to be a Greek in America. The Greek Americans is clearly written so that it can be read by the general public, as well as by scholars. Charts and graphs present the material in an easy-to-understand manner. The many footnotes, references, and an extensive bibliography add value. The photographs included in the book enhance the story of the immigrants. They include wrestler Jack Londos showing his off his physique; elegantly dressed men and women at 1928 dinner dance of the Hlomioton Society of Northern Epirus; Harry Shukas’ drug store and soda fountain – displayed on the wall is a photo of his son, who was killed in France in 1944; and Archbishop Iakovos with Dr. Martin Luther King. A photograph of burly male Pontian dancers, as well as another of scores of smiling children and adults waving Greek and American flags, decorate the cover. More images would have made the book even better. Perhaps they can be included in the next edition.

I look forward to Moskos’ next edition about the Greek American experience, hoping I won’t have to wait another 26 years. Congratulations to him for a job well done.

---

2 Ibid, page 57.
3 Ibid, page 66.
5 Ibid, page 73.
6 I have been told DP was not used in New York City and other Greek centers outside of the Midwest. There is no formal work on this. What is certain is that it was widely used in Chicago.
7 A good accounting of these events is found in The Genocide of the Ottoman Greeks, Studies on the State-Sponsored Campaign of Extermination of the Christians of Asia Minor (1912-1922) and its Aftermath: History, Law, Memory edited by Tess Hofmann, Matthias Bjornlund, and Vasileios Meichanetsidis (New York: Caratzas publishing, 2011).
8 Moskos, Greek Americans: Struggle and Success, page 96.
9 Ibid, page 104.
10 Ibid, page 196.
13 Ibid, page 149.