

SYMPOSIUM '76 OF THE MODERN GREEK STUDIES ASSOCIATION:
THE GREEK EXPERIENCE IN AMERICA

(Chicago, 24 - 31 October 1976)

The National Bicentennial Symposium on «The Greek Experience in America» was a once-in-a-lifetime intellectual and cultural event in Greek Americana. The Symposium was held at the University of Chicago, October 29-31, 1976, under the sponsorship of the Modern Greek Studies Association (MGSA) and the University of Chicago. It was financed, in part, by funding from the American Revolution Bicentennial Administration in Washington, D.C., and the Illinois Bicentennial Commission. The co-chairmen of the Symposium were Dr. Andrew T. Kopan, DePaul University, and Dr. Alexander Karanikas, University of Illinois at Chicago Circle.

Nineteen scholars and writers from across the country gave papers and talks covering the Greek experience in America. Attendance averaged about 400 persons at the various sessions, nearly half of whom came from outside the metropolitan Chicago area. Registrants included sizeable numbers who came at their own expense from as far as California and Florida as well as many from the East Coast. The high expectations for the conference were more than realized.

The tone of the Symposium was set immediately upon entering the lobby of the conference site, the impressive Center for Continuing Education at the University of Chicago on the Midway Plaisance. Names of prominent Greek Americans were displayed on wall posters especially prepared for the Symposium. Most impressive was the AHEPA exhibit which portrayed various aspects of Greek immigrant life and the adaptation to America of these immigrants and their children. Complementing the AHEPA exhibit was a photographic display of Chicago's old Greek town taken from the files of Hull House, the settlement house which under Jane Addams had played a major role in the lives of the early immigrants at the turn of the century. This display was made possible through the efforts of the Hellenic Professional Society of Illinois and the Hellenic Council on Education. There was also a display consisting of books by the conference participants and other materials dealing with Greek Americana.

The conference began on Friday morning, October 29, with welcoming remarks by Andrew Kopan.

The first formal session was chaired by Edmund Keeley of Princeton University, the founding president of the MGSA. The session began with John P. Anton of Emory University who spoke on «The Greek Heritage and the American Republic». Anton's paper dealt with the impact of Hellenic classical ideals on the early American Republic and the later adjustment—often with some strain—of Greek immigrants to American culture and values. The second paper by Epaminondas P. Panagopoulos of San Jose State College was entitled «The Greeks in America During the Eighteenth Century». Apparently the first Greek to set foot in what is today the United States was one Don Teodoro in 1528, a member of a Spanish exploring crew. The first Greek colony was established in Florida under the aegis of a Scottish doctor Andrew Turnbull (whose wife was an Asia Minor Greek). The ill-fated «New Smyrna» colony had a short life (1768-1777) marked by extreme harshness towards its Greek indentured laborers. The third paper, «Greek Workers in the Intermountain West», was presented by Helen Zeese Papanikolas of the Utah Historical Society.

Papanikolas movingly evoked the harsh existence of the Greeks who came to the West in the period before World War I to work in mines and on railroads. Exploited as much by Greek overseers as native Americans, many of the early Greek workers were used as strike breakers. The remarkable thing was that many of these same men later became successful entrepreneurs in their own right. The final paper of the Friday morning session was «Historical Trends in Greek Migration to the United States» delivered by Evan Vlachos of Colorado State University. Putting life into otherwise dry statistics and immigration data, Vlachos gave a masterful overview of the persistencies and changing patterns in Greek migration to the United States since the late 19th century to the present period. Among other facets of his talk, Vlachos noted the prevalence of Greeks among illegal ship-jumpers remaining in the United States.

The second session on Friday afternoon covered the Greek and the Americanization process and was presided over by Father Harakas, Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology. This session began with a presentation by Alice Scourby of C.W. Post College, Long Island University. Scourby criticized the melting pot model of assimilation and discussed the difficulties in defining ethnicity in general and Greek-American ethnicity in particular. Scourby's analysis was based on her study of three generations of Greek Americans in the New York area. The second paper by P. David Seaman of Northern Arizona University was entitled «Modern Greek and American English in Contact». Seaman pointed out that there is an inevitable erosion of standard Greek (*demotiki* was the referent) in America even among immigrants conversing with each other. Seaman documented his thesis with numerous examples of English substitutions in American-Greek vocabulary and grammar. The Friday afternoon session closed with a talk on «The Greek-American Personality» by Harry C. Triandis of the University of Illinois. Triandis summarized existing studies which contrasted the core personality in Greece and in America. Generally speaking, Greek personality traits emphasized *philotimo* and deep friendship while American personality valued efficiency and casual friendships.

The third session on Saturday morning was chaired by George Anastaplo of the University of Chicago and Rosary College and dealt with the sociology of Greek Americans. Chyrsie M. Constantakos of Brooklyn College presented her research on «Variations on Adaptation to America by Greek Home Region». She noted that the most traditional attitudes characterized immigrants from the Peloponnesus while least traditional attitudes were more likely to be found among those coming from Constantinople, Asia Minor, and the Ionian Islands. The second paper on «The Greek-American Woman» was authored by Constantina Safilios-Rothschild, Wayne State University, Chyrsie Constantakos, Brooklyn College, and Basil B. Kardaras, Wayne State University. The presentation was given by Safilios-Rothschild. Contrasts were shown between women in Greece and Greek-American women. Among the conclusions, Safilios-Rothschild noted the persistence of a double standard even though this was much less pronounced in America. The third paper on «Greek Americans: The Urban Conservatives» was by Charles C. Moskos, Jr. of Northwestern University. He presented data based on a 1972 national survey of college freshmen which included over 700 Greek American respondents. It was found that Greek American freshmen were significantly more conservative on social and political issues than was the national norm. Moskos also argued that existing Greek-American community institutions were overwhelmingly middle class, especially in their American born

membership. This led to criticism from the floor that Moskos had ignored working-class American-born Greeks who still maintained a strong ethnic identity.

The Saturday afternoon session, presided over by James N. Alexander, covered the theme of Greek-American community institutions. James Steve Counelis of the University of San Francisco opened the session with a talk on «The Americanization of the Greek Orthodox Church». Counelis convincingly argued that the Church is being Transformed from an immigrant to an American institution. This with regard to changes in administration, hierarchy, language, liturgy, music, and architecture. Andrew T. Kopan of DePaul University gave the second paper on «Education and the Greek Immigrant». Kopan traced the emergence of the Greek parochial schools in the early immigrant community, the later development of afternoon Greek language schools and Church Sunday schools, and the contemporary concern with bi-lingual education. While derived from a meticulous analysis of the Chicago Greek-American community, Kopan's findings were seen as applicable to all metropolitan areas with large Greek concentrations. The third paper was by S. Victor Papacosma of Kent State University and dealt with «The Greek-American Press». Papacosma's talk was a thorough recounting of early Greek-language newspapers, the dominance for many decades of *Atlantis* and *Ethnikos Keryx*, and the current ascendancy of English language newspapers geared to a Greek-American audience such as the *Hellenic Chronicle*. The Saturday afternoon session was closed by remarks from Father Andrew Greeley, director of the Center for the Study of American Pluralism at the University of Chicago. Father Greeley, a leading figure in ethnic studies, gave the Symposium a welcome balance by placing the Greek experience into a broader American perspective.

The Sunday morning session on Greek-American literature was chaired by Theodora Vasils, noted translator of modern Greek literature. The first paper by Byron Raizis was entitled «Suspended Souls» and dealt with Greek immigrant literature in the United States. Raizis examination of poetry, songs, short stories, and novels—written in Greek by Greeks in America—revealed the recurring theme of *xenitia* (foreignness) and *nostos* (homecoming). Special attention was given the writings of Theano Papazoglou Margaritis, the Chicago-based author who has received critical acclaim in Greece. Mrs. Margaritis was in attendance at the Symposium. The second paper was by Alexander Karanikas of the University of Illinois, Chicago Circle. Karanikas who is completing a monumental study of the Greek character in American fiction focused his talk on the novels of Harry Mark Petrakis. Karanikas noted that while the characters of Petrakis do not always place Greeks in the most favorable light, this is because Petrakis treats his Greek-American subject matter as Hellenic archetypes. Petrakis, our preeminent Greek-American author, responded to Karanikas' paper by placing his literary work in the context of his personal growth and maturation. Petrakis regards his work as moving to a new plateau with his recent historical novel (the first of an intended trilogy) on the Greek War of Independence, *The Hour of the Bell*. Petrakis also stressed that while his writings are inextricably based on the Greek experience, he is not an advocate of ethnic parochialism. Rather, the writer and all humans must also harken to more universal truths.

The ethos of the Greek Experience in America was aptly captured in the Symposium motto from Nikos Kazantzakis: «My soul, your voyages have been your native land»!