

Greek-American History: Hardly Anti

By Steve Frangos
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CHICAGO- None other than Theodore Saloutos, the acknowledged dean of Greek-American Studies, proclaimed that any studies on Greeks in the United States prior to the massive waves of the 1880s was nothing more than to use his exact phrase, only "of antiquarian interest." Nothing could be further from the truth. Yet having said that, what we must recall is that Saloutos is also the acknowledged founding father of immigration studies as now practiced in the United States.

As proof of this claim one need only visit the Immigration and Ethnic History Society website to learn of the annual Theodore Saloutos Memorial Book Award. Every year this award is presented "for the book judged best on any aspect of the immigration history of the United States. "Immigration history" is defined as the movement of peoples from other countries to the United States, of the repatriation movements of immigrants, and of the consequences of these migrations, both for the United States and the countries of origin (www.iehs.org/awards_directory.php)." What is implied in this statement, to the knowledgeable reader, is that not only does Saloutos' *The Greeks in the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964) stand as model of a study on immigrants in the United States but that his earlier book, *They Remember America: The Story of the Repatriated Greek-Americans* (1956) also serves as a benchmark for repatriation studies. It is no joke but rather a deeply established academic fact that Saloutos' writings on American immigration have established the parameters for how to research and write on both the comings and goings of the immigrant experiences in North America.

While the phrase had not then been invented, Saloutos had accomplished what is now known as a paradigm shift. This



The history of Greek-American immigrants is neither limited to "antiquarian interest," nor insignificant to those who "already know I'm Greek." Thankfully, an emerging preservation movement of this all-important history is underway.

antiquarian interest, if they are read, remembered or considered at all.

Greek-American authors who immediately followed Saloutos have essentially formed into three distinct groupings. Certainly Charles Moskos was the most vocal proponent of the 'struggle and success' model which he and those of this approach asserted was the logical outcome of Saloutos' work. Greeks, and all of the 1880-1920 period immigrants, had struggled to adapt to America and by the post war period had succeeded in becoming model prosperous citizens. Another viewpoint, more challenging that it may first appear, can be seen in the work of Helen Papanikolas, Zeese Papanikolas and Dan Georgakas (the latter is also a TNH columnist) who all essentially focus on the role of Greeks in the American labor movement as a necessary com-

history. Unlike times past this group is divided by those who live and hold teaching positions in Greece as well as the United States. While, I have not taken a systematic poll, the Greek-born academics in the United States that I have spoken to over the years, do not see themselves as immigrants but émigré scholars abroad. A neat distinction but in their minds a real one. I see these individuals as a new but unstudied class of Greeks in the United States. There have always been individuals who fight any kind of assimilation and in fact actively do all they can to retain a Greek identity while living in America.

In the past, perhaps, such claims could be brushed aside as wishful thinking and fruitless actions. However as technological advances in telephones and televisions, basic incomes and ready transportation have all increased more direct personal and sustained contact is possible

transformed the way scholars approached, researched and so ultimately wrote about American immigration. Saloutos' influence didn't just alter all the future work of researchers/writers but also fundamentally changed how modern scholars and readers viewed what had been published on immigration prior to his two watershed publications. Given this break in basic approach and understanding a whole host of authors, publications, topical areas and even historical figures are now deemed little more than of, well,

not just Greek but any ethnic group's presence in North America during the 1880 to post World War II period.

Finally we have yet another wave of scholars from Greece who seek to understand Greek American actions and activities from a decidedly Greek perspective.

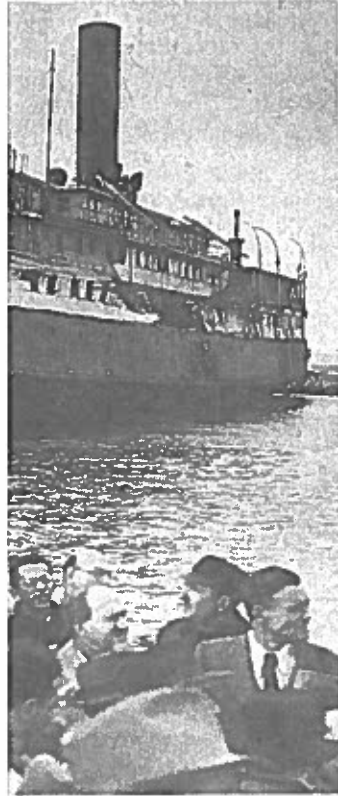
This relatively new group of writers/researchers forms the largest academically based collective to date. And let us remember more Greeks and persons of Greek descent hold university positions than at any other time in

abroad has more real world validity than in the past. In support of this increased contact argument is that within the past few years, as I have travelled the country, I have met more and more individuals who adamantly maintain they are Greeks who do not associate with the local churches or associate with those they identify as "Greek-Americans."

Now at this point you might be saying, "what has this all to do with me? I know who I am, my family, where my ancestors came from I don't need anyone

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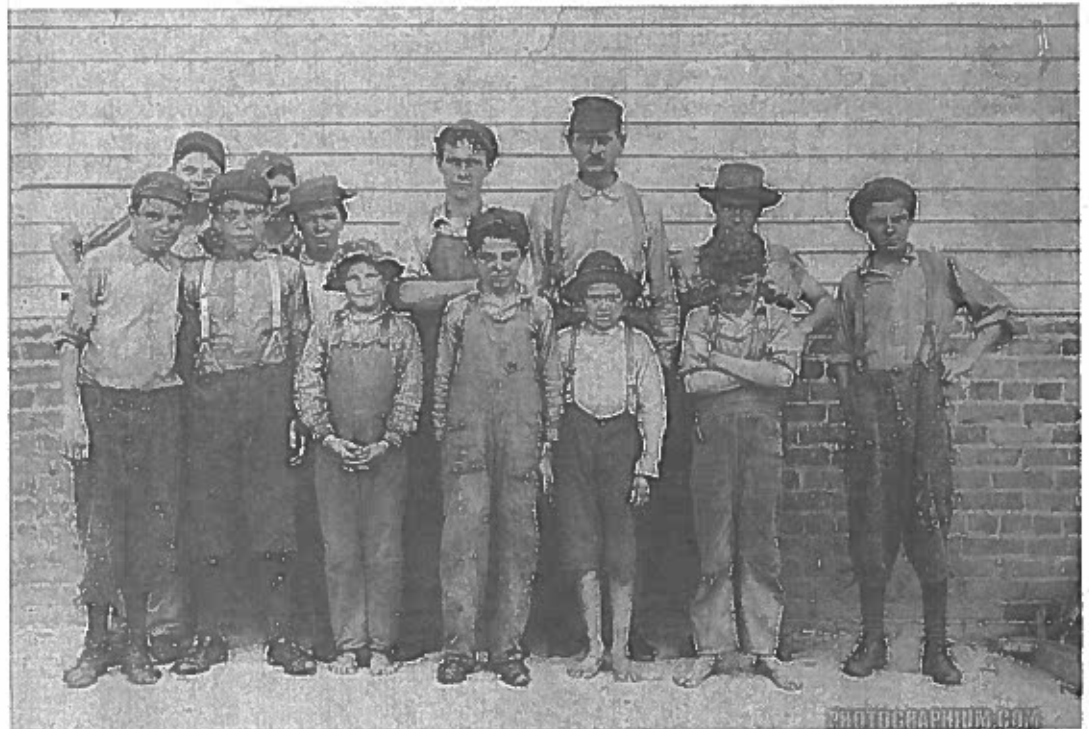


does not alter its existence. What I am describing, which is available to anyone who wishes to read it, is, at the moment, the official documented authoritative history of Greeks in the United States. This ongoing literature and its creators frankly don't need you, anyone from your village or church coffee clutch group to see publication and wide acceptance. These are the presently accepted theoretical points of view and principal writers that non-Greeks consult to about the Hellenic experience in this country.

Greek-Americans, being Greeks after all is said and done, do not strictly follow any of the schools of thought outlined above. The new preservation movement, that is absorbing so much of Greek-America's attention, remains focused on the local personal histories and experiences of their authors. Consequently, if in some town, county, or region of the nation an individual Greek or group of Greeks from long before the

the country about their collective history it is the very group of Greek historians Saloutos' work replaced whose point of view the majority of Greek-Americans share. Seraphim Canoutas, as author of a wide array of books in Greek and English perhaps best represents this school of thought, considered any person, event or collective self-identifying as Greek in the Western hemisphere to be a subject for consideration. *O Ellinismos en Ameriki* (New York City, Cosmos: 1918) or its long English title: *Hellenism in America or the history of the Greeks in North America From the early Days to the Present Time*.

No researchers I know of are asking Greek-Americans directly about their self-identity, the new preservation movement, or their own sense of community history. So, logically, if no one is checking their stated point of view or claims of historical sources then what kind of modern research is being con-



to write about or tell me who I am or what it means to me to be Greek." Unfortunately, while this may be the typical response

1880 to 1920 era is well known then that person or collective is always included within the origin tales of local Greeks. In

ducted? We need a reexamination of Greek-American history and one that includes not excludes the self-understandings

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