

παρουσίασις
βιβλίων

book
reviews

by

Charles Moskos, Jr.

Chairman, Department
of Sociology, Northwestern
University, Evanston, Ill., USA

The Assimilation of Greeks in the United States, by Evangelos C. Vlachos. Athens, Greece: National Centre of Social Research, 1968, 200 pp. \$ 4.00.

First and Second Generation Greeks in Chicago, by George A. Kourvetaris. Athens, Greece: National Centre of Social Research, 1971, 111 pp. \$ 5.00.

Family and Mobility among Second Generation Greek-Americans, by Nicholas Tavuchis. Athens, Greece: National Centre of Social Research, 1972, 180 pp. \$5.00.

In this the apparent Decade of the Ethnic it is especially timely to review these solid contributions to our knowledge of the Greek experience in the United States. For although the Greek community in America is not especially large—a reasonable guess would be about 1,000,000 Greek-born or Greek-descended Americans—its relatively successful position in American society makes it worthy of some attention. Indeed, at the time of this review, the Greek-American community was embarked upon a «Thanks to America» campaign in which funds collected would be donated to non-Greek charities as an expression of gratitude to the American nation!

All three of the monographs under review are based on empirical data and grounded in relevant theory. Collectively they present a sociological portrait of an ethnic group which seems to have maintained particularistic modes of group and family cohesion while also comfortably accommodating itself to the achievement standards of the larger bureaucratic society. This almost self-congratulatory «best of both worlds» adaptation may well be the distinguishing quality of Greek-American ethnicity.

Kourvetaris' study is based on interviews with 46 first generation couples and 43 second generation couples residing in the Chicago area. The generational framework used by Kourvetaris highlights the contrast between the two generations along the following lines. The immigrant or first generation finds its status within the Greek ethnic community; consists predominantly of restaurateurs, tavern operators, and grocery owners; defines success by amount of wealth accumulated; and maintains its Greekness primarily through preservation of the Greek language. Conversely, the American-born or second generation finds its status within the larger American society; consists predominantly of white-collar employees and professionals; defines success in terms of life styles and sources of income; and maintains its Greekness primarily through participation in the Greek Orthodox Church.

Vlachos introduces his study with a wealth of migration and census data as

well as a concise review of the assimilation literature. Even more than Kourvetaris' sample, Vlachos' study points to the occupational concentration of Greek immigrants in eating and drinking establishments (30 times the ratio of the population at large). The core of the monograph, however, is an intensive study of a small Greek community—approximately 125 individuals in a middle-size Indiana city. Briefly, Vlachos finds no evidence to support the hypothesis of a third-generation ethnic renaissance. The third generation is irrevocably American. Yet there is developing within the third generation a distinctive Greek-American culture which is not tied to nostalgia for the immigrant generation (as is the case with the second generation) or the ways of the old country (as is the case with the first generation). Rather, the emergent Greek-American culture is a new form of social identity instrumentally used to separate oneself out of the homogeneity of the mass society.

Tavuchis' findings directly contradict those theorists of the family who regard attenuation of kinship ties as an accompaniment of rapid urbanization and upward mobility. Based on fifty lengthy interviews with upper-middle-class and second-generation Greek-American male household heads in the New York-New Jersey area, Tavuchis finds that, despite tremendous status differences between the respondents and their fathers and fathers-in-law, there was a very high level of interaction between generations. In fact, one's upward mobility in the occupational structure enhanced the prestige of the entire extended family network; siblings and in-laws as well as parents. Moreover, assistance rendered by relatives facilitated the respondents' upward mobility while at the same time forging stronger bonds between kinsmen.

Even though based on rather small-sized samples, all three monographs have obvious applicability to a broader understanding of the Greek community in the United States. Kourvetaris' formulation can serve as an ideal-type contrast between the first and second generations viewing Greek-Americans from a national perspective. Similarly, Vlachos' findings of a distinctive Greek-American culture in a small community would appear to be even more the case in the larger urban centers with sizeable Greek-American populations. And as Tavuchis' documents, a core element in Greek-American ethnicity is a viable extended kinship system in which marked intra-generational mobility actually strengthens cross-generational family solidarity.

Although fully accomplishing their authors' intended goals, the three monographs are necessarily restricted in scope. The totality of the Greek experience in America requires a more comprehensive structure in which the studies reviewed

here will be requisite components. Thus, for example, the archetypal entrepreneurial role of the immigrant male should not obscure the fact that tens of thousands of Greek immigrants worked all of their lives in railroad construction, textile factories, packing houses, and steel mills. (In this regard, see the definitive historical study by Theodore Saloutos, *The Greeks in the United States*, Harvard University Press, 1964.) The significance of the Greek immigrant mother on shaping Greek-American personality has never been adequately examined. There are still enough of these robust women living to make this a feasible study.

There have also been a series of developments on the contemporary scene which are having their effects on the nature of Greek-American ethnicity. The rise of low-cost charter flights between America and Greece further strengthen an extended family system reaching from urban America to the old-country village. These same charter flights have also contributed to a resurgence of Greek-American voluntary organizations whose membership is delimited by regional origins back in Greece. The current controversy in the Greek Orthodox Church on the use of English in the liturgy poses the question as to whether the Church is to remain a bastion of Greek ethnicity or will evolve into an American Orthodox Christian institution with a Greek flavor. The antagonism of the liberal establishment in the United States toward the current Greek regime has probably led to a heightened identification with the Greek homeland among the Greek-American population (a large majority of whom support the Athens government). Also to be mentioned is the subtle impact on Greek-American self-stereotypes caused by the burgeoning of movies with Greek motifs.

Most important, the generational framework adopted in the studies under consideration may need modification to account for the large influx of Greek immigrants in the past decade. A situation has developed in which a new first generation Greek-American cohort now coexists with like-aged second or third generation Greek-Americans. One outcome of this has been a tension between, on the one hand, the «New Greeks», and on the other, the older immigrants and their American progeny. Even though the New Greeks appear to be doing as well economically as the previous wave of Greek immigrants, they are derisively termed «D.P.'s» (from Displaced Persons) by many of their Greek-American predecessors. The established community typically regards the New Greeks as not giving sufficient support to existing Greek-American institutions. For their part, the recent immigrants often find the Greek-American community as neither truly Greek nor really American.

The unanswered question, nevertheless, is whether the New Greeks and their offspring will recapitulate the successful adaptation of earlier Greek-Americans along the dimensions outlined by Kourvetaris, Vlachos, and Tavuchis. It is certainly true that these case studies of Greek-Americans are at odds with the currently fashionable premise of degrading the promise and potential of American society. It is also of more than passing interest that each of the authors is himself a first or second generation Greek-American who acquired his sociology Ph. D. in America. At even more exalted levels, perhaps Greek immigrant parents were overly sanguine when they viewed their sons as potential Presidents of these United States—but would you believe Vice-President?

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George A. Kourvetaris, Ph. D., Editor,
Journal of Political and Military Sociology, c/o Department of Sociology,
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