

THE EARLY AND LATE GREEK IMMIGRANT: A COMPARATIVE SOCIOLOGICAL AND SOCIO—PSYCHOLOGICAL PROFILE

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ABSTRACT

In attempting a social and social-psychological profile of the early and the late Greek immigrants in the United States, this analysis describes and discusses a number of differences and similarities that characterize the two groups. Briefly, the overall background and the life in the new country of these two Greek groups in America are presented, and the author enlists a number of characteristics as a way of comparing the two groups. In concluding, the author notes that the observed differences between the early and the late Greek-Americans may be better explained in the context of continuous changes and modernization of the U.S. society over the years than due to deep-rooted (esoteric) differences between the two groups, groups which are made up from the same "cloth", as the author himself notes.

RESUME

Dans un effort de dresser le profil social et socio-psychologique des immigrants Grecs de vieille et de nouvelle souche aux Etats-Unis, cette étude décrit et analyse un certain nombre de différences et de ressemblances qui caractérisent ces deux groupes. L'auteur expose brièvement l'origine et la vie dans le nouveau pays de ces deux groupes de Grecs d'Amérique et fournit un certain nombre de caractéristiques qui permettent l'établissement d'une comparaison entre les deux. En conclusion, l'auteur note que les différences observées entre les premiers et derniers courants d'immigration grecque aux Etats-Unis peuvent être mieux expliquées dans le contexte de mutations continues et de la modernisation de la société américaine au cours des années, plutôt qu'à des différences profondes entre les deux groupes.

The purpose of this paper is to give a social and social psychological profile of the "early and late Greek immigrants." When I say early I mean all those Greeks who came prior and around World War I roughly between 1890's to 1920's. By sociological and socio-psychological I mean a description and analysis of social, economic, psychological, and demographic characteristics — such things as: problems of adjustment, work and occupational experiences, health, communities, and the like.

More specifically, I will try to answer a number of questions such as: What was the world of the immigrant like? Who were the immigrants? When did they come? Why did they come? What kinds of work experiences did they have? How did they adjust to the problems and difficulties of a strange land? What were some of the problems they encountered? In what ways were the two groups similar and/or different?

In trying to answer questions like these, my purpose, as a social scientist, is not to "stereotype" one group as "the good guys" and the other as the "bad guys" or one group was "right" and the other was "wrong". The social scientist is not interested in the ways in which people stereotype each other but rather what can a sociologist say about a social group in a more objective and detached way. In other words, we must separate the social facts from the personal opinion. The myth from the reality, the "what is" from what one "would like or desire it to be", the ideal from the real.

Much of the misunderstanding between the two groups lies in the unwillingness of both groups to understand each other's point of view, to get to know each others' social world

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better. The older generation sometimes is very critical of the younger generation for the lack of respect, etc. The young accuse the old of being too strict or too conservative.

I will try to draw some similarities and differences between these two groups of Greek immigrants who came to America in different periods. By doing so I hope to shed some light on the causes of conflict and misunderstanding between the two groups.

The problem becomes more complicated because we have only a few in depth analyses of Greeks in America. Most of the studies we have are about early Greeks — those who came around the turn of the century and their progeny but very few about the newcomers — those who came after World War II in the 1950's, 1960's and 1970's and beyond.

I. WHO WERE THE IMMIGRANTS: OLD AND NEW.

U.S. is considered a multi-ethnic and multi-racial society. In the words of the late President Kennedy the U.S. is a nation of immigrants. It has been estimated by the immigration services that between 1820-1973 approximately 46 million immigrants came to America. The majority of these immigrants came from Europe (35 million). The rest came from the countries of Asia, Latin America, and Africa.

Those who came prior to the 1880's are considered "old immigrants". They came by and large from North Western Europe and they were Anglo-Saxon Protestant such as British, Scotch, Irish, Scandinavian, German, Dutch, etc. Those who came after 1880 are considered new immigrants or new immigration. They came primarily from Southeastern European countries such as Italy, Greece, Russia (mostly Jews), Poland, Hungary, and other Slavic countries. The majority of them were Roman Catholic, Jewish, and Eastern (including Greek) Orthodox.

The earlier immigrants (Anglo-Saxon) made the rules and laws, subdued the Indians, brought the slaves, and in general tried to master the new continent. Prior to 1880 the U.S. was mainly an agricultural country. Most of the old immigrants settled in small towns, seaports, and farming communities. Many became farmers, small tradesmen, craftsmen and they were quite religious people. The new immigrants by and large settled in urban and industrial centers. Most of them worked as laborers in the railroads, in factories and mines.

Most immigrants came to America for economic reasons. They came from the lower socio-economic classes and agricultural communities mostly from Europe. They faced many problems of adjustment in the new world, suffered many hardships, and many thousands of them returned to their countries. Most immigrants, old and new, came to America without families. With the exception of the Irish who the majority were women, the rest of the immigrants were primarily men. They planned to return to their homelands. For example 95% of the early Greeks and 78% of the Italians were men. In contrast, many Jews came as families and did not return to their adopted countries. Looking at Table 1 below is a comparative analysis between early and late Greek immigrants.

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TABLE 1. EARLY AND LATE GREEK IMMIGRANTS

	EARLY ARRIVALS	LATE ARRIVALS
WHO WERE THE GREEK IMMIGRANTS?		
A. SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS		
1. Population	No exact number of early Greeks is known; Various estimates including those of Saloutos between 1901 to 1930 about 403,000 Greeks exclusively from Greece were admitted to the U.S.	Again no exact number of Greek newcomers is known. Saloutos estimates from 1946-1975 a total of 200,000 came to the U.S. exclusively from Greece. One might add that since 1957 over 30,000 Greeks have jumped off ships and disappeared somewhere in the U.S. Since 1966 over 4 out of 5 Greek immigrants came to the U.S. because of some relative.
	The quota system of 1924 favored more immigration from NW Europe.	The immigration law of 1965 changed the selection procedure of new immigrants. No more than 20,000 from any country annually and a ceiling of 170,000 immigrants for the Eastern hemisphere.
2. Rural vs. Urban Origins	Most early Greek immigrants came from agricultural and village communities.	In contrast, a substantial number of newcomers came from small towns and cities.
	Had very little exposure to city life - very little knowledge of the U.S.	Had more exposure to city life and better knowledge of the U.S.

U.S. around the turn of the century attracted people from villages who could do menial jobs.

World War II brought many Americans to Europe and Greece (Marshall Plan, Truman Doctrine). Accounts of travellers, stories of early Greek immigrants, newspapers, letters from relatives, movies, etc.

The beginnings of urbanization and industrialization

U.S. by 1950's and 1960's was industrialized. Very little need for unskilled labor. It was a service oriented society (banks, restaurants, department stores, and the like.)

3. Regional Origins

Prior to World War I most early immigrants came from Peloponnesos (esp. Arcadia and Laconia)

In the post World War II period, Peloponnesians were not the predominant. Those who came from Peloponnesos, Messenians ranked first, Laconians second, the Illians third, and Arcadians fourth.

4. Age

Most early arrivals came young between the ages of 14 to 44

Most post World War II arrivals were 20 to 29 years of age (male and female), 30 to 39 (males), 10 to 19. Also a substantial number of older people in their 40's, 50's., 60's, and even 70's came.

5. Sex ratio

In the pre-World War I period, most arrivals regardless of nationality were males. Over 95% of the early Greeks were males. Later the patterns changed somewhat.

Beginning in 1958 there was more balanced ratio between the sexes. As many women as men came to the U.S.

In fact between 1961 and 1965 the incoming females outnumbered the incoming males but beginning in 1966 the trend was reversed — more males than females.

Indecisiveness and unwillingness to settle down was the major problem.

Many families came with little children and settled to the U.S.

6. Education Early Greeks were not educated 27% were illiterate, couldn't read or write. (26.7% those from other Southern or Eastern countries)

The new Greeks were by far more educated. In addition to immigrants, many thousands of students and professionals came to the U.S. Greece is one of the few countries that has a serious problem of "brain drain." No statistics are available on how many Greek immigrants were educated.

7. WHY DID THEY MIGRATE?

Reasons for migration

Most came for economic reasons. They were poor, unemployed, the problem of overpopulation, draft (esp. those from Asia Minor or Turkish controlled Greek territories)

Mostly economic or similar reasons as the early. A large group, however, came for higher studies — as students or professionals. Some came for political reasons. many came from Egypt or Turkey due to policies of those countries unfavorable to the Greeks.

8. WHAT DID THEY DO?

WORK AND OCCUPATION

Most early Greeks were unskilled laborers

Worked in the mines, railroads, factories etc. Many owned shoe shine stores, grocery stores, push cars, ice cream parlors, candy stores, fruit stores, etc. Later opened hot dog stands, taverns, and restaurants.

From 1958 through 1974 about 81,000 of 150,00 admitted to the U.S. were housewives, children, and others with no reported occupation.

Among the new by far were many craftsmen, foremen, operatives professionals, and managers. A large proportion of the newcomers followed similar patterns of work and occupation as the early Greeks restaurants, pizzas, beauty shops, taverns, etc.

A few hundred were educated or went to school and became doctors, lawyers, chemists, teachers, etc.

Many thousands of newcomers come as continued college and university. Many professors, doctors, chemists, engineers were among the late arrivals who either came as professionals or were educated in the U.S.

Pioneer Greeks did not plan to settle in the U.S, and establish roots. They were birds of passage. That is why many did not go into the professions or for the majority it was beyond their reach.

Most early Greek women stayed home. They did not work

Most women especially those of blue collar background worked outside the homes. Many ladies work in light industry.

Thousands of newcomers worked as grillmen and cooks in Greek owned snack shops or became restaurateurs themselves.

In addition, many newcomers became proprietors of tailor shops, shoe repair shops, dry cleaners, taxi cabs (N.Y.). In New York (esp) vendors of ice cream, frankfurters, sandwiches, chestnuts, etc. Some went into painting.

II. GREEKS IN THE US: PROBLEMS AND CONFLICTS

Most of the early and late Greek immigrants settled in cities East of the Mississippi and north of the Ohio Rivers (e.g., Chicago, Boston, New York, Detroit, Pittsburg, Columbus, etc.)

The early Greeks did not come to stay in the U.S. They wanted to amass their fortune and go back. Because of indecisiveness they were reluctant to become American citizens. This however began to change around the 1920's (AHEPA) (Americanization and the coming of the second generation). In contrast the newcomers became naturalized citizens much faster. Two out of 3 Greek born immigrants were naturalized citizens in 1970. Many thousands of early Greeks returned to Greece. Similar patterns have been followed by newcomers. But by and large the majority of old and the new remained in this country. At present due to American economic crisis and inflation for the first time in Greek immigration, there are more Greeks returning to Greece than leaving the country.

A. PROBLEMS OF ADJUSTMENT

By adjustment is meant the social and social psychological adaptation to the American environment. It includes material and non-material adjustments, i.e., food, weather, climate, people, habits, attitudes, feelings of well being, happiness, feelings of alienation and uprootedness, mental and physical health and the like.

Thousands of immigrants both early and late suffered from problems of adjustment. Indeed, many were physically here but mentally and emotionally in the old country. Many thousands of immigrants never managed to make the adjustment. Those who came at a younger age found it easier to adjust than those who came at an older age. Those who came from the cities were better equipped to make the adjustment than those who came from villages. The social world of the immigrant was a limited one. His family and his work were his main concerns. Later when he was secure in his job, made the adjustment, and decided to get married, he began to organize in communities, started organizations, churches, schools, etc.

Under problems of adjustment one must include mental health problems such as depressions, anxieties, feelings of loneliness and isolation, nostalgia, uprootedness, sadness, and the like. Work was an antidote to loneliness and isolation. Many problems emerged because of social mobility and change. A clash of values between the traditional and modern values (the old and the new) was inevitable. Many immigrants could not make the changes. Others broke down — some refused, others returned to Greece.

The warmth and strength of the early family kept the members together. The coming of the second and later generations changed that. Many conflicts emerged. Similar problems between late Greek immigrant families and their children — divorce, intermarriage, mental illness, delinquency, and many more problems were common among the late Greek immigrants. One of the serious problems of early and late Greek immigrants was gambling. Many families and fortunes were destroyed because of that.

B. PROBLEMS OF PREJUDICE AND DISCRIMINATION

The early Greeks suffered a lot from the earlier European immigrants who discriminated against them and considered them to be inferior. In general, every new group coming to the U.S. was a target of prejudice and discrimination by those who preceded them. There were many anti-foreign and racist organizations (K.K.K.) especially in the South. The purpose of these racist organizations was to persecute the minorities and ethnic groups such as Blacks, Catholics, Jews, and the Orthodox Christians, especially the Greeks.

The late Greeks experienced similar kinds of prejudice and discrimination but of different nature. In some instances the early and late Greeks had many more conflicts and problems between themselves than the late Greeks had with American society in general.

C. GREEK-AMERICAN COMMUNITY

Theoretically new and old Greeks were members of the Greek-American community (koinotita). The central focus of the Greek-American community life is the church and its auxiliary structures. In reality, however, about or so 10% of the Greeks in the U.S. are paying members of the Greek-Orthodox Church.

1. Religion vs. Nationality.

The old Greeks accuse the New Greeks of being anti-religious, atheists, etc. The new Greeks see a Greek Orthodox Church and Greek culture in general diluted beyond recognition. They accuse the old timers and their offspring of being anti-Greek (anthellenes). **It is a fact** that if it was not for the new Greek immigrants, hellenism and modern Greek culture would never be maintained to the extent that it is maintained today. The old stressed religion and na-

tionality. Their offspring, the second and subsequent generations, followed more readily the organizational church and were less interested in maintaining the Greek language and Greek ethnic identity.

2. Jealousies and Conflicts.

Ideally all Greeks old and new represent an extended family — after all Greeks are a cohesive ethnic group with strong family and social ties — yet in reality we find more than passing jealousies and conflicts between the old and the new Greeks. The causes of these conflicts and problems are many. Some of them are: a. **Jealousies** — the new Greeks tend to make it faster than earlier Greeks. b. **Stereotypes and prejudice** — the stereo types are also part of the lexikon of second and third generation Greeks. The old used to call the new Greeks D.P.'s (displaced persons), "pushy", "too calculating", "socialist", "communists", "atheists", "immoral", "unthankful", "anti-American", etc. The new Greeks on the other hand called the old timers: "dishwashers", "bootblacks", "peasants", "illiterates", etc.

3. Problems of the Greek senior citizens.

America is a youth and child centered society. No meaningful roles have been devised for the elderly. Greeks are no exception. In the past — older Greek men married younger women — sometimes by 20 or more years difference. This led to many more widows than widowers. New Greek couples however are more symmetrical in age between husbands and wives. Many single old timers moved to Greece, some stay with their children, others live alone, and many moved to homes for the aged.

The major problems of the aged are: loneliness, isolation, depression, physical health, etc. Greeks have not established reading habits nor do they do civic activities outside the Greek church and their home town societies. Both groups tend to be ethnocentric. Most Greeks work hard but don't seem to enjoy life. They worry how much property and cash they will leave to their children. Many worked all their lives without any worthwhile goals other than making money which does not always give them happiness.

III. EARLY AND LATE GREEKS: CONVERGENCES.

So far we have pointed out the differences and the problems among the two groups. I would like to briefly present what is common among them not what separates them. I can think of 10 convergencies between the two. Which I would list without further elaboration. These are:

1. Both shared an ethnic identity — They were proud of their richness of Greek heritage and had a sense of community.
2. Both had a work ethic and a basic conservative ethos in family and personal matters.
3. Both were ethnocentric — to a lesser or larger extent (strong in-group loyalties).
4. Both shared a strong motivation to succeed in American society (mobile).
5. Both had a yearning for **patrida**, **nostalgia**, **pbilotimo**, goodness, generosity, patriotism, **pbiloxenia**. (hospitality).
6. Both groups espoused an american individualistic and entrepreneurial ethos.
7. Both had feelings of **megalomania** — acting bigger than they really were.
8. Both nourished an idealized picture of Greek culture. In many ways they became informal ambassadors of Greece.
9. Both felt the **xenetia** — a frequent word used in conversation with the Greek immigrants — songs, dances, etc.
10. Both groups were competitive and possessed the Protestant ethic of industriousness, savings, and thriftiness.

All in all early and late Greeks were very much made from the same cloth. It was social change and modernization that made the difference — the world of the 1900's, 1920's, 1930's was quite different from the world of the 1960's, 1970's, and 1980's.

We live in a transient and changing world. People, ideas, values, etc. have changed. But despite all these changes, the basic human quality of good nature of the Greek immigrant, has remained.

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