

# Transmitting Heritage Through Children Books. The First Greek American Children's Anthology

---

Maria Kaliambou, *Yale University*

## ***Abstract***

*The paper focuses on the first Anthology of poems and skits for Greek children in America, published in 1935 in New York City. The author of the Anthology, an accomplished teacher, aimed to provide pedagogical material for school ceremonies on Greek national and religious holidays. The Anthology emphasizes the importance of Greek heritage and traditional values for children's education, shaping young children to become more culturally aware Greek Americans through performances of heritage and identity. As a case study, the Anthology epitomizes the ideology regarding Greek education espoused by the first generation of immigrants to America in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.*

## ***Keywords***

*Greek American, Immigrant Education, Performance, Heritage, Identity, Homeland, Children's Books*

## “We Love Greece”

All Greek children  
who are here,  
we love Greece  
the great Mother!

The Anthology, filled with poems and skits to be performed by Greek American children at ceremonies in Greek schools, opens with the poem “*We Love Greece*.” The author of the Anthology, Mimes Demetriou, provides clear instructions for its performance. It should be recited by a young boy wearing the traditional Greek soldier costume (foustanélla) and holding both Greek and American flags.<sup>1</sup> The title’s explicit declaration of love towards Mother Greece, the wearing of traditional costume in its performance, and the juxtaposition of the two flags are all clear demonstrations that the author wishes to indoctrinate Greek American children with Greek values. This poem is one of the many pedagogical texts used in the first half of the twentieth century to transmit Greek heritage to the younger generation.

This Anthology was published in 1935 in New York City by the publisher D. C. Divry, well-known for his stable of pedagogical books. The full title of the publication reads: “The First Greek American Children’s Anthology for Greek Children in America. Original pieces in the Greek American spirit. Namely: poems, monologues, dialogues, comedies, dramas, skits, letters, and songs. For various ceremonies in Greek American schools.” The title of the Anthology clearly indicates that this is the first book of its kind for use in Greek schools in America. Author Demetriou states at the beginning of the book that this collection aims to “fill a gap; to help Greek schools in America and the Greek family; to offer the teachers new Greek-American material; to ignite in our children a sentiment which will make them feel positively towards everything Greek.”<sup>2</sup> Through the poems and detailed instructions for their performance, the author awakens pride in Greek heritage in the children he instructs.

When Demetriou first published his Anthology in 1935, a considerable number of Greek books of various genres were imported from Greece and circulated among Greek American

---

<sup>1</sup> Mimes Demetriou, *Πρώτη Ελληνο-Αμερικανική Παιδική Ανθολογία δια τα Ελληνόπουλα της Αμερικής. Πρωτότυπα έργα με πνεύμα Ελληνο-Αμερικανικόν. Ήτοι: ποιήματα, μονόλογοι, διάλογοι, κωμωδία, δραμάτια, ταμπλώ, επιστολαί, άσματα. Διά τας διαφόρους τελετάς των ελληνικών σχολείων της Αμερικής.* [The First Greek American Children’s Anthology for Greek Children in America. Original pieces in the Greek American spirit. Namely: poems, monologues, dialogues, comedies, dramas, skits, letters, and songs. For various ceremonies in Greek American schools.] (New York: D. C. Divry, 1935), 12.

<sup>2</sup> Demetriou, *The Anthology*, 6.

communities.<sup>3</sup> However, the imported schoolbooks did not fulfil the needs of the young generation in America. Educators commented that these books were written for children living in Greece, thus, inappropriate for children in America, and emphasized the necessity of creating books specifically targeted at Greek children in America.<sup>4</sup> Demetriou was aware of this major issue. By publishing his Anthology, he begins to address this problem and to contribute to the autochthonous production of Greek schoolbooks in America.

This essay will first demonstrate the significance of this publication to the history of Greek American schoolbooks. It is one of the first attempts by Greeks immigrants to produce their own schoolbooks for their children, creating a tradition of autochthonous schoolbook production. Moreover, an analysis of the Anthology as a case study of Greek American schoolbooks will demonstrate the ideological premises of the first Greek immigrants in America regarding the education of their children. The Anthology is important because it showcases the dedicated efforts of the first generation of Greek educators to transmit Greek heritage to their children. It reflects the struggles of the communities to adapt and succeed in their new environment, as well as their efforts to cultivate love and nostalgia for the homeland in their children. Finally, the essay argues that the Anthology wishes to shape the younger generation's identity around core Greek values such as family, religion, commitment to the home, and commitment to the community.

## 2. The Author and His Anthology

Mimes Demetriou had ventured in writing and publishing much earlier than the 1935 children's Anthology. He was interested in writing theatrical pieces for ceremonies in Greek communities, performed by both adults and children. In 1919 he published a play in Lowell, Massachusetts with the title "*The Renegade. Patriotic Drama in four Acts*,"<sup>5</sup> and in 1934 another book in New York City including one play and one comedy.<sup>6</sup> Demetriou targets his Anthology of 1935 exclusively at the Greek American children and their schools, influenced most likely by his work as a teacher.

---

<sup>3</sup> The book catalogues from the largest Greek American publishers (National Herald, Atlantis, and Divry) provide a good picture of the general book culture in Greek America at the first half of the twentieth century: books on history, literature, religion, guidebooks, language books, and schoolbooks circulated among the communities.

<sup>4</sup> Maria Kaliambou, "The First Schoolbooks for Greek American Children." In *Educating Greek Americans. Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Pathways*, eds. Fevronia Soumakis and Theodore Zervas (P Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2020), 45f.

<sup>5</sup> Mimes Demetriou, *Ο λιποτάκτης: πατριωτικόν δράμα εις πράξεις τέσσαρας* [The Renegade. Patriotic Drama in four Acts]. (Lowell, MA: Typois Neai Athenai, 1919).

<sup>6</sup> Mimes Demetriou, *Τύχη στα ξένα. Σύγχρονος ελληνοαμερικανική τραγωδία. Και ο Μπρούκλις στην Αθήνα. Μονόπρακτος ελληνοαμερικανική κωμωδία* [Fortune at the Foreign Lands. Modern Greek American Tragedy. And Broukles in Athens, One-act Greek American Comedy] (New York: no publisher, 1934).

Demetriou perceived his Anthology as a “national - religious duty” and urged Greek communities to spread the word about his book and emphasize the “national importance of his work.”<sup>7</sup> He also compared himself to Rigas Feraios, a revolutionary thinker of the Greek Enlightenment who ignited fervent Greek patriotism and sparked the flame for the Greek Revolution of 1821 through his writing.<sup>8</sup> Even local news such as the newspaper *National Herald* praised him as “enlightened man.”<sup>9</sup>

Demetriou was an experienced educator who taught in Aristoteles Greek school in New York City and in other institutions of the Greek Diaspora centered around Greek language, history, and culture. Demetriou aimed to offer multifaceted experiences to his students through introducing them to every aspect of Greek identity. His engaged and active teaching style was ahead of his time, offering his children extracurricular activities to further connect them to their heritage. A characteristic photograph printed on page 47 shows him and his Aristoteles students visiting the Greek transatlantic boat “Byron”. The Greek captain commented that “for the first time a Greek school in America visited a Greek boat,” which implies that Demetriou took more initiative than his contemporary colleagues and teachers.

Demetriou organized school ceremonies to be attended by the whole community. In one school event accompanied by the Greek section of the Y.W.C.A. [Young Women’s Christian Association], the girls presented poems and skits from his Anthology. According to an article in the New Yorker newspaper *National Herald* on 25<sup>th</sup> of February 1935, “young lively girls dressed in national costumes with their songs and dances, spread the freshness of the Greek mountains. They enlivened the nation of the immortal heroes, who gave to us free homeland. ... They enlivened the whole heroic life of modern Greece ... from the waves of the eternal Greek soul.”<sup>10</sup> The author of the newspaper article describes the event as “a moving spectacle.” In performance, a sense of national pride is intensified through cultural elements such as songs, dances, and costumes. Through offering extracurricular activities and organizing ceremonies, Demetriou offers Greek children the ability to tangibly grasp their Greek heritage outside of the academic sphere while strengthening the Greek American community as a whole through shared experiences.

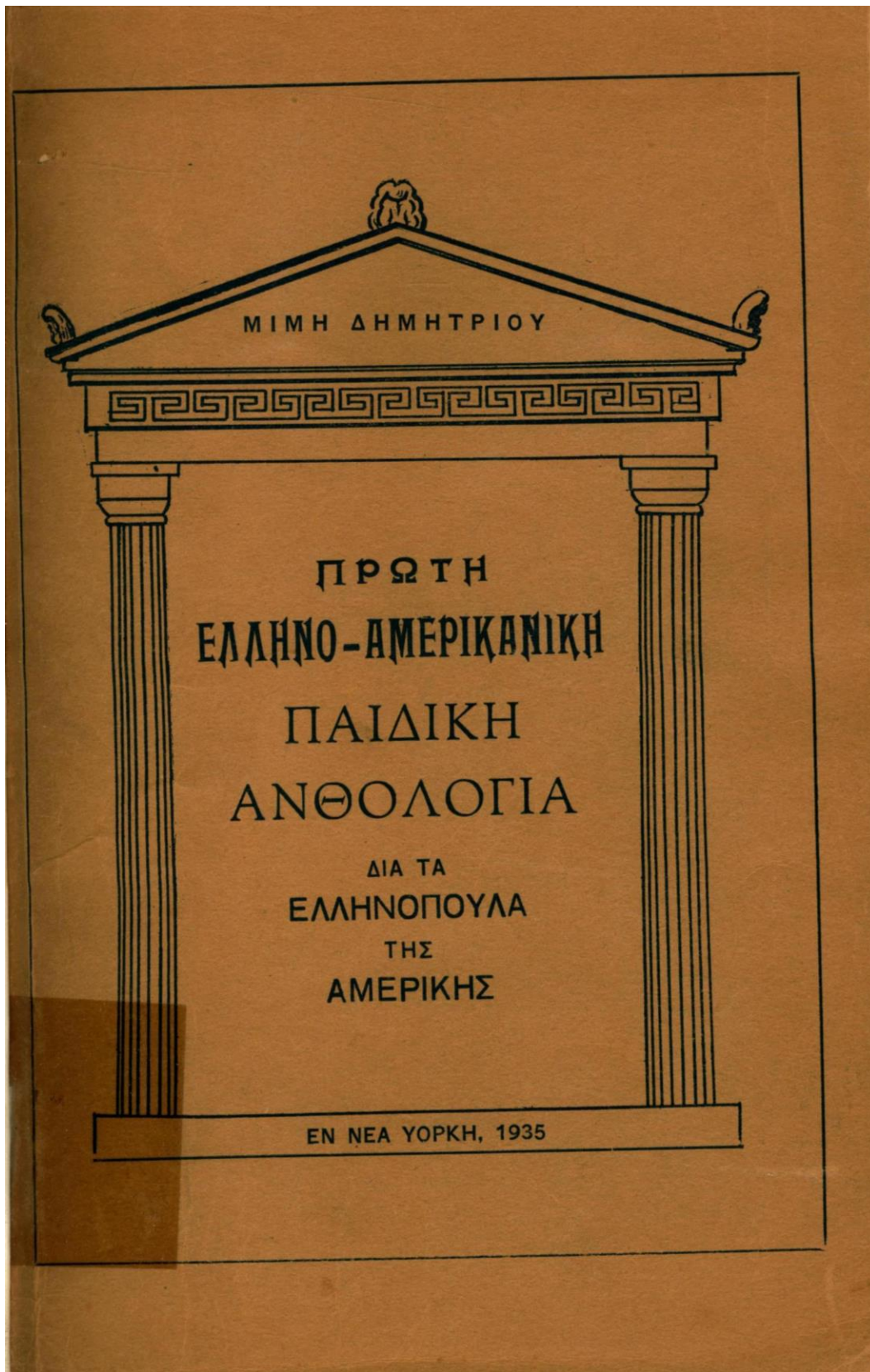
---

<sup>7</sup> Demetriou, *The Anthology*, 157.

<sup>8</sup> Demetriou, *The Anthology*, 6.

<sup>9</sup> Demetriou, *The Anthology*, 5.

<sup>10</sup> «Νεάνιδες χαριτωμένοι, με τας εθνικάς μας ενδυμασίας, με τα άσματά των και τους χορούς των, εσκόρπισαν όλη τη δροσιά των Ελληνικών βουνών. Εζωντάνεψαν την γενεάν της αθανάτου Κλεφτουριάς, της τυραννοκτόνου, που μας εχάρισεν πατρίδα ελευθέραν» (Demetriou, *The Anthology*, 5.)



The aesthetic choices for the book's illustrations demonstrate a love for ancient art which is reflective of a reverence for the glorious ancestors of Greece. The book cover, also used for other schoolbooks of that period, is reminiscent of ancient classical art. It depicts the front entrance of an ancient temple with Doric columns and a meander motif on the frieze. Antiquity embraces modernity: the name of the author is embedded on the pediment, and the title of the book between the Doric columns. The Anthology includes more images of ancient Greek art, illustrations of children playing, and a few photographs of Greek landscapes or people in Greek traditional costumes or prominent Greek Americans.

The first pages of the book have brief texts by various authorities and newspapers praising the publication as "exquisite and original,"<sup>11</sup> "a noble attempt,"<sup>12</sup> and "the best medium to preserve the immortal Greek language,"<sup>13</sup> and the author as "an inspired man."<sup>14</sup> The inclusion of reviews by authorities is a typical characteristic in publications of Greek communities as it offers prestige and legitimacy to the project.<sup>15</sup>

Greek American unity is demonstrated by the inclusion of both the Greek and the American national anthems. The author, "for the sake of our new generation", juxtaposes them as symbols of the old and new home. The Greek "Hymn to Liberty" and the American "Star-Spangled Banner" are printed next to each other with the two national flags displayed respectively on either page. Each anthem is printed in both languages thanks to Corinne Canouta who provided their translations.<sup>16</sup>

The Anthology is divided in three parts. The first part (p. 12-36) contains short "poems and monologues for different performances." The second part consists of "social, religious, patriotic, historic and school dialogues for various performances in Greek schools" (p. 37-70), and the last one offers "short or longer pieces for pupils in Greek schools and school alumni. Comedies, dramas, etc." (p. 71-133). The author, like an experienced theater director, offers detailed instructions on how to perform the poems and skits. Following the third section are personal letters written by the author's children during their visit to Greece, describing their joyful time spent with relatives (p. 134-138). Through this personal message, the author encourages young readers to send him handwritten letters: he implies that they will give him courage to continue

---

<sup>11</sup> Praise by Nestor Veniopoulos, President of the Massachusetts Greek American National Union, who wrote the preface of the Anthology (Demetriou, *The Anthology*, 3).

<sup>12</sup> Praise by the Archbishop of America Athenagoras (Demetriou, *The Anthology*, 6).

<sup>13</sup> Praise by the Greek Ambassador in Washington, D.C., Mr. D. Sisilianos (Demetriou, *The Anthology*, 8).

<sup>14</sup> Praise by the newspaper *National Herald*, (Demetriou, *The Anthology*, 5).

<sup>15</sup> For a similar use of greetings by Greek and American authorities in Greek American albums see Maria Kaliambou, "A Parade of Home. Representations of Home in Greek American Community Albums." In *Reading Home Culture Through Books*, eds. Kirsti Salmi-Niklander and Marija Dalbello (New York, London: Routledge, 2022), 62f.

<sup>16</sup> Demetriou, *The Anthology*, 10-11.

his work.<sup>17</sup> The Anthology concludes with Greek poems and a wider variety of folksongs (p. 139-155) covering themes such as the bravery of Greek bandits (klephts), love songs, and laments for children lost to foreign lands.

Important information about the distribution of this book and its readership is provided by a list of sixty-seven subscribers to the Anthology, twelve of them women, printed on the last two pages of the book (p. 156, 157). The subscribers—potential readers—lived in fourteen states scattered from coast to coast. Some of them mention their professions: teachers, lawyers, doctors, or priests. The list indicates that 300 copies were pre-ordered, a significant number given book distribution at that time. One can assume that through borrowing and lending the book might even have surpassed this number. The Anthology has 157 pages and was sold for \$1.50.

### 3. “The Greek School in America”

We can look to Demetriou’s Anthology and its poems, skits and dialogues as a faithful representation of the Greek schools in America in the 1930s. One of the recurring themes in the Anthology is the importance of Greek education for Greek diasporic communities— emphasized in several dialogues and theater texts. The explicitly-titled poem “*We Want Schools*” expresses this strong desire and describes the invaluable role schools play in the inculcation of a love for tradition in Greek children. According to the directions, a male student should recite the poem “with pomposity”:

Do you want us  
to remain pure Greek children?  
To take care of you,  
in your twilight years?

Do you want us to learn about  
our homeland and religion?  
Our Greek family?  
Oh, give us schools!

Give us, oh Greeks!  
Our language, the mother language,  
we don’t want janissaries  
in America.

If you don’t want to cry  
later, bitterly,

---

<sup>17</sup> Demetriou, *The Anthology*, 4.

you should give us schools—  
Greek schools!<sup>18</sup>

The poem reflects one of the main existential concerns of Greek Americans: how will they provide Greek education to their children? It demonstrates the traditional values that Greeks wanted to indoctrinate in their children so that they remained “pure Greek”: teaching them the ideals of home, religion, family, and language. As Zervas and Papadopoulos note, Greek language, history and Orthodoxy were the three main aspects of the Greek national identity and therefore most important to teach in Greek schools.<sup>19</sup> Constantakos writes, “the Greek language holds symbolic meaning in ethnic identification.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, the poem emphasizes that learning the Greek language, “the mother language,” is crucial for preserving Greek identity in younger generations.

Most basically, the poem functions as a plea for the foundation of more Greek schools. From the first years of their immigration, Greeks made serious efforts to build Greek schools alongside the foundation of their churches. In fact, Greek schools were organized in Greek American diasporic communities before the Church was organized.<sup>21</sup> To mention one example: In 1917, the blue-collar community of St. Spyridon was established in the south suburbs of Chicago, in Pullman, Illinois. In 1920, only three years after its establishment, the community founded a Greek school. Despite there being only twenty-five Greek families in the area, they felt the immediate need to transmit Greek language and culture to their children. Later in 1928, they also built a church which went on to incorporate the school.<sup>22</sup> These actions demonstrate that the school was an utmost priority for Greek families in their new homeland: they were determined to build schools despite the difficulty of forging a small community in a foreign land.

According to Alexander Kitroeff, because of several “false starts” it is hard to say when the first Greek school was officially established in America.<sup>23</sup> It is certain that after 1906 the Greek

---

<sup>18</sup> Demetriou, *The Anthology*, 22-23.

<sup>19</sup> Theodore G. Zervas, & Alex G. Papadopoulos, “Creating Greeks and Greek-Americans: Geographic and Educational Identity Constructions at the Socrates and Koraeas Greek-American Schools.” *European Education*, 52, no. 1 (2020): 21.

<sup>20</sup> Chryssie Costantakos, “Ethnic Language as a Variable in Subcultural Continuity.” In *The Greek American Community in Transition*, ed. Harry J. Psomiades and Alice Scourby (New York: Pella, 1982), 157.

<sup>21</sup> Fevronia K. Soumakis, “Greek Orthodox Education: Challenges and Adaptations in New York City Schools”, in *Educating Greek Americans. Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Pathways*, eds. Fevronia K. Soumakis and Theodore G. Zervas (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 12.

<sup>22</sup> See *Saint Spyridon Hellenic Orthodox Church 1917-2017*. Dallas, TX: Balfour Publishing. [Palos Heights, Illinois], 2018.

<sup>23</sup> Alexander Kitroeff, *The Greek Orthodox Church in America: A Modern History* (Ithaca and London: Northern Illinois University Press, An Imprint of Cornell University Press, 2020), 25. Scholars give slightly different start dates for the first Greek school. Soumakis gives the year 1908, Zervas states that it was 1907, and Kitroeff specifies



schools formally existed in Chicago, New York, and Lowell, Massachusetts. The schools were varied, ranging from day schools, evening schools, and Saturday or Sunday schools adjacent to parishes.<sup>24</sup> The Greek Orthodox church was pivotal for the schools' continued momentum. The church promoted "an educational curriculum in which Greek language and religious education cohabitated."<sup>25</sup> Educators were aware of the influential role the church played in the school system. The principal of the first Greek day-school in Chicago mentioned that church and school were "the two pillars which support our national aspirations."<sup>26</sup>

What were these Greek schools like? According to Theodore Saloutos, the Greek schools "must have been a shock to many people's patriotic sentiments. [...] The classes were held in dark and dreary rooms; the instruction was dull and uninspired; the children were unhappy over having to attend a Greek school after a full day of classes; cooperation between teachers and parents was lacking."<sup>27</sup> One of the main problems faced by Greek schools was a dearth of good, trained teachers. Since schools were integrated into the church, teaching posts were occupied by priests. George Lagios offers two explanations for the shortage of teachers: first, women were discouraged to become teachers, and second, early immigration laws prohibited entry to many would-be immigrants, among them competent teachers.<sup>28</sup>

The Anthology touches the problem of the ineptitude of Greek teachers. The skit "*The Greek School in America*" (p. 97-106) addresses this serious issue of the teachers' lack of considerate behavior. Demetriou, a thoughtful educator, criticizes the old-fashioned, strict, and abusive teachers who don't realize that "things have changed and are very different" from their previous

---

1906 (compare Soumakis, "Greek Orthodox Education," p. 12; Zervas, & Papadopoulos, "Creating Greeks and Greek-Americans," p. 26; and Kitroeff, *The Greek Orthodox Church in America*, p. 25.)

<sup>24</sup> For early education efforts in America, specifically in New York City, see Fevronia K. Soumakis, "A Sacred Paideia: The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, Immigration, and Education in New York City, 1959-1979." (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2015), 71-121. For the types of Greek schools in America in recent years see Giannis Spyridakis and Chryssa Constantakou, "Η ελληνική παιδεία στις ΗΠΑ. Τα κύρια σημεία της έρευνας [The Greek Education in the United States. The Main Research Foci]" in *Ελληνόγλωσση εκπαίδευση στο εξωτερικό* [Greek Speaking Education Outside Greece], ed. Michalis Damanakis, (Rethymno, Greece: University of Crete, 1999), 82-85. See also the five essays on five particular Greek schools in America in Theodosia Michelakaki, ed. *Συμπόσιο Ημερήσια Ελληνικά Σχολεία στη Διασπορά. Πρακτικά Συμποσίου, Πανεπιστημιούπολη Ρεθύμνου 5-6 Ιουλίου 2008* [Symposium on Greek Day Schools in Diaspora. Proceedings of the Symposium, University Town of Rethymno, July 5-6, 2008] Series Παιδεία Ομογενών [Education of the Diaspora], Editor Michalis Damanakis (Rethymno, Greece: University of Crete, 2009), 37-92.

<sup>25</sup> Kitroeff, *The Greek Orthodox Church in America*, 48.

<sup>26</sup> Andrew Kopan, "Greek Survival in Chicago: The Role of Ethnic Education, 1890-1980." In *Ethnic Chicago. Revised and Expanded*, ed. Melvin Holli and Peter d' A. Jones (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William Eerdmans, 1984), 159.

<sup>27</sup> Theodore Saloutos, *The Greeks in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), 74.

<sup>28</sup> George Arthur Lagios, *The Development of Greek American Education in the United States: 1908-1973. Its Theory, Curriculum, and Practice* (PhD diss., University of Connecticut, 1977), 259f.

experience teaching in Greece.<sup>29</sup> A mother shares her frustration: “How could children love a teacher who calls them banes and hits them with a broomstick?” And she continues with her disappointment about the inefficiency of the school: “We send our kids to school, but without knowing it we are limiting them. While the other kids play outside, we are sending our poor kids to learn the Greek language.”<sup>30</sup> Her words demonstrate the constant battle within Greek families to convince children to attend Greek school, especially difficult in an unfriendly teaching environment.

Demetriou, an experienced teacher himself who understands the problems with education in America at the time, depicts a welcoming and attractive image of the school. He wants to persuade his readers about the nice aspects of the Greek school. Either in his short poems for small children or the more extended dialogues for older pupils, the author presents Greek schools as a place where education and pleasure are interlinked. The short poem “*Alphabet*” describes a child who “loves ice cream and pie, and he will go to school to learn the alphabet.”<sup>31</sup> Or in the poem “*Greek Letters*” a small child intones that Greek school is sweeter than children’s candies:

I am a little child  
small and plump  
this year I just started  
Greek school  
I am crazy for the Greek letters  
crazy to learn Greek  
I like Greek more  
than candies.”<sup>32</sup>

Demetriou, by emphasizing the more enjoyable side of school and depicting schools as safe spaces, responds to the bad reputation of Greek schools at the time. Concerned about the less-than-adequate functioning of the school’s instruction, Demetriou challenges the negative stereotype with a positive image of the good, compassionate, supportive, encouraging, and friendly teacher who delivers candies and fruits to children to inspire them to go to school. Because Greek children are taking time away from playing outside to learn about their language and heritage, Demetriou highlights the importance of creating an exciting environment for children to feel enthralled while learning in an alternative to play.

---

<sup>29</sup> Demetriou, *The Anthology*, 97.

<sup>30</sup> Demetriou, *The Anthology*, 98.

<sup>31</sup> Demetriou, *The Anthology*, 14.

<sup>32</sup> Demetriou, *The Anthology*, 13.

## 4. Transmitting Heritage

### Performing Greek History

For Demetriou, teaching Greek history is of paramount importance in the education of Greek Americans. “Whichever Greek child doesn’t know History, doesn’t know his origin”<sup>33</sup> the patriotic teacher says straightforwardly to his pupils in the previously mentioned play “*The Greek School in America*.” The Anthology carefully chooses historical narratives that champion the Greek American ethnic identity. From all of Greek history, the author concentrates on just two historical periods: the ancient classical past and the Greek Revolution of 1821. Both eras are most commonly told as hero narratives. They function as “usable pasts”:<sup>34</sup> stories vital to the formation of Greek American identity, to patriotism for Greece as well as America, and the growing coherence of the diasporic community.

The dialogue “*The Greek School in America*” presents a history lesson where the teacher tries to ignite a passion for Greek history and heritage in his students. Using the Socratic method, the teacher asks questions and elicits responses from his students. Students must prove their historical knowledge of glorious moments in ancient Greek history, such as the famous battles of Marathon, Thermopylai, Salamina, and Plataias.<sup>35</sup> Both the teacher and his students agree that ancient Greek history is also important to their education in American schools and should be included. “The whole world studies and admires the immortal history of Greece,”<sup>36</sup> the anthology states, a position which reflects the belief that Greek schools were an asset to America at large, since they were not opposed to the American education system but added value to it. The anthology argues that Greek schools were necessary for children to thrive in American schools as well. The text sends a clear ideological message: “This is the reason you come to the Greek school: to become perfect Greek Americans!”<sup>37</sup> American history is not perceived as priority and is absent in the Anthology. There’s only one short dialogue about American philhellenes,<sup>38</sup> another one about the American president Franklin Delano Roosevelt,<sup>39</sup> and one short text about the English poet and philhellene Lord Byron.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> Demetriou, *The Anthology*, 104.

<sup>34</sup> Yiorgos Anagnostou, *Contours of White Ethnicity: Popular Ethnography and the Making of Usable Pasts in Greek America* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2009).

<sup>35</sup> These are famous battles where Greeks defeated the Persians or lost by treason, as in the battle in Thermopylai with protagonist Leonidas.

<sup>36</sup> Demetriou, *The Anthology*, 104.

<sup>37</sup> Demetriou, *The Anthology*, 104.

<sup>38</sup> Demetriou, *The Anthology*, 56.

<sup>39</sup> Demetriou, *The Anthology*, 57-58.

<sup>40</sup> Demetriou, *The Anthology*, 58.

Historical milestones, such as the heroic battles of the Antiquity or the Greek Revolution, offer excellent material for performances during school ceremonies. As Christina Koulouri explains, spectacles involving the historical representation of “great men” prevailed in teaching Greek history in the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Historical education takes place not only in a typical setting inside the school classroom, but also occurs “in school ceremonies, theatrical performances, anniversaries, educational field trips, and parades.”<sup>41</sup> By learning to perform history, Greek students make “a spectacle of history,” embodying it for an audience. Indeed, the effect of the dramatization of history is deep: Historical moments are more engrained in memory if they are performed.

At the end of the above play with the history lesson, the performance reaches an emotional peak. The teacher asks the children if they will ever forget Greece, and all of the children univocally answer “NEVER. No.” The teacher invites the children to love Greece just as they love America. “I am sure that you will never forget your Greek origin.” These dialogical exchanges between the teacher and the students, moved a mother who attended the performance so much that she “takes her handkerchief and wipes her eyes.”<sup>42</sup> With this scene, the author succeeds in creating deep emotional reactions amongst the audience of that particular performance and readers of the Anthology at large. In both its performance and its reception, Greek history leaves a deep mark.

### Performing Greek Traditions

The Anthology includes various well-known folk songs about heroes and klephts and about rural life that can be used in the classroom. Folklore, an indispensable part of Greek life in America, precedes history in the Greek American classroom. For example, the above history lesson starts with students singing a folk song about “the foustanélla,” the traditional soldier costume with pleated skirt that every Greek child had to wear. As Helen Papanikolas writes “it was rare for a son of Greek immigrant parents to get through childhood without having his picture taken in the foustanélla.”<sup>43</sup> The image of the young boy dressed in the foustanélla even circulates in other Greek American schoolbooks of the time.<sup>44</sup> The teacher, impressed by the children’s singing, emphatically encourages them to continue their Greek studies: “with such Greek kids, the Greek spirit will never be erased.”<sup>45</sup> Their performance carries positive potential for the future of the Greek community.

---

<sup>41</sup> Christina Koulouri, *Historical Memory in Greece, 1821-1930. Performing the Past in the Present* (New York: Routledge, 2022), 132.

<sup>42</sup> Demetriou, *The Anthology*, 104.

<sup>43</sup> Helen Papanikolas, “Toil and Rage in a New Land. The Greek Immigrants in Utah,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (1970): 187.

<sup>44</sup> Maria Kaliambou, “Representations of the Greek Revolution in Greek American Publications”, in *The Greek Revolution and the Greek Diaspora in the United States*, ed. Maria Kaliambou, (New York: Routledge, 2023, forthcoming).

<sup>45</sup> Demetriou, *The Anthology*, 100.

Besides history and folklore, the texts of the Anthology transmit traditional values with old-fashioned yet period-typical ideas of gender roles. The short poem “*The New Girl Pupil*” should be performed by a girl wearing a school uniform with a headcover, holding embroidery and a needle. Both the instructions and the poem itself demonstrate a patriarchal set of roles for girls and women. Girls are trained to become “good housewives” while also attending Greek school:

I am a Greek young woman,  
a good little homemaker,  
I learned how to dust,  
to embroider and to patch,  
to wash my little dishes  
and I will be a student  
at the Greek school,  
and hold a golden book!<sup>46</sup>

Interestingly, although the short poem demonstrates traditional female domestic activities, it also advocates that girls attend the Greek school. With a similar goal of indoctrination in mind, the poem with the title “*We Will Remain Pure*” explicitly prescribes that the Greek school functions as a bearer of traditions. Female pupils will learn all these “nice things,” namely how “to become good Greek girls,” “to grow up as proper housewives,” “to stay pure,” and make their families proud of the next generation.<sup>47</sup> The role of household etiquette was introduced in Greek schools, but after high school young women were expected to get married. Only few of them continued their studies; further education was seen as “questionable freedom” by the community.<sup>48</sup>

The texts of the Anthology emphasize the significance of traditional values (homeland, religion, and family)<sup>49</sup> as the cornerstones for a proper education. One of the many examples in the Anthology, the short dialogue “*The Greek Children in America Should be Proud*”<sup>50</sup> showcases this ideological attitude. The duty of the Greek American children is “to keep the torch of the Greek culture always unquenched.” Children will know and be proud of their heritage, only “if they attend Greek lessons in the Greek schools and be taught Greek history, Orthodox Greek

---

<sup>46</sup> Demetriou, *The Anthology*, 12.

<sup>47</sup> Demetriou, *The Anthology*, 26.

<sup>48</sup> Helen Papanikolas, “Greek Immigrant Women in the Intermountain West.” *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora* XVI, no. 1-4 (1989): 33.

<sup>49</sup> These values form the popular ideological triptych in Greek society: “Home, Religion, Family”. This triptych has been misused by conservative ideologues in Greece since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (see Effie Gazi, *Πατρίς, Θρησκεία, Οικογένεια. Ιστορία ενός συνθήματος 1880-1930* [Homeland, Religion, Family. History of a Slogan 1880-1930] (Athens: Polis, 2011).

<sup>50</sup> Demetriou, *The Anthology*, 69.

religion, and Greek family.” The necessity of the school is inextricably linked with the preservation of the heritage and the transmission of these traditional values.

### Performing Nostalgia

The author of the Anthology represents Greece and America in a mutual understanding, following the efforts of the earlier generations to integrate Greek immigrants into American society. The poems and dialogues personify Greece and America as Mother and Daughter respectively, demonstrating each country’s role. America, “the older daughter of Greece,” has inherited culture, science, the arts, and the value of freedom from Mother Greece. We can see this in the presence, across America, of Greek revival architecture, museums full of ancient Greek statues, libraries full of Greek wisdom, and a language filled with Greek words.<sup>51</sup> The short dialogue “*Greece – America*” illustrates the reciprocal relationship of both dependence and respect between the old and new homes. According to the author’s instructions, this dialogue, “even if short, enthralls the audience,” and should be performed at the beginning of every school ceremony, together with the recitation of both Greek and American national anthems. “Greece” is dressed in ancient Greek garments and both countries sit on thrones in each corner of the stage holding their flags. The dialogue reads as follows:

Greece: “I am the land of Socrates, of Pericles, of Plato, of Aristoteles!”

America: “I am the land of Washington, of Lincoln, of Jefferson!”

Greece: “I am the Homeland of Alexander the Great, I gave Culture, Freedom, Literature, Science, and Art to the World!”

America: (raising her hand): “Enough! I recognized you! You are the Great Mother of the World! You are Greece! And I am your Older Daughter, America!”<sup>52</sup>

The return to Greece is a common motif in the Anthology. Mother Greece mourns her children who left and desperately begs them to return: “Live well, my children in the foreign lands, but come back to me, to your mother. To me!”<sup>53</sup> and “My children, are you coming back?” she continues.<sup>54</sup> The poem and monologue “*The Longing of the Emigré*” should be recited by an older pupil “slowly, with painful sighs.” In it, an immigrant speaks about “the wretched *xenitiá* (foreign lands)” and their difficulties and disappointments. They strongly desire to return to their birthplace, and forget all the burdens from the *xenitiá*:

I want to go back to my Homeland,  
to my wife, to my poor children,

---

<sup>51</sup> Demetriou, *The Anthology*, 68, 69.

<sup>52</sup> Demetriou, *The Anthology*, 43.

<sup>53</sup> Demetriou, *The Anthology*, 29.

<sup>54</sup> Demetriou, *The Anthology*, 20.

I got fed up with the wretched *xenitiá*  
 ah, *xenitiá* weighs heavy on my heart!

I want, yes, to go back to Greece  
 to my unforgettably beautiful village,  
 to enter the church; I used to hear sermons,  
 to feel Easter! To make my cross...

I want to go into my little chapel on my knees,  
 to take communion from the priest,  
 to bury the burden of *xenitiá* there  
 and understand the joy of the Resurrection!

And then to sit around the table  
 with my wife and my children,  
 crying with joy, “Christ is Risen”  
 to sing and enjoy with all my heart.<sup>55</sup>

The commonly-expressed wish among immigrants— “Happy Homecoming” (“Καλή πατρίδα”),<sup>56</sup> meaning I wish you a good return to the homeland— is spread throughout the texts. The desire to return to the true beloved homeland, Greece, reflects the author’s wishes to return to the Great Mother. The author, an immigrant himself, is transmitting idea of the exceptional great Mother to the next generation, urging children to return to her.<sup>57</sup>

### 5. Conclusions: “We Will Die as Greeks!”

Demetriou’s Anthology belongs to the first educational books ever published by Greek Americans. It was a proactive response by a talented teacher to the dearth of teaching materials for Greek American children at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The author remedies the inappropriateness of the pedagogical tools and helps plug the gap of good teachers, addressing the real needs of Greek pupils in America.

---

<sup>55</sup> Demetriou, *The Anthology*, 32.

<sup>56</sup> Demetriou, *The Anthology*, 37.

<sup>57</sup>The return of Greek Americans to Greece has come to scholarly attention. After the seminal work by Saloutos, who interviewed first-generation returnees (Theodore Saloutos, *They Remember America. The Story of the Repatriated Greek-Americans*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956), there have been recent projects on the return of the second-generation Greek Americans as well. See Anastasia Christou and Russell King, *Counter-Diaspora: The Greek Second Generation Returns “Home”, Cultural Politics, Socioaesthetics, Beginnings* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2014); Evangelia Kindinger, *Homebound. Diaspora Spaces and Selves in Greek American Return Narratives. American Studies. A Monograph* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2015); Theodora Patrona, *Return Narratives. Ethnic Space in Late-Twentieth-Century Greek American and Italian American Literature* (Madison, Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2017).

Demetriou's Anthology is clearly intended to educate Greek children about Greece and to indoctrinate them with traditional core values. Recurring themes include the importance of the Greek education and the development of the school system in Greek America; the teaching and learning of Greek language and history; the keeping of family and religious traditions, and the idea of returning to the Greek homeland. Moreover, the texts advance the author's ideological standpoint on the value of the Greek heritage:

We swear to You,  
oh, our sweet Greece,  
we Greek children in foreign lands,  
with our hands on our hearts.

From where we live now  
we offer you a serious oath:  
Greeks, we were born,  
Greeks, we will die!<sup>58</sup>

This patriotic poem, "*We Will Die as Greeks*," which demonstrates a life-long pride in Greek identity, is to be recited in a highly performative style. The girl or boy who recites it, together with the other school children, kneel in front of the Greek flag and raise one hand while touching their other to their heart. Children should not only read about their heritage but also to experience it through performances in school ceremonies. In addition to the young performers, the audience also experienced a rousing surge of emotion as they saw Greek heritage performed by the next generation.

By focusing on Greek history and culture only, the Anthology provides clear directions regarding the specific Greek American identity it aimed to promote. Greek American children should love both homelands. As a Greek girl recites in a short poem, she "desires to grow up in this magic land" and will respect and love both homelands.<sup>59</sup> But the young children should never forget "The Mother of the World," Greece. They should become proud Greeks in America while holding onto their glorious ancestral roots.

The Anthology argues that the future of the Greek communities in America rests on the good education of the young generation. These children will eventually take care of the elderly, lead the Greek communities, and manage the churches and schools for the generations after them.

The author considers education as of foremost importance in constructing the lives of Greek Americans. He demonstrates his passion for his homeland and sparks this passion to his young audience through performance and dynamic exchange. Books such as this Anthology are useful

---

<sup>58</sup> Demetriou, *The Anthology*, 19.

<sup>59</sup> Demetriou, *The Anthology*, 15.



for deciphering the ideological basis of education, as they demonstrate the ways heritage is used and transmitted from one generation to the next.

### Bibliography

Anagnostou, Yiorgos. *Contours of White Ethnicity: Popular Ethnography and the Making of Usable Pasts in Greek America*. Athens [Ohio]: Ohio University Press, 2009.

Anemoyanis, Vivian. "Greek Bilingual Education in Historical Perspective." In *The Greek American Community in Transition*, edited by Harry J. Psomiades and Alice Scourby, 171-179, New York: Pella, 1982.

Christou, Anastasia and Russell King. *Counter-Diaspora: The Greek Second Generation Returns "Home", Cultural Politics, Socioaesthetics, Beginnings*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2014.

Costantakos, Chryssie. "Ethnic Language as a Variable in Subcultural Continuity." In *The Greek American Community in Transition*, edited by Harry J. Psomiades and Alice Scourby, 137-170, New York: Pella, 1982.

Demetriou, Mimes. *Ο λιποτάκτης: πατριωτικόν δράμα εις πράξεις τέσσαρας* [The Renegade. Patriotic Drama in four Acts]. Lowell, MA: Typois Neai Athenai, 1919.

Demetriou, Mimes. *Τύχη στα ξένα. Σύγχρονος ελληνοαμερικανική τραγωδία. Και ο Μπρούκλις στην Αθήνα. Μονόπρακτος ελληνοαμερικανική κωμωδία* [Fortune at the Foreign Lands. Modern Greek American Tragedy. And Broukles in Athens, One-act Greek American Comedy]. New York: no publisher, 1934.

Demetriou, Mimes. *Πρώτη Ελληνο-Αμερικανική Παιδική Ανθολογία δια τα Ελληνόπουλα της Αμερικής. Πρωτότυπα έργα με πνεύμα Ελληνο-Αμερικανικόν. Ήτοι: ποιήματα, μονόλογοι, διάλογοι, κωμωδίαι, δραμάτια, ταμπλώ, επιστολαί, άσματα. Διά τας διαφόρους τελετάς των ελληνικών σχολείων της Αμερικής*. [The First Greek American Children's Anthology for Greek Children in America. Original pieces in the Greek American spirit. Namely: poems, monologues, dialogues, comedies, dramas, skits, letters, and songs. For various ceremonies in Greek American schools.]. New York: D. C. Divry, 1935.

Gazi, Effie. *Πατρίς, Θρησκεία, Οικογένεια. Ιστορία ενός συνθήματος 1880-1930* [Homeland, Religion, Family. History of a Slogan 1880-1930]. Athens: Polis, 2011.

Kaliambou, Maria. "The First Schoolbooks for Greek American Children." In *Educating Greek Americans. Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Pathways*, edited by Fevronia Soumakis and Theodore Zervas, 41-70, P Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2020.

Kaliambou, Maria. "A Parade of Home. Representations of Home in Greek American Community Albums." In *Reading Home Culture Through Books*, edited by Kirsti Salmi-Niklander and Marija Dalbello, 57-78, New York, London: Routledge, 2022.

Kaliambou, Maria. "Representations of the Greek Revolution in Greek American Publications," in *The Greek Revolution and the Greek Diaspora in the United States*, edited by Maria Kaliambou, New York: Routledge, 2023 (forthcoming).

Kindinger, Evangelia. *Homebound. Diaspora Spaces and Selves in Greek American Return Narratives. American Studies. A Monograph*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2015.

Kitroeff, Alexander. *The Greek Orthodox Church in America: A Modern History*, Ithaca and London: Northern Illinois University Press, An Imprint of Cornell University Press, 2020.

Kopan, Andrew. "Greek Survival in Chicago: The Role of Ethnic Education, 1890-1980." In *Ethnic Chicago. Revised and Expanded*, edited by Melvin Holli and Peter d' A. Jones, 109-168, Grand Rapids, Michigan: William Eerdmans, 1984.

Koulouri, Christina. *Historical Memory in Greece, 1821-1930. Performing the Past in the Present*. New York: Routledge, 2022.

Laliotou, Ioanna. *Transatlantic Subjects. Acts of Migration and Cultures of Transnationalism Between Greece and America*. Chicago & New York: The University of Chicago Press, 2004.

Lagios, George Arthur. *The Development of Greek American Education in the United States: 1908-1973. Its Theory, Curriculum, and Practice*. (PhD diss., University of Connecticut), 1977.

Michelakaki, Theodosia, (ed). *Συμπόσιο Ημερήσια Ελληνικά Σχολεία στη Διασπορά. Πρακτικά Συμποσίου, Πανεπιστημιούπολη Ρεθύμνου 5-6 Ιουλίου 2008* [Symposium on Greek Day Schools in Diaspora. Proceedings of the Symposium, University Town of Rethymno, July 5-6, 2008] Series Παιδεία Ομογενών [Education of the Diaspora], Editor Michalis Damanakis. Rethymno, Greece: University of Crete, 2009.

Orfanos, Spyros D., Harry J. Psomiades, and John Spiridakis, (eds.). *Education and Greek Americans. Process and Prospects*. New York: Pella, 1987.

Papanikolas, Helen. "Toil and Rage in a New Land. The Greek Immigrants in Utah," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (1970): 100-203.

Papanikolas, Helen. "Greek Immigrant Women in the Intermountain West." *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora* XVI, no. 1-4 (1989): 17-36.

Patrona, Theodora. *Return Narratives. Ethnic Space in Late-Twentieth-Century Greek American and Italian American Literature*. Madison, Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2017.

Pozzetta, George (ed.). *Education and the Immigrant*. New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1991.

*Saint Spyridon Hellenic Orthodox Church 1917-2017*. Dallas, TX: Balfour Publishing. [Palos Heights, Illinois], 2018.

Saloutos, Theodore. *They Remember America. The Story of the Repatriated Greek-Americans*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956.

Saloutos, Theodore. *The Greeks in the United States*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964.

Soumakis, Fevronia K. “A Sacred Paideia: The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, Immigration, and Education in New York City, 1959-1979.” PhD diss., Columbia University, 2015.

Soumakis, Fevronia K., “Greek Orthodox Education: Challenges and Adaptations in New York City Schools”, in *Educating Greek Americans. Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Pathways*, edited by Fevronia K. Soumakis and Theodore G. Zervas, 9-40, Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.

Spyridakis, Giannis and Chryssa Constantakou. “Η ελληνική παιδεία στις ΗΠΑ. Τα κύρια σημεία της έρευνας [The Greek Education in the United States. The Main Research Foci].” In *Ελληνόγλωσση εκπαίδευση στο εξωτερικό* [Greek Speaking Education Outside Greece], edited by Michalis Damanakis, 82-90, Rethymno, Greece: University of Crete, 1999.

Zervas, Theodore G. & Alex G. Papadopoulos. “Creating Greeks and Greek-Americans: Geographic and Educational Identity Constructions at the Socrates and Koraes Greek-American Schools.” *European Education*, 52, no. 1 (2020): 16–32.