

Preserving the Past, Celebrating the Present: The Queens College/CUNY Hellenic American Project and the Legacy of Greek Americans.

Evmorfia Argyropoulou

A famous Greek philosopher once wrote that happy is the man who, before dying, has the good fortune to sail the Aegean Sea. Many Greeks indeed had this good fortune, sailing the Aegean Sea not only to explore its beauty but also to venture to lands unknown and vastly different from their small homeland of Greece. Greeks immigrated to countries far from home, such as Canada, Australia, and, of course, the United States of America. Their history in this country dates back to the 18th century but especially to the early 20th century, which was marked by immense challenges, struggles, and a relentless fight for a better life. Greek American communities played an instrumental role in building the modern chronicle of this country, yet their history remains largely unexplored. Fortunately, several institutions and individuals are dedicated to shedding light on Greek American history.

The Hellenic American Project (HAP) is one such institution, dedicated to preserving this history. Since its establishment in 2012 by Queens College Professor Dr. Nicholas Alexiou, HAP has become a cornerstone for documenting and celebrating the history and heritage of Greek Americans in the United States with a particular focus on the greater New York metropolitan area. Located at Queens College/CUNY, it serves as a vibrant hub for Greek American studies, offering a wide range of programs and resources, and providing invaluable insights into the rich cultural tapestry of the Greek American community.

What makes HAP rare in the field of Diaspora Studies, is its growing collection of documents, cultural artifacts, and manuscripts that offer a comprehensive look at the history and culture of Greek Americans. These materials provide invaluable insights into the experiences of Greek immigrants and their descendants, highlighting their

contributions to American society throughout their journeys and personal battles in this new land. Notable archives in the collection include the Greek Collegiate Student Association by Apostolis Zoupaniotis, the personal archive of Dan Georgakas, multi-media personal archives of Emmanuel Cassotis and Fondas Ladis, the electronic archive of Greek News: A Progressive and Democratic Greek American Bilingual Weekly Newspaper (2003-2021), the multi-media personal archive of Lambros Papandoniou, interview transcripts from The Ellis Island Oral History Program, the multi-media archive of The Metropolitan Greek Chorale, and the multi-media archive of Vincent Giordano.

Another pivotal initiative that HAP undertakes is conducting interviews with Greek American individuals, capturing their personal stories and experiences. These oral histories offer a nuanced perspective on the Greek American experience, showcasing the community's diversity and resilience. Through interviews with Greek Americans from various backgrounds and professions, HAP captures a wide range of personal narratives that reflect the multifaceted nature of the community. By preserving the voices of those who have both shaped and have been shaped by the Greek American journey, HAP ensures that these invaluable stories are not lost to time. Each oral history serves as a testament to the individual and collective experiences of Greek Americans, offering insights into their struggles, achievements, and the cultural practices they have maintained and adapted over generations. These narratives also provide a multifaceted understanding of the social, economic, and cultural dynamics that have influenced the Greek American community, enriching the historical record and fostering greater appreciation for their enduring legacy.

HAP's archives, combined with its inspirational work in oral history and research, make it stand out and play a pivotal role in preserving Greek Americans' history, traditions, and cultural heritage. Additionally, HAP's programs and initiatives catalyze community engagement and cohesion within the Greek American community. By providing a platform for community members to connect, share stories, and celebrate their heritage, HAP helps to strengthen social bonds and foster a sense of belonging among Greek Americans. This sense of community is vital for preserving cultural traditions and values, and for passing them on to future generations. HAP's collections also serve as a valuable resource for researchers, scholars, and students interested in Greek American studies. These materials offer important insights into the history, culture, and contributions of Greek Americans to American society. By making these materials accessible to the public, HAP enriches our understanding of the diverse tapestry of the American experience and helps to fill gaps in historical and cultural knowledge.

In addition to its physical archives, HAP offers an extensive range of online resources through its website, [Hellenic American Project](#). These resources include:

- **Digitized Archives:** A selection of historical documents, photographs, and records from HAP's physical collections is available online, offering global access to rare and valuable materials.
- **Oral History Recordings:** Audio and video interviews with Greek Americans provide firsthand accounts of immigration experiences, cultural practices, and community life.
- **Research Articles:** The website hosts in-depth articles on topics such as Greek immigration patterns, community transformations, and the socio-economic impact of Greek Americans in the United States.
- **Statistical Data:** Dr. Alexiou's statistical analyses highlight demographic shifts, settlement patterns, and other socio-economic characteristics of Greek Americans, enriched with visual aids like charts and graphs.
- **Educational Resources:** The site includes tools for educators and researchers, such as bibliographies, study guides, and thematic collections that explore Greek American identity through various lenses.

In essence, the Hellenic American Project (HAP) stands as a beacon of cultural preservation and historical documentation for the Greek American community. This preservation effort is crucial for maintaining a sense of identity and continuity within the Greek American community and for educating future generations about their heritage. Its work and dedication to Greek American history set a great example of the path we must follow to celebrate and keep alive this unique and central corner of Greek history. For more information or to explore HAP's collections, visit [Hellenic American Project](#).

American Journal of Contemporary Hellenic Issues | Copyright © 2025 American Hellenic Institute Foundation, Inc.

All rights reserved. All articles appearing in the [American Journal of Contemporary Hellenic Issues](#) are the copyright of the Journal. The online edition is free to individuals and institutions. Copies of the individual articles are strictly prohibited. Reproduction, storage or transmission of this work in any form or by any means beyond that permitted by Sections 107 and 108 of the U.S. Copyright Law is unlawful without prior permission in writing of the publisher, or in accordance with the terms of licenses issued by the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC) and other organizations authorized by the publisher to administer reprographic reproduction rights. Distribution of the published articles for research or educational purposes is possible, but requires the formal authorization of the Journal editor and the authors. Commercial use of the AHIF Policy Journal or the articles contained herein is expressly prohibited without the written consent of the Managing Editor at AHIFPolicyJournal@aheworld.org. AHIF 1220 16th Street NW, Washington, DC 20036.