

Forget the Past, Remember the Ancestors! Modernity, “Whiteness,” American Hellenism, and the Politics of Memory in Early Greek America

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Abstract

This essay examines the politics of memory associated with the construction of an “American Hellenic” identity by AHEPA (American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association) in the context of Post World War I American nativism. It examines AHEPA’s assimilationist politics in relation to two dominant narratives about American national identity at the time, (a) political/cultural nationalism, and (b) racist nationalism. It shows that although political/cultural and racist nationalisms were incompatible in their expressions of Americanism, they worked dialectically to make race a crucial consideration in the immigrant quest for national belonging. Thus AHEPA’s assimilative politics of national inclusion entailed more than political and cultural conformity; it required a narrative of its racial fitness to American “whiteness.” A politics of memory was instrumental for AHEPA’s inclusion in the racialized nation. AHEPA sought to exclude ethnic memories that were deemed incompatible with the imperative of “white” American republicanism.

The immigrants to America “must cast off the European skin, never to resume it,” Secretary of State John Quincy Adams wrote in 1820. “They must look forward to their prosperity rather than backward to their ancestors” (1976:47). Adams’s authoritative admonition underscores that forgetting has been an enduring component in the discourse on immigration. This is shown in the response of some Greek immigrants who aligned themselves with the authoritarian dictates of American assimilationism. “You became American by giving up your parents’ ways because they also had to give up [the ways of their parents] so they wouldn’t stand out like a sore thumb,” a Greek American said in the 1990s. “By giving up the Old World ways, we ran away from being Greek. We married non-Greek blond women . . . We made a conscious effort to forget Greece” (quoted in Karpathakis, 1999:62).¹ Because the immigrants’

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past is understood as a source of pollution, immigrants were expected to undergo a profound transformation by surrendering their past to a new historical location. They were asked to abandon their memories and bury their ancestral ties in the landfills of history in order to cultivate the formation of new identities.

This vocabulary of radical rupture and discontinuity, pervasive both in political discourse as well as narratives of personal transformation, indelibly marked the immigrant encounter with American modernity in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. In academic monographs, popular magazines, immigrant diaries, research reports, immigration policies and political speeches, the forgetting of ethnicity is repeatedly referred to as a necessary condition to constitute immigrants as American subjects. National belonging required immigrant de-ethnicization, the “liberation” of newcomers from ancestral ties, loyalties, and obligations through a process of social amnesia. Forgetting, as Ernest Renan’s often cited statement makes clear, “is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation” (1990:11).

But how does one forget the past? What kind of alternative knowledge is activated to “fill the void” of “forgotten” memories? What power relations mediate this monumental rupture? What makes the association between forgetting, national identity and blondes, the icon of “whiteness,” necessary? In other words, why is it that forgetting is linked with the racialized American nation? Further, in what manner does the imperative to forget the past affect subsequent politics of memory?

To investigate these questions I examine the politics of memory associated with the construction of an American Hellenic identity by AHEPA in the context of American nativism after the First World War.² I examine AHEPA’s assimilationist politics in relation to two dominant narratives on American national identity at the time—political/cultural nationalism and racist nationalism. I show that although political/cultural and racist nationalisms were incompatible in the versions of Americanism that they advocated, they worked dialectically to make race a crucial consideration in the immigrant quest for full national belonging. Thus AHEPA’s assimilative politics of national inclusion entailed more than political and cultural conformity; it required a narrative of its racial fitness to American “whiteness.”

A politics of memory was instrumental for AHEPA’s inclusion in the racialized nation. AHEPA sought to exclude ethnic memories deemed incompatible with the imperative of “white” American republicanism. At the same time, AHEPA sought to retain memories of its racialized connection with ancient Greece and posit this connection as a natural component of American “whiteness.” I will argue that AHEPA’s

self-reflexive reading of the imperatives of American political/cultural and racist nationalisms generated an assimilative narrative of Greek cultural and racial “whiteness,” enabling AHEPA to legitimize its claim to “authentic” Americanness.

AHEPA’s cultural politics posited the contemporaneity of Greek immigrants in relation to American modernity. As such it refuted the pervasive scientific and popular views of Greek immigrants as racially inferior. It also granted Greek immigrants the agency to transcend a tradition-centered narrative of Greek identity. Yet, AHEPA’s advocacy of a class-based Americanism generated an enduring process of ethnic amnesia in middle-class Greek America. Such amnesia historically idealized the nation and marginalized alternative national affiliations. This legacy perpetuated the myth of national benevolence by denying the institutionalized roots of American nativism. Bracketing immigrant exclusion as a national aberration became a middle-class instrument to legitimize the politics of assimilation.

My aim then is not simply to explain immigrant forgetting as an effect of nationalist discourse, but also to point out that ethnicity can be ideologically manipulated to serve dominant class interests. I examine the manner that ethnic forgetting is associated with class-based identity narratives, and I suggest that narratives of Greek-American assimilation reproduce the ideology of America as a benevolent, egalitarian nation. Such an assimilationist narrative cannot account for an enduring American ambivalence towards immigrants, particularly those classified outside the visual economy of “whiteness.” Inclusion in American “whiteness” has conferred social and economic privileges to Greek America, demanding in turn conformity to the ideology of American national openness. Assimilation to “whiteness” has often worked to forestall the critique of exclusionary structures in America. The production of ethnic memories therefore does not entail a single process, and should be analyzed at specific intersections of racial, class, gender, and ideological locations.

Immigrant forgetting, nationalism, and cultural assimilation

Immigrant forgetting is often thought of in terms of conformity to host cultural practices. In this formulation, immigrants reconfigure Old World identities through re-naming practices. “Dimitrios” becomes “Gus” or “Jimmy” while restaurants and candy stores, the sites of immigrant entrepreneurship, undergo window dressing. “Earlier names, such as Corinthos, [and] Athenian, . . . [are] replaced with new ones: Palace, [and] American” (Papanikolas 2002:164). Similarly, immigrants set aside habitual codes of dress and masculinity, exchanging traditional

garb with derby hats and slacks, their mustaches sacrificed to mirror the culturally prescribed image of clean-cut respectability. Time-honored traditions are abandoned and new cultural norms are embraced. In Greek America, the traditional Greek code of vendetta gives way to legal arbitration and a new ethos of community harmony (Anagnostou 1993–1994). Emotional attachment to the nation and political loyalty are draped with flags of a different color. The expressive, traditional lamentations of the dead are rendered embarrassing and are subjected to a new discipline of emotion and body movement (Moskos 1990:97).

The narrative of cultural assimilation is as follows: to forget means to habituate oneself into mainstream practices, to acquire the knowledge and cultural competence to embody and perform the newly fashioned self. Not uncommonly, this kind of cultural transformation is perceived as a deeply felt conversion experience, a liberating rebirth. There is a productivity in reconfiguring the self, associated with pleasures felt anew in the experience of “disembedding” from traditional structures and participating in modernity (Giddens 1991). A genre of immigrant transformation stories, Werner Sollors’s “narratives of conversion” (1986), associate the passage from ethnic to American with a profound sense of renewal—an absolute obliteration of a former self effected in the act of writing. “The Edward Bok of whom I have written,” wrote the Dutch immigrant editor of *Women’s Wear Daily* in his *Americanization* (1920), “has passed out of my being as completely as if had never been there, save for the records and files on my library shelves” (qtd in Sollors 1986:32).

Economic and social rewards further enhance the value of turning immigrant otherness into national sameness. Conformity comes packaged with privileges, and the immigrants often quickly discover the rewards, translated as material gains and social status. “[I]t came to my mind, ‘I’m in America and I must be like Americans,’” Ioannis (John) Lougaris records in his diary.

First, I went to a Greek barbershop and for 10¢ I got a shave and a haircut. I told the barber to shave my mustache and comb my hair in the middle. The next store was a Jewish second-hand shop selling clothes and hats and shoes, so I got a blue suit, derby hat, American shoes, American shirts, a bow tie, and dressed up like a million dollars . . . Next morning . . . I got the job. (qtd in Karampetsos 1998:91)³

Evidently, immigrant narratives of cultural assimilation-as-transformation are particular sites that validate ethnic forgetting and demarcate a neat dichotomy between the past and the present. The present functions as an impenetrable boundary keeping the past away from

consciousness. The notion that a decisive break from the past initiates a profoundly transforming process, however, has not been a sole preoccupation of immigrant selves; it is rather an integral component of modernity itself. "Clearing away the debris of the past" (Gross 2000:54) has been the guiding principle of modernity's promise for "purification and rebirth." Devaluing the past, "disembedding" the self from traditional structures of authority and meaning entails modernity's promise to emancipate the individual from "oppressive emotional habits" while furnishing the conditions for multiple fashionings of the self (Giddens 1991:78).

The significance of the relationship between nationalism, as a modern phenomenon, and forgetting lies in the politicization of immigrant pasts. Memories of ethnic minorities or immigrant groups are devalued not merely as social and psychological constraints, but as adverse political forces fragmenting a shared sense of remembering and, therefore, threatening national homogeneity (Gillis 1994). The effectiveness of the official banishment of immigrant memories from the nation may lie in the ability of nationalism to resonate with the transformation of immigrant subjectivities. As states have been successful in turning people into national subjects by positing the nation as the extension of the family, and in turn a site of emotional attachment and loyalty, the political eradication of the past resonates with a popular devaluing of the past. In the process of constituting amnesia, nationalism renders the immigrant past as a non-memory through a purification process wherein ambiguities, complex interconnections, and the porous relationship between the past and the present are replaced by the antimony between modernity and tradition.

In American narratives of national belonging, forgetting through cultural conformity celebrates the consensual contract between the polity and the immigrants. The narratives validate the openness of the nation as they legitimize an ideology of inclusion. The stranger consents to political and cultural ideals and in the process is partaking in the nation. Here, forgetting legitimizes the nation through infusion of assimilated others. According to this logic, anyone can become American, since immigrant forgetting reproduces the cultural belief of the national subject as an autonomous individual entering into a voluntary contract with the nation. The notion that national inclusion operates as a choice, rather than as an effect of power relations, is obscured in this association. By viewing the immigrant as an autonomous agent acquiescing to conformity, the function of dominant ideologies in constituting ethnic amnesia escapes critical scrutiny.

Civic assimilation, "whiteness" and citizenship

If cultural assimilation posits the forgetting of ethnicity as a necessary condition for national membership, the narrative of *civic* assimilation privileges political rather than cultural forgetting. The extraordinary emphasis placed on civic values as the glue of the nation has ingrained the notion that political principles, rather than shared culture or descent, are the primary criteria for national belonging. The ideology of freedom in America encourages retention of ethnic and religious diversity, as it envisions a polity of "voluntary pluralism," the unity of the nation through commonly shared political principles (Fuchs 1990). This is the civic narrative of assimilation which is legitimized by an astounding diversity of immigrant groups becoming an integral part of the American polity without shedding completely their ethnic affiliations.

The notion that a shared political culture becomes the unifying mechanism bringing together the ethnically heterogeneous parts of the nation into a like-minded body of citizens has been embraced by a remarkably wide range of scholarship. Political histories of the nation, for example, emphasize the construction of the polity around the founding constitutional ideals, implicitly accepting the deeply egalitarian promise of equality, "an article of national faith" in American political thought (Karst 1989:2). In such histories, Scott-Childress observes that "nationalism meant adherence to the principles of institutionalized freedom . . . [projecting that] Americans' national identity was forged in the American Revolution, polished in the Constitution, and thereafter simply went through various periods of greater or lesser luster" (1999:viii).

This static perspective, however, neglects to take into consideration the manner in which cultural processes enter into the construction of political subjects in specific historical periods. As recent scholarship on nationalism has shown, it is impossible to distinguish between political and cultural nationalism. "Culture has been implicated in the development of even the most political of nations, the United States," Gregory Jusdanis has argued (2001:11). And race, as a core cultural category legitimizing social hierarchies in American society, has prominently factored in the Americanization of the Armenians, the Finns, the Irish, the Jews, the Syrians, and southeastern Europeans, including the Greeks. Assessing the civic merit of these groups, their fitness for self-government in the American democracy, has been intimately linked with their "racial odysseys," their re-signification from racial others to equal participants in the political and social space of American "whiteness" (Jacobson 1998:3).⁴

The link between "whiteness" and citizenship has been central to

constructions of American identity. While this complex connection has been historically contested and transformed in the process, racial understandings of citizenship dominated the political establishment of the young nation and remained a preoccupation well beyond the successive waves of European immigration in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Though implicit in colonial discourse, framed in opposition to the alleged “savagery” of native Indians, the relationship between “whiteness” and citizenship was naturalized in the laws of the new Republic. Codified in the 1790 naturalization law granting citizenship to “all white free persons,” “whiteness” increasingly came to be understood not solely in terms of legal ascription, but most importantly as the embodiment of a set of moral and cultural values. Related to an understanding of citizenship as practice, rather than mere political ascription, civic participation was seen as the performance of related duties. Self-reliance, rationality, self-discipline, the ownership of property, temperance and restraint were prescribed as essential ingredients of the civic contract between the state and a new type of Republican citizen. Unlike the allegedly submissive, docile subjects associated with the monarchical dynasties that republicanism sought to replace, the new citizen was projected as a reflective participant whose rationality and self-reliance were seen as necessary political virtues for the proper functioning of the democratic process. Unlike feudal peasants whose action depended on royal decrees, custom, superstition, kin and community obligations, the modern citizen was encouraged to act as an autonomous individual exhibiting rational initiative over unreflective surrender and personal responsibility in the making of the society over compliant submission to the traditional status quo.

While forgetting traditional forms of political allegiance loomed large in the making of immigrants into republican citizens, racial classification was also a key feature in debating Americanization. As Jacobson (1998) has exhaustively argued, the enormous burden placed on immigrants to conform to the republican code of conduct was inextricably linked with racial assumptions about a people’s fitness for self-government. As the case of the exclusion of the Chinese immigrants on the grounds of supposed dependency on oriental despotism indicates, civic identity has been more than a strictly political matter. Rather, the competent performance of the duties of citizenship has been thought in terms of racially inscribed moral character traits. Jacobson eloquently conveys this point:

The experiment in democratic government seemed to call for a polity that was disciplined, virtuous, self-sacrificing, productive, farseeing, and wise—traits that were all racially inscribed in eighteenth-century Euro-American thought. (1998:26)

In this racialized political thought, the capacity to successfully participate in American democracy, a political form attributed to the assumed superiority of the Anglo-Saxon political genius, was not an issue of voluntary cultural assimilation, but a question of the immigrants' innate potential for fitness in the prevailing political culture. As the embodiment of "good republican substance" (224), "whiteness" served as a racial boundary of immigrant prospects to become fully American (Jacobson 1998).

If "whiteness," understood in contrast to "blackness" and native American "savagery," stood as an undifferentiated monolithic category early in the Republic, immense waves of immigrant laborers in the nineteenth and early twentieth century challenged the nation's fixed racial categories.⁵ Largely a source of cheap labor for America's burgeoning industrial capitalism, immigrants occupied an ambiguous racial location in the republic. Their phenotypical "whiteness" enabled their entrance into the republic as "free white persons," making them eligible for citizenship under the reigning naturalization law. In this sense, "It was their *whiteness*, not any kind of New World magnanimity that opened the Golden Door" (Jacobson 1998:8). Beneficiaries of racialized citizenship, the immigrants also partook in the privileges of "whiteness," becoming eligible under the 1905 homestead law to acquire property in what used to be Ute Indian reservation territory in Utah (Papanikolas 2002:114). Yet, the immigrants also posed an anomaly in the political space of "whiteness." Although they were legally "white," their status as racially distinct national groups undermined their full inclusion to normative "whiteness." As "in-between peoples" (Barrett and Roediger 1997), or "probationary whites" (Jacobson 1998), Italian, Greek, Jewish, Polish or Slovak immigrants fractured "whiteness" into a hierarchical plurality of races, fuelling debates over their capacity to effectively participate in the racialized polity.

Were southeastern European immigrants fit for the rigors of democratic government? Were they capable of exercising the self-discipline, and moral character necessary for constructive civic contribution to the republic? Or did their allegiance to ancestral ties and Old-world political traditions threaten the smooth functioning of the polity? Did custom undermine modernity? Even worse, was it not that immigrant "biological inferiority" posed a genetic threat to the nation, promising nothing short of racial degeneration and chaotic disorder? How was it possible to test the immigrants' fitness for self-government? Popular magazines and prestigious research centers, congressional debates and political speeches, immigration laws and civic institutions generated a discourse classifying, assessing, measuring, evaluating and

predicting immigrant “fitness” and assimilability. Immigrant phenotypes, genotypes, customs and habits, health and appearance, intelligence, cranial capacity and work habits were made the object of a discourse locating immigrant groups in relative proximity or distance from the center of “whiteness” determining, in turn, degrees of national exclusion.

To this effect, two dominant narratives on American national identity gained ascendancy in America after the First World War. They entailed different politics of memory and forgetting. Organizing itself around the predicament of total conformity, assimilationist political/cultural nationalism comprised a militant campaign to accelerate the making of immigrants into Americans. Forgetting those political and cultural affiliations labeled un-American became a necessary condition, a “burden of proof” for immigrants claiming a place in the polity. Racist nationalism, on the other hand, posited an isomorphism between the nation and race, exclusively linking the privileges of white citizenship to the racial superiority of Anglo-Saxonism. Racist nationalism animated the immigration “restrictionist” movement which intransigently sought and eventually succeeded in barring the immigrants, and their memories, from the polity.⁶

Greek immigrants and the fault lines of “whiteness”

“[T]he descendants of the undesirable Greeks may become loyal and useful American citizens,” a 1907 editorial in the *San Francisco Chronicle* asserted. It added that unlike “the Asiatics,” Greek immigrants “do not differ from us so radically in all essential particulars as they can never assimilate, but must always remain a race apart” (quoted in Karampetsos 1998:66). In its succinctness, this passage is paradigmatic of the kind of “progressive racism” which was directed against turn-of-the-century southeastern European immigrants. Consistent with the racialized, classificatory logic of its era, it identifies Greek immigrants as a distinct race, and subsequently locates the newcomers within the hierarchical “racial fault lines” of American society (Almaguer 1994). Placed between the unmarked American “whiteness” and the “Asiatics,” commonly demonized as the “yellow peril,” the immigrants are relegated to an ambivalent position of simultaneous privilege and its absence. Occupying a racial location over the “non-whiteness” of the Asiatics, they are deemed potential national subjects, their “white” phenotype (the likeness in “all essential particulars”) actually conferring to them the privileges of citizenship barred from Chinese immigrants.⁷ Classified within the underbelly of “whiteness,” the “undesirable” immigrant is

subjected to the disciplinary gaze of the dominant, his coevalness with American modernity denied, his national inclusion set to a remote future.⁸

During the early twentieth century, then, Greek immigrants occupied a marked, unstable location, simultaneously a potential component of the racialized nation but also outside of it, “always . . . a race apart.” The unmarked enunciation “us” naturalizes “whiteness” as the racial center, regulating national belonging. Boundary maintenance turns into a strategy of controlling access to the privileges of “whiteness,” as the dominant society scripts the terms of acceptance for the “probationary whites”:

The business of the alien is to go into the mines, the foundries, the sewers, the stifling air of factories and work shops, out on the roads and railroads in the burning sun of summer, or the driving sleet and snow. If he proves himself a man, and rises above his station, and acquires wealth, and cleans himself up—very well, we receive him after a generation or two. But at present he is far beneath us, and the burden of proof rests with him. (Fairchild 1911:237)

Linking race, class, gender and the nation, this commentary underlines the pervasiveness of social Darwinism in narratives of assimilation. The assimilation of the immigrant is framed generationally, as the author builds on a central motif of what Sollors calls “the genetics of salvation” (1986). According to this concept, American identity is “safely and easily received” by the native-born by virtue of birth and descent, “but [it is] something that foreign-born workers would have to strive long and hard to achieve” (Sollors 1986:88). Here, the labor conditions of industrial capitalism function to test racial immigrant fitness. The transformation of wage labor, a class location associated with non-whiteness, into middle-class respectability, a sign of republican “whiteness,” mirrors racial inclusion. Not unlike the Protestant covenant with God, material wealth guarantees immigrant national salvation.⁹

While the narrative of “progressive racism” does provide a location, albeit an ambiguous one, for southeastern European immigrants in the political economy of “whiteness,” racist nationalism, in contrast, systematically denies them one. As I will argue, racist nationalists draw immutable boundaries between racialized citizenship and the immigrants, barring the latter from participation in the polity. Access to “whiteness” here becomes a utopian impossibility because the immigrants are seen as organically alien substances to the national body: “An ostrich could assimilate a croquet ball or a cobble-stone with about the same ease that America assimilated her newcomers from Central and Southeastern Europe” (Roberts 1922:4). Racist nationalists dehuman-

ized Greek immigrants, fixing them outside “whiteness.” The following signs appearing respectively in restaurant signs and newspaper advertisements, speak volumes about the extent of Greek humiliation: “No Sailors, dogs, or Greeks allowed” (Akrotirianakis 1994:26), and “John’s Restaurant, Pure American. No Rats, No Greeks” (Leber 1972:104).

The interviewee’s confident assertion recorded in the beginning of this essay engenders forgetting. The desire to be included in the visual economy of “whiteness” through conjugal association with blondes, the icon par excellence of “whiteness,” assumes that such a union was naturally unproblematic within the realm of imaginable marital possibilities for immigrants. Yet, such a position forgets that racist nationalism saw the union of Greeks with “white” women as a physical aberration, a sexual practice threatening national degeneration through inferior blood mixing. Legitimized by the widely acceptable tenets of scientific racism and eugenics, miscegenation laws policed the sexual boundaries of “whiteness” through legal sanctions disenfranchising trespassers, “native” and immigrant alike. Native-born women who became involved with immigrant men, for example, could potentially lose their citizenship; when their immigrant companions were categorized as non-white, they could be prosecuted for miscegenation.¹⁰

The policing of sexual boundaries was regularly enforced, institutionally as well as through mob violence. In Palatka, Florida, a Greek immigrant was “flogged for dating a ‘white’ woman” (Scofield 1997:20), while in Utah, another was nearly lynched for allegedly raping a “white” woman (Peck 2000:167). The immigrants’ nominal whiteness—that is, their capacity to pass as white—was posited as a greater national threat, prompting Ku Klux Klan to organize its anti-immigrant campaign around the theme of “Protecting American womanhood” from the alien “national menace” (Papanikolas 2002:159–160).

Interacial sexual encounters were among a number of sites where the immigrants’ “non-whiteness” was institutionally or informally inscribed. Immigrant historiographies abound with references to practices legitimizing racial inequalities inherent in the political economy of “whiteness.” In the Intermountain West, where Greeks served as industrial laborers and participated in strikes, the term “Greek” was often “synonymous with ‘alien,’ ‘troublemaker,’ ‘inferior’ and ‘not white’” (Karampetsos 1998:62). Housing covenants barring immigrants from renting in “white” neighborhoods reinforced their non-whiteness, a pattern repeated in residential segregation in labor camps where Greeks, along with other minorities, were set apart from the quarters of “white” laborers. In Pocatello, Idaho, for example, “Greeks were restricted to segregated sections of theaters and barred from living in most neighborhoods” (Georgakas 1992:17).

Greek exceptionalism, the claim of the Greeks as heirs of the ancient Greek civilization as a means to distance the Greek immigrants from their southeastern counterparts (Anagnostou 1999), was dismissed by racist nationalists.

The Modern Greeks like to have visitors believe that they are descended straight from the true Greeks of the days of Pericles; but if they are, then every Greek bootblack in New England is descended straight from Plymouth Colony. The Greeks of to-day—except on some of the Greek islands, which have been comparatively free from invasion and immigration—are descended from Asiatic and African slaves, Italians, old Bulgarians, Slavs, Gepidæ, Huns, Herulians, Avars, Egyptians, Jews, Illyrians, Arabs, Spaniards, Waloons, Franks, Albanians, and several other races. History has an unfortunate but incurable habit of repeating itself—and a word to the wise ought to be better than a jab with an eight-inch hatpin. (Roberts 1922:232)¹¹

Similarly, popular classifications placed the Greeks as undifferentiated members of a racially inferior Mediterranean race. “The driver mounted his quickly emptied wagon, with a curse upon the ‘Dagos,’ and the crowd informally discussed for a while the immigration question; its verdict being that it is time to shut our doors against the Greeks, for they are a poor lot from which to make good American citizens” (Steiner 1906:283). In its racialization of the “new immigrants,” racism proved to be particularly resilient in its ability to appropriate anthropological typologies of European morphological variations and turn them into racial hierarchies. Thus, the strict morphological classification of the European people into three European races—the Teutonic or Nordic Race (which included northern Europeans), the Alpine race (which included southern Germans, Celts, and Slavs), and the Mediterranean race (which included the people of Southern Europe) was produced by the “scientific gospel” of the era, Ripley’s *The Races of Europe* (1915), and was appropriated by racist thinkers to reflect inherent racial inequalities (Bendersky 1995:137). Thus, in the terminology of the era, the Nordic “long headed dolicocephalic races from the zoological zone of Northern Europe” were posited as the superior type of all European races (137).

The Ku Klux Klan, which at the time was impressive in size and scope because it recruited approximately two million members in the 1920s (Archdeacon 1983:170), disseminated the popular view of immigration as national pollution. In Spokane, for instance, a Klan Imperial Lecturer asserted “that Mexicans and Greeks should be sent back to where they came from so that white supremacy and the purity of Americans be preserved” (Scofield 1997:20). Similarly, the Royal Riders of the Red Robe, a Klan affiliate, assembled as “a real patriotic

organization' for approved naturalized citizens unluckily born outside the United States . . . [excluded from membership] immigrants from Greece, Italy and the Balkans" (20).

Yet, as Peck (2000) has shown in his impressive work on racial categories in the early twentieth-century American West, the immigrant racial status was far from stable or permanent. Immigrant laborers as well as established communities were caught in shifting racial locations. While the immigrants' participation in labor unions such as the Western Federation of Miners would render them "white" (220), residential discrimination through city covenants refuted their "whiteness." At the same time, transience "was almost always a marker of non-whiteness in the west in 1900," although "being a member of a residentially persistent community did not guarantee one whiteness" (166). Conversely, middle class respectability bestowed the privileges of "whiteness," though these rights were withdrawn to punish immigrants belonging to nationalities that were politically active.¹²

The volatile contingency of racial meanings and the fluidity of cultural and political immigrant affiliations in the early years of immigration reached relatively rigid patterns of identity ascription in the turbulent years after the First World War, as American nationalism increasingly turned into militant strategies of conformity. Confronted with an acute domestic economic crisis, the rise of communism abroad, an increasingly powerful domestic unionism, vast cultural diversity, extensive urban riots and homegrown terrorist acts, the state politicized national identity. Appointing directors of Americanization to the Bureau of Education and the Department of the Interior, and establishing a National Americanization committee, the state launched a "crusade" of "intense Americanism" known as "One hundred-percent" Americanization (King 2000:90). Aggressively embraced by civic patriotic organizations such as "The Daughters of the American Revolution," "The National Security League," and "The American Legion," the movement castigated the retention of immigrant cultures. In addition, it also branded working class unionism, which was often conflated with communism and anarchism, as being un-American (Coben 1964). This deployment of Americanism as an ideology to extinguish diversity and neutralize working class activism demarcated the boundaries of "whiteness" in relation to "Americanness," understood as uncompromising cultural and political conformity to the middle class values of 100% Americanism. A state-sponsored "class vigilance" (Jacobson 1998:72), endorsed by Congress and the media, culminated in the arrest and eventual deportation of alleged foreign immigrant radicals in violation of their civil rights and due process (Archdeacon 1983:169).

AHEPA, rewriting nationalism and the politics of forgetting

The historical project of institutionally inscribing immigrant Greek America into American “whiteness” was undertaken by the AHEPA. Established in 1922, as a response to the Ku Klux Klan’s militant anti-foreignism according to its foundational narratives (Chebithes 1935; Leber 1972), AHEPA modeled itself as a modern American institution. Its policies were designed to transcend traditional adherence to locality, custom, and ethnic identity ascribed at birth. Its constitution sanctioned the official use of the English language, and a universal membership irrespective of religious affiliation and ethnic descent. In AHEPA’s identity narrative, the term of “Greek” signified a non-voluntary ascription (since it was granted at birth), ethnic nationalism, and a set of traditional cultural practices incompatible with American modernity. The “American Hellenic” identity, on the other hand, stood for choice, progress, and political allegiance to America. It served as an alternative to hyphenated identities (i.e. “Greek-American”), which were stigmatized as un-American at the time, while retaining a claim to the cultural capital of Hellenism. Furthermore, in a host society positing the ideals of Classical Greece as its cultural and political foundation, AHEPA positioned itself to capitalize on the reigning discourse of biological determinism: as racial descendants and therefore cultural inheritors of classical Greece, Greek immigrants were not only endowed with the po-tential to embrace “Americanness,” they had access to “ur-Americanness.”¹³

Viewing itself as a modern institution, AHEPA did not escape the cultural assumptions of its American counterparts. Like the fraternal orders on which it was modeled and persistently courted, particularly freemasonry, its membership was racially inscribed and religiously discriminating. Applicants for membership had to be, or be eligible to become, American citizens, as well as to be Christian and belong to the Caucasian race (Saloutos 1964:249). Similarly, its self-reflexive project of “ethnogenesis,” the fashioning of a new identity, was scripted by the dictates of American assimilationist modernity. In an era when “foreignism” was considered a national offense, AHEPA equated Hellenism with Americanism. It constitutionally endorsed the precepts of “one hundred-percent” Americanism by distancing itself from working class activism as it cultivated an identity of American middle-class respectability and patriotism through affiliation with the modern paragons of Americanism, free-masonry and the American Legion.¹⁴ In its political and cultural alignment with assimilationist Americanism, AHEPA engineered a reflective memory politics to sever its ties from Greek political and cultural nationalism.

Immigrants, as a marked and vulnerable category, are subjected to

the disciplinary gaze of the dominant. Therefore, when reflecting back on the center, it becomes necessary to negotiate relations of power. This is an inextricable feature of modernity, as Anthony Giddens has argued. The surveillance of dominant structures initiates a reflective process aiming at the “smoothing of the rough edges such that behavior which is not integrated into a system—that is not knowledgeably built into the mechanics of system reproduction—becomes alien and discrete” (Giddens 1991:150). AHEPA’s reflexivity vis-à-vis dominant representations of immigrant others was not a novelty in early immigrant Greek America. Rather, it represented the institutional culmination of an ongoing ethnic vigilance among community leaders who realized in the 1910s and early 1920s the importance of assimilation and ethnic participation in national politics (Saloutos 1964:241–244).¹⁵

Often mediated by native elites, the politics of immigrant belonging resembles an anthropological hall of mirrors. Vulnerable otherness requires capitalizing on the knowledge of the system and its “mechanisms of power” to reflect and deliberate on strategic positioning. Subjected to the gaze of the dominant society, immigrants set a counter system of surveillance. The mainstream “observers [are] observed” as George Stocking (1983) aptly puts it in another context, to identify strategic locations for self-representation.

At the height of 1920s nativism, for example, George Horton, an influential politician who served as U.S. Consul General in Athens and as American Consul in Smyrna, advised “every Greek” in America to combat “sly anti-Hellenic propaganda” by not speaking “ill of another Greek in public” and to “[c]hoke down your jealousy, or antipathy, or political difference.” He cautioned the members of AHEPA that whenever they spoke of a Greek to say that he “is a very fine fellow” (Leber 1972:184). He unmistakably delivered a powerful lesson in immigrant politics: that public self-presentation matters in America.

Horton’s admonition represents more than a simple call to close immigrant ranks and to project a positive image to mainstream Americans. In a society where harmonious collaboration among citizens of diverse persuasions was posed as an ideal of citizenship, the AHEPA claim to national inclusion was at stake. For the Republican ideal to be extended to include the Greeks, factionalism, notoriously characterized as an essential attribute of the “race,” needed to be uprooted. If “the spirit of faction among the Greeks is incurable” (Roberts 1922:233), and makes them “equally willing to wreck Greece in order to gain their own ends,” who could guarantee this could be averted in America? If Greeks “pick up some sort of political germs from their coffee” (235), do they not imminently pose a grave threat to the social cohesion and the common good? In an era where knifings and vendettas were an integral

part of the Greek immigrant coffeehouse culture, AHEPA's priority was to launch a project of forgetting that "would eliminate those turbulent political imbroglios that divided communities and brought ridicule and abuse from unsympathetic quarters" (Saloutos 1964:248).

Reflexive judgement on "what to keep and what to let go, to salvage or to shred or shelve, to memorialize or to anathematize" is an integral part in the art (Lowenthal 1999:xi), as well as the politics of forgetting. AHEPA's project of cultural amnesia targeted those aspects of Greek culture rendered incompatible with American "whiteness," conforming to the assimilationist imperative of republican citizenship. AHEPA's constitutional credo was to "promote pure and undefiled Americanism," to cultivate "the highest type of American citizenship" (Leber 1972:150), and "the perfection of the moral sense of its members" (148). It advocated uprooting the "deformities of selfishness" (148) and projected a model of Greeks as "good citizens—law-abiding, progressive, industrious, clean-cut men" (173). In doing so it brought together political and cultural virtues, thus foregrounding the necessity for a new identity narrative based on forgetting.¹⁶

A review of the pleas directed to members illustrates the urgency for ethnic amnesia as AHEPA's organizing principle. For example, an AHEPA member (who represented the Boston, Mass. AHEPA Chapter) had this to say in 1924:

Let us cooperate. Let us prove our loyalty to this great country of ours! Every Greek an American citizen in fact, not in name alone. Let us live as in one big, happy family, with brothers all over the country! Keep out the dangerous characters, the disobedient, the wicked, the disorderly. Shut out the stubborn and those who are incapable of receiving instruction, light and knowledge! *Let us forget the past!* Let's bury this dangerous element—jealousy! Let us cooperate; let us esteem each other: let us work together and in harmony! If this is done, all of us will live a better live. (qtd in Leber 1972:174–175)

AHEPA provided a forum disciplining forgetting as it sought to selectively abandon old world cultural practices perceived as antithetical to American modernity: "jealousy," insubordination to authority, and political factionalism were anathema to AHEPA's aspiration to constitute a disciplined, harmonious collectivity of consenting citizens.

The act of forgetting deeply ingrained cultural predispositions was constituted through a series of disciplinary practices fostering prescribed homogeneous conduct. Like other organizations in modernity, AHEPA operated as an institution of surveillance, regularizing control of social relations. The adoption of English as the organization's official language, for instance, disciplined socio-linguistic behavior. As Saloutos

(1964:253) points out, the use of English meant “to stem the rhetorical proclivities of those who were proficient in Greek.” For example, views featured in a 1927 issue of AHEPA’s official publication, *Archon Magazine*, warned that “The use of Greek language” would turn AHEPA meetings “[in]to coffeehouse pandemonium” (quoted in Saloutos 1964:253). Reflexively monitoring and enforcing its constitutional regulations, AHEPA saw itself as “an American institution and not a Greek organization” (Leber 1972:174), moving from the traditional, agonistic sociability of the coffeehouse to the disciplined oratory of the modern organizational meeting. The following verses of Reverend Thomas James T. Lacey, author of *A Study of Social Heredity as Illustrated in the Greek People* (1916), and *Our Greek Immigrants* (1921), were composed on the occasion of AHEPA’s 1934 convention in Columbus, Ohio. They illustrate the emphasis placed in the de-ethnicization of the immigrants:

We’ll assemble in Columbus in the good old Buckeye State;
 So brother, pack your suitcase and be sure to note the date.
 We will not begin on “Greek” time, so take heed you don’t be late . . .
 Toward Columbus each brother will soon turn his step,
 To the glorious conclave of the mighty AHEP’.
 No politics there will ever find mention;
 No pulling of wires to get votes at convention.
 If a brother gets office, then truly indeed
 The place sought the man and forced him to lead.
 No lengthy debates our patience will tire;
 In short, snappy speech full of passion and fire;
 Each man presses his point incisive and dear.
 Then goes to his seat as the delegates cheer.
 (AHEPA *Convention Album* 1934:50, 51)

The republican imperative of forgetting Old-world political loyalties further fueled AHEPA’s political distancing from Greek nationalism. As sites of deep political divisions, immigrant interest in the affairs of the Greek state, particularly the rift between Royalists and Venizelists, underlined undisciplined (and therefore politically and culturally un-American), passionate attachment to the former homeland. AHEPA therefore lashed out against the tenets of Greek nationalism. It advocated the separation between religious and ethnic identity, and criticized the Greek state’s initiatives to unite immigrants for patriotic purposes. AHEPA sought to transcend Greek ethno-religious identity, sending shock waves through immigrant Greek America when its policies were defended publicly in 1927: “The fanatical cry of the old Panhellenists, ‘*Pas Hellene Prepei na Einai Orthodoxos*’ (Every Greek Must Be an Orthodox), is outdated. We are Greeks, but we did not inherit our present religion from our ancestors, the ancient Greeks, as we did our

blood and traits" (quoted in Saloutos 1964:254). "They [presumably Greek nationalists] would try to sing us to sleep with lullabyes [sic] of Greek patriotism, Greek language, Greek orthodoxy. . . . But the Greek people are no longer asleep. They are wide awake. The phenomenal success of the AHEPA reflects the renaissance of the Greek people in America" (quoted in Leber 1972:214).

AHEPA's renaissance necessitated a politics of forgetting to sever the organization from cultural and political links with Greek ethnic nationalism. Furthermore, the castigation of popular culture as un-American introduced a fault line in the dominant Greek national narrative of uninterrupted cultural continuity. Greek nationalist ideology—and the sciences that legitimized it—saw the folk as a vessel embodying the continuity of the "race," but AHEPA saw popular practices as a sign of unenlightened backwardness. While Greek nationalism sought to incorporate folk practices as an integral part of the nation, AHEPA selectively distanced itself from memories of popular culture.¹⁷ The imperative of Americanization necessitated the rewriting of Greek nationalism in America. Folklore and history, as national institutions, were available to Greek nationalism in order to restore the "backward" folk as Modern Greek national subjects, but not to AHEPA. Lacking access to national institutions such as the university, AHEPA fashioned its own anthropology—a narrative of origins, an identity, a culture—in order to inscribe Greek immigrants as modern American national subjects. AHEPA's anthropological narrative demarcated the "proper" cultural boundaries for Greek immigrants. In doing so, it relied on a common nationalist trope, that of "awakening" (Anderson, 1983). It maintained that a particular class of immigrants awoke in America to discover the already existing, yet dormant Hellenic ideas, uncontaminated from the impurities of popular culture. AHEPA sought to establish the group's origins through memories of a Greek racial continuity, and in turn connect these memories with the dominant narrative of Americanism.

Racist nationalism and the racialization of the nation

In contrast to the assimilative project of the Americanization movement, racist nationalism launched a cultural and political campaign to demonstrate the intrinsic non-assimilability of the immigrants. In literature and theater, popular magazines and scientific treatises, in congressional debates and travelogues, the immigrant question was biologized, the newcomers seen as a depository of inferior genetic material, and therefore an imminent biological threat to the "national family." Controlling selective breeding among biologically superior mates ensured the racial health of the nation, averting degeneration. Though the purported

scientific basis of eugenics may today sound ludicrous and its intellectual caliber may be dismissed as helplessly provincial, it “was scarcely the province of an intellectual fringe or a cabal of crackpots” at the time (Jacobson 2000:162). Rather, it was the activism of high-placed advocates, academics and intellectuals employed by Ivy League institutions which endowed the movement with scientific credibility.¹⁸

As a “redemptive secular religion” (Kenaga, 1999:234), eugenics projected a millennial vision of moral restoration by policing the racial boundaries of “whiteness.” As a national “threat and “menace” the immigrants were not solely to be denied the rights of citizenship; they were to be barred from entry into the polity. This strategy of exclusion, in Bauman’s (1995:22) acrid language, “expelled the strangers beyond the frontiers of the managed and manageable, . . . vomiting the strangers, banishing them from the limits of the orderly world and barring them from all communication with those inside.” The restrictive Reed-Johnson Immigration Act (1924), a political triumph of racist nationalism, accomplished exactly this exclusion, allowing only minimum national quotas for immigrants from southeastern Europe.¹⁹

Racist nationalism, and its political arm, restrictionism, posited a moment of crisis in American modernity as it institutionally sought to once-and-for-all locate the immigrant outside the polity. The republican promise of universal inclusion through civic and cultural assimilation was violated as non-northern European newcomers were seen as genetically unfit to partake of the obligations and rights of citizenship. In the case of racist nationalism, the obsession with immigrant amnesia (which so zealously preoccupied the Americanization movement) became a ruthless political program of exclusion. The immigrants were banned from the polity, their identities becoming a badge of incompatible, threatening difference.

The contradictory imperative of *exiling* ethnic memories from the polity (the racist nationalist project) and forgetting as a condition for national belonging (the assimilationist project) worked dialectically to effect immigrant conformity. Though opposed, racist nationalism and assimilationism mutually reinforced each other. The classification of the incoming immigrants as irreducible aliens and inferior human beings required the negation of the racist charge of “non-fitness,” and the shedding of the stigma of the immigrant as alien to the nation. This negation necessitated in turn a process of nationalization among immigrants which was socially legitimate insofar it satisfied the conditions dictated by the pervasive ideology of one hundred-percent Americanism. As the two dominant narratives prescribing immigrant locations, racist nationalism and assimilationism intersected to discipline the immigrants within the nation while regulating the flow of “aliens” to the

polity. Assimilationist discipline, effected in public spectacles of Americanization, the work place, and the modern organization, was constituted through the hierarchical racial ordering produced by the discourse of racist nationalism.

Violence was also of paramount importance in sustaining the interworking between racism and assimilationism. It was directed against those who did not conform to the ideology of Americanism, functioning as a pervasive technique of discipline. It saturated all aspects of civic life. As primary sites of the state's ideological apparatus, schools enforced assimilation among the children of immigrants by punishing non-conformity. In its interests to manufacture social consensus, the state tolerated, even fermented violent forms of popular vigilantism through its virulent nationalist and patriotic rhetoric. Ordinary citizens turned themselves into instruments of surveillance and monitored behavior, suffering no serious legal repercussions when they resorted to violence, even killing, to punish ideological dissenters.²⁰ Immigrant property was seen as dispensable and immigrant businessmen were targeted by the aggressive Klan as well as mob violence. Their businesses were routinely attacked and non-immigrant employees were threatened for working for "aliens." In its legal transgressions and disruptions of social order, racism required the synergy of the state. In its political drive to assimilation, the state found a powerful ally in the intimidation tactics of racist nationalism.

AHEPA and the politics of racial remembering

AHEPA's narrative of cultural amnesia consented to the imperative of American assimilationism. The claim to national belonging was based on cultural and political forgetting; yet memories of racial continuity were emphasized. AHEPA pursued assimilation by claiming the ancient Greeks as its authentic ancestors. Establishing a distinguished Hellenic racial pedigree was not merely a necessary project to safeguard a privilege-endowing cultural capital.²¹ It was also necessary for AHEPA's project of full national inclusion, since it was ancestral identity that ultimately determined full access to an American political *and racialized* national identity. As Michaels observes, "the Johnson's Act's technology for making crucial the ancestry of those who might become American required that the ancestry of those who already were American be made crucial also" (1995:30). Thus, though coerced to forget their cultural and political past, the immigrants within the polity had to reflect on how to rewrite their ancestral ties in a manner compatible to the dictates of racist nationalism. In other words, the political sanctioning of the tenets of racist nationalism—through the implementation of restrictive immigration politics—inherently racialized immigrant assimilation.

The claim of access to cultural and racial “whiteness” presented an immense challenge for immigrant groups, given the logic of identity propagated by racist nationalism. As Michaels (1995) argues, “nativist modernism,” his term of preference for racist nationalism, profoundly altered the idea of an American national identity. It radically disarticulated citizenship from cultural or civic conformity, conceptualizing the nation as a function of biology, with “nationality [now] becom[ing] an effect of racial identity” (8). In this formulation, race and nation become interchangeable, and family becomes the key metaphor to denote national belonging. The core strategy of nativism, as Michaels points out, was not so much to reproduce racial hierarchies, though its proponents steadfastly held on to notions of Anglo-Saxon superiority, but rather to emphasize the *cultural* differences of “alien” races. Here, the logic capitalizes on an ontology of identity where cultural behavior is a function of biological heritage. In other words, if immigrant practices have a biological basis and racial differences are distinct, irreducible essences, racist nationalism advocates racial pluralism as a cultural one. In this respect, the cultural Americanism of an immigrant poses an irresolvable contradiction. Non-native descent announces the impossibility of cultural Americanization.

It becomes clear then that “nativist modernism” privileges nativity as the absolute criterion of national belonging, transforming American identity from an achieved status to an inherited one. “For the new nativists, appalled by immigrants, who, as Lothrop Stoddard put it, had become ‘American citizens but not Americans,’ ‘American’ could no more be a simple political term” (Michaels 1995:9). The repudiation of the assimilationist aspiration of immigrant national integration, which nativists scornfully derided, is telling. The “melting” of the immigrant culture, posited as an incompatible, biologically inscribed essence, becomes unattainable; in turn, forgetting the memories of the race becomes impossible. To protect national pollution, “to keep the family strong,” nativists banned culture and biology from the boundaries of the racialized nation. Miscegenation, as the “privileged sex crime of nativist modernism” (78), kept alien genes at bay and the nation pure; cultural pluralism as an irreducible racial essence rendered immigrant memories foreign and incompatible with the nation’s familial heritage. Zones of exclusion were drawn keeping the biological and cultural alien a race apart.

In view of the social legitimacy and immense popularity of racist nationalism, the challenge for AHEPA was to demonstrate its racial “whiteness.” If for racist nationalists forgetting the memories of the race was an impossibility, positing the racial whiteness of the Ahepans assured that AHEPA’s racial memories naturally belonged to the nation. Since in

the logic of racist nationalism race determined culture, AHEPA's cultural assimilation would have mirrored its racial fitness for national belonging. AHEPA turned the argument of "nativist modernism" on its head. If the American ideals of republic citizenship were traced to ancient Greece and if culture was racially determined, the Ahepans, as direct racial descendants of the ancient Greeks, did not merely represent natural Americanness, they embodied "ur-Americaness." It was only a step away from this position to argue, as a pro-Americanist immigrant did in 1925, for "the Hellenic Origins of the Anglo-Saxons" (quoted in Saloutos 1964:237).

The task therefore was to racialize AHEPA's assimilation and demonstrate that its cultural conformity was inextricably linked to its racial past. To constitute its intrinsic cultural and racial "whiteness," AHEPA needed to naturalize the connection between politico-cultural Americanism and racial Hellenism, to construct its assimilation in public as American *and* Hellenic. A strategy to this end entailed participation in the civic spectacles commemorating the American nation.

AHEPA collectively participated in national spectacles of Americanism such as Memorial Day and Fourth of July commemorations. In these occasions, its members were uniformly dressed, and "carried canes, emulating American lodges" (Papanikolas 2002:162–163). The patrol, "a precision AHEPA marching unit . . . [whose] members [were] trained to participate in . . . national observances" embodied discipline, order, precision, and uniformity (Order of AHEPA, 1995 *Historical calendar*, El Camino Real District #20, Charitable Foundation, Inc.). It projected a visual *embodiment* of political/cultural Americaness. As such, it entailed more than symbolic allegiance to the nation and tribute to national memories. It asserted a claim of *habitation* in the nation. As Paul Connerton suggests, rituals demand that participants should not only be cognitively competent in them but "must be habituated to those performances." Practices of habituation are "to be found—in the bodily substrate of the performance" (1989:71); "the past is, as it were, sedimented in the body" (72). AHEPA's public embodiment of the principles of one hundred-percent Americanism constituted a claim of habituation to the memories of the nation; AHEPA made itself a spectacle of its naturalization to the nation.²²

Following Foucault's model of visibility, displays, and the seeing of displays, are not natural processes but practices associated with power relations (Rajchman 1988). Through the visual display of its Americanism, AHEPA offered itself to be seen in manner consistent with the visual economy of political/cultural as well as racist nationalisms. The conformist display of American Hellenism made visible to the public that AHEPA had arrived in American modernity. In turn, AHEPA's coevalness

to Americanism dismantled the racist visual association of immigrants with sub-humanity. Assimilated American Hellenism exhibited the political, cultural, and racial whiteness of the Greeks. It also displayed the power of political/cultural and racist nationalism to constitute immigrants into authentic Americans. When the AHEPA patrol won the first prize in the parade competition (July 4, 1926 Springfield, Mass.) commemorating 150 years of American independence, the compatibility between Americanism and Hellenism was ritually sanctioned. In the words of the parade chairman: "This goes to prove that you do not have to be born in America to become a real American. The spirit which you boys show today on this occasion, is enough to outshine any of us born in this land" (quoted in Leber 1972:202). American Hellenism was legitimized as a naturalized component of American whiteness.

Here we are faced with a paradox. Immigrant forgetting was inextricably linked with the invention of a Greek ethnic past; becoming modern, i.e., an American national could not be separated from engaging with that past. As Paul de Man's reading of Nietzsche shows, forgetting in modernity becomes an impossible project, since "The more radical the rejection of anything that came before, the greatest the dependence on the past" (1970:400). The "combined interplay of a deliberate forgetting with an action that is also a new origin, reaches the full power of the idea of modernity," de Man wrote, as he underlined the impossibility of becoming modern as an act of total forgetting (1970:389). "Modernity invests its trust in the power of the present moment as an origin, but discovers that, in severing itself from the past, it has at the same time severed itself from the present . . . the rejection of the past [by a critical historian] is not so much an act of forgetting as an act of critical judgment directed against himself" (390).

It is this predicament that defines the immigrant experience in American modernity: to become modern initiates a judgement on the location of the *ethnic* past in relation to the nation. It is through this movement—which is mediated by power relations—that particular transnational discourses intersect with discourses in the host society on culture, gender, class and race. Following this logic, the nationalization of an ethnic group cannot be reduced to an indigenous phenomenon. Rather, ethnicity in diaspora is constructed at the intersection of transnational and national discourses. Furthermore, various constituencies *within* a national/transnational collectivity negotiate their location in the host society differently, fracturing the notion of a monolithic ethnic collectivity. Counteracting the tendency to homogenize such formations leads to the critical task of identifying the manner in which memory works in specific locations within the system.

AHEPA has been one among many immigrant institutional sites

producing a specific narrative of American national and transnational affiliation. At first glance, AHEPA's political and cultural distancing from Greek nationalism could be interpreted as further evidence supporting Charles Moskos's view of Greek America as an American ethnic rather than diasporic formation (1990). Yet the implications of my analysis suggest otherwise. If the memory of the ethnic past is an integral component of immigration in modernity, and if immigrant identities are constituted at the intersection of national and transnational discourses, it is no longer possible to analytically separate a transnational/diasporic (understood as a relation to a culture claimed as ancestral) and an ethnic identity that is understood as a hyphenation in relation to the host nation. Rather, we should speak of "national/transnational formations" since such entities are constituted as articulations of transnational *and* national discourses.²³

Such an approach resists a linear reading of AHEPA's assimilationism. AHEPA's alignment with one hundred-percent Americanism does not translate as a total transformation of a transnational group into an American national one. The narrative of total assimilation was fractured with contradictions as well as conscious efforts to nourish transnational relations with Greece, which included philanthropy, and the support of immigrant institutions such as Greek language schools (Leber 1972). AHEPA's American modernity was "incomplete" insofar as its annual conventions were seen as occasions to continue a traditional practice, arranged marriage (Papanikolas 2002:217). Moreover, as early as 1932, with the occasion of AHEPA's "excursion to Hellas," marrying within the ethnic group was lauded in moral terms (Chebithes 1935:130):

Of course, the moral effect which cannot be estimated in dollars and cents, is of immensely greater value. The many marriages between excursionists and girls 'back home' constitute some of the greatest of the benefits derived from these excursions.

As Yiorgos Kalogeras has observed, it was not that in early Greek America transnational ties were gradually eliminated (2001:49); rather, immigrants continued to connect with Greece, even though the center of their political and cultural affiliation was shifting towards America.²⁴

AHEPA's politics of memory and its implications

Once approached as a case of self-reflexive positionality, AHEPA's project becomes an astonishingly sophisticated reading of American political/cultural and racist nationalisms. In the process of consenting

to the Americanization imperative, AHEPA sustained an identity politics designed to counteract the relegation of the Greeks as second-class citizens. Any reading of the histories of the Order cannot miss AHEPA's view of itself as a custodian of Greek reputation in America. The biography of AHEPA's founder, for example, emphasizes his commitment to "battle for Hellenism" (Chingos 1935:185) through a relentless "fighting with editors and publishers of papers who printed disparaging remarks and unfounded reports against the fair name and reputation of the Hellenic people" (193). AHEPA successfully lobbied for the removal of "dialogue considered derogatory of Greeks . . . from the movies *The Yellow Ticket* (1932) and *Bureau of Missing Persons* (1934)" (Moskos, 1990:42) and was pioneer in its lobbying for the return of the Elgin Marbles to Greece (Leber 1972:227–228). It later extended its politics outside the community, leading the way among non-Jewish organizations "to denounce the Nazi regime in Germany" (Georgakas, 1992:21).²⁵

AHEPA accomplished what was deemed impossible by racist nationalists and progressive racists alike. In demonstrating Greek assimilability, it refuted charges of Greek racial inferiority. Capitalizing on its rapid assimilation within the immigrant generation, it did not miss the chance to thwart the principles of progressive racism. In this regard, the following statement by the Supreme secretary of the Order Andrew Nickas during the 1925 Chicago Convention banquet is particularly appropriate. AHEPA presents "a convincing argument to those who believe that the assimilation of any foreign group, to the American ideals and principles, is not possible in one generation" (quoted in Leber 1972:195). The refutation of the discourse of the "genetics of salvation," (inherent in Fairchild's colonialist anthropology) could not have been missed by an audience shrewd in identity politics and painfully aware of the anti-Greek sources of the times.²⁶ AHEPA's cultural politics can be seen as a popular anthropology countering the percepts of colonialist, official anthropology while internalizing its core evolutionary percepts.

The public recognition of AHEPA as the embodiment of "the noblest attributes and highest ideals of true Hellenism" (quoted in Leber 1972:233) and AHEPA's own self-ascription as "divinely ordained" (213)—in the words of its Supreme President Dean Alfange in 1927—introduced hierarchical fissures within immigrant Greek America. The representation of AHEPA as a noble immigrant class could have fallen prey to the logic of racist nationalism which associated immigrant whiteness with class status. Throughout its intellectual history, racist discourse allowed the possibility of a class-based model of racial stratification. Racist nationalists, who linked racial degeneration and inferiority

with a fall from an aristocratic class location, decried the fact that America was receiving the lower strata of European “mongrel” populations, and not the racial patricians/elites. As Benedict Anderson argues, the origins of racism should be sought “in ideologies of *class*, rather than in those of nation” (1983:149). It was the “putative sire of modern racism” (149), Joseph Arthur, Comte de Gobineau, who inspired American racist nationalists (Gossett 1963). In his *America’s Race Heritage* (1922) Clinton Stoddard Burr drew from Gobineau to point out that the social class of the immigrants was a further proof of their non-whiteness. Burr conceded that traces of Nordic blood are still evident in the “higher classes of Northern Italians, Poles, Magyars, and Bohemians, from Germanic infusions” (138), but he reminded his audience that the “new immigrants” originated not from the higher intellectual classes, but from “the mongrel submerged populations, the very dregs of European humanity” (177). To prove the non-Hellenicity of the Greek immigrants, Burr similarly argued that “the blood of the classic Greek and the noble Roman patrician has mostly disappeared” (23), with traces of Nordic blood being evident among only the Modern Greek gentry. Burr concluded that Greeks now belong to the Graeco-Latin group which is also represented by the Italians, Spanish, Portuguese, “white” Mexicans, and Romanians, thus racially homogenizing Mediterranean people along class lines.

By implication then, the capacity to assimilate into “white Americanness” laid a claim to an elite status within an immigrant group. Assimilation fractured ethnicity along class lines, posing no challenge to the basic tenets of racist nationalism. Prospective immigrants, or those immigrants within the polity who operated outside the discursive space of whiteness, were subject to racial and cultural stigmatization. Complex cultural and class fault lines were drawn among assimilated American Hellenes, the immigrant working class and those Greek immigrants barred from entry into the polity.²⁷

AHEPA extolled the ideals of America. It praised the nation, embracing principles such as democracy, freedom, equality and justice. It can be said that its version of Americanism obeyed the providential logic of American nationalism that projects the nation “not as it is but to what it should be and can become” (Coleman 1970:75). Such an idealist interpretation locates AHEPA in relation to the narrative of national progress and serves to unequivocally legitimize AHEPA’s assimilationism.

An alternative interpretation offers itself once AHEPA is seen in relation to the ideological, class-based component of one-hundred-percent Americanism. As I have noted, in the early years of the republic, Americanism was inextricably connected with the propertied class. The ownership of property served as a sign of self-sufficiency and indepen-

dence, both cardinal virtues of republican citizenship. In post-World-War-I America, when vast, grass-root labor unrest (over 4,000,000 workers went on strike in 1919 alone) Americanism served the interests of the American bourgeoisie to curb the power of working-class unionism. As Asher and Stephenson (1990:20) have argued, the ideology of a citizen's self-sufficiency served well to advance the corporate version of unbridled capitalism. American businessmen espoused Americanization as a multi-stranded strategy to fight against collective unionism. On the one hand, Americanization workshops and nationalization rituals were routinely introduced in the workplace to discipline workers and in turn to maximize productivity and lessen political unrest. On the other hand, strikers and unions were branded as un-American; immigrant working-class activism was often conflated with political radicalism, and stigmatized as un-patriotic and subversive (Bukowczyk 1990).²⁸

However, Americanism was a contested ideal. As labor historian James Barrett argued, the class-conflict between corporate America and labor entailed a struggle over the meaning of Americanism. For the middle-class, Americanism meant, in the immediate aftermath of the First World War, patriotism, nationalism, and conformity to bourgeois political, economic and cultural ideals. For sectors of the working class, including many immigrants, Americanism stood for an alternative set of workers' rights. Seeking to share in the wartime profits and participate in the process of industrial corporate restructuring, labor advocated collective bargaining, wage increase and the democratization of the work place. Immigrants, who as a vulnerable class were blatantly abused, were attracted to the labor's call for activism.²⁹ Socialized in their work place and labor unions to the principles of "working-class Americanism," they demanded humane treatment, "decent" American wages (Barrett 1992:1051), the payment of overtime, and the termination of phony pay scales widely used by the mill and coal industries. This "labor's version of Americanism," often expressed through a patriotic and democratic rhetoric, was crushed by the collective mobilization of capital and its ideological propaganda. Tainted as un-American by middle-class Americanizers, it was decimated during the state-sponsored suppression of working-class activism, which split the labor movement, causing its decline in the 1920s (1020).

By implication then, AHEPA's one hundred percent Americanism cannot be disassociated from the ideological and material suppression of "working-class Americanism." In fact, dominant Americanism fractured immigrant communities along class lines. Not unlike the case of the Irish, German, and Polish-American middle-class elites (Sullivan 1994; Bukowczyk 1990), AHEPA's class loyalties proved stronger than ethnic bonds. Middle-class American ideals did not include those social

reforms sought by the exploited and socially stigmatized working class. AHEPA's pro-business orientation and socioeconomic success aligned the Order with the national ideology of "the American bourgeoisie, who viewed themselves as the product of a unique national culture that offered the individual the opportunity to excel and accumulate great wealth and power" (Asher and Stephenson 1990:20). The class-based legitimization of the ideology of America as the land of freedom, democracy, justice and opportunity enabled those operating within this discursive space to both extol America and overlook practices of injustice and exclusion taking place within—often in the name of the nation.

AHEPA's politics of memory bequeathed a valuable lesson to Greek America: a conformist politics of memory in compliance with dominant ideologies returns long term social dividends. The American Hellenic claim to "whiteness" came packaged with privileges, as the following public reception of the national AHEPA convention by city officials in Columbus, Ohio testifies:

Persons coming to Columbus during this convention will not need a key to the city for no door will be locked to exclude the fine citizenship that composes the personnel of this national organization. The public buildings, the churches, the schools, the parks, the universities and in fact all of the city is pleased to open wide the door of hospitality to the patriotic citizenship of Greek ancestry that has made this country its adopted home. (AHEPA *Convention Album*, Columbus, Ohio, 1934)

Middle-class Greek America and the politics of forgetting

The uses of ethnic memories are never innocuous or neutral. They serve specific interests and work as powerful mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. Memories created in the past do not remain frozen in time, they circulate into present modes of remembering. Often the similarities between what was established in the past and what is remembered in the present are recognizable. When, for example, a Greek-American businessman, interviewed for the recent PBS documentary *The Greek Americans* (1998), asserted that "the Greeks that left Greece and came to America brought the best of the culture and forgot the worst," he brought the past into the present. For him, the "best of the culture" entailed "education, hard work, and charity," values which have all been embraced by middle-class Greek America in general and AHEPA in particular since early on in the Order's history. In fact, there is a strong resonance between the above statements and the view expressed almost seventy-five years earlier, in the 1926 article entitled "Americanism and Ahepanism": "the men and women who left their native lands preserved

and brought with them only those things worth preserving" (quoted in Leber, 1972:194). There is unmistakable evidence of an enduring narrative that links past and present in terms of the cultural and moral rebirth of Greeks in America (Kalogeras 1992).

At other times, however, the threads connecting past and present memories are less tightly connected, and they point towards recognizable, albeit tenuous, similarities. Ambiguity, not equivalency, may define the transmutations of past constructions of memory in the present. Compare, for example, the production of memories about Greek America's response to discrimination by the narrator of the documentary *The Greek Americans* (1998) and the historian Theodore Saloutos:

It wasn't easy, but we [the Greeks] overcame [discrimination] with grace and humour [narrator, *The Greek Americans*, 1998].

What in effect was happening was that Greek-American businessmen, who felt the menacing hand of nativist opposition, were organized for self-protection. Instead of meeting kind with kind and resorting to violent action, marked by bigotry and hate, the Greek-Americans, the immigrants of yesterday, chose the method of peaceful assembly and democratic discussion. They decided upon organization, persuasion, and positive action. (Saloutos 1964:249)

Despite their difference, the excerpts share a commonality in representing Greek Americans as restrained, proudly defiant people who overcame discrimination with dignity. Their resonance, however, ends here. In view of my discussion of the Republican imperative of citizenship, Theodore Saloutos's analysis effectively captures AHEPA's project: the adoption of a defense strategy was based on disciplined action that demonstrated the Greek immigrants' fitness for self-government. The perspective of the documentary film's narrator, on the other hand, enunciates the effects of discrimination on the Greek American collective. His narrative forgets the devastating human suffering caused by racism. In doing so, the narrator violates even the most rudimentary rules of historical documentation. Greek Americans have expressed deep-seated anger, feelings of profound humiliation, and suffered psychological traumas in the face of discrimination. They have often resorted to violence as means of self-defense. But humor? No hint of grace or humor can be identified in the following incident, documented by Helen Papanikolas:

Two lynchings of Greeks were thwarted in Utah by their armed countrymen. . . . An eighteen-year-old Greek traveling through Idaho was almost lynched by farmers. On his way to Montana he had stopped overnight and attended a movie. When the Pathé News showed war atrocities, he was

pulled out of the theater and taken to a tree to be hanged. He begged the men to look into his pocket for bonds. The Liberty bonds saved him, but he was told to get out of town immediately. (1990:361)

The documentary narrator's cultural amnesia brings to the fore the urgency for critical scholarship to untangle the threads connecting the uses of Greek-American memory, past and present. Who produces ethnic memory in Greek America today? What kind of memories are created and to what end? How does the creation of present memories of the past connect with past ideologies of remembering? The vicissitudes linking past and present memories are too complex to be adequately treated in this paper. However, the ideology of cultural amnesia which grew roots in early Greek America, and circulates in more recent narratives on Greek-American identity, is within the parameters of the discussion here regarding the "selective forgetting" of national violence in Greek America. By "selective forgetting," I do not mean that AHEPA, or Greek America in general, have forgotten the violence of American racism. The current proliferation of popular and scholarly accounts on nativist violence nurtures memories of past discrimination (Karampetsos 1998; Leber 1972; Papanikolas 2002; Scofield 1997). Greek Americans are currently becoming aware that national unity, as Renan (1990:11) has it, "is always effected by means of brutality."

The issue of course is not to merely recount past violence and document its effects, but also to account for its causes and its ideological implications in the making of ethnicity. With this in mind I use the term "selective forgetting" to refer to an ideology of ethnic amnesia which explains discrimination as a social aberration in an otherwise benevolent nation. In a number of intersecting Greek-American narratives, patterns of exclusion in American society are seen as deviant attitudes, rather than as inherent structures operating throughout American history. Such a selective memory denies and therefore fails to confront institutionalized discrimination evident even in contemporary, *mainstream* America (Foner 2000). In some instances, as I pointed out, Greek-American amnesia blatantly violates all rules of historical remembering, belittling profound human suffering. Therefore, I feel compelled to critically address the cultural production of memory in Greek America. Even though selective memories "cannot be avoided," as Davies pithily notes, they "can be counteracted" (quoted in Lidchi 1997:204).

The politics of forgetting, which exonerates nativism, and as a result idealizes the nation, has deep roots in Greek-American history. As Ioanna Laliotou (1998b) suggests, this cultural amnesia was widely sanctioned by early Greek immigrant institutions such as the press. She writes: "Stories of anti-immigrant discrimination and violence were

particularly excluded from mainstream chronicles of Greek migration to the United States. Stories about anti-immigrant mob riots and lynchings were suppressed in mainstream memory of the early years of immigration as isolated events" (203). Such accounts, widely circulating in the Greek press, officially "registered in memory violence and anti-Greek racism as a self-inflicted phenomenon" attributing or even justifying nativist violence in the name of protecting American ideals (203). The editor of *Atlantis* in 1909 explained to his audience that "the revolt against the Greeks was the natural consequence of the general condition of the Greeks" (quoted in Laliotou 1998b:203), thus attributing mob wrath to the personal failure of the Greeks to Americanize.

Regulation and exclusivity, as Laliotou points out, were commonplace practices in the official inscription of ethnic memories, contributing "to the rigidification of fixed and homogeneous notions of national identity" (204). It was of paramount interest to the middle-class to sanction Americanization. The stigma attached to non-conforming immigrants posed a constant threat to undermine its economic and social interests. The Greek middle-class discovered early on that its class status provided no necessary protection in a society that ethnicized discrimination. The ideology of forgetting identified by Laliotou was instrumental in immigrant assimilationist politics which simultaneously emphasized and suppressed memories of nativist violence. The claim to national membership precludes a critique of violence as national, relegating it as an isolated exception. Here the nation is seen as inherently benevolent. On the other hand, the association between coercion and non-conformity recognizes violence as an inherent mechanism sanctioning national conformity. The immigrant middle-class wishes to forget violence but cannot afford not to remember it. The ambivalence that locates violence outside and simultaneously inside the nation informs a politics of memory based on the historical awareness that while assimilation ensures the kindness of the nation, non-conformity sparks its wrath.

The early ambivalence towards nativism was reconfigured in the attempt to historicize AHEPA in the aftermath of the Johnson Immigration Act of 1924. In *AHEPA and the Progress of Hellenism in America*, Vassilios Chebithes (1935:24), a distinguished politician, gifted orator and president of AHEPA, reluctantly though unambiguously inscribes the memory of American nativism as a historical fact. Yet, he retains the earlier notion of nativism as a national aberration, an "insane wave of counterfeit brand of Americanism." He writes:

The Hellenes in this country had purchased their every right to citizenship upon the field of battle. . . . The title-deeds—signed, sealed and delivered

to them by official America—conveyed unto them the full right and privilege to stand upon equal footing with every other law-abiding citizen of the United States, and to receive equal consideration in their efforts to labor, trade and barter, and to enjoy unmolested the common endearments of American life.

It must be reluctantly and regretfully admitted, that such was not the case. It is a well known fact that immediately after the close of the war, there developed and spread in practically every section of the country certain un-American sentiments and practices which greatly disturbed the domestic tranquility of the nation. These hybrid sentiments crystallized in the forms of organized groups of individuals who, for personal profit and advantage, went about preaching the wicked gospel of dissension and discord, pointing out seeming dangerous and holy religious and racial differences among those who made up the citizenship of the United States. They went about stirring up strife and hatred in the hearts of men—spreading, arousing and simulating racial antipathy, religious tolerance [sic] and hateful bigotry in the minds of the weak, the uninformed, the misguided and the gullible—making, by their crafty tricks and dark artifices—‘the worst appear the better reason.’ (1935:23–24)

I have quoted this passage at length as a perceptive commentary on a particular era, postwar nativism. Chebithes astutely surveys the terrain of racial politics to confront a breach in the American narrative of national egalitarianism. America did not keep its promise for national inclusion to those immigrant patriots who were willing to spill blood for the nation. America’s contract with immigrants awkwardly stands as an empty legal ascription, challenged by the institutional triumph, as we have seen, of racist nationalism. There is an elegiac quality in the author’s rhetoric. Chebithes is crushed by the breach of contract, and is shocked by the fact that Greeks’ participation in a “sacred” rite of national loyalty does not translate into full-fledged inclusion. He therefore castigates nativism as un-American.

Chebithes is justified in this assessment insofar as nativism violates American ideals of universal inclusion. Indeed, the erasure of this political principle is un-American, since consent is replaced with descent as the sole criterion of national belonging. Yet, dismissing nativism as an irrational aberration advocated by few self-interested individuals and embraced by the “weak, the uninformed, the misguided and the gullible” casts the issue of discrimination as an individual pathology, not an institution deeply embedded in the social structure. In this manner, Chebithes lays the foundation for an ideology of selective forgetting of institutional nativism—rampant at the time of Chebithes’s writing—and privileges a memory of America as an intrinsically benevolent nation. In doing so, he articulates an enduring Ahepan narrative which erroneously translates American ideals as American realities.

Take the authoritative history of the Order of AHEPA, for example. Not unlike Chebithes, George Leber (1972:78) acknowledges the operation of the multifaceted anti-immigrant forces in the early 1900s and expresses his strong opposition to it. He assumes a resolutely critical stance against discrimination and nativism, which he dismisses as "unfounded and irrational arguments." However, the point is not whether nativist racism is unfounded in hindsight, but that it was considered institutionally legitimate at that time, and that it was sanctioned by the "enlightened" American nation which Americanized Greeks elegiacally extolled. After all, it was the polity which implemented the racist restrictive Reed-Johnson Immigration Act. The ahistorical view of nativism as irrational locates it outside the institutional apparatus of nation-making. Once more, discrimination is pathologized and dismissed, "footnoted as an exceptional case," to use Knobel's apt phrase, "and then ignored" (1996:xix).

The selective remembering of America as a benevolent nation defers the critique of structures of inequality and in turn, the opportunity to demythologize the American ideology of universal inclusion. Belonging to America has not been solely a matter of choice; it has been historically constituted around the tension between the consent to belong to the nation, patterns of ethnic inclusion, and patterns of race-based exclusion (Takaki 1987). As Behdad (1997) has shown, national belonging is a contested site where ambivalence, not unambiguous acceptance, underlines sentiments towards immigrants, particularly "non-white" ones. At the time of Chebithes's writing, for example, descent was made an official criterion of exclusion, as foreign-born Asian Americans were legally denied the privileges of citizenship. Racist nationalism in this case was sanctioned not solely by "uninformed" citizens but by the laws of the country.³⁰ Moreover, it was the U.S. Congress that "failed to enact anti-lynching legislation until after World War II," neglecting to punish all but a handful of perpetrators in the systematic and widespread lynching of racial minorities, predominantly African Americans (King 2000:147). Even today, more than thirty years after Leber's work, discrimination is an integral part of the social fabric of American society, despite "an increasing acceptance of pluralism as a central American value" (Foner 2000:209). Anthropologists report enduring structures of discrimination in real estate practices in the suburbs, and everyday talk about "non-white" immigrants even in a cosmopolitan, multicultural metropolis such as New York City (Foner 2000). Nor are anti-immigrant sentiments absent among assimilated ethnics, the sons and daughters of the despised southeastern immigrants. Helen Papanikolas (2000) has broached this subject in public: "When people become secure they are careless about other people. A

good example is the Mexican immigration . . . They are poor, they are in the same position the early immigrants we've been speaking about. I hear children of immigrants voice derogatory terms about newer immigrants." The unqualified celebration of America as a land of opportunity precludes the possibility of critically confronting discrimination in all its guises. It silences social critique and stalls self-reflexivity and cultural change. Is it that the institutionalized memories of the privileges granted to those immigrants who sang the paean of the nation detracts from a more pragmatic recognition of America as a place where there is opportunity and constraint, acceptance and intolerance, fairness and exploitation?

The production of ethnic memories needs not be an ideological instrument of complacent conformity. Greek America currently produces creative counter-memories which are embedded in an ethos of genuine racial pluralism and articulate a critique of nation-glorifying narratives and structures of exclusion. There are great stakes in disseminating these alternative memories since the construction of the past today sets the parameters for imagining ethnicity tomorrow. Ethnic memory, as Michael Fischer (1986) put it, is "future, not past, oriented" (176). The kind of stance future generations will adopt towards the discrimination of vulnerable groups will depend on the memories they will have of its effects. Something will go terribly wrong in the prospect that the humiliation and anger of discriminated individuals will be taken to mean a politely told humorous tale.

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NOTES

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¹ Anthropologist Anna Karpathakis recorded this statement in the 1990s, during her ethnographic work on Greek Americans in New York City. The interviewee, who offers his recollections of AHEPA's past, remains anonymous. This is consistent with the anthropological ethic to protect the privacy of ethnographic subjects.

² I adopt here Higham's (1955:4) classic definition of nativism as an "intense opposition to an internal minority on the ground of its foreign (i.e., 'un-American') connection," as qualified by Behdad (1997:161). Behdad sees nativism as an intrinsic

component, rather than an effect or cause of nationalism. For an excellent treatment of nativism as a social movement in American history see Knobel (1996).

³ Coercion is an intrinsic component of the Americanization process in the work place. James R. Barrett (1992:1003) writes: "the [Ford] company sought to show workers not only the 'right way to work' but also the 'right way to live.' . . . When about nine hundred workers of Greek or Russian extraction missed work to celebrate Orthodox Christmas—on the Julian calendar, hence thirteen days after Christmas on the Gregorian calendar—he [Ford] summarily fired them all. 'If these men are to make their home in America,' he argued, 'they should observe American holidays.'"

⁴ The literature on "whiteness" is too vast to exhaustively include here. Well known works on the "whitening" of European immigrants include Noel Ignatiev's *How the Irish Became White*, New York: Routledge (1995); Karen Brodtkin's *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press (1998); and Matthew Frye Jacobson's *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press (1998). For a review of "whiteness studies" in the American academy see Anagnostou (2000).

⁵ Twenty-one million immigrants arrived in the United States between 1881 and 1920, the vast majority originating from Southern and Eastern Europe (Feagin 1997:20). According to Charles Moskos (1990:8), an estimated 450,000 Greeks, the vast majority males, immigrated to the United States during the "era of mass migration," from 1890 to 1920. This number includes an approximate 100,000 Greeks who emigrated from areas outside the Greek state. It is estimated "that about 40 percent of all Greeks admitted to the United States before 1920 went back to their homeland" (Moskos 2002:41). A caveat is in order concerning my use of the category "Greek immigrants." Undoubtedly, there were significant class and regional differences among Greek immigrant men and women at the time (Papanikolas 1989:29). I retain the homogenizing category "Greek immigrants," however, since nationality was the official classificatory category of immigration policies, and the object of popular and scientific discourse. I should note, however, that socio-economic conditions in migrancy exacerbated Greek regional differences in several contexts. The writings of Helen Papanikolas on Greek mine-workers in Utah offer valuable information on the manner regional identities and antagonisms, a vital issue in Greek political culture at the time (see Tziovas 1994), were played out in early Greek America. Cretans primarily identified regionally; "in their talk they differentiated themselves: 'There were six of us. Two Greeks and four Cretans.'" Inter-regional hostility was rampant, erupting during elopements. When, for instance, "several Roumeliot *palikaria* eloped with Cretan girls and had to be guarded by their friends wherever they went" (Papanikolas 1971:64). Strikebreaking further fueled regional antagonisms. During the 1912 strike in the Bingham copper mines, the notorious labor agent Leonidas Skliris brought strikebreakers "from the Greek mainland." "Enmity between them and the Cretan strikers," Helen Papanikolas (1976:419) writes, "never healed." For a discussion of the economic base of de-regionalization and the concomitant ethnicization of Greek immigrants in present-day Astoria see Vouyouka-Sereti (2002).

⁶ For a discussion of the cultural and political superiority of "American Racial Anglo-Saxonism" see Horsman (1981). Assimilationism and racist nationalism were not mutually exclusive strains of nativism. Racist assumptions were common in assimilationist thought [Michaels (1995) calls this strain "progressive racism"]. Furthermore, they often intersected in the politics of immigration. For example, the National Americanism Commission, a political arm of the ultra-assimilationist American Legion, "lobbied Congress for immigration restriction, illustrating how restrictive legislation and Americanization converged" (King 2000:108). I should mention that cultural representations of immigration were much more diverse than depicted here. Humanitarian social democrats, pluralists

and, relevant for the Greek case, philhellenes did generate alternative narratives about the immigrants. Grace Abbott, Jane Addams, Thomas James Lacey, Randolph Bourne, and Horace Kallen are well known authors who did not align themselves with the paradigms of cultural/political and racist nationalism. For the purposes of this paper, I focus on cultural and racist nationalisms because of their institutional dominance in the immediate aftermath of post WWI American society.

⁷ Indicative of the shifting racial classifications of the immigrants, the reference to the phenotypical “whiteness” of the Greeks was not a norm in the racialized discourse of the era. The discourse of racial Hellenism, which rendered the ancient Greek body as the ideal of physical development and consequently as the icon of modern European identity (Leoussi 1995), was employed in America to underline the immigrants’s distance from phenotypical “whiteness”: “We never picture the heroes of Greek epics, undersized, like these moderns; round headed, looking into the world out of small, black, piercing eyes, their complexion shallow and their hair straight black. We too, would place them nearer modern Palermo than ancient Athens, and judge their blood to have flowed through the veins of rough Albanese mountaineers and crude Slavic plowmen, rather than through the perfect bodies of those Greeks who have dissolved with their myths, and who disappeared when Mt. Olympus was deserted by its divine tenantry” (Steiner 1906:283–284).

⁸ Denial of coevalness is a site then where the colonial discourse on natives (see Fabian 1983) and the discourse on immigration intersect. They both posited racial arguments on lack of fitness for “self-government” to regulate and discipline colonial and immigrant subjects. Like representations of immigrants at home, American colonial discourses are replete with references on the racial non-fitness of subjugated people abroad (see Jacobson 2000). In the case of Greek America, it was Henry Pratt Fairchild, a pioneer in transnational anthropology (he conducted fieldwork both in Greece and Greek immigrant communities in the United States), who denied the immigrants’ coevalness with American modernity. Not unlike Greek immigrants in the United States, Ionian islanders were also inscribed by colonial discourse as non-white, in fact as “Black Greeks” (Gallant 2002:37).

⁹ Racists took this point further: they located the immigrant working class within a framework of biological evolution. Nonverbal coding such as the body posture of working class laborers was seen as a sign of sub-humanity in early twentieth century American theater. In Eugene O’Neil’s *The Hairy Ape*, for example, “the ethnic stokers are objectified by association with their shovels, which force them into the bent posture of pre- or sub-human life forms” (Smith 1995:24).

¹⁰ Ethnographic statements, therefore, such as those reported by Karpathakis, cannot be treated as transparent “evidence” of truth, but as representations that need to be contextualized in relation to larger social discourses.

¹¹ Publications disseminating racist nationalism proliferated in the 1920s. Influential works of that era include Kenneth Roberts’s *Why Europe Leaves Home* (1922); Clinton Stoddard Burr’s *America’s Race Heritage* (1922); Lothrop Stoddard’s *The Rising Tide of Color* (1920) and *The Revolt of Civilization: The Menace of the Under Man* (1922); Alfred E. Wiggam, *The New Decalogue of Science* (1922) and *The Fruit of the Family Tree* (1924). I should mention here that nativist scholars “desacralized” the Greek war of independence, which served as the focal symbol of nineteenth century American Romantic philhellenism (see Larrabee 1957). For Kenneth Roberts (1922:232), the war was yet another manifestation of “Greek barbarity”: “British leaders and Albanian fighters finally won for them [the Greeks] from the Turks [sic] the horrible exhibition of barbarism and incapacity which is dignified by the name of the Greek war of independence—a war in which the Greeks displayed, as they have so frequently done in recent years, at least as great a capacity for barbarity as the Turks.”

¹² In an autobiographical piece, Helen Papanikolas (1995:8) explains public school racial segregation as a shifting practice, effected by class position and immigrant labor activism. Greek business owners were not exempt from opposition and violent resistance in the early immigrant years. In 1909, mass meetings in Montana passed a resolution and appointed a committee “to confer with the [business-owners] Greeks and induce them to leave the city” (Papanikolas 1970:113). Law-abiding businessmen were vulnerable to nativist violence, given that mob rioting was ethnicized/racialized. An individual’s transgression of racial, legal, or cultural norms caused indiscriminate violence against the transgressor’s co-ethnics, as the “most publicized anti-Greek assault” in Omaha shows. In 1909, in response to the killing of a policeman by a Greek immigrant, “A mob rampaged through the Greek quarter burning most of it to the ground, destroying some thirty-six Greek businesses, and driving all the Greeks from the city” (Moskos 1990:17). The anxiety of the Greek middle class to safeguard ethnic reputation and castigate non-conformity should be understood in this context.

¹³ AHEPA “was middle-class in orientation. It appealed to those [merchants and businessmen] who were climbing the social and economic ladder of success” (Saloutos 1964:250), and “viewed . . . [nativism] as a cunning device to drive them out of business” (247). It was also an all-male organization, which explicitly employed a gendered language of male national progress (see Leber 1972:185). The women’s auxiliary to the Order of AHEPA, Daughters of Penelope, was established in 1929. AHEPA’s early leadership was “comprised of a select group of individuals” (248) “and the non-Greek friends who counseled them” (249). Members included Vassilios Chebithes, an American-educated lawyer and experienced politician, Thomas Burgess an Episcopalian prelate and author of *Greeks in America* (1913), Reverend Dr. J.T. Lacey, and Seraphim Canoutas, author of *Hellenism in America* (1918). The AHEPA membership roster included a host of honorary members who were highly placed officials in the American political and judicial system. In 1924, AHEPA “had 49 chapters and a membership of 2,800. In 1928, 192 chapters and 17,516 members (Saloutos 1964:250). The most vociferous institutional opponent of AHEPA was GAPA (Greek American Progressive Association), established in 1923, in East Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Saloutos pays tribute to GAPA for refusing “to be placed into the strait jacket of conformity by going along with the trend against foreignism” (255). He recognizes GAPA as “a courageous group which waged a relentless, if ineffective campaign to retain its cultural heritage at a time when many others were discarding theirs” (254). Demetrios Callimachos, the “militant editor of the *National Herald*” and “one of the most eloquent supporters” of GAPA (Saloutos 1964:254), advocated an alternative vision to AHEPA’s version of American Hellenism (Laliotou 1998a).

¹⁴ In the twentieth century, masonry shifted its orientation from an organization preoccupied with issues of religion and private morality to a secular organization, defining itself around the tenets of 100% Americanism. Masons saw themselves as a culturally and politically beleaguered group, positing as the racial and class guardians of “real Americanness” against the perceived threat of radicals, immigrants and Catholics. The writings of Joseph Morecombe, an “eminent Masonic editor and writer” exemplify this politics: Morecombe drew attention to the lack of organization of the middle class, claiming “that because the ‘vast majority of the nation is at the mercy of noisy [alien] minorities and scheming groups . . . the voice of real Americanism is not heard.’ He characterized ‘real’ Americans as the middle class, which was ‘hugely helpless and inarticulate’” (qtd in Dumenil 1984:126). The discourse of 100% Americanization was productive then, in terms of articulating proper middle-class Americanism in contrast to alien immigrants. For a discussion of Ahepan membership in freemasonry in Kentucky, see Stephanides (2001).

¹⁵ The Americanization drive made inroads in sectors of the immigrant press.

Government “racial advisers” were in contact with representatives of nationality organizations and lobbied “editors of foreign newspapers to take articles [promoting Americanization] for their papers” (King 2000:113). A newspaper editorial in 1920 made the following case for the Americanization of the Greek immigrants. “Americanization corresponds neither to Turkification, Bulgarization, nor to becoming a Frenchman . . . For one to give up his Greek citizenship and accept a European one represents clear and undisguised treason; . . . America does not seek your head on a platter like another Herod, or as a newer Mephistopheles—your soul for the Devil. America views your Americanism as the discharge of the duties of which Divine Providence entrusted you. In this endeavor it is not driven by an impressive chauvinism or an impious fanaticism” (qtd in Saloutos 1964:237).

¹⁶ Indicative of the organization’s reflexivity, AHEPA met all three criteria recommended by the forty-two-volume Dillingham Commission report. Published in 1911, after four years of research with an estimated cost of \$1,000,000 and headed by the chairman of the Senate Immigration Committee, Senator William P. Dillingham, the report was unsympathetic to the “new immigrants” from southeastern Europe. It recommended that Congress enact restrictions on immigration, and it was assimilationist in scope, envisioning “a model of the United States’s dominant ethnic identity as an Anglo-Saxon one, traceable to the English settlers and subsequent northern European immigrants” (81). It prescribed assimilation though the “learning of English, acquiring U.S. citizenship, and more nebulously, the abandoning of native customs” (King 2000:64). I should note that AHEPA retained Greek folk dances, which featured in its annual conventions.

¹⁷ For a discussion of folklore as a national institution in the service of Greek nationalism see Loring Danforth (1984) and Michael Herzfeld (1986). For the function of literature as a national institution and the role of Greek historiography in constructing nationalist narrative of Greek cultural continuity see Vassilis Lambropoulos (1988) and Alexander Kitroeff (1990) respectively.

¹⁸ Science became the primary mechanism for legitimizing racist nationalism. At the height of the restrictionist movement, early in the 1920s, an unprecedented investment in institutions promoting the “hereditary argument” tilted the scientific consensus in favor of eugenics. A vast network of prestigious academic and research centers such as the National Research Council, the Social Science Research Council, the Carnegie Institution, and influential sectors in the Museum of National History funded eugenically-informed research, and in the process exerted enormous scientific influence. Already by the 1910s eugenics had “entered the curriculum of many major universities through the disciplines of biology, sociology, genetics, and psychology,” while by the 1920s it “had become standard fare in magazines like *Good Housekeeping* and *The Saturday Evening Post*” (Jacobson 2000:162). The scientific legitimation of anti-immigrant ideology in the name of eugenics was part of a larger project advocating the racial homogeneity of the nation. The paradigm of “Scientific Racism” (Barkan 1992) asserted its dominance in the same period, by strategically intervening in debates concerning the basis of human behavior. Positing race as a causal explanation of human differences, its leading advocates capitalized on a pervasive “scientific uncertainty and confusion” and lack of a definitive “epistemological choice among the contradictory alternatives” (77). Highly respected racist scientists such as Madison Grant and Benedict Davenport positioned themselves as key players in the production of knowledge on the “nature-nurture” debate in the biological and social sciences, becoming formidable adversaries to critics of racism and advocates of cultural determinism. Shrewd and militant in its exclusionary academic politics, “Scientific Racism” marginalized its objectors, most notably, anthropologist Franz Boas and his circle.

¹⁹ As Charles Moskos writes, the legislation “closed what had been a virtually open-door policy for Greeks and other European immigrants” (1990:32). It also propelled “a frantic scramble to acquire American citizenship” (33). The upper limit of annual

European immigration was set to 2% of the number of foreign-born counted in the 1890 American census, a year chosen to maximize the entry of northern European immigrants at the expense of southeastern European ones.

²⁰ The opening of Stanley Coben's (1964:52) essay dramatically underscores this point: "At a victory loan pageant in the District of Columbia on May 6, 1919, a man refused to rise for the playing of 'The Star-Spangled Banner.' As soon as the national anthem was completed an enraged sailor fired three shots into the unpatriotic spectator's back. When the man fell, the Washington Post reported, 'the crowd burst into cheering and handclapping' [sic]."

²¹ Claiming a direct link with a past "golden age" has been a constitutive feature in the making of ethnic identities (Smith 1999). The link with ancient Greece offered the basis for immigrant distinction, as the following comments made by the vociferous proponent of assimilation, Theodore Roosevelt, illustrate: "The Greek immigrants' apogee at Hull House was reached on 12 February 1911. On that day, while visiting the world-famed settlement, former President Theodore Roosevelt was informed that the young men in the gymnasium were Greeks. Seizing the opportunity, the President addressed the assembled immigrants and stated that they, unlike other ethnic groups who were expected to abandon old-world loyalties and look toward a new life in America, were exempt because of their own illustrious history" (quoted in Kopan 1990:124).

²² Rituals of visual Americanness permeated the public sphere in the aftermath of World War I. National commemoration organizers shifted their pre-war policies and stressed homogeneity through the display of national symbols at the expense of immigrant cultural representations (Bodnar 1992). Industrial Americanizers staged public spectacles of Americanization as visual cultural transformation. The "Ford English School graduation exercises" offers itself as a telling example: "On the stage was represented an immigrant ship. In front of it was a huge melting pot. Down the gang plank came the members of the class dressed in their national garbs and carrying luggage such as they carried when they landed in this country. Down they poured into the Ford melting pot and disappeared. Then the teachers began to stir the contents of the pot with long ladles. Presently the pot began to boil over and out came the men dressed in their best American clothes and waving American flags" (Schwartz qtd in Zunz 1985:55).

²³ Charles Moskos's (1990:146) view of Greek America as an American ethnic group rather than a Greek diasporic one has been also challenged by Gregory Jusdanis (1991). I should note that Moskos and Jusdanis draw from incompatible definitions of diaspora. The former primarily reacts to the notion of diaspora as an organic, ethnic, cultural and political extension of the nation-state, a transnational national community. The latter emphasizes the transportability of cultural systems, their historically contingent transformations, and their availability in constructing ethnic or diasporic identities.

²⁴ An analysis of AHEPA's relation with Greece and the Greek political and cultural establishment is outside the scope of this paper.

²⁵ In discussing Greek-American initiatives to memorialize George Dilboy, an immigrant born to Greek parents in Asia Minor and Congressional Medal of Honor recipient for his heroic death as an American soldier during WWI, Steve Frangos (2003) has also recognized the astute cultural politics of the Greek immigrant middle-class. By seeking to commemorate the national sacrifice of a Greek immigrant in the "most public of public settings" (8), he notes, "Greek Americans underscored the fact that they had willingly and fully committed themselves to America. . . . [while at the same time] trumpet[ing] their pride at being Greek" (9). It was AHEPA that dedicated the George Dilboy Monument at Somerville, Mass., in 1930 (Leber 1972:260). Frangos is unnecessarily polemic towards Modern Greek Studies scholars when he writes: "The Greek immigrant businessmen and community leaders perhaps understood the American media in a more sophisticated way

than their native-born fellow citizens is a concept yet to be entertained by Modern Greek Studies programs" (9).

²⁶ Fairchild's argument on modern Greek immigrants as degenerate descendants of the ancient Greeks had been explicitly refuted by Thomas Burgess—an honorary AHEPA member—in his *Greeks in America* (1913). For a specific discussion of Fairchild's and Burgess's arguments see Anagnostou (1999).

²⁷ Support for immigration restriction was not absent in Greek America. An article entitled "New Tendencies in the Thinking of the Greeks in America," published in the *American Greek Review*, in 1926, made the following point: "Along with the rest of the inhabitants of this fair land we proclaim it to be God's country; and since the barring of immigrants increases our well-being we too are in favor of the enforcement of the immigration law. The constitution we revere and uphold, and in order not to be out of line from the rest of the free Americans we too disobey the eighteenth amendment" (qtd in Saloutos 1964:257). For the Greek immigrant women in the mining communities of Utah, whose experience in running boarding houses for immigrant single men resembled "a life of slave labor," immigration restriction was welcome on the grounds that it offered relief from unbearable workloads (Papanikolas 1981:89).

²⁸ Labor unionism, the relationship between immigrants and unions, and the ideological orientation of immigrant working-class activism are too complex processes to do justice in this essay. Dan Georgakas (2000), the primary labor historian of the Greek immigrant left, has discussed the relationship between the various ideological constituents of the American labor movement and immigrant working-class activism.

²⁹ For a discussion of the patterns of immigrant exploitation see Helen Papanikolas (1965, 1970).

³⁰ Following the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, the Chinese were ineligible for citizenship until 1943. It was not until 1952 when naturalization eligibility was extended to all Asians.

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