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# Educating Greek Americans

Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Pathways

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## CHAPTER 3

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# The First Schoolbooks for Greek American Children

*Maria Kaliambou*

### INTRODUCTION

When Greeks started immigrating to America toward the end of the nineteenth century, they immediately realized the need for a sound education for their children. Thus, they undertook several educational initiatives either within the community or around their local churches in order to promote Greek language and culture. The majority of the Greek educational books that circulated in America were imported from Greece. However, by the 1930s, when Greek publishing companies were well established in America, Greek immigrants started producing their own books for use in Greek schools. The aim of this chapter is to present and critically analyze the first four schoolbooks written and published by Greek immigrants in America.

The books published in America were a reaction to peer books imported from Greece. Contrary to those imported books, Greek American educational books conveyed ideological messages, which better suited the circumstances of the first generation of immigrants. After close reading and sociohistorical contextualization of the material, I demonstrate that these

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books printed in America reflect a socially conservative outlook, which aimed to fulfill the wishes of the older generation toward the formation of a Greek American ethnic identity.

Greek America has been the focus of historians, ethnologists, anthropologists, and literary scholars, who have researched the historic roots and the formation of the identity of Greek immigrants as manifested in their literature and culture.<sup>1</sup> In addressing the education of Greek immigrants, scholars have discussed some general pedagogical problems in immigrant communities by focusing on the issue of assimilation in the American environment and education as a means of integration.<sup>2</sup> However, there is an astonishing gap in the literature about the schoolbooks used at the newly established Greek American schools. One of the biggest challenges in teaching language and its culture is the use of appropriate pedagogical material. What material did Greek teachers use and why? This chapter fills the gap in our knowledge about the educational solutions created by Greek immigrants during the first half of the twentieth century.

Moreover, through the history of those books we can better understand the complicated relationship between diaspora Greece and homeland Greece. Greek America has a filial relationship with Greece: “[Greece], you are the Big Mother of the World! And I am your oldest daughter, America!”<sup>3</sup> says America to Greece in a brief theatrical dialog in one of those schoolbooks. This metaphor of the “mother–daughter” relationship unveils the inextricable affinity which Greek immigrants have with their homeland. Initially, “the daughter,” the Greek diaspora in America, is in a state of infancy and thus, dependent upon “the Big Mother.” Slowly “the daughter” grows up, self-reflects, and realizes the need to be autonomous. The first Greek American autochthonous schoolbooks are testimonies of the first attempts of the “daughter Greek America” to become independent and also active in publishing. Significantly, the diaspora-daughter has more material and financial resources than Mother Greece.

Therefore, these schoolbooks, as material and cultural objects produced in the diaspora are important for scholars in Greek American studies in order to understand the formation of ethnic identity. They are equally important for book historians who wish to trace the complicated “communication circuit” of agents<sup>4</sup> leading to their production and distribution. This chapter acknowledges those schoolbooks as a significant aspect of the Greek American publishing industry. Although the book history of the diaspora is a relatively recent academic endeavor, this chapter contributes to the broader discussion of ethnic book histories, particularly of European groups in America.

## BOOKS FOR CHILDREN: “PRINTED OUT OF LOVE FOR PROGRESS”

### *“The First Need Is to Learn English”*

During the first decades of the twentieth century there was a significant number of publications produced to fulfill the reading needs of immigrants. Despite the common and widely spread stereotype that the first immigrants had a poor education, these books showcase that the first generation was thirsty for reading and writing.<sup>5</sup> Books with a literary character (poetry collections, novels, short stories), publications with functional purposes (guide books for the new country), and a variety of newspapers and journals appeared on American soil. One of the main educational issues the first immigrants faced was learning the English language. Thus, several types of language books were published: dictionaries, textbooks, language methods, Greek and English grammars, conversational books, letter writing books, and books with technical vocabulary.

Parallel to those books for adults, books for children entered the market in the 1910s until they received a permanent position on publishing catalogs in the 1930s. During the first years of Greek American publishing at the beginning of the twentieth century, publishers considered the demands of the newcomers. As the first generation of immigrants was comprised mostly of bachelor men, who were gradually forming their families in America, there was not an immediate necessity for children’s books. The situation looks different in the 1930s, when children who by that time were born in America, had to receive a proper education. Only then does it become obvious that there was a dearth in the pedagogical material needed to fulfill the educational needs of the younger generation.

The book catalogs of the main publishers in America (Atlantis, Ethnikos Kyrix, and D.C. Divry)<sup>6</sup> showcase the range of Greek children’s literature that circulated in America. The listings in those catalogs make obvious the fact that interest for educational books for children materialized later than adult educational books. In the first book catalog by Atlantis in 1912, there is a limited selection of children’s books.<sup>7</sup> These are illustrated books with short stories, novels, fairy tales, and myths. One entry refers to an anonymous spelling book for children. Atlantis believes that “the first need is to learn English,”<sup>8</sup> and a series of English-Greek educational books for adults is published. Atlantis’ choices reflect the time and social situation of first generation Greek immigrants—namely the importance of learning their host country’s primary language.

In 1930, the *National Herald* published a book catalog in a “methodical and elegant manner” to serve as “a mirror through which one can see [...] all the richness of the library of his bookstore.”<sup>9</sup> Examining the book entries, it becomes evident that the market in the late 1920s and 1930s had a more profound interest in children’s books and children’s education. The catalog has a lengthy section on pedagogical books. It starts with books for elementary schools, such as spelling books, readers for all grades, grammars, books on moral behavior, syntax, history, religion, sciences (physics and mathematics), geography, and maps. The publisher considers the teachers as well. In order to support teachers with relevant material, the *National Herald* offers in a separate section publications about pedagogy, practical advice on teaching, and a collection of poems, songs, and theater skits for school festivals. The next section in the catalog lists books for use in high schools, such as ancient Greek and Latin literature, and dictionaries for modern and ancient Greek language. Finally, the publisher dedicates a section to children and young-adult stories and books, which are mostly translations of European-authored stories and books. This lengthy list demonstrates that the publisher offers a wide variety of books for all schools (elementary, Greek schools, and high schools), as well as supplementary books for teachers, and recreational books for children and adolescents.<sup>10</sup>

The third known publisher D.C. Divry was almost exclusively dedicated to publishing educational books. One book list, printed on the last page on one of the readers in 1944, shows the publisher’s pedagogical interests in language, religion, history, and some literature.<sup>11</sup> The majority of all publications are books for learning the Greek language (spelling books, reading books, grammars, dictionaries). Divry is interested in publishing religious books (such as the Old and New Testament, books about religious history and catechisms) and history books (Greek mythology and ancient Greek history). In addition, Divry publishes the first anthology with collected poems to be recited during school festivals.

The choice of books speaks for itself: Language books for both adults and children receive special attention on all publishing agendas. Adults should learn English, and children should learn Greek. This is in accordance with the Greek educational prerogatives of the time. Learning Greek, and thus saving the language, was the utmost priority of the immigrants, as educator and priest Demetrios Callimachos, in the Sunday edition of the newspaper *National Herald* emphasized. He wrote, “The perpetuation of the Greek language, being taught as something that

inspires the highest ideals of humanity, is our highest duty. The neglect of this duty would be an unforgivable misdeed not only for the Greek nation but for America too.”<sup>12</sup>

*“Throw It Out of the Window!”*

One significant problem arises here. The majority of educational books for Greek schools in America were imported from Greece. According to the Greek educational system at that time, these books were chosen after a competition, and were valid for five years. After their evaluation and approval by the Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, these books could be reprinted (after introducing any necessary changes) and used for an additional two years.

However, these imported books did not reflect the realities of the Greek immigrants in America. Greek children in America had different educational and pedagogical needs than the children in Greece. Several types of Greek schools were founded by immigrant communities, and all were very different from the standardized national school system in Greece. Although there were day schools where children were taught in Greek, the majority of Greek children attended American public schools during the day, and Greek schools in the afternoon. Fewer children attended Saturday and Sunday Greek schools.<sup>13</sup> Also, the Greek Orthodox Church, which was an important institution in the preservation of Greek cultural and social life in the United States, played a significant role in supporting the Greek schools.<sup>14</sup> Educators were aware of the importance and influence that the Church played in the school system, from a political, social, and historical perspective. The principal of the first day school in America, founded in Chicago, mentioned that Church and school were “the two pillars which support our national aspirations.”<sup>15</sup>

All these heterogeneous Greek schools in America espoused the same mission: to promote Greek language and culture. Fear of assimilation, and preservation of the Greek language, culture, and identity were the driving forces behind the curricula. However, offering more courses in English and following the American educational system became inevitable. For some pedagogues, the successful future of Greek schools in America relied on the combination of both Greek and American education.<sup>16</sup> Demetrios Callimachos argued that Greek education was important not only to save the Greek language and tradition, but moreover to become “good” American citizens. Callimachos, moreover, believed in a “healthy

Americanization,” which would keep the Greek language and Greek values in alignment with American values.<sup>17</sup> Educators emphasized through the curricula a continuity of Greek culture from past to present, with ancient Greece and Byzantine Greece serving equal roles: Immigrants demonstrated their “dual pride in classical heritage and commitment to the Byzantine tradition.”<sup>18</sup>

The lack of a uniform Greek educational system in America, and the inability to develop a robust Greek-American curriculum, were major challenges which led Greek immigrants to seek help from Greece. Thus, the first schoolbooks arrived from Greece. One common technique among the Greek American publishers was to take imported books and substitute their own cover with their logo.<sup>19</sup> For instance, the publisher Atlas in New York took one of the first circulated readers by the author Ioannis Arsenis, originally published in Athens in 1906 by the publisher Dikaios, and substituted the Greek publisher’s name with Atlas on the title page.<sup>20</sup> Another example is the well-known alphabet book *O Helios* (The Sun), which was published in Athens by Dimitrakos in the 1930s. The publisher Atlantis in New York published it in 1938 by adding the cover of its own company.<sup>21</sup>

Despite all these efforts, the imported books were not suitable for Greek children in America, both in terms of pedagogy but also in aesthetics. The reaction of children toward these books was not positive. According to Boston cleric Athenagoras Kavathas, “when children here in America saw a Greek book in front of them, the only reaction it caused was to throw it out of the window. Loathsome in outside appearance, unappetizing in its content!”<sup>22</sup>

In order to address the above problems several educators in America advocated for writing and publishing schoolbooks in America. They acknowledged the unsuitability of the imported material and emphasized the need for schools to produce their own books.<sup>23</sup> Only in the 1930s were the first schoolbooks for Greek American children written and published in America. These were mostly readers and primers for the elementary schools. The following analysis of the first four schoolbooks produced in the United States reveals the central concerns of the community toward the development of a Greek education in America.

### “THE FOUNDATION OF HELLENISM”

In 1927 the *National Herald* announced in its catalog the publication of the first Greek primer on American soil. The publisher praises its schoolbook as “the most beautiful and most artistic spelling book from all so far”<sup>24</sup> and strongly recommended the adoption of the book to all schools. However, it is not known if this first edition went into circulation.

In 1930, three years after the publication of the first Greek primer, the *National Herald* published a new spelling book written by Venetia Vidali.<sup>25</sup> This reader received a positive review from the *National Herald* (the ethnic newspaper) which called it “the Messiah of American Hellenism”.<sup>26</sup> The publisher was aware of the problematic situation regarding children’s education, and openly advocated that schoolbooks be adapted to the needs of Greek American students. Thus, this reader is “the first schoolbook which was created specifically for the children in America.”<sup>27</sup>

In the preface, the publisher explained his educational mission. He claims that the book “is the last word of the pedagogical science for schoolbooks like this.”<sup>28</sup> With this reader he aimed to address the pressing concerns of parents and teachers. The publisher emphasized the value of those educational books for the future of Hellenism: “The Hellenism of future generations depends on the schoolbook for the Greek children in America. The school book, which helps the teacher and the parents, sets the psychological and intellectual foundation, upon which the Hellenic identity of the child will be built.”<sup>29</sup> The publisher also saw his reader as a “new contribution to the struggle to preserve and perpetuate the Greek language, the Greek tradition and the Greek culture in America.”<sup>30</sup>

Greece reacted positively toward the first reader published in America. The Greek Minister of Education and Religious Affairs, Georgios Papandreou, congratulated the publisher and appraised this book publication as “a national work indeed.”<sup>31</sup> For Papandreou, learning the language meant also preserving the “holy bonds” between the Greeks in America with their motherland Greece.

The reader was printed in two parts. In Part A, the child learns the letters of the alphabet, the numbers, some words, and basic phrases. To make the material more appealing to a young audience, the publisher inserts colorful images, which “are adapted not only to the theme but also to the general psychology and aesthetic reception of the child.”<sup>32</sup> The images depict scenes from nature or from the everyday life of children (such as playing games, or playing with beloved pets). All illustrations have the



signature “printed by the National Herald” [Tipois Ethnikou Kirikos]. They are drawn by anonymous artists, excepting only one image, which bears the signature of the American illustrator M.E. Musselman. Most likely, these images were copied from American books and therefore, depict the lifestyle of an American middle to upper class. The Greek touch is visible only through two images of Greek soldiers in traditional costumes. The image accompanying the letter E (“Ellinopoulo,” Greek Child) depicts a young boy dressed in a folk soldier’s costume (as “tso-lias”). The text reads: “The Greek Child is full of braveness,” demonstrating pride in being Greek.<sup>33</sup>

Part B targets reading practice, and thus is comprised of longer texts. Again, the textual and visual elements illustrate general family scenes and moments of children’s lives. There are efforts to establish “the holy bonds” with Greece by including a few poems by well-known Greek poets, such as Zacharias Papantoniou, Ioannis Polemis, Georgios Drosinis, and Dionysios Solomos, author of the Greek national anthem. The poem by Georgios Drosinis “Greek Soil” describes the common ritual among immigrants of taking some Greek soil with them during their long journey to the *xenitiá* (foreign lands); a ritual which demonstrates a strong desire to remain connected with the homeland and eventually return back home.<sup>34</sup> The schoolbook ends with a small section with phonological instructions for readers unfamiliar with Greek. A vocabulary list of Greek words with their translation in English concludes the book. Finally, the last page of the second volume ends triumphantly, showing the double-headed eagle above the Greek flag with the slogan of Greek irredentism “Again after many years, they will be ours again” (“Pali me chronia me kairous, pali dika mas thanai”) (Fig. 3.1).

### “THE WATER OF LIFE: OUR LANGUAGE”

While the first school reader published by the National Herald was intended for Greek students in Greece, and only included minor revisions for a Greek American audience, the next schoolbook, published in New York City in 1935, was specifically written for Greek American children. The author Eleni Konstantopoulou-Rompapa, another woman active in writing schoolbooks, published a first-grade reader in two volumes. Because of the success of the reader, this led the author to further develop the book and reprint it several times.<sup>35</sup> The titles, as well as the text, change slightly from one edition to the next.

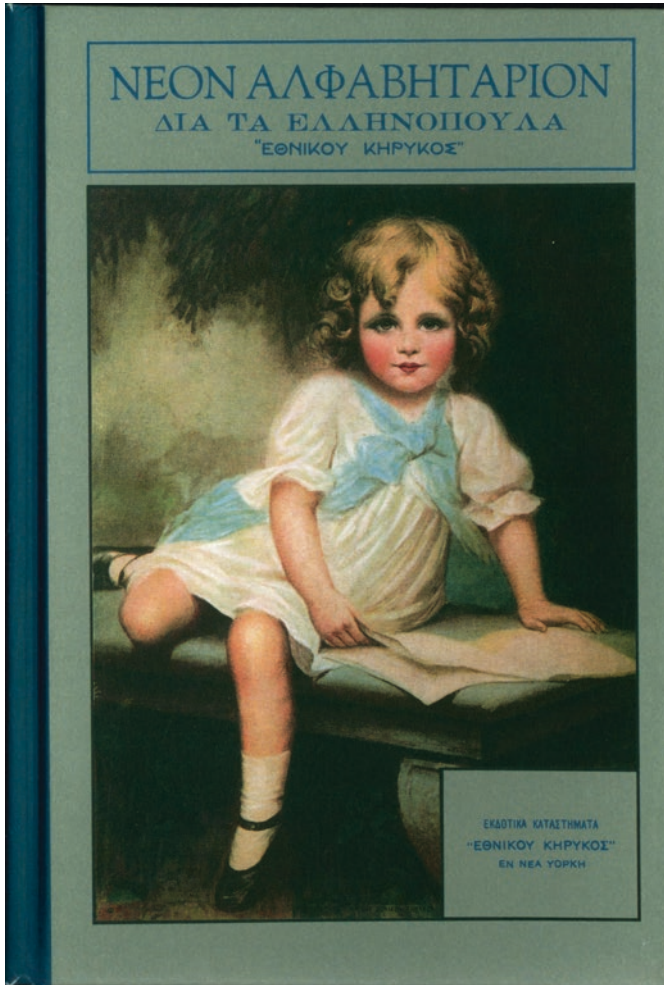


Fig. 3.1 Venetia Vidali. *New alphabet book for the Greek children of National Herald. Part A.* New York: National Herald, 1930

The first volume with the title *The Alphabet Book of the Greek Child* (To Alfavitario tou Ellinopaidos), published by D.C. Divry in New York City, teaches the Greek letters and diphthongs. The author begins with easy texts and moves gradually to more difficult ones. Her purpose is to write a schoolbook that relates to the lives of children; thus, as she mentions in

her explanatory note to the teacher, “all the units are derived from the everyday life of the children at home, at school or at their games, and are with images designed particularly for those lessons.”<sup>36</sup>

The author understands the struggle of Greek children learning two languages. She advises the teachers to keep in mind that Greek American children simultaneously learn two languages (English and Greek). According to her pedagogical suggestions, the teaching of the Greek language should proceed in parallel with their American schooling.<sup>37</sup> She occasionally uses English words with Greek endings<sup>38</sup> as a linguistic strategy to help Greek American students understand the language more readily. Triantafyllidis described this linguistic phenomenon as a “language mix” on the vocabulary level, observed in the first generation and intensified in the next.<sup>39</sup> This mixed language form, according to Constantakos, provided “solidarity and cohesiveness, a common bond of special sentimental attachment and value” to the community.<sup>40</sup>

The book clearly has an indoctrinating character, particularly toward the formation of Greek American identity. The text with the characteristic title “The Good Children” (“Ta kala paidia”)<sup>41</sup> narrates the proper behavior children in America should adhere to: they should attend American school, then Greek school in the afternoon; they should attend Greek Orthodox services on Sunday and also attend Sunday school. Of course, they have to be punctual, quiet, respectful, eat their meals, and drink their milk. The text reflects the mixed everyday life of children in America straddling between two schools, two languages, and two cultures.

Similar to adults, Greek children are depicted expressing their longing to visit Greece. “I would like to go by the big boat to Greece” says one of the protagonist children looking over the wide ocean.<sup>42</sup> Or in another chapter, while they are watching a ship arriving from Greece and disembarking new passengers, they express a wish to board a similar ship to Greece in the summer to see friends and family members.<sup>43</sup> The texts in the first volume, even if brief, familiarize the young readers with the immigrants’ experiences. The stirring images of the blue sea and the long transatlantic sea trip evoke feelings of longing for the homeland, and mediate a nostalgic but hopeful notion of returning to Greece one day.

The second volume named *The Reading Book of the Greek Child in America* (To Anagnosmatarion tou Ellinopaidos tis Amerikis), was also

published by D.C. Divry in New York City, and consists of longer texts, short essays, and poems. The author clearly states in the preface that the book's aim is not only to teach the Greek language but also "to educate the children to form their characters, and mostly to implant to their hearts the love to the values and ideals of the Greek family."<sup>44</sup> The ultimate goal is "to inspire in children the love toward Greek letters and the Greek environment."<sup>45</sup> The use of artistic images both entertained and helped the children to love their Greek books.

Regarding the language, the author consciously chooses "a well-spoken Demotic Greek." However, as she explains, she refrains from using words that remind one of the vulgar demotic ("malliari"). Less familiar words are introduced as a way to assist children in expanding their vocabulary.

Konstantopoulou starts the second part of the book with one of her poems dedicated to the Greek child ("Sto ellinopaido tis Amerikis") who thrives in America but whose roots are in Greece. The children will be proud to feel themselves as descendants of a great generation of Greeks. The book she wrote is like a vessel holding "the water of life, the language," which the child should nurture with great care and joy.<sup>46</sup> The introductory poem makes it clear: Greek children should not forget their ties to Greece, that the beginning and end are Greece, and that a Greek American identity should be centered around Greece (Fig. 3.2).

### "IN GREEK AMERICAN SPIRIT"

In 1935, the first Greek American anthology with theater dialogues for the school festivals was published in New York by D.C. Divry.<sup>47</sup> The author Mimes Demetriou, an experienced teacher at Aristotle School in New York City, aims with his anthology to offer "original works in the Greek-American spirit." By offering new material, his goal was to "fill a gap" and help Greek children "to feel differently for every Greek thing." He even compares himself with the Greek revolutionary writer Rigas Feraios. As Feraios inspired the enslaved Greeks to fight for their freedom, similarly, Demetriou wished to enlighten Greek Americans through Greek learning.<sup>48</sup>

The collection contains three extensive units: The first part consists of poems and monologues, the second of dialogues and theater skits, and the third offers longer theatrical pieces (comedies or dramas). At the end, some Greek poems and folksongs are printed. All of the above were to be



Fig. 3.2 G. Konstantopoulou. *The alphabet book of the Greek child in America. First volume. Second edition, expanded and improved.* New York: D.C. Divry, 1942 [1935]

recited in school ceremonies. The author also inserts a list of letters written by Greek students who visited Greece, noting their impressions of Greece. According to the author, these letters can be useful tools for teachers when they teach geography and history.

A subscriber's list, which is printed on the last two pages, delivers important information about the distribution and readership. Sixty-seven names are listed as subscribers, out of which twelve are recognizable as female names.<sup>49</sup> The author indicates that there were more buyers whose names could not be printed because the book was already in press. The subscribers are from fourteen states in America. Some of them provide their profession next to their names (teacher, lawyer, doctor, or priest). Interestingly, the National Steamship of Greece ordered ten copies of the book. The list indicates that 300 copies were pre-ordered, a significant number for the distribution of books of that time. The author believes that his work is of "national importance"; therefore, it is a "national-religious duty" for the Greek communities to spread the word about his anthology so that every Greek family receives the book.<sup>50</sup>

A recurring topic throughout the anthology is the paramount importance of Greek schools for the community. The poem "We Want Schools!" demonstrates it passionately:

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

Do you want us to know  
Homeland and Religion?  
And Greek family?  
Oh, give us schools!

Give us, oh Greeks,  
Our language, the mother language,  
We don't want Janissaries  
in America.

If you want not to cry  
Later, bitterly,  
Schools should you give to us  
Greek schools!<sup>51</sup>

The poem stresses the importance of Greek traditional values, such as home, religion, and family, in receiving a proper education. Next to these values, learning the Greek language completes the picture of the Greek child who will become a real patriot (and not a Turk janissary).<sup>52</sup> Good Greek schools will cultivate the ethnicity of the next generations. The future of Greek communities is based on a good education of the young generation. The schools will teach them to become model Greek Americans who will care for the elderly, contribute to their communities, and help manage their churches. Thus, children have to learn their ancestry, their religion, and history.<sup>53</sup>

However, Greek schools did not always function well. One major challenge that Greek schools in America faced was the lack of pedagogically trained teachers. As Lagios acknowledges, there is “a shortage on teachers besides priests.”<sup>54</sup> Lagios offers two explanations for the teacher shortage: first, women were discouraged to become teachers because of lack of opportunities; and second, early immigration laws prohibited entry to some categories of immigrants, among them new competent teachers.<sup>55</sup> Some teachers were old-fashioned, strict, and physically abusive, thus, children were reluctant to attend Greek school. The theater play *The Greek School in America* offers contrasting examples of good and bad teachers. The dialogues emphasized the importance of good teachers in inspiring children to love Greek school.<sup>56</sup> Some scenes in the play show friendly and charitable teachers who support young girls and boys, and deliver candies to entice them to go to school.

Another recurring topic in the collection is the return to Greece. In the poem “The longing of the émigré”<sup>57</sup> the protagonist expresses his strong desire to return to Greece: “I want to go back to my Homeland, /to my wife, to my poor children, /I got fed up with the wretched *xenitiá* [foreign lands], /ah, *xenitiá* weighs heavy on my heart!” The hero desires to return to his unforgettable village, to visit his local church, and to forget all his burdens from the *xenitiá*. Also, the common wish among immigrants of “Happy Homecoming”<sup>58</sup> (meaning a good return to the homeland) interspersed throughout the texts shows the desire for the true-loved homeland of Greece. There is also the motif of a mother–daughter relationship where Greece is the mother and America is her first daughter.<sup>59</sup> The mother’s sorrow is the departure of her children. “Live well, my children—in the foreign lands, but come back to me, to your mother. To me!”<sup>60</sup> Moreover, the dilemma continues with a constant comparison

between the two homes, but where Greece triumphs: In Greece things are always better! The author, an immigrant himself, is trying to impart his own wishes for return to his children. He aims to indoctrinate the next generation through his own emotional lenses by inculcating these sentiments upon the Greek children born in America.

There is one text which challenges the notion of return. In the text about the first Greek judge in America, the author, answering the question of why are there not more Greek judges in the US, explains that American Greeks had always intended to return to Greece, thus they did not enter politics or take public positions because those occupations required almost a lifetime of service. The author continues by saying that now there is a larger Greek population in the US, thus, the next generation should be organized in order to play a larger public role in American life. The longing to return to Greece precluded the first generation from progressing and advancing. The idea of return functions here as a handicap for the people, because they could not invest themselves fully in America.<sup>61</sup>

Mimes Demetriou offers an anthology with poems and short stories with a clear ambition to educate and indoctrinate Greek children. An educator himself, he knows and responds to the needs of the Greek educational system in America. His texts are imbued with nationalistic statements: “Without Greece the world would be in darkness. There wouldn’t be culture,”<sup>62</sup> are the straightforward words of a student in a short theater play, which demonstrate the perceived exceptional position of Greece. The anthology shapes the identity of young children by explicitly directing them to become proud Greeks in America by reminding them of their glorious ancestral roots.

The anthology is important for one more reason: its texts are to be presented in school performances or festivals. These school festivals were important not only for the education of children, but also for the coherence of the whole community. The cultural messages in the performances were even more powerful when presented in theatrical texts, where ideology is inserted within the educational framework. Festivals such as these offered a very effective way to teach values and norms while entertaining the community. Thus books for those purposes, such as the anthology by Demetriou, were sources for deciphering the ideological background behind the goals of stakeholders (Fig. 3.3).



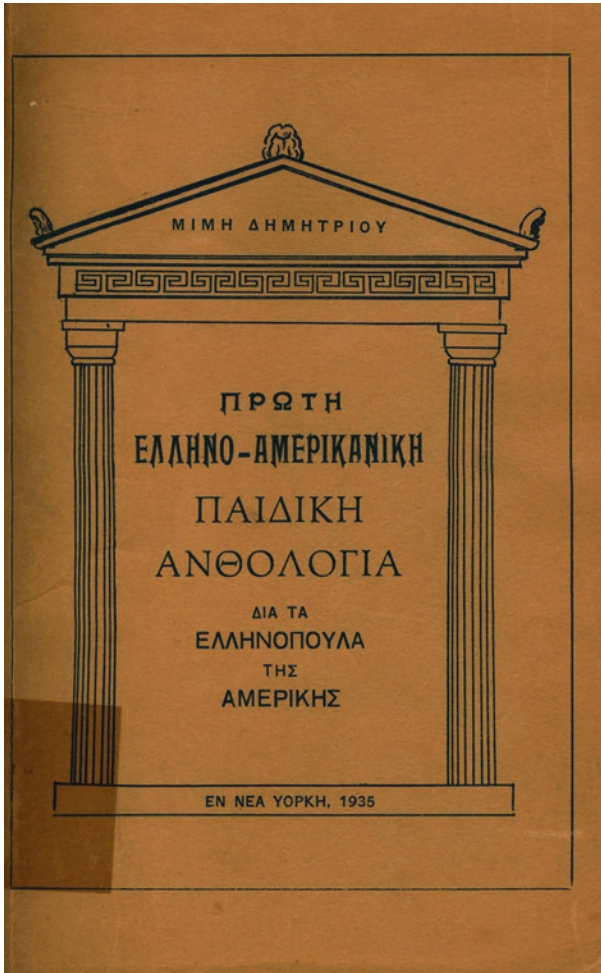


Fig. 3.3 Mimes Demetriou. *First Greek American children's anthology for the Greek children in America*. New York: D.C. Divry, 1935

### “THE PALACES OF MY FATHERLAND”

In 1932 the school reader with the title *The Palaces of my Fatherland* won a competition held by the Supreme Educational Council of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America, and therefore was approved as the only appropriate reader book for the fourth grade of elementary schools. Its first edition was published in 1934 by the National Herald and the author was Platon Papazoglou.<sup>63</sup> The emblematic title *The Palaces of my Fatherland* shows the pride Greeks in the US (should) have for their heritage. The young generation has inherited significant wealth, equal to palaces. The implied message is keeping intact those worthy traditions. The reader is simply structured into fifteen chapters, most of them followed by grammatical exercises. The contents cover three areas: religion (episodes from the Life of Christ, such as Christ’s birth, Christ’s miracles, and the Holy Passion), Greek history (ancient and modern, particularly about the Greek revolution), and a few themes related to Greek Americans (their history and their contribution to American culture). The texts and all the grammatical drills are written in purified Greek *katharevousa*.

The author, concerned about the future of Greek communities in America, states his mission in the preface:

This book aims to give to Greek children in America not only the material on religious studies, Greek history and grammar, everything taught in the schools in Greece, but moreover the necessary knowledge regarding the organization of the communities and the associations, the religious and national festivals and gatherings in which the Greek child will be participating after his graduation, and has not to act as a stranger, but has to understand the words he hears from the religious and community leaders.<sup>64</sup>

The author implies that only when the young generation maintains a connection with their ancestors, will Greek American communities be able to thrive. With his remarks, the author supports the integration of the young generation into the Greek community; this integration will guarantee the continuation of Greek Hellenism in America.

Children learn about the history and achievements of Greeks in America. There are several texts referring to the role that Greek Americans played in American society. There is a hymn to Greek heroes who participated in the American wars, such as the famous and honored George Dilboy.<sup>65</sup> Also, the author acknowledges those successful Greek teachers,

who through their acts and teaching educated the American youth. However, the author praises mostly the laborers who “by their sweat and honorable blood progressed this country.”<sup>66</sup> The aim of those texts is to help young readers position themselves both within the Greek communities and within American society as well. “And within famous America you will see Greece sitting in its own throne” sings the poet (and collaborator for the volume) N.I. Vavoudis whose poem *The Palaces of my Fatherland* opens the reader and presents the title of the book.<sup>67</sup>

The *Palaces of my Fatherland* had a successful publishing history. A number of individuals worked together in order to bring a high quality reader to the public. The author thanks the teachers and the priests who used the schoolbook and sent their comments to the author to develop it further. There is also a great collaboration with the publishers, who did their best to produce a beautiful reader. The reader was reapproved by the Supreme Educational Council. From its first publication in 1934 until 1944, the reader was published in four different editions by the three largest publishers in New York City (National Herald, Atlantis, and Divry). Each edition was slightly different from the previous one because the authors had to implement the suggestions of the Council. These changes provide insightful information regarding the concerns of the educational community, as well as the process of decision-making and the stakeholders behind those changes. They offer a window into the educational scene in Greek America.

The overriding concern among educators was the language. *Diglossia* was the major issue that the authors had to address: which linguistic form to choose, purist Greek or demotic? The linguistic and political debate regarding the controversy between demotic and purist language was transplanted in Greek America as well. Both parties had their advocates, but gradually demoticists dominated the scene. The negative reaction toward the persistence of purist language in schoolbooks testifies that several agents (teachers, clergy, authors, publishers) involved in the production of books were very sensitive to the issue.

Whereas the first edition of the reader uses katharevousa throughout the book, the consequent editions are in demotic Greek. The recommendations of the Council based on the reactions of teachers, required that the authors change their texts to demotic, which they did.<sup>68</sup> However, the author Vavoudis, in the preface of the fourth edition was straightforward: “This book is not propagandistic by suggesting one particular type of Greek.”<sup>69</sup> The author argues that he doesn’t want to eliminate completely purist Greek since these grammatical forms are still spoken by the people.

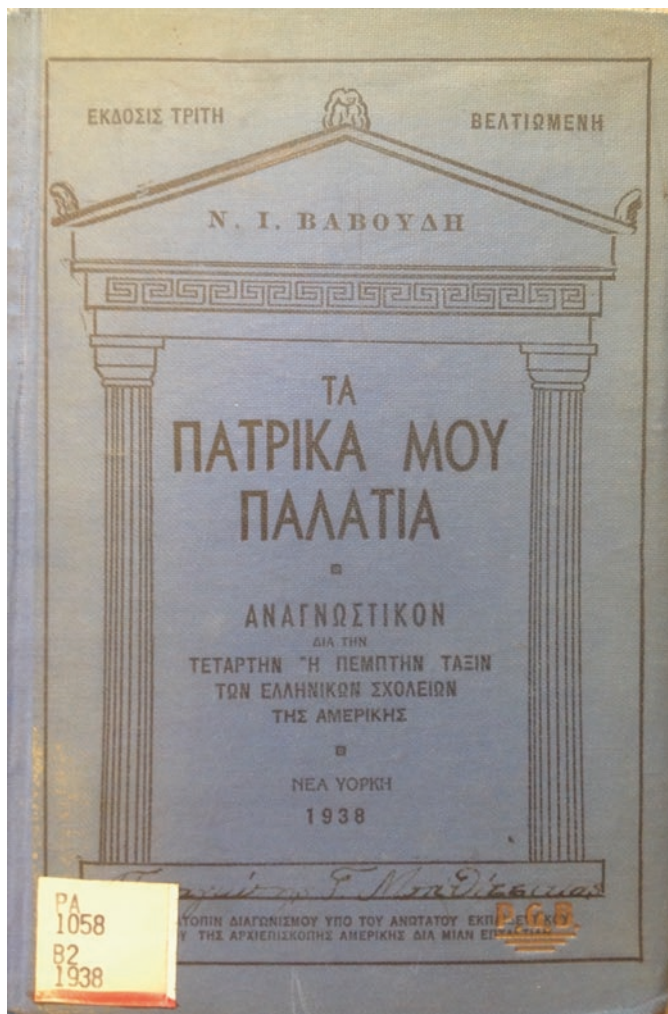


Fig. 3.4 Nikolaos Vavoudis. *The palaces of my fatherland*. Reader for the fourth or fifth grade of the Greek Schools in America. Third improved edition. New York: D.C. Divry, 1938

He offers two sections on grammar: one with exercises in demotic and one in purist, and suggests the teachers teach those archaic forms too.

Besides grammar, vocabulary is the second pillar of Greek language the authors deem most relevant. In the text “The Glory of Greece” (E Ellada tis Doxas) the author praises Greek vocabulary as paramount for the foundation of other languages too; for instance, he comments that forty percent of English words are derived from Greek.<sup>70</sup> The author emphasizes the need for learning new vocabulary, and highly recommends that teachers introduce the children to complex and challenging Greek words in order to enrich their repertoire. Following the recommendations of teachers who used the book in the classroom, from the second edition forward, the authors inserted Greek–English vocabulary lists at the beginning of each chapter (Fig. 3.4).

### CONCLUSION: “LOVE THE GREEK LETTERS!”

Education was of paramount importance for immigrants, who demonstrated serious efforts to provide a proper education for their children. Educational books were part of the publishing agendas of Greek publishers in the US. However, the majority of those books were imported from Greece, and unfortunately did not address the actual needs of the children in America. From the 1930s, in order to resolve this problem, the few well-known Greek publishers in New York City produced the first schoolbooks in America, mostly spelling books and readers for the lower classes of elementary school. Authors were both men and women who lived in America and had experience teaching in the Greek schools. The publishers undertook serious efforts to produce aesthetically pleasing books by using colorful images in order to make them more appealing to the children.

The first four schoolbooks printed in America in the 1930s (two spelling books, one reader, and one anthology of poems for school festivals) epitomize the ideology of Greek education in America during the first half of the twentieth century. The mission of the Greek schools was based on the very well-known ideological triptych “Homeland–Religion–Family”; an ideologeme that prevailed in Greek society from the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>71</sup>

The homeland is one of the main *foci* in the schoolbooks. Children need to love both of their homes, and a good Greek American child is the one who combines both American and Greek values. With the exception

of the first spelling book by the National Herald, the other schoolbooks have sections directly related to the lives of the Greek American children. Texts and pictures show children playing in familiar playgrounds, going to their day or afternoon schools, or talking about Greek holidays. Besides familiar everyday life scenes, there are also texts in the schoolbooks imbued with nostalgia for a return to Greece. The selection of texts, particularly in the anthology, demonstrates the desire of the authors to instill in children a love for Greece.

Religion and faith were part of the official education in Greece, and so likewise in the diaspora. Additionally, the Archdiocese in North America had direct control of approval of some of the educational books, such as the above-mentioned reader *The Palaces of my Fatherland* of the fourth grade. It is important to recognize that the majority of the Greek schools were organized around the local churches. Consequently, the Church-approved books included religious topics, such as prayers, lessons about the life of Christ, the Virgin Mary, and the Saints. Religion as part of the culture could not be absent within those pedagogical books.

Moreover, the family and its values embrace the highest moral duties that children's education should seek to promote. All of the above-mentioned schoolbooks emphasize the value of family. Konstantellou writes that "educational institutions substitute or complement traditional institutions such as family."<sup>72</sup> It might have been expected that education in the diaspora would have focused on the socialization of the children into American society, and thus placed Greek families in the background. However, Greek Americans continued to prioritize the family and to maintain their traditions, but they also simultaneously challenged American society.<sup>73</sup> Family, home, and religion remain basic values for Greek Americans. Greek American educational institutions (schools and churches) are influential for the cultural resilience of Greeks in America.

Above all, language is of primary importance. As an overarching value, the Greek language connects American Greeks with their homeland, enables a special communication with family members, and mediates within religion. "The Greek language holds symbolic meaning in ethnic identification,"<sup>74</sup> thus, keeping their language alive and transferring it to the following generations was a core concern of the educators. "Read Greek" and "love the Greek letters" was the ultimate goal of the books. These first schoolbooks, published in the United States by Greeks are a testimony of the conscious efforts the first generation undertook to keep alive the Greek language and culture in the diaspora.

## NOTES

1. Yiorgos Anagnostou, *Contours of White Ethnicity: Popular Ethnography and the Making of Usable Pasts in Greek America*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2009; Yiorgos Kalogeras, *Ethnic Geographies: Socio-political identifications of a migration*. In Greek. Athens: Katarti, 2007; Alexander Kitroeff, "The Transformation of Homeland–Diaspora Relations: The Greek Case in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries." In *Proceedings of the First International Congress on the Hellenic Diaspora: From Antiquity to Modern Times*, ed. John M. Fossey (Amsterdam: J.C. Gieben, 1991), 233–50; Ioanna Laliotou, *Transatlantic subjects: acts of migration and cultures of transnationalism between Greece and America*. Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2004; Theodore Saloutos, *The Greeks in the United States*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964.
2. Regarding social, public policy, educational, and psychological issues on Greek American education see Spyros D. Orfanos, Harry J. Psomiades, and John Spiridakis, ed. *Education and Greek Americans: Process and Prospects*. New York: Pella, 1987. Regarding bilingual education in the United States see Vivian Anemoyanis, "Greek Bilingual Education in Historical Perspective." In *The Greek American Community in Transition*, ed. Harry J. Psomiades, Alice Scourby (New York: Pella, 1982), 171–9. For more contemporary research on Greek education in America see Giannis Spyridakis and Chryssa Constantakou, "The Greek Education in the United States: The Main Research Foci." In Greek. *Hellenoglossi ekpaideusi sto exoteriko* [*Greek Speaking Education Outside Greece*,] ed. Michalis Damanakis. In Greek. (Rethymno, Greece: University of Crete, 1999), 82–90, as well as Michalis Damanakis, ed., *Education of the Diaspora Greeks: Theoretical and Empirical Approaches*. In Greek. Rethymno, Greece: University of Crete, 1999. For general issues about the education of various ethnic groups in America see George Pozzetta, ed., *Education and the Immigrant*. New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1991.
3. Mimes Demetriou. *First Greek American Children's Anthology for the Greek Children in America. Original work in Greek-American spirit. Namely: poems, monologs, dialogs, comedies, dramas, skits, letter, songs. For the various performances of the Greek schools in America*. In Greek. (New York: D.C. Divry, 1935), 43.
4. Robert Darnton, "What Is the History of Books?" *Daedalus* 111, no. 3 (1982): 65–83, and Robert Darnton "WHAT IS THE HISTORY OF BOOKS? REVISITED," *Modern Intellectual History* 4, vol. 3 (2007): 495–508.

5. Dalbello argues that “the arriving populations carried the stigma of illiteracy even though nearly seventy percent were in fact literate at the time of landing.” Marija Dalbello, “Reading Immigrants: Immigration as Site and Process of Reading and Writing.” In *Reading and Writing from Below: Exploring the Margins of Modernity*, ed. Ann-Katrin Edlund, T.G. Ashplant, and Anna Kuusmin (Umeå: Umeå University and Royal Skyttean Society, 2016), 175.
6. From the first years of Greek immigration in the US there were Greek immigrants who devoted themselves to printing and publishing. Several small businesses started up (mostly run by individuals) which could survive only a few years on the market. The two main publishers were Atlantis and Ethnikos Kyrix [National Herald]. Besides books, both Atlantis and National Herald published a newspaper bearing their name; they were the biggest newspapers in Greek America. A third big publisher, D.C. Divry, is known exclusively for educational books for both adults and children.
7. [Price Catalog Atlantis]. *Big Bookstore “Atlantidos” in New York. Price Catalog 1912*. In Greek. (New York: Atlantis, 1912), 52–56.
8. *Ibid.*, 4. All translations hereafter are the author’s.
9. [Price Catalog National Herald]. *Big Bookstore “National Herald”. General Price Catalog*. In Greek (New York: National Herald, 1930), 4.
10. *Ibid.*, 14–39.
11. Nikolaos. I. Vavoudis. *The Palaces of my Fatherland. Reader for the Fourth Grade of Elementary School. Approved after competition of the Supreme Educational Council of the Archdiocese in America. Fourth Edition. Developed after the suggestions of the SEC and the teachers of the United States. (Possible to be used to the Fifth Grade in schools in co-teaching with the Fourth grade.)* In Greek. (New York: D.C. Divry, 1944), 160.
12. In Panagiotis Dimitropoulos. *The educational problem of the Greek Diaspora in America*. In Greek. (Athens: n.p., 1956), 18 (Initial reference in *National Herald*, August 21, 1949, p. 10).
13. For early education efforts in America, in particular in the New York City area, see Fevronia K. Soumakis, “A Sacred Paideia: The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, Immigration, and Education in New York City, 1959–1979.” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2015), 71–121. For the types of Greek schools in America in recent years see Giannis Spyridakis and Chryssa Constantakou. *Symposium on Greek Day Schools in Diaspora: Proceedings of the Symposium, University Town of Rethymno, July 5–6, 2008*. Series Education of the Diaspora, editor Michalis Damanakis. In Greek (Rethymno, Greece: University of Crete, 2009), 37–92.
14. According to Kopan, during the first decade of the twentieth century, Chicago had the first permanent communities consisting of a church and a school. Andrew Kopan, “Greek Survival in Chicago: The Role of Ethnic



- Education, 1890–1980.” In *Ethnic Chicago: Revised and Expanded*, edited by Melvin Holli and Peter d’A. Jones, 109–68 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William Eerdmans, 1984), 117–19.
15. *Ibid.*, 159.
  16. “The solid soil where the educational training of the young Greek American generation can be founded is the combination of the Greek and American academic system.” In Dimitropoulos 1956, p. 19.
  17. In Dimitropoulos. *The educational problem*. In Greek. 18 (Initial reference in *National Herald*, August 21, 1949, p. 10).
  18. Kopan, “Greek Survival in Chicago,” 164.
  19. It is a known phenomenon in publishing (particularly in popular prints) that one publisher takes a book by another publisher, adds a cover with his logo, and sells it as its own. The lack of copyright reinforced such behaviors. This tactic helped the Greek American publishers, who did not have the capacities to produce many books, to present more books as their own productions, whereas in fact they were produced in Greece.
  20. Ioannis Arsenis. *Greek Alphabet Book. First Part. Approved at the competition for five years. New edition*. In Greek (New York: Atlas, 1914).
  21. Syntaktike Epitrope (Writing Committee). *Alphabet Book o Helios. Part B. Fourth Edition (19th)*. In Greek (Athens, New York: Dimitrakos, Atlantis, 1938).
  22. Unpublished papers by Demetrios Callimachos, January 21, 1932.
  23. Asterios Asteriou. *Greek Schools in America. What they are, what they should be. Report to the second conference of Greek teachers in America*. In Greek. 1931, 43.
  24. The description in the catalog reads: “Spelling Book by National Herald, edition of 1927. The most beautiful and most artistic spelling book from all so far. Easy to understand, simple, clear, easy in methodology, with abundant artistic images, a truly automatic teacher for the child, printed out of love to the progress, with a section for toddlers. We highly recommend it to be imported to all schools of our communities. It is priced elegantly bound \$0.30.” [Price Catalog National Herald] 1930, p. 14.
  25. The full title reads “New Alphabet Book for the Greek Children of National Herald. On the basis of the best current pedagogical systems. By Venetia Vidali. Printing stores by National Herald, in New York, 1930.” The book was reprinted in 2017 by the Greek newspaper *To Vima*, edited and with an Afterword by Lamprini Kouzeli.
  26. Initial reference in *National Herald*, August 29, 1931, 3. (In Afterword of the 2017 reprinted edition, page 0.) Original by Venetia Vidali, [*New Alphabet Book*]. In Greek.
  27. Vidali, [*New Alphabet Book*], 1.
  28. *Ibid.*, 1.

29. Ibid., 1.
30. Ibid., 1.
31. Ibid., 2.
32. Ibid., 1.
33. "The Greek Child Full of Pride," in Vidali [*New Alphabet Book*], 8.
34. "Greek soil," in Vidali [*New Alphabet Book*], 75.
35. G. Konstantopoulou, *The Alphabet Book of the Greek Child in America. Highly recommended by the Supreme Educational Council. First Volume. Second edition, enlarged and developed.* In Greek (New York: D.C. Divry, 1942 [1935]), 3.
36. Konstantopoulou, *The Alphabet Book of the Greek Child in America*, 6.
37. Ibid., 7.
38. For instance, in two places the author uses the word "keki" meaning the cake. Konstantopoulou, *The Alphabet Book of the Greek Child in America*, 16 and p. 22.
39. Manolis Triantafyllides, "The Greek language of the Greeks in America." In Greek. *Ellenika* 12 (1953): 311–16.
40. Chryssie Costantakos, "Ethnic Language as a Variable in Subcultural Continuity." In *The Greek American Community in Transition*, ed. Harry J. Psomiades, Alice Scourby, (New York: Pella, 1982), 157.
41. Konstantopoulou, *The Alphabet Book of the Greek Child in America*, 64.
42. Konstantopoulou, *The Alphabet Book of the Greek Child in America*, 27.
43. Konstantopoulou, *The Alphabet Book of the Greek Child in America*, 36.
44. El. Konstantopoulou-Rompapa, *The Reading Book of the Greek Child in America. Second Volume. Fourth edition (same as the second), enlarged and developed.* In Greek. (New York: Divry, D.C, 1948), 5.
45. "I give you a pot which has the water of life, our language," Konstantopoulou-Rompapa, *The Reading Book of the Greek Child in America*, 6.
46. Konstantopoulou-Rompapa, *The Reading Book of the Greek Child in America*, 7.
47. The full title reads: Mimes Demetriou. *First Greek American Children's Anthology for the Greek Children in America. Original work in Greek-American spirit. Namely: poems, monologs, dialogs, comedies, dramas, skits, letter, songs. For the various performances of the Greek schools in America.* In Greek. New York: D.C. Divry, 1935.
48. Demetriou justifies himself, by paralleling his writings with Rigas's writings: "Let's not forget, that Rigas Feraios enlivened the temper of the enslaved by the way he wrote his several and diverse patriotic works." (Demetriou, *First Greek American Children's Anthology*, 6).
49. "Penelope's Daughters" from Columbus, Ohio is one of the subscribers who orders one copy of the anthology (Demetriou, *First Greek American Children's Anthology*, 157).

50. Demetriou, *First Greek American Children's Anthology*, 157.
51. Demetriou, *First Greek American Children's Anthology*, 22, 23.
52. Janissaries were soldiers of elite Turkish troops during the Ottoman Empire. Greek male kids were forcefully abducted from their families in order to serve to the Ottoman army and become janissaries.
53. A theater skit with the title "The Greek School in America" demonstrates clearly the mission of the schools: "This is the reason you come to the Greek school: to become perfect Greek Americans!" Demetriou, *First Greek American Children's Anthology*, 104.
54. George Arthur Lagios, "The Development of Greek American Education in the United States: 1908–1973: Its theory, curriculum, and practice." (PhD diss., University of Connecticut, 1977), 260.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 259 f.
56. "We are sending our kids to school, but with our action we are limiting our kids without knowing it. Whereas the other kids are playing outside, we are sending our poor kids to learn the Greek language, and..." ... "How could children love a teacher who calls names on them and hits them with a broom stick?" Demetriou, *First Greek American Children's Anthology*, 98.
57. Demetriou, *First Greek American Children's Anthology*, 32.
58. Demetriou, *First Greek American Children's Anthology*, 37.
59. Demetriou, *First Greek American Children's Anthology*, 43, 68–9.
60. Demetriou, *First Greek American Children's Anthology*, 29.
61. The return of Greek Americans to Greece has been part of scholarship attention. After the seminal work by Saloutos, who interviewed first-generation returnees (see Theodore Saloutos, *They Remember America: The Story of the Repatriated Greek-Americans*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956), there are recent projects on the return of the second-generation Greek Americans: see Anastasia Christou, "American Dreams and European Nightmares: Experiences and Polemics of Second-Generation Greek-American Returning Migrants." *Journal of ethnic and migration studies* 32, no. 5 (2006): 831–45; Anastasia Christou, "Deciphering Diaspora: Translating Transnationalism: Family Dynamics, Identity Constructions and the Legacy of 'Home' in Second-Generation Greek-American Return Migration." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 29, no. 6 (2006): 1040–56; Anastasia Christou and Russell King. *Counter-Diaspora: The Greek Second Generation Returns "Home"*, *Cultural Politics, Socioaesthetics, Beginnings*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2014); Evangelia Kindinger, *Homebound: Diaspora Spaces and Selves in Greek American Return Narratives*. *American Studies. A Monograph* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2015); Theodora Patrona, *Return Narratives: Ethnic Space in Late-Twentieth-Century Greek American and Italian American Literature* (Madison, Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2017).

62. Demetriou, *First Greek American Children's Anthology*, 49.
63. Platon Papazoglou. *The Palaces of my Fatherland. Reader for the Fourth Grade of Elementary School. (Possible to be used to the Fifth Grade in schools with co-teaching or to classes not having completed the cycle of the prescribed lessons.) Approved after competition by the Supreme Educational Council of the Archdiocese of North and South America.* In Greek. 1st ed. New York: National Herald, 1934. The author suggests that the book can be used for the fourth and fifth grades as well.
64. *Ibid.*, 3.
65. George Dilboy was a Greek American soldier who participated in the American Army and died heroically in the First World War. His body, initially buried in his homeland in Asia Minor, was transferred to the National Cemetery at Arlington. The American Congress posthumously awarded him a medal and named one legion after him. (*Ibid.*, 123–4).
66. *Ibid.*, 125.
67. *Ibid.*, 5.
68. For instance, phrases like “teknon mou,” became “paidi mou,” or “o oikos tou theou” became “to spiti tou theou,” etc.
69. Nikolaos. I. Vavoudis. *The Palaces of my Fatherland. Reader for the Fourth Grade of Elementary School. Approved after competition of the Supreme Educational Council of the Archdiocese in America. Fourth Edition. Developed after the suggestions of the SEC and the teachers of the United States. (Possible to be used to the Fifth Grade in schools in co-teaching with the Fourth grade.)* In Greek. (New York: D.C. Divry, 1944), 3.
70. *Ibid.*, 56.
71. The slogan “Homeland–Religion–Family” is very well known within Greek society and used in a popularized form as a catchword. It is associated with the conservative discourse, particularly the ideology of dictatorships. Historian Gazi traces its complicated routes in modern Greek history. She finds that this emblematic triptych started slowly in the 1880s, was institutionalized in the 1930s by the Metaxa's dictator political discourse, and used till the 1967 dictatorship of the colonels (Effie Gazi, *Patris, Thriskeia, Oikogeneia. Istoría enos synthimatos 1880–1930 [Homeland, Religion, Family. History of a Slogan 1880–1930]*. Athens: Polis, 2011.)
72. Eva Konstantellou, “Education as a Means of Empowerment for Minority Cultures: Strategies for the Greek American Community.” *Journal of Modern Hellenism*, 1990: 125.
73. *Ibid.*, 137.
74. Costantakos, “Ethnic Language,” 157.

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