

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Greek Culture Project

Impact on Campbell, Ohio

O. H. 451

CHARLES KOULIANOS

Interviewed

by

Wilfredo Rivera

on

November 25, 1980

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: CHARLES KOULIANOS

INTERVIEWER: Wilfredo Rivera

SUBJECT: Alienation, Group Solitary, Kinship and Extended Family

DATE: November 25, 1980

R: This is an interview with Mr. Charles Koulianos, for the Youngstown State University Greek Culture Project, by Wilfredo Rivera, at 472 Tenney Avenue, Campbell, Ohio, on November 25, 1980, at approximately 4:00 p.m.

Mr. Koulianos, could you tell me something about your background starting with your childhood and working up to your present status?

K: I was born on March 19, 1956, in Youngstown, Ohio. I was born and raised in Campbell. My parents are both Kalyrnian Greek heritage. My mother was born on the island of Kalyrnos, Greece. My father was born in Ambridge, Pennsylvania. I have presently lived in Campbell all of my life. My father is currently employed at Republic Steel Corporation and my mother is employed at Strouss Department Store in downtown Youngstown.

I attended Gordon Elementary School in Campbell, Ohio. After completing Gordon School I attended Campbell Memorial High School in Campbell, Ohio. I have two brothers: Michael and Anthony. Michael is presently twenty-one years old, and Anthony is twenty years old. I completed the college preparatory course at Campbell, and after completing high school I went to Ohio State for three and a half years. I did not finish my degree at Ohio State and in May of 1979 I dropped out for a couple of quarters. I am presently, now, going to Youngstown State University and working in Republic Steel Corporation. I am working toward a Chemical Engineering degree.

R: Mr. Koulianos, could you tell me a little bit more about

your family background, the way it is structured in your eyes?

- K: The Greek family is very cohesive. Most of the Greek families that live in Campbell, Ohio are from the island of Kalymnos, Greece. They are very stressful in maintaining the Greek background.
- R: What keeps the Greek families in Campbell so cohesive? What do you think is the social factor there?
- K: The majority of families that live in Campbell are from Greece. For example, we have Greek school for the young children. Approximately, you start attending when you are about seven years old until about fifteen. That is one of the main reasons why the Greek language is building up and not being forgotten. The parents stress to speak the language at home. We also have a Greek Orthodox church in Campbell, Ohio, and that is one of the main reasons why the Greek language and religion is still functioning and maintaining its present status. Most of the Greek children are raised very strongly with Greek customs. The main custom is the language. Our parents make it a very special and positive point to speak the Greek language. They make it a point to speak to us in Greek while at home.

When we reach the age of seven, we attend Greek school at least once a week for three hours. We are fortunate enough to have two dedicated people, who have given so many years of their knowledge and patience to advance and to teach the Greek language, culture, the Christian Orthodox faith. The Greek youth of Campbell have been privileged to have two such dedicated people as Mrs. Irene Koulianos Thomas and Reverend George Pappas to guide them and instruct them. Since 1938, Mrs. Irene Koulianos Thomas has taught grades one through five. The subjects taught during that period are Greek grammar, reading, writing, conversation, history, spelling. After completing the fifth grade, they attend two more years in order to learn about The New Testament, The Old Testament, the ecclesiastical history of the church itself. The Most Reverend George Pappas is the principal and the teacher of the religious subjects, and is very qualified and well-known in our area as one of the best theologians.

- R: Is language stressed in all the families in Campbell among the Greek people?
- K: I would say that every family in Campbell has the language maintained in their family, or stressed. Hopefully it is maintained to keep the Greek tradition or language functioning, and to keep it a strong language. Most of the children attending grade school or high school are pretty cohesive with the other Greek children that they are attending school

with, but of course they mingle and talk with non-Greeks. What made me very happy while growing up was my parents when they stressed and made it a point for me to learn the Greek language at a young age. Right now I speak it fluently; I am bilingual. Also, my close friends, which of course I have Greek and non-Greek close friends, but my Greek close friends made it a point while amongst ourselves to talk Greek. That was good not for only me, but for my friends. The only way you can be good at something is by practicing it. The more you practice something hopefully the better you will be at it. I am very happy that I speak the Greek language. I was brought up in the Greek way. Even being born and raised in this country, I visited Greece in the summers of 1976, 1977, and 1978, and I was very surprised; I felt like I was at home there. I knew how to speak the language and I could communicate with anybody. It was to my advantage being brought up in the Greek background while I was in that country. I was able to communicate and see how people live. I am very grateful that I had that experience.

R: You mentioned that your mother was born in Kalymnos and your father was born in Pennsylvania. When your mother came here did she know any English at all?

K: My parents were married in July of 1955 and my mother didn't know any English at all. Presently she knows some English, but not too much. The English that she knows she learned from work. My father went down to Greece for a vacation in 1955 and he met my mother and he eventually got married. That's how my mother ended up here. She tries to speak the English language as well as she can, but she makes it a point to learn whatever she can. She also tried to keep the Greek language the main language in our household. She makes it a point to talk to us in Greek while at home, wherever she is with us, and the same thing goes with my father. She also stresses a point to go to church every Sunday, and listening to the Greek language at church also helps. It helps to keep up on the Greek language and sharpen up on it.

I am very grateful too, that I have two younger brothers. But they don't speak the language as well as I do. They weren't forced to go to Greek school like I was. My mother sort of pushed me, and she didn't push them, but it is to my advantage. Now I can speak two languages fluently.

The church in Campbell, Ohio also has different organizations such as GOYA, the Kalymnian Society, and the Philoptochos Society, which are basically composed of the Greek Kalymnian adults and younger adults. The main reasons for these societies are to build money and have certain organizations to keep the church functioning, but also to keep the Greeks as a tightly knit group. The only way that comes about is through inter-

action amongst Greeks and Greek practices and culture.

- R: You mentioned that your mother came to Campbell because she married your father. What drew your father and your mother to come to Campbell? What attracted them to Campbell?
- K: My father's mother and father were originally from Campbell. When my grandparents moved to Ambridge, Pennsylvania, my grandfather was killed in an industrial accident. My father was presently two years old at that time. When he was killed my grandmother and my father and his brothers and two sisters went to Greece. My father was raised in Greece from the age of two until he was about sixteen. When he was sixteen my grandmother moved back to the United States in Campbell, Ohio. They lived in Campbell and then my father joined the Army and served in the Korean War. When my father got out of the Army he applied for a job at Republic Steel Corporation and he was accepted. At the age of twenty-six he went down for a vacation to Greece and that's where he met my mother. Five months later they were married; that's how my mother and father were drawn back to Campbell, because father came back to his family. My mother's father is still in Greece. My father's mother and father are deceased along with my mother's mother. I'm not sure when they themselves came to Campbell.
- R: What drew your grandparents here?
- K: Most of the Kalyrnians from Greece, if they don't come to Campbell, Ohio they go to Tarpon Springs, Florida. The majority of the Kalyrnians go. For example, there is an abundance of Kalyrnians in Campbell, Ohio, in Tarpon Springs, Florida, in Australia, in Gary, Indiana. The Greeks, being cohesive as they are, usually stick together. One way of sticking together is to follow your fellow Greeks and companions.
- R: You mentioned that the Kalyrnian people migrated to Campbell. I understand that the Kalyrnians are guarded, dominant people among the Greeks. What kind of customs did they bring over from Greece? Are these customs different from other Greeks?
- K: Our customs are usually the same, but they vary in some ways.
- R: Can you touch on some of the customs brought over?
- K: Easter is one of the traditional customs. Easter is celebrated in all of the languages and most of the religions. Our Greek Easter is usually celebrated like the Easters that are celebrated in Greece. For example, on Holy Friday the priest and the whole congregation will come outside of the church and go around the church yard with the Epitafion, which includes the body of Jesus Christ.

R: You mentioned Epitafion, can you explain what that is?

K: The Epitafion is the casket which supposedly has the body of Jesus Christ in it, which is really an icon of Jesus Christ placed in the Epitafion. That's what we have as our casket of Jesus Christ. On Holy Saturday, of course, we have resurrection at midnight, on Easter Sunday morning. An example of our customs that I haven't seen in any other Greek customs is that they have the Epitafion going outside the churchyard.

Another custom is our Greek Independence Day, which is always celebrated on March 25. That is the year that the Greeks got their independence from the Turks.

R: Did the Turks own Greece at one time? What kind of significant value did the Turks have?

K: The Turks and the Italians and the Germans all invaded Greece late in the 1800's and early 1900's. I don't specifically remember the year that Greece gained its independence, but it was Italy and Germany fighting and Turkey fighting in the mainland of Greece against the Greeks.

R: Let's talk on the customs of marriage. I understand that in ancient Greece the dowry was practiced and they had prearranged marriages. Does that apply to the community that exists in Campbell now?

K: The custom of the dowry doesn't apply at all in the city of Campbell, Ohio, but on my three recent trips to Greece that is one custom that is still strongly maintained in Greece. I was really surprised and shocked to still see that it is maintained. If a lady loves a man and the lady doesn't have a dowry to offer, the man will not accept the lady as his wife. Even being raised in the Greek tradition and manner, I don't agree with that custom. It is one of the main customs that is still held and maintained in Greece, but I don't think it is held in the city of Campbell, Ohio or in any part of the United States. That is a traditional old custom which I think will only be maintained on the island of Greece. It will probably be maintained there for a long time, but I don't think that tradition has an effect on the society that I live in.

R: In regards to prearranged marriages, I understand that that exists in Campbell? Can you elaborate on that somewhat?

K: The prearranged marriage is how my mother and father were married. Before my father left for his vacation when he was twenty-six years old, my mother's uncle told my father that he had a niece and that she would like to come to the

United States. He said that she was a nice girl and my father went down and met her; they were engaged and got married. That is also one tradition and custom that is not strongly kept up anymore. In old days that custom was very strongly held and maintained. As the years have gone on that custom is rapidly diminishing and fading. I guess that younger people now don't believe in that custom. People now are mingling with more ethnic groups. Even though the Greeks hold their Greek tradition and try to maintain their background, they don't necessarily live with that idea anymore where a Greek has to marry a Greek. That is how tradition is sort of fading out.

R: How is interracial marriage looked at by the Greeks?

K: The majority of the Greeks in Campbell don't tell you who to marry, but they tell you that in order for you to maintain your Greek language and background and customs, the only way you can do that is by marrying a Greek. I can see that to a point, but there are Greeks in Campbell who have married non-Greeks and it's up to the person really if they want to learn Greek or not, but they can also raise children in the Greek tradition and manner. I personally am strong in the beliefs of keeping up the Greek tradition and language; however I do think that I have to marry a Greek in order to keep up the Greek tradition. If that person really loved me they would do and say what we both wanted.

R: Are there any special church functions that enhance cohesiveness among Greek people? What is the purpose of a Greek dance?

K: The significance of the Greek functions and Greek dances is that it is a way for the Greek people to go out and have a good time and do it in a Greek way. I personally don't know what significance a line dance has.

R: I understand that it indicates what part of Greece that individual is from. Is this true?

K: There are some dances practiced among all Greeks, and others that are practiced only by people of a certain island.

R: In regards to leadership, who would you consider as being the leader among the Greek people in Campbell?

K: I consider Father Pappas to be the leader in our city of Campbell. He makes it a point to keep up the Greek tradition and custom. He is very strict on it and he tries to do his best. He would like to keep up tradition and language to hopefully be the dominant language in Campbell. The people in Campbell find the church as being the dominant factor in keeping the Greek tradition in the city of Campbell very strong.

- R: Does Father Pappas have a special community council that he has established where they get together and make certain decisions in regard to what they feel will help their people?
- K: I'm sure every church has its council. The main function of those people is to keep the church functioning. By keeping the church functioning you have to have money. They have certain ways of raising money. Every Greek family in the city of Campbell has to pay its annual dues. These dues have one purpose: To keep the church functioning. The only way you can keep the church functioning is to pay its bills.
- R: How do the Greek people in Campbell respond to the church?
- K: The Greek people in Campbell respond to the church as a force which is there for a purpose.
- R: If I was to take away the Greek church in Campbell would you say the Greek community would fall apart in terms of cohesiveness?
- K: It wouldn't necessarily split the Greeks apart because there is a Greek church in Youngstown and in Boardman. Personally I feel that if there wasn't a Greek church in Campbell that most of the Greek people wouldn't have a chance to be at one place at the same time, which of course is by attending church. That would play a role in splitting up the Greek people, but not completely splitting them up. If the church was taken away the only way the people could mingle is by visiting each other, or attending a Greek function.
- R: Would you say the Greeks would become more Americanized in their views?
- K: Yes.
- R: Then interracial marriages would be more accepted then?
- K: Yes, exactly. Interracial marriage is not as bad as the non-Greeks think it is.
- R: If you marry a Greek lady, are you going to bring up your kids the same way your parents brought you up, with that strong emphasis on your own culture?
- K: I am happy and feel fortunate to have been brought up in the Greek way. I would make it a point to raise my kids the way I was raised. The only way a tradition and custom can be kept up as a good and dominant one is by keeping it going from generation to generation.
- R: Are you hoping to marry a Greek girl?
- K: I would like to, but if I fell in love with a non-Greek that



wouldn't stop me from marrying her.

- R: Would your family have an impact on your decision with regards to who you should marry?
- K: Yes. They won't tell me who to marry, but they will give their opinion.
- R: What impact has the economy had among your people?
- K: The layoffs in the mill have had an impact on all of Ohio. Not only Youngstown Sheet & Tube has closed, but also U.S. Steel. I'm fortunate because I work for Republic Steel Corporation and still have my job, and so does my father. The majority of the Greek men in Campbell are construction workers and painters.
- R: Where do you see the people going? Do you see the people staying here and just working as painters? Since they did shut down the mills will this enhance the people's decision in regards to moving back to Greece or immigrating down south to Florida?
- K: A few people have moved back to Greece, but the majority have moved down south to Florida. Fortunately most of the Greeks that did lose their jobs were able to retire anyway. The shutdown didn't really have as hard an impact on the Greeks as it did to the whole area. The majority of people that did work in the steel mills were non-Greeks.
- R: Can you tell me something that has happened in your life that has changed your own outlook about Greek culture?
- K: My father used to tell me stories about things that happened to him while in Greece as a small boy. When I was there I noticed that some of the things were still there that he and my mother told me about. A lot of things weren't as he told me they were. I guess that is because times are changing. There hasn't been one certain thing that has changed my outlook on the culture. The culture is still there along with the traditions, but people can alter those traditions and customs, such as the dowry and interracial marriage.
- R: On final question, are there any other factors that we haven't touched on that might be relevant to our interview with regards to the Greek impact towards the community of Campbell? If not, can you tell me what the years from 1970 through 1980 were like for you? What does the future have in store for the Greek people?
- K: I don't think there are any other factors that have to do with the Greek traditions and customs that we haven't mentioned.
- The years from 1970 to 1980 have taught me to accept the Greek

culture and language. We strive to make it one of the best. I can never see it dying out.

What the future holds is up to the young people now, to live with it, practice it. Hopefully their kids will pass it on too. It's a bright future. I think there will always be an abundance of Greeks in the city of Campbell because the culture will not die out I feel.

R: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW