

**The Greek Community of Broward County, Florida:
Its Origin, Growth and Evolution**

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Broward County in South Florida is the second largest metropolitan area of the state, home to 1.8 million permanent residents. Over the past fifty years, the area has been transformed from a winter resort and major agricultural area at the southern periphery of the United States to a dynamic diverse multi-ethnic metropolis. Since 1990, Broward County is the third most racially diverse county in Florida and is considered among the top immigrant destinations in the state (www.broward.org). According to the 2006 U.S. Census' American Community Survey (ACS), more than 11,000 persons claim Greek descent. Those self identified Greeks have created a vibrant Greek ethnic community that is not spatially connected, yet it reflects the diverse origins and cultural experiences of its members. The Greek community of Broward County is an ethnic community whose occupants have created a social space of interaction between different localities. The socio-spatial construction of the Greek ethnic space is a complex process that takes place at multiple levels with evidence of a continual evolution reflecting its members.

Ethnic communities have been an important focal point of geographic inquiry during the past century. Researchers agree that these communities are created and sustained because they meet not only the physical, but also the psychological needs of its members (Castles and Miller 1993; Massey, Goldring, and Durand 1994; Pedraza and Rumbault 1996; Zhou 1998; Kennedy and Roudometof 2001; Zelinsky 2001).

As Kennedy and Roudometof (2001; 9) explain ethnic communities are:

"Units of belonging whose members perceive that they share moral, aesthetic/expressive or cognitive meanings, thereby

gaining a sense of personal as well as group identity. In turn, this identity distinguishes the boundary between members and non-members. Communities, therefore, are constructed symbolically through an engagement with rituals, signs and meanings”.

Once the community is established, ethnic institutions become an important site to perpetuate and reinforce a sense of ethnicity. Therefore, the creation of an ethnic community, the maintenance of cultural ties, the preservation of the native language, and in many cases, the continuation of native religious institutions in the new setting, promote the survival of the ethnic group (Zelinsky 2001).

Historically, when non-English speaking immigrants arrived in America, they clustered in neighborhoods with high concentrations of residents from the same ethnic group. Those first geographically connected ethnic communities became known as ethnic enclaves where ethnic groups often separated themselves from the dominant society. These enclaves were given names such Greektown, Little Italy, or Germantown and provided the ethnic group space for social and economic interaction. A physical connection to kin existed within those neighborhoods, which provided the social support necessary for survival within the new environment (Alba 1990; Gold 1997; Newbold 1999; Zelinsky 2001).

Within the past few decades, researchers noted that a new type of ethnic community has emerged; one that is not spatially connected, but continues to provides the same benefits to its members as the ethnic enclaves. These new types of ethnic communities without propinquity or unbounded can survive without residential proximity because members can continue to maintain active ethnic networks due to the advances in modern communications and transportation (Webber 1963; Agocs 1981; Zelinsky and Lee 2000). The ethnic, social and religious institutions act as centers of ethnic group social interaction, even though members live in scattered locations (Zelinky and Lee 2000; Zelinsky 2001). The Greek community of Broward County is a very good example of an unbounded ethnic community whose members live and work scattered throughout the county. The two Greek Orthodox

Churches and the many ethnic and social Greek associations and organizations of the area act as the glue that keeps this ethnic community together in an unbounded space.

The theoretical model of heterolocalism is best able to explain how the Greek community of Broward County can be maintained without close proximity of its members. This model suggests that residential concentration may not be necessary to retain close ethnic ties, as it has been confirmed by this case study. The notion of heterolocalism implies that ethnic communities today are actively and consciously created by their members. The assumption that residential clustering is a necessary condition for the survival of an ethnic community is not supported by this case study.

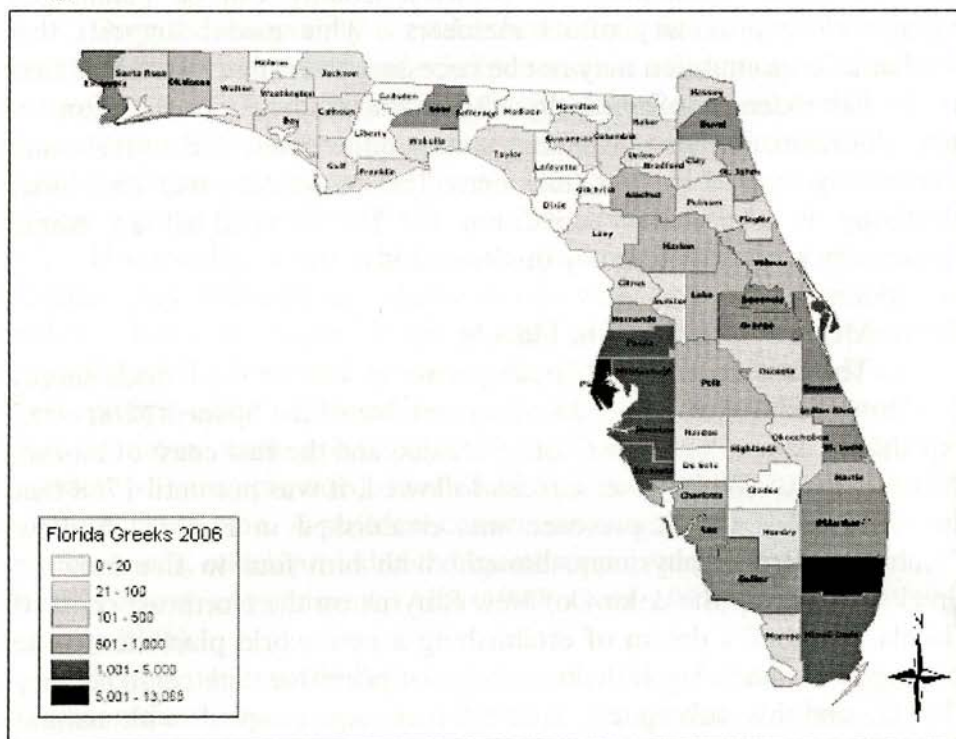
Greek Migration Patterns to Florida

The first documented Greek person to land on the Florida shores was Don Teodoro, who in 1528 was a member of the Spanish "Narvaez" expedition that explored the Gulf of Mexico and the east coast of Florida (Moskos 1980). While other Greeks followed, it was not until 1768 that the first sizable Greek presence was established in Florida. Andrew Turnbull, a British physician, brought with him four to five hundred Greeks and set up the colony of New Smyrna on the Northeast coast of Florida. Turnbull's dream of establishing a new world plantation came to naught. He had very little knowledge of primitive eighteenth century Florida, and his subsequent lack of planning, coupled with natural disasters and illnesses, resulted in the destruction of the colony (Panagopoulos 1966).

The first sizable number of Greeks who moved to Florida in the early 1900s headed for Tarpon Springs. The abundance of sponges lured hundreds of Greek immigrants who moved into Tarpon Springs with their deep-sea diving equipment and superior knowledge of deep sea diving to harvest natural sponges from the Gulf of Mexico. By 1905, about 500 men had arrived in the city and within a few years there were "100 sponge boats based in Tarpon Springs and up to 1,500 Greeks working Florida waters. By 1940 three-quarters of the residents were of Greek heritage, making it the most Greek city in the nation" (Bukuvalas 2006; 40).

More than one hundred years later, according to the 2006 ACS United States Census estimates, Florida has the fifth largest population of self identifying Greeks with 96,799 persons spread unevenly across the state (Figure 1). Broward County in southeast Florida has the second

Figure 1: Greeks in Florida



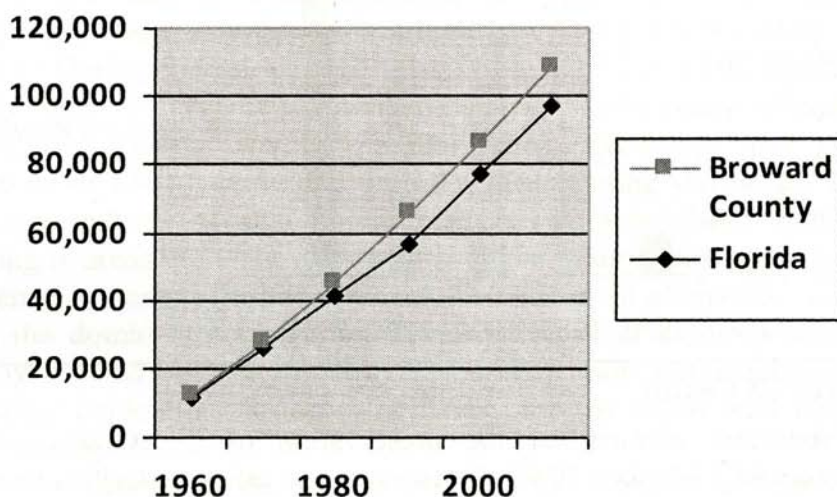
Source: US Census (ACS) 2006

largest concentration of Greeks with 11,467 persons only after Pinellas County which has the most with 12,748 Greeks.

Early Greek Migration to Broward County

In contrast to Tarpon Springs, very few Greeks moved to Broward County during the 1920's and 1930's. According to 1930 Census records, there were only four Greeks in Broward County. The number rose to eleven by 1939 according to the 1940 Census records. The foundation of the Greek ethnic community in Broward

Figure 2: Comparison of the Greek Population Growth to Florida and Broward County

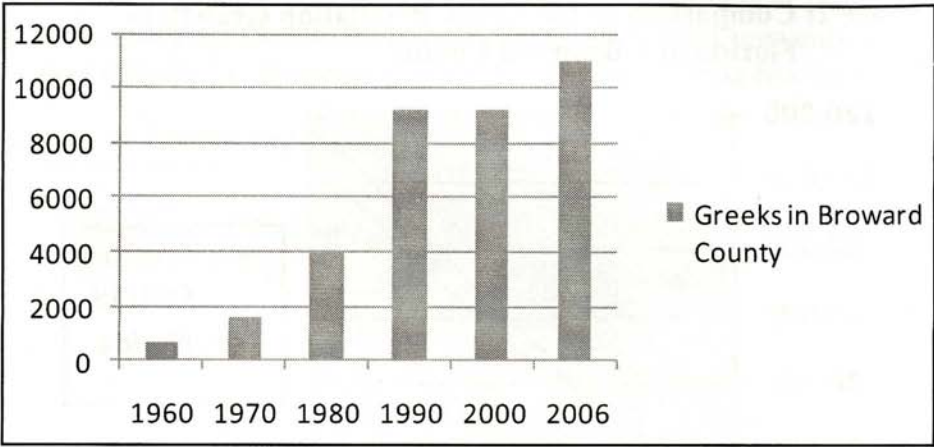


Source: US Census

County can be traced in the early 1950s. The number of Greeks who moved to Broward County after WWII began to accelerate as the 1960s Census records show 659 Greeks residing in the county (Figures 2 and 3). Those Greeks had immigrated to other parts of the United States years before or were second generation Greeks born in the United States. The first group was fully assimilated into the American culture and had enough money to look for better opportunities. The second generation already had the education and the financial means to move to Florida. Surprisingly, in the late 1950s, there were nine Greek attorneys in Broward County. All of these attorneys were second generation Greeks (Silver 2008).

As more and more Greeks moved into the area, the need for the creation of a formal ethnic space became necessary to combat the separate spatial distribution of the group (Figure 4). The Greek Orthodox Church from the early days of Greek immigration to North America were more than just places of worship, they were the places where most ethnic activity took place. Identification with the Greek Orthodox Church and membership in the Orthodox parishes became a

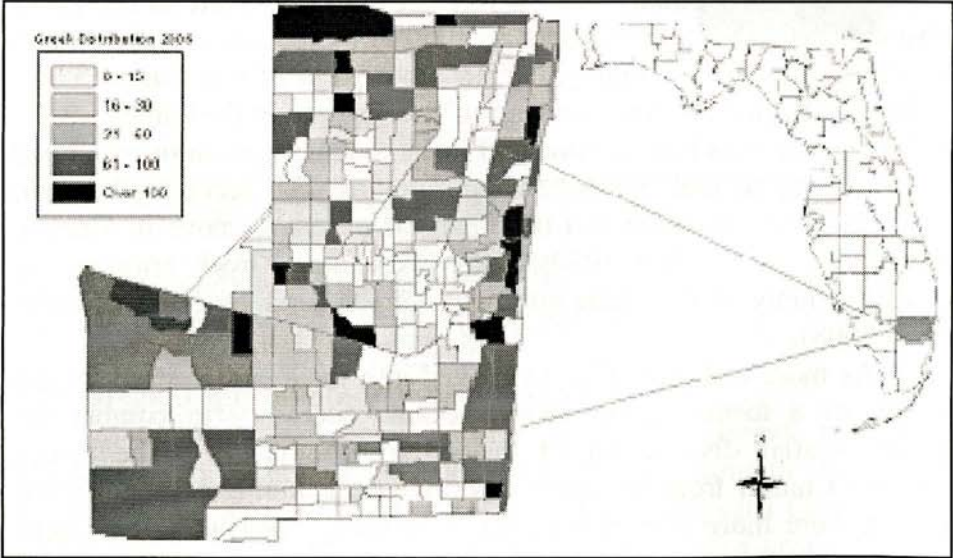
Figure 3: Greek Population Growth to Broward County



Source: US Census

very important element of the preservation of the Greek culture (Saloutos 1980; Moskos 1980). Participation in ethnic activities through the auspices of the Orthodox Church reinforces how Greeks perceive their Greek identity.

Figure 4: Spatial Distribution of the Greeks in Broward County



Source: US Census 2006

Due to the heterogeneity present in Broward County, the Greeks felt the need to create an ethnic space as a way of declaring their own uniqueness. Mary C. Waters (1990) has suggested that many white Europeans, when they claim the ethnicity of their ancestors, have the feeling of being special without having to give up any of the benefits of belonging to the accepted American majority. Like many other ethnic groups, the Greeks have a parallel ethnic existence; they remain members of their own ethnic group while adopting the norms of the dominant culture in order to improve their socioeconomic status. By residing in areas with many competing ethnic groups, this ethnic parallel existence can create feelings of exclusion and even alienation, not only from the dominant society, but from all the other ethnic groups that occupy the area (Zelinsky 2000). Thus, the creation and maintenance of an ethnic community becomes necessary for the social well being of many immigrants.

In South Florida, at the end of the 1950s there were only established ethnic communities centered on the two Greek Orthodox Churches. The first was in Coral Gables, a part of Miami, and the second was in Palm Beach. The majority of the Greeks in Broward County felt that it was very important to establish an Orthodox Church in the area (Aspras 2008). In 1957, they petitioned the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese in New York to organize a church. The Archdiocese replied that to form a church, 75 families willing to assume the economic responsibility for the building of a church were required. In 1957 they could not come up with 75 families willing to shoulder the responsibility of a new Orthodox Church, so the next thing they did was to organize a chapter of the American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association (AHEPA). This ethnic organization was founded in Atlanta during the 1920s in order to curb the activities of the Ku Klux Klan against the Greek immigrants in the United States' southern states (www.ahepa.org). Theodore Saloutos made an extensive study of the origin and the activities of the AHEPA. He wrote: "from the outset AHEPA had a middle-class orientation. It appealed to those who were climbing the social and economic ladder of success" (Saloutos 1964 39). The purpose and the objectives of AHEPA were to expand the horizons and the status of the Greek-Americans and also to further the causes of

Hellenism in the United States. On December 17, 1957, two months after the men formed the AHEPA; the Greek women formed the Daughters of Penelope, an auxiliary of AHEPA. Both organizations became centers of activity, which in turn became the magnet that brought families together.

In 1963, a Baptist Church in Northeast Fort Lauderdale became available for sale and the newly formed congregation voted to buy it. The Baptist church was not built in the traditional Byzantine style that most of the Greek Orthodox Churches were, but for the time it had to suffice. The Saint Demetrios Orthodox Church was established and within five years a new social hall was added next to the church. St. Demetrios Greek Orthodox Church was the first ethnic Greek marker in Broward County. This ethnic space allowed the Broward Greeks to have a place to practice their religion and at the same time it provided a physical space for all other Greek ethnic activities (Aspras 2008, Silver

**Figure 5: St. Demetrios Greek Orthodox Church,
Fort Lauderdale**



Source: www.stdemetrios.org

2008). Figure 5 shows the church as it appears today.

Based on census data, by 1970, almost 1600 Greeks called Broward County their home. Many Greeks bought homes in the newly built southern areas of Broward County and by 1974 another Orthodox Church was established in Hollywood, Florida. Saint George Orthodox Church was founded and very quickly became the second physical marker and center of Greek ethnic activity. During the 1980s Broward County experienced a tremendous growth to its Greek population from 3,960 in 1980, to 9,193 persons ten years later. This dramatic increase is partly due to the influx of Greek-Canadians, especially from Montreal who made a permanent move to Broward County.

Latest Greek Migration to Broward County

The majority of the Greek-Canadians left Montreal because of the economic and political reforms the Quebecois party instituted in 1977. Under that bill, French was declared the official language of the province. Commercial signs had to be written in French only, and with few exceptions, the use of English was banned. Public reaction to this law was powerful, especially among young couples with school-aged children. Bill 101 specified that all children had to attend French speaking schools unless their parents had received an English elementary education in the province. Greek-Canadians felt that the new political environment had a negative effect on their lives. The universal preference among Greek-Canadians was the English language since French was viewed as a relic of the past. Most of the Greek-Canadians felt that their children had many more opportunities within an Anglophone environment, and many chose to show their displeasure by migrating to 'other parts' (Caravelis 2007). Florida with its abundant sunshine, warm ocean breezes, and many economic opportunities proved irresistible. When the Greek-Canadians migrated to South Florida, the lack of a visible Greek ethnic enclave became evident. All ethnic activity was centered on the Greek Orthodox Churches of the area. The arrival of the newcomers created a new dimension to the community.

Evolution of the Greek Community

The Greek-Canadians of Montreal left a vibrant contiguous Greek community with an abundance of visible ethnic markers. Chomedey Avenue, on the island of Laval, is lined with an uninterrupted string of Greek restaurants, ethnic grocery stores, Greek coffee shops, bakeries and even a branch of the Greek National Bank. The Greek language is spoken everywhere and all the shops have signs in three languages. The Greek community in Montreal is described as the most institutionally developed Greek community in Canada, even though they are fewer in number than the Greeks inhabiting Toronto (Gavaki 2003). When the Greek-Canadians migrated to South Florida, they found themselves thrust into an unbounded ethnic community whose members were assimilated into the greater American society and lived scattered throughout the area. Almost from the start, the Greek-Canadians became part of the existing Greek community without severing their ties to the Greek- Canadian community in Montreal. In effect, they created a transnational community and helped this ethnic community evolve in a new direction.

Today, as it has been widely reported, immigrants are able to maintain strong social, cultural, economic, and political ties not only with their compatriots, but also with their country of birth, forming global networks through which information, goods, services, and individuals move (Schiller et. al. 1992; Basch et al.1994; Portes 1996; Faist 2000; Kivisto 2001). This recent phenomenon is known as transnationalism. The core view of transnationalism is the concept that immigration is a multi-level process (demographic, economic, cultural, and political) that involves relationships between many places rather than a one time permanent move from one nation to another. New technologies, especially in communication and transportation, serve to connect these transnational immigrants with increasing speed and efficiency. The Greek- Canadians are a very good example of transnational immigrants; being a twice-migrant group, first to Canada and later to the United States, they offer an insight as to how contemporary ethnic communities are shaped and evolve.

Upon closer inspection, the Greek ethnic community in Broward County reflects the level of assimilation and time of immigration arrival

of the members of this ethnic group. The two Greek orthodox Churches mirror the needs of this diverse ethnic community. Saint Demetrios Orthodox Church in Fort Lauderdale appears to attract the self identified Greeks who are fully assimilated and they are second or third generation. Their Greek language skills are very limited or non-existent. In contrast, Saint George in Hollywood is attracting the Greeks who immigrated from Greece either to the United States or Canada. Most of them speak Greek fluently or very well. The Orthodox Liturgy service is mostly conducted in Greek. This is in contrast to Saint Demetrios, where the service is primarily in English.

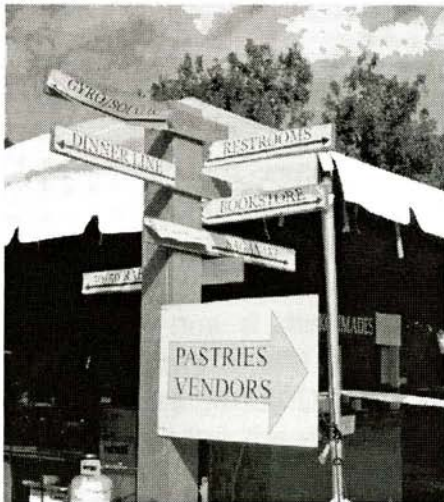
Earlier researchers were in agreement that Greek language retention played a very important role of ethnic cultural maintenance (Christou 2001; Constantinou 1996; Saloutos 1964, 1980; Moskos 1980; Costantakos 1980; Zotos 1976). However, the same studies show that the knowledge of the Greek language declines along sequent generations. In the case of the Greeks in Broward County, the Greek language retention as an identifier of ethnic cultural maintenance is important, but the proficiency in speaking Greek is not. Caravelis (2007) reported that knowledge of the most basic Greek words appeared sufficient for many to identify strongly with their Greek heritage.

Identification with the Greek Orthodox Church and membership in the Orthodox parishes however, continues to be an important element of the preservation of the Greek culture (Saloutos 1980; Moskos 1980). Participation in ethnic activities through the auspices of the Orthodox Church reinforces how Greeks perceive their Greek identity. The case of the Greek-Canadian community in South Florida thus captures the complexities that are involved in the process of creating and maintaining an ethnic community in a new transnational setting. In the case of the Broward Greeks who choose to actively or passively adhere to their Greek heritage and consider themselves part of the Greek community, it seems to indicate that they derive certain benefits by declaring their Greek ethnicity.

One event that most publicly declares the Greek ethnic origins of the members of the Greek community of Broward County is the annual Greek festivals. Dawson (1991 40) explains:

"For members of ethnic groups, their festivals are seen to bring them together in a common meeting place and through a set of common experiences which can then be used as cultural reference points throughout the year. In this sense, the festival creates an experience, and once it is over it becomes a new text itself, providing a current reading of an ongoing ethnic culture."

**Figure 6: St. Demetrios Greek Orthodox Church
Greek Festival 2009**



Source: Author

The Greeks in Broward County view the annual Greek Festival as declaration of their Greekness.

Festivals have been a religious and cultural tradition of Greek society since ancient times and the planning of such an event takes months of preparation and organization. The Greek festival is an invitation for everyone to participate in some of the Greek cultural customs at least for one weekend. Figure 6 is a photograph taken at the festival.

The two Greek festivals in Broward County, besides offering Greek food, Greek entertainment and the selling of items imported from Greece, promote the social ethnic

interaction between all of the Greeks in the area. Also, at the same time, needed funds are raised for the two Orthodox Churches. The Greek festivals appear to contribute to Greek ethnic cohesiveness. No other event provides Greeks the opportunity to express their ethnicity in such a loud, public and spatial manner.

Conclusion

One of the most important aspects of the Greek ethnic community of Broward County is that it provides to its members a sense of belonging. Most of those self identified Greeks appear to be looking for a connection with their Greek heritage and a setting where they can

celebrate their Greek culture and customs. Most of the Greeks who moved to Broward County came from other parts of North America. They have strived to create their ethnic community in South Florida based on their immigrant experiences. When the Greek community was first founded in the 1950s it reflected the experiences of the founding members. Those Greeks were born in the United States or were residents for many years thus fully assimilated to the norms of the United States. Even though, their first impulse was to recreate the same sense of belonging as their connected ethnic community of the northern U.S. cities that they came from, the spatial urban landscape of Broward County was not very conducive for the creation of a similar Greek ethnic enclave. Additionally, the lack of a large Greek population facilitated a new unbounded ethnic community. Modern transportation and communication connections present in the area further aided in the creation of the community. The establishment of the Greek Orthodox Church as a central symbolic ethnic meeting place further augmented the growth of this ethnic community.

The arrival of the Greek Canadians changed this ethnic community in many ways. The new Greek-Canadian migrants never severed their ties with their Canadian Greek friends and relatives in Canada, and in effect, they connected their ethnic community in Broward by a network of social, economic, cultural and religious bonds that reach across borders. All these connections facilitate the continuing evolution of this community in ways that were never apparent when this ethnic community was founded.

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