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BOOK REVIEWS

Greek Confectioners, Kandy Kitchens, and the KKK

Beck, Ann Flesor. *Sweet Greeks: First-Generation Immigrant Confectioners in the Heartland*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2020. xi + 303 pp. $27.95 (paperback), ISBN 978-0252085314.

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Like a fluffy bat of cotton candy, independent scholar Ann Flesor Beck's *Sweet Greeks* spins a regional history of a Greek immigrant community in early twentieth-century Illinois around the central core of her own family history. Her grandfather, Gus Flesor, emigrated in 1901 from Pigadakia, Greece, to the south of Tripoli, then to Chicago, and eventually to small-town Illinois. Like thousands of other Greeks, he learned the confectionary trade from family connections, and in 1904 he opened his Candy Kitchen—one of the Greek-owned candy, ice cream, and fruit stores that were ubiquitous in early twentieth-century American cities and towns. He and his children operated the store until the 1970s, and the author and her sister reopened it in 2004. For Beck, Gus Flesor is an exemplar of the Greek immigrant confectioner: his shop was an icon of family devotion and the immigrant's dream of success and respect through hard work. His Greek identity, intermittently a target of nativist threats, more often opened kin networks of skill, trade, and loyalty.

Beck first reviews Greek history. Her look back to the Bronze Age is not strictly necessary, but her account pushes forward quickly and elucidates the political and economic reasons for the Greek emigration that began in the 1890s. Beck places Greeks among other European immigrants arriving around the turn of the twentieth century: overwhelmingly male casual laborers in search of money to establish themselves or acquire dowries for their sisters. Although Greek immigrants were relatively small in number, Beck contends that, as southern Europeans, they felt a pressure to Americanize, particularly in light of eugenic disapproval targeting them as an "inferior race." However, Greeks also benefited from the wider cultural idealization of ancient Greece, an association utilized by American Hellenic associations. Jane Addams welcomed the Greek immigrants living near Hull-House, Grace Abbott studied them, and Addams assisted organizers such as Georgia Bitzis Pooley, an educated Greek woman who created a Philoptochos ("Friends of the Poor") Society of Greek Women and a Socrates School for women (67–68).

Initially starting as railroad laborers or pushcart fruit sellers, Greeks quickly found a niche in the food industry with confectioneries, ice cream shops, and small restaurants. (They almost always joined family in the business, as most had no experience with any such work in Greece.) Greek confectioners fanned out across small cities and towns through a network of kinsmen and mentorship. Brothers, cousins, partners, and sons learned the business from established confectioners, including the well-known Vriner's Confectionary in Champaign. The stores they established had similar recipes, offerings, and fixtures. Beck suggests that the many "Kandy Kitchens" were thus spelled because the Greek alphabet has a K (kappa) but no C (x).

Beck describes a threat to Greek communities—especially in smaller towns—with the rise of the Ku Klux Klan in the late 1910s and early 1920s. This Klan resurgence, especially in the Midwest, was still violent but also popular among native-born Americans. Its focus was widely nativist as well as anti-Black, and it led local campaigns against Mexicans, Italians, Jews, Catholics, Greeks, and any "others." The Klan accused Greeks of "white slavery" and threatened their candy stores (often the only immigrant-owned businesses in the small-town Midwest). In response, Greeks formed their own fraternal order, the American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association (AHEPA). Beck relates how Gus Flesor later served a former Klansman who patronized his candy store, forty years after the man had burned a cross on Gus's lawn, by genially saluting him each day with the (untranslated) Greek for "horse's ass" (101).

Beck cites abundant sources ranging from census records to city directories, genealogy resources, local English and Greek newspapers, and oral histories. This profusion of sources is at times repetitive or insufficiently contextualized. Beck cannot resist calling out every newspaper mention of each confectionery, so the reader must wade through the puffery and pleasantries of small-town boosterism. Similarly, she reads ethnic pride in the oft-repeated description of Greek candy stores as "clean and sanitary," but this was a nearly universal assertion about public food businesses in an era newly aware of germ theory and among individuals living through a flu pandemic. The chapters on Greek confectioneries in small cities and towns in particular are a rather overwhelming parade of immigrants' birth and death dates, their relatives, their mentors, their marriages, their stores, and anything else known about them—exemplary military service, a town commendation, a long reminiscence from an old customer.

The stories all add up to a remarkably uniform pattern, which is in itself important: despite Klan resistance, Greek immigrants to the Midwest proved strikingly tenacious at establishing themselves in the small-town confectionery niche, and they demonstrated both family stability (purchasing business investments and family homes and assisting relatives into the business) and civic commitment. Successful confectioners contributed public meeting spaces and parks to their adopted hometowns, served in the military, and received public accolades at their retirements or when their shops closed (as most did by the 1970s, with the deterioration of small-town public spaces). The Klan aside, ethnicity seems not to have been a major barrier: many Greek men married non-Greek women, and their stores functioned as social centers of small-town and city life without being dismissed as "foreign" spaces.

Beck's study is intentionally microlocal, but it leaves the curious reader with questions: did other states and regions experience this density of Greek-owned confectioneries or was proximity to Chicago the key? The candies, sodas, and foods sold, as described, seem to have been entirely American; although Beck briefly mentions the Greek culinary history of sweets made with honey, figs, and nuts, we do not learn whether any of the American Greek confectioneries served identifiably "Greek" sweets or foods. Did the relative absence of Greek women, with their home cooking traditions, create a distinction

between Greek food for the family (cooked by women) and commercial American treats for the store (cooked by men)? Nevertheless, this study will satisfy scholars of regional Midwest foodways, immigrant business, and Americanization (and will surely delight families and townspeople who remember each candy store mentioned). And, as Beck says, it also lights the way to further study into immigrant food businesses.

Retaining the Empire: Taft and the Philippines

Burns, Adam. *William Howard Taft and the Philippines: A Blueprint for Empire*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2020. xii + 189 pp. $70.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1621905691.

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President William McKinley's decision to appoint William Howard Taft governor-general of the Philippines was unconventional. The Cincinnati judge was silent on the War of 1898 and cool toward the American annexation of the Philippines. But the appointment turned Taft into the nation's most ardent imperial retentionist. Where previous biographers and political historians have speculated that Taft was open to or even supported independence for the Philippines upon his return to the United States, Adam Burns's meticulous reconstruction of Taft's correspondence reveals otherwise.

Burns makes the case that the "Taft Era" lasted beyond his term as governor-general of the Philippines by dividing the book into sections on Taft's time in and out of the Philippines. The first half of the book turns to the "policy of attraction"—the mix of incentives by which Americans "attracted" potential allies to the colonial state. Taft framed annexation as a fait accompli, thereby positioning himself as a reluctant but duty-bound administrator working for the good of the Filipinos. Burns acknowledges the racist nature of this position but is mainly concerned with the sociocultural (chapter one), political (chapter two), and economic (chapter three) components of attraction. Yet Taft's ambivalence toward Filipinos resulted in deeply contradictory stances. He proclaimed the "Philippines for Filipinos" but urged Chinese migration as a solution to labor shortages. He relied on an elite he famously condemned as "as ambitious as Satan" (41) while encouraging their formation of a federal party (the Partido Federal) whose hopes for statehood he knew had no chance of succeeding. For all his emphasis on procedure, institutions, and law, Taft was "convinced that his personal touch was essential for the success of the policy of attraction" (39).

Taft's conviction that he alone could forge a successful policy shaped his tenure as secretary of war (chapter four) and his one-term presidency (chapter five). Burns argues that Taft believed a multigenerational period of tutelage would end with a U.S.-Philippine relationship modeled on that of the British-Canadian dominion status. For this reason,