Greek-American Relations from Monroe to Truman

Angelo Repousis

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Introduction

The benefits which the Greeks derived from the noble and benevolent exertions of the great American Nation of the United States are innumerable. Americans endowed by nature with a warm heart, and inspired by the noble history of Hellas . . . hailed with delight the glorious resurrection of Greece in 1821. Since that time Greece has discovered in the United States a great Patron, who pitied her misfortunes and succored her needs.

—Constantine Maniakes, America and Greece (1899)

In October of 2000, former U.S. ambassador to Greece Nicholas Burns, together with Athens mayor Dimitris Avramopoulos, rededicated the monument to the American philhellenes who fought for Greek independence that was first donated by the American Legion in 1930. Later that month the ambassador helped dedicate a new permanent exhibition in the U.S. embassy lobby on the history of U.S.-Greek relations from the 1820s to the twenty-first century. These monuments and exhibitions, Burns noted, “are testimony to the power of memory and history in America’s relations with Greece. Our hope is that these events will permit us to remember all that has been good and positive in our relationship and to look toward the future with confidence.”

Public statements by top officials, like the one given by President George W. Bush during the signing of a presidential proclamation for Greek Independence Day on March 23, 2001, highlight the mutually constructive and historic relationship between the two countries and seem to hearken back to an earlier time:

When I became President I inherited the responsibility to safeguard one of America’s oldest and most sacred friendships—that of the government and people of the United States with the government and people of Greece. We must keep that relationship vibrant, as it has been for 180 years. . . . We respect the ancient influence of Greece, and we value its modern friendships. Greece
and America have been allies in the great 20th century struggles against Nazism, Soviet Communism, and Iraqi aggression. Our two nations are bound by history, by trade, by mutual respect, by common ideals, and one of the world’s most important alliances. We in the United States consider Greece to be a friend, a strong ally, and a powerful force for good in the world.\(^2\)

In this volume I examine the history of U.S.-Greek foreign relations from the time of the Greek War for Independence (1821–28) to the announcement of the Truman Doctrine in 1947. Diplomatic relations between Greece and the United States in these years have received little attention from historians. When it comes to American relations with Europe during this period, studies generally focus on the major European powers—Great Britain, France, and Spain. This is primarily because Greece was not perceived as vital to America’s national interest. As a consequence, U.S. political and military involvement in that part of the world prior to World War II was both limited and intermittent. Moreover, because of the preeminence of American political, military, and economic influence in Greece after 1947 and the catalytic role of its civil war in the promulgation of the Truman Doctrine and containment policy, what attention historians of U.S. foreign policy have given to Greece has focused almost entirely on the Cold War period. This study provides a comprehensive account of the formative period of U.S.-Greek relations, illuminating a positive, though often forgotten, chapter in the relations between the two countries.

Filling any long-standing lacuna in the literature is a valuable contribution, but my objectives are more ambitious, as I intend to demonstrate the dynamics and influences on U.S. foreign relations by using Greece as a model. Two of the most fundamental doctrines of American foreign policy, the Monroe and Truman doctrines, both explicitly address issues concerning external aggression toward Greece. What were the developments in Greece that provoked Washington’s concern to such a degree that this Balkan nation’s future would be integral to these two hallowed expressions of America’s global posture in history? Since Greece was not as vital to America’s national interest (at least not prior to 1947), how do we explain its remarkably prominent role at junctures of such transcendent importance to the evolution of U.S. foreign relations? In answering these questions, I provide important insights into a variety of resonant themes in the field of U.S. foreign relations, including the role of private individuals and groups in influencing foreign policymaking, the way cultural influences transfer across societies, and how public opinion shapes policy (or sometimes does not).

As the Truman Doctrine indicates, Greece was a principal catalyst in America rejecting its historic isolationism. But what is often overlooked is that Greece also played a role in strengthening the primacy of American isolationism in the nineteenth century. During the 1820s, the inspiration of the Greek revolt against the
Ottoman Empire nearly caused the Monroe administration to extend recognition to the Greek revolutionaries. Ultimately, with the enunciation of the Monroe Doctrine in 1823, the administration reaffirmed the country's traditional policy of political and military nonintervention in the affairs of Europe. Thus, the United States remained, in the words of John Quincy Adams, “vindicator only of her own.” This, however, did not mean that the United States would become a hermit nation. As James A. Field Jr. persuasively argues, the U.S. government during much of the nineteenth century encouraged commercial and cultural expansion with foreign nations while avoiding political entanglements. “As believers in minimum government, the founders,” Field writes, “were necessarily isolationist in matters concerning the intercourse of states. On the level of the individual, however . . . they were fiercely internationalist.”

The government was to hold back, intervening only to release the energies of the private sector, while the individual took the initiative in foreign affairs. The history of U.S. relations with Greece provides compelling evidence in support of Field’s argument.

In the years following the promulgation of the Monroe Doctrine, U.S. government intervention in Greek affairs remained limited. This, however, did not preclude private American citizens from getting involved in the affairs of the modern Hellenic state. During the Greek Revolution and, later, during the Cretan Insurrection of 1866–1869, for example, positive action in support of Greece was taken through private initiatives. American philhellenes in both cases gave their moral and material support to the Hellenic cause, while some even participated directly in the hostilities. After Greece achieved independence in 1830, individual traders, missionaries, philanthropists, classical scholars, journalists, politicians, sailors, and other travelers were the first to make contact with the Greek people, preceding both consuls and naval officers. What they witnessed, experienced, and told home characterized U.S.-Greek relations prior to 1947. The important point here is that an American presence in Greece had been firmly established long before the United States became the dominant foreign influence in that country after 1947.

I extend the reach of historical scholarship beyond official state actions to examine the role of private individuals and groups. The study of U.S. foreign relations in general and that of U.S.-Greek diplomacy in particular has often been preoccupied with the study of official U.S. policy, whereby the state is viewed as the principal actor. Diplomatic historians have traditionally been primarily concerned with the activities of state policymakers, with the strategic and geopolitical determinants of policy, and with such conventional notions as national security, national interest, and the balance of power. Working within this so-called “realist” framework, these scholars, represented by George Kennan and Hans Morgenthau, were interested primarily in the use of power to advance the national interest.

An analysis of U.S.-Greek relations prior to World War II raises the question of whether the state should so dominate our concerns. This is not to imply that
the role of the state should be minimized but, rather, to suggest that finding a place for nonstate actors can broaden our understanding of American involvement in the world. After American independence, individual Americans, mostly on private initiative, reached across national boundaries to engage in commercial, religious, educational, humanitarian, and other activities abroad. What they saw, experienced, and reported home formed a rich legacy of American foreign relations, and until the twentieth century these activities defined the nature of American relations with the rest of the world.

The activities associated with the private sphere cannot be treated in isolation. From the 1890s on, official Washington, as Emily Rosenberg argues, became increasingly interested in what Americans did abroad and sought to direct their activities in ways to promote national interests. Rosenberg shows how private citizens and government officials cooperated by an evolving series of techniques to promote the extension of American economic and cultural influence throughout the world. Thus, the relationship between the private and public spheres is an intricate and interdependent one. The study of U.S. relations with Greece provides a useful model in understanding the dynamics of this evolving relationship.

Greece provides a case study of the extent to which, until the late nineteenth century, American commercial, religious, and educational activities abroad were largely the domain of private individuals. Following Greek independence, American missionaries, traders, and intellectuals were prominently active in Greek society developing social, commercial, and intellectual bonds. After World War I there emerged a cooperative state in which the government sought to encourage and coordinate these private initiatives. During the interwar years American relief, technical assistance, and investment capital would take on a greater influence in the economic, social, and even political life of Greece. By 1947 the U.S. government was intervening more actively as an agent of societal and global transformation in the interests of the United States. With the promulgation of the Truman Doctrine, the United States gradually abandoned its traditional nonintervention in Greek internal affairs and adopted a policy of direct intervention.

Within this context, moreover, the ways “ordinary” Americans dealt with the challenges they found in Greece’s unfamiliar setting, and how they affected that society, figure prominently here. Through the export of American goods, and the activities of missionaries, educators, and tourists, American culture penetrates other cultures. Merchants, missionaries, educators, and even tourists, then, functioned in one way or another as cultural intermediaries. What preconceptions did Americans carry with them and how did those preconceptions shape their outlook and behavior toward the Greek people? I likewise address the impact of Greek immigration on the overall development of U.S.-Greek relations. These exchanges did much to shape the ways Greeks and Americans viewed one another. What influence did these immigrants have on U.S. policy toward their homeland?
What were the attitudes of Americans toward these immigrants? These are important questions that await extensive investigation.

In taking a cultural approach to the study of U.S.-Greek foreign relations, I am indebted to the work of those historians who have tried to analyze the relationship between culture and international relations. These scholars have shown that the driving forces of American behavior in the world are social and cultural as well as economic and geopolitical. Michael Hunt, for example, sees American diplomacy rooted in such issues as nationalism, racial and ethnic identity, evangelical faith, regional anxieties, and social class. He views U.S. foreign policy as an expression of an American ideology. But for him that ideology cannot be sufficiently explained by markets or the pursuit of national interests. Instead, it rests on racism, a sense of superiority, and Americans’ confidence in their ability to change the world. In emphasizing the cultural roots of foreign policy, Hunt provides a useful intellectual tool for studying American diplomacy. For Hunt, ideology and culture are invariably linked.6

The cultural setting is vital to the workings of foreign affairs. Bradford Perkins also argues this in his study *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1865*. For Perkins, it is impossible to understand American foreign policy without fully appreciating the profound, persistent impact of an ideology that emerged during the colonial and early national periods. The most important belief was an almost zealous devotion to republicanism, which itself became fervently associated with the notion of individualism. This belief system conditioned the way Americans have viewed and responded to world developments. Many Americans considered theirs a model republic, one destined to change the world. Secure in their faith in liberty, Americans would set about remaking others in their own image.7

Foreign policy, Walter Hixson adds, therefore plays an especially important role in affirming, creating, and disciplining American notions of national identity.8 The reaction of Americans to the Greek Revolution of 1821 was essentially a projection of their vision of their own. The struggle for Greek independence seemed to offer the ideal opportunity for the inauguration of a revolutionary new foreign policy approach in which Americans would actively help oppressed peoples attain the same freedoms they possessed. That Washington did not adopt a forward policy toward the Greek revolutionaries does not diminish the significance of this missionary ideology. Indeed, as Anders Stephanson argues, this American ideology of providential and historical “choseness” has been invoked numerous times in the course of American history. After World War II and the promulgation of the Truman Doctrine, the United States styled itself as “leader of the free world,” locked in a mortal combat with the forces of communism.9 In this regard, the extent to which the rhetoric of Truman’s appeal for aid to Greece in 1947 parallels that of appeals made in 1823 is revealing. Americans in both 1823 and 1947 reached out to help others achieve the freedoms they themselves enjoyed. What differed
in 1947 was that the government took the lead as an agent of global and societal transformation, whereas in 1823 that task fell largely to private organizations. One must remember that in 1823 the United States lacked the capability to project its values and power abroad.

By juxtaposing policies and programs regarding Greece with the evolution of American society and political culture, I intend to show how domestic forces in the United States found expression in external attitudes toward Greece. I contend that Greek culture, particularly that associated with classical Greece, played a vital role in the development of American political culture, especially during the Jefferson and Jackson periods. The “democratic” impulses associated with those eras had a firm foundation in the political culture of ancient Greece. The first two decades of the nineteenth century saw a revival of interest in Greek language and Hellenic culture. Many learned Americans thought that the writings of the ancient Greeks, with their love of liberty and freedom, provided the guidelines for how republicanism could be maintained. Many classically inclined Americans during this period modeled their homes and public buildings after Greek temples and launched new cities with names straight from antiquity, giving physical evidence to the notion that the glory of Greece was being revived in the American wilderness. In the years following the close of the revolution, a flock of American pilgrims visited Greece. As Americans began to discover Greece through travel, they brought back descriptions of Greek lands and an enthusiasm for Hellenism.

In recent years there have been a number of important narratives—led by Carl Richard's *The Golden Age of the Classics in America: Greece, Rome, and the United States*, Caroline Winterer’s *The Culture of Classicism: Ancient Greece and Rome in American Intellectual Life, 1780–1910*, and David Roessel's *In Byron’s Shadow: Modern Greece in the English and American Imagination*—that have examined the powerful impact of the classical tradition on American society and culture. Winterer shows how classicists saw classical study as a way to combat the crass materialism and industrialization of nineteenth-century America. Richard goes further to illustrate how the classical tradition stimulated a feeling among Americans that they were the rightful successors of Hellenic civilization. Roessel analyzes the cultural influence of literary philhellenism in both the United States and Great Britain. He shows how intellectual and political currents have shaped modern conceptions of Greece in the West during the last two centuries.10

This study moves beyond those works to show how cultural influences, such as the role of philhellenism, have influenced American relations with modern Greece. The outbreak of the Greek War for Independence in 1821 did much to excite the zeal of romantic philhellenes, who eagerly anticipated a resurrection of ancient Hellas and the return of the arts and sciences to that hallowed land. Given the reverence many Americans held for classical Greece, it should not be surprising that they would exhibit such a deep concern for the plight of the contempo-
rary Greeks, who were perceived as the lineal descendants of the ancient Hellenes to whom Western civilization owed so much. Many Americans thought they had a responsibility to extend the “light of civilization” and to impart the “improvements of science and the blessings of free and liberal institutions” to Greece, a place where those principles had first been expressed.

From the Greek Revolution down to the Truman Doctrine, the depiction of ancient Greece and what it represented stimulated discussion in support of modern Greece. A unique bond was said to exist between the peoples of the United States and Greece arising out of their shared devotion to advancing the ideals of democracy. Throughout the period under investigation, political events in Greece—ranging from the Greek Revolution in the 1820s to the Cretan Insurrection in the 1860s to the Greek Civil War in the 1940s—were perceived as crusades to extend the blessings of individual liberty and democracy. American intervention in Greek affairs was motivated in part by this sense of kinship between American and Greek political cultures.

This study begins by examining the extent of philhellenic sentiment in the United States during the early national and antebellum periods and then proceeds to show how this philhellenism found expression in external attitudes toward Greece by looking first at America’s role during the Greek Revolution. During the 1820s, pro-Greek societies sprang up throughout the country as hundreds of sponsors gave their moral and material support to the cause. During the 1830s, with Greece’s independence secured, Greek enthusiasts, both secular and religious, initiated new campaigns for Greek relief aimed at establishing schools of all grades throughout the country. One of the most successful efforts of this kind was Emma Hart Willard’s female seminary established to educate women teachers—the first of its kind in Greece. Her campaign to unfetter her Greek “sisters” paralleled the determination of Protestant missionaries who sought to transform the Greek Orthodox Church and to bring American, Protestant-style civilization to the Hellenic people. But the 1852 proselytism case against an American missionary, Jonas King, illustrates the challenges that arose out of the clash between a budding American nationalism and the religiously based nationalism of the newly developing Hellenic nation.

After the U.S. Civil War, Americans were again entreated to provide material assistance to Greek refugees fleeing Crete following the devastation of the island as a result of the Cretan Insurrection of 1866. A significant by-product of the war was the establishment of a permanent American legation in Athens in 1868. Although the development of U.S.-Greek diplomatic relations progressed slowly in these years, U.S.-Greek relations grew closer in other ways as American commercial, cultural, and educational activities in Greece grew at century’s end.

The turn of the century witnessed the influx of several thousand Greek immigrants to the United States. But in the racialized climate of the time, the veneration lavished on Greece since the time of the revolution abated appreciably. As
more and more Americans increasingly came in contact with the Greek people, either through travel to Greece or through exposure to newly arriving emigrants, the perceived dichotomy between the ancient and modern Hellenes grew more pronounced. Many observers presumed that the Greek race had been reduced to an inferior, or "mongrelized," type, not much different from the latest collection of immigrants pouring into the United States from eastern and southern Europe.

After the close of the Greek Revolution, two impressions of the modern Greeks prevailed in American social thought: the romantic idealization of classical Greece continued to influence a number of Americans, particularly intellectuals, in their attitudes toward the descendants of the ancient Hellenes, whereas other social theorists questioned the lineal descent of the modern from the ancient Hellenes.

After World War I, the United States assumed a greater role in the economic, social, cultural, and, to a limited extent, political life of Greece. In 1922, after the disastrous defeat of the Greek military forces in Asia Minor, the U.S. government, American relief agencies, and American private citizens again responded swiftly with humanitarian aid. The U.S. government coordinated the charitable enterprise implemented by the American Red Cross and the Near East Relief. American aid had a lasting and beneficial effect on U.S.-Greek relations over the next several decades.

The growth of American commercial, economic, and cultural influence continued during the 1920s and 1930s. At the conclusion of World War II, American influence in Greece underwent a fundamental change, largely as a result of the United States's emergence as the preeminent power in the world. The year 1947 represented a significant departure from the American diplomatic tradition, in general, and a momentous watershed in the history of U.S.-Greek relations, in particular. Though a number of American organizations and private citizens, mostly on private initiative, had engaged in a series of philanthropic, educational, religious, and cultural activities in Greece since the days of the Greek Revolution in 1821, the United States had adhered almost unwaveringly to the precepts enunciated in Monroe's famous speech of December 1823 relating to political nonintervention in the political and military affairs of Europe. Throughout the nineteenth century, the U.S. government would offer words of encouragement and sympathy for subjugated people everywhere. Nowhere did this sentiment find greater expression than in the several campaigns to provide aid to the Greek revolutionists of 1821, the Cretan rebels of 1866 and 1897, and the Asia Minor refugees in 1922. But diplomatic and military support would not come until the Truman Doctrine.

In 1947 American officials became convinced that abstention from intervention in the Greek civil war and entanglement with Western Europe presented undue risks to the country's safety. America's growing interests in the eastern Mediterranean, especially regarding access to the oil resources of the Middle East, made Greece's strategic location of vital importance. With the postwar decline of
the Western European powers, the United States could no longer rely on its traditional allies, especially Great Britain, to shoulder their responsibilities. In 1823 the United States did not need to intervene to save the Greeks. That job fell to the great powers of Europe. But after 1947 the United States was compelled to intervene in areas outside its traditional sphere of influence. With the global threat of Soviet communism, the Truman administration succeeded where earlier philhellenes had fallen short.

With the promulgation of the Truman Doctrine, the United States would gradually abandon its traditional detachment from Greek internal affairs and adopt a policy of direct intervention. Certainly after 1947 the state came to play a more active role in Greek affairs. But one must not lose sight of the importance of nonstate actors in the study of U.S. foreign relations. Private individuals abroad, until the late nineteenth century, largely influenced American commercial, religious, and educational activities. By finding a place in historical accounts for these individuals, we gain a fuller and more sophisticated understanding of American involvement in the world. As the history of U.S. relations with Greece indicates, cultural issues were frequently critically important—indeed, determinant—influences on U.S. foreign relations.
The conditions and prospects of modern Greece have been a common subject of interest and conversation since the appearance of the first cantos of *Childe Harold*. The splendid success of that poem produced a very general effect on the public mind and from that period the number of travellers to Greece has much more increased and the situation of that country been much more the subject of inquiry than at any former period. The beautiful stanzas in *Childe Harold* . . . and the notes on the subject of the Greeks and the specimens of their language also given there excited in me as probably in all young men first leaving college the most lively interest with respect to the classic land and a wish that circumstances might enable me to visit it.

—Edward Everett, “A Trip Through Greece in 1819”

Lord Byron’s acclaimed *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, published in 1812 with its detailed notes on contemporary Greece, deeply affected a number of American philhellenes, including a young twenty-one year old Boston linguist and scholar named Edward Everett. On completion of his studies at Harvard, Everett was inspired to make his own pilgrimage to Greece. The travels of François René Viscount de Chateaubriand in Greece and his book *L’Itineraire de Paris a Jerusalem* also fed Everett’s growing enthusiasm.¹

The first indication of Everett’s philhellenism came in the form of an anonymously published essay in the January 1813 issue of the *General Repository and Review* of Boston. The article, titled “On the Literature and Language of Modern Greece,” together with his Master of Arts oration at Cambridge in 1814 on the “Restoration of Greece,” reflected his burgeoning interest in Greece and Hellenic culture. His article is significant in light of Everett’s later championing of the Greek cause for independence in the 1820s. “If then, in the page of revolutions,
which is opening on the world, there is written an hour of political revival for
Greece, we may prophesy that their language may be restored," he mused.2

Everett's dream of actually visiting Greece came to fruition when in 1815 he
accepted an appointment as the first Eliot Professor of Greek Language and Lit-
erature at Harvard College. Before assuming his new post, he was given leave to
study abroad, as there were few facilities in the United States sufficient to train a
classical scholar.3 This presented a golden opportunity for the young academic,
one that he did not lose sight of.

When appointed . . . to the Professorship of Greek Literature everything rela-
tive to Greece became more than ever a proper object of interest to me, and in
the plans for a visit to Europe which I was to make before entering into the du-
ties of my office, a short tour of Greece was the part to which I looked forward
with more eagerness than any other. I thought much of the light which might
be thrown on the ancient dialect by a familiar acquaintance with the modern.4

London became the first stop on Everett's "Grand Tour." There he consulted
with a number of important Greek scholars and travelers, among them Byron,
who graciously autographed the young American's copy of Childe Harold. Everett
also found time to visit the British Museum to catch a glimpse of the controversial
Elgin Marbles; he was quite disappointed, however, to discover that they were
"fewer, less perfect, and less interesting" than he had hoped. Enjoying his stay in
London, the young scholar set out for the University of Göttingen, in Germany,
then considered the best university in Europe for classical studies. Arriving in
August 1815, Everett immediately became acquainted with the New Humanism in
Germany, with its emphasis on Greek language and Hellenic culture. In the first
two decades of the nineteenth century, a number of American scholars studied
at Göttingen; the most prominent of these, besides Everett, included George Tic-
knor, Joseph Green Cogswell, and George Bancroft.5

Throughout his travels in Europe Everett acquainted himself with anyone who
could provide him with information on Greece. While in Paris in late 1817 and early
1818, Everett met the acclaimed Greek scholar and patriot Adamantios Koraes (or
Coray, as he came to be known), who agreed to instruct the American in the mod-
er Greek language.6 Complete with letters of introduction from Byron, Koraes,
and others, Everett set out for Italy in the fall of 1818. During his stay he met various
Greeks, including the former Archbishop of Arta and Aetolia, who provided him
with further information and helped him plan his Greek trip. At the end of March
1819, Everett, accompanied by fellow Bostonian Theodore Lyman Jr., finally left for
the island of Corfu and Greece. Following in Byron's footsteps, the two Americans
left Corfu on April 8 for Epirus and the city of Yanina (Ioannina), where they met
the famed Ali Pasha, who had been immortalized in *Childe Harold*. Traveling south they passed through the historic Pass of Thermopylae on their way to Delphi. From Delphi Lyman and Everett proceeded to Athens by way of Livadia, Thebes, and Plataea. Reaching Athens on April 25, they met another of Byron’s acquaintances in the celebrated “Maid of Athens.” The two soon grew disappointed, however, when they failed to secure lodging in the house where their hero had slept. Another disappointment followed when Turkish officials chased the Americans from the steps of the Acropolis for not having the appropriate authorization. Not to be denied, they returned and succeeded in bribing the sentinels into opening the portals of the Acropolis. After that, they had free passage to roam the ancient ruins.7

Remaining in Athens for approximately eleven days, Everett immersed himself in his studies, consulting with a number of prominent Greek scholars and walking in the footsteps of his ancient heroes and philosophers. “I took as nearly as possible,” he wrote in his journal, “the walk described so beautifully by Plato in the Phaedrus.” But as Everett soon discovered, modern Athens offered a melancholy reminder of the loss of its former greatness and a warning for Americans. The visitor, Everett counseled, would do well to “remember that it was civil liberty that made [Athens] what it was and slavery that has made it what it is.” From Athens, Everett and Lyman embarked on an extensive tour of the Peloponneseus, visiting Eleusis, Megara, Corinth, Argos, Tripolis, and Sparta. Leaving the Peloponneseus, they “determined not to leave Greece without having bathed in its classical waters” and paused for swim in the Gulf of Corinth. They left Greece on May 21, after securing passage on a ship bound for Constantinople.8

Throughout his travels in Greece, Everett lost no opportunity to search for Greek manuscripts in the libraries and religious houses in order to expand his personal library. He expressed no qualms about divesting those ancient texts from their owners.

We may excuse the severity with which those Greeks, who feel for the literary degradation of their native country, speak of the removal of such manuscripts from the convents and schools in Greece, where they are still preserved. But it cannot of course be doubted that the cause of literature at large authorizes the European traveller to avail himself of the ignorance and insensitivity of the Greek priests and monks, and to induce them to sell those manuscripts which can only become generally useful, by being taken from their present places of deposit, and brought to regions, where they will be collated and made known to the world.9

Implicit in the removal of these ancient artifacts was a cultural imperialism. While Everett may have revered the ancient Greeks, he and other contemporary travelers and writers looked on the modern Greeks with disdain, as children in need of
guidance from “older brothers” like himself. Quite probably, few of the Greeks he encountered had little knowledge of their ancient counterparts.10

After four and a half years of study and travel in Europe, Everett returned to Cambridge in 1820 to assume his new post as Professor of Greek Literature and to vie for the distinction of being the “foremost American Hellenist.” His Greek courses at Harvard and his public lectures in Boston on the antiquities of Athens reflected and, in turn, contributed to the burgeoning fascination with Greece that evolved in the United States during the first two decades of the nineteenth century. Joining Everett at Harvard were a few of his former colleagues from Göttingen, including Ticknor, Cogswell, and Bancroft. Ticknor, who had studied German philosophy and literature in addition to Greek while at Göttingen, assumed the position of Smith Professor of French and Spanish at Harvard, with an added professorship of belles lettres. Bancroft accepted a tutorship in Greek in 1822, and Cogswell became the head librarian of Harvard’s library and a professor of mineralogy and geology.11

Among the young men who studied Greek at Harvard under Everett at this time were Charles Francis Adams, who later served with distinction as U.S. minister to England during the Civil War; transcendentalist essayist and poet Ralph Waldo Emerson; Unitarian clergyman Frederic Henry Hedge, who joined Emerson in organizing the transcendentalist movement; Andrew Preston Peabody, who became editor of the North American Review (1853) and Plummer Professor of Christian Morals at Harvard (1862); and classical scholar Cornelius C. Felton, who succeeded Everett as Greek professor (1832) and president of Harvard (1860). Emerson in particular became enamored with Everett’s lectures. As Emerson observed, there “was an influence on the young people from the genius of Everett which was almost comparable to that of Pericles in Athens. He had an inspiration which did not go beyond his head, but which made him the master of elegance.”12

A number of Everett’s students continued to appreciate classical literature and promoted artistic interests. Some, including Felton, followed in their mentor’s footsteps and traveled to Greece over the next several decades. Felton’s most popular work consisted of four courses of lectures before the Lowell Institute in Boston, which he delivered in the years 1852, 1853, 1854, and 1859. They were eventually published posthumously in two volumes titled Greece, Ancient and Modern.13

Through his post at Harvard, Everett mounted a concerted campaign to give greater impetus to the study of Greek language and culture in the United States. Articles by Everett and his friends appeared in the leading literary magazines of the day, including the American Monthly Review of Boston, the Southern Review of Charleston, the New York Knickerbocker, the American Monthly Magazine of New York, the Southern Literary Messenger of Richmond, the Portico of Baltimore, and the Philadelphia Port Folio. Foremost among these periodicals in its zeal for promoting Greek and Hellenism was the influential North American Review, edited by Everett. A frequent contributor to the Review was George Bancroft.
Subscriptions of the journal reached 3,000, and it boasted readers in the South and West. Bancroft and Everett also produced several basic texts used by American college students. One of those texts, a translation of German professor Philipp Buttman’s *Greek Grammar*, became a mainstay of freshman and sophomore college curricula until midcentury.  

The story of the increasing knowledge of Greece and Hellenic culture forms an important part of the cultural history of the United States. During the early national and antebellum eras, Greek enthusiasts studied Greek language, literature, and architecture for the lessons they afforded. Many educated Americans believed that the study of Greek literature and history inculcated republican values. Simple and chaste, Greek architecture and literature embodied the characteristics of the young republic struggling to acquire a national culture free of baneful European influences. A number of Americans built their homes and public buildings in the Greek temple style and named their cities and towns for those of antiquity. Hellenic references also infused the writings of several of the era’s foremost literary writers, among them Herman Melville and Nathaniel Hawthorne. Antebellum American Hellenism even influenced New England transcendentalists like Emerson, whose idealist philosophy can be traced back to the teachings of Plato. New opportunities for leisure and improved transatlantic transportation between the 1820s and 1860s made travel to Europe more accessible and desirable for a number of upper- and even middle-class Americans. In these years, a host of American tourists, missionaries, and scholars made the pilgrimage to Greece, and many published accounts of their travels and gave lyceum lectures on their experiences.  

With the increase of public schooling, improvements in printing, and the advent of railroad transportation, classical texts and other popular works on Greek mythology and history were introduced for the first time to small frontier towns, a growing middle class, women, and, in some places in the North, blacks. Founded in 1821, Emma Willard’s Troy Female Seminary taught the Greek and Roman classics to 12,000 young women over a fifty-year span. The school’s curriculum was comparable to that of male colleges at the time. By the 1830s several of Willard’s students succeeded in establishing similar schools modeled on the Troy plan in places like South Carolina, Maryland, and Ohio. In 1833 Willard even launched a female seminary in Athens, Greece, to train women teachers, thereby extending the blessings of female education to the descendants of Aspasia and Sappho. By the 1850s some schools in the larger northeastern cities also began providing a classical education to blacks. The coeducational Institute for Colored Youth in Philadelphia, for example, taught students courses on the Greek New Testament, Xenophon’s *Anabasis*, and other classical works. Enthusiasm for the classics also extended beyond the large northeastern cultural centers. The Northwest and Southwest saw an increase in the number of colleges, with almost all focused on classical instruction.
The strength and meaning of this classical tradition, Carl Richard writes, encouraged many antebellum Americans to see themselves as the legitimate heirs of Hellenic civilization. The perceived similarity between classical and American institutions reinforced that belief. Americans believed that their shared commitment to democracy moved them closer to the ancient Greeks than any other nation. Some, like Thomas Dew, went further, claiming, “We are enacting Greece, if I may use the expression, on a grander scale. . . . We shall have millions of freemen where the Athenians had thousands.”

Hellenism therefore reinforced American nationalism, especially when it came to pursuing the nation’s mission to remake the world. As Samuel S. Cox of Ohio wrote in 1851,

The ancient Greeks used to imagine a Hesperian clime, beyond the pillars of Hercules, near the setting sun; and Plato organized an imaginary commonwealth, where human passion played harmoniously and subordinately for the public weal, without jar or rupture. Out of such a clime, and from such a republic, an influence emanated as ideal as it was potent upon the soul of the plastic Grecian. May we not hope that an analogous influence, as real as it is potent, shall emanate from our own Hesperus, to mould anew the dynasties of corrupt power in this eastern world?

Everett likewise connected Athens to American democracy and argued in the pages of his *North American Review* that the writings of the ancient Greeks, with their love of liberty and freedom, provided the guidelines for how republicanism could be maintained. Everett’s love of Hellenism also found support through his correspondence with Thomas Jefferson. Over the years, the men exchanged views on a variety of subjects. Jefferson complimented Everett on his *Greek Reader* and for his translation of Buttman’s *Greek Grammar*, adding that “on the subject of the Greek ablative, I dare say that your historical explanation is the true one.” Like Everett, Jefferson championed the need for the classics in the college curriculum, arguing that “in these schools should be taught Latin and Greek to a good degree.”

While a student at William and Mary College, Jefferson became well versed in the classics, especially Greek history, language, and literature. Not only did Jefferson enjoy reading the Greek classics, but he also urged others to carefully study Greek. In a letter to George Washington Lewis dated October 25, 1825, Jefferson advised that Greek history should be studied on the basis of the original authors. Jefferson especially loved reading Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* “for their educational and instructional value, for the moral issues and the power of their language to sharpen the skills of the reader.” He considered classical learning an important preparation and model for daily life and a source of moral and political guidance.

Americans in the early national period began to look to the direct democracy of Athens, which had earlier been discounted by the revolutionary generation.
because of its tendency for mob rule. By the mid-1820s the legal qualifications for political participation became more democratized as every state but Rhode Island had achieved white male suffrage. But as the vote broadened and electioneering tactics grew more popular, traditional respect, or deference, for social and political superiors declined. This in turn allowed for greater participation of the “common people” in national and local government. But for many elite Americans, these ordinary individuals “lacked the requisite liberal, disinterested, cosmopolitan outlook that presumably was possessed only by enlightened and educated persons—only by gentlemen.”

In his novel *Modern Chivalry*, Hugh Henry Brackenridge expressed these concerns when he ridiculed the follies of American society to expose “new democrats” their shortcomings, namely their lack of “education, refinement, and self-knowledge.” In his sardonic style, Brackenridge condemned what he perceived as the arrogance of the learned classes, the incivility of the frontiersman, and the greed and self-interest of Eastern politicians. Ambition and ignorance played the roles of villains in his satire. Brackenridge believed that the success of America’s “democratic experiment” depended on a well-educated citizenry. Education meant a thorough knowledge of ancient Greek and Latin. Brackenridge’s novel describes the adventures of Captain John Farrago, “a gentleman of leisure” whose notions of society are derived “from the old school, the Greek and Roman way of looking at things,” and his illiterate servant, Teague O’Reagan. Throughout the novel the Captain endeavors, in vain, to teach his servant the lesson that only through education and “application of talents” could Teague become more than a servant and qualify for the broader responsibilities associated with a true “statesman.”

A member of Philadelphia’s Federalist gentry, Brackenridge had been brought up with the notion that the success of the nation’s republican experiment depended on a “natural aristocracy” of virtuous orators and statesmen who would rise above special interests. Brackenridge especially deplored popular leaders, who seemed only interested in trade and moneymaking and exploited the revolutionary rhetoric of “liberty and equality” to gain political power and to promote the local interests of their constituents at the expense of the public good. There arose a growing perception in the early national period that the nation was somehow losing its moral compass and that Americans were betraying the republican simplicity of the revolutionary generation and degenerating into “dissipation,” “extravagance,” and “effeminate refinements.” The austerity and self-denial of the Puritans and Quakers had given way to the conspicuous consumption of the Market Revolution. Moral reformers railed against the evils of alcohol, prostitution, crime, and other deficiencies in virtue. There were those who believed that a Greek cultural revival could somehow return Americans to the path of virtue and simplicity.

But as many classical theorists reminded their contemporaries, the nation’s democratic experiment remained perilous, as the examples of the ancient Greek and Roman republics illustrated. “The legacy of classical political thought, stretch-
ing across continents and centuries,” Daniel Walker Howe writes, “had made use of history as ‘philosophy teaching by examples.’”

“The models of ancient literature,” Yale president Jeremiah Day concluded in 1829, “can hardly fail to imbue” the mind of the young student “with the principles of liberty; to inspire the liveliest patriotism, and to excite to noble and generous action.” For philhellenes, a liberal education steeped in the lessons of ancient Greek history provided the avenue to disseminate the traits of virtue and wisdom necessary to maintain lasting freedom. “We should,” Everett wrote in 1824, “find pleasure in being instructed, by the ‘rules of ancient liberty,’ how a people may provide for its prosperity and glory.”

Critics, however, rejected the classical assumption that America remained bound to historical constraints and precedents. “The things of the past,” the Democratic Review mused in 1840, “have but little interest or value to us.” And as Thomas Paine earlier explained, “every age and generation must be free to act for itself, in all cases, as the generation which preceded it.”

Already weakened by the rise of mass political parties, which pandered to uneducated voters, classical learning also suffered from the advent of romanticism, which focused on the “present over study of the past” and accentuated the importance of “nature over books as the source of enlightenment”; by “the revivalism of the Second Great Awakening, which emphasized emotional attachment to Christianity over the rationalism of classical philosophy”; and by the Market Revolution, “which increased the gap between ancient and modern lifestyles, making the classics seem less relevant to contemporary concerns.”

The influence of classical Greece, however, did not entirely disappear from the discourse on antebellum social, political, and intellectual thought. While romantics might have eschewed the fanatic devotion to classical laws that some of their contemporaries shared, they continued to embrace the “classical spirit.” Transcendentalists like Emerson and Thoreau admired the ancient Greeks’ simplicity, their love of nature, and the alleged nonconformity of figures like Socrates, who defied the conventions of society to follow their own “inner voices.” Classical analogies also influenced the content of Whig-Jacksonian political dialogue. Whig spokesmen, a number of whom had been former Federalists, like Edward Everett, Daniel Webster, and Nicholas Biddle, continued to warn against the “Caesarism” of their Democratic rival, Andrew Jackson.

Antebellum southerners also seized on the history of ancient Athens, which had been rehabilitated by pro-Greek and prodemocratic spokesmen to justify their institutions and way of life. They used classical analogies to justify the institution of slavery. The Southern Literary Messenger of Richmond, for example, agreed with Aristotle that there were certain races “designed by nature for servitude, as there are others as manifestly designed for freedom and command.” Moreover, the “laws of Athens permitted slaves to retain their gains and allowed them to hire their own time from their own masters, as was so commonly done in our day throughout the Southern States.” Simply put, southerners did not see slavery as antithetical to
democracy. On the contrary, proslavery advocates attributed the greatness of Athenian democracy to slavery, which provided “free” citizens the necessary liberty, equality among citizens, and leisure to produce great literary and artistic works. “In slave society,” George Fitzhugh wrote, “one white man does not lord over another; for all are equal in privilege, if not in wealth.”

During the sectional controversy, southern secessionists likewise favored the Greek system of small independent states over the more centralized Roman model. Defenders of states’ rights readily reminded their southern brethren that the “great nations of antiquity were mere city states . . . not larger than one or two of our Southern counties” and that “Grecian history” especially afforded “instances of the almost miraculous exploits of little states or nations.” But southern nationalists also harbored a sober realization that the small city-states of ancient Greece ultimately fell victim to their northern Macedonian neighbor. The analogies between Greece’s civil war and the impending sectional conflict were obvious.

A number of American intellectuals looked to Greek models in their campaign to cultivate the advancement of the arts. Everett believed that the United States, having secured its political and civil institutions on a solid foundation and provided for the economic prosperity of many of its citizens, had the duty to foster other sources of national glory. He believed that cultural advances were as important and as significant as material prosperity. In the generation or two following the American Revolution, Americans still faced the problem of creating a sense of a national identity or common culture. In 1836 the *North American Review* went so far as to say that in no civilized country had the arts been less regarded than in the United States and claimed that there existed no such thing as a distinct American literature, painting, or sculpture.

Everett and others were well aware that many Americans were biased against the “elegant and ornamental arts.” The prominent architect Benjamin Henry Latrobe discerned in 1811 that there were those who feared that the arts would corrupt the simple republican character of the United States. After all, had not luxury undermined the ancient Athenians and Romans? In his 1811 “Anniversary Oration” before an audience of American artists in Philadelphia, Latrobe tried to dispel this prejudice by using the example of ancient Greece. The Apollo of Phidias, the Parthenon, and other examples of Grecian art served as monuments to freedom as well as lessons to statesmen. Greece, Latrobe reminded his audience, was free when the arts flourished, and it was only when Greece lost its freedom that the arts lost their virtue and “became the sycophants of wealth and the slaves of sensuality.” The best works of art, he believed, were those created under a republican form of government. The parallels between the United States and ancient Greece were clear. “Greek art and Greek democracy, and American art and American democracy,” Latrobe wrote Thomas Jefferson, “grew from the same roots.” He firmly believed that American soil remained “as congenial” to the arts “and as favorable to their growth and
perfection, as that of Sparta, Thebes, Delphos, or Athens.” Latrobe also entertained the hope that “the days of Greece may be revived in the woods of America, and Philadelphia become the Athens of the Western World.”

Latrobe's discourse became the “first statement of an American ideology . . . for the American Greek Revival.” In the years that followed, the opinions espoused in Latrobe's address came to dominate American debate on the course of American architecture. In 1814 George Tucker of the University of Virginia, writing in the Port Folio, identified Greek architecture as the standard of excellence. George Fitzhugh, writing that Greek architecture was “perfect,” believed that “in the whole range of taste, the Greeks” were “to be copied and imitated.” From 1820 to 1860 the Greek Temple style became the dominant architectural form. It became the nation’s first national style in architecture as it gradually spread throughout the country.

Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, admiration for Greek architecture came about primarily as a consequence of the increasing knowledge of Greek buildings themselves. This knowledge was acquired through archeological works (published abroad) that provided precise data about actual Greek buildings. There were also builders’ handbooks that supplied basic information about the Greek orders and Greek ornamental detail. Other sources of information on Greek architecture came from the travel accounts of American and European tourists in Greece, many of whom published detailed sketches of Greek buildings in their accounts. Some of those travelers, like Nicholas Biddle, who visited Greece in 1806, became renowned patrons of architecture. According to at least one historian, Biddle, “as much as Latrobe, was the true founder of the Greek Revival in the United States.”

Through his influential position as president of the Second Bank of the United States, Biddle promoted the use of Grecian forms for a number of public buildings in Philadelphia and elsewhere. He served as chairman of the building committee for the rechartered bank, and his influence was so strong that all branch offices were constructed in the style he approved. The Second U.S. Bank, designed by William Strickland between 1818 and 1823, is regarded as the first truly Greek Revival building in the United States. Modeled on the Parthenon in Athens, the proportions and details of the Doric order of the bank were closer to the Greek than anything built in the United States up to that time. The Greek orders and ornamental system were used with deliberate authenticity. When the bank was finally completed, it won instant acclaim and popularity. Even as late as 1836 the North American Review continued to applaud it, proclaiming it “undoubtedly the most faultless monument of its size in the United States,” combining “strength and durability with beauty of proportion.” With the Second U.S. Bank, the Greek Revival movement came of age.

From government buildings to churches and homes, the Greek temple style and Grecian orders permeated every level of American architecture and extended to
every corner of the country. Almost every state capital in the Union carried some form of Greek order—Doric, Ionic, or Corinthian. During the administration of Andrew Jackson, Robert Mills was commissioned to design the public buildings in Washington in the Greek temple style. One contemporary visitor remarked as late as 1858 that a “Grecian capitol” was being “reared in America.” The Centenary Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, designed and constructed in 1842, resembled a Greek temple in the style of the Parthenon. In 1836 Nicholas Biddle commissioned Thomas U. Walter to build a Greek Doric portico, modeled on the Temple of Theseus, around the main house of his estate, Andalusia, north of Philadelphia. So pervasive had the Greek style become that a character in James Fenimore Cooper’s 1838 novel Home as Bound could observe that the “public sentiment just now runs almost exclusively and popularly into the Grecian school. We build little besides temples for our churches, our banks, our taverns, our court houses, and our dwellings.”

Adopted by the common man as well as the professional, Greek Revival became the first architectural style to be consciously understood and embraced as a truly national mode of building. There were several reasons for this. The enthusiasm for Greek architecture was inspired to a certain degree by the influence of classical Greek studies. Aside from its intrinsic beauty, the Greek style became attractive to Americans because of its symbolic relevance. Proponents believed that the architecture of ancient Greece conformed to the democratic spirit of American institutions. For many, Greek Revival not only represented the visual embodiment of the oldest democracy on earth but also became a symbol of the country’s cultural independence. These Greek temples exhibiting “chaste” Grecian forms carried the meaning of “austere simplicity” and demonstrated that Americans could escape corrupt European influences. For some like Edward Everett, the building of Greek temples would “embalm the memory of our generation in the hearts of [our] posterity, as the memory of the master spirits of antiquity is embalmed in our hearts; we gain the grateful assurance, that when, in other times the students of the grand [and] beautiful arts shall explore the history of these monuments [and] ruins, he will not pass over the period, in which we have lived, with neglect [and] disdain.” These structures would be a testament to the republican spirit of the country and would lend credence to the claim made by a number of American intellectuals that another Athens was being reared in the “woods of America.” Having already characterized the war of 1776 as the “Trojan War of America,” which had “brought the colonies into united action, and bound them together as members of a whole,” and the war of 1812 as the “Persian war of our country,” which ensured the “tranquil security” of the republic, Everett believed his generation was left to fashion a new American golden age comparable to Periclean Athens, “where poetry and the fine arts put forth their blossoms.”

This nascent philhellenism also found expression in the growing number of American tourists. Few Americans had traveled to Greece prior to the 1820s. As
an isolated and poverty-stricken outpost of the Ottoman Empire, threatened by pirates at sea and brigands on land, subject to the whims of Turkish despotism, and plagued by the ever-present threat of disease, Greece presented a myriad of dangers for the foreign tourist. The growing interest in ancient Greek culture, improved transatlantic transportation after 1820, and the return of peace following the close of the Greek Revolution in 1830 made Greece more accessible and desirable.

Among the first Americans to visit Greece following the Greek Revolution was James Cook Richmond of Providence. A graduate of Harvard College, Richmond followed in the footsteps of Everett; he studied at the same German university and later felt the inspiration to make his own pilgrimage to Greece. Arriving in early 1831, Richmond stayed approximately five months in Greece, visiting such historic sites as Tiryns, Argos, Epidauros, and Athens. His detailed letters of his experiences and observations were published in thirty-four installments in the *Episcopal Watchman* of Hartford, Connecticut, in 1832. His enthusiasm remained vibrant throughout his sojourn: “I shall never forget the feelings with which I stepped for the first time on the soil of this sacred land.” He mused, “The fancied care of the gods, the battles of old, the Greeks themselves all rose up as in a living picture before me.” On other occasions Richmond went “hunting in every deserted church and turning aside at every stone heap in search of ruins.” On his return to the United States, he helped organize a campaign to establish an American university in Athens.50

Another pilgrim of the early 1830s was Nathaniel Parker Willis, editor of the *New York Mirror*, a popular literary weekly. As a freshman at Yale College in 1823, he had enlisted in the cause of Greek independence, joining the college campaign for Greek relief. When the war ended, Willis visited Greece to walk in the footsteps of its ancient heroes and philosophers.51 Standing under the portico of the Parthenon, overlooking Athens, Willis waxed poetically about the beauty of its immortal ruins: “Can this be Athens? Are these the same isles and mountains where Pericles nursed the arts, and Socrates and Plato taught?” On the site of the old academy Willis continued his eulogy: “The ‘Altar of Love’ still stood before the entrance; the temple of Prometheus, the sanctuary of the Muses, the statues of Plato and of the Graces, the sacred olive, the tank in the coal gardens, and the tower of the railing Timon, were all there. I could almost have waited till evening to see Epicurus and Leontium, Socrates and Aspasia, returning to Athens.”52

Willis’s impressions were published back home. His account of Greece ran in the *New York Mirror* from May 31 to August 16, 1834. His letters became so popular that they were collected under the title *Pencillings by the Way*, which saw several printings over the next few years. Another highly popular travel account at the time was John Lloyd Stephens’s *Incidents of Travel in Greece, Turkey, Russia, and Poland*, published in 1838. By November of that year it had already reached a fifth edition. Some of the Greek portions of his “incidents” also appeared in the *American Monthly Magazine*. With his copy of the *Iliad* in hand, Stephens visited the plain of Argos and, like many other pilgrims, felt himself carried “back to the
heroic ages, to the history of times bordering on the fabulous.” From Argos, Stephens visited Mycenae, Nauplion, Corinth, Athens, and Marathon. Everywhere along the journey, he described the ancient ruins, including the Parthenon, the Temple of Theseus, and the tomb of Agamemnon. According to one contemporary reviewer, the Incidents of Stephens became “universally read and admired.”

In the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s, a varied group of American travelers came to Greece. These included writers, classical scholars, professionals, naval officers, politicians and diplomats, and evangelical students. Some of the more noteworthy tourists were the U.S. senator from Michigan, Lewis Cass, who made a Mediterranean cruise on the USS Constitution in the summer of 1837; Edward Joy Morris, a graduate of Harvard College and future U.S. minister; poet William Cullen Bryant; and writer Herman Melville. Some, like Stephens and Willis, went with the intent to pursue artistic or literary goals. Others, like Cornelius C. Felton, professor of Greek at Harvard, and Henry Baird, the first American classical student to spend a year studying in Greece, sought to enhance their education. Theological students on their way to the Holy Land availed themselves of an opportunity for a brief tour. Standing on Mars’ Hill, the site where St. Paul delivered his sermons to the ancient Athenians, evangelicals like Benjamin Dorr, the pastor of the Congregation of Christ Church of Philadelphia, regularly mused on the history of ancient Hellas and the part that the Greek language had played in the spread of early Christianity. Other evangelicals, like the Reverend Rufus Anderson, the foreign secretary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, went to ascertain the prospects for establishing an American missionary presence in newly liberated Greece. Almost all travelers left published accounts of their experiences and observations.

During the nineteenth century, travel writing was considered a regular and highly popular literary genre. Regardless of the author, travel accounts usually followed the same conventions. They had to both inform and entertain. The writer often couched his observations in the form of letters. Another common practice employed by travel writers involved comparisons between the Old World and the New. In this sense, travel writing played a significant role in the construction of an American national identity. American travel accounts frequently make critical references to Europe’s lack of republican institutions or democratic ideals. American tourists in Greece especially lamented that the newly liberated country had begun to borrow its “customs from the barbarous nations of the north.” For example, when visitors came before the Greek monarch, court etiquette required entering with a black hat under their arm. Nevertheless, John Lloyd Stephens’s American companion, “in his republican simplicity, thought that a hat, good enough to put on his own head, was good enough to go into the king’s presence.” Others, including Edward Joy Morris of Philadelphia perceived the king to be “a vain, silly young man, intoxicated with the idea of holding a scepter, and ambitious, not to
restore a fallen, yet fine race of people to the dignity of and the renown of their
glorious ancestry, but simply to play a part among the other despots of Europe.”

For many American philhellenes, the dichotomy between the halcyon days of
ancient Greece and the desolation of its modern inhabitants, first under Turkish
rule and now under the control of a monarchy, proved particularly disconcerting.

It was also common practice to demonstrate one’s classical learning by inun-
dating the narrative with quotations in Greek, especially when in Greece. The au-
thor had to demonstrate his knowledge of the history of ancient Hellas. After John
Lloyd Stephens visited Vostizza, on the banks of the Gulf of Corinith, he informed
readers that it represented the ancient Aigion, one of the most celebrated cities in
ancient Greece mentioned by Homer as having supplied the vessels for the Trojan
War. This practice helped to give the writer’s account a touch of immediacy and
accuracy as well as satisfy the public’s thirst for information about foreign lands,
especially Greece. More important, travel narratives, David Roessel writes, in-
spired many readers to make a connection between classical and modern Greece
and encouraged the hope that Greece may one day be restored to its ancient glory

Though generally acknowledging Greece’s degenerative condition, support-
ers remained hopeful that the day would come when the Greek people would
rise from the midst of their moldering and beautiful ruins and again become
distinguished. Morris, who later as U.S. minister to the Ottoman Empire would
champion the Cretan struggle for freedom in the 1860s, maintained that Greece,
though fallen and degraded, was still worthy of “our warmest sympathies and
affections.” As representatives of American culture abroad, Morris and other
American pilgrims saw themselves as cultural intermediaries. They believed that
Americans had an obligation to spread the “light of civilization” and to impart
the “improvements of science and the blessings of free and liberal institutions” to
Greece, a land where those ideals had first been conceived.

Indebted to ancient Greece for their democratic institutions, many Americans
felt fated by providence to rehabilitate the Greek people from ages of appalling de-
gradation and help guide them in creating a modern liberal democracy. The Greek
war for independence from Turkey, which began in 1821, signaled to American
intellectuals that the glory of Greece would be revived. It was also frequently “seen
as a validation and extension of the American experiment as well as a return of
the classic past.” Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Daniel Webster, Henry Clay,
Albert Gallatin, and Edward Everett were just some of the nation’s leading states-
men who uttered words of encouragement and support for the rebirth of a Greek
national state liberated from Turkish despotism. Many educated Americans whose
knowledge of ancient Greek history and literature inspired strong pro-Greek feel-
ings shared their concern.

And during the 1830s and 1840s, American educators and missionaries in
Greece succeeded in establishing schools to dispense the “lights and blessings
of education” among Greek children.⁶¹ Should these schools continue to spread 
American principles of civilization and freedom among the isles and cities of 
Greece, philhellenes believed, they would “reawaken the activity and energies of 
a people whom ages have not taught to be slaves.” As one contemporary admirer 
mused, a “nobler employment than that of enlightening the minds of those whose 
ancestors have handed down the light of wisdom and learning to all succeeding 
ages can not be conceived.”⁶²