GREEK DINERS: HOW GREEKS HAVE KEPT TRADITIONAL AND AMERICANIZED GREEK FOODWAYS ALIVE IN AMERICAN DINERS

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at George Mason University.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to all of my friends, family, and professors who have helped me achieve this goal. In particular, I want to thank my parents for their unconditional love and support throughout my academic career.
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Abstract

GREEK DINERS: HOW GREEKS HAVE KEPT TRADITIONAL AND AMERICANIZED GREEK FOODWAYS ALIVE IN AMERICAN DINERS

Michelle L. Roth, M.A.
George Mason University, 2014
Thesis Director: Linda J. Seligmann

This thesis explores the connection between the social space of the American diner and Greek immigrant ownership of diners. Its aim is to understand what the relationship is between Greeks and American diners and how these relationships have been created. This thesis begins with a historical overview of events that sparked Greeks to immigrate to the United States and is followed by a brief history of the American diner in order to comprehend its place in American culture. These respective histories are important in order to understand how and when these two concepts became intertwined. In order to further understand how Greek immigrants and diners are connected, participant observation was conducted at three diners in Virginia. Interviews were conducted at two of the three diners. The diners are located in three different regional spaces: urban, suburban, and rural in order to examine the similarities and differences in customers, employees, diner owners, ingredients used, and the cost of food in the regions
in which they are located. This study also looks at the roles that diffusion, regionalism, ethnic identity and the social construction of space have played in connecting Greek immigrants with American diners.
Chapter 1: Introduction

Diners and Greek immigrants have been intertwined concepts since the 1900s when an increase in diner ownership by Greek immigrants began in the U.S. I have been to many diners in Virginia in my limited experience and most of these diners have been owned and operated by Greek families. Throughout my preliminary research, I have seen many representations of traditional Greek foods served within diners. Alongside traditional Greek foods, traditional American diner foods are also served.

For the purpose of this research, the term diner is understood as having the following meaning adapted from Richard Gutman’s work, discussed by Randy Garbin: “a prefabricated structure with counter service hauled to a remote site” (Garbin 2005:8). The concept also draws on the stereotype of American diners, articulated by Michael Witzel: “The full fledged American diner- a twenty four hour, dedicated restaurant operation that had no wheels, remained static, and held a position permanently along the roadside” (1999:37). Diners differ from other styles of restaurants in that the focal point of the diner is the counter that is located in front and faces the kitchen. The structure of diners has undergone modifications over time, but one element that is always present is the counter accompanied by stationary stools. Diners were created to serve cheap and filling meals to the working and middle classes. This is still true today: diners continue to
offer customers inexpensive meals with large portions.

Greece became an independent state around the same time that diners were beginning to form in America. “The American diner was an idea born in the streets” (Witzel 1999:11). The diner began as a humble horse drawn lunch cart in 1872 (Hurley 2001:26). The lunch cart was created by Walter Scott from Providence, Rhode Island (Hurley 2001:26). The lunch cart grew into a wagon and launched the enterprise of mobile eateries in America (Hurley 2001:26). Scott took his lunch cart to the industrial factories. Blue collar laborers who worked long hours needed cheap and filling meals (Hurley 1997:1284). Eventually, it became necessary to create a larger lunch cart or wagon capable of reaching more people: an indoor space complete with kitchenette and seats for a handful of customers (Gutman 1993). Samuel Messer Jones is credited with moving the lunch cart phenomenon indoors in 1884 (Gutman 1993:17). Sam Jones enhanced the diner industry by creating a diner manufacturing company. Jones set up his company in Worcester, MA (Garbin 2005:1). Jones’s company helped to spark the diner manufacture industry which led to fierce competition. With new technologies and innovations underway, these early diners had to change in order to survive.

Throughout this research, I demonstrate that the diner changed throughout its history. I argue that the essence of the diner remains constant though the style of the diner may transform. Diners today do not necessarily need to have the quintessential counter and the nostalgic chrome and neon signs. Diners are meant to be spaces that form communities with the people that live in that community. Diners also promote family ties. The three diners in this study demonstrate that while one diner is the nostalgic
representation of the original diner, each restaurant is still considered a diner because they create a social space specific to the community in which they are situated.

Also for this research, I use the term “traditional” as meaning “the passing of customs, beliefs, etc. from one generation to another”. This research discusses what Greek diner owners and customers view as traditional, whether in connection to diners or Greek culture. The aim of this research is to comprehend how American diners and Greek immigrants became linked with each other. Several factors have influenced these connections, and this research investigated some of those connections.

A connection that is seen in the three diners of this thesis was the presentation of family and diner history on their respective websites. Each diner’s websites list in detail what foods they offer, a small biography on the family that owns the diner, and shows new ways in which they have kept the tradition of diners alive. The urban diner demonstrates this with their video clip of their interview on Diners, Drive-Ins, and Dives. It also shows pictures of several famous people that have dined at their establishment. In the suburban diner, they show that they have a room that can host large events (which not every restaurant can boast let alone diners). The rural diner offers their unique bar room and hosts unique events in their bar room. These distinctive qualities help to make each diner attractive to customers and bring them back. It also illustrates how each diner is helping to promote the tradition of diners but to introduce new ideas to intrigue customers.

The American diner was, at one time, a passing fad. However, since the 1990s, there has been a resurgence in the popularity of diners, and new diners have begun
making their appearance. With shows like the Food Network’s, *Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives*, diners have soared in popularity. It is because of this resurgence that I became interested in diner culture and how it has changed throughout its long history.

My research was conducted between 2013 and 2014. The historical background information is dated from the 1870s to 2014. During this time period, the number of Greek immigrants to the United States greatly increased. I discuss some of the reasons that Greeks fled to the United States. These events also give insight into what regions Greeks chose to relocate to as well as the occupations that they were drawn to. In particular, I investigate why Greek immigrants were drawn to the American diner as a place for employment, and for many Greek families, eventually a business that they would own.

This thesis is framed by the following research questions: 1) How do the efforts of different ethnic groups to define themselves through their cultural relationship with particular foods affect the unique characteristics of diners in the different regions of Virginia?, 2) Why do Greek owners offer particular cuisines rather than others and how, in turn, this affects who controls the presentation of traditional Greek foodways?, and 3) How do changing foodways affect ethnic identity and vise versa? 4) How does the social construction of space affect the object of the diner? These are the main questions that structure this thesis.

I chose three diners in my home state of Virginia to conduct my research. I decided to conduct research in Virginia because there has not been much research done in the area. There have been copious studies on New England diners, but few that delve into
the other regions of the country. The other consideration was to study New England type
diners, particularly in New Jersey where there is a rich history of diners and Greek
ownership. In a future study, it would be interesting to conduct a comparison between
Virginia and New Jersey diners. For this thesis, I consider Newport News to be a
suburban space because it is neither an overly populated city nor a rural setting. I also
chose a diner in Arlington that I consider to be an urban setting because it is near
downtown Arlington and Washington, D.C. and is densely populated. Lastly, I chose a
diner in Warrenton that I consider to be located in a rural space because there are vast
stretches of land between homes and businesses, along with many farms in the area.
These three diners offer different representations of American diners with a Greek twist,
which is why I selected them. I also selected them based on their location and
recommendations from family and friends.

Diner Regional Background

Arlington, Virginia is not technically a city, but is nevertheless considered by the
U.S. Census Bureau to be a Census Designated Place (CDP) (US Census Bureau: State &
County Quick Facts: Arlington 2014). CDP’s “are the statistical counterparts of
incorporated places and are delineated to provide data for settled concentrations of
population that are identifiable by name, but are not legally incorporated under the laws
of the state in which they are located” (US Census Bureau: Census Glossary 2014).

While Arlington is considered a county in legal terms, it is nevertheless urban
setting based, on the data from the Census Bureau. According to the Quick Facts guide,
the population for Arlington County for 2010 was 207,627 people (US Census Bureau:
Demographic Profile Date: Arlington 2010). Arlington County is 25.97 square miles in land area and the persons per square mile in 2010 was 7,993.6 (US Census Bureau: State & County Quick Facts: Arlington 2014). Of the population in 2010, 71.7% of people classified themselves as White, 8.5% were African American, 9.6% were Asian, and 15.1% were Hispanic or Latino (US Census Bureau: State & County Quick Facts: Arlington 2014). According to Arlington County’s government website the current population is 215,000 and is projected to reach 276,000 by 2040 (US Census Bureau: State & County Quick Facts: Arlington 2014). The demographic profile of each area helps to structure the area being researched. Arlington’s urban setting show that there is quite a range of ethnicities located in the urban area. The median household income from 2008 to 2012 was $102,459 which is substantially higher than the median for the state of Virginia which is $63,636 (US Census Bureau: State & County Quick Facts: Arlington 2014).

In 2012, Arlington County had 141,213 people 16 and older employed within the county (US Census Bureau: American Community Survey: Arlington 2012). The main field that people were employed within was management, business, science, and arts occupations, with 92,837 people within those fields (US Census Bureau: American Community Survey: Arlington 2012). The second largest occupation field was education, legal, community service, arts, and media occupations with 27,875 people (US Census Bureau: American Community Survey: Arlington 2012). The third field was service occupations with 15,820 people in that industry (US Census Bureau: American Community Survey: Arlington 2012). Finally the fourth largest industry was office and

The occupational industries are considered to be located in urban settings, as well as the other settings, but there are a higher number of individuals that work in each industry in an urban setting. Urban setting occupations tend to be considered more white collar rather than blue collar jobs. White collar jobs are considered to be more professional in the social value that is placed on those occupations. White collar jobs are more valued because they require more specialized education and training in order to be successful. Blue collar jobs are often associated with more hands-on, physical jobs that require little to know specialized training and education.

Arlington County has a large population and many types of industry to employ its people. With so many people inhabiting the area, businesses have to create ways to stand out from among their competitors. This can be said of Metro 29 in the heart of Arlington. Metro 29 is located less than five miles from downtown Washington, D.C. It offers a large menu with varying tastes to give patrons more choices. For the most part, many residents of Arlington are middle class and upper middle class: between 2008 and 2012 the median household income was $102,459 (Arlington County Profile 2014).

Newport News City, Virginia is located in the Tidewater region. It is close to other larger, well known cities such as Williamsburg and Norfolk. In 2010, the census calculated that the population of Newport News was 180,719 people for the 68.71 square miles of land (US Census Bureau: State & County Quick Facts: Newport News 2014). According to the Census Bureau, the city is comprised of 88,518 (49%) whites, 73,514
black or African Americans, 13,590 (7.5%) Hispanics, and 4,956 (2.7%) Asians
(US Census Bureau: Demographic Profile Data: Newport News 2010). The median
household income from 2008 to 2012 in Newport News was $50,744 which is less than
the median for the state of Virginia which was $63,636 (US Census Bureau: State &
County Quick Facts: Newport News 2014).

Newport News had been home to many English settlers since as early as 1622
(Newport News Tourism Development Office 2014). Newport News became an
independent city in 1896 (Newport News Tourism Development Office 2014). Then in
1958 Newport News combined with Warwick County and grew to its current 68.71
square miles of land (Newport News Tourism Development Office 2014). The
demographic data show that Newport News is not as ethnically diverse as the urban
setting in Arlington. The occupations are also different from Arlington due to the higher
numbers in the sales and office occupations. This may indicate that people of the
suburban setting have access to education but these people may not seek as much
education as those in an urban environment.

Warrenton, Virginia is neither a large city nor a suburban outpost; it is a small
community. In 2010, the census concluded the population of Warrenton (referred to as
Warrenton Town in the Census) was 9,611 (US Census Bureau: Demographic Profile
Data: Warrenton 2010). It is only four and a half square miles of land and 2,136.3 people
Some of the racial profiles for Warrenton are as follows: 7,509 white (78.1 %), 1,303
black or African American (13.6 %), 222 Asian (2.3 %), and 709 Hispanic or Latino
(7.4%) (US Census Bureau: Demographic Profile Data: Warrenton 2010). The median household income from 2008 to 2012 was $68,803, which is more than the median for the state of Virginia which is $63,636 (US Census Bureau: State & County Quick Facts: Warrenton 2014).
Chapter 2: Methods

This research draws on several theories and disciplines. It relies on historical and anthropological theory to make sense of how suburbanization, regionalism, diffusion of an object, the construction of ethnic identities, and assimilation/acculturation affect the dynamic relationship that continues today between diners and Greeks in the U.S.

I define regionalism as the emphasis on specific characteristics of a certain geographical area. For the purpose of this study I look at the environment of the three diners and use their surroundings to make up the different regions of urban, suburban, and rural spaces. For my purposes I use suburbanization to define the area that lies on the fringe of the urban center and is between the urban and rural spaces. My research findings demonstrate that regionalism and suburbanization have become major components in the presentation of cultural identity and ethnic foodways. For this research, three types of regional spaces were studied: urban, suburban and rural spaces. Urban spaces were places with higher prices for most commodities and a higher concentration of people living in a smaller space. For example, recently the gas prices for Washington, D.C. were estimated at $4.12 per gallon of unleaded fuel. Whereas in a rural setting like Warrenton gas prices were $3.30 per gallon. Suburban spaces were locations where people were more spread out and used to more personal space. This space was
further defined with a large portion of its population that commuted to urban areas for work. In rural areas there were fewer people, more land, and commodities were cheaper. These areas were important to consider when discussing suburbanization.

In addition to historical research about diners and Greek immigration to the U.S., I conducted fieldwork in the form of participant observation. My fieldwork was conducted at three separate diners. Each diner was chosen based on my own experiences as well as recommendations by other people. By conducting participant observations, I hoped to gain a sample of the demographics of the customers, employees, and environment of each diner.

I also conducted two semi-structured interviews with two of the diner owners. The purpose of the interviews was to gather some demographic information regarding the staff of each diner as well as their customers. It was also to get more personal narratives of the diner owners to describe their story of how they became diner owners. The interviews were also meant to gain an understanding of the operations of each diner and allow me the opportunity to compare and contrast diners of different regions. Each participant did give me much information about their family background and about their staff. They also gave me insight to how their families only ever wanted to run their own business and their diners had become one of their favorite places. My research showed me that these immigrant owners were following the ideal of the American Dream: becoming entrepreneurs, home owners, and being in control of their future.

Along with participant observation and interviews, I researched the three diners’ websites and social media pages. Each website gave insight into family background and
the history of the establishment. The social media pages of these diners surprised me, especially the Warrenton diner. I was astonished to learn that the rural diner had a website, but was even more so to discover their Facebook page. It was recently added in 2010, when the diner reopened after a long hiatus. The Newport News diner also recently added a Facebook page in 2013 and a new website in 2014. What I have found to be really interesting is that the urban diner in Arlington only has a website. These new media developments for the diners demonstrated that they are evolving social spaces and using current trends to reach a larger clientele. With these new media technologies, the Greek diner owners have been showing their family more to customers. For example, Northside 29 posted on their Facebook page the owner’s pictures of their recent trip to Greece. Northside also hosted their very own Greek Week the week of Greece’s Independence Day (March 25). The history, participant observation, interviews, and media research all aid in the presentation of the relationship between Greek immigrants and American diners.
Chapter 3: Literature Review

The connections between Greek immigrants in the United States and the iconic American diner are not natural, but rather socially constructed. The concept of the diner has been consistently linked to American culture and history since its creation in the late nineteenth century (Gutman 1993). During the infancy of the American diner, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Greeks were emigrating in high numbers and many traveled to the United States. Several major variables affected how connections developed between Greeks immigrating to the United States and the iconic American diner: the dynamics of diffusion of an object (in this case, the diner); suburbanization; regionalism; the social construction of ethnic foodways and class in diners; and the presentation of cultural identity.

The Dynamics of Diffusion of an Object: The Diner

What were there reasons for the spread of diners in specific regions of the U.S. while not diffusing into others? Diners began in the Northeast region because the majority of factories were located there during the second Industrial Revolution (1880s-1914) in the United States. Following the Industrial Revolution, new products became available to consumers throughout the country, especially, the car in the 1930s. Once cars were available, people could live further away from their jobs and commute to them from outlying areas of the big city. In the new suburban communities that began to sprout up,
diners easily followed because the diner offered comfort foods at all times of the day and were inexpensive. Diners, as establishments, diffused slowly from the Northeast region where they were predominate and popular when compared to other regions of the U.S.

There were only a few diners located in the Southern or Western regions of the U.S. during the early part of diner history: this may be because both areas focused on agriculture, with fewer population centers. The northern portion of the United States was where new technologies and inventions were being developed; for example, the car, the telephone, the light bulb and the assembly line. Factories were mainly located in the North and with the expansion of factories came the new need for all night eateries that came in the form of diners. Richard Gutman (1993) provides a guide to diners, American Diner: Then & Now, and it is clear that diners blossomed more in industrial Northeastern states than anywhere else, as most are currently found in New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania.

In We Are What We Eat, Donna Gabaccia (1998) discusses what foods and processes have influenced American cuisine. Gabaccia discusses what and how foodways in America have changed throughout history. She begins with the colonial period and describes the different immigrant groups that began to interact with colonists, and how this interaction sparked the influence that new groups would have on early Americans (Gabaccia 1998). Gabaccia (1998) states that there has been change in American eating habits over time, but there have also been changes in identities as well.

Psychologists tell us that food and language are the cultural traits humans learn first, and the ones that they change with the greatest reluctance. Humans cannot easily
lose their accents when they learn new languages after the age of about twelve; similarly the food they ate as children forever defines familiarity and comfort. [Gabaccia 1998:6]

People are hesitant to change things that are reminiscent of their upbringings and personal memories. In particular, if people have good memories related to a particular food they will be less likely to change that food on the chance that it would provide a negative memory to associate with that food. “Food thus entwines intimately with much that makes a culture unique, binding taste and satiety to group loyalties. Eating habits both symbolize and mark the boundaries of cultures” (Gabaccia 1998:8).

The American diner became synonymous with providing foods that were thought to be American, but also serving foods whose origins are linked to European countries. I believe that one reason diners have penetrated the northeast more than any other region is because there initially was a larger concentration of immigrant groups due to the more readily available industrial occupations. Diners began to serve food that was reminiscent of Old World foodways to factory workers, because the immigrants became the main consumer group. Many of the immigrants had come over from Europe and were homesick, so diners began to cater to their patron’s desires in order to grow their businesses. An example of this is seen through the frankfurter. Americans, nowadays, typically associate the hot dog with American food and culture. However, the hot dog originates from Frankfurt, Germany. The frankfurter was introduced in America in the late 1890s and early 1900s (Encyclopedia Britannica 2014). Frankfurters became very popular items at the early diners. The diffusion of the diner is thus structured by several factors including regionalism, familiarity and memories, industrialization and ethnic foodways.
The Social Construction of Ethnic Foodways and Class of the Diner

Class of the Diner

The second theme of this research involves the construction of social space and class in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. According to Andrew Haley (2011), during this time period, the middle class in American society was emerging. People began to want new kinds of social spaces for themselves that differed from the places typically meant for the upper class. This led to tensions between the upper and middle class members of American society (Haley 2011). The middle class wanted to have the luxury of eating out of the home like the elite did, but they did not want to eat in the same fancy restaurants serving expensive French cuisine (Haley 2011). This need for a restaurant that served more American cuisine, for an affordable price, and that catered to the middle class helped make diners more attractive to the working class. The diners created a new social space, outside of the home, where people from the working and middle class could come together and socialize.

Social Construction of Ethnic Foodways

In her work, *Hungering for America*, Hasia Diner (2001) discusses the foodways of three immigrant groups in America: the Italians, the Irish and the Jews. Her main argument is that food behaviors change slowly, based on the social and cultural constructions of a group (Diner 2001). Diner describes how each immigrant group adjusted to the new resources available in the U.S., but also demonstrated that the changes in environment did not alter the traditional foodways of each group overnight. Each group held onto their cultural heritage and practiced their beliefs from their
homeland. Maintaining a connection to their homeland and to their culture was important to all the immigrants. The Italian, Irish, and Jewish cultures maintained their traditions in one major way: through traditional foodways. Through their foodways each group was able to maintain their cultural identity. I argue that ethnic foodways and cultural identities form a relationship that can impact a space, in this case a diner.

The slow pace of change in ethnic foodways is evident through a history of the American diner. Diners are seen as serving what are described as traditional diner foods. Some of these foods include breakfast items like toast, eggs, hot cereal (or oatmeal), etc. Diners were open twenty-four hours and many customers wanted to have a hot breakfast to start their early day or have breakfast when they got off their late night shift (Gutman 1993). Other foods included meatloaf, mashed potatoes, roast turkey, and many types of sandwiches, which came to be known as “comfort foods” (Gutman 1993). Diners were also connected to the serving of foods from Europe and other countries to cater to the differing tastes of the immigrant workers who ate at diners.

One thing that changed with many diner menus throughout the evolution of the diner was the introduction of traditional Greek foods, which demonstrated how intertwined diners and Greek immigrants had become since the creation of diners. Greek diner owners served both traditional diner foods as well as traditional Greek foods in their establishments and continued the traditional preparation and serving of American and Greek foods, which demonstrated how slowly foodways have evolved over time. For example, one of my participants explained to me that he uses his grandmother’s recipe for mousaka (a Greek lasagna of sorts), tsaziki sauce (made using Greek yogurt), and
souvlaki (marinated pork loin in Greek seasonings and herbs served with pita bread). He informed me that it was tradition in his family to use yia-yia’s (grandmother) recipes because hers were the best. He then made a joke that he would be disowned by the family if he altered the recipes in any way. Not only does this demonstrate how foodways change slowly, but it also shows family and cultural traditions changing slowly.

Diner owners may not want to change the foods that they serve to their customers since the menu is relatively consistent across regions. The food offerings may not have changed much throughout the history of the diner because diners epitomize serving relatively cheap and filling meals. From a business perspective, it would be more economical to cook copious amounts of foods and then serve a portion to a customer. For example, it would be beneficial to cook a large meatloaf and then sell a thick slice to multiple customers. Since this business practice seemed to work well for most diners it is reasonable to think this practice influenced the unchanging menu at diners. Most diners also tend to serve the same foods (whether American or Greek or any ethnic group), which also confirms that diner foodways change slowly. Many diners served the same foods, or similar ones, because there were only so many dishes that they could serve at such low prices with large portions to customers. Diners retained their foodways that were culturally reinforced by the people the diners meant to serve.

My fieldwork demonstrated that traditional diner and Greek foods served in diners have changed relatively little throughout the history of diners. Each diner served foods that the owner grew up with, traditional Greek foods as well as traditional diner foods, and demonstrated a continuation of these traditional foods. Each diner owner is
proud of their Greek heritage and showed a passion for sharing their family’s Greek culture with their customers. Greeks’ pride and devotion to their family’s culture illustrated that foodways do change slowly. Diner owners loved their Greek-American status and wanted to share the combined foodways with other people. Diners did change a few ingredients in some of their traditional recipes, usually due to the need to use more local ingredients because imported goods might be too expensive. Sometimes ingredients changed because younger generations wanted to create a twist on an old favorite by putting their own signature on a dish; these changes were relatively small in the grand scheme of things. The overall foods were the same but they had a few new items that slightly altered them, thus reinforcing Diner’s (2001) argument that foodways changed slowly.

The Role of Regionalism and Suburbanization

Were there differences in the regions where diners emerged, and did the character of diners change because of the region in which they were located? Kenneth T. Jackson discusses the concept of suburbanization in his work, Crabgrass Frontier. For Jackson, suburbanization has four major components (Jackson 1985).

…Affluent and middle-class Americans live in suburban areas that are far from their work places, in homes that they own, and in the center of yards that by urban standards elsewhere are enormous. This uniqueness thus involves population density, home-ownership, residential status, and journey-to-work. [Jackson 1985:6]

Jackson specifies each of these elements. For these distances he states them as: “function, class, separation, and density” (Jackson 1985:11). Function refers to non-farm residence, class meaning middle and upper middle status, separation denoting the
commute to work daily, and density referring to population of an area (Jackson 1985). These components add to the distinctive region known as suburbia that happens to be in between urban and rural settings. “The first distinguishing element of metropolitan areas in this nation is their low residential density and the absence of sharp divisions between town and country” (Jackson 1985:6). The town is viewed as the city or urban setting while the country is a rural environment.

Dolores Hayden has also done research on suburbanization in her book, *Building Suburbia* (2003). Hayden described different elements that influenced the creation of suburbia. Her emphasis is on class, gender, race, economy, and politics (Hayden 2003). These elements influenced the distinctive characteristics of suburbia throughout America. Hayden looks at how entrepreneurs, land developers, politicians, men and women, etc. viewed the construction and development of suburban spaces in America.

Where Jackson argues that suburbanization is a declining trend, Hayden demonstrates not only that America’s suburban areas remain prevalent; they are on the rise (Hayden 2003). Jackson predicted that the steady increase in energy and land costs would persuade people to return to the cities (Jackson 1985). Instead, suburbia has been on the rise. Jackson’s argument attempted to keep suburbia as a place between rural and urban settings. Hayden explains seven eras of urban development that have influenced the design and the characteristics that have become synonymous with suburbia (Hayden 2003:). The seven eras she investigated are as follows: borderlands, picturesque enclaves, mail-order and self-built suburbs, mass-produced and urban-scale “sitcom” suburbs, edge nodes, and rural fringes (Hayden 2003:4-5). Each of these forms of
suburban development were based on the push and pull from the rural and urban settings that people were migrating to and from during the second Industrial Revolution.

In *The Anthropology of Space and Place: Locating Culture*, editors Setha Low and Denise Lawrence-Zúñiga use the work of Edward Hall to frame the introduction to the concept of space. Hall established the field of *proxemics*, which is “the study of people’s uses of space as an aspect of culture” (Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003:4). Hall posits that not only do people structure spaces differently, they also experience them differently (Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003: 4). This is evident in the socially constructed space of the iconic American diner. Diners have been constructed to be gathering places for people of the working and middle classes. According to Hall, people experience diners differently. However, I propose that diners have a cultural history that aid in the continuation of traditional diners and their foods. Even though people may experience diners differently, there are aspects of each diner space that people expect to experience at diners and diners only. They also expect that the food is inexpensive and the portions are large. People also expect that diners will mainly work to serve the local community and workers of a specific location. These characteristics have continued throughout the history of the diner and continue today. The architecture of diners may differ but the concept of what makes up the atmosphere and culture of a diner are the same. People have the expectation to see chrome, stainless steel and neon lights at diners. The architecture of each diner demonstrates how each diner owner want to experience a space and how they hope their customers view their space.

Using Edward Hall’s proxemics, it is interesting to look at diners as an ethnic
eatery. Diners have traditionally been an American institution, but Greek immigrants
have contributed to the culture and traditions of diners greatly. Therefore, diners have
become an ethnic eatery that blends American and Greek traditions within their space.
This ethnic eatery attracts people of varying ethnicities. Being able to attract many ethnic
groups to a restaurant almost guarantees success for the diner owners, because they have
a broader reach of customers. The Greek immigrants who become diner owners are very
successful. It is no wonder that so many of the Greek immigrants who immigrated to the
U.S. during the early years of the diner told their families to come join them in the
business since they were very successful. For Greek immigrants, the diner as a space
came to represent prosperity and entrepreneurial success.

Suburbia has become fluid in the more recent past, based on the growing demands
from the current American population; Americans inhabit suburban areas more than
urban and rural areas combined (Hayden 2003:10). The suburban sprawl may or may not
have influenced changes that have occurred in the three diners that were investigated. The
suburban diner may be the one that has seen the most change throughout its history:
changes in resources, clientele, employees, pricing, etc. Jackson’s main argument is that
the physical space that surrounds us –whether it is neighborhoods, roads, schools, land,
etc.-set up patterns of living that have influenced our behavior (1985:3). Jackson’s
argument leads into Hall’s argument that people experience spaces differently. This thesis
demonstrates how the three different regional spaces influenced the three diners that this
research investigated. The supplies and resources available in one area may or may not be
available in another area. There appear to be connections between patterns of residence
and labor that are dependent upon region. The availability of resources influenced the kinds of foods that diner owners are capable of recreating for their patrons and how they decide on what to sell.

Presentation of Cultural Identity

Jeffery Pilcher argued that groups view themselves from within their group differently from those outside the group perceive them. Pilcher (2012) states that regional differentiation has been a cause for confusion around the nature of a group’s culture or ethnic identity. According to Pilcher (2012), food is one way in which a group can present a common representation of ethnic identity to different groups. This concept is the main impetus behind his question of who controls culture. Are foods and cuisine of a particular ethnic identity owned by that group, or is it owned by outsiders who take an ethnic identity’s foodways and change it to suit their needs?

Like Hasia Diner, Pilcher believes that groups use foodways to self-identify themselves. According to Pilcher, food is one of the main ways in which groups of people present their culture to other groups. This assumption fits well with Diner’s findings that cultural changes, particularly with respect to food, occur slowly. This thesis asks, what happens when a group of people relocated to a new environment and can no longer retain the goods and supplies that they were once able to gather easily? Do their cultural foodways still change slowly? Or do cultural changes take place more quickly? Do traditional foodways become so changed that this means the group’s traditional identity also has changed? Or has the group’s identity only been perceived to have changed, based on what outsiders observe? In other words, what are the limits to how
changed foodways affect ethnic identity and vice versa? By looking at American diners in the context of Greek ownership of them in three different locations, we may be able to find answers to these questions.

One question this research addresses is how the dynamics of residence and labor patterns (in each region) affected the character of diners in the different regions. Each diner in this study was owned and operated by a Greek family. The urban diner was the largest, the suburban diner the second largest, and the rural diner was the smallest. The three spaces each had several occupations that were dominate in that area. The spaces also had their own population density, which played a role in the character of the diners. The rural diner demonstrated a very close relation between a majority of the clientele and the staff. There was also a close camaraderie between all the staff members. At the suburban diner, there were some close relationships between the customers and the staff, but not as many when compared to the rural diner. The urban also showed relationships between the staff and the customers; however the relationships that I observed were friendly, but not very personal. My research displayed that relationships/communities are formed between the customers and the staff of every diner. However, my research also demonstrated that more personal connections between the staff and customers were more common in the rural diner than the other two spaces. These connections impact the social space of each individual diner, but can also be seen as contributing to the overall experience of a diner.

A second question the research addresses was how the efforts of different ethnic groups to define themselves through their cultural relationship with particular foods
affected the personality of diners in the different regions. Gustavo Arellano asks the question: “Are Mexicans making food for Mexicans?” (2012:160). This question made me ponder, who represents diner culture? I learned that the diner owners in this research all used family recipes to make their traditional Greek foods. There were also a few traditional diner foods that were also based on family recipes such as pancakes, country biscuits and sausage gravy. The main differences between the diners’ foods were that the Warrenton diner used the most local ingredients in the foods they served. I expected that the rural diner would do this. The Warrenton diner had more access to local ingredients for cheaper prices based on its location. The diner boasted their tight-knit community in Fauquier County, Virginia. The diner was decorated with large photographs of local landmarks by local artists. At the suburban diner there were also some personal touches of photographs of the diner owner with prominent members of the area. The urban diner did not have any personal photographs in the diner. I found that the urban diner was more business focused rather than creating a social space to encourage connections between members of the community. It appeared that the urban diner was just representing a nostalgic and fantastical diner rather than emphasizing the community that diners actually form. These differences impacted the personalities of each diner. However, it was clear that each diner owner and their family were focused on sharing their culture with their clients.

Drawing from Hasia Diner’s (2001) work, I expected to find that Greek foodways have changed slowly since the immigration of Greeks to the U.S. This appears to be the case. Each diner served traditional Greek foods that their families have created for several
generations. I anticipated that Greeks were controlling the structuring and perception of their ethnic identity by preparing their culture’s traditional foods for American consumers and my research at each diner confirmed this. The diners showed their customers the traditional cultural foods of Greece and these were met with much enthusiasm from customers. The diner owners were in a unique situation because they showcased traditional Greek and diner foods. I expected and learned that ingredients varied among diners in the different regions. The ingredients used by each diner did overlap in certain commodities: they all had the same condiments and served the same beverages that were typical thanks to mainstream American consumerism; for example the diners either served Coke products or Pepsi products. I anticipated that the different regions would use different ingredients based on availability and those differences influenced the foods that Greeks offered to different people.

It was more difficult to ascertain who represents diner culture, because so many ethnic identities have been involved in the history of the diner and its recent revival. I expected that one group in particular does not own diner culture. I anticipated that multiple ethnic identities are involved with transmitting the culture of the diner (in an intersubjective way). At the beginning of this thesis, I asked who owns diner culture. Based on research, the diner owners do not own diner culture, but rather contribute to its culture in a dynamic fashion. Diner culture cannot be owned by one person, but by a collective. Diner owners as a collective present diner culture, because they have continued the diner and have restored its popularity in mainstream culture.

There is a push-pull relationship that occurs between diner owners and diner
customers that affects what foods are cooked and served; these relationships include bonds between customers and diner owners, diner owners and employees, customers and employees; class, cultural presentations, and ethnic foodways.
Chapter 4: Historical Background

The history of the American diner and the history of Greek immigration into America were independent events, but they worked with each other to create the modern diner. The history of Greece has been wide-ranging and prominent since antiquity. During antiquity, Greece was a powerhouse for the promotion of culture and leadership throughout the Ancient world. After the collapse of the Greek empire, political factions vied for control of Greece. Greece has experienced the ebb and flow of many powerful rulers throughout its long history. In the nineteenth century, Greeks had won their independence. However, many Greeks left the motherland in several events prior to gaining independence. The turbulent past of this country led to several large migratory patterns out of Greece. One of the main areas that Greeks relocated to was the United States. It took a long time for the Greeks to finally make their way to North America, but once they managed the journey many followed.

Greece has survived many wars and some believe that the repeated exoduses of Greeks have been catalyzed by the social and political upheavals Greece has experienced (Clogg 1992). Richard Clogg explains how the long history of political strife, war, and other hardships of Greece laid the groundwork for modern Greece. Clogg mainly focused on the historical events of Greece in the late nineteenth century until the twentieth century. Clogg also explains how Greeks can see these events as triggers for mass
exodus. He discusses significant periods in modern times that Greece has seen major political, social, and cultural changes.

Greece gained full independence in 1830 (from Britain), and was the first European country to achieve this feat (Clogg 1992:2). For thousands of years, several empires and powerful groups had controlled Greece. Even though Greece gained its independence in 1830, it took over a century for the country to attain stability. Greece's democratic institutions came after great social and political tumult (Clogg 1992:234-235). After Greece gained its independence, several political parties attempted to gain control of the country and endeavored to incorporate the outlying regions of Greece into one country. Their attempts to seize control led to major political and social uprisings within the country.

During the 1890s, Greece’s,

...poor economic prospects at home were the main impetus underlying the wave of emigration, principally to the United States, that got underway... It has been estimated that between 1890 and 1914, some 350,000 Greeks, almost all male and amounting to nearly one-seventh of the entire population, emigrated. [Clogg 1992:69]

Many of these immigrants left Greece with every intention of returning. “The great majority left with the intention of returning to the homeland after working abroad for a few years, to build up modest savings, but in the end most of the migrants became permanently established in their adopted countries” (Clogg 1992:69). Many Greek immigrants changed their migratory plans based on developments in their new host country.

Migration for Greeks was tricky. “Restrictive or facilitative developments at
either the origin or the destination exert their impact on the migratory flow”
(Constantinou 2002:95). Greece’s history placed its inhabitants at a disadvantage because
the country had not seen much development like the United States had experienced. The
United States had seen transformation since the Industrial Revolution, whereas Greece
had experienced very little progress in technological advancement. This lack of
 technological advancement has been thought to be thanks to the Ottoman Empire that
ruled over Greece until 1821 (Kaloudis 2006:51). Under the Ottomans, “Greece had
undergone no Renaissance, no Reformation, no Age of Enlightenment, although it was
affected obliquely by the cultural and religious upheaval that transformed Europe”
(Kaloudis 2006:51). The lack of forward movement in Greece made some immigrants
look at the vast possibilities in the United States as a beacon of opportunity.

Another significant, historical moment that affected the Greeks occurred during
the late 1930s and 1940s. Greece had been drawn into the turmoil of World War II, and
towards the end of the 1940s, internal conflict erupted. Between 1946 and 1949 Greece
was mired in civil war (Clogg 1992:137-138). The country had been divided by World
War II which exacerbated long standing conflicts between political groups vying for
dominance in Greece. Additionally, a famine broke out in the winter of 1941-42 (Clogg
1992:137-138). The ravages of World War II, a civil war, and a famine back to back led
to another mass emigration. It is estimated that between 1951 and 1980 about twelve
percent of the remaining Greek population had emigrated (Clogg 1992:146). In the
middle of this exodus, the United States lifted its quota restrictions on immigration,
which led many Greeks to relocate to the United States.
The United States was the main area for relocation for Greek immigrants for several reasons. One main factor was that the United States had numerous jobs that the Greeks could perform. When Greek immigrants entered the United States, they settled mainly into cities. “According to the 1990 census, 88 percent of the Greek American population was classified as urban” (Constantinou 2002:107). Greek immigrants began their new lives in the United States in cities because that was where most of the job opportunities were. Many immigrant groups, including the Greeks, had to take proximity to work into account when choosing a place to reside. Many immigrants had come to the United States with just barely enough resources to live on. It is rare that these immigrants would have had enough money to buy a car for transportation. Another reason Greek immigrants chose to relocate to the United States was education. Many Greek immigrants wanted to enhance their personal knowledge. They also saw that having a good, well-rounded education would lead them to having more success in the United States.

As Greeks were making their way into the United States, the early stages of the diner were developed. “To survive in this strange new environment, the lunch wagon had to evolve into a new format that offered customers more convenience, spaciousness, and social interaction” (Witzel 1999:36-37). Beginning in 1897, these new and more permanent spaces came when horse-drawn trolleys were replaced with electric versions (Witzel 1999:43). The old trolley cars were then recycled by owners who created this first version of the permanent diner with these trolley shells (Witzel 1999:43). Some of these structures had two large steel wheels, one on each side, so that the structure could be moved if the people of the area were not frequenting the early diner (Gutman
Eventually these cars lost the large wheels and had smaller wheels used only, primarily, to haul the new structures to their final destination (Gutman 1993:31). These smaller wheels were based on the structure of the recycled trolley cars that some manufactures were using (Witzel 1999:43). The main area where the latest redesigned diners were being manufactured was now in New Jersey (Garbin 2005:3).

These diners were redesigned several times but, it was after World War II that they were created with a sleek stainless steel exterior (Gutman 1979:50). The post modern diner iteration can still be seen today, especially on the East Coast of the United States but is not limited to this area. However, some diners have become faced with brick or stucco or have reverted back to the original wood (Gutman 1979:50). In short, diners were created during the Industrial Revolution and grew into a new type of eatery in America that had not been seen before.

Randy Garbin (2005) describes that various architectural styles throughout the evolution of the diner. From 1910 to 1935 diners were styles with a barrel roof and a wooden and porcelain exterior (Garbin 2005: xiii). From 1935 to 1955 diners were designed with a modern style of stainless steel, glass block, rounded corners in early years then gradually become square (Garbin 2005: xiii). The exaggerated modern style was from 1955 to 1965 and consisted of stainless steel with colored flexglas or anodized aluminum and sharp, dramatic edges (Garbin 2005: xiv). The environmental design was popularized from 1965 to 1985 and had a stone or brick façade and a brown or red roof (Garbin 2005: xiv). And finally the postmodern design was popularized from 1985 to the present and was created as a reinterpretation of the classic diner elements (Garbin 2005: xiv).
xiv). The postmodern diner has the quintessential stainless steel, neon trim, black-and-white checkered walls, chrome, and glass blocks (Garbin 2005: xiv). The urban diner of this study is of the postmodern design, or the more nostalgic and iconic image evoked when imagining diners. The suburban diner is of the environmental design due to its brick façade and red roof. The rural diner does not fit neatly into any of Randy Garbin’s (2005) classifications. I propose that the rural diner of this study is a new type of diner that could be considered a post-post modern diner.

The U.S. experienced a rise in technological advancements during the second Industrial Revolution, which lasted from the 1880s to about 1914. During this period, America was about expanding westward and exploring what the land could do for Americans (Trachtenberg 2007:5-10). Americans were more concerned with industry and creating big businesses (Trachtenberg 2007:38-39). The era of the machine had arrived in America and changed the social and cultural aspects of everyday life. “And the chief agent of such cultural changes was, of course, the most conspicuous machine of the age: the steam-driven locomotive, with its train of cars” (Trachtenberg 2007:57). The steam locomotive made it possible for people to travel great distances in a shorter amount of time, and also opened the opportunity for people to live in one area of the country and work in another area. This time period also saw the increase of social unrest between the social classes.

In short, the increasingly rigid social stratification that accompanied the dramatic rise in industrial productivity confused, angered, and frustrated masses of Americans, a growing percentage of them recent immigrants recruited into the very industrial system which seemed destined to dash their hopes of social improvement. [Trachtenberg 2007:54]
The tensions grew out of the newly renovated labor market. People began to have more specific skills that made them specialists (Trachtenberg 2007:43-60). Others had to learn how to use and operate new mechanical devices to produce goods at a quick pace (Trachtenberg 2007:43-60). These new occupations led to the social strife between the bourgeoisie and proletariats.

It was after the Industrial Revolution that diners began to form and change. Diners may have started out as small carts outside of noisy factories, but they grew into places that offered different experiences to different people based on the needs of each patron. At first, diners catered to factory workers who needed to be able to get food fast. Factories would hire almost anyone who could endure the difficult factory conditions for a low wage. Immigrant groups, upon arrival to America, would likely head towards a city for work because the city was where the jobs were available during the growing industrialization of America (Hurley 1997:1286-1287). These large numbers of immigrant workers needed a place to grab a quick bite to eat during their short breaks on their shifts. They became patrons of the diners. Diners, therefore, became one of the places where in which many groups of various cultural backgrounds gathered and interacted with each other (Hurley 1997:1287). “Diner operators frequently attempted to secure customer loyalty by offering a generous selection of Old World dishes” (Hurley 1997:1287). Diner owners would serve dishes that reminded various immigrant groups of traditional food from their homeland as a way to establish a regular clientele.

Diners became associated with men during the 1920s because they were open
twenty-four hours a day (Hurley 1997:1284-1287). It was only socially acceptable for men to be out at all hours because many men worked long, laborious shifts. This is different from women, who mainly worked in the home and were expected to care for the children while men worked in nearby factories and other occupations. Men were free to openly express themselves in the presence of other men who often shared the same occupation (commonly as factory laborers). Women were reluctant to patronize diners due to the salty reputation associated with them (Hurley 1997:1285). Diner owners tried to change the atmospheres of their diners during the 1920s so that women would feel more welcome and frequent the diners (Gutman 1993:84). Women were also viewed as an untapped market that diner owners could sell food to and make a profit (Gutman 1993:84). As women became more interested in patronizing the diners, diner owners made drastic changes to cater to this new clientele. Diners were originally designed with only stools at a counter. Diner owners and manufactures then redesigned their diners to include booths and tables and chairs to offer customers seats other than stools (Gutman 1993:89). While some diner owners did not want to cater to women, others saw it as an opportunity and learned that diners needed the business of both men and women in order to survive (Gutman 1993:91).

Diners not only gained popularity in the 1930s, but they also seemed to be a business that Americans needed. “Diners were described as ‘depression-proof-businesses’ because everyone still had to eat” (Gutman 1993:92). Even though diners were ‘depression-proof’ they were still about serving cheap, filling meals to people at all hours of the day. Diners had also begun to fill a void in the social realm that affected
many Americans during the 1920s. Once Prohibition was in full swing, diners filled the gap that was left behind as saloons, taverns, and bars were permanently closed (Hurley 1997:1287). It was during this time that diners grew in popularity because of their new environment, which had changed at the beginning of Prohibition. More and more people were frequenting diners because of their cheap prices and filling meals that were as good as home cooking.

It has been said that the first Greek owned restaurant in the United States was created in 1857 (Moskos 1980:123). This restaurant was called the “Peloponesos” and was located in Manhattan (Moskos 1980:123). It was estimated that by 1913, there were about six hundred Greek-owned eating establishments in Chicago and two hundred in New York (Moskos 1980:123). These restaurants were described as being of the “chop-house or third-rate” types of restaurants (Moskos 1980:123). These restaurants were comparable to American diners in that they were located in grungy parts of cities. They were also created to serve a particular group of people: Greek immigrants. “Some Greeks went into the restaurant business because of the new health laws in the early decades of this century that restricted or forbade food carts” (Moskos 1980:123). Another reason that some Greek started restaurants was because of the collapse of the confectionery shop business in the 1920s (Moskos 1980:123). The confectionery industry was making the transition towards a more mechanized manufacturing of goods. The restaurant business utilized Greeks’ skills to cook and offered to opportunity to go into business for themselves. Many Greeks were confectioners and to save their businesses they converted them into lunchrooms and eventually full restaurants (Moskos 1980:123). It is estimated
that on the eve of the Depression, there were around 7,000 Greek owned restaurants in the country (Moskos 1980:123).

During the Depression, Greek immigrant restaurateurs endured difficult times and many lost their restaurants. “The Depression not only reduced the number of patrons who could afford to eat out, but also a rival in food service arose from an unexpected quarter. The restaurants had to compete with the introduction of lunch counters in drugstores, department stores, and five-and-ten-cent chain stores” (Moskos 1980:124). These new competitors offered the American public new places to enjoy meals out of their homes, but they affected the presence of the Greek-owned restaurants. Following World War II, the Greek restaurant owners saw prosperity and they were able to expand their businesses (Moskos 1980:124). “By the late 1970s, Greek had become a prominent mainstay of the American restaurant scene” (Moskos 1980:124). With the growing success of the Greek owned restaurants it was essential to find someone to continue ownership and operation of each restaurant.

Modern diners are relatively unchanged and that is thanks to the rich history and culture of the diner. With the history of the Greek immigration, Greeks have maintained their historical roots and have preserved their traditions in a vital way: through food. The American diner is a place where the history of the establishment and the history of the Greek immigrants help to solidify the connection between the two histories. This history of the diner, in conjunction with the history of Greek immigration to the United States, helps provide the background necessary to understanding the roles that diffusion, regionalism, ethnic identity and the social construction of space have played in creating
connections between American diners and Greek cuisine and culture.
Chapter 5: A Greek-American Urban Diner: Metro 29 Diner

Figure 1: Metro 29 at night

The street is lined with excessive car horn beeping, bright lights, and buildings on either side. Less than two blocks from the intersection where Lee Highway crosses North Glebe Road, Metro 29 rises out of the street in a grand view. The exterior of Metro 29 is the stereotypical façade that many people have associated with diners. According Randy Garbin’s style guide, Metro 29 is a postmodern diner. It has all the elements of the modern diner, but all the cooking is now done in the kitchen and not behind the counter (Garbin 2005: xiii-xiv). The shiny stainless steel exterior makes Metro 29 shine in any light and that shine draw customers in, as seen in the image above. If the illumination of the stainless steel does not get customers’ attention, then the copious neon lights will. Above the front entrance billows a large American flag on a flag pole on the roof, as depicted below. This building is the epitome of a stereotypical American diner.
Metro 29 has a more modern design than a traditional diner, as seen below. Metro 29 appears to present their diner as a sort of nostalgia for the diners of the modern era that were popularized post World War II. Where there was a lot of stainless steel throughout the structure, there were also plush booths, chairs, and lots of windows to let in natural light. There were also four large televisions located throughout the diner. The staff of Metro 29 tried to present themselves in a professional way: the staff wore white dress shirts, black bow ties, and black pants and shoes. On occasion they wore black dress vests over their shirts. It appeared that this was an attempt to project an elevated status to draw in higher class patrons. The staff was comprised of various ethnic groups. For the most part, the waitresses and waiters were white and African American. The kitchen staff and table clearers were Hispanic. Metro 29 was unlike traditional diners in that it was not open 24 hours a day. Metro 29 was only open from 6 AM to either 1 or 3 AM (later on the weekends).
Metro 29 is a family owned and operated business that began when it was founded in 1995 (Metro 29 2013). Peter Bota is the owner and operator of Metro 29 with other members of his family (Metro 29 2013). The design of the diner was based on a New York style diner that Bota and his family wanted to duplicate in Arlington (Metro 29 2013). Bota and family wanted to “create a menu that offered something for everyone, and an ambiance that welcomed families and couples, friends and colleagues” (Metro 29 2013). One of the unique characteristics of Metro 29 is their basement bakery where the staff creates their homemade luscious desserts (Metro 29 2013). “Patrons lured by the freshly prepared goods are greeted by a glass case filled with layered cakes, cream pies, cheesecakes and 18 different kinds of mouthwatering pastries” (Metro 29 2013).

Metro 29 is about family, community, ethnic pride and nationalism and Peter Bota demonstrated that in his advocacy outside of Metro 29. Bota is a member of the AHI: the American Hellenic Institute, Inc. (Polizos 2012). The AHI is, “an independent, non-profit Greek American public policy center that works to strengthen relations between the U.S
and Greece and Cyprus and within the Greek American community” (Polizos 2012). Bota continued to demonstrate a tight-knit community within his family diner as well as using his stance in the community to help others. With his fellow members of AHI, Bota and others strengthened relations between the Greek-American communities around the country and the world. Metro 29 may have started out as a diner for a smaller community, but has recently experienced national popularity.

In 2010, Guy Fieri from the Food Network paid a visit to Metro 29 (Metro 29 2013). Peter Bota and his staff were featured on the hit show, Diners, Drive-Ins, and Dives and their show first aired November 26, 2010 (Metro 29 2013). Bota described to Fieri that the diner had been built “from the ground up” and that there were 12,000 square feet of space in the building (Food Network 2014). Fieri then went into the kitchen with head chef Nick Athanasiou. Athanasiou demonstrated Metro 29’s best selling roast leg of lamb and challah bread French toast (Food Network 2014). The staff and patrons all demonstrated to Fieri that Metro 29 is all about community. There were several of their regular clients in the video segment discussing their love of Metro 29. Many people described the huge portions of homemade food served (Food Network 2014). Fieri’s visit was planned, but Metro 29 catered to another famous man who had not expected.

On December 7, 2012, a limo and several unmarked cars pulled up to Metro 29. Vice President Joe Biden decided to host a meeting at the local Metro 29. Biden’s meeting was with seven members of the middle class from all over the Washington Metro area. The meeting was a discussion about the fiscal cliff and the possible increase of taxes for the middle class. The meeting did take place in the side room of Metro 29 to
accommodate Mr. Biden, his seven guests, and his security detail. The members all enjoyed the food and the atmosphere of Metro 29. Before Mr. Biden left he posed for pictures with the staff and patrons of Metro 29, as shown below.

![Image of Mr. Biden with staff and patrons of Metro 29]

Figure 4: Peter Bota (left), Vice President Joe Biden (center), Christopher Bota, son of Peter (left)

With Metro 29’s new-found fame, their popularity has certainly grown beyond the community of Arlington County. Most diners maintain relatively low menu prices because being inexpensive is a major draw for their clientele. Metro 29 is not like that. Main course dinner dishes, range in price from $8.25 to $28.95 (Metro 29 2013). Their salads range from $10.00 to $14.25, but the portions are quite large. Their omelets range from $8.50 to $11.25. The rest of the menu offered a wide variety of diner favorites like open-faced sandwiches, meatloaf, roast turkey, and breakfast items. One of the main reasons people return to Metro 29 is their vast selection of delectable desserts. With an on-site bakery, Metro 29 produced more items in house compared to other diners. Many diners have the capability to make their own baked goods and breads, but that process has
to be done in the same space as the other cooking. Not at Metro 29. They have someone come in early and made all their breads from scratch, as well as all of their sweet treats. With an on-site bakery, costs can be kept down on certain items, but it also allowed the diner to be more creative and well rounded with their baked goods. For example, challah bread is not something that is commonly found in diners these days. Challah bread is important to Jewish culture. Typically, the challah bread is reserved for the Friday Jewish Shabbat. Metro 29’s bakery gives the diner the opportunity to acquaint customers with this type of bread.

The basement bakery of Metro 29 proves its usefulness every day. Having accessibility to something is very powerful. Being in an urban setting, there are no farms and ranches to buy produce or meats from. Metro 29 has to buy all of their produce and meats from outside of the local Arlington community. Buying outside of the community increases the prices on products that the diner purchases. While the diner saves money on baked goods, they spend more money on fresh ingredients. The lack of local ingredients only slightly changes the traditional recipes served at Metro 29. Peter Bota strives to make as much as possible from scratch using every inch of his 12,000 square foot facility to achieve that. Bota has incorporated his family’s traditional recipes and his head chef’s traditional recipes to create a fantastic menu.

The items are pricier than other diners than I have been to. One reason for this is that Metro 29 has seen a substantial growth in their clientele since 2010 when they were on *Diners, Drive-Ins, and Dives*. With an increase in celebrity patrons and people from all over the country, Metro 29 has become very popular and simple supply and demand
theory indicates that their prices needed to be raised as consequence to their new fame. Chef Nick Athanasiou’s cooking style is very traditional Greek cooking. He tells Guy Fieri during his interview in the *Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives* episode that his lamb for Metro 29 is what Greeks would have for Sunday dinners (Food Network 2014).

Metro 29’s diner website is very grand. On the welcome page, users are greeted with a large picture of Guy Fieri standing in front of a picture of the diner. Guests are then invited to watch the video clip that aired on Food Network’s *Diners, Drive-Ins, and Dives*. Then there are large bright pictures of the food on the menu page that shows some of the favorite dishes on the diner. There is also a news section of the website that gives blurbs of all the reviews that Metro 29 has received. It also describes the events that the diner has played host to in recent years.

Food is one of the main ways in which people can identify themselves with particular groups. Eating habits and foods have been said to invoke memories. This is certainly evident in Metro 29, which blends Greek and American traditional foods. The Bota family displays their connection with their family’s culture of the past (Greek) as well as their new culture (American) and create a cohesive menu that epitomizes both cultures. It could be considered that Metro 29 is presenting a new fusion culture with the blending of multiple cultures to present customers. Being situated in an urban setting, Metro 29 has accessibility to customers from many ethnic groups. Metro 29 is able to present their Greek-American culture to these groups through their urban diner. Diners have their own culture, but Metro 29 blends the traditional atmosphere of the American diner with a Greek-American menu.
Metro 29 demonstrates that the American diner is socially constructed as a particular space through its preparation and serving of particular foods. The foods served also illustrate a certain class of the diner (whether of its patrons or its employees). Metro 29 appears to cater to mainly a middle class and upper middle class clientele. During my observations, I noticed that there were several business professionals from the area at Metro 29 for a quick lunch. There were also lots of families that live in the surrounding community. The menu offers meals that can fit any budget but mainly the budget of the middle class since some of the dishes are more expensive than other diners. The urban setting influences the diner in many ways: in clientele and employee demographics, accessibility to ingredients and pricing. These influences are also seen on the diner’s website. These influences are also seen in the suburban diner.
Chapter 6: A Greek-American Suburban Diner: Angelo’s Steak and Pancake House

Angelo’s is affixed to an eight lane highway that runs through the heart of Newport News, Virginia. Until recently, only the building drew one in. On September 3rd, 2013, Angelo’s introduced their new electronic sign that begs for attention from drivers that pass by on Route 17 (Angelo’s Steak and Pancake House Facebook Page 2013). Angelo’s does not resemble to stereotypical American diner. In fact, based on the image of its exterior above, Angelo’s appears to be more of a lounge than a diner. This design is consistent with Randy Garbin’s explanation of the environmental diner design that was popularized in 1965 to 1985 (2005: xiv). The red roof and the windows and stone façade with the Mediterranean style are what make this diner an environmental design (Garbin 2005: xiv). Angelo’s has recently begun adapting to a more post modern
diner in that Angelo’s is utilizing the internet. Angelo’s recently begun a website and launched a Facebook page.

Newport News is situated in the region known as Hampton Roads. This region includes the cities of Hampton, Norfolk, Suffolk, York County, Williamsburg, James City and many other smaller cities. This region has a history rooted in the building of ships and this is still true today. In Newport News, there is a shipyard that helps build necessary materials for large naval ships and these materials are frequently transported to the Norfolk Naval base. The shipyard is only a short drive away from Angelo’s. Many of the shipbuilding workers come to Angelo’s because it offers inexpensive large portions of home cooked meals. Newport News plays host to a large military culture as well as a large tourist culture being close to other large and historic cities. The food is one of the main reasons people flock to Angelo’s.

Angelo’s is also uniquely situated on Route 17, or J. Clyde Morris Boulevard to the locals, and literally connects people from the main highway of Interstate 64 to Christopher Newport University, which is located where Route 17 dead ends. Many CNU students frequent Angelo’s because they offer large meals that are inexpensive, which is important to most college students. Angelo’s also has a large party room on premise so many CNU celebrations are held at Angelo’s because there are few party rooms that are reasonably priced in the area. Even though many CNU students eat at Angelo’s the demographic of the clientele are, for the most, part people who live and work in the area. During my fieldwork, I noticed that many people who would come to Angelo’s were coming in for their lunch break or for a quick meal after work. Many people that I
saw were dressed down: most people were in jeans and a shirt. Others wore their work uniforms. There were a lot of men and women dressed in their uniforms for mechanical occupations, chimney sweeps, plumbers, marine technicians, etc. Sometimes these men and women would sometimes also have some sort of grease on them. At Angelo’s, the atmosphere is inviting and is a place where customers feel comfortable be who they are: as if it was an extension of their home. I never saw anyone in formal attire in my several trips to Angelo’s. The environment made people feel comfortable and relaxed and they felt no need to “put on airs,” as some might say. Angelo’s projects an environment in which people can be themselves at their most relaxed, and to come in and have a good meal. Angelo’s is what I would consider to be a “real” American diner because it creates the social space and community between all members (customers and staff). The sense of community is the essence of what a true American diner is about. Angelo’s also continues to cater to the working and middle classes, whereas Metro 29 presents a false diner that resembles the nostalgia of diners, but fails to create a community.

Angelo’s has an environmental design (popularized between 1965 and 1985) and has undergone renovations in the past ten years. The original restaurant allowed smoking throughout the dining areas (Williams 2009). Over the years, Angelo restricted the smoking section to only the counter and booths in the front of the building (Williams 2009). In 2009, the Virginia state law banning any smoking in any public space went into effect. Many regulars did not take to the change very well. Constantine (Costa) Theodorogiannis, son of owner Angelo Theodorogiannis, was interviewed by the Daily Press during the first day of the change. He stated, “It’ll blow over eventually. People
just have to adjust to the changes. It’ll be fine” (Williams 2009). And it did turn out fine. Since the ban, the diner has undergone some renovations to rid the building of the saturation of tobacco smoke. All of the carpeting was torn out and replaced with tile. The diner still has the original counter and stools for people to sit at and get a quick bite to eat, as pictured below.

Figure 6: Angelo having a quick dinner at the counter with the front booths behind him

The unique feature of Angelo’s is that it still has an open air grill and many line cooks use the grill to make a majority of their foods like steaks, omelets, burgers, chicken, and other foods. The grill is featured below.
Angelo’s differs from a traditional diner in that it is not open twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. It is open daily but only from 6 AM to 10 PM.

Even though Angelo’s looks more like a lounge it is a diner because it has the quintessential counter and it also has an open kitchen to give clients insight into the inner workings of a restaurant. The different diner designs all move the kitchen around in the designs. Typically the environmental design does not do any cooking behind the counter in front of the customers. My participant informed me that he has always loved being able to see his food being prepared in front of him. That is why when he was building Angelo’s, he wanted to bring that experience to his customers. This classic feature of being a part of the cooking process allows the staff and customers to interact and form bonds with each other, strengthening the community at Angelo’s. This shows that even though a culture has a history and traditions, owners have the opportunity to redesign and personalize their diners.

Angelo’s Steak and Pancake House was founded by Angelo Theodorogiannis in 1976 (Angelo’s 2014). Angelo moved with his family from Karpenisi, Greece to
Williamsburg, Virginia in 1974 (Angelo’s 2014). Angelo went into business with his family at a local restaurant called Sammy & Nick’s Steak House in Newport News (Angelo’s 2014). Angelo’s father Konstantinos became manager of Sammy & Nick’s and remained manager until 1993 after being with the restaurant for twenty-four years (Phillips 1998). In 1976 Angelo opened his own Sammy & Nick’s Steak House in Smithfield, Virginia (Angelo’s 2014). Then he opened another Sammy & Nick’s in Yorktown (Angelo’s 2014). In 1984 Angelo opened his own restaurant called Angelo’s Steak and Pancake House in Newport News with his brother Nick Theodorogiannis (Angelo’s 2014). Keeping in line with the family business, in 2005 Angelo’s son Constantine (Costa) joined as a manager of the business after graduating from George Mason University. Angelo’s is a place built on family ties and values but is also a place where community is strengthened. Angelo and his family are members of their local community church, Saints Constantine and Helen Greek Orthodox Church in Newport News, VA. Angelo’s daughter Zoe Theodorogiannis was married at their church in 2007 (Daily Press 2007).

Angelo’s Steak and Pancake House offers a wide array of meals to satisfy most taste buds. Angelo’s also offers inexpensive meals with large portions. Angelo’s offers the classic diner foods like pancakes, omelets, steak and eggs, French toast, meatloaf, fried chicken, burgers, and lots of salads. Angelo’s also offers Greek and Italian dishes that have become expected at most diners. They offer scratch made lasagna, spaghetti and meatballs, chicken parmigiana, souvlaki, and more. They also offer some of the freshest seafood with selections like flounder, shrimp, salmon, and oysters. Many of the fish are
locally caught that day or the previous day and prepared deliciously. Angelo’s also prides itself on serving quality steaks and takes the time to hand cut all of their meat in the restaurant. The image below shows Angelo and his son Costa preparing meat for the day, grinding beef for burgers and meat sauces as well as hand trimming the fat off of their prime rib and steaks.

Figure 8: Line cook (left), Costa (center), Angelo (right) grinding beef and cutting prime rib

Angelo’s is located in a suburban area and has the access to semi-local ingredients. Angelo’s does try to buy most of their products locally to sell the freshest food that they possibly can. There are many farms in neighboring cities like York County, Yorktown, Williamsburg, Gloucester, Mathews and more. There are no farms and ranches within Newport News, but these cities are no more than a forty mile or so drive from Angelo’s. On premise, there is no space for the diner to have a small garden so the majority of the food has to be brought in. Angelo’s does keep everything fresh by grinding all of their beef and hand cutting all of their meat as well. This gives their food a freshness that could not be achieved if they were to bring in frozen meat.
Angelo’s Steak and Pancake House is a local Newport News institution. As far as I know, it is the only one in the area. Angelo Theodorogiannis uses his past experiences from opening other restaurants and put those skills to use in the creation of his own diner, named after him. Angelo’s continues the tradition of finding diners alongside major roadways. Route 17 is very busy and has eight lanes of traffic (four on each side). So many people drive by Angelo’s every day and many stop in for a quick bite to eat, just like the early diners. Newport News is in southern Virginia and is not too far from the North Carolina border (about an hour or so). As we learned above, diners were originally located in industrial areas with many factory workers. As a center of shipbuilding, Newport News was one of those places. When the U.S. navy base was being constructed in Norfolk and workers from the surrounding cities were brought in to help with production, the population in the area increased. These blue collar workers needed to help with the laborious tasks of manufacturing large naval vessels. When these workers got off work, they wanted a hot and inexpensive meal to fill them up.

With the shipbuilding industry drawing blue collar workers, the surrounding area became dominated by the working class and lower middle class, one of the principal reasons that diners began to diffuse from the northeast to the south of the U.S. The demographics of the community also have an influence on southern diners, like Angelo’s. If prices were not kept low there would be a drop in customers. It would be too expensive for a family from the working class to eat at Angelo’s. The menu at Angelo’s offers traditional foods that are viewed as American, Greek and Italian. Angelo’s puts its own spin on each type of food. Angelo Theodorogiannis was born in Greece but uses his
family recipes and skills and incorporates the skills that he has learned in his American restaurants to create a Greek-American diner. An example of Angelo using his Greek-American traditions has created several popular dishes on his menu that are a fusion of the two cultures. Angelo’s offers a Greek burger. Typically a burger is thought of as an American tradition. At Angelo’s they take a classic American burger and give it Greek influences: they add feta cheese and tzaziki sauce instead of using mayonnaise.
As a typical diner is expected to be alongside a major roadway, Northside 29 is no different. Northside 29 sits on the busy Route 29 in Warrenton, Virginia. In this part of town, Route 29 is a four lane highway (two lanes on either side). Northside 29 sits across the highway from a small golf driving range. In the same parking lot Northside is neighbor to a small ice cream store with outside seating and a walk up window, on its left. On the other side of the ice cream shop there is also a gas station and on the left of the gas station is a pizza joint. On the right side of Northside 29 is a large gas station that does not share its parking lot. In this small less than one mile stretch Route 29 gradually rises to a small hill where an old church sits.

Northside 29 is not your typical diner. It is only open on Tuesdays to Sundays from 7 AM to 9 PM and is closed on Mondays. It differs from other diners in that it only
serves breakfast until 2 PM daily. From the exterior, the building looks to be someone’s home and not a restaurant. The parking lot is not large and is in need of repair. When I first entered the building, I thought I was in someone’s dining room. This was different from Metro 29 and Angelo’s because there was no chrome or stainless steel or glass blocks. There was only brightly colored wood paneling throughout the entire restaurant except for one side that was all windows. Northside is also much smaller in comparison to the two other diners and that size difference made me feel that I was in the family’s home. With a smaller room it felt like someone’s dining room and they had just invited me to dinner.

Northside also differs in that there is no counter and stools. This does not fit into the definition of a diner that was determined at the beginning of this thesis. However, it has the other qualities that epitomize diners. Northside has inexpensive and filling meals; it serves a local community and promotes a family environment; and it serves traditional diner foods. Northside 29 is a unique diner in that it has the design elements of the environmental design style. It has some brick on its exterior and has pillars, wood grain, and curtains. It also has no cooking done outside of its kitchen. There is one element that may transition Northside from an environmental design to a new category: a post-post modern diner. In a post modern diner there is stainless steel, chrome, neon signs and glass blocks. Northside has none of these elements. However, it does have its very own private bar room on site. I have never encountered a diner with its own private bar room before. This could be the beginning of a new design style for the post-post modern era. Northside 29 might not be the traditional diner, but demonstrates Hasia Diner’s arguments that
cultures change slowly. Northside 29 could be considered the next generation of diners.

Northside 29 is owned and operated by the Chakalos family. Spiro and Demetra Chakalos left their home in Vourvoura, Greece and came to the U.S. in 1956 with very little in the way of possessions (Northside 29: 2014). They worked diligently to learn English and worked to save money to follow their dream of running their own business (Northside 29 2014). In 1971 Spiro and Demetra had earned enough to buy the restaurant called “Town and Country”, which was the original name for Northside 29 (Northside 29: 2014). Spiro and Demetra raised their three children (Bill, Dina and Vicki) at the restaurant and made the place feel like an extension of their family (Northside 29: 2014). Spiro and Demetra operated the restaurant for several decades and enlarged the building to the size it is today (Northside 29: 2014). Then in 2002 Spiro and Demetra decided to rent the business out and retire (Northside 29: 2014). After years of neglect by the renters, Spiro and Demetra’s children decided to take back the restaurant and renamed it Northside 29 (Northside 29: 2014).

In 1975, Spiro and his brother Tony embarked on another business opportunity. In the same vicinity as Town and Country there was a Stuckey’s candy and gift shop (Spitony’s Pizza 2014). Spiro and Tony jumped at the opportunity to open a small snack shop inside of Stuckey’s (Spitony’s Pizza 2014). A snack shop was not the only thing that Spiro and Tony wanted Spitony’s to be. They installed a pizza oven, and the rest they say is history. In 1978 Stuckey’s closed but Spitony’s remained open and eventually became a local favorite. Spitony’s still sells a few snack items but they have also added a few baked pasta dishes and toasted sub sandwiches. However, pizza is Spitony’s number one
seller and Spitony’s takes pride in their pizzas. If people are looking for something other than pizza and snacks, they need only walk down the parking lot to reach Northside 29.

Below is a photo of the original “Town and Country” dining room. In 2010, the Chakalos family renovated the building.

![Figure 10: Town and Country dining room](image)

One of my participants stated that the family gutted and renovated it to make the building feel like a second home. They removed the old carpeting, replaced the old booths, covered the old tile floors with new hard wood floors, and replaced the old buffet counter as depicted below. The buffet counter was where the original bar of “Town and Country” had been located and it was eventually torn out to provide more space in the dining area.
Below is an image of the original “Town and Country” bar that was replaced. Even though they removed the bar eventually, the family loved the look of the wood paneling on the walls of the original building and decided to use that design in their renovations.

Today the interior of Northside 29 is warm and inviting. The entire diner is covered in a warm hard wood that makes you feel like you’re in someone’s family restaurant.
When the Chakalos family retook ownership in 2010, one of the newest additions to the diner was the new exterior sign. The sign greets travelers as they move along Route 29 and can be seen at a distance. The new Northside 29 boasts serving traditional comfort foods which is the epitome of diner cuisine.
Northside 29 demonstrates that this diner is not just about family but also about serving the community. Northside has five unique things that they do to promote local awareness. One of the most unique things at Northside 29 is large photographs printed on canvas in varying sizes. Underneath each canvas photo is the local artist’s information as well as a selling price. I have been to Northside 29 several times and every time different photo canvases have been displayed on the walls of the diner, except one (which is so large it almost takes up an entire wall).

![Figure 15: Large canvas photo on wall](image)

The second most unique thing that I have seen at this diner was a large container in the dining room next to the diner’s personal bar. This container is plastered with bright colors and advertises that Northside 29 collects food for the local Fauquier Community Food Bank as seen below. Northside 29 promotes the food drive by a sign written on the
bin that tells customers if they bring in non-perishable food items they get 10% off their check. Everyone likes to get good deals and what a simple way to give back to those less fortunate.

![Image: Collection bin of food for Fauquier Community Food Bank]

**Figure 16: Collection bin of food for Fauquier Community Food Bank**

The third most unique quality of Northside 29 is that the diner has its very own bar within the diner. Many diners do sell a limited quantity of alcohol. That is not true at Northside. When the Chakalos family took back the property in 2010, they waited to renovate their bar. Then in 2012 they opened their new bar complete with thick walls to cut down on the boisterous bar noise so as not to disturb guests in the dining room. The bar has become a local favorite hang out. Northside 29 has hosted several local events in their bar since they reopened in 2010. Being a small town, Warrenton does not have a lot of places where people can gather and have a drink and a bite to eat. Northside 29 has given the community that venue and every Friday and Saturday night, the bar at
Northside 29 is filled with locals of varying ages. This new space helps to create even more ties between people of Warrenton and strengthens their community.

Another unique thing that Northside 29 does to promote itself as a fixture of the local community is that they host a weekly Trivia Night at their bar. Every Thursday night from 7 PM to 9 PM a group of regulars shows up to answer trivia questions and to have a good time with their friends. Usually, these participants are members of the community since Northside 29 is far from suburban and urban residents. I have heard of trivia events at other restaurants but this was the first time that I had heard a diner hosting one.

Finally, the most unique thing that Northside does is hosting special events in their bar. Northside 29 has begun a new event called the “Tap Takeover.” I unexpectedly went to Northside 29 the night of the event, which turned out to be an extraordinary spectacle. During this event, a local brewery came in and for that evening, Northside 29 only sold their beers from the taps. If anyone wanted any other beer they had to get it in a bottle. The event was very popular and the bar was packed the entire night. If anyone was interested in partaking in the event they went into the bar and were given two free samples of one of the brewery’s beers. This was such a unique event for a diner. Another event that Northside 29 hosts in their bar is the live performances of local musicians. Whenever there is a live band or singer, many locals flock to Northside 29 for the entertainment. By providing the community this type of space and events Northside 29 is bringing Warrenton’s inhabitants a new place to mingle with each other, creating an even tighter community bond.
The Chakalos family believes that the food at Northside 29 is “comfort food at its best” (which is their slogan). They offer all of the traditional diner classics as well as a few traditional Greek favorites. One of the first things that surprised me was that breakfast is not served all day and in fact is not offered after 2 PM. The other thing that surprised me during my field work was that Northside 29 has two separate menus: one for breakfast and lunch, and another for lunch and dinner. Most diners have just one menu and offer either the whole menu or a large portion of the menu all day. Originally, the Town and Country restaurant was only open for breakfast and lunch. When the Chakalos family reopened the restaurant as Northside 29 they added a new dinner menu and extended the hours of the restaurant (Northside 29 Facebook 2014).

The breakfast items range in prices from $3.99 to $10.99. The lunch options range from $3.29 to $13.99. And their dinner choices range from $3.99 to $19.99. There are several factors as to how Northside 29 can offer menu choices for a relatively inexpensive price. Being in a rural community, Northside 29 is uniquely situated to buy produce and meats from local farmers and businesses. The image below shows what the owners have printed on their menus to inform their clients where their food is coming from.
Northside 29 buys its meats from Wilson’s Meats, Crabill’s Meats, and The Farmers Wife as a way to support the other local businesses of Warrenton. My informant informed me of what each business was and what they provided to Northside. “Wilson’s Meats is a wholesale meat retailer in the area that sells butchered, local meats. They have been in business since 1955 and have served many local businesses. Crabill’s Meats has been in business since 1962 and is located to the west of Warrenton in the Shenandoah Valley. They also provide meat for Northside 29. The Farmer’s Wife is newer to the community, opened in 2004, and provide some baked goods (like rolls and buns for burgers) as well as some deli meats.” By buying local ingredients, Northside 29 offers some of the freshest foods possible. I had the opportunity to have some of their Angus rib eye steak: it was the most luxurious piece of meat I had eaten in a long time. The meat was extremely tender and fresh. Being close to farms allows Northside to serve foods at the peak of freshness.

Northside 29 demonstrates the diffusion of the diner by being located on a major highway. Route 29 may only be four lanes through Warrenton, but it is a major cut
through between Gainesville and other cities further south or west like Haymarket, Strasburg, and Charlottesville. Diners were built on the old highway systems that helped connect the country and Northside 29 is no different. Because Northside 29 is on the highway in a small community, it is accessible to many customers travelling through who stop in on their commute to another destination. It also provides the small community in which it is located with services and activities that mainly serve the needs of the community. The social environment of the diner is built on familiarity. Since it is situated in a small community, Northside is seen as been one of the main places that residents of the community gather. Many of the customers seem to know each other and visit each others’ tables frequently to mingle with friends. However, there are other customers besides people who live within the community and those just passing through. Northside 29 is not a fancy joint and they do not pretend to be high class. They serve good old traditional home cooking for low prices. The community is a low population which means that the inhabitants do not contribute to a very wealthy community. Many of the customers and employees seemed to be of the lower middle class.

The Chakalos family is in a great situation in their community. The family has been in the area since 1956 and has made many connections in the community. The family is still very connected to their family heritage. They bring their traditions to life for their family and friends in their diner. They love their Greek-American traditions and have created a space that highlights the best of both traditions. Northside 29 appears to have become a second home for the Chakalos family for several reasons. They have many family members working at the diner so it seems that there is always a member of
the family present. They serve traditional Greek foods that have been passed on for
generations. They also love to have family gatherings and love to share their stories with
their clients. Northside 29 is the epitome of a local family joint in that they bring together
families and have helped to create a tight knit community.
Chapter 8: Discussion

Location of a Diner: Regionalism/Suburbanization

The locations of each of the diners examined in this thesis have unique qualities that entice people of different ethnicities and class to settle into them. The state of Virginia has been categorized differently by people for ages. According to the Census Bureau, there are four regions comprising the U.S. with several divisions of each region. The four regions are: Northeast, South, Midwest, and West (Census Regions and Divisions of the US 2014). The Northeast is then divided into the New England and Mid Atlantic sub regions (Census Regions and Division of the US 2014). The South is divided into the South Atlantic, East South Central and West South Central (Census Regions and Divisions of the US 2014). The Midwest is divided into East North Central and West North Central (Census Regions and Divisions of the US 2014). And finally, the West is divided into Mountain and Pacific sub regions (Census Regions and Divisions of the US 2014). Following the map demarcated by the Census Bureau, Virginia is located in South Atlantic subdivision of the South region. There has been argument that Virginia is part of the Mid Atlantic subdivision of the Northeast region. This debate has been observed by the inhabitants of Virginia. The debate derives from the expansion of the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area in Northern Virginia. With differences of opinion as
to the regional division of Virginia, there are also differences of opinions in what is considered and urban, suburban, and rural regional space.

The diners in this thesis show that there are many similarities between the urban and suburban settings in Virginia. Metro 29 is located in the heart of Arlington County and is very close to downtown Washington, D.C. Angelo’s Steak and Pancake House is in the middle of Newport News and is located on a busy highway that is one of the main routes for transportation in the area. Both of these diners get a lot of customers who are commuting through the area on their way to or from work. These two diners are situated in areas that have a more dense population and therefore have more customers and make more money when compared to the rural diner. With suburbanization on the rise, urban environments have to compete to have people come and live in their setting. The urban area offers more local attractions and entertainment when compared to the suburban area and most definitely, when compared to, the rural area. The urban diner also demonstrates that the higher population density requires higher prices for commodities in this setting. Economic theory states that when there is a higher demand for limited supplies the price must rise. Where there is a surplus of supplies and less demand, then prices decrease. The diners of this study demonstrate this relationship of supply and demand with Metro 29 being the most expensive and Northside 29 being the least expensive.

Metro 29 and Angelo’s cannot offer much in the way of local foods. Both diners are situated in heavily populated areas which mean that there is little to no space for any farms or ranches to growing fresh produce or raise animals. Both diners do have their meats and produce shipped in from as close by as they can, and they try to make their
meats as best as possible by hand trimming and processing in house. Northside 29 also hand trims all of their meat, and they get much better quality produce and meat because they are close to local farms. Northside 29 also has some land around back and they are able to grow some of their own produce as well. By being able to buy goods locally, Northside 29 can keep the cost of their meals down. Northside can also boast of the freshness of their food because most of their food is brought in daily or once a week and can serve their food at peak freshness.

At Northside 29, there is a greater sense of community promoted by the diner. By buying local ingredients from local businesses, Northside 29 has created a close knit circle of the local businesses. The connection between the businesses is also strengthened when the other business owners come to dine at Northside 29 and eat foods that they help to produce. This connection is not really observed at Metro 29 or Angelo’s. While the other diners do cater to other businesses in the area, they do not necessarily use foods that other companies have created locally. Northside 29 also promotes their community by collecting non-perishable foods for the local food bank. Northside also promotes local artists by inviting local musicians to perform as well as local businesses of the beer and wine industry to host tastings of local craft beverages. This is a unique quality that I have only witnessed at Northside 29, in my limited research. Community seems to be just as important as family to the owners of Northside 29.

Even with the various differences in the architecture, these three diners are in fact diners. Each one displays the traditions of diners in the pricing of their foods, the types of foods served and with being open long hours to accommodate the schedules of their
customers. The diners are also situated on busy roads as a way to entice travelers to stop and eat at their restaurants. This is critical of diners. Diners need to be on a road or in a well populated area in order to keep their patron numbers high. It is also important for diners to be a space that promotes the continuity of the diner culture and allowing for the individualization of each diner based on the family traditions of its diner owner. Even though diner owners may make architectural adjustments over time, the essence of the diner remains the same. They may change the shell but the nut, or essence, of the diner remains constant. The most important aspect of a diner is that it is a socially constructed space meant to culminate relationships with other members of the community in which a diner is located. The social space of the diner is socially constructed by those people who live in the area and know the area well.

**The Social Construction of Ethnic Identity and Foodways and Class**

Diners have traditionally been a space where multiple ethnic groups interact. This still holds true today at Northside 29, Angelo’s, and Metro 29. Each diner is owned and operated by a Greek-American family. The employees of each diner include: whites, African Americans, Hispanics, and Asians. From my observations, the only Greek members in the diners were the owners and their families as well as a few other local Greeks. Generally the wait staff was mainly white and female whereas the line cooks were Hispanic. There was also a great range of age between the staff of each diner. At Metro 29, there were several older people working as waitresses and hosts and greeters. The majority of the staff was younger ranging from late teens to early 30s. At Angelo’s, the staff ages were similar to Metro 29’s except they had fewer older people on their
staff. Northside 29 seemed to cater to a younger staff. The wait staff was mainly comprised of people who were in their late teens and late 20s. There were a few people who were about 30-40, but mainly they worked in the kitchen.

For the most part, diners traditionally catered to people who were of the middle class. This was because the middle class wanted a public restaurant that did not serve high class French cuisine and required formal attire. This still remains true today. Based on my observations, I saw that diners have remained a working class and middle class joint. Diners have changed menus relatively little but some diners have increased their prices, like Metro 29. I have also observed that location of the diner influences the class of the clientele at diners. Metro 29 hosted Vice President Joe Biden. It could be said that this occurred since Metro 29 is in a more affluent area and has a more upper middle class clientele. However, it could be argued that Vice President Biden was making a political statement by eating at a diner period. It may have just been one of the closest diners to the White House. It could also have been a statement that Biden was a man for the “working man”.

Presentation of Cultural Identity

The three diners of this study each demonstrated a fusion of Greek and American culture. Each owner was either born in the U.S. or Greece and then learned their family’s traditional heritage of Greek culture. Their Greek culture inspired each owner to share their love and passion for their family traditions with their clients. Jeffery Pilcher argues that different groups use food as a way to present their culture to insiders and outsiders. Pilcher asks the question of who own culture. Based on my research, it would appear that
no one person represents a particular culture. Each of the diner owners demonstrate that they practice a hybrid culture by continuing practices and traditions of their family’s culture as well as using traditional American diner practices. Each diner owner creates traditional Greek foods and serves them alongside traditional diner foods.

Hasia Diner (2001) argues that foodways do not change quickly. Metro 29, Angelo’s and Northside 29 all demonstrate her argument at work. Each diner makes traditional Greek foods that are based on family recipes and use many of the traditional ingredients. Many of the diner owner’s families have been in the U.S. for a few generations, but still continue to prepare foods as they were made generations earlier. The same can be said of traditional diner foods. The early diner was opened to serve industrial workers and others a quick bite to eat for an inexpensive price. They served hot sandwiches, breakfast items and other quick and simple foods. Those meals have continued to this day. Metro 29, Angelo’s and Northside 29 all serve traditional diner foods and serve breakfast, lunch and dinner. Although, Northside 29 is breaking from tradition in that they only serve breakfast until 2 PM daily.

Each diner demonstrates a continuation of the diner history and culture through their buildings. Metro 29 is the epitome of the post modern architecture of diners that were typical after World War II. Angelo’s captures the essences of the environmental diner with its brick and stone exterior, whereas Northside 29 has renovated their original building and it now appears to be the new post-post modern diner which is an environmental style that has evolved. Each diner still uses some neon as a way to attract customers but each one does it differently. Metro 29 has the stereotypical neon wrapping
around the whole building that lights the diner up at night. Angelo’s recently added a large digital neon sign that flashes daily specials tempting drivers on Route 17 to stop in. Northside 29 only has a neon sign on the roof that says “Restaurant” to entice customers. This exemplifies the tradition of the diner but also shows that diners can vary in appearance.

Anthropology of Migration and Food and Culture

This thesis has reviewed the history of Greek immigration to the U.S. and the history of diner culture. These histories helped to structure the discussion of diner culture and Greek immigrant ownership. The structure is further strengthened by the ideas of human relationships with food, spatial organization, and ethnic identity.

Food is one of the important ways that humans replenish their bodies with nutrients and improve the body’s strength. Without food, humans would cease to exist. Perhaps that is the reason that humans form attachments to food consumption? It is evident throughout this study that humans form bonds with other humans in social settings and many of those social settings revolve around food consumption. Diners offer a comfortable environment where customers feel relaxed and free to remain as long as they wish and socialize with whoever they wish to. At diners people can come in with large parties or come in alone and have the opportunity to seek out social interaction from other people in the environment.

Diners also offer an environment in which diner owners can serve foods of various ethnicities: in particular, American and Greek foods. Diners are known for serving traditional American meals, but have also become synonymous with a few
traditional Greek dishes. The migration of the Greek diner owners has influenced the owners and their personal and familial histories influence the kinds of foods that they serve in their diners. This shows that even though people may travel, they will always want to cook foods that they grew up with and remember fondly. Groups of people may travel thousands of miles and absorb new foods and new cooking techniques, etc. from other cultures; however, they will always practice their cultural traditions in addition to these new foods and cultures. This demonstrates that culture and traditions take a long time to make substantial alterations that will take effect on the practitioners of a particular culture.

People form attachments to spaces through many modes but food may be the most powerful mode. Humans eat many of their meals with families in their environments that are considered their homes. Often times, food evoke memories of home and family. Every human structures the concept of home differently, but most will agree that home is a place where family can come together and be themselves. The diner owners of this study demonstrate that their diners are structured to be like a second home for their family, customers, and staff.

Kenneth Jackson (1985) posits that humans are influenced by their surrounding environments. Edward Hall (in Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003) suggests that each person structures spaces differently from other people. These two theories open the discussion as to how history of an object can influence a person’s perception of it. Diners have a rich history, and yet they have remained relatively unchanged throughout their existence. The environment influenced the diffusion of the diner as well as the
architectural changes. The diner as an object has been socially reinforced as a cultural space thanks to the environment and based on people’s experiences with diners. People may have differing ideas of what diners should look like, but most people agree on one essence that encompasses the diner.
Chapter 9: Conclusion

Based on the data and research that has been covered in this thesis, it seems clear that no one person or group represents diner culture. Diner culture was created as a multicultural environment and this remains true today. The social space of the American diner and Greek immigrant ownership are intertwined concepts, but create a unique ethnic eatery. I began this thesis by asking several questions of who owns a particular culture. It is true that members of a particular culture represent their culture in many facets of their lives. Members promote their culture through foodways, religious practices, cultural norms and mores, etc. The members also share their traditions of their culture with members of other cultures. It could be said that members of a culture who practice their culture’s traditions and share with other cultures are demonstrating their ownership of their culture. Through their ownership, these members can share things like their foods to other people. The Greek-American diner owners of this study illustrated that they are doing just that. They belong to their family’s traditional Greek culture. They share their traditional Greek foods with their clients, who are members of various cultures.

The diner owners also share traditional diner foods with their customers. Does that mean they also own diner culture? It would appear that no one group represents diner culture. Many people from all cultural backgrounds participate in the resurgence the diner
has experienced in recent years. Diners have traditionally been a multicultural space that has been shared with other groups by people of several cultures. It is true that Greek immigrants have been one of the main proponents of diner culture throughout the history of diners and Greek immigration to the United States. However, diners are not solely owned and operated by Greeks. If Greeks were the sole proprietors of all American diners then they would represent diner culture, because they would influence how diners were perceived by the larger community around each diner. Diners are not owned or controlled by one group: instead diners belong to several cultural groups because the groups that continue their legacy are proponents of a multicultural phenomenon.

This study has shown that suburbanization has played a key role in the diffusion of the diner as city dwellers moved to the suburbs. Diners began in the urban areas of the New England area but have since then migrated to other places throughout the country. It appears that diners have followed the movement of people from out of the urban centers to the suburban and rural areas. People left the urban areas for various reasons, but diners appeared to have moved when large numbers of people moved. One thing that has remained true of diners: they are located near busy roads of different regions across the country. Diners were once the stereotypical food stop for travelers. Today diners have competition from fast food restaurants. Even with this competition, diners have survived difficult economic times and cultural change and have for the most part remained unchanged. It would appear that foodways and culture as well do not change quickly. This thesis has shown that diners have become a mixed culture of history and tradition from many cultures, especially the Greeks.
In a future study, it would be beneficial to conduct interviews with owners, workers, and customers at all diners that are being researched. This thesis has determined that no one particular group represents diner culture but all contribute to it. In future work, it would be beneficial to examine diners in various regions in various states to gain a more distinct understanding of the patterns of diffusion of diners across the U.S. and the kinds of changes that may appear in different diners located in different regions. It would also be interesting to see if other types of restaurants of various ethnic backgrounds demonstrate the same patterns in relationship between food offerings, architectural style, clientele, location over time, and also, whether they have experienced diffusion like the diner. It would also be fascinating to determine if a particular ethnic group owns more than one type of cultural restaurant. Given Gustavo Arellano’s question, “Are Mexicans making food for Mexicans”, it would be exciting to learn if particular groups are in fact making foods for their cultural members or not (2012:160). Culture changes slowly and can be influenced by history, diffusion, regionalism, suburbanization, ethnic identity, and the construction of social space. Culture can also change to incorporate aspects of other cultures to create a hybrid culture that demonstrates a partnership between multiple cultures.
Appendix: Figures

Figure 1: This photo of Metro 29 Diner is courtesy of Flickr https://farm3.staticflickr.com/2808/13306081005_0253a26c91.jpg, accessed April 10, 2014.


Figure 3: This photo of Metro 29 Diner is courtesy of Trip Advisor <a href="http://www.tripadvisor.com/LocationPhotoDirectLink-g30242-d494837-i48421835-Metro_29_Diner-Arlington_Virginia.html#48421852"<img alt="" src="http://media-cdn.tripadvisor.com/media/photo-s/02/e2/db/dc/metro-29-diner.jpg"/"</a><br />, accessed March 28, 2014.


Figure 8: Angelo’s Steak and Pancake House Facebook page. Added April 3, 2014, https://www.facebook.com/pages/Angelos-Steak-and-Pancake-
Figure 9: Roth, Michelle. Taken February 2, 2014.


Figure 13: Roth, Michelle. Taken February 2, 2014.

Figure 14: Roth, Michelle. Taken February 2, 2014.

Figure 15: Roth, Michelle. Taken February 2, 2014.

Figure 16: Roth, Michelle. Taken February 2, 2014.

Figure 17: Roth, Michelle. Taken March 1, 2014.
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Biography

Michelle Roth is a native of Annandale, Virginia. She completed her undergraduate career at Christopher Newport University in 2011. She plans to use her anthropological training to assist her in her hopes of helping people in other cultures.