From the Corniche Beirut to the Tree-lined Boulevards of Yerevan: The Formation of the Armenian Community of Los Angeles

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Armenia through the Ages
The Cultural Heritage of Armenia

Statue of Mesrop Mashots, who invented the Armenian alphabet ca. 405 AD.

Mother Cathedral of Ani, ca. 1000 AD.
The Genocide of 1915 and Dispersal of the Armenian Population

Armenian Genocide, 1915

- Relative number of Armenians massacred (exact figures are not known)
- Deportation control centre
- Deportation concentration and annihilation centres
- Deportation stations
- Areas of greater or lesser Armenian resistance
- Major and minor deportation route
- Armenian and Assyrian escape routes
Soviet Armenia (1920-1991)
The First Communities

- Watertown, MA
- Providence, RI
- New York City, NY
- Detroit, MI
- Chicago, IL
- Fresno, CA

The Gazarian family in Boston, 1908.
Traditional Forms of Communal Organization and Institutions

- Establishment of Compatriotic Societies (e.g., Compatriotic Union of Armenians of Urfa)
- Churches (See of Antelias vs. See of Echmiadzin)
- Political organizations (ARF, Hnchakian, and Ramkavar parties)
- Philanthropic organizations and cultural clubs (AGBU, Armenian Relief Society, Homenetmen, AYF)
- Press (Hairenik, Azbarez, Armenian Mirror-Spectator)
- Schools and educational programs.
  - Education was considered by first-generation parents a priority for their children.
The Arrival of the First Armenians in Los Angeles

• During the Depression, Armenians began moving out of the Central Valley, settling in San Francisco and Los Angeles.

• Greater waves followed after a succession of crises in the Middle East, including the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) and the Islamic Revolution in Iran (1979) and political oppression (Turkey in the 1970s and 1980s).

• Most recent (and ongoing) wave started with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the emergence of an independent republic of Armenia.

• Many first-generation immigrants arrived with limited skills, but over the years Armenians have gone on to start private businesses as well as enter into white-collar professions.
Scenes of Armenian Life

Street sign in the Little Armenia neighborhood of Hollywood.

Rose and Alex Pilbos School, Hollywood.
Scenes of Armenian Life (cont.)

St. Leon Cathedral, Burbank.

Zankou Chicken, West Hollywood.
Scenes of Armenian Life (cont.)

Asbarez (Arena, found 1908) newspaper homepage.

Plaque in honor of Armenian Studies chair at UCLA.
Current-day Challenges for the Community

• Culture and Group Maintenance
  • Assimilation vs. acculturation
  • Education
  • Language and the role of Armenian within households
  • Intermarriage

• Church and Faith
  • Lower levels of attendance; greater focus on matters not relating to doctrine
  • Growth of use of English during church liturgy

• Politics and lobbying
  • Recognition for the Armenian Genocide
  • Concern for and desire to improve conditions in the Republic of Armenia
  • Armenian Assembly (est. 1972) and Armenian National Committee
April 24 demonstrations in Hollywood and West LA.