

Armenian Americans have a long history in which the ambiguous and pivotal racialization of the “Orient” became a dividing line essential to the reception of Armenians, Persians, Mizrahi Jews, Yazidis, Arabs, Copts and other West Asian ethnic groups in the United States and California. Racialized together as “Orientals” or through the first waves of immigration as “natives of the Ottoman Empire,” these groups’ collective histories, including particularly prominent West Asian communities like: Armenians in the Central Valley and Los Angeles, Arabs in Los Angeles and the Bay Area, Iranians in Los Angeles exposes, a unique relation to anti-Black, Asian and Latinx racism as well as Native dispossession in California

Seeking opportunity and fleeing the Armenian Genocide in Turkey during World War I, many Armenians settled in the Central Valley of California, where they faced state sanctioned discrimination in housing, education, anti-miscegenation laws, and immigration. Early Armenian refugees were threatened with mass deportation under Anti-Asian exclusion and organized for naturalization along with other West Asian groups. Despite winning naturalization via court cases re *Halladjian* and *United States v. Cartozian*, anti-Armenian racism persisted from the federal to local level. Racial covenants denied home ownership to Armenians and their exclusion from organizations like fraternities, clubs, and business organizations, led Armenians to form their own thriving cultural, philanthropic and social organizations. Anti-refugee racism and Orientalism has dominated portrayals of Armenians from the earliest Armenian displacement to the United States and persisted in subsequent waves of immigration. Descendants from these early generations pursued a range of divergent professional and political careers, including Oscar and Pulitzer-prize winner William Saroyan and his cousin Ross Bagdasarian, the creator of *Alvin and the Chipmunks*; developer and philanthropist Kirk Kerkorian; George Deukmejian California Governor and Attorney General; as well as political activists like Charles Garry and Bob Avakian who forged solidarities with the Black Panthers, Indigenous leaders, and other civil rights activists.

Armenians in the early 1960s to the 1980s were again subjected to Orientalism, anti-immigrant, and anti-refugee racism. Like many other West Asian groups, the Immigration Act of 1965, built on the wins of the early days of the civil rights era, impacted the Armenian community coming to the United States. Following major events like the Lebanese Civil War and the Iranian Revolution, Armenian-Americans coming to the United States and Armenian-American organizations were subjected to targeted campaigns of surveillance and discrimination. Meanwhile, beginning in the Depression, Armenians were especially subject to deportation and surveilled as a result of their association with the Soviet Republic. During the Cold War, Armenians immigrating from the USSR, were subjected to red-scare tactics. Nonetheless, Armenian-American organizations like the Armenian National Committee of America organized large scale aid campaigns for the Republic of Armenia, United States recognition of the Armenian Genocide, and the election of Armenian-Americans to office.

Scholars estimate Armenian-Americans currently number up to 1 million in the United States, with the majority of the population living in California. Los Angeles boasts the largest population of Armenians in the world outside of the Republic of Armenia.

In more recent decades, Armenians have suffered as a result of racism that paints West Asia in broad strokes. Armenians were impacted by the NSEERS program and today remain banned and separated from their families by the thousands as a result of Executive Order 13769, commonly termed the “Muslim Ban” although it impacts millions of non-Muslims. Throughout the history of Armenian immigration to the United States, Armenian students have faced discriminatory practices in schools ranging from deficit-oriented perspectives regarding their culture to subtractive assimilation and language acquisition approaches. Despite these realities Armenian-Americans have organized successful campaigns today organizing for representation and electoral power, building support for the Republic of Armenia, creating cultural work that is read, heard and watched by millions like the work of Serj Tankian, Chris Bohjalian, Peter Balakian, and Nancy Kricorian. After more than a hundred years of US denialism, the House and Senate finally passed U.S. Recognition of the Armenian Genocide in 2019. Armenian - Americans continue to uplift their connection to their homeland, and fight for international support for Armenia. Although structurally marginalized, Armenian-Americans continue to contribute to every industrial, cultural and political institution in the United States, forging solidarities with other communities and calling for a more just and inclusive America.