

armenian americans from being to feeling armenian

****Armenian Americans: From Being to Feeling Armenian****

armenian americans from being to feeling armenian is a journey that delves deep into identity, culture, and belonging. For many Armenian Americans, it's not just about having Armenian heritage on paper or in their ancestry—it's about truly feeling connected to the rich history, language, and community that shape what it means to be Armenian in the United States. This transformation from simply being Armenian by birth or descent to genuinely feeling Armenian culturally and emotionally is a complex and deeply personal experience.

The Roots of Armenian American Identity

Armenian Americans trace their roots back to a rich and ancient civilization, with a history spanning thousands of years. Many families came to the United States fleeing the Armenian Genocide of 1915, seeking safety and new opportunities. This traumatic past is a foundational part of the Armenian American narrative, influencing how identity and memory are preserved across generations.

For descendants of these survivors, being Armenian has always been about more than just nationality—it's about resilience, remembrance, and cultural preservation. However, as time passes and newer generations grow up further removed from Armenia itself, the question arises: how does one move from merely **being** Armenian to truly **feeling** Armenian?

Understanding the Difference: Being vs. Feeling Armenian

Being Armenian: The Inherited Identity

When we talk about “being Armenian,” it often refers to the inherited aspects: family lineage, cultural traditions passed down, and perhaps a certain pride in the Armenian name. For many first-generation Armenian Americans, this identity is clear and visible—they speak Armenian at home, celebrate Armenian holidays, and participate in community events.

However, for some, especially younger generations born and raised in the U.S., Armenian identity can sometimes feel more like a label or a background detail. They might know their Armenian ancestry but lack a deep connection to its cultural nuances, language, or history. This is where the journey from “being” to “feeling” begins.

Feeling Armenian: The Emotional and Cultural Connection

Feeling Armenian is about embracing the identity on a personal and emotional level, not just recognizing it intellectually. It involves a heartfelt connection to Armenian customs, language, food, music, and community life that goes beyond family traditions. This feeling fosters a sense of pride and belonging that can influence how Armenian Americans view themselves and their place in the world.

Many find this feeling through active engagement—learning the Armenian language, visiting Armenia, participating in Armenian church services, or joining cultural organizations. It's a dynamic process that evolves with experience and exposure.

The Role of Language in Armenian American Identity

Language is often called the soul of a culture, and for Armenian Americans, it plays a crucial role in bridging the gap between being and feeling Armenian. The Armenian language itself has two main dialects—Eastern and Western Armenian—each with its own history and community.

Challenges in Language Retention

One of the biggest challenges for Armenian Americans is maintaining fluency in Armenian. For many families, English becomes the dominant language after just one or two generations. Schools in the U.S. rarely offer Armenian language classes, and daily life often doesn't require its use.

This language gap can create a sense of cultural distance, making it harder for younger Armenian Americans to feel fully connected to their heritage.

Efforts to Revive the Language

Fortunately, many Armenian American organizations and churches offer language classes, summer camps, and cultural programs aimed at helping younger generations learn Armenian. These opportunities are essential in cultivating a genuine feeling of Armenian identity.

Learning the language not only strengthens communication within families but also allows individuals to engage more deeply with Armenian literature, music, and history, enriching their connection to their roots.

Cultural Traditions and Community Life

Celebrating Armenian Holidays and Customs

Participating in Armenian holidays like Vardavar, Armenian Christmas, or commemorating the Armenian Genocide Day helps Armenian Americans feel a sense of shared history and community. These celebrations are often vibrant and filled with symbolic rituals, traditional foods like lavash and dolma, and communal gatherings that reinforce cultural pride.

The Armenian Church as a Cultural Anchor

For many Armenian Americans, the Armenian Apostolic Church is more than a place of worship—it's a cultural hub. It provides not only spiritual guidance but also a space for social events, Armenian language classes, and cultural preservation.

The church reinforces a collective identity by reminding members of their shared history and values, helping many move from simply having Armenian ancestry to truly feeling connected.

Arts, Music, and Literature

Engagement with Armenian music, dance, and literature offers another pathway to feeling Armenian. Traditional folk music and modern Armenian artists alike provide a soundtrack to identity. Armenian literature, from ancient poets to contemporary writers, opens windows into the Armenian experience.

Many Armenian Americans find that exploring these creative expressions enhances their emotional ties to their heritage.

The Impact of Armenian American Organizations and Networks

Community organizations play a vital role in nurturing Armenian identity in the diaspora. Groups like the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU), Armenian Youth Federation, and local cultural centers provide platforms for education, advocacy, and socializing.

Building Connections Through Community

For many Armenian Americans, the transition from being to feeling Armenian happens through these networks. Meeting peers who share the same background, engaging in

cultural events, and participating in community service projects fosters a sense of belonging and pride.

Advocacy and Awareness

These organizations also raise awareness about Armenian history and issues, such as recognition of the Armenian Genocide and support for Armenia and Artsakh. Advocacy helps instill a collective purpose and identity that goes beyond personal heritage—it becomes a shared mission.

Navigating Identity in a Multicultural Society

Growing up Armenian American means balancing multiple identities. Many individuals navigate the complexities of integrating their Armenian heritage with the broader American culture they live in.

Challenges of Assimilation and Preservation

Assimilation pressures can sometimes dilute cultural identity. The desire to fit in or avoid standing out can lead some Armenian Americans to suppress or downplay their heritage. This can create internal conflict between being Armenian and feeling Armenian.

Embracing a Hybrid Identity

On the other hand, many embrace a hybrid Armenian American identity—proudly Armenian while fully participating in American society. This dual identity can be empowering, allowing individuals to draw strength from both cultures.

Supportive families, communities, and cultural education are key to helping younger generations feel comfortable and proud of this blended identity.

Tips for Armenian Americans on Deepening Their Connection

For those seeking to move from simply being Armenian to truly feeling Armenian, here are some practical suggestions:

- **Learn the language:** Enroll in Armenian classes or use language apps to build fluency.

- **Engage with community:** Attend Armenian cultural events, festivals, and church services.
- **Explore Armenian history:** Read about Armenia's past, including the genocide and diaspora stories.
- **Cook traditional foods:** Prepare Armenian dishes with family or friends to connect with cultural tastes.
- **Travel to Armenia:** Visiting the homeland can deepen emotional ties and provide firsthand cultural experience.
- **Connect with elders:** Listening to stories from older relatives can offer valuable insight and inspiration.
- **Participate in arts:** Explore Armenian music, dance, and literature to enrich your cultural understanding.

These steps can help Armenian Americans foster a heartfelt connection that goes beyond ancestry, transforming identity into lived experience.

The journey of armenian americans from being to feeling armenian is ultimately about embracing a vibrant, multifaceted identity. It's a process shaped by history, culture, language, and community, but also by personal choice and engagement. Whether through language learning, community involvement, or cultural exploration, Armenian Americans continue to cultivate a deep sense of belonging that honors their past while enriching their present.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are some common experiences of Armenian Americans in preserving their cultural identity?

Armenian Americans often preserve their cultural identity through language, cuisine, religious practices, and community events such as Armenian festivals and commemorations of the Armenian Genocide.

How do Armenian Americans balance assimilation with maintaining their Armenian heritage?

Many Armenian Americans balance assimilation by integrating into American society while actively participating in Armenian community organizations, attending Armenian churches, and passing down traditions and language to younger generations.

What role does the Armenian Church play in the identity of Armenian Americans?

The Armenian Church serves as a central institution for Armenian Americans, providing spiritual guidance, cultural education, and a communal space that strengthens ethnic identity and preserves Armenian heritage.

In what ways do Armenian American youth connect with their Armenian roots today?

Armenian American youth engage with their roots through cultural schools, language classes, social media groups, youth organizations, and participation in cultural events that promote Armenian history and traditions.

How has the Armenian Genocide influenced the identity of Armenian Americans?

The Armenian Genocide is a significant part of Armenian American identity, fostering a strong sense of community, activism for recognition, and a commitment to preserving Armenian history and advocating for justice.

What challenges do Armenian Americans face in maintaining their Armenian identity across generations?

Challenges include language loss, assimilation pressures, geographic dispersion, and the need to adapt cultural practices to contemporary American life while keeping traditions meaningful for younger generations.

How do Armenian American organizations contribute to fostering a sense of Armenian identity?

Armenian American organizations provide educational programs, cultural events, networking opportunities, and advocacy platforms that help individuals feel connected to their heritage and community.

Additional Resources

****Armenian Americans: From Being to Feeling Armenian****

armenian americans from being to feeling armenian encapsulates a complex journey of identity, culture, and belonging. For many Armenian Americans, the experience transcends mere heritage or ancestry; it is a deeply personal and evolving process of embracing a multifaceted identity shaped by history, diaspora, and the American socio-cultural landscape. This exploration reveals how Armenian Americans navigate their ethnic roots while integrating into the broader fabric of American society, highlighting the nuances

of cultural retention, assimilation, and the emotional resonance of feeling Armenian.

Understanding Armenian American Identity

Armenian Americans represent a unique ethnic group within the United States, with origins tracing back to the Armenian Highlands and a history profoundly marked by the Armenian Genocide of 1915. The migration waves, primarily during the early 20th century, were not just physical relocations but profound cultural transitions. The shift from merely "being" Armenian, defined by ancestry and lineage, to "feeling" Armenian involves an active engagement with language, religion, traditions, and collective memory.

Although the U.S. Census does not always capture detailed ethnic breakdowns, estimates suggest that approximately 500,000 to 600,000 Armenian Americans currently reside in the United States, with significant populations in California, Massachusetts, and New York. These communities serve as cultural hubs where Armenian language schools, churches, and social organizations play pivotal roles in reinforcing Armenian identity.

The Role of Language and Religion

Language remains a cornerstone of Armenian identity. For first-generation immigrants, Armenian (both Eastern and Western dialects) is often the mother tongue, spoken fluently at home and within community settings. However, subsequent generations face challenges in maintaining this linguistic connection amid broader English dominance. Language schools and weekend Armenian classes strive to bridge this gap, fostering not only communication skills but also a sense of cultural pride.

Religion, particularly the Armenian Apostolic Church, is another significant pillar. The Church is more than a spiritual institution; it acts as a cultural custodian, preserving Armenian liturgical traditions, holidays, and community events. Participation in church activities often deepens the emotional ties to Armenian heritage, transforming ethnic identity into lived experience.

The Interplay of Assimilation and Cultural Preservation

The dynamic between assimilation and cultural preservation defines much of the Armenian American experience. On one hand, integration into American society involves adopting new norms, values, and languages, which can sometimes dilute ethnic distinctiveness. On the other, there is a conscious effort within Armenian American communities to retain cultural markers that affirm their unique identity.

Generational Differences in Identity Expression

Younger Armenian Americans often navigate dual identities, balancing the cultural expectations of their heritage with the realities of American life. Studies in ethnic identity development highlight how second- and third-generation Armenian Americans may initially feel distanced from their roots but gradually rediscover or redefine their Armenian identity through cultural events, cuisine, music, and activism.

This generational shift is reflected in how Armenian Americans engage with their heritage:

- **First-generation immigrants:** Tend to have a strong, direct connection to Armenian culture, language, and historical memory.
- **Second generation:** Often bilingual, they experience a hybrid identity, sometimes facing pressure to assimilate but also seeking ways to connect with their roots.
- **Third generation and beyond:** May identify more symbolically with Armenian heritage, often through cultural celebrations and community involvement rather than daily practices.

Challenges in Cultural Retention

One of the significant challenges Armenian Americans face is the potential erosion of cultural identity through assimilation. The risk is that language attrition, intermarriage, and geographic dispersion can weaken communal bonds. However, Armenian American organizations actively counter these trends by promoting cultural programs, language courses, and commemorative events such as the annual Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day.

From Historical Trauma to Collective Memory

The collective memory of the Armenian Genocide profoundly shapes Armenian American identity. This historical trauma is not just a recollection of past suffering but a living narrative that informs community cohesion, political activism, and cultural expression.

Activism and Political Engagement

Armenian Americans have been at the forefront of advocacy for recognition of the Armenian Genocide, both within the United States and internationally. This activism serves as a powerful mechanism for community solidarity and identity affirmation. The pursuit of justice and acknowledgment transforms historical experience into a contemporary cause, reinforcing a shared sense of purpose and belonging.

Cultural Expression as Resistance

Art, literature, and music among Armenian Americans often reflect themes of loss, resilience, and identity exploration. These creative expressions provide platforms for individuals to process their heritage emotionally and intellectually, contributing to the broader discourse of what it means to be Armenian in America.

Community Institutions and Their Impact

The presence of robust community organizations has been instrumental in fostering a strong Armenian identity. Institutions such as:

- **Armenian churches**, which function as cultural and spiritual centers.
- **Armenian schools**, preserving language and history.
- **Cultural festivals**, showcasing traditional dance, music, and cuisine.
- **Advocacy groups**, promoting political causes and community welfare.

These entities facilitate intergenerational dialogue and provide spaces where Armenian Americans can collectively experience and celebrate their identity.

Geographical Concentrations and Identity

The concentration of Armenian Americans in metropolitan areas like Los Angeles contributes to vibrant ethnic enclaves, such as Glendale, California, often referred to as the “Armenian capital of America.” These neighborhoods offer a rich tapestry of Armenian businesses, media outlets, and social venues, creating immersive environments that reinforce cultural identity and community solidarity.

The Emotional Dimension of Feeling Armenian

Beyond the tangible aspects of culture and community, the transition from simply being Armenian to genuinely feeling Armenian involves an emotional and psychological dimension. This sentiment encompasses pride, empathy, and a sense of responsibility toward preserving one’s heritage.

For many Armenian Americans, feeling Armenian is associated with a profound connection to family history, language, and the shared experiences of diaspora. It is an internalized identity that informs daily life choices, from the food they eat to the stories they pass on to

their children.

Identity as a Dynamic Process

Identity is not static; it evolves with personal experiences, social interactions, and historical contexts. Armenian Americans often find that their connection to Armenia itself—whether through visits, cultural exchange, or political developments—shapes how they feel about their Armenian identity. The rise of digital connectivity and social media also allows younger generations to engage with Armenian culture globally, enriching their sense of belonging.

Challenges and Opportunities Ahead

As Armenian Americans continue to navigate the complexities of identity, they face both challenges and opportunities. The pressures of assimilation, changing demographics, and shifting cultural landscapes require adaptive strategies to maintain a vibrant Armenian American identity.

However, the resilience of Armenian communities, bolstered by strong institutions and a rich cultural heritage, provides a hopeful outlook. The ongoing interest in heritage among younger generations, combined with innovative cultural programming and activism, ensures that the journey from being Armenian to feeling Armenian remains a living, evolving narrative.

In this ongoing process, Armenian Americans embody a dual existence—rooted in a rich historical legacy while dynamically engaging with contemporary American life—demonstrating how ethnic identity can be both preserved and transformed in diaspora contexts.

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Armenianness of the immigrant generation is transformed into a voluntary, rational, situational Armenianness. The generational change is from being Armenian to feeling Armenian. The Armenian-American community has grown and prospered in this century

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current trends and everyday religiosity, particularly within the Armenian Apostolic Church (AAC), and amongst Armenian Catholics, Protestants and vernacular religions. Themes examined include: Armenian grass-roots religiosity; the changing forms of regular worship and devotion; various types of congregational life; and the dynamics of social composition of both the clergy and lay believers. Exploring through the lens of Armenia, this book considers wider implications of 'postsecular' trends in the role of global religion.

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