

Anatolian Railway, learned about Boettrich's orders, he warned:

*Our enemies will some day pay a good price to obtain possession of this document . . . they will be able to prove that the Germans have not only done nothing to prevent the Armenian persecutions but they even issued certain orders to this effect, as the [Turkish] Military Commander has ecstatically pointed out.*⁷⁶

In a study of German participation in the Armenian Genocide, Vahakn Dadrian notes: "Whereas some German operatives went out of their way to avoid being drawn into acts that would have been tantamount to complicity, others willingly allowed the Turks to coopt them. . . . What is most noteworthy in this connection is the additional fact that the Germans belonging to the latter category had more power."⁷⁷

On October 8, 1915, four members of the German missionaries staff to Turkey appealed to the German Minister of Foreign Affairs to intercede with their ally on behalf of the Armenians.



Enver Pasha

Courtesy of the Library of Congress

We think it our duty to draw the attention of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the fact that our school work will be deprived, for the future, of its moral basis and will lose all authority in the eyes of the natives, if it is really beyond the power of the German Government to mitigate the brutality of the treatment which the exiled women and children of the massacred Armenians are receiving.

In face of the scenes of horror which are being unfolded daily before our eyes in the neighborhood of our school, our educational activity becomes a mockery of humanity. How can we make our pupils listen to the Tales of the Seven Dwarfs, how can we teach them conjugations and declensions, when, in the compounds next door to our school, death is carrying off their starving compatriots—when there are girls and women and children, practically naked, some lying on the ground, others stretched between the dead or the coffins made ready for them beforehand, and breathing their last breath!

Out of 2,000 to 3,000 peasant women from the Armenian Plateau who were brought here in good health, only forty or fifty skeletons are left. The prettier ones are the victims of their gaolers' [jailers'] lust; the plain ones succumb to blows, hunger and thirst (they lie by the water's edge, but are not allowed to quench their thirst). The Europeans are forbidden to distribute bread to the starving.

Every day more than a hundred corpses are carried out of Aleppo.

All this happens under the eyes of high Turkish officials. There are forty or fifty emaciated phantoms crowded into the compound opposite our school. They are women out of their mind; they have forgotten how to eat; when one offers them bread, they throw it aside with indifference. They only groan and wait for death.

"See," say the natives, "Taâlim el Alman (the teaching of the Germans)."

The German scutcheon [a shield with a coat of arms] is in danger of being smirched forever in the memory of the Near Eastern peoples. There are natives of Aleppo, more enlightened than the rest, who say: "The Germans do not want these horrors. Perhaps the German nation does not know about them. If it did, how could the German Press, which is attached to the truth, talk about the humanity of the treatment accorded to the Armenians who are guilty of High Treason? Perhaps, too, the German Government has its hands tied by some contract defining the powers of the [German and Turkish] State; in regard to one another's affairs?"

No, when it is a question of giving over thousands of women and children to death by starvation, the words "Opportunism" and "definition of powers" lose their meaning. Every civilized human being is "empowered" in this case to interfere, and it is his bounden duty to do so. Our prestige in the East is the thing at stake. There are even Turks and Arabs who have remained human, and who shake their heads in sorrow when they see, in the exile convoys that pass through the town, how the brutal soldiers shower blows on women with child who can march no farther.

We may expect further and still more dreadful hecatombs after the order published by Djemal Pasha. (The engineers of the Baghdad Railway are forbidden, by this order, to photograph the Armenian convoys; any plates they have already used for this must be given up within twenty-four hours, under penalty of prosecution before the Council of War.) It is a proof that the responsible authorities fear the light, but have no intention of putting an end to scenes which are a disgrace to humanity.

. . . We know that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has already, from other sources, received detailed descriptions of what is happening here. But as no change has occurred in the system of the deportations, we feel ourselves under a double obligation to make this report, all the more because the fact of our living abroad enables us to see more clearly the immense danger by which the German name is threatened here.⁷⁸

Despite the pleas of the mission's staff and many ordinary German citizens who witnessed the treatment of Christian minorities in the Ottoman Empire, the German government chose not to intervene.

CONNECTIONS

- ❖ Vahakn Dadrian believes that German officials were “indirect accessories to crimes perpetrated by the [Turkish] Special Organization functionaries whose overall goal they endorsed, financed to some extent, and shepherded.” Dadrian uses legal language to describe the German officials’ participation in the genocide. How would you describe the relationship in moral terms?
- ❖ How do the German missionaries express their outrage? What arguments do they make to convince the German foreign minister to intervene? What words or phrases from the letter stand out? What rules are needed so that individuals can know they are protected as they voice dissent?
- ❖ In the letter the German missionaries ask: “How can we make our pupils listen to the Tales of the Seven Dwarfs, how can we teach them conjugations and declensions, when, in the compounds next door to our school, death is carrying off their starving compatriots?” How would you answer their question?
- ❖ After the war, General von Schellendorf compared the Armenians and the Jews living in his country, Germany. In language laden with stereotypes, Bronsart von Schellendorf explains:

...the Armenian is just like the Jew, a parasite outside of the confines of his homeland, sucking the marrow of the people of the host country. Year after year they abandon their native land—just like the Polish Jews who migrate to Germany—to engage in usurious activities. Hence, the hatred which, in a medieval form, has unleashed itself against them as an unpleasant people, entailing their murder.⁷⁹

What stereotypes are reflected in his comparisons? Whom does he blame for the mistreatment of Armenians and Jews?

Between 1904 and 1907, German troops killed between 65,000 and 80,000 of the Herero people who inhabited present-day Namibia in Southwest Africa, then a German colony. Some scholars suggest that Germany’s colonial experience, and its experiences during World War I and the Armenian Genocide served as models for the Nazi Holocaust. To research the relationship between the treatment of colonized Africans and genocide, see the book *Exterminate All the Brutes: One Man’s Odyssey into the Heart of Darkness and the Origins of European Genocide* by Sven Lindqvist.



Reading 5 — FOLLOWING ORDERS

Lieutenant Said Ahmed Mukhtar al-Ba'aj, an Ottoman officer, was one of four Arab Muslim soldiers who defected to the Russian Army. The Russians turned the men over to the British, who interviewed them. In December 1916, the officer testified about his role in the deportation of Armenians from Trebizond and Erzerum.

An order came from Constantinople that Armenians inhabiting the frontier towns and villages be deported to the interior. It was said then that this was only a precautional measure. I saw at that time large convoys of Armenians go through Erzeroum. They were mostly old men, women and children. Some of the able-bodied men had been recruited in the Turkish Army and many had fled to Russia. The massacres had not begun yet. In May 1915 I was transferred to Trebizond. In July an order came to deport to the interior all the Armenians in the Vilayet of Trebizond. Being a member of the Court Martial I knew that deportations meant massacres....

Besides the deportation order... an Imperial "Iradeh" was issued ordering that all deserters when caught, should be shot without trial. The secret order read "Armenians" in lieu of "deserters." The Sultan's "Iradeh" was accompanied by a "fatwa" [Muslim legal opinion] from Sheikh-ul-Islam stating that the Armenians had shed [Muslim] blood and their killing was lawful. Then the deportations started. The children were kept back at first. The Government opened up a school for the grown up children and the American Consul of Trebizond instituted an asylum for the infants. When the first batches of Armenians arrived at Gumush-Khana all able-bodied men were sorted out with the excuse that they were going to be given work. The women and children were sent ahead under escort with the assurance by the Turkish authorities that their final destination was Mosul and that no harm will befall them. The men kept behind were taken out of town in batches of 15 and 20, lined up on the edge of ditches prepared beforehand, shot and thrown into the ditches. Hundreds of men were shot every day in a similar manner. The women and children were attacked on their way by the ("Shotas") the armed bands organised by the Turkish government who attacked them and seized a certain number. After plundering and committing the most dastardly outrages on the women and children they massacred them in cold blood. These attacks were a daily occurrence until every woman and child had been got rid of. The military escorts had strict orders not to interfere with the "Shotas."

He continues:

In July 1915 I was ordered to accompany a convoy of deported Armenians. It was the last batch from Trebizond. There were in the convoy 120 men, 700 children and about 400 women. From Trebizond I took them to Ghumush-Khana. Here the 120 men were taken away, and, as I was informed later, they were all killed. At Ghumush-Khana I was ordered to take the women and children to Erzinjan. On the way I saw thousands of bodies of Armenians unburied. Several bands of "Shotas" met us on the way and wanted me to hand over to them women and children. But I persistently refused. I did

leave on the way about 300 children with [Muslim] families who were willing to take care of them and educate them. The "Mutessarrif" of Erzinjian ordered me to proceed with the convoy to Kamack [Kemakh]. At the latter place the authorities refused to take charge of the women and children. I fell ill and wanted to go back, but I was told that as long as the Armenians in my charge were alive I would be sent from one place to the other. However I managed to include my batch with the deported Armenians that had come from Erzeroum. In charge of the latter was a colleague of mine Mohamed Effendi from the Gendarmerie. He told me afterwards that after leaving Kamach they came to a valley where the Euphrates ran. A band of Shotas sprang out and stopped the convoy. They ordered the escort to keep away and then shot every one of the Armenians and threw them in the river.

At Trebizond the [Muslims] were warned that if they sheltered Armenians they would be liable to the death penalty.

Government officials at Trebizond picked up some of the prettiest Armenian women of the best families. After committing the worst outrages on them they had them killed.

Cases of rape of women and girls even publicly are numerous. They were systematically murdered after the outrage.



Courtesy of the Armenian National Institute

Family of deportees on the road in the Ottoman Empire, 1915. Armin Wegner, the photographer, described what he saw: "Armenian deportees—women, children and elderly men. Woman in foreground is carrying a child in her arms, shielding it from the sun with a shawl; man on left is carrying bedding; no other belongings or food noticeable among effects being carried. All are walking in the sun on an unpaved road with no means of shelter from the elements."⁸⁰

*The Armenians deported from Erzeroum started with their cattle and whatever possessions they could carry. When they reached Erzinjian they became suspicious seeing that all the Armenians had already been deported. The Vali of Erzeroum allayed their fears and assured them most solemnly that no harm would befall them. He told them that the first convoy should leave for Kamach, the others remaining at Erzeroum until they received word from their friends informing of their safe arrival to destination. And so it happened. Word came that the first batch had arrived safely at Kamach, which was true enough. But the men were kept at Kamach and shot, and the women were massacred by the Shotas after leaving that town.*⁸¹

Not everybody went along. Upon taking command of the Third Army in February 1916 General Vehib learned that the unit had killed 2,000 Armenian soldiers. After a complete investigation he court-martialed two men in charge, both of whom had followed the directive to “kill all Armenians in the armed forces.” They were convicted and hanged.⁸²

CONNECTIONS

- ❖ How does Lieutenant Said Ahmed Mukhtar al-Ba'aj describe his role in the deportations? What orders did he receive? What did he know about the deportations before he received his orders? How would you describe his role in the genocide?
- ❖ The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines *perpetrators* as people responsible for committing a crime. Was al-Ba'aj a perpetrator? What choices were available to al-Ba'aj?
- ❖ In his account, where do you find examples of obedience to authority? Do you also see examples of resistance?
- ❖ The sultan's order for deportation was followed by a religious opinion that came from the Sheikh-ul-Islam—the religious leader appointed by the Young Turk dictatorship. What is the difference between the way people respond to political leaders as compared to religious figures?

Many psychologists have studied the way human beings respond to the roles they are given. Among the most famous experiments are Stanley Milgram's work on “Obedience to Authority” and Philip Zimbardo's prison experiment investigating “what happens when you put good people in an evil place?” Zimbardo's prison experiment is documented on line. Visit his web site at <http://www.zimbardo.com>. Videos of both experiments are available from the Facing History and Ourselves resource library. A Reading describing the experiments can be found on page 210 of *Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior*.

Reading 6 — WOMEN AND THE DEPORTATIONS

The deportation of Armenians from villages across the Ottoman Empire followed the same pattern. Families were given a few days to collect their belongings. Their property was sold off or given to the local population. Men were rounded up and killed. Convoys of the elderly, women, and children were sent on the road and subject to robbery, looting, and murder at the hands of the special operations units and local tribesmen.

Children were often separated from their parents, some were forcibly converted to Islam and joined Muslim families, and others were killed. A number of women were given a chance to convert and compelled to join Muslim families; countless women were raped. Their stories, often recounted by witnesses, or recorded on scraps of paper, were given to sympathetic strangers who in turn passed on the papers to journalists or those working for Armenian relief groups. An Armenian woman from Bitlis told a witness about the brutality she and other Armenian women faced during the deportations. The witness recorded her story.

All the old women and the weak who were unable to walk were killed. There were about one hundred Kurdish guards over us, and our lives depended on their pleasure. It was a very common thing for



Project SAVE Armenian Photograph Archives, courtesy of Elizabeth Boyajian Roberts.

Armenian survivors from Kharpert on a forced march to Baghdad in 1916, pictured here on the banks of the Euphrates River at Der-Zor, Syria.

them to rape our girls in our presence. Very often they violated eight-or ten-year-old girls, and as a consequence many would be unable to walk, and were shot.

Our company moved on slowly, leaving heaps of corpses behind. Most of us were almost naked. When we passed by a village, all the Kurdish men and women would come and rob us as they pleased. When a Kurd fancied a girl, nothing would prevent him from taking her. The babies of those who were carried away were killed in our presence.

They gave us bread once every other day, though many did not get even that. When all our provisions were gone, we gathered wheat from the fields and ate it. Many a mother lost her mind and dropped her baby by the wayside.

Some succeeded in running away, and hid themselves in the fields among the wheat until it was dark. Those who were acquainted with the mountains of that region would thus escape and go back to seek their dear ones. Some went to Sassoun, hearing that it had not yet fallen, others were drowned in the Mourad [Lower Euphrates] River. I did not attempt to run away, as I had witnessed with my own eyes the assassination of my dear ones. I had a few piastres left, and hoped to live a few days longer.

We heard on our way from the Kurds that Kurdish Chettis (bands of robbers) had collected all the inhabitants of Kurdmeidan and Sheklilan, about 500 women and children, and burnt them by the order of Rashid Effendi, the head of the Chettis.

When we reached the Khozmo Pass, our guards changed their southerly direction and turned west, in the direction of the Euphrates. When we reached the boundary of the Ginja district our guards were changed, the new ones being more brutal. By this time our number was diminished by half. When we reached the boundary of Djabaghchour we passed through a narrow valley; here our guards ordered us to sit down by the river and take a rest. We were very thankful for this respite and ran towards the river to get a drink of water.

After half-an-hour we saw a crowd of Kurds coming towards us from Djabaghchour. They surrounded us and ordered us to cross the river, and many obeyed. The report of the guns drowned the sounds of wailing and crying. In that panic I took my little boy on my back and jumped into the river. I was a good swimmer and succeeded in reaching the opposite shore of the Euphrates with my precious bundle unnoticed, and hid myself behind some undergrowth.

By nightfall no one remained alive from our party.⁸³

Two days after giving her account of the deportation the woman's son died of starvation. She was later tracked down and killed.

CONNECTIONS

- ❖ How do you respond to such unspeakable horror? How do you understand the brutality this woman faced if you have never experienced it? What do you know after hearing stories like this that you would not know otherwise?
- ❖ Much of this book has emphasized choice and decision-making. But in accounts like the one in this reading, the victims are faced with what Professor Lawrence Langer refers to as “choiceless choices.” In *Versions of Survival*, a book about survivors of the Holocaust, Langer describes these as decisions made in the “absence of humanly significant alternatives—that is, alternatives enabling an individual to make a decision, act on it, and accept the consequences—all within a framework that supports personal integrity and self-esteem.” What distinguishes a “choiceless choice” from other decisions? Why does Langer believe that normal standards for judging behavior will not apply to all the “choices” of victims?
- ❖ Donald Miller and Lorna Touryan Miller have studied the testimony of women who survived the deportations. They believe the conditions of the deportations had tragic consequences for Armenian parents and required Armenian mothers to make unthinkable choices. They frame some of those choices:
 1. Whose life is of more value? My own or those of my children?
 2. If I cannot care for all of my children, which lives shall I seek to preserve?
 3. Is it better that we, as a family unit, all die together, or that some family members perish while others survive?
 4. Is it preferable to give my son or daughter to a passing Turk or Kurd, knowing that he or she will thereby lose all consciousness of their Armenian as well as religious identity—but thereby survive—or is it preferable that they die? ⁸⁴

How are the choices they describe like the “choiceless choices” that Langer writes about?

- ❖ Systematic rape and forced prostitution were not specifically subject to international law until the creation of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia included them in its mandate in 1993. The first conviction for rape as a crime against humanity came in February of 2001 in a case where Muslim women were systematically raped by Bosnian Serb soldiers. Why do you think it took so long for crimes against women to be recognized and prosecuted?

Reading 7 — CRIES RINGING IN MY EARS

Viscount Bryce's collection *Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire 1915-16* includes dozens of eyewitness accounts of the Armenian Genocide, some of them from survivors, others by witnesses. In the book, all of the accounts are published anonymously, but there was a classified key to each person's identity. The following letter was written by a woman from the United States who was traveling with her husband by train. Her train had a three-hour stop in the town of Kara Hissar.

We took a carriage at the station and drove to the home of an Armenian doctor there—a well educated, fine young doctor, whom we had met on our previous visit to Kara Hissar. We found his wife and two small children at home, but the doctor had been taken a year ago to work for the wounded Turkish soldiers.

The wife had heard of the exiling of all the Armenians from different towns around her, and so she was packing a few things to take with her when her hour came to go. That hour arrived while we were in her home. All the Armenians were ordered to be at the station in twenty-four hours, to be sent—where? They did not know, but they did know that they had to leave everything—the little homes they had worked for for years, the few little things they had collected—all must be left to the plunder of the Turks.



From the private collection of Berj Fenarci

Post card of Kara Hissar before the Genocide.

It was one of the saddest hours I ever lived through; in fact, the hours that followed on the train, from Kara Hissar to Constantinople, were the saddest hours I ever spent.

I wish I could picture the scene in that Armenian home, and we knew that in hundreds of other homes in that very town the same heart-breaking scenes might be witnessed.

The courage of that brave little doctor's wife, who knew she must take her two babies and face starvation and death with them. Many began to come to her home—to her, for comfort and cheer; and she gave it. I have never seen such courage before. You have to go to the darkest places of the earth to see the brightest lights, to the most obscure spot to find the greatest heroes.

Her bright smile, with no trace of fear in it, was like a beacon light in that mud village, where hundreds were doomed.

It was not because she did not understand how they felt; she

was one of them. It was not because she had no dear ones in peril; her husband was far away, ministering to those who were sending her and her babies to destruction.

"Oh! There is no God for the Armenians," said one Armenian, who, with others, had come in to talk it over.

Just then a poor woman rushed in to get some medicine for a young girl who had fainted when the order came.

Such despair, such hopelessness you have never seen on human faces in America.

"It is the slow massacre of our entire race," said one woman.

"It is worse than massacre!" replied another man.

The town crier went through all the streets of the village, crying out that anyone who helped the Armenians in any way, gave them food, money or anything, would be beaten and cast into prison. It was more than we could stand.

"Have you any money?" my husband asked the doctor's wife. "Yes," she said; "a few liras; but many families will have nothing."

After figuring out what it would cost us all to reach Constantinople we gave them what money we had left in our small party. But really to help them we could do nothing, we were powerless to save their lives....

It was with broken hearts that we left the town, and hardly had we started on our way when we began to pass one train after another crowded, jammed with these poor people, being carried away to some spot where no food could be obtained. At every station where we stopped, we came side by side with one of these trains. It was made up of cattle-trucks, and the faces of little children were looking out from behind the tiny barred windows of each truck. The side doors were wide open, and one could plainly see old men and old women, young mothers with tiny babies, men, women and children, all huddled together like so many sheep or pigs—human beings treated worse than cattle are treated.

About eight o'clock that evening we came to a station where there stood one of these trains. The Armenians told us that they had been in the station for three days with no food. The Turks kept them from buying food; in fact, at the end of these trains there was a truck-full of Turkish soldiers ready to drive these poor people on when they reached the Salt Desert or whatever place they were being taken to.

Old women weeping, babies crying piteously. Oh, it was awful to see such brutality, to hear such suffering.

They told us that twenty babies had been thrown into a river as a train crossed—thrown by the mothers themselves, who could not bear to hear their little ones crying for food when there was no food to give them.

One woman gave birth to twins in one of those crowded trucks, and crossing a river she threw both her babies and then herself into the water.

Those who could not pay to ride in these cattle-trucks were forced to walk. All along the road, as our train passed, we saw them walking slowly and sadly along, driven from their homes like sheep to the slaughter.

A German officer was on the train with us, and I asked him if Germany had anything to do with this deportation, for I thought it was the most brutal thing that had ever happened. He said: "You can't object to exiling a race; it's only the way the Turks are doing it which is bad." He said he had just come from the interior himself and had seen the most terrible sights he ever saw in his life. He said: "Hundreds of people were walking over the mountains, driven by soldiers. Many dead and dying by the roadside. Old women and little children too feeble to walk were strapped to the sides of donkeys. Babies lying dead in the road. Human life thrown away everywhere."

The last thing we saw late at night and the first thing early in the morning was one train after another carrying its freight of human lives to destruction....

The crying of those babies and little children for food is still ringing in my ears. On every train we met we heard the same heart-rending cries of little children.⁸⁵

CONNECTIONS

- ❖ The author writes that she was "powerless" to save the lives of the Armenians she encountered yet she struggled to respond morally to the atrocities she witnessed. Where do you see evidence of her struggle? How does she respond?
- ❖ How would you describe the differences between a bystander to injustice and a witness to injustice?
- ❖ Today people all over the world "witness" ethnic cleansing and the results of genocide and famine on television, the internet, and in the press. What should be done? Why do some people take action in response or to prevent further atrocity while others do not?
- ❖ How would you respond to the German officer who told the author: "You can't object to exiling a race; it's only the way the Turks are doing it which is bad"?

Reading 8 — TARGETING THE GREEKS AND THE ASSYRIANS

Although many of the Young Turk measures were directed specifically at the Armenians, other non-Muslim populations, including the Assyrians and the Greeks of the empire faced deportation and murder. Although Greece won its independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1828, territorial disputes left many people who identified themselves as Greek or Pontian subject to Ottoman rule. Those Hellenist or Greek Ottomans that remained in the empire were viewed with suspicion. In response to the Balkan war of 1912–1913 there were massive boycotts of Greek Ottoman businesses that spread to other Christians, including Armenians. In the aftermath of Greek victory thousands of ethnic Turkish refugees fled and resettled in Turkey. As the war broke out Talaat, Young Turk Minister of the Interior, told the Greek Patriarch that “there was no room for non-Muslims” in the Ottoman Empire.



Greek and Armenian refugee children from Anatolia, near Athens, Greece.

Frank and Frances Carpenter Collection, [Library of Congress].
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Thea Halo, an author and daughter of a Pontian [Greek] survivor of the genocide, writes that “there were three separate groups of Greeks in Turkey: the Ionians, who lived in the Western coastal regions facing Greece; the Kappadokans, those from the area of the ancient Greek cities of Anatolia now known as Cappadocia; and the Pontians, who lived in the Pontic Mountains below the Black Sea and on its southern shores. But the term Pontian has come to encompass the struggles and tragedies of all the Greeks of Turkey.”

In her book, *Not Even My Name*, Halo, using official documents, outlines the evolution of anti-Greek measures under the Young Turks.

14 May 1914 Official document from Talaat Bey, Minister of the Interior to Prefect of Smyrna: The Greeks, who are Ottoman subjects, and form the majority of inhabitants in your district, take advantage of the circumstances in order to provoke a revolutionary current, favorable to the intervention of the Great Powers. Consequently, it is urgently necessary that the Greeks occupying the coastline of Asia Minor be compelled to evacuate their villages and install themselves in the vilayets of Erzerum and Chaldea. If they should refuse to be transported to the appointed places, kindly give instructions to our [Muslim] brothers, so that they shall induce the Greeks, through excesses of all sorts, to leave their native places of their own accord. Do not forget to obtain, in such cases, from the emigrants certificates stating that they leave their homes on their own initiative, so that we shall not have political complications ensuing from their displacement.

31 July 1915 German J. Lepsius: “The anti-Greek and anti-Armenian persecutions are two phases of



Courtesy of Martin Gilbert, from *The First World War: A Complete History*, revised edition (Henry Holt: New York, 2003)

GREECE AND THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

Though Greece won its independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1828, many Greeks still lived within the Empire's borders. On July 31, 1915 German missionary and historian Johannes Lepsius warned, "the anti-Greek and anti-Armenian persecutions are two phases of one programme."

one programme—the extermination of the Christian element from Turkey.”

16 July 1916 Austrian consul at Amisos Kwiatowski to Austrian Foreign Minister Baron Burian: “on 26 November Rafet Bey told me: ‘we must finish off the Greeks as we did with the Armenians. . . .’ On November 28 Rafet Bey told me: ‘today I sent squads to the interior to kill every Greek on sight.’ I fear for the elimination of the entire Greek population and a repeat of what occurred last year.” (the Armenian Genocide).

13 December 1916 German Ambassador Kuhlman to Chancellor Hollweg in Berlin: “Consuls. . . report of displacement of local population and murders. Prisoners are not kept. Villages reduced to ashes. Greek refugee families consisting mostly of women and children being marched from the coasts to Sebastea. The need is great.”

19 December 1916 Austrian Ambassador to Turkey Pallavicini to Vienna lists the villages in the region of Amisos that were being burned to the ground and their inhabitants raped, murdered or dispersed.

20 January 1917 Austrian Ambassador Pallavicini: “the situation for the displaced is desperate. Death awaits them all. I spoke to the Grand Vizier and told him that it would be sad if the persecution of the Greek element took the same scope and dimension as the Armenian persecution. The Grand Vizier promised that he would influence Talaat Bey and Enver Pasha.”

31 January 1917 Austrian Chancellor Hollweg’s report “. . . the indications are that the Turks plan to eliminate the Greek element as enemies of the state, as they did earlier with the Armenians. The strategy implemented by the Turks is of displacing people to the interior without taking measures for their survival by exposing them to death, hunger, and illness. The abandoned homes are then looted and burnt or destroyed. Whatever was done to the Armenians is being repeated with the Greeks.” ⁸⁶

Until the summer of 1917 official persecution of Greek Ottomans was tempered by foreign policy considerations. Greece, under the rule of King Constantine, remained neutral as the war waged on. When the Special Organizations began to deport Greek Ottomans in the early days of the war, the Greek Premier warned that the Greek government might take reprisals against the Turkish subjects of Greece. Further tempering Turkish treatment of its Greek population was the attitude of the German leadership, a number of high ranking German military and civilian officials lobbied on the behalf of Greek Ottomans.

Vahakn Dadrian explains:

In December 1917, for example Marshal Liman von Sanders alerted the German Ambassador Bernstorff about an order by war minister Enver who wanted “the deportation of virtually all Greeks

of the coast to inland areas. . . .” Enver had prepared a list of five categories for the deportation order. Sanders “had personally intervened and had succeeded because he had threatened to resign.” The German Foreign Office supported the efforts of Sanders and Ambassador Bernstorff, and let it be known that it “advised strongly against the deportations. . . .” All the while, however, “the plundering and burning down of a large number of Greek villages . . . and the forcible relocation of 70,000 Greeks from the Littoral, stretching from Bafra [on the Aegean Sea] to Tirebolu [on the Black Sea] continued; many of the victims in all likelihood died due to the privations they incurred.

To demonstrate his solidarity with the deported Greeks, German emperor William II authorized the allocation of 10,000 Deutsche Marks to be used as relief money for the needs of the deported Greeks.”⁸⁷

In July 1917 Greece joined the Allies and declared war on the Central Powers of Austria-Hungary, Germany, and Turkey. As war broke out between Greece and Turkey, Ottoman Greeks lost their leverage. According to Thea Halo, during and especially after World War I some 360,000 Pontian Greeks were systematically deported and killed and one and a half million were sent into exile.

Throughout the war, another Ottoman Christian minority, the Assyrians were also subject to genocide. Estimates of Assyrian deaths range from 75,000 to 150,000.

CONNECTIONS

- ❖ How is your understanding of the Armenian Genocide influenced by examining the persecution of the Greeks and Assyrians?
- ❖ How do you explain the difference in the way German officials responded to the treatment of Greeks and Armenians? What does it say about the way German officials defined their “universe of obligation”?
- ❖ Some historians believe that many Ottoman Greeks were saved from death through the outside intervention of the Greek and German governments. Neither the Assyrians nor the Armenians had a country of their own, and those concerned with their plight either failed to use their power or were unable or unwilling to directly intervene in the deportation and murder. Who is responsible for groups that do not have their own state? How can their safety be protected?

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“You are a Jew; these people are Christians. The (Muslims) and the Jews always get along harmoniously....What have you to complain of? Why can't you let us do with these Christians as we please?”

—Talaat, Minister of the Interior for the Committee of Union and Progress

Chapter 5

THE RANGE OF CHOICES

IN *A PROBLEM FROM HELL: AMERICA AND THE AGE OF GENOCIDE*, SAMANTHA POWER WRITES: “WE HAVE ALL been bystanders to genocide. The crucial question is why.... The answers seemed to lie in the critical decisions—and decisions not to decide—made before, during, and after the various genocide.”⁸⁸ This chapter focuses on the choices made by a wide range of people in response to the genocide—from diplomats to missionaries to ordinary Turks and even members of the Young Turk party. Although some people were actively involved in the genocide—issuing orders, escorting the deportations, attacking women and children, and rounding up Armenian men and executing them—many others either witnessed part of the process, or heard stories about what was happening. Confronted with massive injustice, people had to make a decision. What role would they assume? Would they speak out, and if they did, who would they speak to? Would they risk their lives to rescue men, women, or children? Would they go about their lives, pretending they were unaware? Did they believe the anti-Armenian propaganda? Did they choose to believe it?

Often scholars of history classify people's involvement with injustice into categories, such as bystander, perpetrator, victim, resister, or rescuer. These labels reflect the complexity of human behavior. There is a wide range of choices people can make in the face of quickly moving events. Often people who are in

one role at one time choose to respond differently in another. People who once had the opportunity to make a choice often lose those opportunities as time passes. Writing about individuals who spoke up during genocide, Samantha Power created a new category, “upstanders,” people who stand up to get others to take notice and make a difference. While the people Power writes about were unable to stop the process of genocide, their choices often saved lives. The actions of “upstanders” remind us that if the warning signs are recognized early enough prevention is possible.

During the second decade of the twentieth century, the Armenian massacres were widely publicized. Many people, inside and outside of the Ottoman Empire, were aware of the persecution of the Armenians, Greeks, and Assyrians. What influenced the ways people responded to that knowledge? While some people halfway around the world chose to become deeply involved in trying to protect the victims of the genocide, others who directly witnessed the murder of innocent people did little or nothing.

Albert Camus, a French writer who joined the resistance during World War II, wrote about the choices people make in the face of injustice:

I know that the great tragedies of history often fascinate men with approaching horror. Paralyzed, they cannot make up their minds to do anything but wait, and one day the Gorgon monster devours them. But I should like to convince you that the spell can be broken, that there is an illusion of impotence, that strength of heart, intelligence and courage are enough to stop fate and sometimes reverse it.⁸⁹

This chapter explores responses to the Armenian Genocide and highlights the stories of how individuals challenged silence and indifference.

Reading 1 — REMEMBERING RESCUE

Although many people were aware of the massacres of Armenians, very few reached out to save others. Yet the stories of ordinary Turks who did what they could to save Armenians are recorded in the stories of survivors. Too often, the stories are of nameless individuals, and, as historian Richard Hovannisian observed: "Altruism during the Armenian Genocide of 1915 is a subject that has not been studied." He and his colleagues are working to understand the complex motivation of individuals who saved Armenians during the genocide. Scholars at the Zoryan Institute, an Armenian research organization that works to educate people about the genocide and Armenian life, believe that much can be learned from sharing the stories of Turkish rescuers.

As the leaders of the Ottoman Turkish government in 1915 were rounding up the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire for mass deportation and slaughter, a number of Turks risked their own lives to help Armenians escape certain death. There is no way to know today how many such individual acts of courage and humanity occurred in those tragic times. Our sources of information are largely anecdotal: family histories transmitted orally, autobiographies and personal memoirs, and the oral testimonies of survivors.

These acts of heroism and kindness stand in stark contrast to the cruelest savagery displayed by the perpetrators of the Armenian Genocide. Their importance is great, for several reasons. First, they are additional evidence of the Armenian Genocide. Secondly, they illustrate that, while there was indeed a genocide, not all Turks supported it. Thirdly, these stories serve to reassure us of the human potential for courage and virtue. While these stories do serve as evidence of goodness, they can not and should not be used to counterbalance the record of evil in some quantitative manner, as there are relatively few documented examples. The quality of goodness they evidence, however, may give some comfort to us all.

What did these people do? As Armenians were being rounded up, forced to sell all their possessions, save what they could carry, for a tiny fraction of their worth, and led off to what was certain death, some individual Turks hid them in their homes, while others helped them escape to safety. It must be noted that these Turks did so in the full knowledge that to be caught helping an Armenian meant summary execution.... In such highly charged circumstances, one can only imagine today the difficulty of helping Armenians escape to a safer location, or keeping secret the fact that a group of Armenians was hidden in one's home. Providing food for them, giving them privacy for bathing and other necessities of life, were all fraught with mortal danger.

Why did they do it? One can only speculate. We know in some cases it was because of long-standing personal friendships. Yet, there are many cases where Turks helped Armenians who were strangers. It seems that basic human decency was a key element, although there are cases where some benefit to the rescuer was involved (c.g., bribes, labor, sexual exploitation, marriage to the rescuer's chil-

dren), as well as forced conversion to Islam.⁹⁰

Members of Kourken Sarkissian's family were among those that were rescued by Turks:

I am the son of genocide survivors. My father is now 90, my mother 82. His father was hanged, his mother raped and killed, and of the nine children in the family, only he and his five year old brother survived.

The story of my mother's family was different, atypical, but not to be neglected for that reason. My maternal grandfather was hanged in front of his family, which included his pregnant wife, my grandmother, and four children between the ages of two and eight.

A Turkish businessman, Haji Khalil, had been my grandfather's partner, and had promised to care for his family in case of misfortune. When a disaster greater than anything either of them could have

imagined struck, he kept his promise by hiding our family in the upper story of his house for a year. The logistics involved were extremely burdensome: including my grandmother's niece, there were seven people in hiding. Food for seven extra mouths had to be purchased, prepared and carried up undetected once a night and had to suffice until the next night. Khalil's consideration was such that he even arranged for his two wives and the servants to be absent from the house once a week so that my grandmother and her family could bathe.

When two of the children died, he buried them in secret. He took tremendous risks and his situation was precarious, because his servants knew what he was doing. Had he been caught sheltering Armenians, he would almost certainly have shared their fate. Luckily, his household was loyal and discreet, and so I was one of the few children of my generation and neighborhood to grow up with uncles and aunts, all of whom remember the Turk Haji Khalil—may God bless his soul.

I grew up in the predominantly Armenian districts of Aleppo and Beirut, attended Armenian schools and joined Armenian organizations like the Zavarian movement. The dream of a free, independent Armenia and of the nightmarish genocide perpetrated by the Turks became the obsessions of my life. Both from Armenian organizations and from other survivors I learned that Turks had been inhuman monsters, and indeed many had



Courtesy of the Armenian National Institute

**An Armenian Orphan
after the genocide.**

behaved as such. Yet the memory of Haji Khalil was also part of my consciousness, and so I grew up with a dichotomy, knowing the story of a humane Turkish man, his family and household.

This internalized duality taught me that truth and justice cannot be had easily; they must be searched for I want to extend my hand to the people of Turkey, to ask them to remember that though at one time their state was led by mass murderers, they also had their Haji Khalils, and that it would honor the memory of the latter to acknowledge the overwhelming truth of the genocide, to express regrets, so that the healing process may begin between our two peoples. Because without this healing mass extermination as a tool of political dominance may become more common in the future.⁹¹

CONNECTIONS

- ❖ Is it important to understand the motivation of rescuers? Do their actions speak louder than any words or explanations they might share?
- ❖ Often entire groups of people are blamed for mass atrocities like the Armenian Genocide. In an essay titled "Intervention and Shades of Altruism during the Armenian Genocide," Richard Hovannisian writes:

Even in the extreme circumstances of 1915, there were thousands of Turks, Kurds, and others who opposed the persecution of the Armenians. Some of them tried to intervene. The testimony of the victims attests to the fact that kindness and solace were manifest amid the cruelty and suffering, and that the human spirit was never fully extinguished.

How do these stories of break down generalizations and stereotypes? How do they help the healing process?

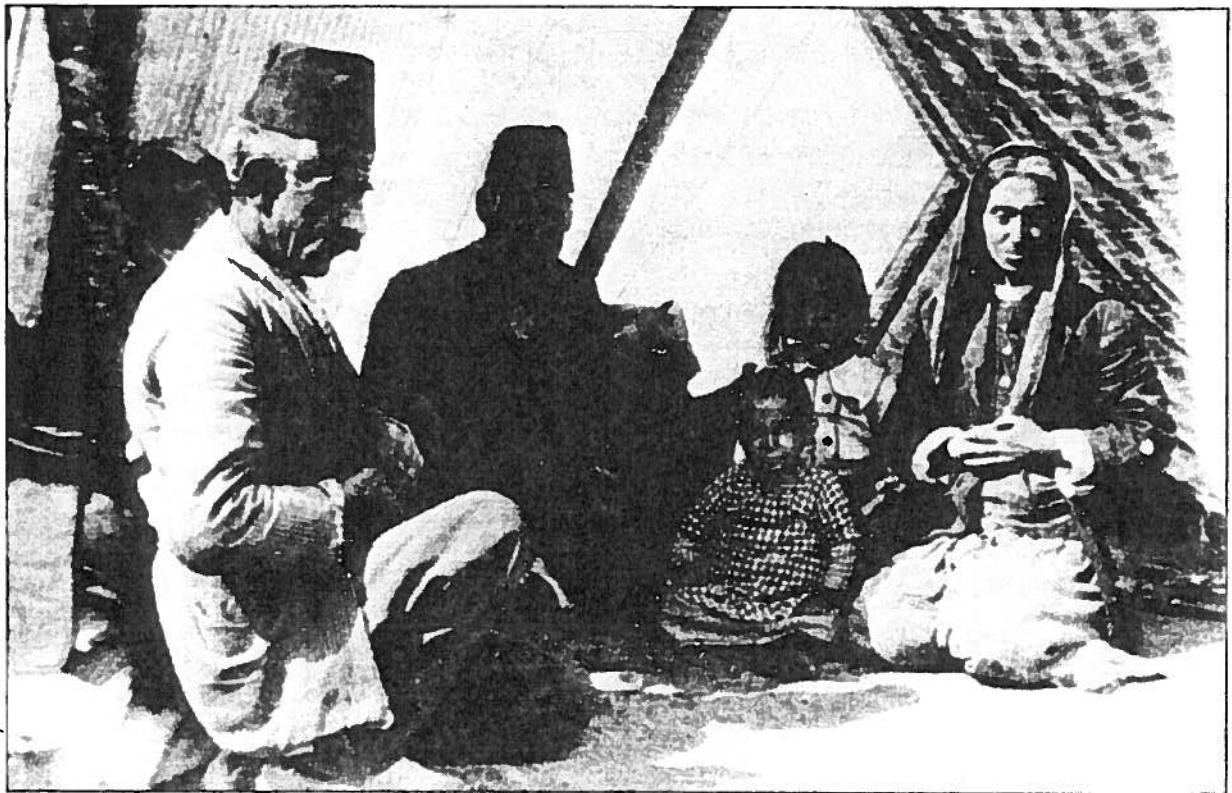
- ❖ Knowing the story of Haji Khalil taught Sarkissian that "truth and justice cannot be had easily; they must be searched for." How can stories like Sarkissian's and Khalil's broaden our perspective on how all people understand truth and justice?
- ❖ Kourken Sarkissian says "I want to extend my hand to the people of Turkey, to ask them to remember that though at one time their state was led by mass murderers, they also had their Haji Khalils." What does he hope will happen through the acknowledgment of Turkish rescuers?

Reading 2 — TRYING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Ahmed Riza, an early leader of the Young Turks and a member of the Ottoman parliament during and after the genocide, and Ali Suad Bey, the governor general of Deir-el-Zor found themselves, as Turkish politicians, witnesses to the unfolding genocide as well as being part of a government that was responsible. What could they do to stop the atrocities? What were the risks of taking a stand?

At the outset of the genocide in 1915, the Ottoman parliament introduced two bills: The Temporary Law of Deportation, which authorized the deportation of the bulk of Turkey's Armenian population, and The Temporary Law of Expropriation and Confiscation, which allowed the government to confiscate Armenian cash and property and resell it for profit.

There was no debate on the Law of Deportation. It was approved by the cabinet. However, the Temporary Law of Expropriation and Confiscation came up for debate during the fall sessions of the Ottoman parliament in 1915. The debate gave Senator Ahmed Riza an opening. He argued that the proposed law violated basic constitutional protections and pleaded for the government to assume responsibility for the people who were being deported.



Courtesy of the Armenian National Institute

1915, deported Armenian family—two older couples and two young children—living under a tent in the desert.

Senator Riza pleaded with his government to allow the deportees, “hundreds of thousands of whom, women, children and old people, are helplessly and miserably wandering around the streets and mountains of Anatolia, to return to their original places of residence or to settle wherever they wish before the onset of winter.” He then submitted a draft bill that proposed to postpone the Temporary Law’s application until after the end of the war, arguing that the Temporary Law was, “contrary to...the Ottoman Constitution.... [I]t is also inimical to the principles of law and justice.”⁹² Riza’s actions provoked a strong backlash and ultimately no action was taken on Riza’s proposal. Despite the pressure he faced, Riza continued to speak out forcefully. In a later session of parliament, Riza once again took up the issue of confiscated Armenian property. He argued:

*It is unlawful to designate the Armenian assets and properties as “abandoned goods” for the Armenians, the proprietors, did not abandon their properties voluntarily; they were forcibly...removed from their domiciles and exiled. Now the government through its officials is selling their goods. . . . Nobody can sell my property if I am unwilling to sell it. . . . If we are a constitutional regime functioning in accordance with constitutional law we can’t do this. This is atrocious. Grab my arm, eject me from my village, then sell my goods and properties, such a thing can never be permissible. Neither the conscience of the Ottomans nor the law can allow it.*⁹³

In December 1916, Riza continued his resistance when he took on the special organization, which had become primary actors in the genocide. Without raising questions about its actions directly, Riza argued that the law allowing convicts to enroll in the special organization degraded the military. He argued that:

Our nation’s respect for the military, its esteem of and affection for the military corps, is great. Those who are enrolled in it are [expected to] not only protect its rights, but also its honor. . . .

*Parents, who learn of the presence in the army of murderers and criminals, do not want to send their offspring to it; even if they did, they would do it with [feelings of] loathing and disgust. . . . [The convicts’] immorality and wicked attitudes can, however, be contagious for their companions, and corrupt the sense of morality in the Army.”*⁹⁴

After the war, Riza’s first speech in the new Ottoman Senate publicly exposed the dimensions of the massacres. He declared:

*All Ottomans, irrespective of race and creed, shall equally benefit from [the blessings of] justice and freedom during the reign of his Imperial Majesty [the new Sultan, Vahdettin.] The Sublime Highness, His Imperial Majesty, will not allow that the orphans and widows of those Armenians who were savagely killed off, those Arabs who were hanged and exiled, be overwhelmed by miseries on this earth. There shall be no more people weeping and moaning in places of exile.*⁹⁵

Riza wasn't the only Ottoman politician to try to make a difference. Many Armenian survivors describe the heroic acts of Turks, some of whom were in positions of power, who tried to save their lives. Several witnesses recorded the efforts of a Turkish governor, Ali Suad Bey, to save the lives of Armenians who had been deported and placed under his supervision in Deir-el-Zor [now part of Syria]. An American eye-witness believed that Ali Suad Bey's example makes it clear that, "even if one is prepared for a moment to admit a reason of state for the mass-deportation of the Armenians ... it was surely not necessary for the Turkish authorities to betray basic humanity."⁹⁶ He recalled:

A few months ago, 30,000 Armenians in various camps outside of the town were ... under the protection of the governor, Mutessarif Ali Suad Bey.... I would like to remember this man's name, who has a heart, and to whom the deportees are grateful, for he tried to lighten their miseries.... The mitigating circumstances, under which the Armenians of Der-el-Zor existed, became the cause for a denunciation at the Central Authorities in Constantinople. The "guilty" Ali Suad Bey was sent to Baghdad and replaced by Zekki Bey who is well known for his cruelty and barbarism. I was told horrible things that happened under the rule of the new governor... Ali Suad Bey, this rare example of a Turkish official, had lodged about 1,000 children in a large house, where they were fed at the cost of the municipality.⁹⁷

CONNECTIONS

- ❖ What risks did Ahmed Riza and Suad Bey take in order to help victims of the massacres? Would you consider them heroes? How do their actions influence the way you think about the choices made by their peers to remain bystanders?
- ❖ What kinds of arguments did Ahmed Riza use to try to win support in the Ottoman Parliament? Did they appeal to conscience or law? Which arguments do you find most powerful?
- ❖ Did Ahmed Riza's and Suad Bey's actions change policies? Were they able to save lives? Did their actions make a difference?
- ❖ Ahmed Riza argued that guilt for the massacres of the Armenians belonged to Turkey alone because the killing was a political crime committed by the Ottoman state. If a crime is committed by a state, who should be responsible for pursuing justice?

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Reading 3 — OFFICIAL POLICY

During the war, German diplomats balanced their personal feelings about the treatment of Armenians with their professional duties. Their reports revealed the attitudes of Young Turk officials toward the Armenians.

Despite intimate knowledge of the Young Turks' intentions, the German Ambassador Baron von Wangenheim pronounced that diplomats had no right to interfere in Turkey's wartime decisions. After being prodded to protest the treatment by the American ambassador, Henry Morgenthau, Wangenheim replied: "I shall do nothing whatever for the Armenians."⁹⁸ As time went on and the killing escalated, some of the consular officials tried to find a way to make their disapproval public, without success. Morgenthau observed: "Of course no Germans could make much impression on the Turkish Government as long as the German Ambassador refused to interfere. And, as time went on, it became more and more evident that Wangenheim had no desire to stop the deportations."⁹⁹ On October 25, 1915, Wangenheim died and was replaced in November by Count Paul von Wolff-Metternich. Almost immediately Wolff-Metternich looked for ways to protest Turkish treatment of the Armenians. In December 1915, he wrote the reich chancellor [a top government official] in Germany that he would like to take a "firmer stance" against the way the Armenians were being treated:



German ambassador Baron von Wangenheim

Courtesy of Clip Art. Some images ©2003-2004 www.clipart.com

Our annoyance about the persecution of the Armenians should be clearly expressed in our press and an end be put to our gushings over the Turks. Whatever they are accomplishing is due to our doing; those are our officers, our cannons, our money. Without our help that inflated frog would be slowly deflated. There is no need to be so afraid in dealing with the Turks. It is not easy for them to switch sides and make peace....

In order to achieve any success in the Armenian question, we will have to inspire fear in the Turkish government regarding the consequences. If for military considerations we do not dare to confront it with a firmer stance, then we will have no choice but, with further abortive protests which tend rather to aggravate than to be of any use, to stand back and watch how our ally continues to massacre.¹⁰⁰

The reich chancellor rejected Wolff-Metternich's proposal, objecting, "public reprimand of an ally in the course of a war would be an act which is unprecedented in history. Our only aim is to keep Turkey on

our side until the end of the war, no matter whether as a result Armenians do perish or not.”¹⁰¹ German Ambassador Wolff-Metternich was recalled to Germany on October 3, 1916, at the request of Ottoman Minister of War Enver, who complained about the ambassador’s protests about the treatment of the Armenians.

Inside Germany, reports on the genocide were severely censored to portray their ally, Turkey, in a favorable light. Historian Deborah Dwork writes that the situation troubled at least one reporter.

*Harry Sturmer, a German correspondent in Constantinople for the major newspaper Kolnische Zeitung, understood that his government’s silence and lack of action amounted to complicity. A veteran of many German military operations, Sturmer was no stranger to the brutality and the misery of war. The murder of Armenians was not a military action, however, and Sturmer knew the difference and knew that his country knew the difference. “The mixture of cowardice, lack of conscience, and lack of foresight of which our Government has been guilty in Armenian affairs is quite enough to undermine completely the political loyalty of any thinking man who has any regard for humanity and civilization.” The genocide of the Armenians was “the meanest, lowest, the most cynical, most criminal act of race-fanaticism that the history of mankind has to show,” Sturmer lamented. And as far as he was concerned, it embarrassed “every German.” He resigned his post and went into voluntary exile in Switzerland.*¹⁰²

CONNECTIONS

❖ Professor Ervin Staub believes that bystanders play a more critical role in events than people realize.

Bystanders, people who witness but are not directly affected by the actions of perpetrators, help shape society by their reactions....

*Bystanders can exert powerful influences. They can define the meaning of events and move others toward empathy or indifference. They can promote values and norms of caring, or by their passivity or participation in the system they can affirm the perpetrators.*¹⁰³

Germany and the Ottoman Empire had a special alliance. Not only were their armies fighting on the same side, but German officers also assumed the leadership of Turkish forces under the Ottoman minister of war. Would Staub consider them bystanders to the genocide of the Armenians, or did their alliance make them complicit in the crime as well?

❖ The German reich chancellor rejected Wolff-Metternich’s proposal, objecting, “public reprimand of an ally in the course of a war would be an act which is unprecedented in history. Our only aim is to

keep Turkey on our side until the end of the war, no matter whether as a result Armenians do perish or not.”¹⁰⁴ Compare the way the reich chancellor framed his “universe of obligation” with the way Ambassador Woff-Metternich constructed his. What differences do you find most striking?

- ❖ Harry Sturmer said that the mass murder of the Armenians was “the meanest, lowest, the most cynical, most criminal act of race-fanaticism that the history of mankind has to show.” What does he mean by race-fanaticism?
- ❖ Law professor Martha Minow describes how “role morality”—a way in which individuals adapt their morality to their profession—influences the way individuals respond to injustice. In this reading, how do individuals balance their “role” and their personal conscience? Which roles do you play? How do they influence your actions? How do you balance your role and your own sense of right and wrong?
- ❖ Many German diplomats feared that Germany would be held accountable for Turkey’s crimes. Considering their close alliance, in what ways did Germany share responsibility for the genocide?



Reading 4 — TAKING A STAND

Turkish officials often told distorted stories of Armenian resistance to justify mass killing. They hoped their stories would lessen sympathy for the Armenians outside of the country. The story of Armenian resistance at Musa Dagħ had the opposite effect. The bravery of the Armenians, against overwhelming odds, rallied international support for them.

In April 1915, orders reached the district of Musa Dagħ, the six villages at the base of Musa Dagħ, the Mountain of Moses, instructing the Armenian population to leave their homes. They knew that deportation meant near-certain death and they had to do something if they were to survive. Reverend Dikran Andreasian, described what happened next.

Knowing that it would be impossible to defend our villages in the foot-hills, it was resolved to withdraw to the heights of Mousa Dagħ, taking with us as large a supply of food and implements as it was possible to carry. All the flocks of sheep and goats were also driven up the mountain side, and every available weapon of defense was brought out and furbished up. We found that we had a hundred and twenty modern rifles and shot-guns, with perhaps three times that number of old flint-locks and horse pistols. That still left more than half our men without weapons.

It was very hard to leave our homes. My mother wept as if her heart would break. But we had hopes that possibly, while we were fighting off the Turks, the Dardanelles might be forced and deliverance come to the country.

By nightfall of the first day we had reached the upper crags of the mountain. As we were preparing to camp and to cook the evening meal, a pouring rain set in and continued all night. For this we were ill prepared. There had not been time to make huts of branches, nor had we any tents or waterproof clothing. Men, women and children, somewhat over five thousand in all, were soaked to the skin, and much of the bread we had brought with us was turned into a pulpy mass. We were especially solicitous to keep our powder and rifles dry. This the men managed to do very well.

At dawn next morning all hands went to work digging trenches at the most strategic points in the ascent of the mountain. Where there was no earth for trench-digging, rocks were rolled together, making strong barricades behind which groups of our sharp-shooters were stationed. The sun came out gloriously, and we were hard at it all day strengthening our position against the attack which we knew was certain to come.¹⁰⁵

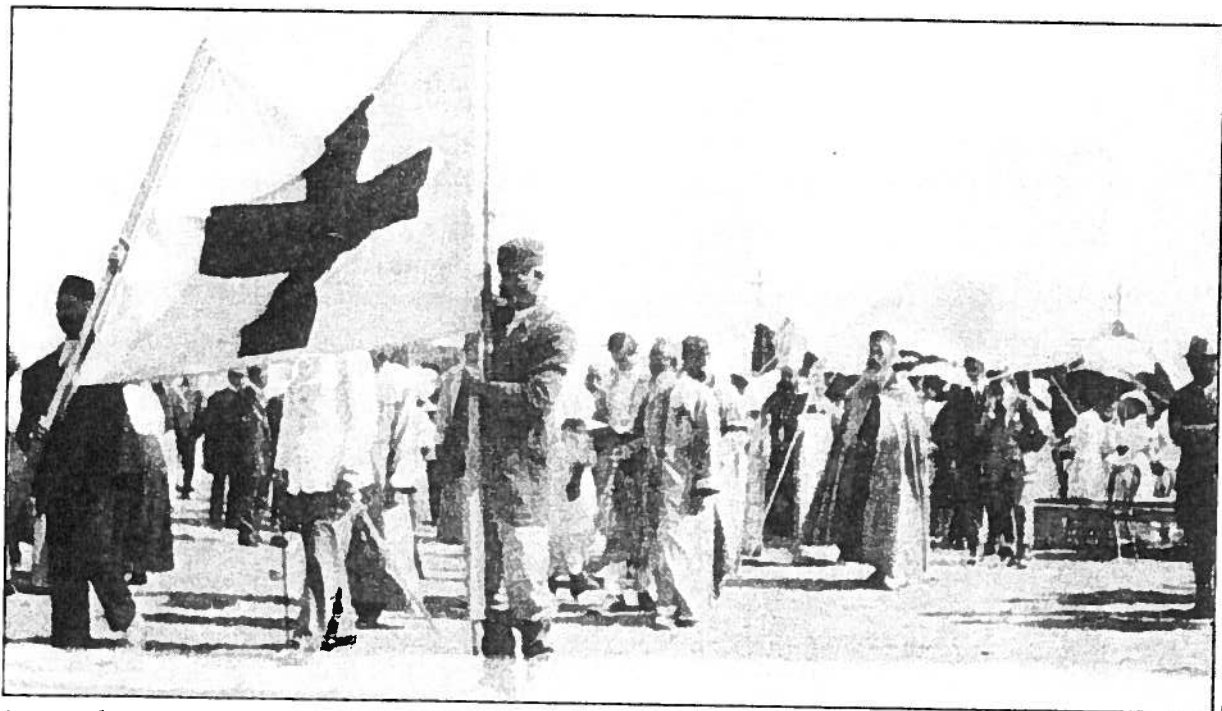
Later that day, the residents of Musa Dagħ organized a committee for defense of the six communities. Although they were able to hold off the Turkish soldiers and reinforcements, the Armenians of Musa Dagħ found themselves surrounded, cut off by land and sea. The defense committee dispatched a run-

ner to Aleppo with the hopes that he might be able to reach the American Consul, Jesse B. Jackson. Their other hope was of a rescue by sea. In desperation, people suggested sending three swimmers out into the harbor with the hope that one would reach a ship passing by the coast. At the same time a group of Armenian women prepared two very large white flags. One was embroidered with thick black English lettering. It read "CHRISTIANS IN DISTRESS: RESCUE." The other had a large red cross in the center. The flags were hung from tall trees overlooking the harbor.

Reverend Dikran Andreasian described what happened on the morning of the fifty-third day of the siege:

I was startled by hearing a man shouting at the top of his voice. He came racing through our encampment straight for my hut. "Pastor, pastor," he exclaimed, "a battleship is coming and has answered our waving!—Thank God! Our prayers are heard. When we wave the Red Cross flag the battleship answers by waving signal flags. They see us and are coming in nearer shore!"

This proved to be the French Guichen, a four-funnel ship. While one of its boats was being lowered, some of our young men raced down to the shore and were soon swimming out to the stately vessel which seemed to have been sent to us from God! With beating hearts we hurried down to the beach, and soon an invitation came from the Captain for a delegation to come on board and explain the sit-



Port Said, Egypt, fall 1915. Armenians originally from Musa Dagh march with their bishop, priests, and deacons in a procession of thanksgiving displaying the signal flag that was instrumental in saving them. They are joined by officials and missionaries.

uation. He sent a wireless to the Admiral of the fleet, and before very long the flag-ship *Ste. Jeanne d'Arc* appeared on the horizon followed by other French battleships. The Admiral spoke words of comfort and cheer to us, and gave an order that every soul of our community should be taken on board the ships.¹⁰⁶

Franz Werfel, a Prague-born writer, was inspired by the story and wrote *Forty Days of Musa Dagh*, published in 1933. The novel became a best-seller in Germany and Austria. Despite the popularity of his work, Werfel was forced to flee shortly after Hitler and the Nazis came to power. The American motion picture company Metro Goldwyn Mayer planned to make a movie based on the novel. The plans were scrapped when the Turkish government protested to the Department of State and threatened to ban all American-made films from Turkey if the film was produced.

In the mid 1930s, Jews in Eastern Europe read Werfel's novel as a warning of their own fate. During the Holocaust, copies of the novel are reported to have circulated as a source of inspiration and a call to arms in some of the ghettos to which the Nazis confined the Jews.

CONNECTIONS

- ❖ What inspires people to resist against tremendous odds? What forms can that resistance take?
- ❖ Accounts of resistance at Musa Dagh do not focus solely on the military strategy. They often highlight details that may seem less important to outsiders; the democratically elected defense council, the nightly church services in which Armenians of various Christian denominations prayed together. How do those details add to your perception of resistance?
- ❖ Why do you think the Armenians in Musa Dagh choose to have the flag read "CHRISTIANS IN DISTRESS: RESCUE." Is it important that the words were written in English? Who did they think would respond to their call for help?
- ❖ Why would the Turkish government, after the genocide, take such strong measures to suppress the film *Forty Days of Musa Dagh*?

Reading 5 — THE AMERICAN AMBASSADOR IN CONSTANTINOPLE

The Armenian Genocide did not take place without witnesses. Journalists, missionaries, and diplomats from many countries witnessed the genocide or listened to first-hand accounts. The question was, what to do about it? The problem was particularly troubling to Henry Morgenthau, an American businessman and lawyer who served as the American ambassador to the Ottoman Empire. Pulitzer-prize winner Samantha Power describes the choices he faced as his understanding of the genocide grew. In May 1915, the Allies issued a declaration warning the Turks of the consequences of committing “crimes against humanity and civilization.” Power notes:

The United States, determined to maintain its neutrality in the war, refused to join the Allied declaration. President Woodrow Wilson chose not to pressure either the Turks or their German backers. It was better not to draw attention to the atrocities, lest U.S. public opinion get stirred up and begin demanding U.S. involvement. Because the Turks had not violated the rights of Americans, Wilson did not formally protest.



Henry Morgenthau

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But in Turkey itself America's role as bystander was contested. Henry Morgenthau Sr., a German-born Jew who had come to the United States as a ten-year-old boy and had been appointed ambassador to the Ottoman Empire by President Wilson in 1913, agitated for U.S. diplomatic intervention. In January and February 1915, Morgenthau had begun receiving graphic but fragmentary intelligence from his ten American consuls posted throughout the Ottoman Empire. At first he did not recognize that the atrocities against the Armenians were of a different nature than the wartime violence. He was taken in by Talaat's assurances that uncontrolled elements had simply embarked upon “mob violence” that would soon be contained. In April, when the massacres began in earnest, the Turkish authorities severed Morgenthau's communication with his consuls and censored their letters. Morgenthau was reluctant to file reports back to Washington based on rumors, and the Turks were making it impossible for him to fact-check.

Although he was initially incredulous, by July 1915 the ambassador had come around. He had received too many visits from desperate Armenians and trusted missionary sources to remain skeptical. They had sat in his office with tears streaming down their faces, regaling him with terrifying tales. When he compared this testimony to the strikingly similar horrors relayed via consular cables,

Morgenthau came to an astonishing conclusion. What he called "race murder" was under way. On July 10, 1915 he cabled Washington with a description of the Turkish campaign:

"Persecution of Armenians assuming unprecedented proportions. Reports from widely scattered districts indicate systematic attempt to uproot peaceful Armenian populations and through arbitrary arrests, terrible tortures, whole-sale expulsions and deportations from one end of the Empire to the other accompanied by frequent instances of rape, pillage, and murder; turning into massacre, to bring destruction and destitution on them. These measures are not in response to popular or fanatical demand but are purely arbitrary and directed from Constantinople in the name of military necessity, often in districts where no military operations are likely to take place."

Morgenthau was constrained by two background conditions that seemed immutable. First, the Wilson administration was resolved to stay out of World War I. Picking fights with Turkey did not seem a good way to advance that objective. And second, diplomatic protocol demanded that ambassadors act respectfully toward their host governments. U.S. diplomats were expected to stay out of business that did not concern U.S. national interests. "Turkish authorities have definitely informed me that I have no right to interfere with their internal affairs," Morgenthau wrote. Still, he warned Washington, "there seems to be a systematic plan to crush the Armenian race."

Local witnesses urged him to involve the moral power of the United States. Otherwise, he was told, "the whole Armenian nation would disappear." The ambassador did what he could, continuing to send blistering cables back to Washington and raising the matter at virtually every meeting he held with Talaat. He found his exchanges with the interior minister infuriating.¹⁰⁷

As Morgenthau became increasingly aware of the conflict between his role as ambassador and his moral outrage, he faced a dilemma. Power elaborates:

Morgenthau had to remind himself that one of the core prerogatives of sovereignty was that states and statesmen could do as they pleased within their own borders. "Technically," he noted to himself, "I had no right to interfere. According to the cold-blooded legalities of the situation, the treatment of Turkish subjects by the Turkish Government was purely a domestic affair; unless it directly affected American lives and American interests, it was outside of the concerns of the American Government." The ambassador found this maddening.¹⁰⁸

Without support from the American government, Morgenthau had to look for help from private sources. He lobbied his friends at the *New York Times* to give the story prominent coverage and helped raise funds for Armenian relief. Power describes this work and its limitations:

The Congregationalist, Baptist, and Roman Catholic churches made donations. The Rockefeller founda-

tion gave \$290,000 in 1915 alone. And most notable, a number of distinguished Americans, none of Armenian descent, set up a new Committee on Armenian Atrocities. The committee raised \$100,000 for Armenian relief and staged high-profile rallies, gathering delegations from more than 1,000 churches and religious organizations in New York City to join in denouncing the Turkish crimes.

But in calling for "action," the committee was not urging U.S. military intervention. It was worried about the impact of an American declaration of war on American schools and churches in Turkey. In addition, the sentiment that made committee members empathize with their fellow Christians in Armenia also made some pacifists. In decrying the atrocities but opposing the war against Turkey, the committee earned the scorn of former president Theodore Roosevelt. In a letter to Samuel Dutton, the Armenia committee secretary, Roosevelt slammed the hypocrisy of the "peace-at-any-price type" who acted on the motto of "safety first," which, he wrote, "could be appropriately used by the men on a sinking steamer who jump into boats ahead of the women and children." He continued:



President Theodore Roosevelt

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"Mass meetings on behalf of Armenians amount to nothing whatever if they are mere methods of giving a sentimental but ineffective and safe outlet to the emotion of those engaged in them. Indeed they amount to less than nothing. . . . Until we put honor and duty first, and are willing to risk something in order to achieve righteousness both for ourselves and for others, we shall accomplish nothing; and we shall earn and deserve the contempt of the strong nations of mankind."

Roosevelt wondered how anyone could possibly advise neutrality "between despairing and hunted people, people whose little children are murdered and their women raped, and the victorious and evil wrongdoers." He observed that such a position put "safety in the present above both duty in the present and safety in the future." Roosevelt would grow even angrier later in the war, when the very relief campaign initiated to aid the Armenians would be invoked as reason not to make war on Turkey. In 1918 he wrote to Cleveland Dodge, the most influential member of the Armenia committee: "To allow the Turks to massacre the Armenians and then solicit permission to help the survivors and then to allege the fact that we are helping the survivors as a reason why we should not follow the only policy that will permanently put a stop to such massacres is both foolish and odious." 109

Despite the criticism, Morgenthau continued to work tirelessly to aid the Armenians, including an offer to raise money to relocate survivors to the United States. Yet he remained frustrated that he had not achieved more. "My failure to stop the destruction of the Armenians had made Turkey, for me a place of horror—I had reached the end of my resources." 110

CONNECTIONS

- ❖ In May 1915, the Allies decried persecution of the Armenians as a “crime against humanity and civilization.” What qualifies as a crime against humanity and civilization? What are the implications of the label? Who is responsible for preventing crimes against humanity and civilization? What do you think are other examples of crimes against humanity and civilization?
- ❖ Despite Morgenthau’s pleas, President Woodrow Wilson was determined to remain neutral during the early days of the war. What are the advantages of remaining neutral during a conflict? During the genocide was it possible to remain neutral and act morally? What actions did Wilson take?
- ❖ What was Morgenthau’s dilemma? What choices were available to him? Why do you think he made the choices that he did?
- ❖ Morgenthau wrote, “Technically, I had no right to interfere . . . the treatment of Turkish subjects by the Turkish government was a purely domestic affair, unless it directly affected American lives and interests, it was outside of the concerns of the American Government.” Do you agree? How do you define American interests?
- ❖ When does one nation have the right to intervene in the internal affairs of another sovereign nation? The film *Triumph of Evil* examines the role of international intervention and responsibility during the Rwandan Genocide, including the role of the U.S. government and the United Nations.
- ❖ Former President Theodore Roosevelt was very critical of U.S. neutrality in the face of genocide. That criticism extended to assessment of Armenian relief efforts. In 1918 he wrote: “To allow the Turks to massacre the Armenians and then solicit permission to help the survivors and then to allege the fact that we are helping the survivors as a reason why we should not follow the only policy that will permanently put a stop to such massacres is both foolish and odious.” How would you respond to Theodore Roosevelt’s critique of Armenian relief efforts?
- ❖ Samantha Power describes Morgenthau and other people who try to make a difference as “upstanders.” What does that term mean to you? What do you think enables people to become “upstanders”?



Reading 6 — TALAAT AND THE LIMITS OF DIPLOMACY

American Ambassador Henry Morgenthau often met with leaders of the Committee of Union and Progress to protest the treatment of Christians in Turkey. Later he recounted the first time he brought up the plight of the Armenians with the Ottoman Minister of the Interior Talaat. Morgenthau recalled:

I began to talk about the Armenians at Konia. I had hardly started when Talaat's attitude became even more belligerent. His eyes lighted up, he brought his jaws together, leaned over toward me, and snapped out:

"Are they Americans?"

The implications of this question were hardly diplomatic; it was merely a way of telling me that the matter was none of my business. In a moment Talaat said this in so many words.



Talaat, the Ottoman Minister of the Interior.

"The Armenians are not to be trusted," he said, "besides, what we do with them does not concern the United States."

I replied that I regarded myself as the friend of the Armenians and was shocked at the way they were being treated. But he shook his head and refused to discuss the matter.¹¹¹

Morgenthau dropped the subject but continued to raise the "Armenian Question" in subsequent meetings. At another meeting Talaat asked Morgenthau: "Why are you so interested in the Armenians anyway?" Talaat continued:

"You are a Jew; these people are Christians. The [Muslims] and the Jews always get on harmoniously. We are treating the Jews here all right. What have you to complain of? Why can't you let us do with these Christians as we please?"...

"You don't seem to realize," I replied, "that I am not here as a Jew but as American ambassador. My country contains something more than 97,000,000 Christians and something less than 3,000,000 Jews. So, at least in my ambassadorial capacity, I am 97 percent Christian. But after all, that is not the point. I do not appeal to you in the name of any race or any religion, but merely as a human being. You have told me many times that you want to make Turkey a part of the modern progressive world. The way you are treating the Armenians will not help you to realize that ambition; it puts you in the class of backward, reactionary peoples."

"We treat the Americans all right, too," said Talaat. "I don't see why you should complain."

"But Americans are outraged by your persecutions of the Armenians," I replied. "You must base your principles on humanitarianism, not racial discrimination, or the United States will not regard you as a friend and an equal. And you should understand the great changes that are taking place among Christians all over the world. They are forgetting their differences and all sects are coming together as one. You look down on American missionaries, but don't forget that it is the best element in America that supports their religious work, as well as their educational institutions. Americans are not mere materialists, always chasing money—they are broadly humanitarian, and interested in the spread of justice and civilization throughout the world. After this war is over you will face a new situation. You say that, if victorious, you can defy the world, but you are wrong. You will have to meet public opinion everywhere, especially in the United States. Our people will never forget these massacres. They will always resent the wholesale destruction of Christians in Turkey. They will look upon it as nothing but wilful murder and will seriously condemn all the men who are responsible for it. You will not be able to protect yourself under your political status and say that you acted as Minister of the Interior and not as Talaat. You are defying all ideas of justice as we understand the term in our country."

Strangely enough, these remarks did not offend Talaat, but they did not shake his determination. I might as well have been talking to a stone wall. From my abstractions he immediately came down to something definite.

"These people," he said, "refused to disarm when we told them to. They opposed us at Van and at Zeitoun, and they helped the Russians. There is only one way in which we can defend ourselves against them in the future, and that is just to deport them."

"Suppose a few Armenians did betray you," I said. "Is that a reason for destroying a whole race? Is that an excuse for making innocent women and children suffer?"

"Those things are inevitable," he replied.

This remark to me was not quite so illuminating as one which Talaat made subsequently to a reporter of the Berliner Tageblatt, who asked him the same question. "We have been reproached," he said, according to this interviewer, "for making no distinction between the innocent Armenians and the guilty; but that was utterly impossible, in view of the fact that those who were innocent to-day might be guilty to-morrow!" ¹¹²

In later conversations with Talaat, Morgenthau argued that if humanitarian issues weren't of concern, what about economic interests. Talaat replied: "We care nothing about the commercial loss." As much as Morgenthau tried, talk alone was not going to save the remaining Armenian population. Not only was Talaat unmoved, but he tried to influence Morgenthau to give the money raised for Armenian relief to

the Turkish government. Another request went even further. In his memoir, Morgenthau recounts the day when Talaat raised a question about Armenian life insurance policies. He explains:

One day Talaat made what was perhaps the most astonishing request I had ever heard. The New York Life Insurance Company and the Equitable Life of New York had for years done considerable business among the Armenians. The extent to which this people insured their lives was merely another indication of their thrifty habits.

"I wish," Talaat now said, "that you would get the American life insurance companies to send us a complete list of their Armenian policy holders. They are practically all dead now and have left no heirs to collect the money. It of course all escheats to the State. The Government is the beneficiary now. Will you do so?"

This was almost too much, and I lost my temper.¹¹³

CONNECTIONS

- ❖ What arguments does Morgenthau use to try to persuade Talaat to stop the deportation and mass murder of Armenians? How does Talaat respond to each argument? Considering President Wilson's determination to remain neutral, what other forms of persuasion were available to Morgenthau?
- ❖ Talaat assumes that Morgenthau, as a Jew, will be unsympathetic toward Christians and inclined to support Muslims. Compare the way Talaat and Morgenthau construct their "universe of obligation"? How does Morgenthau define his identity?
- ❖ What is a diplomat? What is diplomacy? What strategies do diplomats use to get their way? How do the stories of Ambassador Morgenthau and the German ambassador reflect the limits of diplomacy?
- ❖ What do the exchanges between Talaat and Morgenthau suggest about the limits of diplomacy in responding to genocide?
- ❖ Underline words and phrases in this reading that resonate with you. Reflect on them in your journal. How do they help you understand this particular history? What connections are you making to your own life or other history that you have learned? How does this history connect with current events?
- ❖ In his conversation with Morgenthau, Talaat asked for information on Armenian life insurance policies. Victims of genocide have used the courts to seek justice and reparations from corporations and banks that played a role in the genocide. Research how Holocaust survivors, victims of apartheid, and descendants of slaves from the United States are using the law to seek restitution.

Reading 7 — THE EYES OF THE WORLD

Witnesses to the Armenian Genocide shared their stories in journals, newspapers, and even best-selling books. How did those accounts influence the way people understood the events and the world around them? In an essay entitled “Genocide and Traumatic Memory,” American literary scholar Walter Kalaijian probes the way the media’s coverage of the Armenian Genocide shaped the public’s response.

Not just an unprecedented modern horror, the Armenian genocide was also an inaugural media event. The spectacle of concentration-camp internment, death marches, and mass murder—centrally administered throughout the Ottoman Empire under the watchful eye of the German and Austro-Hungarian alliance—was widely reported in the United States and among other Entente nations of Britain, France, and Russia. In America alone, such newspapers and journals as the New York Times, New York Herald Tribune, Boston Herald, Chicago Tribune, Atlantic Monthly, Nation, Outlook, and Literary Digest covered the story. In diplomatic circles, Viscount Bryce in 1916 submitted a massive government blue paper to the British Secretary of State for foreign affairs; edited by Arnold J. Toynbee, The Treatment of Armenians archived eyewitness accounts of torture, rape, and mass murder reported by missionaries, Red Cross volunteers, consular officials, German health workers, and Armenian survivors. The previous year, Toynbee had published Armenian Atrocities: The Murder of a Nation, which included Bryce’s address to the House of Lords appealing for British intervention in the Turkish massacres. Quoting from a 1915 New York Tribune editorial, Toynbee underscored “German complicity with the Young Turk Genocide.” “What Germany has done,” according to the Tribune, “is to bring us back in the Twentieth Century to the condition of the dark ages.” German witnesses who dissented from Germany’s denial of the massacres included Dr. Johannes Lepsius, head of the Deutsche Orient-Mission. His Der Todesgang des armenischen Volkes (The Walk into Death March of the Armenian People) had a 1919 print run of twenty-thousand copies, distributed, in part, to the Orient Mission and German Reichstag....

What did it mean in the mid 1910s to pick up, for the first time, any major daily paper around the world and read such headlines as “Armenians Are Sent to Perish in Desert: Turks Accused of Plan to Exterminate Whole Population,” “Turks Depopulate Towns of Armenia,” and “1,500,000 Armenians Starve”? ¹¹⁴

Among the countless newspaper stories on the genocide was front-page coverage in the *New York Times* on October 4, 1915. It was followed up with stories in the October 5 and 6. On the fourth straight day of coverage, October 7, an article appeared on page 3. It read:

Viscount Bryce, former British ambassador to the United States, in the House of Lords today said that such information as had reached him from many quarters showed that the figure of 800,000 Armenians destroyed since May was quite a possible number. Virtually the whole nation had been

wiped out, he declared, and he did not suppose there was any case in history of a crime "so hideous and on so large a scale."

"The death of these people," said Lord Bryce, "resulted from the deliberate and premeditated policy of the gang now in possession of the Turkish government. Orders for the massacres came in every case direct from Constantinople. In some instances local Governors, being humane, pious men, refused to carry out the orders and at least two Governors were summarily dismissed for this reason.

"The customary procedure was to round up the whole of the population of a designated town. A part of the population was thrown into prison and the remainder were marched out of town and in the suburbs the men were separated from the women and children. The men were then taken to a convenient place and shot and bayoneted. The women and children were then put under a convoy of the lower kind of soldiers and dispatched to some distant destination.

"They were driven by the soldiers day after day. Many fell by the way and many died of hunger, for no provisions were furnished them. They were robbed of all they possessed, and in many cases the women were stripped naked and made to continue the march in that condition. Many of the women went mad and threw away their children. The caravan route was marked by a line of corpses. Comparatively few of

Hundreds of articles appeared in newspapers throughout the world describing massacre and deportations.

From Klotian, Armenian Genocide News Accounts

The New York Times
THURSDAY, OCTOBER 7, 1915

(314)

800,000 ARMENIANS COUNTED DESTROYED

Viscount Bryce Tells House of Lords That Is the Probable Number of Turks' Victims.

10,000 DROWNED AT ONCE

Peers Are Told How Entire Chris- tian Population of Trebizond Was Wiped Out.

Special Cable to THE NEW YORK TIMES.
LONDON, Thursday, Oct. 7.—The
Daily Chronicle's Parliamentary corre-
spondent in the House of Lords says:
"This afternoon Lord Bryce gave a
heart-piercing account of the circum-
stances under which the Armenian people
are being exterminated as a result of an
absolutely premeditated policy elabor-
ately pursued by the gang now in control
of Turkey. He computes that since
May last 800,000 Armenians, men, wo-
men, and children, have been slain in
cold blood in Asia Minor.
"The House of Lords is a very un-
emotional assembly."

"On behalf of these
als of a fine race Lord
powerful appeal to the n
He did not mention Ameri
it was obvious that this
sador at Washington had
public of the West in r
appealed to the conscience
and when he said he belie
some crimes which even no
vulsion of a great war th
lon of the world will not
"The Armenian question
question put by Lord Crom
whether statements that
sular officials had been p
massacres rest on any aut
dence. Lord Cromer thinks
there may be no trustwor
to prove the complicity of
Government and its agen
terrible atrocities, yet the G
ernment, having regard to l
in Constantinople, cannot b
of moral responsibility unles
shown that it took vigorous
getic measures to prevent the
"Lord Crewe, replying fo
ernment stated that the B
sular reports bear out the s
massacre and reveal facts o
horrible character. The co
refugees in Caucasian provinc
ous in the extreme.
"We have no official con-
said Lord Crewe, 'of the s
that German Consular repre
have not merely looked on
possibly managed these horror
ments to that effect have
beer freely made by America
ers, and in view of what has
elsewhere, these cannot be as
antecedently improbable since
when we informed the Porte
dividuals who incited these m
would be held personally res
by us, no representations on t
ject have been made by our
office to the m."

the people ever reached their destination.

"The facts as to the slaughter in Trebizond are vouched for by the Italian Consul. Orders came for the murder of all the Armenian Christians in Trebizond. Many Mussulmans tried to save their Christian friends, but the authorities were implacable and hunted out all the Christians and then drove them down to the sea front. Then they put them aboard sail boats and carried them some distance out to sea and threw them overboard. The whole Armenian population, numbering 10,000, was thus destroyed in one afternoon." The Lord Mayor at a meeting at the Mansion House on Oct. 15, will start a fund for the aid of Armenian refugees. Among the speakers will be Lord Bryce, Cardinal Bourne and T. P. O'Connor.¹¹⁵

Hundreds of subsequent articles appeared in the *New York Times* and other newspapers and journals throughout the world.

CONNECTIONS

- ❖ As Professor Walter Kalaijian explains, the Armenian Genocide was covered thoroughly in the press of the 1910s. How does media exposure to genocide and collective violence shape the way people respond to atrocity? Does the awareness of genocide and mass violence lead to action? Do people become desensitized to violence?
- ❖ Today, more and more people are able to witness genocide and human rights abuses through the media. Does this mean that more people are bystanders to the atrocities? How do you respond to television and newspaper reports of war crimes and genocide?
- ❖ Collect a few issues of a major daily newspaper. Are there articles and reports of human rights violations? What language do the articles use? On what page do the stories appear?



Reading 8 — SAVING THE ARMENIANS

As stories of Turkish atrocities against innocent Armenians spread through the Western press, activists clamored to get their governments to intervene and stop the abuses. In *The Splendid Blond Beast*, Christopher Simpson describes the choice that Djemal Pasha, one of the Young Turk leaders, offered to the Allies.

At the height of the genocide, a factional split among the Young Turks opened the possibility that Turkey might put an end to the massacres in exchange for an agreement from the Associated Powers to abandon their claims on Turkey and the Ottoman Empire. Djemal Pasha, a member of the triumvirate that ruled Turkey, had settled into Damascus and exercised local control of much of what is today Syria, Jordan, and Israel. In late 1915, while Turkish efforts to exterminate Armenians were at their height, Djemal sought out an Armenian emissary and convinced him to carry an offer to the governments of the Associated Powers. If czarist Russia, France, and Britain would back him, Djemal promised, he would undertake a coup d'etat against his Young Turk rivals, end the massacres, and take Turkey out of the war. . . .



Djemal Pasha, Ottoman Minister of the Marine.

Courtesy of Clip Art. Some images © 2003-2004 www.clipart.com

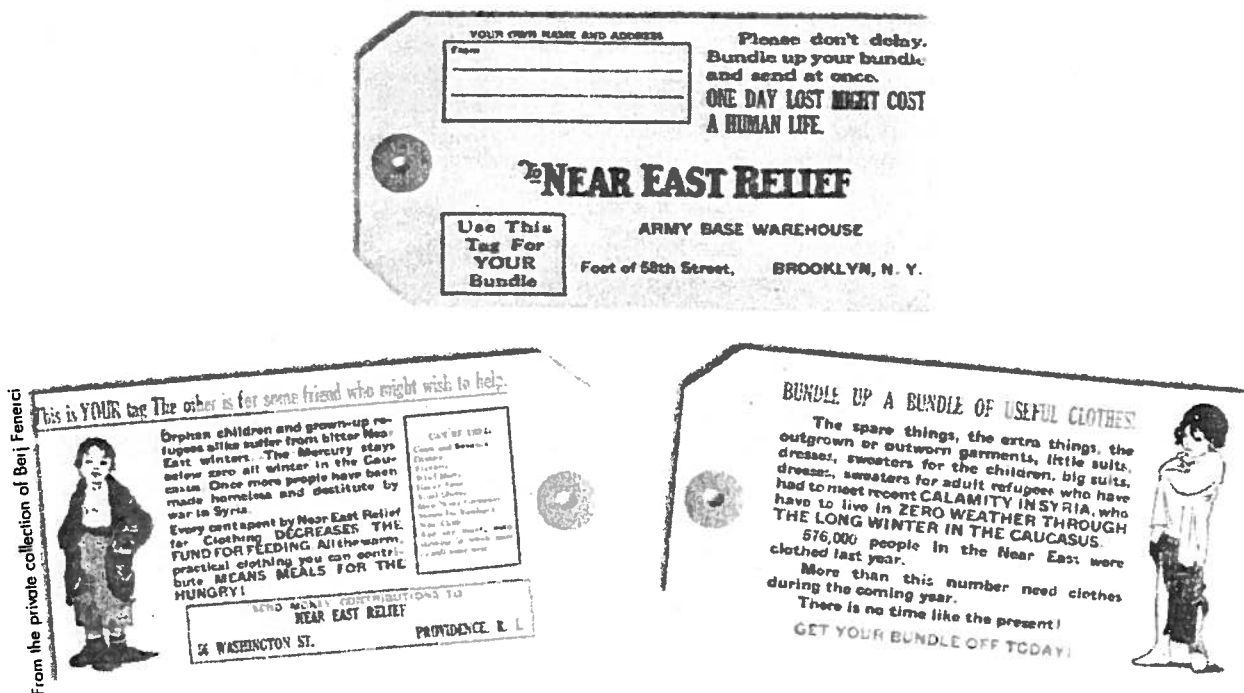
The price for the plan was that the European powers would abandon imperial claims for what is today Iraq and Syria and provide reconstruction assistance to Djemal's government after the war. Djemal, for his part, was willing to concede control of Constantinople and the Dardanelles to Russia.

"Djemal appears to have acted on the mistaken assumption that saving the Armenians—as distinct from merely exploiting their plight for propaganda purposes—was an important Allied objective," writes David Fromkin, a historian specializing in Ottoman affairs. The Russians favored Djemal's plan and for a time assured him that the other Associated Powers would cooperate. But in early 1916, France rejected Djemal's offer and claimed southern Turkey, Syria, and parts of Iraq. Great Britain followed suit, claiming Iraq on the behalf of a local "Iraqi" government created by London. "In their passion for booty," Fromkin writes, "the Allied governments lost sight of the condition upon which future gains were predicated: winning the war. . . Djemal's offer afforded the Allies their one great opportunity to subvert the Ottoman Empire from within"—and to save innocent lives—"and they let it go." Nor did the Allies

exploit Djemal's attempted betrayal of his colleagues for propaganda or intelligence purposes. As far as can be determined, the other Young Turks never learned of Djemal's secret correspondence with the enemy, and he remained part of the ruling triumvirate for the remainder of the war.¹¹⁶

CONNECTIONS

- ❖ Why do you think the Allies decided to reject Djemal Pasha's offer? What factors do you think influenced the thinking of the Allied leaders?
- ❖ David Fromkin writes: "Djemal appears to have acted on the mistaken assumption that saving the Armenians—as distinct from merely exploiting their plight for propaganda purposes—was an important Allied objective." What happens to victims of injustice when their cause is exploited for political gain?
- ❖ Do stories like this one influence your thinking about who is responsible for the Armenian Genocide? Does it make the leaders of France and Great Britain complicit?



Tags for bundles of food and supplies intended for Armenian, Greek, and Assyrian refugees of the deportations, sent through the Near East Relief foundation.

Reading 9 — ARMENIAN RELIEF

When major disasters occur anywhere in the world, efforts begin immediately to provide relief for the victims. The mass media are able to keep ordinary people from all over the world abreast of the disaster. The Red Cross, Red Crescent, and other nongovernment organizations raise money and send experts and supplies to the location.

The American reaction to the treatment of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire became one of the largest humanitarian responses in the history of the United States. Fundraising efforts were coupled with a public relations campaign designed to elicit sympathy for the Armenian orphans and refugees. Bureaucracies evolved to handle the distribution of money and materials for the Armenians. In many ways, the relief campaign for the Armenian Genocide provided a prototype for relief work in the twentieth century.

For decades foreign powers condemned the Ottoman Empire for its abuse of minority rights but failed to intervene directly in the affairs of the empire. During World War I, however, foreign observers took measures to provide food and shelter for Armenians, even though they could not convince their own countries to intervene militarily.



Armenian-Syrian Relief "Tag Day"
volunteer fundraisers, Haroutune and
Vartanoosh Manigian beside their aunt,
Aghavni Kazazian, New York City, 1916.

Project SAVE Armenian Photograph Archives, Inc., Photo courtesy of Hermine Manigian.

As early as April 1915, missionaries from Germany and the United States began helping Armenians in various cities of the Ottoman Empire. In September 1915, Ambassador Henry Morgenthau realized the scope of what was happening to the Armenians and urged the U.S. government to help prevent the complete destruction of the Armenian people. In response, the State Department asked the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions to undertake an emergency drive to collect money. James L. Barton and Cleveland H. Dodge founded the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief with the support of President Woodrow Wilson. Through their efforts to raise awareness, the phrase "starving Armenians" became part of everyday speech. The money raised was sent to the American Embassy in Constantinople, which in turn distributed the funds to missionaries and consuls in Turkey. This line of support was temporarily interrupted when the United States entered the war in April 1917. But within a short time the committee, renamed the American Committee for Relief in the Near East (ACRNE) in 1918, reorganized and expanded former operations to include Armenian communities in Russian

Armenia. In 1919, the committee was incorporated by an act of Congress as the Near East Relief (NER).

An article in *The Literary Digest* explained to the public "How Your Gift Is Saving The Armenians":

There are no starving Armenians in Yerevan...A building and site for the orphanage have been bought by the committee, and is being enlarged by refugee workmen. Dr. G. C. Reynolds, the veteran missionary from Van... is in charge of orphan relief and the orphanage. He conducted a large orphanage in Van. His purpose, he says, is not by any means to gather all orphans into institutions, but to train a hundred picked boys and later the same number of girls, who may become leaders of the Armenian people. There are hundreds of orphanages being well maintained by the Armenians themselves, through their joint Armenian committee. Something like 7,000,000 rubles every six months is spent by this committee.

All the work upon the new orphanage is being done by refugees, from the building of the walls to the construction of the beds and the tables and garments. Other relief work for the children is the furnishing of milk for the babies, and the maintenance of a physician, and the opening of a hospital. . . . In the Yerevan district [Russian Armenian] . . . there are approximately 50,000 persons being aided, directly or indirectly, by the American committee. . . .

. . . The outstanding factor in Armenian relief has been the American committee. Its work has been on a large scale, and systematic form. All of it has been supervised by Americans, and the subordinate workers have been men and women trained in American mission schools, and known personally to the missionaries. Professors have not hesitated to become relief agents in villages, or accountants or actual workers in the industrial department. Had it not been for the fact that there were available a force of American board missionaries knowing the language and the land and the people, and with trusted helpers at hand, the wonders that have been wrought in the way of repatriation, rehabilitation, and the maintenance of life, and self respect would have been impossible.¹¹⁷

In July 1918, James L. Barton, the chairman of the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief said that even though \$10 million had already been raised and distributed, the need would continue into the postwar years.

One of the most successful strategies of the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief was a national poster campaign. Using strong graphics and minimal text, the images grabbed the public's attention, sent a message, and offered the average citizen an opportunity to make a difference.

Between 1915 and 1930 American relief organizations raised \$116,000,000 of assistance, delivering food, clothing, and materials for shelter. The committee also set up refugee camps, clinics, hospitals, orphanages, and vocational training programs. It is estimated that during that time the Near East Relief cared for 132,000 orphans from Tiflis and Yerevan in the Caucasus to Constantinople, Beirut, Damascus, and Jerusalem.



Courtesy the Near East Relief Foundation

Posters intended to raise awareness for the American Committee for Relief in the Near East.

CONNECTIONS

- ❖ Why do you think President Wilson was willing to support humanitarian assistance but unwilling to make a military commitment to intervene to stop the genocide?
- ❖ What is necessary to rehabilitate refugees and survivors of genocide? What needs to happen? Who needs to be involved?
- ❖ Examine the posters for Armenian relief.

Look at the image, and describe it exactly as you see it.

Notice how the posters use shape, images, and perspective to communicate a message.

Look for the way the artist uses symbols. What emotion is the artist trying to evoke?

What is the message? To whom is it directed? Is it a single message? Or do others in your class interpret the work in other ways? Finally, make your own judgement about the poster.

Reading 10 — THE STORY OF AURORA MARDIGANIAN AND "RAVISHED ARMENIA"

Articles and accounts of the treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire were widely read in the United States and Europe. One of the most popular accounts of Armenian suffering was *Ravished Armenia*. The book and the film that followed, records the story of Aurora Mardiganian, a teenage survivor, living in the United States in the care of Nora Waln, the publicity secretary of the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief. *Ravished Armenia* was a huge success, educating ordinary Americans about atrocities across the globe. On February 15, 1919, the *New York Times* reported that "many persons prominent in society attended a private showing of 'Ravished Armenia.'" It continued:

The first half of the picture consists of four reels of scenes showing Armenia as it was before Turkish and German devastation, and led up to the deportation of priests and thousands of families into the desert. One of the concluding scenes showed young Armenian women flogged for their refusal to enter Turkish harems and depicted the Turkish slave markets.

Aurora Mardiganian, whose experiences in Armenia furnished the story on which the picture was founded, and who was injured in an accident that occurred during the making of the picture, was carried into the ballroom on a chair. . . .

"The whole purpose of the picture is to acquaint America with ravished Armenia," said Mrs. Harriman, "to visualize conditions so that there will be no misunderstanding in the mind of any one about the terrible things which have transpired. It was deemed essential that the leaders, social and intellectual, should first learn the story, but later the general public shall be informed. It is proposed that before this campaign of information is completed, as many adults as possible shall know the story of Armenia, and the screen was selected as the medium because it reaches the millions, where the printed word reaches the thousands."¹¹⁸



Aurora Mardiganian

Screenings of the film often climaxed in a personal appearance by Aurora Mardiganian herself, who had been given English lessons to help transform her into a spokesperson for her people. Audiences were moved by what they saw and it helped enlist impassioned supporters of the Armenian cause. The attention had its downside. Anthony Slide, author of *Ravished Armenia and the Story of Aurora Mardiganian* writes about the effect of the publicity on Mardiganian herself.

*The pressure was taking its toll on the teenager. In Armenia, she had led a relatively sheltered existence. She had witnessed the horrors of genocide, but was unprepared for the rigors of American society. Its code of behavior was alien to a girl from a different continent and a different culture. She had become a movie star with all the accompanying trappings, but it was unsought-for fame.*¹¹⁹

Aware of the mounting tension, Mardiganian's guardians hired a chaperone and then later seven impersonators to help cover the relentless schedule of speaking engagements. Before long it became too much, Mardiganian made her last public personal appearance with the film in May 1920 and then slipped into a quiet life. Slide writes:

*In the 1920s, interest in both the film Ravished Armenia and an independent Armenia dissipated in the United States. Near East Relief produced one other film, Alice in Hungerland (1921), in which an American child goes to the Near East and witnesses conditions there. Aurora Mardiganian made no other film appearances, and expressed no interest in continuing her career as an actress. . . . Because of the horrors she had suffered in Armenia, for many years Aurora Mardiganian could not permit a man to touch her; but in 1929, she married and embarked on a new life as an Armenian-American housewife. She died in Los Angeles on February 6, 1994.*¹²⁰

Although no complete copy of *Ravished Armenia* remains, the film is a testament to the power of movies to educate and build sympathy for a cause.

CONNECTIONS

- ❖ Why did Harriman and others believe film would capture the public's attention more effectively than words? Do you agree?
- ❖ What role can film play in shaping public opinion? How does a film make an event more real for some people?
- ❖ Many of the contemporary reports of the Armenian Genocide played into cultural and religious prejudices and stereotypes by contrasting the image of innocent Christian victims and "fanatical" Muslims. How do you think the identity of the victims and perpetrators of the Armenian Genocide contributed to the public's engagement with the plight of the Armenians? How does the identity of victims of injustice influence the way people respond to human rights abuses today?
- ❖ Slide describes Mardiganian's fame as "unsought," yet her celebrity status gave the suffering of her fellow Armenians a face with which people could identify. What toll did those experiences take on Mardiganian?

- ❖ Are all forms of persuasion propaganda? Was *Ravished Armenia* propaganda? What criteria would you use to judge? Can propaganda be used for a good cause? Are there other ways to rally people to a common cause?

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*“Must the Armenians be once more disillusioned?
The future of this small nation must not be relegated to obscurity
behind the selfish schemes and plans of the great states.”*
—Armin Wegner, an eyewitness to the Armenian Genocide

Chapter 6

“WHO REMEMBERS THE ARMENIANS?”

Judgment, Memory, and Legacies

THIS CHAPTER EXAMINES THE WAYS VARIOUS INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS RESPONDED IN THE WAKE OF THE Armenian Genocide. During the war, the Allies promised to hold Turkish leaders responsible for their crimes. After the war, however, international efforts to prosecute perpetrators of the genocide were aborted. In their place were a series of court martials within Turkey. By the time the prosecutions began many of the top leaders of the Committee of Union and Progress had already fled. Although the post-war trials did not fulfill the promise of bringing the perpetrators of the genocide to justice, the evidence collected offers some of the most important documentation of the Armenian Genocide.

A few months before the end of the World War I, at a time when a civil war was raging in Russia, Armenian leaders in Russian Armenia formed their own Republic. President Woodrow Wilson's support for the concept of national self-determination—the idea that groups should rule themselves in their own nation—encouraged the Armenians, and many other ethnic and national groups to seek support to create their own state. The Armenians would need support to help rebuild after the genocide. Although the Allies made promises, they did little to protect the emerging Armenian Republic. Empowered by the lack of commitment a Turkish nationalist named Mustafa Kemal led troops into the Republic of Armenia. Desperate to save their remaining land, the leaders of the fledgling Armenian Republic were forced to

turn to Communist Russia for help, forgoing national independence. Until the break up of the Soviet Union in 1991, Armenia existed as much in memory and diaspora as it did in any one place on the map.

Living scattered across the globe Armenians have struggled to hold on to their identity. Part of that struggle is an effort for acknowledgement of the genocide. An international campaign of genocide denial, often sponsored by the Turkish government, targeting politicians, academics, and diplomats, has attempted to turn what was a known fact into something unrecognizable to the witnesses and survivors of the genocide.

Despite those efforts, the history of the Armenian Genocide continues to influence international law and human rights policy. Raphael Lemkin, a Polish Jew, saw the connection between the crimes committed against the Armenians and the rise of the Nazis in Germany. Lemkin was profoundly frustrated by the failure of the international community to hold leaders of the Young Turk movement accountable after the war. He worked tirelessly to have “crimes against humanity” recognized as a violation of international law. Indeed it was Lemkin who coined the term “genocide”—a concept that stands as one of the foundations of the international movement for human rights. Although law and language have not been able to prevent genocide on their own, they have set a legal and moral standard making the protection of citizens a concern of not just one country, but the entire world.



Project SAVE Armenian Photograph Archives, Inc., Courtesy of Rev. Varian Hartunian

Abraham and Shushan Hartunian and their family, Genocide survivors from Marash, Cilician Armenia, Ottoman Empire, pose in front of the camera on board the King Alexander, a Greek ship out of Athens, before stepping into a new life on a New York City pier, November 1, 1922.

Reading 1 — A MANDATE FOR ARMENIA?

By November 1917 a revolution in Russia brought down the czar and replaced the monarchy with a Bolshevik state. At the same time refugees from the genocide poured across the border from Turkey into Russia. On May 28, 1918, in what had been Russian Armenia, surviving Armenians organized an independent republic. At the same time, Armenians as well as other peoples and nations—Arabs, Kurds, Bulgarians, Greeks, Serbs, and Zionist Jews—claimed parts of the Ottoman Empire. Historian Richard Hovannisian describes the optimism that many Armenians felt as the war came to an end.

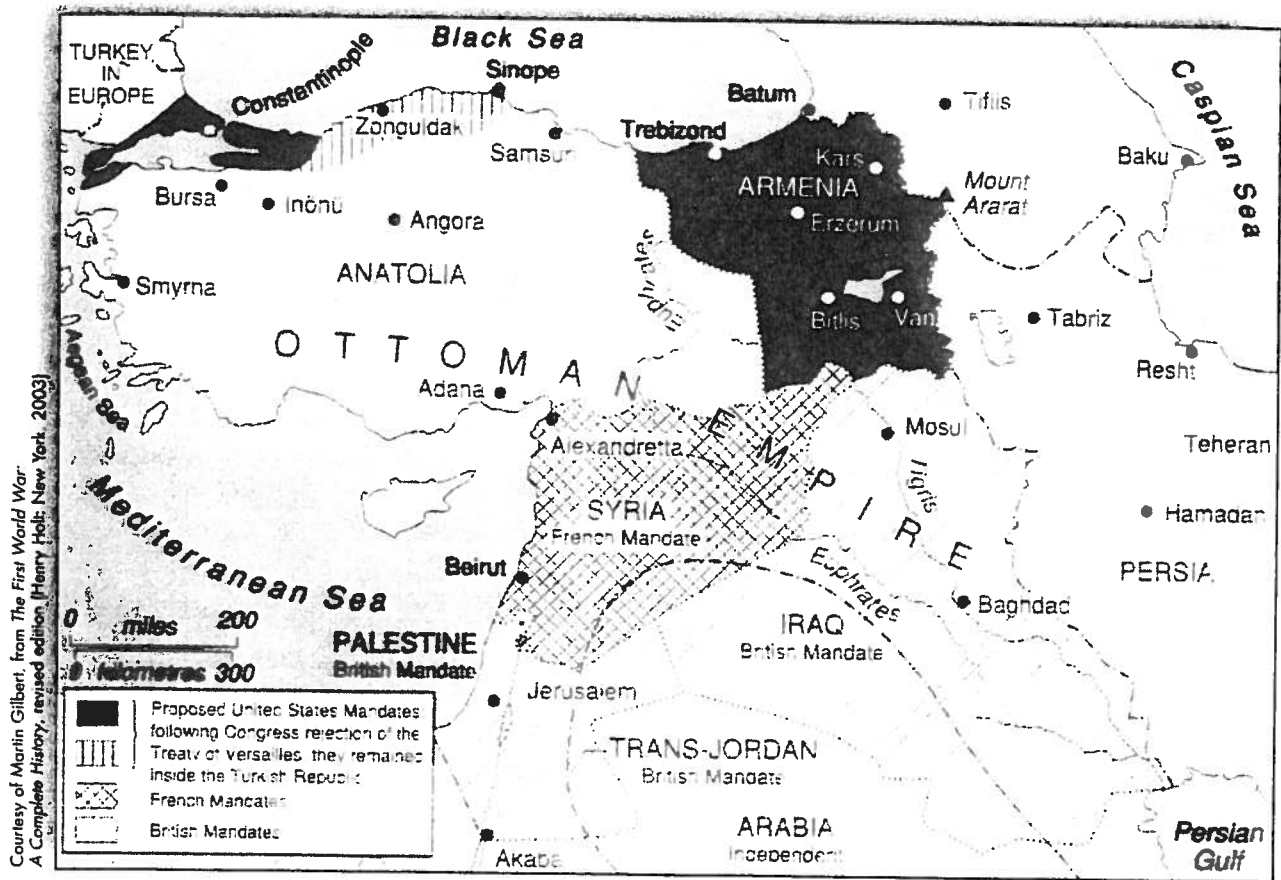


Armenian deportees returning home to Marash from exile. Marash, Cilician Armenia, Ottoman Empire, 1919. Photo by E. Stanley Kerr, medical missionary.

Project SAFE Armenian Photograph Archives, Inc.,
Courtesy of Vartan Hovhann

The surrender of the Ottoman Empire and the flight of the Young Turk leaders in October 1918 evoked thanksgiving and hope among the Armenian survivors. The prospect of compatriots returning to the homeland from all over the world, some refugees and survivors of the genocide, and others longtime exiles from the days of Abdul-Hamid, excited imaginations. Every Allied power was pledged to a separate autonomous or independent existence for the Armenians in their historic lands. A small republic had already taken form in the Caucasus and now gradually expanded as the Turkish armies withdrew from the area. There were, of course, major obstacles to its incorporation of Turkish Armenia because the population had been massacred or driven out and the Turkish army still controlled the region. In drawing up the Mudros Armistice, British negotiators had required Turkish evacuation of the Caucasus but gave up their initial intent to demand also the clearance of Turkish Armenia, although they reserved for the Allies the right to occupy any or all of the region in case of disorder, an option they never exercised. Nonetheless, to the Armenians and their sympathizers, it seemed that the crucifixion of the nation would be followed by a veritable resurrection.¹²¹

Allied leaders began to map out the future of the region at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. Attempting to organize the peace and mediate further conflict was the newly formed League of Nations. Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations provided mandatories or protectorates, through which larger countries promised to support the developing states.



THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE MANDATES

A map depicting mandates that were to be created from former Ottoman Territory after the end of World War I.

The article read in part:

Certain communities formerly belonging to the Turkish Empire have reached a stage of development where their existence as independent nations can be provisionally recognized subject to the rendering of administrative advice and assistance by a Mandatory until such time as they are able to stand alone. The wishes of these communities must be a principal consideration in the selection of the Mandatory.

In July 1919, President Wilson sent Major General James Harbord to investigate the status of Armenians living in the emerging Armenian Republic and to consider whether the United States should accept an mandate over the territory. Both the report and the League of Nations itself set off a debate about the role of the United States in foreign affairs. In his report Harbord listed reasons for and against taking on a mandate for Armenia. Included here are excerpts from his report:

REASONS FOR	REASONS AGAINST
As one of the chief contributors to the formation of the League of Nations, the United States is morally bound to accept the obligations and responsibilities of a mandatory power.	The United States has prior and nearer foreign obligations, and ample responsibilities with domestic problems growing out of the war.
The Near East presents the greatest humanitarian opportunity of the age—a duty for which the United States is better fitted than any other—as witness Cuba, Puerto Rico, Philippines, Hawaii, Panama, and our altruistic policy of developing peoples rather than material resources alone.	Humanitarianism should begin at home. There is a sufficient number of difficult situations which call for our actions within the well-recognized spheres of American influence.
America is practically the unanimous choice and fervent hope of all the peoples involved.	The United States has in no way contributed to and is not responsible for the conditions, political, social, or economic, that prevail in this region. It will be entirely consistent to decline the invitation.
America is already spending millions to save starving people in Turkey and Transcaucasia and could do this with much more efficiency if in control. Whoever becomes a mandatory for these regions we shall be still expected to finance their relief, and will probably eventually furnish the capital for material development.	American philanthropy and charity are world wide. Such policy would commit us to a policy of meddling or draw upon our philanthropy to the point of exhaustion.
America is the only hope of the Armenians. They consider but one other nation, Great Britain....For a mandatory America is not only the first choice of all the peoples of the Near East but of each of the great powers, after itself. American power is adequate; its record is clean; its motives above suspicion.	Other powers, particularly Great Britain, and Russia, have shown continued interest in the welfare of Armenia....The United States is not capable of sustaining a continuity of foreign policy. One Congress cannot bind another. Even treaties can be nullified by cutting off appropriations.
The mandatory would be self-supporting after.... five years. The building of railroads would offer opportunities to our capital. There would be great trade advantages.	Our country would be put to great expense, involving probably an increase of the Army and Navy.... It is questionable if railroads could for many years pay interest on investments in their very difficult construction. The effort and money spent would get us more trade in nearer lands than we could hope for in Russia and Rumania.
It would definitely stop further massacres of Armenians and other Christians, give justice to the Turks, Kurds, Greeks, and other peoples.	Peace and justice would be equally assured under any other of the great powers.

Continued on next page

REASONS FOR	REASONS AGAINST
America has strong sentimental interests in the region—our missions and colleges.	These institutions have been respected even by the Turks throughout the war and the massacres: and sympathy and respect would be shown by any other mandatory.
If the United States does not take responsibility in this region, it is likely that international jealousies will result in a continuance of the unspeakable misrule of the Turk.	The peace conference has definitely informed the Turkish government that it may expect to go under a mandate. It is not conceivable that the League of Nations would permit further uncontrolled rule by that thoroughly discredited government.
"And the Lord said unto Cain, 'Where is Abel, thy brother?' And he said, 'I know not; am I my brother's keeper?'" Better millions for a mandate than billions for future wars.	The first duty of America is to its own people and its nearer neighbors. ¹²²

The last point, which Harbord presented without an opposing view read:

Here is a man's job that the world says can be better done by America than by any other. America can afford the money; she has the men; no duty to her own people would suffer; her traditional policy of isolation did not keep her from successful participation in the Great War. Shall it be said that our country lacks the courage to take up new and difficult duties?

Without visiting the Near East it is not possible for an American to realize even faintly the respect, faith, and affection with which our country is regarded throughout that region. Whether it is the world-wide reputation which we enjoy for fair dealing, a tribute perhaps to the crusading spirit which carried us into the Great War, not untinged with hope that the same spirit may urge us into the solution of great problems growing out of that conflict, or whether due to unselfish and impartial missionary and educational influence exerted for a century, it is the one faith which is held alike by Christian and [Muslim], by Jew and Gentile, by prince and peasant in the Near East. It is very gratifying to the pride of Americans far from home. But it brings with it the heavy responsibility of deciding great questions with a seriousness worthy of such faith. Burdens that might be assumed on the appeal of such sentiment would have to be carried for not less than a generation under circumstances so trying that we might easily forfeit the faith of the world. If we refuse to assume it, for no matter what reasons satisfactory to ourselves, we shall be considered by many millions of people as having left unfinished the task for which we entered the war, and as having betrayed their hopes.¹²³

After consideration, the United States did not take on a mandate for Armenia.

CONNECTIONS

- ❖ Richard Hovannisian writes that Armenians and their supporters believed “the crucifixion of the nation would be followed by a veritable resurrection.” The words “crucifixion” and “resurrection” refer to Christian spiritual beliefs. What images do the words evoke? Why do you think he choose to use them in this context?
- ❖ The Paris Peace Conference created new countries in what is now called the Middle East as well as new structures to prevent war. Many contemporary conflicts in the Middle East and the Balkans trace their roots to this period. Research how the decisions made in 1919 echo in the headlines today.
- ❖ Which of Harbord's arguments do you find most persuasive? Rank the arguments and justify your rankings?
- ❖ Consider Henry Morgenthau's comments from his editorial “Shall Armenia Perish?” which was published on February 28, 1920:

*If America is going to condone these offenses, if she is going to permit to continue conditions that threaten and permit their repetition, she is party to the crime. These people must be freed from the agony and dangers of such horrors. They must not only be saved for the present but either thru governmental action or protection under the League of Nations they must be given assurance that they will be free in peace and that no harm can come to them.*¹²⁴

How do his comments compare with Harbord's?

- ❖ How might Harbord's arguments be applied to a foreign policy decision today? Consider the two statements:

The United States should always participate in efforts to build new nations with the hope of building democratic states.

The United States should not involve itself in nation building.

With which statement do you most agree? Why? Another way to discuss this is through a barometer. Stand in a line representing a continuum between the two statements. Participants should stand closest to the position they agree with most. Discuss why you have choosen your position and listen to the arguments made by other. Move along the barometer as your thinking changes.

- ❖ U.S. President Woodrow Wilson promoted the idea of “self-determination” in which groups would be able to decide their own future and form their own government. Why did Wilson believe it would reduce conflict? What new challenges were raised by the concept of self-determination? Would the world be safer if all groups had the right to form their own nation?

- ❖ Consider how foreign policy decisions are made today. How are arguments made for or against intervention? Are the arguments similar to those made in the Harbord report? How has the language changed? Are the arguments moral or are they political?
- ❖ Much of the present day middle east grew from Ottoman mandates. Research other mandates and countries that grew out of the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. Which countries took on mandates? Have the border issues that grew from the collapse of the Ottoman Empire been resolved?



Reading 2 — CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY AND CIVILIZATION

After the Mudros Armistice in October 1918 which officially ended the war in the Ottoman Empire, the Allied leaders knew that somebody had to be held accountable for the massacres. In an article titled "The Trial of Perpetrators by the Turkish Military Tribunals: The Case of Yozgat," German scholar Annette Höss described the challenges in bringing the perpetrators of the Armenian Genocide to justice.

The Turkish military defeat in the latter part of 1918 posed serious problems for succeeding governments of the Ottoman Empire. The victorious Allies were expected to impose harsh peace terms upon . . . Turkey, especially because of the mistreatment of prisoners of war and the genocidal massacres against the Armenians. In fact, on 24 May 1915 the Allies had solemnly warned the Turkish authorities of the dire consequences of these massacres which they termed "new crimes of Turkey against humanity and civilization." Consequently, the arrest, trial, and punishment of the culprits was a central issues in Turkish internal and external politics following the Mudros Armistice. . . .

The ruling class of Turkey was divided into two camps after the signing of the armistice. One still adhered to the Ittihadist ideology, while the other repudiated the Ittihadists and sided with the

An article from the New York Times on July 13, 1919 describing the Turkish court-martials for Djemal, Enver, and Talaat.

From Kivim, Armenian Genocide: News Accounts

The New York Times
SUNDAY, JULY 13, 1919

(1,2)

TURKEY CONDEMNS ITS WAR LEADERS

Court-Martial Gives Death Sentence to Enver Pasha, Talaat Bey, and Djemal Pasha.

ALL THREE MADE ESCAPES

Djavid Bey and Alusa Metssa Get 15 Years at Hard Labor for Part in the War.

CONSTANTINOPLE, July 11.—Enver Pasha, Talaat Bey, and Djemal Pasha, the leaders of the Turkish Government during the war, were condemned to death today by a Turkish court-martial investigating the conduct of the Turkish Government during the war period.

Enver and his two leading associates in the Young Turk Government fled from the

Henry Morgenthau, American Ambassador at Constantinople, and Sir George Buchanan, the British Ambassador at the same time, have left no doubt in their dispatches, articles, and interviews of the Young Turk leaders which have proclaimed with sentences pronounced by Turkish court-martial ordered Grand Vizier Damad Ferid Pasha, and venerated by Ahmed Abouk Pasha, the War.

It is the climax of a long series of prosecutions undertaken by the new regime to clear the skirts of the people from blame for joining in the war.

Allied Powers, which took charge of parts of the Ottoman capital. . . . In order to impress and mollify the victors, therefore, the postwar Turkish government set out to institute court-martial proceedings against the top leaders of the Ittihadist party, many of whom had also functioned as cabinet ministers. Seven leading Ittihadists—Talât [Talaat], Enver, Jemal [Djemal], Shakir, Nazim, Bedri, and Azmi—had already fled the country.

The Allied Powers were pledged to punish the organizers of the genocide and showed considerable interest in the prosecution. As the political situation in Turkey began to change, however, some of the Allies became more cautious. It was Great Britain which actually pursued the prosecution. The main interest of the British was punishment of officials responsible for the ill-treatment of British prisoners of the war and only secondarily those involved in the Armenian massacres.

There were three different levels at which the formation of courts-martial were considered in early 1919: a sub-commission of the Paris Peace Conference, the British High Commission at Constantinople, and the Turkish cabinets under İzzet Pasha and Damad Ferid Pasha. At the peace conference the delegates dealt with the problems of international law and how the regulations could be applied in the case of Turkey....

The fact that seven Young Turk leaders had fled from Turkey [to Germany] at the end of 1918 required rapid action by the British High Commission and the new Turkish government. This resulted in numerous arrests in early 1919. A special court-martial was established on 8 January on the basis of an imperial decree of 16 December. . . . Interestingly enough, these sessions were open to the public, an uncommon practice in cases of court-martial....

Although the courts-martial began promisingly, the results were disappointing. . . . The most important trials were as follows: Yozgat (5 February-7 April 1919), Trebizond (26 March-17 May 1919), Ittihadist Leaders (28 April-17 May 1919), and Cabinet Ministers (3 June-25 June 1919). Preparations were made for many other trials . . . but only a few were actually held. . . . Interruption of the trials was not because of lack of evidence but because of political developments in Turkey. As the Kemalist movement spread, the work of the courts-martial slowed and ultimately was suspended.

The evidence used in the court-martial proceedings in 1919 was collected through two commissions: The Fifth Committee of Parliament and the Mazhar Inquiry Commission. The Fifth Committee of Parliament initiated the investigation into the massacres. . . .

In the fourteen hearings of the committee, thirteen ministers, and two Sheikhs-ul-Islam were interrogated. A number of documents, including top-secret orders and instructions regarding the massacres, were procured.¹²⁵

The sultan disbanded the Fifth Committee before a vote was taken on their findings but the Mazhar Inquiry Commission continued its work. In less than two months the commission collected written and oral evidence, including telegraphic orders for the deportations and the massacres. In mid-January 1919, the commission submitted dossiers on 130 subjects to the court-martial.¹²⁶

At the trial of the Ittihad leaders in Constantinople, the prosecutors explained to the court: "The disaster visiting the Armenians was not a local or isolated event. It was the result of a premeditated decision taken by a central body . . . and the excesses which took place were based on oral and written orders issued by that central body."¹²⁷ In absentia, Talaat, Djemal, and Enver were found guilty and sentenced to death. Just after the verdict was handed down, leaders of the new Ottoman government asked to have the triumvirate extradited from Germany but the request was ignored. In the meantime, nearly 400 functionaries were arrested, and the trials continued while most of the top party officials lived in exile. Under pressure from Turkish nationalist Mustafa Kemal and his supporters, the court martials were brought to a close in January, 1921.

After the trials, the British high commissioner in Constantinople wrote: "The Court Martial has been such a dead failure that its findings cannot be held of any account at all, if it is intended to make responsibility for deportations and massacres a matter of inter-Allied concern."¹²⁸ Seemingly alone in their desire to press on with trials, the British considered creating a special court to try Ottoman war criminals but ultimately took no action.

Over thirty years after the start of the Armenian Genocide, Sir Harley Shawcross, the British chief prosecutor at the Nuremberg trials, which followed the fall of the Nazis, declared that the World War I genocide of the Armenians became a foundation for the Nuremberg Law recognizing crimes against humanity.

CONNECTIONS

- ❖ On May 24, 1915, the Allied Powers warned that the Turkish leaders would be held responsible for the crimes they committed. What is the danger in threatening prosecution but not following through?
- ❖ What is justice? Who should have been held accountable for the Armenian Genocide? After all the years that have passed, is justice still possible? What would need to happen? Who would need to be involved?
- ❖ What made it difficult for the Ottoman government after World War I to sustain a vigorous prosecution of its war criminals?
- ❖ The Indictment of the Constantinople Military Court (April 27, 1919) read:

The . . . investigation has disclosed that the Ittihad [Young Turk] Party had two faces. One of these was its well-known external face, that is, a Party acting in accordance with its by-laws; the second was the secretive, conspiratorial, traitorous Ittihad acting with criminal intent on oral and secret instructions . . . the history of the Party has been marked by an unending chain of massacres, pillage and abuse. That Party is responsible for the crimes committed. . . . 129

What kinds of evidence would be needed to establish these charges?

- ✧ The post-apartheid South African government responded to the mass violence of apartheid very differently from the government of post-war Turkey. While the post-apartheid government formed the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, nationalists led by Mustafa Kemal worked to erase the memory of the Armenian Genocide. What does the term “truth and reconciliation” imply? What is reconciliation? Can there be reconciliation without an acknowledgement of the truth? To learn more about the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, download the study guide *Facing the Truth* from the Facing History and Ourselves web site and view the film with your class.
- ✧ The Nuremberg International Tribunal at the close of World War II placed leading Nazi war criminals on trial. Professor Richard Hovannisian has argued that the Holocaust might have been prevented if the Allied Powers after World War I had upheld the decision to establish an international tribunal for the perpetrators of the Armenian Genocide. See his comments in the videotape of the 1985 Facing History Conference, *The Impact of Nuremberg*, available at the Facing History Resource Center. What are the dangers when injustice is neither confronted nor acknowledged?



Reading 3 — WAR, GENOCIDE, AND HUMAN RIGHTS

At the Paris Peace Conference at the end of World War I, advocates for an international standard for human rights believed the newly formed League of Nations would uphold basic standards for the fair and equal treatment of people from all over the world. Human rights scholar Paul Gordon Lauren describes the dreams and frustrations of those that hoped to ensure that the horror of World War I and the atrocities of the Armenian Genocide would never happen again.

The human rights of minorities . . . attracted considerable attention and care at the Paris Peace Conference. Humanitarian intervention as a means of protecting religious or ethnic minorities from persecution, of course, had arisen well before the war; but concern had been greatly intensified by the recent experience with genocide against the Armenians and other wartime loss of human life. To make this issue even more acute, the very act of establishing new states created sizable numbers of new minorities within their frontiers, thereby raising serious questions about their rights. If any of these governments persecuted those populations under one guise or another who had just been joined to their states, genuine threats could be posed to both domestic and international stability. "Nothing," acknowledged [U.S. President] Wilson at a plenary meeting of the peace conference "is more likely to disturb the peace of the world than the treatment which might in certain circumstances be meted out to minorities." The realization thus very slowly began to emerge (although it would take the experience of another world war to be appreciated more fully) that violations of human rights at home ran perilous risks of jeopardizing world peace abroad. This could be seen in the large number and wide-ranging scope of proposals submitted to the conference by private citizens, nongovernmental organizations, and official representatives in the name of protecting the rights of minorities. They argued for the right of minorities for the preservation of their culture and ethnic character, the right of equality of all before the law, and the right of freedom of worship and religion. "All citizens," urged one proposal, "without distinction as to race, nationality, or religion, shall enjoy equal civil, religious, political and national rights." The most critical factor in all of these proposals, of course, was not their assertion of rights, but rather their call for responsibilities. That is, all the proposals strongly urged members of the international



A 1919 political cartoon from *Punch* magazine, depicting U.S. President Woodrow Wilson with an olive branch, representing the League of Nations.

Courtesy of Clip Ari. Some images © 2003-2004 www.clipari.com

*community to cross that important intellectual and political threshold imposed by strict definitions of national sovereignty and now establish that they possessed a collective responsibility beyond their own borders to guarantee protection for the rights of minorities.*¹³⁰

At Paris, negotiators forged an international structure for the protection of the rights of minorities in a series of agreements called the Minority Treaties. Questions also arose around the issue of the human right to life and food, as seen in the commitment of the 1919 legislation that created the American Relief Administration (ARA) and the ongoing efforts for victims and refugees of the Armenian Genocide. The talk of rights went beyond issues of identity; provisions for the rights of labor were written into binding peace treaties as well.¹³¹ For all the accomplishments, many felt ignored. The Minority Treaties did not cover the rights of minorities living in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Latin America, the United States, and Canada, or islands of the Pacific. Furthermore, the principle of self-determination, used by advocates of the Armenian Republic, did not seem to apply to colonial possessions.

Lauren believes that despite the many disappointments, the Paris Peace Conference built an important precedent for the international human rights movement.

The many exaggerated expectations, often encouraged by political leaders themselves, that somehow all the sacrifices made in wartime would be rewarded and thereby suddenly transform the nature of rights around the globe did not materialize. . . . On the other hand . . . never before in history had a peace conference produced so many treaties about the right of self-determination, the right of minorities to be protected, the right to enjoy life by receiving assistance, and the rights of the laboring classes, or produced an international organization formally charged with guaranteeing these particular rights. Never before had the global community made such a direct connection between peace and justice, or been willing to acknowledge such extensive responsibilities.

The rights of Armenians, as individuals and as a nation, whose plight had been an important warning to the world, would be one of the first tests of the commitment of the new international system.

CONNECTIONS

- ❖ President Wilson believed, “Nothing is more likely to disturb the peace of the world than the treatment which might in certain circumstances be meted out to minorities.” What does he mean? What is the relationship between the treatment of groups within a nation and war? Can you think of examples that support Wilson’s argument?
- ❖ Who was responsible for the Armenian Genocide? Who was guilty? How important is it to have those questions answered?

- ❖ One of the challenges in preventing abuses of human rights is the question of enforcement. How can human rights be enforced? Whose responsibility is their enforcement?
- ❖ Paul Gordon Lauren writes about the many disappointments at the Paris Peace Conference, including the rejection of a Japanese proposal to ban racial discrimination. He states: “Never before had the global community made such a direct connection between peace and justice.” What criteria would you use to evaluate the effort? What precedents did it set for the field of human rights?
- ❖ How did indignation about the mistreatment of Armenians evolve from concerned individuals and groups to become an essential foundation for international law and human rights?



Research post-World War II efforts to prevent collective violence including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. You may also visit the archive of Facing History and Ourselves' online forum *Engaging the Future: Religion, Human Rights, and Conflict Resolution*.

Reading 4 → THE ARMENIAN REPUBLIC AND THE NEW TURKEY

Even before the Paris Peace Conference at the end of World War I, President Woodrow Wilson articulated a new vision for the world. At the outset of U.S. involvement in the war, Wilson argued that action was needed to “make the world safe for democracy.” His new idea went further. Wilson articulated a principle of national self-determination in which small nations would be granted independence from the old empires. Before the end of the war, Wilson laid out fourteen points, which would be central to his vision. The twelfth point spoke directly to the Armenians:

*The Turkish portions of the Ottoman Empire should be assured a secure sovereignty, but the other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and an unmolested opportunity of autonomous development.*¹³²

Wilson's ideas influenced the treaties that were negotiated in Paris and after the war. The Treaty of Sevres, which was signed nearly two years after the armistice, required that Turkey recognize the Armenian Republic and allowed President Wilson to set the boundary between Turkey and Armenia within limits of the four eastern Ottoman provinces of Trebizond, Erzeram, Bitlis, and Van.



©Julien Archive

Mustafa Kemal also known as Kemal Ataturk.

Despite international support, the survival of the small Armenian nation was almost immediately threatened by Mustafa Kemal. As a young man, Kemal had helped the Young Turks overthrow the sultan and had solidified his record as a nationalist during the war. Stung by the surrender of the Turkish army in 1918 and by the occupation of the Turkish ports by British, French, and Greek forces, Mustafa Kemal rejected the terms of the peace, which carved a number of states from Ottoman territory. Mustafa Kemal's message caught on among nationalists who were bitter over the loss of land and angered by what they perceived as further meddling in Turkey's internal affairs. In 1920, he set up an opposition government in Ankara, and the Kemalists (his followers) soon gained so much support that they were able to influence policy in the capital. As Kemal planned an invasion of the Armenian Republic in the Caucasus, he knew he could count on the support of Turkish troops. Historian Richard Hovannisian writes that the fledgling Armenian Republic was unable to defend itself against the invasion of the Turkish army.

The Allied Powers looked on with a mixture of distress and resignation as the Turkish armies advanced into the heart of the republic and in December forced the Armenian government to repudiate the terms of the Sevres settlement, renounce all claims to Turkish Armenia, and even cede the former Russian Armenian districts of Kars, Araham, and Surmalu, including Mount Ararat, the symbolic Armenian mountain. . . . Desperate and forlorn, the crippled Armenian government had no choice other than to save what little territory was left by opting for Soviet rule and seek the protection of the Red Army.¹³³

Emboldened by their victory, Turkish nationalists set out to deport the remaining Armenians and Christians in the Ottoman Empire. In her daughter's book, *Not Even My Name*, Sano Halo, a Pontian Greek, remembers the day in 1920 when Turkish soldiers appeared in her village, forcing her family into exile. After an arduous journey during which she lost her family, Halo recalls crossing the border into Syria.



Courtesy of Thea Halo

Sano Halo (left) and her family, Syria, 1925.

Each day a new group of Christians rolled past our house in creaky wagons, or walked alongside donkeys piled high with bundles.

On the fifth day, we started on our own journey south to Aleppo. The trip was long and tedious, but could not compare to the forced march with my family. At least there were no corpses on the road, and we had enough food and money to keep us, even if it was not in great abundance.

Our wagon bumped along the dry, pitted road as we crossed the border that marked the end of Turkey and the beginning of Aleppo. . . . It was the first time since I left my home, a million years ago it seemed, that I took time to think about what happened and realize my loss. I looked back one last time toward the country that had been a great joy to me in my first years of life; the country that had become the cause of all my sorrows. . . .¹³⁴

Nearly two years after Halo's family was forced to flee, British, Italian, and French ships evacuated thousands of Greek and Armenian nationals from the city of Smyrna in 1922, leaving Turkey nearly purged of its Christian minorities. While the Allies argued about who was to blame, Kemal ousted the sultan on November 1, 1922. Unwilling to resume fighting, and aware of the economic benefits of normalizing relations with Turkey, Allied leaders negotiated a new treaty with the Kemalist government. After these successful negotiations that culminated in the Treaty of Lausanne, Kemal and his supporters declared the birth of the Turkish Republic on October 29, 1923. To fulfill the treaty, Greece and Turkey exchanged

minority populations, uprooting Turks in Greece as well as far more Greeks in Turkey.

CONNECTIONS

- ❖ What is “self-determination”? Who should have the power to determine which people or groups should be given their own nation?
- ❖ Can you imagine a country where everybody would be the same? What conflicts would be eliminated? What new challenges would you anticipate? What would be lost?
- ❖ According to Kemal, what threat did the Armenians represent in a new Turkey?
- ❖ Wilson’s plan for the border between Armenia and Turkey granted Armenia over 16,000 square miles of land including access to the Black Sea. The plan was announced on November 22 after Kemal’s army had advanced well into the Armenian Republic. Christopher Walker writes that Wilson’s plan “was predicated upon the notion that right and justice prevail in the world, not force, cunning and self interest. As such, it served no purpose.”¹³⁵ What would it have taken for Wilson’s plan to become a reality? Why do you think Walker believes “it served no purpose”? Do you agree?
- ❖ What is ethnic cleansing? In what ways did the Treaty of Lausanne condone ethnic cleansing?



Turkish crowds in Smyrna, 1922, at the symbolic end of the Christian presence in the Ottoman Empire.

Reading 5 → ACQUITTING THE ASSASSIN

In 1918, Talaat Pasha fled Turkey for Germany, Turkey's ally during the war. By March 1921, he was living in Berlin with his wife under an assumed name. There, Talaat became the center of a group of Turkish nationalists and led an active social life. On March 16, Soghomon Tehlirian, a 24-year-old Armenian survivor of the genocide, shot and killed Talaat and wounded Talaat's wife. Tehlirian showed no remorse for the murder. He told police: "It is not I who am the murderer. It is he [Talaat]."

After Talaat's death, the press mourned him as a loyal friend to Germany. In early June, when the trial began, it was widely believed that the German courts would enact the harshest punishment on Tehlirian, especially since Germany had been sympathetic to the Young Turks and had provided refuge for several Turkish leaders after the war.



Soghomon Tehlirian

Courtesy of Project SAVE Armenian Photograph Archives, Inc.,
Courtesy of Faith Cross

Tehlirian's lawyers planned a two-part defense. First, they would argue that Tehlirian was temporarily insane at the time of the murder. To support his claim, Tehlirian told the court that two weeks before the murder his mother, who had been killed during the genocide, appeared to him in a vision, exhorting him to kill Talaat as an act of revenge for the atrocities committed against the Armenian people. The second part of the strategy was to put the victim on trial.

To support their case, Tehlirian's lawyers were able to get support from two prominent Germans, Johannes Lepsius, who had recently published a book about the atrocities perpetrated against the Armenians by the Turks, and General Liman von Sanders, the former leader of the German military mission in the Ottoman Empire. Testifying in Tehlirian's defense, Lepsius detailed the systematic plans for what he called the elimination of the "Armenians in Armenia." Lepsius testified to Talaat's role in the massacres of the Armenians and told the court that he had physical documentary evidence to prove his allegations. Lepsius's overview was followed by the testimony of General von Sanders, who described the callousness of German military officials who watched the massacre of Armenians but failed to intervene. During the trial, five messages with Talaat's signature were entered into evidence including one in which Talaat ordered that Armenian children who were living in orphanages after the murder of their parents be killed "in order to eliminate further danger from antagonistic elements."¹³⁶

After one hour of deliberations Tehlirian was acquitted.

In an editorial titled "They Simply Had to Let Him Go," the *New York Times*, outlined the jury's dilemma.

By acquitting the young Armenian who shot dead Talaat Pasha on the street in a Berlin suburb where that too eminent Turk was quietly living, the court before which he was tried practically has given, not only to this young man, but to the many others like him and with like grievances, a license to kill at discretion any Turkish official whom they can find in Germany.

That was going rather far. Of course, death was about the least of the punishments for his innumerable and most atrocious crimes that was deserved by Talaat Pasha. The world's atmosphere is the more safely and pleasantly breathed now that he is gone, and there will be little sympathy with his fate or regret for his loss. The fact remains, however, that he was assassinated, not put to death with the judicial formality that is the right of even such as he, and to hold, as the German jurors did, that his taking off was "morally right" both reveals a queer view of moral rightness and opens the way to other assassinations less easily excusable than his or not excusable at all.

And yet—and yet—what other verdict was possible? An acquittal on the ground of insanity, the usual device of jurors who do not want to punish a killing of which they approve, would have been more than ordinarily absurd in the case of a man as obviously sane as this Armenian is, and to have hanged him, or even to have sent him to prison, would have been intolerably to overlook his provocation. The dilemma cannot be escaped—all assassins should be punished; this assassin should not be punished. And there you are! The solution lies further back and long ago, when German officers in Turkey permitted the massacres of Armenians, though they had the power to prevent them.¹³⁷

CONNECTIONS

- ❧ What was the German court's dilemma? Should the court have acquitted Tehlirian? How do you decide?
- ❧ Who did Tehlirian's lawyers believe was responsible? Who did the prosecution believe was responsible? Who did the *New York Times* believe was responsible? What arguments could be made in each case? Whom do you hold responsible? Explain your thinking.
- ❧ Historians now believe, as did the prosecutors, that Tehlirian was working with Operation Nemesis, a group of Armenian radicals who, in the absence of international justice, plotted to target individual Turkish leaders they held responsible for the genocide. Does that information alter your thinking about Tehlirian's acquittal?
- ❧ What is the danger of letting people like Tehlirian, and his compatriots in Operation Nemesis take the law in their own hands? What is lost when a man like Talaat dies without a public trial?
- ❧ How did the failure of international efforts to hold the leaders of the genocide responsible affect Tehlirian's actions?

Reading 6 — REWRITING HISTORY



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Turkish soldiers posing for a picture during World War I.

The three men considered most responsible for the Armenian Genocide—Talaat, Enver, and Djemal—escaped from Turkey at the end of World War I with the help of the German government. They were tried in absentia by a Turkish military tribunal, convicted of war crimes, and sentenced to death. Nevertheless, the tribunal sentences were never carried out, since Talaat and the other principal authors of the genocide remained outside Turkey and the Allied Powers made little effort to hunt them down.

Talaat's memoirs, published after his death, contain the core arguments that have been used by those that have sought to rewrite the history of the Armenian Genocide. Although it is important to compare conflicting interpretations, by analyzing data, identifying sources, and reading critically before making judgment, it is not legitimate scholarship to give credence to denial or intentional distortion or falsification, to revise the history beyond the recognition of its survivors. Israel Charny, editor of the *Encyclopedia of Genocide*, describes denial as a celebration of the crimes of genocide. He believes that killing the record of the truth of the genocide is also killing recorded human history.¹³⁸

Talaat's narrative of the history is crafted to explain away the systematic nature of Young Turk attacks on Armenians. In the opening section, Talaat argues that Turkey had tried to remain neutral at the outset of World War I. A series of political events, Talaat continues, left Turkey with no choice but to join the Germans against Great Britain, France, and Russia: Turkey needed to preserve its own interests against encroachments of the Russians. Moreover, Talaat maintained that there were no deliberate plans for the massacres of Armenians. He wrote:

I admit that we deported many Armenians from our eastern provinces, but we never acted in this matter upon a previously prepared scheme. The responsibility for these acts falls first of all upon the deported people themselves. Russia, in order to lay hand on our eastern provinces, had armed and

equipped the Armenian inhabitants of this district, and had organized strong Armenian bandit forces in the said area. When we entered the great war, these bandits began their destructive activities in the rear of the Turkish Army on the Caucasus front, blowing up the bridges, setting fire to the Turkish towns and villages and killing the innocent [Muslim] inhabitants, regardless of age and sex. They spread death and terror all over the eastern provinces, and endangered the Turkish Army's line of retreat. All these Armenian bandits were helped by the native Armenians. When they were pursued by the Turkish gendarmes, the Armenian villages were a refuge for them. When they needed help, the Armenian peasants around them, taking their arms hidden in their churches, ran to their aid. Every Armenian Church, it was later discovered, was a depot of ammunition. In this disloyal way they killed more than 300,000 [Muslims], and destroyed the communication of the Turkish Army with its bases.

The information that we were receiving from the administrators of these provinces and from the commander of the Caucasian Army gave us details of the most revolting and barbarous activities of the Armenian bandits. It was impossible to shut our eyes to the treacherous acts of the Armenians, at a time when we were engaged in a war which would determine the fate of our country. Even if these atrocities had occurred in a time of peace, our Government would have been obliged to quell such outbreaks. The Porte, acting under the same obligation, and wishing to secure the safety of its army and its citizens, took energetic measures to check these uprisings. The deportation of the Armenians was one of these preventative measures.

I admit also that the deportation was not carried out lawfully everywhere. In some places unlawful acts were committed. The already existing hatred among the Armenians and [Muslims], intensified by the barbarous activities of the former, had created many tragic consequences. Some of the officials abused their authority, and in many places people took preventative measures into their own hands and innocent people were molested. I confess it. . . . I confess . . . that we ought to have acted more sternly, opened up a general investigation for the purpose of finding out all the promoters and looters and punished them severely.

But we could not do that. Although we punished many of the guilty, most of them were untouched. These people, whom we might call outlaws, because of their unlawful attitude in disregarding the order of the Central Government, were divided into two classes. Some of them were acting under personal hatred, or for individual profit. Those who looted the goods of the deported Armenians were easily punishable, and we punished them. But there was another group, who sincerely believed that the general interest of the community necessitated the punishment alike of those Armenians who massacred the guiltless [Muslims] and those who helped the Armenian bandits to endanger our national life. The Turkish elements here referred to were short-sighted, fanatic, and yet sincere in their belief. The public encouraged them.... They were numerous and strong. Their open and immediate punishment would have aroused great discontent among the people, who favored their acts. An endeavor to arrest and to punish all these promoters would have created anarchy in Anatolia at a time when we

greatly needed unity. It would have been dangerous to divide the nation into two camps, when we needed strength to fight outside enemies. We did all that we could, but we preferred to postpone the solution of our internal difficulties until after the defeat of our external enemies. . . .

These preventative measures were taken in every country during the war; but, while the regrettable results were passed over in silence in the other countries, the echo of our acts was heard the world over; because everybody's eyes were upon us.¹³⁹

CONNECTIONS

- ❖ What strategies help historians distinguish between conflicting versions of the same historical event? Why is it important to make judgment and recognize that not all historical accounts are equally valid?
- ❖ How does Talaat try to rationalize the mass murder of the Armenians? What strategies does he use? What language do you find striking? Whom does he hold responsible for the deaths?
- ❖ *Takvim-i-Vekayi*, the official gazette of the Turkish government carried reports on the trials of the Young Turk leaders including the indictment of the military court from April 27, 1919. A passage from the indictment counters many of Talaat's claims.

The disaster visiting the Armenians was not a local or isolated event. It was the result of a pre-meditated decision taken by the central body . . . and excesses which took place were based on oral and written orders issued by that central body. . . . The truth is that Talaat, Enver and Jemal ordered the massacres willingly. In a cipher [telegram] dated July 11, 1915, signed by Talaat Bey, and addressed to the Governors of Diarbekir province of the Urfa district, Talaat ordered the burial of all corpses left along the roads, that they may not be thrown into ditches, caves, lakes or rivers; that it was necessary to burn all the effects of the dead.

This operation has been confirmed by another secret telegram sent by Jemal [Djemal] Pasha, Commander in Chief of the 4th Army in Syria, dated July 1, 1915, addressed to the Governor of Diarbekir. . . . In it, Jemal advised the Governor General to circulate false rumors that "dead bodies found in rivers were possibly those of Armenians who had revolted."¹⁴⁰

Compare Talaat's version of events with the excerpt from the indictment. Notice the choice of language of the indictment. How does it counter Talaat's claims? After reading the indictment, which words or phrases do you find most significant?

Reading 7 — THE LEGACY OF A WITNESS

Armin Wegner personally witnessed the brutality of the Armenian Genocide, and it changed him forever. After he first learned about the atrocities he risked his life to document the destruction of the Armenian population of the Ottoman Empire.

Wegner was born in Wupperthal, Germany, in 1886 and died in Rome, Italy in 1978. As a young man with the German army, he witnessed the Armenian Genocide and took graphic photographs of what he saw. For the rest of his life, he devoted his efforts as a writer, photographer, and poet to human rights.

At the outset of the World War I, Wegner enrolled in the army as a volunteer nurse in Poland. When Turkey joined the alliance with Germany, he was sent to the Middle East as a member of the German Sanitary Corps. Wegner used his leave in the summer months to investigate rumors about the Armenian massacres. Horrified by what he witnessed, Wegner went to work. Serving under German Field Marshal von der Goltz, commander of the sixth Ottoman Army in Turkey, he traveled throughout Asia Minor, photographing the Armenian deportations and the unburied remains of the dead. Deliberately disobeying orders meant to prevent news of the massacres from spreading, Wegner arranged for evidence of the genocide, including photographs, documents, and personal notes to reach contacts in Germany and the United States. Before long, Wegner's mail routes were discovered, and the Turkish government asked the German army to place him under arrest.

Reassigned to the cholera wards, Wegner became seriously ill the fall of 1916 and was sent from Baghdad to Constantinople in November 1916, all the while hiding photographic images of the atrocities in his belt. Wegner was recalled to Germany in 1916. Back home he continued to raise consciousness about the Armenian massacres. In 1919, Wegner published his eyewitness accounts of the atrocities in *The Way of No Return: A Martyrdom in Letters*.

By that time, the map of Europe and Asia was very different from what it had been before the war. The large multinational empires had been broken apart, and new independent nation states were created in their place. The Armenian Republic in Russian Armenia was one of these new states.

Wegner, a German citizen, wrote an open letter to President Wilson calling on the Allied governments to fulfill their obligations to support the nascent Armenian Republic.

I appeal to you at the moment when the Governments allied to you are carrying on peace negotiations in Paris, which will determine the fate of the world for many decades.

But the Armenian people is only a small one among several others; and the future of greater and more prominent states is hanging in the balance. And so there is reason to fear that the importance of a small and extremely enfeebled nation may be obscured by the influential and selfish aims of the great



Courtesy of the Armenian National Institute

A photograph taken by Armin Wegner in 1915 documenting a burial service in a deportation camp.

European States, and that with regard to Armenia there will be a repetition of neglect and oblivion of which she has so often been the victim in the course of her history....

In the Berlin Treaty of July 1878, all the six European Great Powers gave the most solemn guarantees that they would guard the tranquility and security of the Armenian People. But has this promise ever been kept? Even Abdul Hamid's massacres failed to refresh their memory, and in blind greed they pursued selfish aims, not one putting itself forward as the champion of an oppressed people. In the Armistice between Turkey and your Allies, which the Armenians all over the world awaited with anxiety, the Armenian Question is scarcely mentioned.

Shall this unworthy game be repeated a second time, and must the Armenians be once more disillusioned? The future of this small nation must not be relegated to obscurity behind the selfish schemes and plans of the great states. . . .

Mr. President, pride prevents me from pleading for my own people. I have no doubt that, out of the depths of its sorrow, they will find the force to co-operate, making sacrifices for the future redemption of the world.

But, on behalf of the Armenian Nation, which has been so utterly humiliated, I venture to intervene, for if, after this war, it is not given reparation for its fearful sufferings, it will be lost forever.¹⁴¹

By 1921, the Armenian Republic was lost. When Kemalist forces invaded the small republic, its leaders turned to the new Russian Bolshevik government for protection. Just a few years later, Wegner reeled in horror when the Nazis came to power in his own country, bringing with them a vile racism that Wegner found familiar. In the months after Hitler became chancellor of Germany, anti-Jewish legislation swept the country. Unable to remain only a witness, Wegner delivered a letter, through intermediaries, to Hitler pleading for an end to the persecution of the Jews to save the soul of Germany. Nazi officials had Wegner arrested but it did not silence him. He continued to try to speak out to protect the Jews from the brutal end suffered by the Armenians he had photographed.

In 1966, on the fifty-first anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, Wegner described the frustration of being a witness to an atrocity that had been nearly forgotten.

This is what happened to the witness who tried to have their tragedy and their end known. He continued to bear the burden of his promise to remember the dead once back in the West. But no one listened anymore.

Fifty years have passed. The people of even larger nations have experienced great suffering. The witness remains, full of shame and feeling a little guilty for he has seen things that one can see without risking one's life. Does this not perhaps mean that he must die like one who has seen the face of God?

There is silence all about him. In whatever direction he turns, he knocks on closed doors. "We have our own sorrow!" they think or say. "We bear the tragedies of our own people. Why should we torment ourselves with the pain of others, long forgotten?"

They want to live without worry or sorrow, and go through life knowing nothing about the violence and troubles of the preceding generation. At the beginning of the Twenties, when the witness of these horrors foresaw that the same thing could occur in the West, and illustrated what he had seen with numerous photographs and all the documentation that he could collect from the extermination camps, those that came to know of these things in Germany and in neighboring countries were seized with fear but thought, "The Arabian desert is so far away!"¹⁴²

CONNECTIONS

- ❖ Wegner describes himself as a witness to the Armenian Genocide. What are the responsibilities of people who have witnessed an injustice? When are they relieved of those responsibilities?
- ❖ Wegner's photographs are housed at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Samples from the collection may be viewed on line at <http://www.armenian-genocide.org/photo-wegner/index.htm>. After viewing the photographs, discuss their impact. How do they add to your understanding of the genocide?

- ❖ Wegner tried to save Jews from the same end that met the Armenians. Imagine if the world had paid attention. What lessons should have been learned from this history?
- ❖ How does Wegner describe the world's responsibility towards the Armenian people to President Wilson? What arguments does he make for U.S. intervention? Which do you personally find most convincing? Least effective? Which arguments do you imagine would resonate with the President?
- ❖ Wegner writes about the reactions he gets when he reminds people of the treatment of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. People responded, "We have our own sorrow.... We bear the tragedies of our own people. Why should we torment ourselves with the pain of others, long forgotten?" How would you answer those comments?
- ❖ What lesson does Wegner hope to impart when he reminds readers that when people learned of the Armenian Genocide in Germany they "were seized with fear but thought, 'The Arabian desert is so far away'"?
- ❖ Photographs serve as a powerful record of human rights abuses. James Natchwey, a contemporary photojournalist, has used his camera to awake the moral conscience of people throughout the world. *War Photographer*, a film on Natchwey, is available from the Facing History and Ourselves library.



Reading 8 — REMEMBRANCE AND DENIAL

Even at the very beginning of the Armenian Genocide, plans were already under way to distort the facts about the massacres.¹⁴³ The posthumous release of Talaat's memoirs set a pattern of rationalization and deflection of responsibility that has continued into the twenty-first century. After the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 effectively ended all talk of the "Armenian Question," Turkey concentrated on building a modern state and used all means to suppress any memory or mention of the genocide. Mustafa Kemal Pasha, who took the name Atatürk—father of the Turks, was the leader of the new Turkish Republic and insisted that there had been no systematic mass murder of the Armenians. The Allied Powers remained silent in the face of the historical revisionism. United in their anti-Communism, they viewed Atatürk's Turkey as a strategic ally against the newly formed Soviet Union, which had come to include what was left of historic Armenia. At the same time, all efforts of the immediate postwar Turkish government to prosecute war criminals for brutalities against Armenians were forgotten; records were buried in the archives and closed off to scholars unsympathetic to the new Turkish policy of denial.

Deniers and revisionists have used many different strategies and many different arguments while attempting to turn what was everyday knowledge into myth. By the 1960s, deniers hoped to take advantage of a climate of openness. They argued that teachers, journalists, and public officials should "tell the other side of the story." At the same time, deniers worked to censor United Nations reports by blocking mention of the genocide and by countering resolutions in the United States that would have recognized April 24 as a national day of remembrance of the Armenian Genocide.¹⁴⁴

In the 1980s, deniers expanded their work to universities and other academic institutions. In 1982, a grant from the Turkish government helped to create the Institute of Turkish Studies in Washington, D.C. At the time of its inception through 1994, the Institute's executive director was Dr. Heath Lowry. Through his work at the institute, Lowry advised the Turkish ambassador to the United States about the work being done by scholars of the Armenian Genocide. The ambassador, in turn, used his position to intimidate authors who dared write about the genocide. It is possible that nobody would have found out if Lowry's notes to the ambassador hadn't ended up in a letter mailed to Robert Jay Lifton, author of *The Nazi Doctors*.¹⁴⁵

Lifton, a prominent psychiatrist and historian whose work often investigates the roots of violence, wrote about the Armenian Genocide in his book about doctors who participated in the Holocaust. Lowry's letter tried to refute Lifton's scholarship on the Armenian Genocide by concentrating on his footnotes. Lowry wrote to the ambassador, "our problem is less with Lifton than it is with the works upon which he relies. Lifton is simply the end of the chain."¹⁴⁶ Lowry drafted a letter to Lifton for the ambassador to sign, declaring: "I was shocked by references in your work . . . to the so-called 'Armenian Genocide,' allegedly perpetrated by the Ottoman Turks during the First World War."¹⁴⁷ By accident, Lifton received both the memo and the draft letter, and a letter from the ambassador that was almost a word for word copy of Lowry's draft.

Lifton and his colleagues questioned why. Why do deniers deny a history that is overwhelmingly supported by historical evidence, including primary sources, eyewitness accounts, testimony of the perpetrators, survivor recollections, convictions in post-war Turkish courts, and physical evidence? Lifton wondered if it is possible that the deniers believe their own distortions and considered what it means if they do not. Were they denying the genocide simply to advance their careers? In an article examining the ethics of denial, Lifton and his colleagues wrote:

"Careerism" is a complicated phenomenon, but for our purposes we would identify two forms ... that it may take: one that is oriented toward material goals, and one that involves the satisfactions that go with power. Both share the "thoughtlessness" that Hannah Arendt saw as the essence of the "banality of evil": an imaginative blindness that prevents one from reflecting upon the consequences from one's actions. . . . Arendt also speaks of a "willed evil," and the second type of careerism is not far removed from this: not simply the obliviousness to hurt, but the calculated infliction of hurt.¹⁴⁸

In 1998, Lifton was one of more than a hundred prominent scholars who signed a petition circulated by Peter Balakian as an effort to counter denial efforts by commemorating the genocide and deploring the Turkish government's denial of this "crime against humanity."

*Denial of genocide strives to reshape history in order to demonize the victims and rehabilitate the perpetrators. Denial of genocide is the final stage of genocide. It is what Elie Wiesel has called a "double killing." Denial murders the dignity of the survivors and seeks to destroy remembrance of the crime. In a century plagued by genocide, we affirm the moral necessity of remembering.*¹⁴⁹

CONNECTIONS

- ✦ Why do you think the Turkish government has invested so much money and energy in denying the reality of the Armenian Genocide? What does it require of a nation to face the truth of its past errors? What actions can nations take to face their own histories of collective violence and genocide?

A petition signed by prominent scholars commemorating the Genocide.

[illegible]

- ❖ What are the ways in which individuals can respond to denial? What options does a prominent scholar like Lifton have that aren't available to the average citizen?
- ❖ In the past, denial efforts have prevented some public recognition of the Armenian Genocide, but at the same time scholars have continued to study the history and write about it. Are there ways to measure the impact of denial? What would they be?
- ❖ Lifton and his colleagues, Smith and Markusen, suggest reasons why people might deny the Armenian Genocide. Can you think of others?
- ❖ Lifton and his colleagues write that behind some denial there is "the 'thoughtlessness' that Hannah Arendt saw as the essence of the 'banality of evil': an imaginative blindness that prevents one from reflecting upon the consequences of one's actions." What do they mean? Do you agree?
- ❖ What is the difference between the "thoughtlessness" of banal evil and "willed evil"? Do the differences alter the action or simply the motivation behind them? Who do you find more responsible, someone who is thoughtless or someone who acts intentionally? Who is more dangerous?
- ❖ The authors of the petition wrote that "in a century plagued by genocide" there is a "moral necessity of remembering." What makes something a moral necessity?
- ❖ The scholars and writers who signed the statement believe that "denial is the final stage of genocide." What does denial accomplish? For whom?
- ❖ Why is it important to acknowledge past atrocities? How can acknowledgement of injustice influence victims, perpetrators, bystanders, and their descendants?
- ❖ The Turkish government attempts to resist official recognition of the Armenian Genocide. Despite that pressure, a growing number of countries now formally recognize the history. The United States is not one of them. In the fall of 2000, the House Foreign Relations Committee approved a resolution acknowledging the Armenian Genocide and sent it to the full House for a vote. The State Department and the Clinton Administration prevented the resolution from coming to a vote in the face of threatened military and economic retaliation from the Turkish government, and this was repeated in the administration of George W. Bush. What would acknowledging the genocide accomplish? Is the decision to formally recognize the genocide a moral or a political decision?



Refer to *Facing History and Ourselves Holocaust and Human Behavior* for a story about U.S. Senator Robert Dole's efforts to bring attention to the Armenian Genocide.

Reading 2 — DENIAL, FREE SPEECH, AND HATE SPEECH

Scholar and philosophy professor Henry Theriault believes that denial of the Armenian Genocide is tantamount to hate speech. Theriault explains:

In recent decades, the international denial campaign has intensified in reaction to growing calls for acknowledgement of and restitution for the genocide. Beyond activities by diplomatic leaders and staff, the Turkish government since the 1960s has spent millions of dollars in the United States on denialist public relations and political lobbying. The Turkish government and its supporters have also funded chairs at prestigious United States universities awarded to prominent deniers. Typical denial arguments contend that documentation of the genocide is inconclusive, biased, or falsified, that the genocide was actually a civil war or mutual conflict in which the Turks were also killed and for which Armenians likewise bear responsibility; or that Armenian deaths in 1915 and after were not the result of a deliberate, centrally-orchestrated extermination program.

In the United States and elsewhere, Armenian organizations and activists as well as comparative genocide, Holocaust, and Armenian Studies scholars have done much to teach the public about this tragedy. Yet, active denial backed by political blackmail has blocked general recognition and restitution.¹⁵⁰

Theriault believes that academic and historical openness have created a climate of relativism, in which all versions of the past are treated as equally valid. This, he argues, has contributed to a failure to recognize the serious consequences of denial on Armenian individuals and on the Armenian community and has played into the hands of those that willfully deny the historical facts. “Academic relativism,” as Theriault understands it, “is the belief that any viewpoint held by a scholar declaring expertise is automatically a credible perspective.”¹⁵¹ Deniers, then, are able to claim expertise and despite the overwhelming documentation of the genocide, relativists “retreat into a neutrality that accepts all parties to the ‘debate’ as equally worthy simply by their status as academics. As a consequence, they avoid the Armenian Question in teaching and writing because they believe the history uncertain, or they promote in their classrooms and other forums a two-sided approach that validates denial.”¹⁵² Furthermore, their attitude influences other researchers and educators.

Theriault notes: “At its most extreme, academic relativism takes the form of historical relativism. Historical relativists believe that, where there are competing versions of historical periods or events, there is no ultimate fact of the matter. Each perspective or side is as accurate as the other.” This is a problem because people often fail to consider the overwhelming evidence. As Theriault reminds us: “There is a wealth of it [evidence] showing unequivocally that the Turkish government carried out a premeditated, centrally-planned, systematic program to exterminate its Armenian subjects. A properly critical attitude would distinguish between the failure to be aware of compelling evidence because one has not investigated the issue adequately and a genuine shortfall of evidence.”¹⁵³

In the meantime, denial has consequences. Theriault reasons that “deniers are ‘accessories after the fact of genocide,’ who have so far prevented an international political and legal process affirming the genocide, requiring appropriate restitution, and curbing further Turkish mistreatment of Armenians.”¹⁵⁴ One outgrowth of the failure is that people in Turkey are able to reap benefit from the land and money claimed from victims of the Armenian Genocide. There is also psychological harm that the genocide and its subsequent denial caused the victims, their descendents, and the larger Armenian community, as well as the impact on individual identity that is caused by preventing people from being able to properly mourn the dead. Professor Theriault writes: “Deniers operate as agents of the original perpetrators [of the genocide], pursuing and hounding victims through time. Through these agents, the perpetrators reach once again into the lives of the victims long after their escape from the perpetrators’ physical grasp.”¹⁵⁵

Deniers have disrupted efforts to commemorate the Armenian Genocide and hounded those that tried to speak about the genocide publicly. Theriault notes that often these deniers hide behind the First Amendment.

Deniers often complain that their free speech rights are suppressed when their views do not appear alongside published statements about the genocide or if in public forums these statements are given more attention than denialist claims. Such protests distort the meaning of freedom of speech. The right does not guarantee access to the podium during a discussion of the genocide, publication of a response to a newspaper or scholarly article on the genocide, or automatic inclusion of denial sources next to information on the genocide in school curricula.



Project SAVE Armenian Photograph Archives, Inc., Courtesy of James Tashjian

New York City, Fifth Avenue at 42nd Street, April 24, 1975. Armenian Martyrs' Day; Armenians march in front of the New York Public Library.

Professor Theriault argues that until the harm done by denial is stopped, there should be regulation of denial based on current regulations that restrict hate speech. Theriault proposes:

Legal restriction of public dissemination of denial of the Armenian Genocide would entail a law barring denial and setting penalties for it or authorizing civil suits against deniers. The law need not determine particular statements to be counted as denial but rather offer general guidelines for determining this. Because universities, colleges, scholarly associations, and sometimes school systems have greater latitude in setting limits in hate speech than Congress or a lower-level legislature, they could ban denial in the absence of laws doing so. . . . Crucial for anyone found guilty of denial would be an order to cease and desist. A just remedy would in addition require a statement affirming the genocide as a historical fact.¹⁵⁶

CONNECTIONS

- ❖ Theriault writes: “At its most extreme, academic relativism takes the form of historical relativism.” What is relativism? How is relativism different than being open to other possibilities?
- ❖ According to Theriault, what are the consequences of denial?
- ❖ Create a working definition for the term “hate speech.” How is hate speech different from a matter of opinion? How does Theriault compare hate speech and genocide denial?
- ❖ Theriault and others believe that “academic relativists” become bystanders while denial does real harm to individuals and the larger society. Revisit your definition of bystander. What arguments could be made to support Theriault’s claim that academic relativists are bystanders?
- ❖ What is the purpose of a debate? What ground rules are useful to ensure that a debate leads to understanding? Do deniers follow those rules?
- ❖ How can educators validate multiple points of view without creating an atmosphere in which every comment is understood as equally true?
- ❖ What arguments does Theriault use to make the case for prohibiting denial? What other arguments would you add? Does his proposal raise concerns for you? What are they? Create a structured debate of Professor Theriault’s proposal in your class. First agree on some ground rules. Divide the class into three groups. One group should brainstorm arguments in support of Theriault’s proposal. Another should brainstorm arguments against the proposal. The third group, the judges, should try to work on a rubric to score the debate.

Reading 10 — DEMANDING JUSTICE

Where does justice come from? Is it achieved? Is it obtained? How do you know when it is fulfilled? Nafina Hagop Chilinguirian, scholar Peter Balakian's grandmother, did not rely on international treaties and tribunals to right the wrongs that had been done to her family. Rather, she took legal action to express her personal outrage.

Chilinguirian survived a death march during which her husband, a U.S. Citizen, was killed. After the war, the United States government supported claims against foreign governments for the loss of life or injury suffered by citizens of the United States. Since Chilinguirian's husband had been a U.S. citizen, she reasoned that she was entitled to compensation for his loss, the loss of his property, and the loss of nearly their entire family. With the help of a lawyer in Newark, New Jersey, Chilinguirian filled out an application seeking the support of the U.S. government for her claims against Turkey. She answered Question 63 on the form by detailing the facts and circumstances surrounding her husband's death.

At 1 August 1915, our parish in Diarbekir was besieged by the gendarmes under the command of the Vali of Diarbekir. The same day with the menace of death they removed us, the Armenians. We could take by us only our ready money, if it was easy to take, our birth and marriage certificates; my husband Hagop Chilinguirian's Naturalization Paper and Passport; all our other goods were left behind. The Turk officers



Courtesy of Peter Balakian

The Chilinguirian family, circa 1914. Nafina is seated in the middle. Her brothers and sisters in the photograph were murdered in August 1915.

of the Turkish government and by their allowance the Turk people plundered and captured our goods left behind. The deporter gendarmes separated the men from the women, and binding them to each other, they carried all of us to an unknown direction. After three days journey, they killed one by one the man deportees of whom only a few were saved. So were killed mercilessly my brothers and sisters, and other relatives mentioned in the answer 55. My husband in spite of that he was a citizen of the U.S.A., was forced to be deported with us, his Naturalization paper and Passport being taken of him by the gendarmes. As he was feeble and indisposed, being subjected to such conditions, and seeing our relatives killed unhumanly; he could not support the life, and died, leaving me a widow with my two orphan daughters named Zivart 7 years old and Arshalois 5 years old. We, the remaining of the deportees, women and children, were forced to walk without being allowed even to buy some bread to eat. Frequently we were robbed by Turks and the gendarmes, as if they would carry us safely to our destiny which was entirely unknown to us. So for thirty two days we were obliged to wander through mountains and valleys. Fatigue and hunger enforced by the whip of the cruel gen-

darmes, diminished the number of the deportees. After many dangers whose description would take much time, a few women and children, included I myself, arrived at Aleppo, Syria, in the beginning of September 1915. Since then I am supported by the Hon. Consulate of U.S.A. in Aleppo, Syria. The deportation itself and the fiendish steps taken against the Armenians in general being well known by the civilized world, I do not mention other evidence concerning this matter. Only I assert that 1) The Turkish government is responsible for the losses and injuries happened to me, because I am a human being and a citizen of U.S.A., I am under the support of human and International law. 2) That the circumstances being very extraordinary, and our deportation unawares, it was impossible to have by me the documentary evidences concerning my losses and injuries; but my co-deportees, saved of death by any way, witness that I am the very owner and proprietor of the said losses and injuries occurred. Herewith I attach their affidavit.¹⁵⁷

Chilinguirian's total claim for was \$167,750. Among the items and property lost which she enumerated in her claim were the names of 13 family members, the contents of a dry goods store, jewels, and money. No action was taken on Chilinguirian's claim despite her husband's status as a U.S. citizen. In fact, no one in the Balakian family spoke of it until Peter Balakian's aunt pulled the yellowed document from a drawer in the 1980s.

CONNECTIONS

- ❖ What forms can justice take? If Chilinguirian had received compensation for her claim would that have been just? Would she have obtained justice?
- ❖ One strategy in pursuing justice for the victims of mass atrocity and their descendents has been to insist on reparations, including financial compensation, after mass atrocities. Do you think Armenian descendents of the genocide are entitled to reparations?
- ❖ In January 2004, almost 90 years after the Armenian Genocide, the New York Life Insurance Company agreed to settle 2,400 unpaid claims and pay \$20 million to the descendants of those who were killed. What are the limits of financial compensation as a means toward justice and healing?
- ❖ The crimes of the Armenian Genocide were perpetrated under the Ottoman Empire. In 1923, the empire was replaced by the Republic of Turkey. Should the current Turkish Republic be financially accountable for reparations to Armenians? What should be done about the countless individuals who benefited by obtaining confiscated Armenian goods and property? Do those that have benefited from atrocity have a responsibility towards the victims and their descendents?
- ❖ In the 1980s, the United States Congress voted reparations for Japanese Americans interned in camps during World War II. Why do you think these claims were finally honored while a claim after World War I has remained dormant for eight decades?

Reading 11 — MEETING THE PAST

After massive popular demonstrations throughout Soviet Armenia in 1965, the fiftieth anniversary of the genocide, Soviet leaders were compelled to commission architects S. Kalashian and L. Mkrtchian to build a monument on a hilltop in Yerevan. Every year, on April 24—the anniversary of the beginning of the Armenian Genocide—thousands of people come to the monument to remember the history.

In *Passage to Ararat*, Michael J. Arlen writes about his struggle to come to terms with his dead father and their identity as Armenians. Arlen travels to what was then Soviet Armenia and is assigned a guide, Sarkis, who brings him to the genocide memorial shortly after he arrives. At the time, Arlen feels disconnected from the genocide and the need to remember. Throughout his visit to Armenia, Arlen is conflicted about his relationship to Armenian history and culture. Before returning to the United States, Sarkis takes him back to the monument for a second visit, it is there that he is able to come to terms with his identity.

How strange it is to finally meet one's past: to simply meet it, the way one might finally acknowledge a person who had been in one's company a long while. So, it's you.

I was standing by myself beneath the overhanging slabs of the monument, looking into the fire. I remember thinking that if I had a flower in my hand I would gladly have thrown it into the fire, but that I hadn't remembered to pick one. My eyes went out to the open fields beyond the fire, the fields



© Dave Bartlett/CORBIS

People stand around the eternal flame that burns as part of a monument to the victims of the Armenian Genocide, ca. 1980s Yerevan, Armenia.

of yellow flowers. I thought that it didn't matter about the flower; I thought suddenly that I was home. It was the flattest, simplest, lightest of feelings. I thought, So this is what it's all about.

And then I felt my father's hand in mine. It was so strong a feeling that today I can almost (but not quite) recover that imaginary touch. But what I responded to was not merely the "touch"—I had felt that before at many moments in my life. One of the key memories of my childhood had been a nearly tactile recollection of being pulled by the hand (were we running? walking?) by my father down an unremembered street—an unremembered time except for the pull of the hand, even his face out of sight, his expression unknown, only his arm extending from a dark overcoat.

But I knew that this time it was different, and as I stood there I knew that it would always be different (as it has been). For the hand I felt was not pulling me; it was the hand of a man which I had briefly held in my own one afternoon in New York, the hand of my father dying. His hand had been so small—smaller than mine—and I remember how the feel of this hand had been such a shock to me then (more than his fading speech, or pale features, or struggle of recognition): the hand of my father, who was releasing me, releasing himself from me, and me from him (if either thing were possible between fathers and sons). And I had not known how to grip him back. But here his hand was again. I felt that hand in mine. I felt somehow I had brought him here—to this place. I didn't know what else I felt or knew, but I wept, large tears streaming down my face. I wasn't even sure for what. Nor did it feel bad. On the contrary it felt quite natural.¹⁵⁸

CONNECTIONS

- ❖ What does it mean to come to “finally meet one's past”? How is it different from knowing what happened in the past?
- ❖ What is it about being at the monument that allowed Arlen to reconnect with his father and their Armenian identity?
- ❖ How do individuals and nations heal after genocide? Is it possible?
- ❖ At the Armenian Genocide Memorial in Yerevan it is customary to place flowers around the eternal flame. How do you interpret that ritual? What is its meaning? What rituals for remembering the past do you participate in? How do memorials inform how you think about the past? Do they inform how you think about your role in society?



To learn more about memorials and monuments, visit Facing History and Ourselves online module *Memory, History Memorials* at www.facinghistory.org.

Reading 12 — THE CRIME OF GENOCIDE

Journalist and human rights activist Samantha Power writes that the trial of Soghomon Tehlirian stirred up deep moral reflection in Raphael Lemkin, a 21-year-old Polish Jew studying linguistics at the University of Lvov. He raised the issue with a law professor. Power describes the exchange.

Lemkin asked why the Armenians did not have Talaat arrested for the massacre. The professor said there was no law under which he could be arrested. "Consider the case of a farmer who owns a flock of chickens," he said. "He kills them and this is his business. If you interfere, you are trespassing."

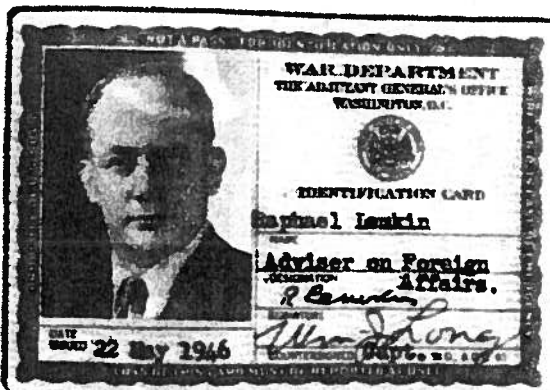
"It is a crime for Tehlirian to kill a man, but it is not a crime for his oppressor to kill more than a million men?" Lemkin asked. "This is most inconsistent."

Lemkin was appalled that the banner of "state sovereignty" could shield men who tried to wipe out an entire minority. "Sovereignty," Lemkin argued to the professor; "implies conducting an independent foreign and internal policy, building schools, construction of roads . . . all types of activity directed towards the welfare of people. Sovereignty cannot be conceived as the right to kill millions of innocent people." But it was states, and particularly strong states, that made the rules.¹⁵⁹

Lemkin set about to change the rules. After all, they had not worked for the Armenians. The international community first failed to intervene as innocent Armenians were slaughtered. Then it lacked the political will to prosecute those responsible. Maybe, he thought, if there was a law that made mass murder a crime without state boundaries, people like Tehlirian would not fill the vacuum with the need for revenge.

During the 1920s Lemkin became a lawyer and drafted a law challenging the issue of state sovereignty. In 1933, the same year that the Nazis came to power in Germany, Lemkin planned to present his ideas before an international criminal conference in Madrid.

Courtesy of the American Jewish Historical Society
New York, NY and Newton Centre, MA



The U.S. War Department I.D. card of Raphael Lemkin

Power writes:

Lemkin drafted a paper that drew attention to both Hitler's ascent and to the Ottoman slaughter of the Armenians, a crime that most Europeans either had ignored or filed away as an "Eastern" phenomenon. If it happened once, the young lawyer urged, it would happen again. If it happened there, he argued, it could happen here. If the international community ever hoped to prevent mass slaughter of the kind the Armenians

had suffered, he insisted, the world's states would have to unite in a campaign to ban the practice. With that in mind, Lemkin had prepared a law that would prohibit the destruction of nations, races, and religious groups. The law hinged on what he called "universal repression," a precursor to what today is called "universal jurisdiction": The instigators and perpetrators of these acts should be punished wherever they were caught, regardless of where the crime was committed, or the criminals' nationality or official status. The attempt to wipe out national, ethnic, or religious groups like the Armenians would become an international crime that could be punished anywhere, like slavery and piracy. The threat of punishment, Lemkin argued, would yield a change in practice.¹⁶⁰

Unable to present the legislation in person, Lemkin was disappointed by the response his paper received. One delegate to the conference wrote that crimes of this sort occurred "too seldom to legislate." Others wondered why these issues should concern them at all. Despite the setback, Lemkin pushed on, presenting his legislation at law conferences in Budapest, Copenhagen, Paris, Amsterdam, and Cairo. Samantha Power notes that Lemkin "was not the only European who had learned from the past. So, too, had Hitler."

She explains:

Six years after the Madrid conference, in August of 1939, Hitler met with his military chiefs and delivered a notorious tutorial on a central lesson of the recent past: Victors write the history books. He declared:

"It was knowingly and lightheartedly that Genghis Khan sent thousands of women and children to their deaths. History sees in him only the founder of a state. . . . The aim of war is not to reach definite lines but to annihilate the enemy physically. It is by this means that we shall obtain the vital living space that we need. Who today still speaks of the massacre of the Armenians?"¹⁶¹

In 1939, Lemkin, a Jew, fled when the Nazis invaded Poland. While Lemkin pursued his research in the libraries of Europe, his friends, family, and colleagues found themselves under Nazi rule. Lemkin listened carefully as people throughout the world struggled to find the right words to describe the horrors of Nazi brutality. In the early 1940s, Lemkin was living in the United States, doing what he could to find an audience for his message that the international community had to do something to stop Hitler's crimes. Most people, including Vice President Henry Wallace and President Franklin Roosevelt, listened politely, but the timing was wrong. Some simply failed to respond.

Perhaps he was using the wrong language. He knew his legal reasoning was sound, but how could he get people to pay attention? Before Lemkin met with Roosevelt, one of the president's aides suggested that he summarize his proposals in a one-page memo. How was he to do that? How do you "compress the pain of millions, the fear of nations, the hopes for salvation from death" into one page, Lemkin asked. After hearing Winston Churchill tell the world: "We are in the presence of a crime without a name," Lemkin, a former student of linguistics, came to believe that if he could find the right name people would listen.

Power writes:

"Mass murder" was inadequate because it failed to incorporate the singular motive behind the perpetration of the crime he had in mind. "Denationalization," a word that had been used to describe attempts to destroy a nation and wipe out its cultural personality, failed because it had come to mean depriving citizens of citizenship. And "Germanization," "Magyarization," and other specified words connoting forced assimilation of culture came up short because they could not be applied universally and because they did not convey biological destruction. . . .

The word that Lemkin settled upon was a hybrid that combined the Greek derivative geno, meaning "race" or "tribe," together with the Latin derivative cide, from caedere, meaning "killing." "Genocide" was short, it was novel, and it was not likely to be mispronounced. Because of the word's lasting association with Hitler's horrors, it would also send shudders down the spines of those who heard it.¹⁶²

In his book *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, Lemkin documented the way the Nazis used the legal system to turn society inside out. In the book he describes genocide as a "coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves."¹⁶³ It did not mean that the groups had to be physically annihilated to suffer. It implied cultural destruction as well as mass murder.

During World War II, the word "genocide" was included in *Webster's New International Dictionary*. On December 3, 1944, a *Washington Post* editorial claimed that genocide was the only word that properly described the murder of Jews at Auschwitz. While these were signs of progress, Lemkin was not simply trying to create new language, instead, he was trying to use language as a tool to make mass atrocity a violation of international law. In a letter to the *New York Times* on November 8, 1946, Lemkin wrote:

It seems inconsistent with our concepts of civilization that selling a drug to an individual is a matter of worldly concern, while gassing millions of human beings might be a problem of internal concern. It seems also inconsistent with our philosophy of life that abduction of one woman for prostitution is an international crime, while sterilization of millions of women remains an internal affair of the state in question.¹⁶⁴

As the Nuremberg trials unfolded in the aftermath of the Nazi Holocaust, Lemkin was there to push for his legislation making genocide a crime against humanity. It was at Nuremberg that he learned that at least 49 members of his family were killed by the Nazis. More determined than ever, Lemkin listened as one of the British prosecutors explained to a Nazi defendant that in the indictment he was being charged "among other things, with genocide." Samantha Power notes: "This was the first official mention of genocide in an international legal setting."¹⁶⁵

After Nuremberg, Lemkin went to the newly formed United Nations. In a climate of optimism, Lemkin lobbied UN delegates nonstop. On December 11, 1946, the General Assembly unanimously passed a resolution defining genocide as “the denial of the right of existence of entire human groups” which is “contrary to moral law and the spirit and aims of the United Nations.” The resolution went further; it asked a committee to draft a treaty banning the practice. Two years later, with Lemkin acting as one-man lobby, the United Nations passed the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which declares “genocide, whether committed in time of peace or in time of war, is a crime under international law which [the United Nations] undertake to prevent and to punish.”

Since that ratification of the genocide convention, war criminals have been prosecuted both by domestic and international courts. In 2002, the United Nations established a permanent international criminal court to try the crime of genocide and other cases of massive abuse of human rights.

CONNECTIONS

- ❖ After learning about the treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, Lemkin failed to understand why the Armenians did not have Talaat arrested. Lemkin’s law professor argued that Turkey did not break any laws. To explain, he asked Lemkin to “consider the case of a farmer who owns a flock of chickens,” he said. “He kills them and this is his business. If you interfere, you are trespassing.” How would you respond to the analogy presented by the professor? Does it work as a framework to consider ways to respond to the intentional murder of over a million people?
- ❖ Power writes that after the Armenian Genocide few people understood that the problem was universal. Even after terrible crimes befall people in faraway places, most of us fail to imagine that something similar could happen where we live. Why?
- ❖ What did Lemkin hope to accomplish by making mass murder an international crime? Why was it so hard for him to persuade people to act on his proposals?



© Gilles Peress, Magnum Photos

*Survivors of the Rwanda Genocide, 1994.
Tutsi refugees on the road to Kabgayi.*

- ❖ In 1939 Hitler asked: “Who today still speaks of the massacre of the Armenians?” What did Hitler learn from the way the world responded to the Armenian Genocide? What have you learned from this study about preventing mass violence?
- ❖ How does finding language focus attention on a problem? Samantha Power, a scholar of genocide and human rights, states that during the blood bath in Rwanda U.S. officials were careful not to use the word *genocide*.

Even after the reality of genocide in Rwanda had become irrefutable, when bodies were shown choking the Kagera River on the nightly news, the brute fact of the slaughter failed to influence U.S. policy except in a negative way. American officials, for a variety of reasons, shunned the use of what became known as “the g-word.” They felt that using it would have obliged the United States to act, under the terms of the 1948 Genocide Convention. They also believed, understandably, that it would harm U.S. credibility to name the crime and then do nothing to stop it. A discussion paper on Rwanda, prepared by an official in the Office of the Secretary of Defense and dated May 1, testifies to the nature of official thinking. Regarding issues that might be brought up at the next interagency working group, it stated,

1. Genocide Investigation: Language that calls for an international investigation of human rights abuses and possible violations of the genocide convention. Be Careful. Legal at State was worried about this yesterday—Genocide finding could commit [the U.S. government] to actually “do something.” [Emphasis added.]¹⁶⁶

Would it made a difference if the president had declared the events in Rwanda as genocide? Why do you think the U.S. officials were reluctant “do something”?

- ❖ Article 2 of the Genocide Convention defines genocide as:

“any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

“(a) Killing members of the group;

“(b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;

“(c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;

“(d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;

“(e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.”

Some people claim that each of the following is an example of genocide:

The destruction of the Native American population by various colonial powers and later the United States.

The enslavement of Africans in the United States.

Iraq's treatment of the Kurds before and after the first Gulf War.

The suffering of the people of East Timor during the 1980s and 1990s.

The mass murder of Bosnian Muslims during the 1990s.

Research one of these cases or another case of which you are aware. Using the definition offered by the Genocide Convention, decide whether it was genocide. Present your findings to the class. Do your classmates agree with your assessment? What difficulties did you encounter in trying to reach a consensus on what constitutes genocide?



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