



*“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. Vartan 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.

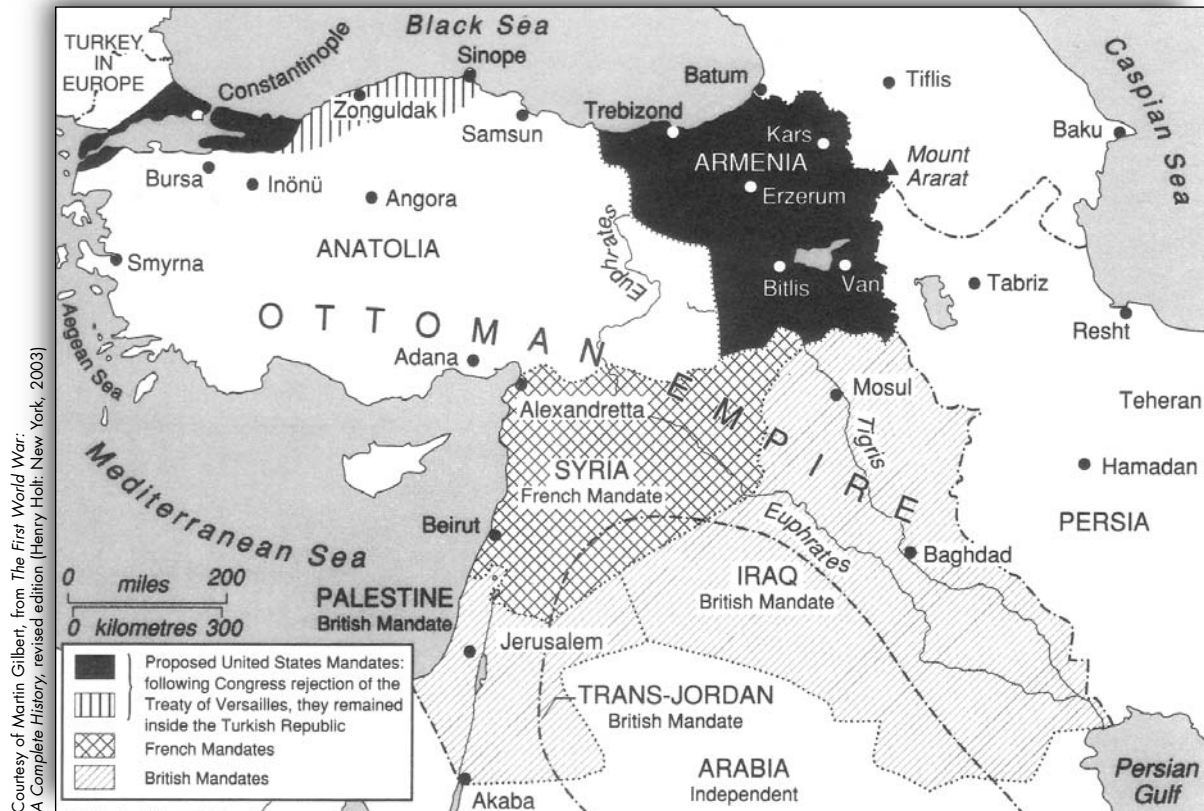


Armenian deportees returning home to Marash from exile. Marash, Cilician Armenia, Ottoman Empire, 1919. Photo by E. Stanley Kerr, medical missionary.

Project SAVE Armenian Photograph Archives, Inc.,
Courtesy of Vartan Hantunian

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
<p>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.</p>	<p>The United States has prior and nearer foreign obligations, and ample responsibilities with domestic problems growing out of the war.</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>America is practically the unanimous choice and fervent hope of all the peoples involved.</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>It would definitely stop further massacres of Armenians and other Christians, give justice to the Turks, Kurds, Greeks, and other peoples.</p>	<p>Peace and justice would be equally assured under any other of the great powers.</p>

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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 chosen 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

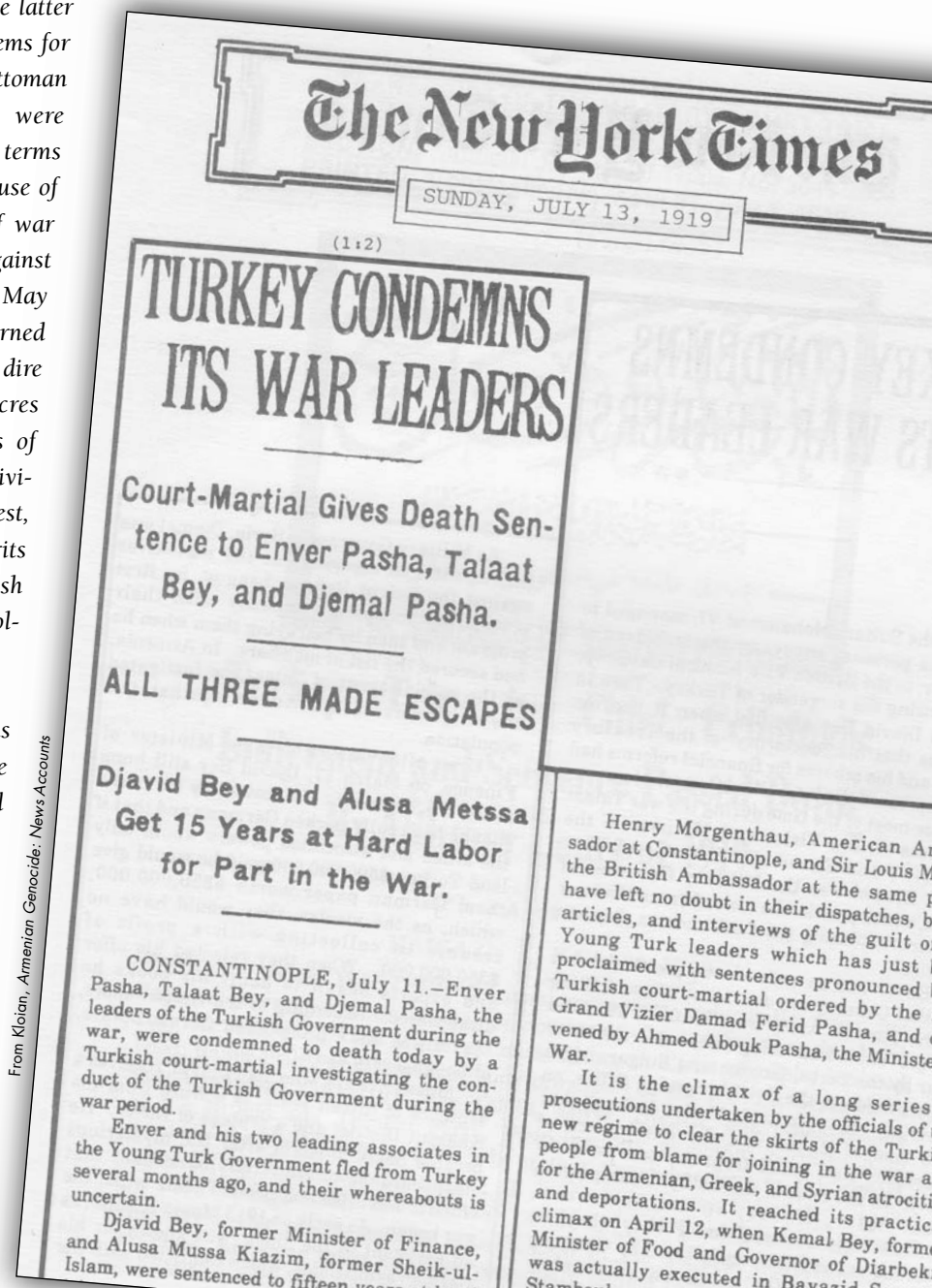
After the Mudros Armistice in October 1918 which officially ended the war in the Ottoman Empire, the Allied leaders knew that somebody had to be held accountable for the massacres. In an article titled “The Trial of Perpetrators by the Turkish Military Tribunals: The Case of Yozgat,” German scholar Annette 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 Kloian, *Armenian Genocide: News Accounts*



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 Izzet 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?

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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 Art. Some images © 2003-2004 www.clipart.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.



©Hulton 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.



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

Courtesy of Thea Halo

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?



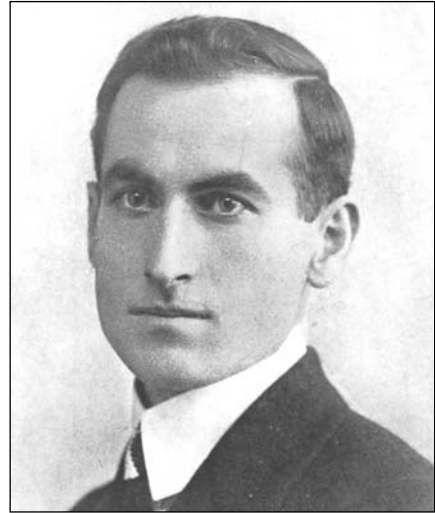
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Turkish crowds in Smyrna, 1922, at the symbolic end of the Christian presence in the Ottoman Empire.

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.



Courtesy of Project SAFE Armenian Photograph Archives, Inc.,
Courtesy of Faith Cass

Soghomon Tehlirian

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



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

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 [Djermal] 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 9 — 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 Wuppertal, 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.



Courtesy of the Armenian National Institute

- 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 descendents?
- 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 9 ↪ 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 II — 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



© Dove Bartruff/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.

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



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

*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?



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

© Gilles Peress, Magnum Photos

- ☛ 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?



NOTES

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124. Henry Morgenthau, "Shall Armenia Perish?" *The Independent* (February 28, 1920), p. 341.
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130. Paul Gordon Lauren, *The Evolution of International Human Rights: Visions Seen* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), pp. 94–95.
131. Ibid., pp. 96–97.
132. Christopher Walker, *Armenia: Survival of a Nation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), p. 264.
133. Richard Hovannisian, "Historical Dimensions 1878–1923" in *Armenian Genocide in Perspective*, p. 36.
134. Thea Halo, *Not Even My Name* (New York: Picador, 2000), pp. 202–203.
135. Walker, *Armenia: Survival of a Nation*, p. 316.