

A Letter to the Editor

28 January 2006
Suzanne Fields c/o Creators Syndicate

Dear Ms. Fields,

It was with interest that I read your column on the subject of memories and deniers of the Holocaust in the Riverside, California *Press-Enterprise*, Friday, January 27, 2006.

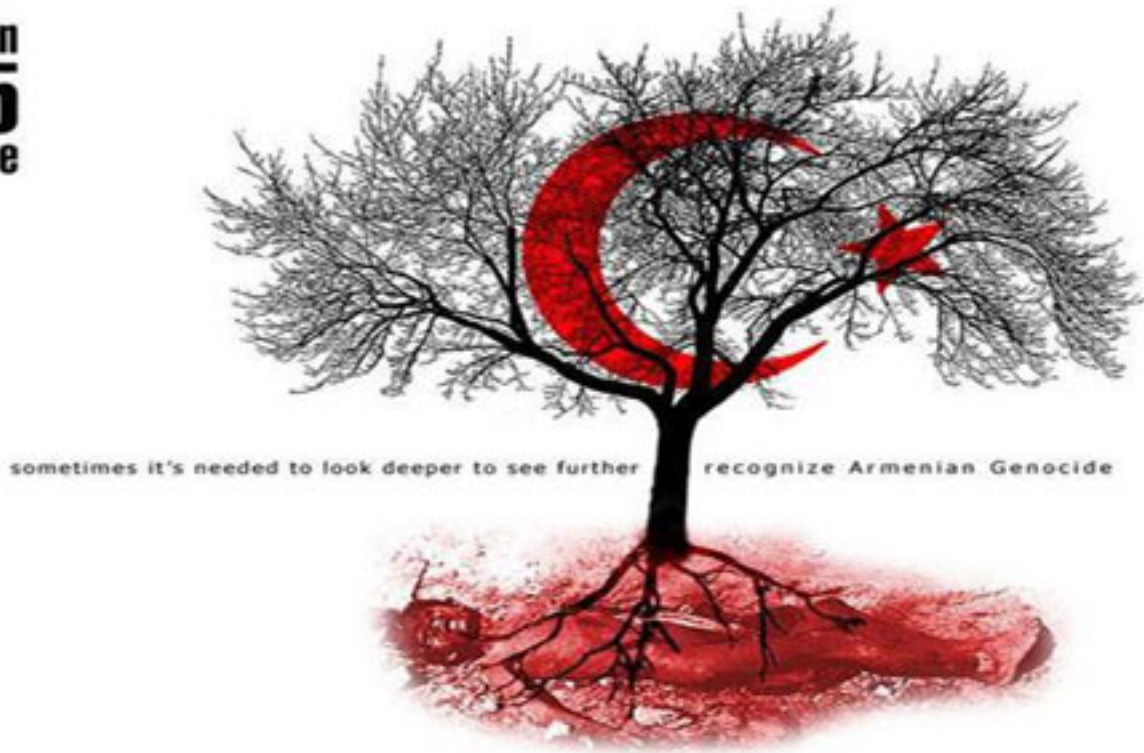
My parents were Armenian and my mother survived the genocide that took place at the hands of the Ottoman Turks in 1915. Like many others, my parents tried to spare me and my siblings of their pain. From time to time they would mention small things but never the horrendous details. While I was growing up, very little was mentioned in the media about the fate of the Armenians. Yet world leaders knew what had taken place. The United States Ambassador to Turkey at the time, Henry Morgenthau, reported on the Turkish government's attempt to exterminate the Armenians and upon his return to America documented his experiences in a book about the events. U.S. and European newspapers headlined the news when reports leaked out. It was said, "Even God cries for the Armenians" and relief efforts for "the starving Armenians" were well known. Those events, however, were on the other side of the world and The United States and Europe had their own concerns. By mid-twentieth century, the Armenian genocide was mostly forgotten among non-Armenians and when Hitler's staff asked what world opinion might be when he proposed killing the Jews, he said he was not concerned because "After all, who today speaks of the Armenians."

I am writing because your article stressed the importance of memories and the disgust of denials in the face of irrefutable facts. Since the latter part of the twentieth century many well researched books have confirmed the historical fact of the Armenian Genocide. The deniers, in this case, however, are not just a few extremists—deniers are the Turkish government and those who know the truth but support Turkey for political purposes. It is disappointing to Armenians that the U.S. government's policy is to side with Turkish denials because of world politics. We needed them during the cold war and they are a part of NATO so we gloss over horrendous acts in order not to offend them. An even more disappointing politically motivated policy is that the Israeli government has joined Turkey in the denial. Israel needs Turkey as an ally and from a pragmatic standpoint their action is understandable. I know there are many Jews (perhaps a majority) who condemn their government for its denial just as I condemn a U.S. policy that goes along with Turkish denials—it is painful nevertheless.

Because of Turkish lobbying efforts, uninformed writers often refer to the Armenian genocide as "the alleged genocide" and they think that by doing so they are giving a balanced report. If an occasion comes up for you to write about this subject, please keep in mind how Jews might feel today if Germany denied the Holocaust, uninformed writers referred to it as the "alleged Holocaust," and the United States went along with the charade. Thank you very much for the work you do.

Sincerely,
Hovak Najarian
La Quinta, CA

armenian
1915
genocide



The Armenian National Institute (ANI)

The Armenian National Institute (ANI) is an independent 501(c)3 non-profit organization based in Washington, D.C., dedicated to the study, research, and affirmation of the Armenian Genocide. ANI is founded upon the following principles. Keeping memory alive is imperative. Crimes against humanity must not be forgotten. Past genocides must be confronted and acknowledged to prevent future genocides.

To meet this commitment ANI is engaged in a full-time concentrated effort to integrate the lessons of the Armenian Genocide into the universal understanding of the problem of genocide.

Institute Objectives:

- To promote understanding of the Armenian Genocide through research, analysis, publication, and public forums.
- To collect and organize documentation attesting to and preserving the memory of the Armenian Genocide.
- To increase public awareness of the crime, and denial, of genocide and their lasting effect in our times.

Website: <http://www.armenian-genocide.org/index.htm>

The History Place

Adolf Hitler to his Army commanders, August 22, 1939:

"Thus for the time being I have sent to the East only my 'Death's Head Units' with the orders to kill without pity or mercy all men, women, and children of Polish race or language. Only in such a way will we win the vital space that we need. Who still talks nowadays about the Armenians?"

The term 'Genocide' was coined by Polish writer and attorney, Raphael Lemkin, in 1941 by combining the Greek word '*genos*' (race) with the Latin word '*cide*' (killing). Genocide as defined by the United Nations in 1948 means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, including: (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.

Recent to Past Occurrences

- Bosnia-Herzegovina: 1992-1995 - 200.000 Deaths
- Rwanda: 1994 - 800.000 Deaths
- Pol Pot in Cambodia: 1975-1979 - 2.000.000 Deaths
- Nazi Holocaust: 1938-1945 - 6.000.000 Deaths
- Rape of Nanking: 1937-1938 - 300.000 Deaths
- Stalin's Forced Famine: 1932-1933 - 7.000.000 Deaths
- Armenians in Turkey: 1915-1918 - 1.500.000 Deaths

Website: <http://bit.ly/Ziddpw>
Retrieved 17 April 2013

Armenian Genocide

The first genocide of the 20th Century occurred when two million Armenians living in Turkey were eliminated from their historic homeland through forced deportations and massacres.

For three thousand years, a thriving Armenian community had existed inside the vast region of the Middle East bordered by the Black, Mediterranean and Caspian Seas. The area, known as Asia Minor, stands at the crossroads of three continents; Europe, Asia and Africa. Great powers rose and fell over the many centuries and the Armenian homeland was at various times ruled by Persians, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Arabs and Mongols.

Despite the repeated invasions and occupations, Armenian pride and cultural identity never wavered. The snow-capped peak of Mount Ararat became its focal point and by 600 BC Armenia as a nation sprang into being. Following the advent of Christianity, Armenia became the very first nation to accept it as the state religion. A golden era of peace and prosperity followed which saw the invention of a distinct alphabet, a flourishing of literature, art, commerce, and a unique style of architecture. By the 10th century, Armenians had established a new capital at Ani, affectionately called the 'city of a thousand and one churches.'

In the eleventh century, the first Turkish invasion of the Armenian homeland occurred. Thus began several hundred years of rule by Muslim Turks. By the sixteenth century, Armenia had been absorbed into the vast and mighty Ottoman Empire. At its peak, this Turkish empire included much of Southeast Europe, North Africa, and almost all of the Middle East.

But by the 1800s the once powerful Ottoman Empire was in serious decline. For centuries, it had spurned technological and economic progress, while the nations of Europe had embraced innovation and became industrial giants. Turkish armies had once been virtually invincible. Now, they lost battle after battle to modern European armies.

As the empire gradually disintegrated, formerly subject peoples including the Greeks, Serbs and Romanians achieved their long-awaited independence. Only the Armenians and the Arabs of the Middle East remained stuck in the backward and nearly bankrupt empire, now under the autocratic rule of Sultan Abdul Hamid.

By the 1890s, young Armenians began to press for political reforms, calling for a constitutional government, the right to vote and an end to discriminatory practices such as special taxes levied solely against them because they were Christians. The despotic Sultan responded to their pleas with brutal persecutions. Between 1894 and 1896 over 100,000 inhabitants of Armenian villages were massacred during widespread pogroms conducted by the Sultan's special regiments.

But the Sultan's days were numbered. In July 1908, reform-minded Turkish nationalists known as "Young Turks" forced the Sultan to allow a constitutional government and guarantee basic rights. The Young Turks were ambitious junior officers in the Turkish Army who hoped to halt their country's steady decline.

Armenians in Turkey were delighted with this sudden turn of events and its prospects for a brighter future. Jubilant public rallies were held attended by both Turks and Armenians with banners held high calling for freedom, equality and justice.

However, their hopes were dashed when three of the Young Turks seized full control of the government via a coup in 1913. This triumvirate of Young Turks, consisting of Mehmed Talaat, Ismail Enver and Ahmed Djemal, came to wield dictatorial powers and concocted their own ambitious plans for the future of Turkey. They wanted to unite all of the Turkic peoples in the entire region while expanding the borders of Turkey eastward across the Caucasus all the way into Central Asia. This would create a new Turkish empire, a "great and eternal land" called Turan with one language and one religion.

But there was a big problem. The traditional historic homeland of Armenia lay right in the path of their plans to expand eastward. And on that land was a large population of Christian Armenians totaling some two million persons, making up about 10 percent of Turkey's overall population.

Along with the Young Turk's newfound "Turanism" there was a dramatic rise in Islamic fundamentalist agitation throughout Turkey. Christian Armenians were once again branded as infidels (non-believers in Islam). Anti-Armenian demonstrations were staged by young Islamic extremists, sometimes leading to violence. During one such outbreak in 1909, two hundred villages were plundered and over 30,000 persons massacred in the Cilicia district on the Mediterranean coast. Throughout Turkey, sporadic local attacks against Armenians continued unchecked over the next several years.

There were also big cultural differences between Armenians and Turks. The Armenians had always been one of the best educated communities within the old Turkish empire. Armenians were the

professionals in society, the businessmen, lawyers, doctors and skilled craftsmen And they were more open to new scientific, political, and social ideas from the West (Europe and America). Children of wealthy Armenians went to Paris, Geneva or even to America to complete their education.

By contrast, the majority of Turks were illiterate peasant farmers and small shop keepers. Leaders of the Ottoman Empire had traditionally placed little value on education and not a single institute of higher learning could be found within their old empire. The various autocratic and despotic rulers throughout the empire's history had valued loyalty and blind obedience above all. Their uneducated subjects had never heard of democracy or liberalism and thus had no inclination toward political reform. But this was not the case with the better educated Armenians who sought political and social reforms that would improve life for themselves and Turkey's other minorities.

The Young Turks decided to glorify the virtues of simple Turkish peasantry at the expense of the Armenians in order to capture peasant loyalty. They exploited the religious, cultural, economic and political differences between Turks and Armenians so that the average Turk came to regard Armenians as strangers among them.

When World War I broke out in 1914, leaders of the Young Turk regime sided with the Central Powers (Germany and Austria-Hungary). The outbreak of war would provide the perfect opportunity to solve the "Armenian question" once and for all. The world's attention became fixed upon the battlegrounds of France and Belgium where the young men of Europe were soon falling dead by the hundreds of thousands. The Eastern Front eventually included the border between Turkey and Russia. With war at hand, unusual measures involving the civilian population would not seem too out of the ordinary.

As a prelude to the coming action, Turks disarmed the entire Armenian population under the pretext that the people were naturally sympathetic toward Christian Russia. Every last rifle and pistol was forcibly seized, with severe penalties for anyone who failed to turn in a weapon. Quite a few Armenian men actually purchased a weapon from local Turks or Kurds (nomadic Muslim tribesmen) at very high prices so they would have something to turn in.

At this time, about forty thousand Armenian men were serving in the Turkish Army. In the fall and winter of 1914, all of their weapons were confiscated and they were put into slave labor battalions building roads or were used as human pack animals. Under the brutal work conditions they suffered a very high death rate. Those who survived would soon be shot outright. For the time had come to move against the Armenians.

The decision to annihilate the entire population came directly from the ruling triumvirate of ultra-nationalist Young Turks. The actual extermination orders were transmitted in coded telegrams to all provincial governors throughout Turkey. Armed roundups began on the evening of April 24, 1915, as 300 Armenian political leaders, educators, writers, clergy and dignitaries in Constantinople (present day Istanbul) were taken from their homes, briefly jailed and tortured, then hanged or shot.

Next, there were mass arrests of Armenian men throughout the country by Turkish soldiers, police agents and bands of Turkish volunteers. The men were tied together with ropes in small groups then taken to the outskirts of their town and shot dead or bayoneted by death squads. Local Turks and Kurds armed with knives and sticks often joined in on the killing.

Then it was the turn of Armenian women, children, and the elderly. On very short notice, they were ordered to pack a few belongings and be ready to leave home, under the pretext that they were

being relocated to a non-military zone for their own safety. They were actually being taken on death marches heading south toward the Syrian desert.

Most of the homes and villages left behind by the roused Armenians were quickly occupied by Muslim Turks who assumed instant ownership of everything. In many cases, young Armenian children were spared from deportation by local Turks who took them from their families. The children were coerced into denouncing Christianity and becoming Muslims, and were then given new Turkish names. For Armenian boys the forced conversion meant they each had to endure painful circumcision as required by Islamic custom.

Individual caravans consisting of thousands of deported Armenians were escorted by Turkish gendarmes. These guards allowed roving government units of hardened criminals known as the "Special Organization" to attack the defenseless people, killing anyone they pleased. They also encouraged Kurdish bandits to raid the caravans and steal anything they wanted. In addition, an extraordinary amount of sexual abuse and rape of girls and young women occurred at the hands of the Special Organization and Kurdish bandits. Most of the attractive young females were kidnapped for a life of involuntary servitude.

The death marches, involving over a million Armenians, covered hundreds of miles and lasted months. Indirect routes through mountains and wilderness areas were deliberately chosen in order to prolong the ordeal and to keep the caravans away from Turkish villages.

Food supplies being carried by the people quickly ran out and they were usually denied further food or water. Anyone stopping to rest or lagging behind the caravan was mercilessly beaten until they rejoined the march. If they couldn't continue they were shot. A common practice was to force all of the people in the caravan to remove every stitch of clothing and have them resume the march in the nude under the scorching sun until they dropped dead by the roadside from exhaustion and dehydration.

An estimated 75 percent of the Armenians on these marches perished, especially children and the elderly. Those who survived the ordeal were herded into the desert without a drop of water. Others were killed by being thrown off cliffs, burned alive, or drowned in rivers.

The Turkish countryside became littered with decomposing corpses. At one point, Mehmed Talaat responded to the problem by sending a coded message to all provincial leaders: "I have been advised that in certain areas unburied corpses are still to be seen. I ask you to issue the strictest instructions so that the corpses and their debris in your vilayet are buried."

But his instructions were generally ignored. Those involved in the mass murder showed little interest in stopping to dig graves. The roadside corpses and emaciated deportees were a shocking sight to foreigners working in Turkey. Eyewitnesses included German government liaisons, American missionaries, and U.S. diplomats stationed in the country.

The Christian missionaries were often threatened with death themselves and were unable to help the people. Diplomats from the still neutral United States communicated their blunt assessments of the ongoing government actions. U.S. ambassador to Turkey, Henry Morgenthau, reported to Washington: "When the Turkish authorities gave the orders for these deportations, they were merely giving the death warrant to a whole race..."

The Allied Powers (Great Britain, France, Russia) responded to news of the massacres by issuing a warning to Turkey: "...the Allied governments announce publicly...that they will hold all the members of the Ottoman Government, as well as such of their agents as are implicated, personally responsible for such matters."

The warning had no effect. Newspapers in the West including the New York Times published reports of the continuing deportations with the headlines: **“Armenians Are Sent to Perish in the Desert - Turks Accused of Plan to Exterminate Whole Population”** (August 18, 1915) – **“Million Armenians Killed or in Exile - American Committee on Relief Says Victims of Turks Are Steadily Increasing - Policy of Extermination”** (December 15, 1915).

Temporary relief for some Armenians came as Russian troops attacked along the Eastern Front and made their way into central Turkey. But the troops withdrew in 1917 upon the Russian Revolution. Armenian survivors withdrew along with them and settled in among fellow Armenians already living in provinces of the former Russian Empire. There were in total about 500,000 Armenians gathered in this region.

In May 1918, Turkish armies attacked the area to achieve the goal of expanding Turkey eastward into the Caucasus and also to resume the annihilation of the Armenians. As many as 100,000 Armenians may have fallen victim to the advancing Turkish troops.

However, the Armenians managed to acquire weapons and they fought back, finally repelling the Turkish invasion at the battle of Sadarabad, thus saving the remaining population from total extermination with no help from the outside world. Following that victory, Armenian leaders declared the establishment of the independent Republic of Armenia.

World War I ended in November 1918 with a defeat for Germany and the Central Powers including Turkey. Shortly before the war had ended, the Young Turk triumvirate; Talaat, Enver and Djemal, abruptly resigned their government posts and fled to Germany where they had been offered asylum.

In the months that followed, repeated requests were made by Turkey's new moderate government and the Allies asking Germany to send the Young Turks back home to stand trial. However all such requests were turned down. As a result, Armenian activists took matters into their own hands, located the Young Turks and assassinated them along with two other instigators of the mass murder.

Meanwhile, representatives from the fledgling Republic of Armenia attended the Paris Peace Conference in the hope that the victorious Allies would give them back their historic lands seized by Turkey. The European Allies responded to their request by asked the United States to assume guardianship of the new Republic. However, President Woodrow Wilson's attempt to make Armenia an official U.S. protectorate was rejected by the U.S. Congress in May 1920.

But Wilson did not give up on Armenia. As a result of his efforts, the Treaty of Sevres was signed on August 10, 1920, by the Allied Powers, the Republic of Armenia and the new moderate leaders of Turkey. The treaty recognized an independent Armenian state in an area comprising much of the former historic homeland.

However, Turkish nationalism once again reared its head. The moderate Turkish leaders who signed the treaty were ousted in favor of a new nationalist leader, Mustafa Kemal, who simply refused to accept the treaty and even re-occupied the very lands in question then expelled any surviving Armenians, including thousands of orphans.

No Allied power came to the aid of the Armenian Republic and it collapsed. Only a tiny portion of the easternmost area of historic Armenia survived by being becoming part of the Soviet Union.

After the successful obliteration of the people of historic Armenia, the Turks demolished any remnants of Armenian cultural heritage including priceless masterpieces of ancient architecture,

old libraries and archives. The Turks even leveled entire cities such as the once thriving Kharpert, Van and the ancient capital at Ani, to remove all traces of the three thousand year old civilization.

The half-hearted reaction of the world's great powers to the plight of the Armenians was duly noted by the young German politician Adolf Hitler. After achieving total power in Germany, Hitler decided to conquer Poland in 1939 and told his generals: "Thus for the time being I have sent to the East only my 'Death's Head Units' with the orders to kill without pity or mercy all men, women, and children of Polish race or language. Only in such a way will we win the vital space that we need. Who still talks nowadays about the Armenians?"

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April 24: Genocide Remembrance

This day is set aside in the calendar of the church to hold in remembrance those who have died and those whose lives have been severely damaged as a result of acts of genocide: the systematic and intentional destruction of a people by death, by the imposition of severe mental or physical abuse, by the forced displacement of children, or by other atrocities designed to destroy the lives and human dignity of large groups of people.

This day is chosen for the commemoration because the international community recognizes April 24 as a day of remembrance for the Armenian Genocide, the systematic annihilation of the Armenian people during and just after World War I. On April 24, 1915, more than 250 Armenian notables—civic and political leaders, teachers, writers, and members of the clergy—were rounded up, imprisoned, tortured, and killed. Before the cessation of conflict, it is estimated that as many as one-and-a-half million Armenians perished, many as the result of forced marches, deliberate starvation, and heinous massacres. President Theodore Roosevelt declared the Armenian Genocide to be the greatest crime of World War I. The close relationships between Anglicans and Episcopalians and our sisters and brothers in the Armenian Church make the remembrance of this day a particular sign of our fellowship in the body of Christ.

Tragically, human history is littered with such atrocities and the Armenian Genocide was far from the last such mass extermination of people in the twentieth century. One need only mention Croatia, Nazi Germany, Zanzibar, Guatemala, Bangladesh, Burundi, Equatorial Guinea, East Timor, Cambodia, Afghanistan, Kurdish Iraq, and Tibet, and this is by no means a comprehensive list. The unflinching resolve of people of faith, in prayer and in action, is critical if the travesty of human genocide is to be curbed and eventually stopped.

Collect for Genocide Remembrance

Almighty God, our Refuge and our Rock, your loving care knows no bounds and embraces all the peoples of the earth: Defend and protect those who fall victim to the forces of evil, and as we remember this day those who endured depredation and death because of who they were, not because of what they had done or failed to do, give us the courage to stand against hatred and oppression, and to seek the dignity and well-being of all for the sake of our Savior Jesus Christ, in whom you have reconciled the world to yourself; and who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Lessons at Holy Eucharist

Isaiah 2:2-5 | Psalm 70 | Revelation 7:13-17 | Matthew 2:13-18