

The armenian genocide and its denial essay



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Genocide. The killing of hundreds of people. The extermination of a nation. Such a thing may sound too horrible to be true, but it happens right under our very noses. And what is even worse, is when such tragic events are not recognized as what they are, or simply forgotten.

Such is the case of the Armenian Genocide, also referred to as the Forgotten Genocide, the Hidden Holocaust, the Secret Genocide, or the Unremembered Genocide (Balakian xvii). The Jewish Holocaust is well known throughout the world and is taught to all students. But who talks of the Armenians? Who talks of the innocent people being forced by the Turks to leave their 3, 000 year-old homeland and march without stopping to the Syrian Desert (Bournoutian 274)? Who remembers the 1. 5 million people killed in what is the first genocide of the 20th century? Very few do. And so, here is the unique history of the Armenian Genocide, and the way Turkey denies the horrible act they have done. Armenians and Turks actually lived in harmony for centuries in the Ottoman Empire.

However, the idea of nationalism formed, causing the Ottoman Empire to crumble. Ottoman Turkey had a dream of a Pan-Turkic Empire. What this was, was that there were Turkish speaking areas in central Asia, and Turkey wanted to unite with that group. Armenia was the only other ethnic group in between those two groups of Turks, so nationalists in Ottoman Turkey decided to just get rid of them altogether. Things began to get really bad for the Armenians.

They were treated worse by the government, and hundreds of thousands were killed in the Hamidian Massacres ordered by Sultan Abdul Hamid II from

1894 to 1896. Talaat Pasha and Enver Pasha were two extreme Turkish nationalists who took complete dictatorial control and planned the extermination of the Armenians, using World War I as a cover up to carry out their plan ("Armenian"). Enver Pasha declared that "The Ottoman Empire should be cleaned up of the Armenians We have destroyed the former by the sword, we shall destroy the latter through starvation" ("Genocide").

On April 24, 1915, known worldwide by Armenians as Genocide Memorial Day, over 200 Armenian writers, teachers, lawyers, members of parliaments, and other leaders were summoned and gathered in Istanbul. They were all murdered that night (Bournoutian 271-272). The next step, after getting rid of all of Armenia's professionals and leaders, was to get rid of the men, who were more likely to fight back. They were told by the Ottoman Turks that they were being drafted to go to the war, but this was a lie.

Instead they were either immediately killed or forced to work until they died ("Armenian"). Some men were taken to extermination camps. These are very different from the concentration camps the Jews were sent to. The Armenians were not given the chance to work and hopefully survive.

Instead, they were immediately killed. Turks only kept around 20 out of every 300 men alive to work, burying the dead (Douglas 324). Many other violent and cruel things were done to the men. For example, some men had their eyes taped open, and were forced to stare at the sun until they became blind.

Others were beheaded ("Genocide"). After the men were taken away, all that was left was the women, children, and elderly. They were told to gather

for relocation, in which they would march toward the Syrian Desert. In some places, however, the Turks just ordered everyone to gather inside churches or other large buildings, and then set the buildings on fire, killing everyone inside (Bournoutian 272). The Armenians were told they could only take along what they could carry, and to turn in all weapons they had that was supposedly for the war effort.

Also, all valuables had to be turned in to the Turks. It is a bit odd how the Armenians cooperated so well withal of it. They had no idea what was going to happen. Having been told by the Turks that everything was for the war effort, they turned in all weapons and gathered for relocation without much resistance, believing they were being transported to safety for their own good ("Armenian"). Though things went like this most of the time, there was some rebellion.

A well known incident of such sort is the rebellion in the city of Van in the year 1914 (Douglas 326). The Armenians were forced to march in what came to be known as Death Marches across Anatolia and into the Syrian Desert. They were faced with many horrors along the way. Many were raped, starved, dehydrated, murdered, or kidnapped ("Armenian"). No men or boys older than eleven were left alive during the Death Marches, and often, the women had to march completely naked in the scorching sun. Water and food were rarely distributed, and anyone who slowed down was shot and left to die (Miller).

On top of all this, there was greed. The Turks would burn or cut up bodies to search for pieces of gold or other valuables that had been swallowed for

safekeeping (Balakian 243). Often, the Armenians would be taken to open fields and shot, or tied together with ropes and thrown into rivers or off cliffs. After all these horrible events, many Armenians began to doubt God. They didn't believe that he would allow such a thing to happen to millions of innocent people (Douglas 321-337).

Many of the ones who survived the Death Marches were killed upon arrival at their destination; however some miraculously found a way to survive until it was all over, and lived to tell the tale ("Armenian"). Not all Turks were completely heartless. Many took Armenian children during the Death Marches and raised them as their own to save their lives. These children were eventually converted to Muslim, and sadly lost their Armenian identity. This was the case for over 250,000 Armenian children (Bournoutian 272). It may come as a shock to many that such a horrible event was not well recognized many countries in the world.

In the early years of the Genocide, America did not recognize the event as what it is, in order to not damage any relations with Turkey (Bournoutian 276). But what is even worse than this, is that the Turkish Government today spends millions of dollars and time to cover up, or distort the history of the Armenian Genocide. Elie Wiesel calls the Armenian Genocide a "double killing", because it not only killed 1.5 million Armenians, but also the memory of that terrible event (Balakian xxiii). There are many things Turkey says about what happened.

For example, according to Talaat Pasha, what they had planned to do was right, but some of the local Ottoman Turks handling the whole thing just got

a bit out of hand (Miller). Others in Turkey say there never even was a plan to exterminate the Armenians. They were simply being evacuated to be away from the war zone, and the deaths were caused mainly by epidemics, lack of supplies, lack of shelter, and other disasters having to do with World War I (Bournoutian 274). Caroline, Baroness Cox from the House of Lords says: If nations are allowed to commit genocide with impunity, to hide their camouflage of lies and denials, there is a real danger that other brutal regimes will be encouraged to attempt genocides.

Unless we speak today of the Armenian Genocide and unless the Government recognizes this historical fact, we shall leave this century of unprecedented genocides with this blot on our consciences. (" Genocide") The Denial of the Armenian Genocide is an awful thing, and can cause some people to think the wrong way. When Adolf Hitler was persuading his associates that the west would tolerate a Jewish holocaust, he said, " Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians? " (" Genocide") Genocide is an awful thing, and even worse when it is forgotten, or denied that it ever even happened. Turkey may continue to deny the Armenian Genocide, but its memory may not be killed along with the other 1.

5 million Armenians who lost their lives during that period. Hopefully, one day everyone will remember and talk about the Armenians, their long Death Marches through the deserts, and the way the Ottoman Turks who committed such a crime refuse to say it is true. Bibliography: " Armenian Genocide". Armeniopedia. 20 February 2006. Armeniopedia.

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