

THE FORGOTTEN GENOCIDE

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Genocide accounts for the murder of over 50 million people in the 20th Century and continues to haunt us into this one. The first modern genocide of the 20th Century was the Armenian Case during which 1.5 million Armenians were killed by the Ottoman government. The 21st Century has begun with over 400,000 Darfurians murdered in Sudan, and the number is still rising. Despite the pledge “never again” that is continually echoed when discussions about genocide arise, it still happens, and effective strategies to stop it from continuing have yet to be put into action.

Education is Key

In order to initiate positive change we must be educated about the historical facts and the contemporary reality surrounding genocide. Equipped with this knowledge, students can take a proactive approach to understanding and eventually stopping genocide by acting as informed citizens. In 2005, Illinois became the sixth state to pass a mandate on the teaching of the Armenian Genocide. It is an inclusive mandate, supported by numerous organizations throughout the state, such as the Genocide Education Network of Illinois, that have collaborated to instruct teachers on genocide. Though other states have included the Armenian Genocide in their standards, and many more have passed genocide and Holocaust education mandates, in many states it is still woefully absent from textbooks.

The Armenian Case

The Armenian Genocide is still denied by the Turkish government. Gregory Stanton, vice president of the International Association of Genocide Scholars, asserts that the final stage of genocide is denial. The persistent denial of the genocide by the Turkish government and their allies prevents Armenians around the world with the closure needed to end the trauma of genocide that is passed down from generation to generation. And the denial of genocide inhibits the world community from being able to truly understand and end atrocities of this magnitude.

The Armenian Genocide began during World War I and proved to be the most devastating human catastrophe the world had ever witnessed until that time. It began in full force in Constantinople on April 24, 1915 when Turkish soldiers rounded up and executed over 250 Armenian community leaders, including writers, doctors, lawyers, teachers, priests and artists. Armenian men were removed from the Ottoman army, segregated into work gangs and later killed. By summer, Armenian women, children, and the elderly were forced to march into the Syrian Desert. Although told by Turkish officials they would be relocated to safer havens, the Armenians were exterminated according to a scheme planned by the highest Ottoman authorities. Deprived of food and water, Armenian women with children were often left to die during these forced marches.

The Ottoman government was led by Talaat Pasha, the Minister of the Interior; Enver Pasha, the Minister of War; and Djemal Pasha, the Minister of the Navy. In their policy of Turkification, Turkey for the Turks, they believed it necessary to eliminate non-Turkish groups such as the Armenians, Pontian Greeks,

and Assyrians. Telegrams sent by government leaders communicated to their subordinates the importance of ensuring eternal rest of the Armenians. The genocide was continued after World War I, by the new Turkish government under Ataturk. Over 75% of the Armenian population, or 1.5 million people, perished in what had been the Ottoman Empire from 1915-1923.

Teaching about the Armenian Genocide

Over the past several years scholarship on the Armenian Genocide has exploded as have the available resources for educators. Around the country, teachers are implementing innovative lessons on the Armenian Genocide with the help of educational and Armenian organizations. For example, one middle school teacher in Illinois, Ron Levitsky, found inspiration from an action alert issued by the Armenian National Committee of America which called on people to create a design for a postage stamp and submit it to the United States Citizen Stamp Advisory Committee. After his students gained an understanding of the efforts Americans undertook during WWI to aid the Armenians, they created postal stamps and submitted them to U.S. Postal Service and asked that a real commemorative stamp be issued. Mr. Levitsky was also awarded the Aharonian Award this year by The Genocide Education Project for his innovative work. His lesson plan is now posted on their online resource library at www.TeachGenocide.org. The Aharonian Award is the first national award recognizing excellence in the teaching of the Armenian Genocide by secondary level educators.

Various organizations have developed instructional units and provide teacher training sessions on the topic of genocide and the Armenian Case including The Genocide Education Project, Brown University's The Choices Program and Facing History and Ourselves. The Genocide Education Project's *Human Rights and Genocide: A Case Study of the First Modern Genocide of the 20th Century* contains background materials and lesson plans for educators, including such resources as survivor testimonials, newspaper accounts, and maps. Its interactive Web site at www.TeachGenocide.org allows teachers to research the Armenian Genocide and other genocides through primary and secondary sources. Choices publishes *Confronting Genocide: Never Again?*, in which students explore various genocides and international responses to them. Facing History and Ourselves has produced *Crimes Against Humanity and Civilization: The Genocide of the Armenians*, which enables students to study the Armenian Genocide in depth, while at the same time calling on students to make connections with their own identities. This resource guide is an excellent companion to Holocaust and Human Behavior, the quintessential publication by Facing History and Ourselves.

In the End

The current genocide in Sudan shows the world has much to learn about how to respond effectively to the crime of genocide. Young people need to better understand this issue so that future generations possess the awareness and willingness for preventing and effectively opposing genocidal campaigns. The study of genocide and human rights is still a side note in most curricula. It is through education that one day of genocide will be strictly part of our historical memory and not a part of our current reality.

For additional resources on the Armenian Genocide please visit www.TeachGenocide.org.

**Please attend the Pre-Conference Clinic on genocide at the 2006 NCSS Annual Conference in Washington, D.C. The conference is headed by The Genocide Education Project in cooperation with The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Facing History and Ourselves, and the Choices Program at Brown University. The clinic is entitled "Teaching about Genocide in the Age of Genocide."*