

# **The Truth about the Armenian Genocide**

**by Nicolas Knaian**

As we near the 100 year mark since the Armenian Genocide of 1915 was committed by the Ottoman Turks, it is deeply saddening to see how much ambiguity surrounds the issue in the public setting today—especially in countries such as the United States, where the Armenian Genocide is not officially recognized by the federal government.

As an Armenian and descendent of grandparents and great-grandparents who survived the genocide, I find it a crime that there are many people that are not aware of the Armenian Genocide and that many people that are learning about it now are being misinformed. The passage of time and Turkey's adamant denial over the years has caused the issue to fade out of the public spotlight.

For those unfamiliar with the topic, the history of Turkish denial of the Armenian Genocide dates all the way back to the massacres themselves which took place from 1915 to 1920 in present-day eastern Turkey (then the falling Ottoman Empire). These massacres were masterminded by the leading party of the Ottoman Empire to free themselves of the worry of rebellion from Christian Armenians, who for years had been second-class citizens to the Muslim Turks and were starting to gain aid from the Allied powers at the start of World War I.

Additionally, the execution of this genocide is backed up by strong evidence. In their journal article "Turks, Armenians, and the 'G Word,'" Belinda Cooper and Taner Akcam (a Turkish writer) provide evidence of genocide, writing, "First-hand accounts of these events by European and American diplomats, politicians, missionaries, and military officers describe church burnings, mass drownings, beatings, rapes, and mutilation in brutal detail." Many countries recognize these massacres of the Armenian people by the Ottoman Turks as genocide, and in many places the Armenian Genocide is included in history textbooks. Yet, after all of these years to this day, the Turkish government still denies that it ever happened.

While this denial is especially saddening to me as an Armenian, I feel that it is even more unfortunate for those people today who are just beginning to learn about the Armenian Genocide and being exposed to it as a "debate." Many Armenians have their own personal genocide story, stories that have been passed down through the generations from the genocide survivors themselves. But for everyone else, the only exposure they get to the Armenian Genocide is press about denial, failed attempts at recognition, and debates over whether the word genocide actually applies.

People learning right now need to know that the truth about the Armenian Genocide lies in these stories of death, suffering, and survival that Armenians living today all over the world have inherited. The truth carries no ounce of debate. It simply tells the story of why we're here today. I'm here today because of my parents, and the only reason that my parents were ever born was because of a fortunate series of events that led their parents to safety during the Genocide.

My mother's mother, Siranoush, was two years old in 1915 when her father was taken away by Turkish Soldiers, never to return. Due to a friendly Turkish business partner of their father's, Siranoush and her older sister were able to be hidden in the Turkish neighbor's house while all of the Armenian women and children were being taken on death marches into the desert. My mother tells of how Siranoush and her older sister ended up in a Catholic orphanage for some time after the massacres had ceased. The kids all had their own spoon; at meals one bowl was given for all of them to share and they had to fight to get enough to eat. Luckily for Siranoush, she had her older sister to fight for her.

On my father's side, the story goes that his grandfather on his mother's side provided chalk for the town they lived in. When he was taken away and killed with all of the other Armenian men in the village, friendly Turkish neighbors protected his wife along with her two year old daughter, Armenouhi, saying that they couldn't kill her because she was the only one left who knew the process for making the chalk.

Over time all of my grandparents found their way to the United States, met, and now I'm the living proof. And there are so many more amazing stories and shocking pieces of evidence on the Genocide that deserve a larger part of the public spotlight. The Armenian Library and Museum of America (ALMA), located on 65 Main Street, Watertown MA 02472, is a wonderful place to learn about the Armenian Genocide, but is unfortunately not well known outside of the Armenian community. Some other credible texts to learn from include *The Burning Tigris* by Peter Balakian, *The Sandcastle Girls*, a novel by Chris Bohajalian, and articles such as [Turks, Armenians, and the "G" Word](#) and ["Armenian genocide: Why many Turkish people have trouble accepting it."](#)

With all of this great literature and first-hand accounts out there, however, it worries me that there are still people who could have first learned about the Armenian Genocide through a source such as "Armenian Genocide Debate," a website I recently discovered that has since been taken down. The website was authored almost exclusively by someone named Jonathon Wilson, who claimed on the site to be an American historian. In all of his articles that he posted there, he wrote with a straightforward type of persona laying out reasons why the events of 1915 did not constitute genocide.

A review of the website was done back in 2009 on YouTube and can be found [here](#). The review, done by [lairdofgarscaddon](#), includes screenshot views of the website when it was fully running as well as a review of an article in which Wilson claims that President Obama had no right to make a statement that the Armenian Genocide happened because he is not a qualified historian. Similar poor and un-supported arguments persist throughout the website, and in the video, lairdofgarscaddon goes into the "archives" section of the website to demonstrate how skimpy and meaningless it is.

In one article, Wilson went through multiple stories that Armenians have told him about their ancestors' personal genocide tales and stated, without evidence, why he believes that each one of these accounts are false. This attitude throws a negative spin on the topic of the Armenian Genocide and is a terrible way for someone to be exposed to the issue. What is the historical value of only paying attention to historical documents that could have been altered by the

Turkish government over the years that deny genocidal intent and ignoring anyone that says otherwise? All this “debate” does is suggest to people that because the information has become so convoluted, they could commit genocide and the international community would not be organized enough to ever be able to prove it.

So while I’m glad that the website is no longer there to corrupt people’s views, it has opened my eyes to the fact that there are others out there who feel the same way that Jonathon Wilson does toward the Armenian Genocide. And the negativity of denial can only be combatted by the spreading of the truth.

But, ultimately, all of this negativity stems from Turkey’s continual denial. One example is shown by an article on CNN.com published on February 28, 2012 that discusses France’s failed attempt to make denial of the Armenian Genocide a crime. After the attempt at law was deemed unconstitutional by the council, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan expressed his disappointment with France, with CNN noting, “Turkey was reviewing its ties with France. Ankara recalled its ambassador to Paris for consultations, canceled bilateral visits and wouldn’t cooperate with France in joint projects within the European Union.”

Why is Turkey so adamant over preventing a law that has no effect on their nation? Not being able to admit that your ancestors committed genocide is slightly understandable, but it is completely unnecessary and detrimental to the fight against genocide today all over the world for Turkey to try to control other people’s opinions of the Armenian Genocide. Political ties make recognizing the Armenian Genocide in countries like France and the United States complicated, but if Turkey stopped denying then all of this would be simplified. All this denial does is teach us to hate and to dilute the past if it isn’t pretty.

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