

Abstract—Ultimate Crime, Ultimate Challenge, Human Rights and Genocide
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Looking Backward, Moving Forward

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After nine decades, there are major gaps in scholarship and knowledge about the Armenian Genocide. A part of the difficulty results from official denial and exclusion from the primary sources relating to the perpetrators, their motives, planning, and execution of the ultimate crime. This paper will assess the strides that have been made in human rights and genocide research and scholarship during the past two decades, drawing attention to areas of contention relative to the perpetration of a genocide as an entirely premeditated program that was awaiting the opportune moment for implementation (World War I) or else was incremental, starting out with a genuine intent to deport and relocate the Armenian population but then deteriorating into full-scale genocide. Are there scholarly and logical grounds to challenge the view that the Genocide of 1915 was a not-surprising consequence of centuries of political, religious, and social discrimination, especially once an ingredient of insipient modern nationalism had been added to the equation? And was the objective of the Genocide fully conceived in advance with clear and definite goals or did it take on a life of its own once the repressive measures began and gained momentum in a snow-ball effect? Prominent scholars offer differing interpretations, even as they agree on the central role of the state as perpetrator.

This presentation will assess the literature on the subject and suggest avenues for future research and means to move forward beyond fixation with the past and needing to reaffirm time and again the reality of the genocide. One should consider how to integrate the Armenian experience into the human experience and to draw upon it for means purposes of prevention and recognizing early warning signals. In view of the fact that the Armenian Genocide served as the prototype of twentieth-century mass killing, the legacy of that crime is enduring and its echoes have been heard down through the Holocaust, Cambodia, the Balkans, and various parts of Africa. The extreme “downside” of state denial is that it has distracted scholarship away from concentrating energies on looking forward to expending enormous time and effort to gain recognition and reaffirmation of the historical record. The presentation will conclude with suggestions and proposals on ways to move forward without losing sight of the past.