

**IB 20th Century**  
**Armenian Genocide: 1915**

**Name**  
**Period**

*Maxim Gorky, The Artist and His Mother, c. 1926–36.*

Oil on canvas, 60 × 50 in. (152.4 × 127 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

I. Describe Gorky's painting. Pay attention to color, line and space. Where are the people?



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**Historical Perspective #2** Crimes Against Humanity and Civilization. The Genocide of the Armenians. Facing History and Ourselves National Foundation Inc. Brookline, Mass, 2004.  
(This is the text from your readings)

In 1939, just before the invasion of Poland, Adolf Hitler told his generals:

*The aim of war is not to reach definite lines but to annihilate the enemy physically. It is by this means that we shall obtain the vital living space that we need. Who today still speaks of the massacre of the Armenians?<sup>1</sup>*

He was referring to the systematic murder of the Armenians by Turkish leaders of the Ottoman Empire during World War I. In May 1915, in the midst of the war, Britain, Russia, and France warned that those leaders would be held accountable for “crimes against humanity and civilization” if the massacres continued. The Turks ignored the warning.

In July, Henry Morgenthau, the U.S. ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, begged the State Department to take action against what he called the “race murder” of the Armenians. Instead, the nation chose to remain neutral.

Henry Sturmer, a journalist for the German newspaper Kolnische Zeitung, was also outraged by the murders. He wanted Germany to use its influence as an ally of the Ottoman Empire to stop the systematic extermination of the Armenians. When they failed to do so, he wrote:

The mixture of cowardice, lack of conscience, and lack of foresight of which our government has been guilty in Armenian affairs is quite enough to undermine completely the political loyalty of any thinking man who has any regard for humanity and civilization.<sup>2</sup>

Hitler learned a lesson from the world's response to the mass murder of the Armenians. So did many Jews. Michel Mazar, a survivor of the Warsaw Ghetto, recalled: "During the terrible days of July and August 1942, we often spoke of the fate of the Armenians by the Turks in 1915." He wondered if "the gas chambers and crematoria of Auschwitz and Treblinka" would have come into being if "at the end of the First World War, a 'Nuremberg Tribunal' had convened at Istanbul."

1. Samantha Power, *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), p. 23.
2. Deborah Dwork and Robert Jan van Pelt, *The Holocaust: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2002), pp. 39–40.

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1. To what extent do you agree with the perspective presented in *Facing History*? Provide a concrete example.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  2. How is perspective one similar to and different from military historian Hew Strachan's focus on the significance of the events in Turkey?



### Historical Perspective #3

#### Armenian Massacres – Tipping into Genocide Lecture Notes

Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, University of Tennessee

Read and highlight/annotate the lecture notes below as you listen. Then answer the questions that follow.

#### Scope

“The First World War formed the backdrop and context for the launching of what is considered the first full-scale modern genocide, the 1915 Armenian massacres in Ottoman Turkey, one of the Central Powers. Between 500,000 and 1,200,000 men, women, and children of the Armenian minority in the empire were killed or died from abuse in the government’s resettlement campaign and massacres. The Christian Armenians were considered a suspect population and a liability on the home front. At a time of worldwide suffering, international reactions to these murders were muted. This important example shows how the war itself seemingly normalized mass violence, including the targeting of civilians, and formed a precedent for the later genocides of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.”

#### 1. The Massacres

- a. Killings opened with preparatory actions that indicate that the massacres were not entirely spontaneous.
  - i. In an earlier step, Armenian soldiers in the army had been (isolated and) disarmed.
  - ii. The first wave of civilian arrests and killings coincided with the Allies’ Gallipoli landing of April 25, 1915, creating an urgent sense of crisis.
  - iii. The plans were also spurred by some armed resistance and communal violence. Russia had encouraged some Armenian rebels as part of a program of revolutionizing the group, yet the massacres focused on the Armenian community as a whole.

- iv. Armenian intellectuals and community leaders in Constantinople itself were the first targets along with leaders in the provinces. Several hundred were taken out and shot.
  - v. After their arrests, deportations began, often announced on extremely short notice.
  - vi. Proclamations claimed these measures were being taken for the safety of the Armenians.
- b. With men often killed immediately, women, children, and the old were rounded up for what amounted to death marches.
  - i. Over the next two years, two to three million Armenians were deported from eastern Anatolia and sent toward the Syrian desert.
  - ii. By some estimates, a third of Armenians were massacred, a third perished en route, and a third survived.
  - iii. It is estimated that half a million to one million died, killed outright or from exposure in the desert (some estimates run as high as 1.5 million dead).
  - iv. Men were bludgeoned to death, children thrown into rivers, and young women taken away, forced to convert to save themselves.
  - v. . The Young Turks encouraged these measures, though many historians believe no one single order was issued for the killings.

## **2. International Reactions**

- a. In spite of attempts to hide the program (for example, the entire Armenian community of Constantinople was spared), news reached the outside world.
- b. In May 1915, the Allies warned Turkey against these crimes against humanity and promised to hold leaders responsible.
- c. The anguished American ambassador, Henry Morgenthau Sr., passed along news of the events, but American neutrality in the war at that date complicated any possible stronger American response. U.S. newspapers carried news of the tragedies.
- d. In Germany, Turkish actions did not meet reproof because Turkey was an ally. Voices of conscience urging a stop to the atrocities like those of the German ambassador to Turkey, Count Wolff-Metternich, or of horrified German missionaries, were brushed aside.
- e. World events in this time of war obscured the scale of what was happening, and the fact that the victims were not Europeans probably also reduced concern at the time.

## **3. Outcomes and Precedents**

- a. This first modern genocide seemed to establish a terrible precedent, followed by later instances. A remarkable amnesia seemed to set in as the horrors were forgotten.
- b. Immediately after the war, the British insisted that Turkey put perpetrators on trial, but the results were mixed.
- c. Among the leaders who had fled, Talat Pasha was living in Germany, where in 1921 he was killed by a young Armenian seeking revenge and publicity for the tragedy. In following years, however, attention faded.
- d. The creation of the term “genocide” merits some discussion, as does its legacy.

## **STUDENT QUESTIONS:**

1) How does Liulevicius characterize the relocation/ethnic cleansing? What evidence does he offer that it is premeditated and organized?

2) What for him defines this act of violence as genocidal?

3) What is his thesis? How does his focus differ from the other 2 sources?

4) To what extent do you agree that total war in WWI could have normalized mass violence, including the targeting of civilians and sets a precedent for future violence ?

**SEMINAR NOTES:**

Write or attach at least 3 questions that directly reference the text that you would like to discuss.

1.

2.

3.

**SEMINAR TOPIC I:** How does the history of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire impact the events that take place during WWI?

**SEMINAR TOPIC II:** Evaluate the arguments supporting and undermining the notion that killing of Armenians was a genocide

**SEMINAR TOPIC III:** To what extent are practice like dehumanization, mass deportation, extermination directly related to practices of total war?

**PERSONAL NOTES/OTHERS' IDEAS/RESPONSES**