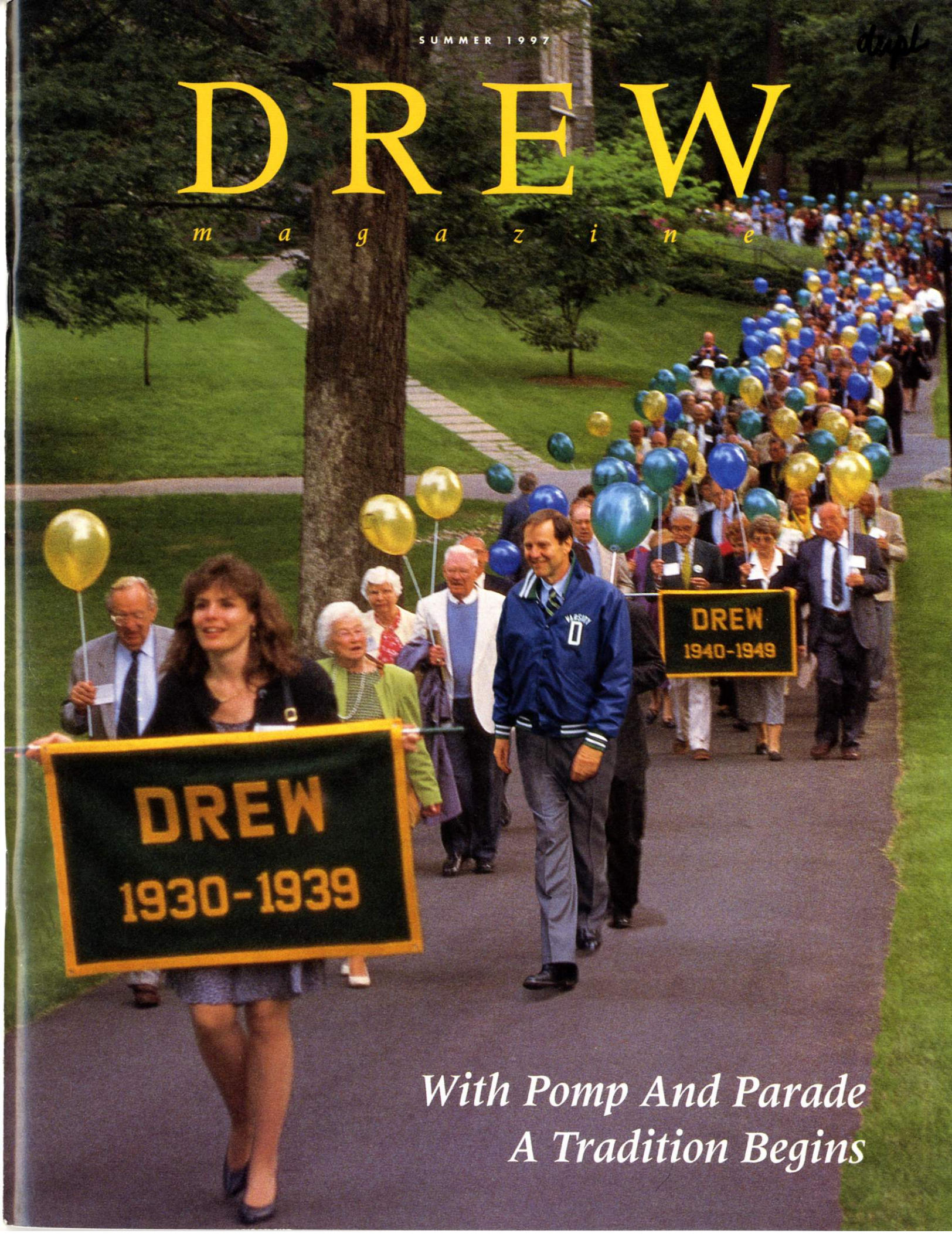


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# DREW

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*With Pomp And Parade  
A Tradition Begins*

The Young Turk regime conducted a systematic genocide against the Armenian people, using executions, conscription into army death-labor camps, torture, starvation, forced marches, and abandonment in the desert.

# TRUTH BE TOLD

By Sara Nuss-Galles

THOUGH IT OFFERS LITTLE COMFORT ONE WOULD EXPECT THAT FACTS REMAIN FACTS, A MASSACRE REMAINS A MASSACRE, A DEATH MARCH A DEATH MARCH, AND A MILLION DEAD COULD NEVER BE DENIED. UNFORTUNATELY, WE HAVE LEARNED THAT THIS IS NOT SO, THAT WHEN HORRORS ARE REVISITED, THERE ARE THOSE WHO ATTEMPT TO CHANGE HISTORY, EVEN IN THE FACE OF IRREFUTABLE EVIDENCE.

The circumstances surrounding the death and suffering of more than a million Armenians living in Turkey around 1916 are such an issue. This April, Drew's Graduate School sponsored The Armenian Genocide, Political & Historical Controversies, a conference that sought to examine the event, as well as the calculated web of spin, massage, and revision that is determined to erode the facts.

For nearly 3,000 years Armenians lived near the Black Sea in what is now eastern Turkey. During the 16th century the area was absorbed into the Ottoman Empire and the local non-Islamic population adjusted to the institutionalized inequality that accompanies such political shifts. "As long as the Ottoman Empire was strong the system tended to work in one way or another," enabling Armenians and other minorities to "get along," explained Professor Richard Hovannisian of University of California, Los Angeles.

Setting a historical backdrop for the horror upon which the conference focused, the introductory keynote speaker described how the Islamic empire's enfeeblement disrupted the formerly tolerable status quo. "The system began breaking down and the persecution and exacting of taxes increased." As the 20th century neared, Turkish nationalism swelled and, with it, resentment of outsiders escalated.

The Christian Armenian population endured pillaging, rape, and, then, a series of massacres. Although some Armenians converted to Islam and others fled to America, establishing an enclave on the Lower East Side of New York City, Hovannisian said that most remained. Believing themselves integral to Turkish commerce and life, "they did not envisage this society without them." Rather than viewing the calamities as a portent, the scholar said, the prevailing Armenian attitude



was that the Turks were merely trying to scare them.

Much as Germany later used the cover of World War II to exterminate Jews, Hovannisian said, Turkey “used World War I to end the Armenian problem by ending the Armenians.” Between 1915 and 1917 the Young Turk regime conducted a systematic, premeditated, centrally planned genocide against the Armenian people, he said. They used executions, conscription into army death-labor units, torture, starvation, relocation, forced marches, and abandonment in uninhabitable deserts of Iraq and Syria.

By the 1918 defeat of Turkey and Germany, the Armenian death toll had climbed staggeringly high. Gradually, survivors, among them women who had been raped and given birth to “the evidence of their shame,” returned home.

Those are the facts, Hovannisian said in conclusion, and they are supported by voluminous newspaper accounts, testimonies, and diplomatic communiques. Survivors received neither apologies nor compensation. Punishment of military and civilian perpetrators was limited to executing a handful of generals while far more became generals in the next war. In 1915 some two million Armenians lived within Turkey; today there are fewer than 60,000.

### Denial Begins

Scarcely a year had passed before Turkish government authorities embarked on an “active campaign of denial,” Robert J. Lifton, the second keynote speaker, informed conference attendees. Initially, they used scapegoats, blaming “unscrupulous officials, Kurds, and common criminals,” for what were classified as security measures gone



The evidence of starvation, top, and the Armenians’ arrival at American mission yards in Persia

awry. Avoidance, another strategy employed, was accomplished by combining diplomatic and political pressure with official silence, the City University of New York scholar noted.

By the 50th anniversary of the genocide, “another side of the story” was being fed to journalists, educators, and public officials. Lifton said the recast Turkish version alternately blamed Armenians’ provocative behavior and wartime conditions that cost even more Turkish than Armenian lives. Turkey’s interference extended to trying to prohibit mention of the genocide in a United Nations’ report, pressuring the Reagan and Bush administrations to defeat congressional bills for an official remembrance, and lobbying against mentioning the genocide in American textbooks. Lifton further reported that threats arose against Jews living in Turkey if the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council or an academic conference in Tel Aviv referenced the Armenian genocide.

“The basic argument of denial remained the same” for eight decades, the CUNY professor said. “It never happened; Turkey is not responsible; the term ‘genocide’ does not apply.”

photos courtesy of the  
Mission Album Collection, U.M.C.  
Archives, Madison, NJ

### The Scholarly Spin

In the 1980s, however, the tactics changed. The Turkish government began establishing “institutes to further knowledge” of Turkey, a move that escalated and broadened the debate.

Here the plot thickened, ensnaring Lifton unwittingly into the fray. His 1986 book, *The Nazi Doctors*, included seven brief references to the Armenian genocide. In 1990 the Turkish ambassador to the United States contacted Lifton regarding his use of “questionable secondary sources” on issues that were “hotly debated” among scholars. The ambassador’s letter clarified that “a tragic civil war perpetrated by misguided Armenian nationalists” cannot be compared to a premeditated attempt to eradicate a people. For Lifton’s education the ambassador enclosed relevant articles by “American experts.”

What the ambassador did not realize, Lifton revealed, was that two confidential items had inadvertently been enclosed in the mailing: a memo to

the ambassador written by a scholar who has been central to the controversy, Heath W. Lowry, detailing the “Lifton prob-

lem” and Lowry’s drafted response for the ambassador to send to Lifton (which he did, verbatim).

Subsequently, Lifton co-authored an article in spring 1995 in *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* with Roger W. Smith, College of William and Mary, and Eric Markusen, Southwest State University, that “...exposes an arrangement by which the government of Turkey channeled funds into a supposedly objective research institute in the United States, which in turn paid the salary of a historian who served that government in its campaign to discredit scholarship on the Armenian genocide.” The article revealed that the tax-exempt Institute of Turkish Studies, Inc., directed by Lowry, planned to endow chairs at U.S. universities.

In 1994 Lowry had assumed the first Atatürk Chair in Turkish Studies at Princeton University. Just as he had denied and reworked history at the institute, his new position at the university enabled Lowry to perpetuate “pseudo-scholarly denial of known genocide,” Lifton and his co-authors charged. Since Lowry’s appointment, the national press has continuously scrutinized the Princeton situation; a relevant 1996 *New York Times* article ran under the headline, “Princeton Accused of Fronting for the Turkish Government.”

Deniers of the century’s first genocide bear what political theorist Hannah Arendt later termed

**“We must create a climate where passivity is not OK and where bystanders are also evil.”**

**—Dr. Ervin Staub**



“the banality of evil,” Lifton said, “an imaginative blindness that prevents one from reflecting upon the consequences of one’s actions.” Warning that scholars who lend authority to genocide denial invite its repetition, he called upon those “wishing to be true to their calling to expose denial and bear witness to truth.”

As to why scholars, who should be seekers of truth, engage in denial, Lifton deferred to Israel Charny, executive director of Hebrew University’s Institute on the Holocaust and Genocide. When 69 scholars (including Lowry) signed a full-page advertisement in the 1980s in which they “questioned insidiously the evidence of the Armenian genocide,” Charny and colleague Daphna Fromer sent them questionnaires. Despite irate denial of tangible gain, the report revealed that many respondents had benefitted from Turkish grants.

Charny submitted a paper exploring scholarly denial for the conference. He identified two types: “innocent deniers,” unaware of seeking benefits yet “unconsciously tied to the hand that feeds them,” and those seeking personal or career advantage. The former suffer “rationalization and intellectual confusion,” Charny wrote, claiming insufficient empirical evidence of genocide and acknowledging deaths while shifting responsibility from government to “famine, war, and disease.” The latter comprises two types, those “oriented more toward material goals” and those striving for “the satisfactions that come with power.” Ultimately, Charny stressed, the issue remains “thou shalt not kill.”



### Seeing Is Believing

Witness bearers at the conference included Henry Morgenthau III, whose grandfather was American ambassador to Turkey during World War I. The speaker related that the elder Morgenthau's memoirs published in 1918 referenced the atrocities. On questioning Turkish leaders about reports of women, children, and old people being marched into the desert to be killed, the ambassador was told, "We can't make distinctions. Those who are not guilty today will oppose us in the future."

Further witness was born in a panel titled "The Evidence of the Missionaries," relating accounts of those who went to the Holy Land to convert "heathens." The four panelists shared evidence from "150 missionaries who corresponded regularly with home and personal journals." Before the tragic events began, one missionary penned that a German officer had confided to him, "Something terrible of which we never dreamed would happen in 1915."

Letters cited that "a case was built up in the minds of common people" to frighten them into perceiving Armenians as threatening and treasonous. By describing instances of self defense as "scheming Armenian sedition," Turkish authorities paved the way for the tragic deportations.

Against official advice, missionary Mary Louise Gratham accompanied Armenian villagers part way on their deportation. It was "the counterpart of the worst description of hell," she penned in letters sent through the state department. She learned that a notorious publicity campaign featuring photographs of weaponry allegedly hidden by

Armenians had been planted by officials intent on fanning Turkish fears.

Witness to murder and death by starvation, Gratham said there was no time to be afraid and that "death would have been welcome." When circumstances of the march became even worse, Turkish officials "bribed her to remain behind in order to take care of orphans." On leaving, people entrusted her with money and jewelry to hide at the mission. After repeatedly outwitting the regime, Gratham was eventually arrested for her clandestine relief work. Miraculously the gutsy missionary talked her way out of the treason charge.

In fitting testimony, The United Methodist Archives housed at Drew contributed visual proof of the atrocities. Among dozens of massive albums filled with photographs taken by missionaries from 1880 until the 1940s, two were from Western Asia.

Archivist Dale Patterson related that the albums were used to educate the Methodist public on situations and needs around the world. Until recently, he said, no one had recognized precisely what the photos depicted. Then, during a display on preservation in 1993, an album happened to be open to one of those pages and caught the attention of a visitor. The images and photographer's log documented the suffering: "Massacred Armenians, Bozanti,"

"Starving Armenians who have fallen by the wayside," and "Armenian graveyard, Bozanti, Near East." The photographs showed bodies neatly laid out, riverbeds bearing skulls and skeletons, and washed out mass graves.



Young Armenian refugees, top, and bread distribution at a relief center

Based on his studies of people who help others in terrible times, participant Dr. Ervin Staub concluded, "One person can greatly influence others by action or passivity." The University of Massachusetts scholar called on the international community to work to "create a climate where passivity is not OK and where bystanders are also evil." In that way, neither genocide nor its denial will be repeated.