

# Editorial

## Armenian Genocide Should Be Acknowledged

Ninety-two years ago the Ottoman Empire made a last-ditch effort to regain some of the prestige and glory it had enjoyed some 300 years earlier at the height of its power. At the end of that last gasp of a dying regime, one and a half million people of Armenian descent were driven out of the homes in Eastern Turkey where their ancestors had lived for generations. Most of the 1.5 million were murdered outright or driven into neighboring Syria to die in the deserts that lie to the south and east of the region.

The House Foreign Affairs Committee last Wednesday passed a nonbinding and largely symbolic resolution condemning as genocide the mass killings of Armenians in Turkey that began during World War I. The word "genocide" in the House resolution offended the Turkish government—identifying the Armenian killings as genocide is considered an insult against Turkish identity and is a crime under the Turkish penal code—and demonstrations by some groups in Turkey that come out in force every time this subject comes up, broke out in the streets of Istanbul and in Ankara, the Turkish capital. Last Thursday, Turkey recalled its ambassador from Washington and threatened to withdraw its support for the Iraq war.

Since the word "genocide" means the

systematic killing of, or a program of action intended to destroy, a whole national or ethnic group, and since almost the entire Armenian population of Eastern Turkey was wiped off the face of the earth between 1915 and 1923, "genocide" seems to be the only word that fits. Indeed, the Armenian Genocide set the pattern for events that followed only 20-some years afterward. "Who remembers the Armenians?" Hitler asked when he set out on his campaign for the Holocaust that saw the slaughter of 6 million Jews and another 6 million "racial undesirables" such as gypsies, trade unionists and homosexuals during world War II. Exercising the same criteria, USSR dictator Josef Stalin systematically starved an entire population of one of his "Soviet Socialist Republics" during the 1930s. Nobody remembered the Armenians, but tyrants all over the world learned the lessons of their massacre too well. To ignore the past is to risk repeating it, one reason for the House Committee passing the resolution by a 27-21 vote.

The House resolution is largely symbolic and in no way condemns the present Turkish government. Nor do we. The resolution seeks only the acknowledgment that the word "genocide" applies to the sad events of 1915. Modern Turkey is not to blame for the acts of a regime that

ended its reign long before the present government came into being—indeed, long before most of the people taking exception to the House resolution were born. What's more, the American government is one of Turkey's major business partners, with \$11 billion in trade last year. Much of the Turkish military's equipment is provided by the American defense industry. American military personnel and materiel move through Turkey to the battle lines in Iraq. The two nations need each other too much to let a situation that was not the fault or responsibility of the present government in Ankara come between them.

"I'm a big supporter of Turkey and Turkey is a very important ally that plays an important geopolitical role and a vital role in the war on terror," Congressman Gary Ackerman, a co-sponsor of the resolution, said. "Our friends in Turkey need to understand that they can get beyond this emotional issue. Turkey has to understand that they are no more the Ottoman Empire than today's Germany is the Third Reich. We've heard from people who say that this will be very damaging to our efforts underway today. But more damaging than anything else would be the damage done by us denying the truth."

## Happy 70th Birthday, Queens College

Seventy years ago 400 students walked onto a campus that was still a-building and matriculated at a new institution. Today, more than 18,000 students are enrolled at Queens College, long considered to be a jewel in the crown of the City University of New York (CUNY)—an institution founded some 24 years after Queens College first opened its doors.

Queens College at first charged no tuition; today students pay several thousand dollars a year to attend. As is the case with other city and state colleges, however, tuition is considerably lower than at comparable private institutions—and the education offered at Queens College is now, as it has always been, the equal of, and in many cases, far superior to, that of private, pricier, schools.

The founders of Queens College provided its students a campus that equaled many a private institution aesthetically as well. The original buildings and those that were constructed later all convey the same

message: the students attending Queens College are the equal of those at any college or university and deserve a campus that shows the high regard in which they are held.

The student body—commuter students from the borough and throughout the city—also compares favorably with the classes attending private institutions. The Queens College Class of 1941 graduated just in time to enlist in the United States armed forces and fight in World War II. More women than men were students during the war years, a situation that reversed after the war, when returning soldiers took advantage of the G.I. Bill to further their education. But while tuition was once free and today students pay far less than they would at a private college or university, Queens College requires its students to meet high academic standards to enter and remain enrolled.

In the 70 years of its existence, the college has seen students take sides for and

against other policies and conflicts concerning the United States and its place in the world. Queens College student Andrew Goodman, along with fellow civil rights workers James Chaney and Michael Schwerner, was murdered in Mississippi in 1964. The Flushing campus has never tried to isolate itself from the surrounding borough or the rest of the city, the nation and the world and, unlike some other institutions, has maintained a policy of airing all points of view.

Anyone who meets the entrance requirements can attend Queens College, and once having availed him- or herself of the accumulated wisdom of the ages conveyed by some of the most outstanding minds in their respective fields, is free to rise as high as he or she desires to go. Congratulations to Queens College on 70 years of embodying the highest ideals of American education and promulgating the American dream. Here's to 70 more such glorious years and many more to come.

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