# A GIANT OF OUR TIMES

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Vicken Gulvartian, Los Angeles, April 2013

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Married to an Armenian patriot, and father of four children--all with Armenian names—Prof. Hovannisian has been the making of an American-Armenian who stands out as a role model to generations of youngsters looking for a purpose and a path in life. Here was, from the day he entered the academic arena, a distinguished historian, articulate, making a case for the plight of the forgotten, recognition of the Armenian Genocide, and well prepared to debate the denialists and the revisionists with proof. His work has singularly changed the image of Armenians in America from that of the discriminated Fresno Armenian to a voice for a cause, recognition of rights, and a place in California, the United States and world history. It has been an honor knowing him, and a pleasure to have introduced his driven children to mine, one in particular.

It has been a life dedicated to the mind, and Prof. Hovannisian has become the measure of the work of the mind: asking questions to which answers are to be found in a tireless research of documents, letters, eyewitness accounts, forgotten manuscripts, oral testimonies and archives hidden deep in rooms in London, Washington, Paris, Berlin and Beirut.
The Armenian nation is indebted to him for his relentless search for our story in the modern era, and for transforming the international movement for the recognition of the Armenian Genocide into a case for our human right to claim the past and own it. The Turks shall not tell our story. The story of life on our ancestral lands in Kharpert, Cilicia, Mush, Daron, Van, and in all the eastern provinces of Turkey is documented by an extensive series of academic conferences organized by Prof. Hovanissian. They serve as yet another proof that the only reason why we abruptly vanished from the land after 1915 was by force, by genocide.

Scholars who research and study Armenian issues and topics must be advised to keep in mind the standards set by Prof. Hovannisian: an insistent discipline to work, write, publish, and lecture; an endless energy to travel and meet people, and to teach.

All said and done, what will be Prof. Hovannisian's legacy? Huge!

There will, of course, always be the more than two dozen books that he has authored or edited, and the more than 100 scholarly articles he has published; academic seminars he has organized, research papers he has delivered, lectures and speeches he has delivered everywhere, in the presence of Turks and Armenians alike, and others.
I believe that this is what struck me more than thirty years ago as a college student in Philadelphia: The discovery of the implications of being Armenian in this world, and the place and purpose of Armenia in the history of peoples, civilizations and nations. Prof. Hovannisian has been equally effective to draw the identity of the Armenian in America. The answer to the question, "What are we to do to be relevant and effective?" has been at the core of his activism.

While the rest of us must work hard to keep alive our institutions of national, cultural, religious preservation (schools, churches, newspapers, organizations), it is important to remember that it is the trail-blazing work of people like Prof. Hovannisian who have given us the sense of urgency to organize, rally and demand, and have a seat at the negotiating table. The historic dimensions of discussions on our common goals, dreams and aspirations; and our drive to live with pride and dignity on a piece of land of our own, are in the history that Prof. Hovannisian has spent a career to document.

He has led generations of students to find their identity, many organizations to find a cause, and activists to find their voice. Our current strategy to put Genocide recognition into a narrative understandable to a general audience and to shake the wall of Genocide denial is something we owe to Prof. Hovannisian.

A message to upstart republics and a warning to those who do not heed the lessons of history are loud and clear from the giant in our midst. And that is why the Professor has the podium, and he has not yet finished his lesson in history.