GENOCIDE OF THE ARMENIANS MATTERS

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By Robbie Gennet, The Huffington Post, 12 March 2010

Robbie Gennet is a songwriter, musician and journalist from Los Angeles, CA who loves to travel the planet, ride waves and expand his inner and outer horizons. He's recorded and released a lot his own music both solo and with his bands Rudy and Rabbithead and toured as a sideman and vocalist with acts as diverse as Nick Lachey, Everclear and 7Mary3. An award-winning piano player, Robbie released an instructional piano DVD and numerous music books with Hal Leonard, and has been writing for major music magazines including Musician, Gig, Guitar Player and Keyboard Magazine, at which he is a contributing editor and a long time columnist. He is working on his own long awaited music instruction book/DVD with Alfred Publishing and will soon be commencing the recording of the third Rudy record this fall. Robbie can be found online at myspace.com/robbiegennet and robbiegennet.com as well as on iTunes and stages worldwide.

You may ask yourself why the Armenian genocide currently matters, or more accurately, why Turkey is so resolute against it being recognized as such. One would think after almost a hundred years, an official apology for killing or displacing 2 million Armenians would be a welcome and long overdue occasion for Turkey to make peace with Armenia. But as we've seen, Turkey has threatened "diplomatic consequences" if Obama doesn't suppress a congressional resolution that would officially use the label "genocide" for the incident, even going so far as to withdraw their U.S. Ambassador because of it. In fact, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said the issue was a matter of "honor" for his country and no less than Turkish President Abdullah Gul said the following:

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Ambassador because of it. In fact, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said the issue was a matter of "honor" for his country and no less than Turkish President Abdullah Gul said the following: "I declare such a decision that was taken with political concerns in mind to be an injustice to history and to the science of history. Turkey will not be responsible for the negative results that this event may lead to."

Before we examine this further, it would be helpful to define the term "genocide" so that we know what we're talking about. In 1948, the United Nations adopted the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (CPPCG). Article 2 of this convention defines genocide as "any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life, calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; forcibly transferring children of the group to another group."

Under these terms, the widespread massacres and deportations of Armenians in 1915- which included the use of 25 major concentration camps, forced marches, mass burnings, drownings, and gassings- were in every way a genocide by the Turks against the Armenians. So why is Turkey so against calling it as such, let alone apologizing? After all, Germany has made great steps to publicly acknowledge and profusely apologize for the Jewish Holocaust, even paying reparations, making holocaust denial and the display of symbols of Nazism a criminal offense and establishing a National Holocaust Memorial Museum in Berlin. But Turkey? They won't even allow the US to label the Armenian genocide as such or acknowledge it in any way. Here is why: land.

Take a look at a map of pre-genocide Armenia here, here and here. What you will notice is that a huge chunk of what is now Turkey was then considered Armenia. If the 1915 Turkish actions were indeed recognized as a genocide, current day Armenia could potentially petition for the return of its land. Note that this may even include the area known as Cilicia, a separate but ethnically connected entity bordering the Mediterranean Sea that dates back to the Kingdom of Cilician Armenia in the early part of the second Millenium. These historically grounded lands could rightfully be considered Armenian if they could establish that they were unlawfully taken from them via the genocide. The evidence is there and so is the history. Armenia itself was officially named way back in 512 BC when it was annexed to Persia, while Cilicia was established as a principality it 1078. After years of struggle under Turkish, Kurdish and Mongol rule, the Ottoman Empire ruled Armenia from 1453-1829, after which the Russian Empire ruled through the rest of the 19th century. After the Genocide and WWI, what's left of Armenia was annexed by Bolshevist Russia and became part of the Soviet Union from 1922-1991, after which Armenia declared its independence. But let's back up for a moment for a glimpse at what happened during WWI.

In 1913, three so-called Young Turks took over the Turkish government via a coup with a goal of uniting all of the Turkic peoples in the region and creating a new Turkish empire called Turan with

one language and one religion. The wanted to expand their borders eastward but standing in their way was historic Armenia. Hence, the Armenian Genocide. In December of 1920, the Treaty of Alexandropol was signed between the Democratic Republic of Armenia and the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, thereby ending the Turkish-Armenian War while forcing Armenia to cede over 50% of it's land to Turkey. In seven years, the Turkish government had ethnically cleansed and took over most of Armenia. Armenia was granted formal international recognition with the 1920 signing of the Treaty of Sevres and with the help of President Woodrow Wilson, arranged for the return of a portion of their historic homeland. However, Turkey soon elected Mustafa Kemal, an extreme nationalist who refused to honor the treaty and set about re-occupying those lands, leaving current day Armenia as a far smaller portion of its former self.

Interestingly (and not all unexpected) Turkey is predominantly Muslim and Armenia is predominantly Christian, dating back to AD 40 when the Armenian Church was purportedly founded by two of Jesus' disciples. Currently, over 93% of Armenian Christians belong to the Armenian Apostolic Church and they rightly claim that the Armenian Genocide was a religious and ethnic cleansing. It was also a purging of a culture that was in many ways more advanced and educated than their Turkish neighbors. Here's a passage from the Armenian Genocide page on historyplace.com that's illuminating:

There were also big cultural differences between Armenians and Turks. The Armenians had always been one of the best educated communities within the old Turkish empire. Armenians were the professionals in society, the businessmen, lawyers, doctors and skilled craftsmen. And they were more open to new scientific, political and social ideas from the West (Europe and America). Children of wealthy Armenians went to Paris, Geneva or even to America to complete their education.

By contrast, the majority of Turks were illiterate peasant farmers and small shop keepers. Leaders of the Ottoman Empire had traditionally placed little value on education and not a single institute of higher learning could be found within their old empire. The various autocratic and despotic rulers throughout the empire's history had valued loyalty and blind obedience above all. Their uneducated subjects had never heard of democracy or liberalism and thus had no inclination toward political reform. But this was not the case with the better educated Armenians who sought political and social reforms that would improve life for themselves and Turkey's other minorities.

The Young Turks decided to glorify the virtues of simple Turkish peasantry at the expense of the Armenians in order to capture peasant loyalty. They exploited the religious, cultural, economic and political differences between Turks and Armenians so that the average Turk came to regard Armenians as strangers among them.

Even before the Young Turks took over, there was a spike in Islamic fundamentalism and Christian Armenians were branded as infidels. In 1909, tens of thousands of Armenians from hundreds of villages in Cilicia were massacred, setting the stage for the genocide years later. Reading an account

of these atrocities is not for the faint of heart and yet, we must not shield our eyes from the dark realities of history, lest we want to see them repeated. As much as we wish to see these barbaric behaviors relegated to the distant past, one need only look to places like Darfur, Bosnia and Rwanda to see modern day humans at their worst.

The histories of Armenia and Turkey are surely intertwined and yet, this genocide remains a black stain on both their psyches. Judging from Turkeys recalcitrance to discuss or acknowledge it, that stain may never go away. But that doesn't mean it will ever be forgotten, no matter how much Turkey wishes it would fade into history. Though they would like to take advantage of the worlds collective amnesia, the internet has made it impossible to forget and erase this so-called "injustice to history". Here is a telling quote from Adolph Hitler, speaking to his generals before invading Poland in 1939:

"Thus for the time being I have sent to the East only my 'Death's Head Units' with the orders to kill without pity or mercy all men, women, and children of Polish race or language. Only in such a way will we win the vital space that we need. Who still talks nowadays about the Armenians?"

We all do, Mr. Hitler, and long after your genocidal dreams have faded, long after the last survivors of those inflicted generations have passed, they will not be forgotten. Armenian-American author William Saroyan put it best:

"I should like to see any power of the world destroy this race, this small tribe of unimportant people, whose history is ended, whose wars have all been fought and lost, whose structures have crumbled, whose literature is unread, whose music is unheard, whose prayers are no longer uttered. Go ahead, destroy this race. Let us say that it is again 1915. There is war in the world. Destroy Armenia. See if you can do it. Send them from their homes into the desert. Let them have neither bread nor water. Burn their houses and their churches. See if they will not live again. See if they will not laugh again. See if the race will not live again when two of them meet in a beer parlor, twenty years after, and laugh, and speak in their tongue. Go ahead, see if you can do anything about it. See if you can stop them from mocking the big ideas of the world, you sons of bitches, a couple of Armenians talking in the world, go ahead and try to destroy them."