WHISPER BLOODY MURDER?

Posted on December 28, 2008 by Keghart

Category: Opinions

By Paul Sookiasian, Friday, December 5, 2008

Less than a month ago news started coming across the wires that surprised many in the Armenian-American community. A CNN press release said that it would be airing a program by their respected correspondent Christiane Amanpour, entitled, "Scream Bloody Murder," which would deal with the lack of response to genocides of the 20th century. The release specifically mentioned Armenia as one of the cases of genocide it would be examining.

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This naturally created some excitement that finally a major news organization would be dedicating a program partly to the so often overlooked Armenian Genocide of 1915 and inform a nationwide audience about it. Word was spread by phone and internet with many Armenian-Americans excited that the mainstream media would finally take a look at our forgotten genocide. Personally, I was a little suspicious and the day before the showed aired I found out through a source that, as I had suspected, the total time dedicated to the Armenian Genocide in this two hour program would be 45 seconds. However the many other Armenians who did not know this went into the show expecting at long last some serious interest in the plight of their ancestors from one of these many 20th century genocides. They must have been sorely disappointed. Before the show had even ended people I know were angrily posting messages of shock and disappointment that something billed as a documentary about genocide, inclusive of the Armenian case, would dedicate large portions of time to all the other cases but less than a fleeting minute to Armenia.

What's so interesting is the title of the CNN show to begin with invokes the imagery of screaming and talked to those who screamed about genocide, a notion identical to that of Carla Garapedian's Armenian Genocide documentary "Screamers". This idea of screaming about genocide to make it known was originated by Harvard scholar Dr. Samantha Power in her Pulitzer Prize-winning book "A Problem from Hell". She was featured in "Screamers" and it is hard to think that the CNN special was not at least in part inspired by Power's work based on this similarity. It bares mentioning that Power dedicated a chapter of her book on genocide to the Armenian Genocide and so one can assume that if put in charge of planning "Scream Bloody Murder" she would have found it worthy of much more screen time than 45 seconds. This is not to say that CNN should be condemned for mentioning the Armenian Genocide, but the off-handed manner in which 1915 gets mentioned (despite Armenia having been prominently billed as one of the documentary's subjects in the original press release) when the other examples of genocide each received on average the space of time through two commercial breaks seems to imply it is a lesser example or somehow not central to the subject of genocide.

Flying in the face of this conception though is the fact mentioned in the documentary that 1915 inspired Lemkin to coin the word genocide and really got him thinking about the crime in the first place. As one can see in the documentary Screamers or Power's book, there was no lack of screaming going on in the Armenian case either. Ambassador Henry Morgenthau's story is a now legendary example of someone who stood up to the very face of genocide and tried to scream about it to the world. This

screaming reached its way to the top, as evidenced by this article regarding Secretary of State at the time William Jennings Bryan, but unfortunately it couldn't be stopped. Other screamers included Consul Leslie A. Davis who told tales of genocide which sound frighteningly similar to those which occurred later in Rwanda and Cambodia as mentioned in "Scream Bloody Murder". Even though the Armenian Genocide is over its effect and the fact it is unrecognized by Turkey still resound today in the highest levels of world affairs, geopolitics, and is quite relevant to our world today even though it is almost a hundred years in the past. Just a few years ago former US Ambassador to Armenia John Evans was fired by the State Department for screaming proper recognition of the genocide. This story compliments those mentioned by CNN, such as that of Canadian general in Rwanda Romeo Dallaire, of those who screamed and paid the price (and is a unique twist in that this scream was so long after the genocide happened as opposed to while it was going on).

Despite being largely overlooked, the Armenian Genocide was even referenced in the Genocide Convention covered by Amanpour as having finally put into law the crime of genocide. While it is too late now to go back and create a new segment on the Armenian Genocide to place in the already aired documentary, that does not mean CNN has no way of rectifying this error. I had been feeling hopeful about the documentary and might have given it more of a pass on this omission until I saw this interactive map on the section of Scream Bloody Murder section of CNN's website about the world's killing fields. It appears that despite the fact when it had first been announced Armenia was prominently mentioned as one of the examples of genocide that would be covered, it failed to even be pinpointed on the interactive map as an example of genocide. This is a very strange thing to ponder since one would assume if the Armenian Genocide is mentioned in the promotional material it'd be listed on this interactive map. This seems to compound the insult of being only mentioned for 45 seconds in the documentary to being completely forgotten on their world map of genocides and makes me question what went on behind the scenes. Perhaps they found it too provocative to pinpoint a NATO ally such as Turkey and decided that since marking the Armenian Genocide would mean marking Turkey it'd be best to just leave Armenia off despite the fact it is even mentioned in the documentary? Despite the fact it says almost nothing about the Armenian Genocide, Scream Bloody Murder hasn't gone unnoticed in Turkey after all, as this Turkish newspaper article from Hurriyet yesterday makes clear: "Genocide feature worrisome"

Whatever the case, this oversight is extremely unfortunate and Armenians and Americans alike should take CNN to task. American officials were the first to scream out in the 20th century – a proud fact swept under the rug. Besides letting CNN know they should have paid more attention to the original example of 20th century genocide in their documentary, it can show its good faith immediately by placing the Armenian Genocide on their website's interactive map as it deserves. For an otherwise well-done documentary on the importance of screaming bloody murder whenever and wherever it happens, this blank spot over Turkey doubles as a shameful and bloody stain
To write to CNN, or to post your question for Christiane Amanpour, take action here:

Amanpour Screams 'Bloody Murder' But Not about Armenian Genocide
By Ara Khachatourian, Asbarez.com, 4 December 2008
A powerful documentary entitled “Scream Bloody Murder” anchored by Christiane Amanpour premiering on CNN today (9 p.m. ET/PT) offers a gripping look at Genocide throughout history and those who
witnessed and warned a deaf world about such atrocities, but neglects to mention the Armenian Genocide as the first such event that prompted Raphael Lemkin to coin the phrase.

The documentary begins with the roots of the word Genocide and chronicles the stormy conflicts within Lemkin, who, as Amanpour puts it, was affected by the slaughter of 1.5 million Armenians by Ottoman Turks and was prompted to coin the phrase Genocide. In the almost 90-minute press screener, the Armenian Genocide was mentioned for about 45 seconds as an anecdotal reference to Lemkin's struggle for human justice. Using photographs now familiar to all Armenians and possibly obtained from Armin T. Wegner Collection, Amanpour illustrates the horror of the Armenian Genocide but does not delve into it in as in-depth and compelling manner as she does the other instances of Genocide.

Throughout the program, Amanpour "reveals stories of those who tried to stop genocide," as the CNN press information describes it and discusses the horrific stories of Genocide with "heroes who witnessed evil-- and 'screamed bloody murder' for the international community to stop it.

Amanpour and CNN should be applauded for the in-depth look at Genocide, from the Holocaust to the killing fields of Cambodia, to Iraq, Rwanda, Bosnia and now Darfur the horror of it all is told with searing images and graphic eyewitness accounts.

To bring attention to Genocide, on the eve of the 60th anniversary of the adoption of UN Convention of Genocide and Human Rights, authored by Lemkin, is an important accomplishment, one that also asks the hard question of why the world did (does) not interfere when it has a moral obligation.

Amanpour adeptly clarifies the political machinations behind the response--or lack thereof--by the US in all instances featured in the report and wonders, at the end, whether others who "scream bloody murder" will be heard. One wonders, however, if Amanpour heard the screams of Henry Morgenthau, the US Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire at the time of the Armenian Genocide, who along with Elie Wiesel, Father Francois Ponchaud, Peter Galbraith, Richard Holbrook, Canadian General Romeo Dallaire and others who bore witness to such unspeakable atrocities and whose warnings prompted action but not soon enough to save millions of lives.

Perhaps, the Armenian community can now prompt CNN, as it did eight years ago ABC News and its venerable anchor the late Peter Jennings to take a closer look at the first Genocide of the 20th Century.

Amanpour's "Scream Bloody Murder" is an important piece of journalism as it asks the very critical questions that could have prevented so many acts of Genocide. In its reporting, Amanpour is also very adept at pointing to US complicity in all these events, much like Samantha Power was in her Pulitzer Prize-winning book "A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide."

"Scream Bloody Murder" anchored by CNN Chief International Correspondent Christiane Amanpour airs on CNN Thursday at 9 p.m. Eastern/Pacific, with an encore at midnight Eastern and Pacific.

1) Post your question on CNN iReport

Ask Christiane Amanpour a question about this serious shortcoming in her documentary through CNN iReport,

an interactive feature that allows you to post video and text viewable by the millions of visitors to CNN's website. Your posting will also be searchable on Google News.
View an effective CNN iReport
posting commenting on "Scream Bloody Murder".

2) Write directly to CNN's editors
Send a free ANCA WebFax to CNN's leadership pointing out this shortcoming and asking them to address this gap in their reporting in future coverage of genocide-related issues.