

ATTACK BUSH, NOT HISTORY

Daniel Larison's piece on the alleged Armenian "genocide" was a huge disappointment to me (Nov. 5). I had come to expect a respect for historical exactitude from *The American Conservative*.

As Larison notes, the historical debate is complex, more so than he allows. Much of the standard account relies on the dubious testimony of Amb. Henry Morgenthau and the "elaborations" he encouraged from his Armenian amanuensis, Hagop Andonian, who was certainly not an unbiased observer. Morgenthau himself was an early edition of Paul Wolfowitz, a drum beater with a secret agenda, anxious to get U.S. troops into war. He was among the "malevolent persons" Kaiser Wilhelm II accused of being behind the concoctions concerning the Crown Council in Potsdam just prior to the outbreak of war.

Scholars will continue to debate the exact term for the horrible events of 1915-16, the pro-genocide "prominent historians" coming mostly from the Armenian diaspora. Bernard Lewis is not the only historian on the other side of the question—he is joined by the late Stanford J. Shaw, Pierre Oberling, Dankwart Rostow, Justin McCarthy, Norman Stone, Guenther Lewy, Heath Lowry, and Avigdor Levy. It is facile, if not dishonest, to dismiss all of these as "denialists."

Historical research is necessarily selective, but certain facts cannot be gainsaid. It is difficult to "pack" census data. When the claims of Armenian genocide first came to my attention in the 1960s, the figure routinely bandied about was 2.5 million dead. I was appropriately shocked.

The Ottomans, however, kept very good census data. According to the census of 1914, there were 1.3 million Armenians in the Empire. At least 100,000 in the western cities were unafflicted by the troubles in the east.

Another 700,000 are known to have fled to the Caucasus, Western Europe, and the United States.

In his history of the Ottoman Empire, Shaw estimated that there were about 300,000 Armenian victims. He acknowledges that Armenian researchers claim higher census figures that, if true, could mean a toll of up to 1.3 million—a far cry from 2.5 million.

Shaw notes that there were approximately 6 million victims in this area during this period "killed by a combination of revolts, bandit attacks, massacres and counter massacres, and famine and disease, compounded by destructive and brutal foreign invasions in which all the people of the empire, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, had their victims and criminals." The Turks have long had their main archives open to researchers, and they have proposed an international commission of scholars to determine exactly what happened.

The folly of the Bush administration, Larison's main target, certainly deserves exposure, but *TAC* has made a bad bargain if it sacrifices its own credibility in the process.

FRANK CREEL
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Daniel Larison replies:

I must respectfully disagree with Mr. Creel's letter. He has provided a list of both skeptical historians who dispute certain details and denialist historians who flatly reject the claim of genocide, including Professors Lewis, Shaw, and Shaw's students. If Shaw was not a genocide denier, no such person exists. The majority consensus of scholars accepts the designation of genocide in this case.

Mr. Creel also raises the problems posed in assessing the total number of Armenians slain, granting that the toll may have been as high as 1.3 million, which is not far removed from the frequently cited figure of 1.5 that I used in

my column. More fundamental to the question of whether there was a genocide beginning in 1915, however, is not the exact number of dead but rather the evidence of a state-run policy of deliberate mass murder of a particular group of people.

Tanker Akcam's *A Shameful Act* details the evidence of this policy at length, working from the records of Ottoman courts-martial, Ottoman archives, American, German, and Austrian consular reports, as well as the accounts of American missionaries serving in Anatolia. These records tell of the consequences of Talaat Pasha's stated desire for "a complete and fundamental elimination of this concern," that is, the Armenians. As Akcam has explained, using this wide array of sources that goes far beyond the allegedly doctored records of Ambassador Morgenthau, the genocide policy ignored those settlements in which Armenian population density did not exceed 10 percent of the population. He writes on page 178, "The issue was Armenian population density."

The genocide policy was an effort to reduce and limit the numerical strength of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, and this policy was implemented in both eastern and western Anatolia and in Thrace. Unfortunately, it was successful in its aims, such that Talaat could tell the German ambassador to the Porte by the end of August 1915, "The Armenian question no longer exists." It is an embarrassment to our country that any part of our government continues to act as if there is any question about the reality of the Armenian genocide.

The American Conservative welcomes letters to the editor. Submit by e-mail to letters@amconmag.com, by fax to 703-875-3350, or by mail to 1300 Wilson Blvd., Suite 120, Arlington, VA 22209. Please include your name, address, and phone number. We reserve the right to edit all correspondence for space and clarity.

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[DIPLOMACY]

TRAILING OUR COAT

In the hope that renewed threats will cause Tehran to abandon its nuclear-weapons ambitions, President Bush ordered the State and Treasury Departments to reclassify Iran's largest banks and affiliates of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as supporters of terrorism and impose sanctions. The *Washington Post* called these "the most punitive measures imposed on Tehran since the 1979 takeover of the American Embassy." Condoleezza Rice warned that "Iran's rulers [who] choose to continue down a path of confrontation" will face "resistance" from the United States and its allies. According to the Bush administration, these punishments are the first steps toward peace.

Of course, the president's potential successors understand the logic of the sanctions. Mitt Romney, when asked what he would do if economic sanctions fail to warm relations, said he was open to "bombardment of some kind." Compassionate conservative Mike Huckabee explained, "Before we bomb them, we ought to try to bankrupt them." Making the administration's Orwellian logic explicit, he continued, "Iran is not a nation building up nuclear arms to defend against somebody, because there is no one threatening them." Clearly,

[CULTURE]

POLITICAL SCIENCE

We would be remiss if we didn't comment on the ritual humiliation of James Watson, who won a Nobel Prize in 1953, shared with two others, for discovering the structure of DNA, and has since been the guiding force behind one of America's most important scientific research libraries. The episode has been widely covered. At the end of a long interview in the *London Times* kicking off a lecture tour, Watson was asked a leading question and rather



than ducking, averred that he was "inherently gloomy about the prospect of Africa" because "all our social policies are based on the fact that their intelligence is the same as ours, whereas all the testing says not really."

A mass gang-up followed, as many competed to see who could most emphatically abhor the remark. First his prestigious lectures in London and Edinburgh were cancelled, then an "outraged" Federation of American Scientists issued a statement denouncing his "noxious" views, and finally Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, which owes its eminence entirely to Watson's efforts, forced his resignation. Were public stoning legal in the West, that would have been the logical next step.

Americans have perfectly good moral and societal reasons not to dwell on the racial distribution of intelligence, and there is much wisdom in Nathan Glazer's comment in response to the publication of *The Bell Curve*. According to Hershstein and Murray, Glazer said, America "live[s] with an untruth. ... I ask myself whether the untruth is not better for American society than the truth."

But that doesn't justify the mob-like attacks that followed Watson's remark. If the old scientist's comments were so

obviously batty, they could have easily been ignored, discounted, or refuted. Scientists could point to Africa's record of development once freed from the shackles of colonialism or generate more nuanced arguments. The effort to block out and shout down goes entirely against the spirit of free inquiry, a great legacy of the modern West. If American science is now represented by those who would restart the Inquisition over a few comments in a newspaper interview, that is greater cause for worry than anything James Watson said.

[CONGRESS]

COUNTRY OVER PARTY

Congressman Walter Jones's courage may cost him his seat. Two years ago, the North Carolina conservative broke with the GOP establishment to oppose the indefinite occupation of Iraq. In July, he was one of only four House Republicans to vote for a troop-withdrawal bill. Now the six-term congressman faces his first primary challenge.

He won't go gentle. Jones, who still sits on the Armed Services Committee though his antiwar stand has cost him the leadership position his seniority deserves, knows the administration has Iran in its sites. His first blocking maneuver was a