

## DENIAL OF GENOCIDE

Imagine taking a class in modern German history and not learning anything about the Holocaust. And imagine further if the author of the textbook, the professor himself, blamed the Jews for massacring Germans and said that their disappearance from Europe was nothing more than a misfortune which also befell the entire German population.

I find it extremely unfortunate that students in Professor Stanford Shaw's Turkish history class did not have the opportunity to learn about important historical events of the Ottoman Empire which shaped the present Republic, such as the Armenian genocide.

At least I was aware of what was missing from our textbook, and did additional research and reading on the side. What about the dozens of other students who have not been previously exposed to the history of the Middle East? Isn't this malnutrition of young minds who will become tomorrow's leaders and intellectuals? Has "freedom of speech" become a gimmick to rewrite history?

As a scholar in history, I oppose and condemn all attempts by politically motivated professors to revise history or, worse, to teach it according to the agendas of foreign governments. Terrence Des Pres, a noted Holocaust expert, recognized the fault in Turkish studies when asking the question:

"What is happening to the university if increasing numbers of scholars occupy positions funded or promoted by governments and have no ethical or professional qualms about work that aims, sometimes less, sometimes more, to shore up the official claims of nation-states?"

I am sure Professor Shaw will agree that this is not a personal issue, for he knows that I respect him dearly as an individual. Nevertheless, his lectures and works remain unjust and clearly reflect a denialist attitude.

As April 24 (the day in 1915 which marked the beginning of the Armenian genocide) nears, I ask students in this university and elsewhere to do everything in their power to stop Holocaust and genocide denial.

Denial is the final stage of genocide.

The following is from my letter that was distributed in Professor Shaw's class on March 18. It was in response to a sheet written and dispersed by Ersin Sivrican, an engineering student of Turkish descent, with the consent of Professor Shaw. Sivrican's article, which argued that there was no such thing as an Armenian genocide, included such statements as "let the mad dog bark" and "revolting Armenians."

I appreciate greatly that Sivrican has begun to take advantage of the freedom of speech afforded by the United States government, which he could not do in his homeland of Turkey. While I would be imprisoned in Turkey for writing this column (and many have and continue to be imprisoned and tortured in Turkey solely for expressing their opinions), the United States allows expression of opinion.

>From the many interesting articles written on genocide denial, of particular interest is one by Israel Charny, executive director of the Institute on the Holocaust and Genocide (Jerusalem), titled "A Contribution to the Psychology of Denial of Genocide."

He states that to deny the countless deaths of a known event of genocide is to celebrate the deaths of the same victims and to intimate that the doctrine of power which brought about their destruction is still in force, to be used when opportunity permits.

This is a common theme that permeates Turkish denial of the Armenian genocide. In fact, this observation helps explain the current political state of Turkey. It is a society where true Turkish heroes are chastised and demonized while the demons of Turkish society are idolized. It is unfortunate that Sivrican does not recognize the destructive consequences of such a policy.

Charny states that to seek to erase agonizing vivid memories and pictures from the eyes and minds of survivors, their descendants and relatives is to mock their sensibilities, memorial needs and personal attachments - in a sense once again to victimize the victims.

In his sheet, Sivrican victimizes me, my family and my people once again (by denying the genocide). Whether this is done knowingly or as a consequence of Sivrican's implementing the policies of others is irrelevant. He must understand the message he is supporting with his actions, just as all of us must understand the messages of our actions.

Charny also states that to promote blatant lies about major events of history is to demand power over the minds of the masses and their blind obedience to the dictators of their minds.

As students at a university, it is imperative for us to expand our knowledge. Denial is an attempt to limit knowledge.

Charny states that to kill man's ability to differentiate between what is known and unknown is to write a final chapter to mass murder by murdering truth, reality, human memory and history.

We, as Americans, must be vigilant in preserving the truth. While the denier wishes to portray this as an issue between Turks and Armenians, in fact it is an issue of human rights and justice. When justice is absent, human rights perish.

It behooves us to avoid playing a part in the destructive behavior of genocide denial. As Charny also writes, "We must fight denial of past genocides, not only to set the record straight, but to fight evil in our time, relentlessly, courageously and toughly."