

## Textbook Coverage of the Destruction of the Armenians

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*Despite its importance as the event establishing that the 20<sup>th</sup> century would be known as “the age of genocide,” the destruction of the Armenians that occurred between the mid-1890s and 1923 is given marginal coverage in contemporary U. S. high school history textbooks. This article critiques that coverage and identifies the overall flow of the information that is presented while noting several instances in which information is presented in an underdeveloped, confusing, or contradictory manner. It then makes several suggestions about topics that should be included in an expanded coverage of the Armenian situation, thus ensuring that students develop accurate perspectives about this critical event.*

Keywords: History, study and teaching, genocide, ethnic conflict, textbooks and teaching history.

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In *The Burning Tigris*, Balakian (2003) contends that the metaphor “the unremembered genocide” does not acknowledge “how large the massacres of the Armenians in the 1890s and the genocide of the Armenians in 1915 loomed in American (as well as European) consciousness and social and political life during a span of four decades” (p. xiii). Taking a long-term view, Power (2002) outlines how Armenia set the stage for both “the age of genocide” that defines the 20<sup>th</sup> century and for America’s response to the genocides that have occurred and continue to occur. Given the Armenian situation’s profound effect on American thought during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in particular and on that century’s history in general, it is problematic that most history courses taught in contemporary American high schools devote little, if any, attention to the destruction of the Armenians. After providing a brief overview of the history of the Armenian situation, this article examines how current high school history textbooks portray the destruction of the Armenians that occurred before, during, and shortly after World War I.

### Historical Context

A detailed discussion of the destruction of the Armenians is beyond the scope of this article. However, a general overview of that situation will provide a context into which textbook coverage of it can be placed.

The rise of ethnic nationalism threatened the existence of the Ottoman Empire during the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as minority groups living within the empire demanded increasing levels of autonomy, if not independence. In addition, the Treaties of San Stefano and Berlin (1878) obligated the empire to institute reforms designed to improve the status of those groups. However, the empire was emboldened and the Armenians disappointed when European powers failed to force the Ottomans to institute changes required by the treaties (Hovannisian, 1986).

Sultan Abdul Hamid II viewed the Armenians as the most dangerous minority group in his empire. In fact, he was so convinced that the Armenians’ influence in the empire had to be

eliminated, if his regime were to survive, that he blamed all of the empire's ills on "the Armenian Question" (Balakian, 2003, p 5). As a result, Abdul's government staged a series of massacres during the mid-1890s, thus initiating a process of destruction that would span three decades. At least 200,000 Armenians are believed to have been murdered during the 1890s, and the Armenian situation quickly became a humanitarian *cause célèbre* in Europe and the United States (Balakian, 2003).

Responding to the empire's ongoing disintegration, the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) forced the sultan to relinquish power in 1908, although he was allowed to keep his title until the following year. Enver Bey, one of the Young Turks and a CUP leader, promised that the empire's ethnic groups would share the country's future but, as Balakian (2003) notes, "The word 'Armenian' was conspicuously absent" from the list of the peoples whom Bey identified as being part of the new Turkey (p. 144).

A massacre of Armenians occurred in 1909 as the government attempted to eradicate non-Muslim influences in the empire. Soon thereafter, Bulgaria declared its independence, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina (Balakian, 2003). Ousted in a 1912 coup, the Young Turks regained power in January, 1913. One result of these events was a deepening polarization of Turkish-Armenian relations (Bloxham, 2009) because the Young Turks saw these developments as "another dramatic sign of their empire's dissolution, and it [the loss of territory] fueled their distrust and dislike of their Christian subjects, in particular their Christian subjects inside Turkey—notably the Armenians" (Balakian, 2003, p. 145).

The stage for the Armenian genocide had thus been set. Beginning in 1915 and using the cover provided by World War I, the government's bureaucratic apparatus staged "the first genocide of the past century or even the first of its kind in history" (Smith, 2000, p. 149). The genocide continued after the war ended in 1918, and it is estimated that well over one million Armenians were either murdered outright or died as a result of the conditions they faced during deportations and death marches.

### **The Role of Textbooks in Social Studies Instruction**

Textbooks have long been the primary determiner of social studies curricula. Saxe (1991) notes that that Committee of Seven recognized this fact in 1896 and, in doing so, identified some of the strengths (e.g., unity, continuity) and weaknesses (e.g., overgeneralization, an undo focus on factual accumulation) of textbooks that continue to affect instruction today. Ravitch (2004) contends that at least 80% of all social studies students read a textbook at least once a week, and Chapin (2011) believes that that figure may be low, noting that "Almost all homework and much classroom activity [in social studies classrooms] are textbook driven" (p. 23). In this regard, Zevin (2007) notes that many teachers establish a routine in which students read the textbook and answer end-of-the-chapter questions repeatedly throughout a course. When this occurs, students miss the richness of investigation and evaluation that can result from examining diverse sources and participating in varied activities.

Thus, it can be argued that textbooks do not simply support history curricula; rather, they are *the* curricula in many classrooms, a reality that has a pervasive impact on instruction. Rather than engaging students in the examination of complex, contradictory, and controversial themes at multiple levels and through nuanced perspectives, textbook-driven instruction leads students to believe that the textbook is "an authoritative and unproblematic source of information" (Barton and Levstik, 2009, p. 249). As such, what students learn about most historical topics can be

gauged accurately by how textbooks cover those subjects.

### **Selection of Textbooks to be Reviewed**

This article reviews the Armenian situation as it is portrayed in several of the most frequently used recent editions (2009/2010 copyrights) of high school world history textbooks published by Glencoe, Holt McDougal, and Pearson [Prentice Hall]), the companies that dominate the high school history textbook market (American Textbook Council, 2011). Given that textbooks direct most contemporary high school history instruction (Beal, Bolick, and Martorella, 2009), it may be held that a majority of American high school students gain their primary information about world history from textbooks produced by the companies identified above. Through this review, the content about the Armenian situation that is presented to students may be identified, analyzed, and strengthened.

The most frequently used U.S. history textbooks published by the three companies noted above were also reviewed. None of those textbooks discusses the destruction of the Armenians.

### **Methodology of the Study**

The textbooks were read, coded, and analyzed in order to evaluate their coverage of the destruction of the Armenians, the Ottoman Empire, Middle East nationalism during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Young Turks, and World War I. Several pertinent topics were noted, including: 1) a general overview of coverage of the Armenian situation in world history textbooks; 2) definition of the word genocide; 3) pre-World War I contextualization; 4) World War I contextualization; 5) motivations for the persecution of the Armenians; and 6) scope of the persecutions. The textbooks' indices were also studied in order to cross-check for completeness of the review process.

A content matrix chart for each topic was prepared so that information from the textbooks could be analyzed efficiently. Detailed data were recorded as the textbooks were studied, and several critical topics that were not discussed or that were mentioned tangentially were identified as the study progressed. These topics are discussed in the section: Unreported or Underreported Critical Aspects of the Armenian Situation.

### **Definition of Terms**

This article uses the terms “narrative” and “text” in referring to information provided in regular paragraph form. The term “ancillary” refers to information located in side and bottom panels and end-of-chapter review sections.

### **General Overview of Coverage in World History Textbooks**

Coverage of the Armenian situation varies considerably from textbook to textbook. Glencoe's narrative, which is placed in a chapter titled “Nationalism Around the World, 1919-1939,” includes three short paragraphs and a brief primary source passage. Located on the same page as the last part of the narrative, an ancillary panel provides additional information.

Located in a chapter titled “World War I, 1914-1919,” Holt's coverage appears on one page. Its narrative provides two short paragraphs, while a picture of a deportation in progress and a

chart depicting various fates suffered by the Armenians (i.e., escaped, deported, died while being deported) provide ancillary information.

Pearson's narrative is located in chapters titled "The New Imperialism" and "World War I and the Russian Revolution." In the first chapter, two brief paragraphs consider events from the 1890s, and one paragraph in the latter discusses the wartime genocide. Ancillary information is included in these two chapters and two later ones entitled "World War II and Its Aftermath" and "The Cold War".

### **Definition of the Word Genocide**

Each textbook includes a brief definition of genocide in its narrative about the Armenian situation with each definition referring to deliberate actions against racial, political, and cultural groups. These actions are labeled "mass murder" (Glencoe, p. 823), "destruction" (Holt, p. 788), and "attempt to destroy" (Pearson, p.764).

Glossary definitions are also provided. Glencoe adds "physical extinction" (p. R70) to its narrative, while Holt shortens its definition to "the killing of an entire people" (p. R103). Pearson retains the phrase "deliberate attempt to destroy" but substitutes "an entire religious or ethnic group" (p. 1183) for "racial, political, and cultural groups." As such, a diminution or altering of the word's meaning occurs in Holt and Pearson, respectively. The textbooks do not reference the five-part definition of genocide as enacted by United Nations Resolution 260 (United Nations, n.d.), nor do they mention that many contemporary historians and experts in international law have proposed an expanded use of the word (Totten and Parsons, 2009).

### **Pre-World War I Contextualization**

Most coverage of the Armenian situation refers to what occurred during World War I. As was noted earlier, however, a critical part of the Armenian story involves persecutions that were staged during the 1890s. Although Glencoe states that tensions had been building between the Ottoman Empire and the Armenians for many years, neither that book nor Holt refers to the atrocities that occurred before 1915. As such, students are presented with an incomplete account of the overall framework of the destruction of the Armenians.

In "The New Imperialism," Pearson accurately identifies nationalistic tensions between Turks and minority groups who wanted either increased autonomy within the empire or their own national states and notes that the Armenians were accused of supporting Russian aims in the region. However, its presentation is confusing. In discussing events that occurred during the 1890s, Pearson says, "The tensions triggered a brutal genocide of the Armenians ... Over the next 25 years, between 600,000 and 1.5 million Armenians were killed or died from disease and starvation" (p. 764). Later, its World War I chapter states that "The Ottoman government used this cooperation [between Armenians and the Russian army] as a reason to deport the entire Armenian population south to Syria and Mesopotamia. During the deportation, between 600,000 and 1.5 million Armenians died" (p. 827). As such, the two accounts contradict each other, leading to the possibility that students might be confused about the overall scope of what happened during the extended time frame in question.

Several additional problems exist with this account. For example, the 1890s situation is usually labeled as the massacre of the Armenians, with the word genocide being reserved for World War I era events (Balakian, 2003). This distinction is critical to students' understanding of

Armenia in specific and genocide in general because “The earlier massacres were episodic and affected selected communities. The genocide [from 1915] was *systematic, comprehensive, and directed practically against everyone* [of the Armenians]” (Adalian, 2009, p. 74) [italics added for emphasis].

Pearson’s initial reference to Armenia does not mention the war, thus decontextualizing that aspect of the situation until a later chapter that focuses on the war; however, this connection is never stated. The term “the Armenian genocide” is commonly used to refer to events from the World War I era, but Pearson does not use the word genocide in that context. An ancillary section placed at the end of the chapter does so, however. Finally, the World War I narrative states that 600,000 to 1.5 million Armenians died in 1915-1918. The two chapters thus contradict or, at least, overlap each other.

This chapter includes an ancillary section titled “The Forgotten Genocide,” an important term that suggests a powerful inference that can be proposed about the event. Four primary source documents and related questions that lead students to consider varying aspects of the situation are included. The section states that the genocide occurred from 1895-1923. As noted above, the term genocide is usually reserved for World War I era events. It also states that the perpetrators of the genocide were not punished after the war despite Allied pledges to do so. However, no explanation regarding the Allies’ failure to pursue war crimes trials is given, nor are the long-term ramifications of that failure identified. While the information given in this section is relevant, mixing information from the 1890s and the World War I era without providing clearly stated distinctions between the two phases of the Armenian situation could be confusing to students.

### **World War I Contextualization**

Glencoe uses the title “The Armenian Genocide” to introduce its narrative and defines the word genocide in the text. It also states that the Allies labeled Turkish actions as “crimes against humanity” as the genocide was in progress.

Two problems exist regarding the narrative as it relates to World War I era events. First, it includes only an oblique reference to the fact that the genocide occurred during World War I, ending its coverage by stating “Because of the war, however, the killings continued” (p. 824). Second, the Armenian genocide is discussed in a chapter titled “Nationalism Around the World, 1919-1939”; as such, the time frame in which the bulk of the genocide occurred does not align with the years in which the chapter is set.

Glencoe’s ancillary panel does mention that the genocide was implemented “under the cover of war” (p. 824) and continued until 1919. The date actually should be 1923 (Balakian, 2003). A quotation from a leader of the Young Turks’ acknowledges that his regime had targeted the Armenians for destruction, thus supporting the text’s contention that the new regime was seeking to build “a purely Turkish state” (p. 824). A lithograph titled “The Massacre of the Armenians” is also included. This image, which appeared in a French magazine in December, 1915, is referenced in two document-based questions, thus establishing contemporaneous international knowledge of the event. This circumstance is not stated explicitly, however, and is not developed. The ongoing refusal of the Turkish government to admit that the genocide occurred is noted, as is the diaspora that occurred after 1918. However, the diaspora’s effect on Armenian culture (Adalian, 1989) is not discussed.

Beginning its narrative by stating “As the Gallipoli campaign went on ...,” Holt sets the

genocide within the war's framework and uses the word genocide in that description (p. 788). An ancillary panel on the same page includes a photograph of victims arriving at a refugee camp and a chart that shows various fates that befell the Armenians (e.g., escaped, deported, or died while being deported).

Located in the chapter "World War I and the Russian Revolution," Pearson's narrative of the wartime situation begins by outlining Turkey's war with Russia, weaving the Armenian situation into that discussion and, again, notes the Russian-Armenian connection. However, the word genocide is not used in this context, having been applied earlier to events from the 1890s. The text again sets the number of victims at 600,000 to 1.5 million and this time states that that toll occurred during the wartime deportations. While the number given is consistent with most established historical accounts, its presentation contradicts statements made in the earlier chapter (see above). A photograph of Armenian refugees awaiting the delivery of food accompanies the text, and a review section notes the ongoing refusal of Turkey's government to acknowledge that the genocide occurred.

Neither Holt nor Pearson discusses the post-war killings, a critical omission because the fact that the genocide continued after 1918 impugns the Young Turks' contention that destroying the Armenians was a defensive measure necessitated by the war. In addition, neither of these textbooks mentions the post-1918 Armenian diaspora.

### **Motivations for the Persecution of the Armenians**

Each textbook proposes that the Russian-Armenian connection was the dominant reason for the genocide, although Glencoe does mention the Armenians' desire for independence or, at least, autonomy within the Ottoman Empire as a parallel reason for the atrocities that occurred. However, Valentino (2004) states that "The leaders of the new (Turkish) regime were convinced that the empire's precipitous decline over the previous century had been the direct result of its multinational character. ... The leaders of the new regime believed that the Armenian minority represented the most critical threat to the creation of this new, more harmonious Turkish state" (pp. 161-162). Thus, an ethnically-based nationalism was the *primary* reason for genocide (Adalian, 2009) (*italics added for emphasis*). While the idea that agitation rooted in the Russian-Armenian connection led to the genocide has some ancillary validity, that factor was subsumed by the Young Turks' desire to create an ethnically and religiously homogeneous state (Adalian, 2009), a critical point that is not evident in any of the textbooks' coverage.

### **Scope of the Persecutions**

Balakian (2003) places the death toll from the 1890s massacres at between 200,000 and 250,000 and states that one million to 1.5 million people died during the genocide of 1915-1923, figures that align closely with those given by Glencoe and Pearson. Holt, however, sets the death toll at 600,000, a number that departs substantially from the total given in most historical accounts.

Relating the scope of genocidal events in purely numerical terms, however, diminishes the human story that is involved. For this reason, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (n.d.) has established a guideline for teaching the Holocaust that states "Translate statistics into people" (n.p.), proposing that students see people "in the fullness of their lives and not just as victims" (n.p.) when this approach is taken. The museum suggests that a similar approach be

used when other genocides are studied.

In an ancillary section that focuses on document-based assessments, Pearson approaches this aspect of the event by including accounts given by an Armenian survivor and an American consular official who witnessed events that occurred in 1915. As noted above, Pearson also includes a photograph of refugees awaiting the arrival of food, and Glencoe provides a brief eyewitness account of a deportation. Holt makes no reference to the personal tragedy that was involved, although the textbook includes without comment a photograph showing people arriving at a refugee camp. In general, all three textbooks present sterile who, what, when, where accounts that are devoid of the human tragedy that was central to the destruction of the Armenians.

### **Linking the Destruction of the Armenians to Other Genocidal Events**

Glencoe's only reference to other genocidal events occurs when it states that "A similar practice would be called **ethnic cleansing** in the Bosnian War of 1993-1996" (p. 824) (bold-faced in original). Holt does not connect the Armenian situation to later genocidal events.

Pearson establishes several such connections, which appear in ancillary sections of later chapters. The first reference in the chapter "World War II and Its Aftermath" is introduced by the question: What factors have led groups of people or governments to commit genocide? Pictures from the Holocaust, Cambodia, and Rwanda and a map of Armenia are included, and events that occurred in Armenia, Cambodia, and Rwanda are aligned to each other. Students are then asked to compare and contrast these genocides. While this assignment is worthwhile, the fact that this section precedes Pearson's narratives about Cambodia and Rwanda means that students are asked to analyze events that they have yet to study, a situation that is historically and pedagogically disingenuous.

A chapter review item linking Armenia to the Holocaust follows and is contextualized by the Holocaust narrative that appears earlier in the same chapter. Students are asked to discuss several important issues (e.g., nation-building and nationalism, murder of minority leaders, large-scale deportations, systematic torture and murder, and the use of concentration camps). However, students may find it difficult to evaluate these issues because Pearson's earlier coverage of Armenia does not provide information about these aspects of that situation.

A final review item connecting Armenia and the Holocaust to the Cambodian genocide appears in a chapter titled "The Cold War" and follows a brief mention of what occurred in Cambodia. Students are asked to evaluate the role of ideology and racial, religious, and ethnic prejudices and how these factors affected those situations. Once again, Pearson does not provide the information that would allow students to develop adequate responses in their evaluation.

### **Unreported or Underreported Critical Aspects of the Armenian Situation**

#### **Genocide as State Policy**

Several critical aspects of the destruction of the Armenians are either not discussed or are mentioned only in passing. For example, genocide was a matter of state policy at the highest level of government (Power, 2002); as such, it was neither spontaneous nor accidental. Instead, it involved a detailed plan designed to achieve maximum efficiency (Waller, 2007; Adalian, 2009). The only mention of this critical fact occurs in a primary source document included in one of

Pearson's ancillary sections. An understanding of this fact is necessary if students are to understand that most genocides are neither accidental nor spontaneous, and that they are often used to implement governmental policies.

### **German Complicity in the Genocide and Connections to the Holocaust**

An ancillary section in Glencoe mentions that the Ottoman Empire was allied to the Central Powers during World War I, and Pearson notes that German military leaders stationed in the Ottoman Empire during that war "... may have applied what they observed there to their persecution of the Jewish people during World War II" (p. 957). However, neither text addresses the complex debate regarding Germany's complicity in the Armenian genocide (Dadrian, 1996). In addition, many similarities between the Armenia genocide and the Holocaust are not identified (Power, 2002; Balakian, 2003; Valentino, 2004; Bergen, 2009); as such, the thesis that Armenia became "the template for most of the genocide that followed in the twentieth century" (Balakian, 2003, p. xiv) is neither proposed nor developed.

### **International Reaction to the Armenian Situation and Postwar Culpability**

The international community had extensive contemporaneous knowledge of the genocide (Power, 2002; Kloian, 1987), and considerable public opinion focused on what could and should be done to stop the genocide as the Armenians' fate became a major news story in Europe and the United States. In fact, Balakian (2003) contends that the "response to the Armenian crisis, which began in the 1890s and continued into the 1920s, was the first international human rights movement in American history and helped to define the nation's global identity" (p. xiii), thus establishing a vital connection between Armenia and the United States.

Little tangible support for the Armenians resulted from this interest, however. Unwilling to involve the United States in World War I, at least until 1917; President Wilson ignored the demands of many groups and individuals, notably Theodore Roosevelt, for direct American intervention in Armenia (Power, 2002). After 1918, political conflicts between Wilson and an isolationist Congress constrained America's international role and the British and French focused their attention on recovery and on preserving their empires. As a result, little pressure regarding the genocide was directed toward the Turkish government, resulting in a situation in which the international community "legitimized" Turkey's policies (Adalian, 2009, p. 77).

Neither Holt nor Pearson mentions the international response to the Armenian genocide, while Glencoe makes two brief references to it without amplification. Because this issue is avoided, therefore, an opportunity to "address[es] issues of personal and societal responsibility both from a historical as well as a contemporary perspective" (Totten and Parsons, 2009, p. 11) is lost. Conversely, implementing the Totten/Parsons approach, which would allow content knowledge to evolve into a study of one of the most critical challenges inherent in living in a democratic society, is not established.

Postwar political manipulations regarding war crimes trials are not discussed in any of the textbooks. Given the current interest in bringing war criminals to justice, as shown by the arrest of Ratko Mladic in May, 2011; the introduction of this topic as it affected the Armenian situation would establish an important theme to be considered in contemporary world history classrooms.



## **Denial of the Armenian Genocide**

The Turkish government began a campaign designed to deny the genocide even as the event itself was ending. Over the course of ninety years, this approach has intensified as public interest in and scholarly work about the genocide has expanded (Adalian, 2009). However, Holt does not mention the ongoing refusal of the current Turkish government to acknowledge the reality of the genocide, and Glencoe and Pearson include only brief, neutral references to that controversial, politically charged circumstance.

Given the pervasive nature of genocide denial, the implications of this omission are critical because “Denial of genocide strives to reshape history in order to demonize the victims and rehabilitate the perpetrators. Denial of genocide is the final stage of genocide” (Lipstadt, 2000, n.p.). Students must be aware that the acknowledged historical record can be subverted for various purposes, and that this subversion affects their world because the denial of historical genocides makes the denial or diminution of similar contemporary events plausible and even acceptable. In addition, the reluctance of democratic governments both past and present, to acknowledge genocides when they occur provides teachers with a lens through which they can incorporate the discussion of controversial issues into their curricula. This approach is fundamental to the development of meaningful social studies instruction (Hess, 2008).

### **Summary: Unreported and Underreported Aspects of the Armenian Situation**

Including these unreported or underreported topics in textbook coverage of the Armenian situation would provide opportunities for students to engage in substantive study of controversial issues, thus meeting the imperative to include the discussion of such matters in social studies classrooms (Chapin, 2011). In doing so, to approach the concept that “The primary purpose of the social studies is to help young people make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world” (National Council for the Social Studies, 2010, p. 3) would be promoted.

### **Correlation to Textbook Coverage of Other Genocides**

Using the same textbooks, the author has conducted similar studies of the coverage of the Holocaust (Lindquist, 2009) and the Bosnian genocide (Lindquist, 2012). While each situation involves unique dynamics, several similarities in their treatment in the textbooks may be noted. For example, comprehensive definitions of key terms (e.g., Holocaust, genocide) are not given, contextualization linking critical events preceding the genocides to the genocides themselves is limited, and the related issues of collaboration and complicity are generally absent from the coverage that is provided. Both the Holocaust and the Bosnian situation are given considerable coverage in the United States history textbooks that were reviewed; however, the Armenian situation is not discussed in those publications. In addition, the contemporary significance of each situation is generally overlooked in the treatment of all three events.

### **Discussion**

Given the necessity to cover large amounts of content efficiently, to provide readings that can be accessed by students whose reading abilities vary greatly, and the perceived need to be

politically “safe,” the typical high school history textbook presents:

... a narrative that is so bland, so agreeable, and so monotonous that students cannot stay awake reading it. ... By obscuring the way conclusions were developed, condensing vast subjects into brief capsules, asking largely didactic questions, and offering students little or no involvement in the investigative process, textbooks discourage the growth of student reasoning and thinking skills and offer an oversimplified vision of the historical record and its meaning. (Zevin, 2007, p.306)

Because textbooks continue to provide the basic outline for high school history education in the United States, these factors exert a profound effect on students’ interest in and learning of history.

This study describes how textbook coverage of the destruction of the Armenians validates these concerns. The textbooks’ narratives are presented in a surface-level manner that does not invite students to participate in the investigative process that is central to understanding and appreciating history. In addition, the contemporary relevance of the study of the Armenian situation is neither suggested nor developed.

A specific example should be noted in this regard. While it may be argued that the destruction of the Armenians is not directly related to United States history, Balakian’s (2003) thesis regarding how America’s response to that event defined the nation internationally and preoccupied its thoughts regarding human rights for many years is worthy of discussion in American classrooms. The U.S. government’s inaction contrasted with the desire of individuals and private organizations to intervene directly on behalf of the Armenians was, in many ways, the initial example of the nation’s ongoing dualistic and often contentious approach to human rights situations around the world. An approach described as evolving from non-intervention to non-recognition in several more recent cases (Bloxham, 2005). Students who are coming of age in the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century should be aware of that history so that they can develop informed perspectives about how America can and should react when similar challenges present themselves in the future. Both the rights and the responsibilities of citizenship in a democratic society can accept nothing less than an awareness of this history.

The absence of any such discussion limits the ability of students to judge contemporary human rights issues because, as proposed in the null theory of education, “what schools do not teach may be just as important as what they do teach. I argue this because ignorance is not simply a void, it has important effects on the kinds of options one is able to consider” (Eisner, 1979, p. 83). The absence of coverage of the destruction of the Armenians in U.S. history textbooks and the superficiality and lack of sophistication that characterizes that coverage in world history textbooks contributes to that void. The absence limits the perspectives that students develop as they study the history that has created the world in which they live.

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