

## NAASR At Fifty: Marking a Milestone and Planning the Future

### Looking Back

The year 2005 is a milestone for NAASR as it marks a half century since its incorporation in 1955. The organization began the formal observance of this significant date at its 50th Annual Assembly in November 2004 (see previous issue of the *Newsletter* for report). A multitude of activities are being planned, culminating in a gala banquet and academic conference in October 2006.

In 1955 there was, for all practical purposes, no such thing as Armenian Studies in the United States – there were individuals who studied Armenian history, language, and culture, but no organized programs. Today, there are some seventeen active or soon-to-be active endowed chairs, lectureships, or visiting professorships in Armenian Studies in the United States. (See story on page 6 on the most recently launched programs at the University of Connecticut and the University of Southern California.) The first two chairs – the Mashtots Chair at Harvard University and the Naregatsi Chair at the University of California, Los Angeles – were established by NAASR, thus providing the impetus for this extraordinary flourishing of the field.

The First Annual Assembly of Members, held at the Hotel Commander (now the Sheraton Commander) in Cam-

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### Moving Forward

NAASR has recently taken major strides towards the complete cataloguing and reorganization of its Edward and Helen Mardigian Reference and Research Library and general archives, including its substantial periodicals collection, the library's Armenian and English language book collection, and the Avedis B. Derounian personal papers.

The end result of this process will be a library which is far more accessible to researchers and interested individuals, and whose listings will eventually be made available on the world wide web. The target date for completion of cataloguing is fall, 2005. NAASR has worked in consultation with other local libraries such as the Armenian Library and Museum of America in Watertown and the Armenian Cultural Foundation in Arlington towards the ultimate goal of creating a true library consortium with online catalogues linked to one another. Although this has long been a dream, it is coming closer to becoming a reality.

The Edward and Helen Mardigian Reference and Research Library at NAASR is composed of thousands of Armenian and English language texts that date as far back as the late-18th century. The collection encompasses a broad range of topics including history, literature, art and

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## NAASR Hosts Spirited Account of Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation

David L. Phillips, the former Chairman of the Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation Commission (TARC), gave his sole lecture to a Boston-area Armenian audience before a standing-room-only crowd on Tuesday, February 22, at the NAASR headquarters.

Phillips discussed his recently published book, *Unsilencing the Past: Track Two Diplomacy and Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation*, which is the first detailed discussion of the reconciliation process by a TARC member. Phillips and TARC as a whole have been a source of controversy from the moment the formation of the commission became public knowledge in 2001. The high level of interest in the subject, as indicated by the turnout as well as by the vehemence of some of the opposition to Phillips and TARC, shows no sign of abating even as TARC appears to be in a transition phase.

### Track Two Diplomacy

Phillips began by defining Track Two Diplomacy, stating clearly that it is not a new form of conciliatory exercise, nor is it a substitute for official diplomacy, but it is nonetheless the appropriate route for Turkish-Armenian reconciliation. In effect, Track Two Diplomacy is so effective because third parties are afforded more room for creativity and flexibility in reaching goals.

According to Phillips, Track Two Diplomacy is designed to “foster collaboration

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David L. Phillips, former TARC Chairman

## Looking Back 50 Years (from page 1)

bridge, MA, included reports, discussions, and business sessions during the morning and afternoon followed by speakers in the evening. Speakers included NAASR Chairman Manoog S. Young and Prof. Peter Elder, Dean of Harvard's Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, and a panel discussion was led by Prof. Richard N. Frye on "Armenian Studies and Research: Problems and Needs." The panelists included the Rev. A. A. Bedikian, Abp. Tiran Nersoyan, Dr. Firuz Kazemzadeh, Prof. H. H. Chakmakjian, and Prof. Roman Jakobson.

Half a century later, Armenian Studies still faces challenges. However, it behooves us to take note of the extraordinary growth of the field in the United States, as well as elsewhere in the world, which can be measured not only by the increase in the number of programs at American universities but also in the explosion of publications on Armenian and related subjects (NAASR's bookstore currently carries some 1,800 titles) and the large number of scholars working in non-Armenian fields who nonetheless incorporate Armenian material in their work.

With so many aspects of Armenian history and civil-

ization remaining to be studied, we cannot dwell on the past, but history teaches us that we must occasionally look back in order to realize how much progress has been made.



The First NAASR Board of Directors. Front, left to right: Manoog S. Young, Zabelle D. Tahmizian, General Sarkis Zartarian, Abp. Tiran Nersoyan, Rev. A. A. Bedikian, Armine Dikijian, Prof. Manasseh G. Sevag; Back: Thomas T. Amirian, Haig Der Manuelian, Arra S. Avakian, J. Mark Kolligian, Richard Malkasian. Photo by Arshag Gechijian.

## Moving Forward (continued from page 1)

architecture, linguistics, as well as law, anthropology, health, nutrition, and sports.

### Avedis B. Derounian Collection Update

Avedis Derounian, of Alexandropolis, Greece, grew up in Bulgaria and Turkey before immigrating to the United States in 1926 and graduating from New York University School of Journalism to become an author, publisher, investigative journalist, and a controversial yet noteworthy figure in Armenian-American history.

Derounian's work as a reporter and editor for the *Anglo-Armenian Weekly*, *Fortune Magazine*, and other organizations led to his ultimate interest in politically contentious issues before and during WWII. This fascination deepened in the late 1930s and 40s, when, under the penname John Roy Carlson, Derounian infiltrated various fascist organizations in the United States and abroad and subsequently released his findings in several exposés.

The most famous of these books was *Under Cover* (1943), which became an instant best-seller and was followed by *The Plotters* (1946), and *From Cairo to Damascus* (1951). The books, often controversial and sensationalistic, contain ethnographic accounts and commentary on the activities of the shrouded underworld of ultra right-wing America before and during WWII, bigotry in America, and deception and conspiracy in the Middle East respectively. The extensive files he kept during this time on individuals, organizations, activities, and relationships make up a great portion of what is now available to researchers in NAASR's Derounian

Collection.

The archives were acquired in 1993 by NAASR Board Chairman Emeritus Manoog S. Young shortly after Derounian's passing. The collection includes over 1,000 files compiled by Derounian on the organizations and people he was studying as well as over 300 periodicals pertaining to religious and political organizations in the U.S. and abroad, and well over 100 non-Armenian related books, many of which are of great historical and political significance. There are also posters, photographs, rare records, and unpublished manuscripts, as well as numerous versions of his published works at various stages of editing.

### Periodicals

As this *Newsletter* goes to press, the process of listing each of the thousands of periodicals in NAASR's collection is drawing to a close. The initial step of culling out thousands of duplicate copies, which were separated from the main collection and organized in order to be available for trade with other libraries, was completed this past winter by Ruby Chorbajian. She has gone on to the lengthy task of cataloguing the main periodicals collection and will continue to serve as NAASR's primary cataloguer as the Research Library itself is listed.

The complete listing of NAASR's Armenian and English periodicals collection will be available online as soon as it is completed.



## Facing History and Ourselves: The Armenian Genocide

Facing History and Ourselves is proud to announce the publication of its newest resource book, *Crimes Against Humanity and Civilization: The Genocide of the Armenians*. In advance of its release, scholars of the Armenian Genocide, the Holocaust, and Human Rights as well as middle and high school educators have enthusiastically received the book. *Crimes Against Humanity and Civilization: The Genocide of the Armenians* combines the latest scholarship on the Armenian Genocide with Facing History and Ourselves' interdisciplinary approach to history – enabling students and teachers to make the essential connections between history and their own lives.

Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide*, Samantha Power explains, “The Armenian Genocide of 1915 set the stage for a gruesome twentieth century. Facing History’s attention to the genocide, and its focus on key events and personalities, can leave us with hope not only that the genocide will not be forgotten, but also that future generations will be better equipped to respond to the injustices that await them, at home and abroad.”

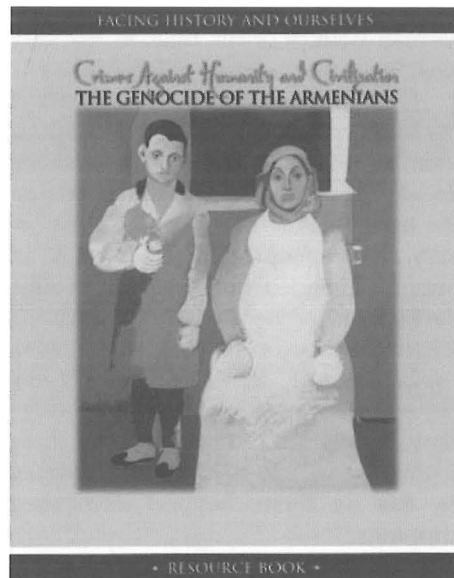
After reading the book, Richard Hovannisian, chairholder in Modern Armenian History at UCLA, explained, “This resource book is unique in its approaches to the legacy of the Armenian Genocide. It helps students and teachers to understand that the crime was committed not only against the Armenians but also against all humanity.”

Adam Strom, program associate for research and development, and the coordinator for the Armenian Genocide project at Facing History, believes that the new book has the potential to reach multiple audiences. He explains, “Recent events have reminded all of us how important it is to teach about tolerance and human rights, as well as the need to have informed discussion about our relationship to events beyond our borders.”

Social studies teachers can use *Crimes Against Humanity and Civilization: The Genocide of the Armenians* to teach about empires and nationalism and the quest of minorities to obtain equal rights. By placing the Armenian Genocide in the context of World War I, the book fo-

cuses on a neglected aspect of the war and the precedent set by the deportation and massacre of the Ottoman Armenians for the Nazi Holocaust under the cover of World War II. Throughout the book, the stories emphasize the moral dilemmas faced by individuals, groups, and nations as they confronted the treatment of the Armenians before, during, and after the genocide.

Founded in 1976, Facing History and Ourselves offers an interdisciplinary approach to citizenship education that connects the history of genocides to moral questions young people face today. Its mission is to engage students in civic education – an education that encourages the skills, promotes the val-



ues, and fosters the ideals needed to sustain a democratic society. Facing History provides middle and high school teachers with tools for teaching history and ethics, and for helping students learn to combat prejudice with compassion, indifference with participation, myth and misinformation with knowledge.

*Crimes Against Humanity and Civilization: The Genocide of the Armenians* was substantially underwritten by Thomas and Lisa Blumenthal of Boston. In February, the Blumenthals also hosted a reception for the launch of the book at their home in the Back Bay, with NAASR Board Chairman Nancy Kolligian, Board member Seda Keshishian, and Director of Programs and Publications Marc A. Mamigonian in atten-

### NAASR and Facing History

Margot Stern Strom writes in the Introduction to *Crimes Against Humanity and Civilization: The Genocide of the Armenians*: “Soon after the founding of [Facing History and Ourselves] in 1976, Manoog Young of the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research approached us with the idea of creating a study guide on the Armenian Genocide as a companion to *Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior*. He and others in the Armenian community were eager to tell the story of what was then a “forgotten genocide.” [This] marked the beginning of our work with the history of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire.”

dance. Facing History’s Adam Strom conducted a mini-workshop demonstrating ways in which the book can be used in an educational setting to generate discussion and to impart information on the Armenian Genocide in a way that is relevant to students’ lives.

The new resource book is just the latest example of the commitment Facing History and Ourselves has to teaching about the Armenian Genocide. Over 25 years ago, Facing History’s first study guide addressed the Armenian Genocide. Since that time, the organization has included resources and speakers on the Armenian Genocide in workshops and institutes. Starting next fall, Facing History and Ourselves will model interdisciplinary educational strategies for using *Crimes Against Humanity and Civilization: The Genocide of the Armenians* in institutes, seminars, and workshops in the U.S. and abroad.

Sample readings and lesson plans may be downloaded from Facing History and Ourselves’ website, and copies of the book may be ordered from the NAASR bookstore.

## NYU Researcher Discusses Value of NAASR Collections

Ben Alexander is a PhD candidate at New York University who is in the late stages of completing his doctoral thesis dealing primarily with the immigrant experiences of Armenian-Americans between 1915 and 1955. For the past several years Alexander has been making trips to NAASR for several days at a time to spend hours in the archives, reading, translating, and researching for his thesis. As his research comes to a close, he discussed his involvement with NAASR and reflected on the time he has spent at the Association.

Alexander explained, "When I started research for my dissertation I had to scout out all the resource centers systematically, and in [eastern Massachusetts] that included NAASR. A lot of what I've used [at NAASR] has been the standard published materials, the old periodicals. As far as collections go, I've had a fascinating time browsing through the collections of Avedis Derounian, a.k.a. John Roy Carlson, and I've also found it fruitful to go through the papers of his friend and ally the Reverend Charles Vertanes."

"The thing about both these men," Alexander continued, "is, yes, they're significant to Armenian-American history, but oh so much more besides. I think students of American history in the 1930s and 40s, especially the history of political extremist groups, and of ethnic history and cultural politics, should have a look at the Derounian collection, because he accumulated a tremendous amount from both his friends and his enemies of that period. He definitely believed in knowing his enemy.

"He had a bitter feud going with John T. Flynn, the fiery Chicago isolationist and anti-New Deal editor, and Flynn's books are right here on [NAASR's] shelves. There are also a lot of papers from the Nazi and fascist groups he infiltrated. He's a colorful character, with all his deeds of derring-do. There's one letter in the late '30s, written just before he went under cover to research for his book *Under Cover*, a letter he wrote to one of his journalism associates, where he tells her he's going to be on a top-secret mission where his life will be in constant danger, and he says he can't discuss the particulars, but

you can tell that he'd just love to regale her with the whole story."

"The Vertanes collection gives a good window into the lobbying that his group the Armenian National Council of America was doing, and various Armenian causes of the late '40s and early '50s. But because both Derounian and Vertanes were consummate renaissance men, they have valuable material on a lot of subjects beyond Armenians. As for Carlson, who published three books, that certainly wasn't all that he tried to publish; and it's all in here."

The Derounian collection, as Alexander pointed out, is a significant if controversial one, due to Derounian's strident partisan politics. However, whether or not Derounian can be viewed as a reliable chronicler of Armenian politics of his time, at the very least he was an active participant.

Alexander explained, "A big part of my work on Armenian-American ethnic identity is the feud between Tashnag and anti-Tashnag." Derounian was on the front lines of those battles. "Before very many people had even heard of him, he attended the 1934 trial of nine Tashnags accused of murdering Archbishop Levon Tourian, and he took copious notes. When he did become famous, he never missed a chance to rant against the Tashnags. The thing that surprises me is how little material he has on them, beyond newspaper clippings."

As far as his personal connection to the subject of his doctoral research, Alexander explained, "Alexander is Anglicized from [the Armenian] Isakendarian, but culturally speaking, I am an outsider. My father, born in 1905, and whose family [arrived in the US] in 1907, was past his prime during my lifetime, so the remnants of the Armenian world that I knew were "eench g'oozess," and stuffed vine leaves.

"So, as far as how I got interested, I wanted to make a gesture to my father's memory, but there isn't anything personal in the way I'm carrying out the actual project. For me it's a huge asset that I had never even heard of Tashnags and Ramgavars until I started the academic research eight years ago, because I'm able to put them up to analytic scrutiny without pounding on the table

about any of them."

As for his over-all feelings concerning his time spent here at NAASR, Alexander concluded, "Well, like any other Armenian resource center, it has a lot of the stuff I need. When I'm here, I'm never lacking for materials to make use of. In terms of actual materials, the Derounian papers, the Vertanes papers, and some issues of *Gotchnag* have been excellent. But just as helpful has been the hospitality. The way that I've been allowed to spread out, relax, use a computer, bring all the materials I want over to the computer, ask questions—this has been marvelous. The accommodations here are excellent, and very much appreciated."

Ben Alexander will be defending his dissertation entitled, "Armenian and American: The Changing Face of Ethnic Identity and Diasporic Nationalism, 1915-1955," at New York University on April 13, 2005. He plans to keep researching as the thesis develops into a book, which will then be submitted to university presses for publication.

If you or someone you know has books in Armenian, English, or other languages on Armenian or related subjects, please donate them to NAASR's Armenian Reference and Research Library.

The core of the library's collection has come from donors like you who have helped make it one of the best and largest of its kind in America.

No collection is too big or too small – contact NAASR if you have any questions.

All gifts to NAASR are tax deductible. Keep the Armenian heritage alive – give to NAASR.



## TARC Chairman Commences 2005 Lecture Series at NAASR *(from p. 1)*

so that conflict comes to be seen as a shared problem requiring cooperation on both sides" and that it has been successful in the past, between Turkish and Greek Cypriots, and Turks and Kurds, by developing the notion of a shared history. But it was not long before Phillips realized that there is very little common ground between Armenian and Turkish officials on the issue of the Genocide.

In an interview by Mark Grossman (U.S. Undersecretary of Public Affairs) with TARC member Van Krikorian, the latter stated that, "There is no shared history, there is only one version of history, which is the truth, and that is the truth about the Armenian Genocide." Turkish members of the commission were similarly adamant that there had been no genocide.

### The TARC Initiative

Phillips explained that TARC was a "centerpiece of a whole broad range of civil society initiatives, and served as a policy forum. It involved high level personalities, former government officials, the idea being to set the stage for official discussions by developing new ideas that had the potential of forming formal negotiations."

Throughout the first year, a series of closed-door meetings were held in Vienna, but it was no secret that they were occurring. Phillips met with Vartan Oskanian (Armenia's Foreign Minister) at the beginning of the process, and briefed him on repeated occasions, noting that Oskanian was always very supportive.

Phillips never met with Turkish officials directly, but there was a Turkish official at the Turkish Embassy in Washington whom Phillips refers to in his book as "the man in the Fedora hat." This man, who was ostensibly operating outside the knowledge of his ambassador and without the official backing of the Turkish State, met with Phillips to discuss the perspective and attitude of the Turkish government with respect to TARC.

TARC was announced on July 9, 2001. The United States allocated \$3 million through American University to be spent over three years. TARC was also supported by Britain, Austria, and Switzerland.

American University of Armenia professor and TARC member David Hovhanissian received a phone call the morning of the announcement of TARC and was essentially fired from his position by Armenia's Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian, a move which indicated a clear reconsideration of Armenian support for the TARC initiative.

Phillips recounted his surprise at the Turkish reaction to the announcement of TARC as well; there was extreme resistance because reconciliation would involve retrospection on the genocide issue. In fact, both governments backed down at the last minute once TARC became a public reality.

### TARC Successes

Although there is little question that it did not achieve its ultimate goals, Phillips took note of what he considered to be TARC's successes. It was eventually responsible for the creation of numerous intercultural programs including cultural exchanges both musical and visual, whereby Armenians performed in Turkey and Turks performed in Armenia. In addition, the Turkish-Armenian Businessman's Development Council was created to monitor and encourage economic development, and members of both countries' Chambers of Commerce were brought together.

Several other educational initiatives were supported including equipping government officials with conflict resolution skills. Gender issues were also addressed and a women's magazine was published under the auspices of the Turkish Armenian Reconciliation Commission.

### Genocide Issue Unavoidable

Although the original intention of TARC was not to address the issue of the Armenian Genocide directly, it eventually became apparent that this was not possible. Armenians insisted on revisiting the Genocide issue from a new perspective, and the suggestion was made on the Turkish side to develop a group of international legal experts to assess the applicability of the Genocide Convention of 1948.

The International Center of Transitional Justice (ICTJ) was asked to undertake that assessment. Turkish

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### David L. Phillips on TARC

A selection of comments from David L. Phillips's February 22 lecture:

"The ultimate goals [of TARC] are full, bilateral, diplomatic relations with open social, economic, and cultural activities between Turks and Armenians and Turkey and Armenia. To these ends it requires improvement of official contacts, opening the broader, public support from governments to civil society activities particularly in areas of education, science, culture, and tourism, establishment for cooperation in the event of a national disaster ... and disseminating the ICTJ findings."

"It is important to demonstrate results from Track Two Diplomacy efforts, otherwise the effects and the cause may not have been worthwhile. And I have to say that I was repeatedly disappointed by the Turks, Armenians, and the U.S. for not having done more. I felt that U.S. officials gave Turkey too much credibility in the fight against terrorism; there were too many concessions made to Turkey's involvement in the Iraq war."

"I was disappointed that officials in Ankara didn't have the vision and the foresight to recognize that it was in their own interest to open the border. When I had the chance to raise this matter directly with Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan, he said all [the Turkish government] needed was a direct, unambiguous statement from the Armenian authorities that there would be no territorial claims. I repeatedly raised my hope with Vartan Oskanian that such a statement would be forthcoming. No such statement was ever to be issued. It was a disappointment that the border was not opened, that the goals we had set were not achieved."



## New Armenian Studies Programs at UConn and USC

The past several months have seen the announcement of two more endowed programs in Armenian Studies in American universities. On the east coast, the University of Connecticut has revived its Armenian Studies program and affiliation with Yerevan State University. On the west coast, the University of Southern California has launched the USC Institute for Armenian Studies. Both programs have been greeted with great anticipation and enthusiasm and are expected to draw wide interest.

### Yerevan State and UConn Team Up for Armenian Studies

The new Armenian Studies program at the University of Connecticut is a joint effort with Yerevan State University, which has been represented through its Social Work Department at UConn for fifteen years. Former ambassador of the Republic of Armenia to the United States, Arman Kirakossian, spoke fondly and with great hope about the emerging program at the commencement banquet in late September. In a 40-minute talk to UConn faculty, students, and community members, Kirakossian discussed Armenia's culture, economy, and partnership with the United States, stressing his gratitude for America's continued support through the past century.

University President Philip E. Austin echoed the importance of the universities' affiliations, stressing the importance of cross-cultural compatibility in universities. "It's one more sign of UConn's growing engagement with the world outside our national borders. We build on a long tradition, but it's one that has made dramatic strides in recent years—and we take another step forward today."

This new program, made possible by a \$500,000 donation of a long-time friend of UConn faculty and staff, will take a multidisciplinary approach, incorporating the faculties of the School for Social Work, the Center for European Studies, and the Office of International Affairs. In the future, the initiative aims to develop courses on Armenian culture and history, increase the volume of cultural exchanges between UConn and YSU, and publish literature to educate Americans about Armenia. UConn President Austin said the partnership will be

a boon for both universities, while former Ambassador Kirakossian said he was, "sure the new partnership project will be of great value to students, faculty, and researchers."

### Armenian Studies at USC

The University of Southern California has launched the Institute of Armenian Studies (IAS). The long-standing commitment of the University of Southern California to the Armenian community brought forth the University's desire to strengthen and perpetuate the relationship through this initiative. The Institute will address a broad range of academic and professional topics, including architecture, business, science and technology, law and medicine, religion and politics, history and education, as well as the arts.

At the inaugural banquet held in February, an audience of nearly 500 community members was addressed by USC Dean of the College of Letters, Arts and Sciences, Dr. Joseph Aoun, who discussed the relevance of the new IAS for the University and for the larger community. USC Professor of Political Science, Dr. Richard Hrair Dekmejian, presented the vision and mission of the Institute he helped design, while Harut Sassounian, *California Courier* publisher and original co-founding member, spoke of the importance of such an institute to the Armenian community as a whole. Other speakers presented projected initiatives at the Institute.

The Institute for Armenian Studies was envisioned as a non-partisan center—around which the entire Armenian community could rally regardless of political or religious affiliation—aimed at addressing concerns of the local and international Armenian community. Through a broad-based initiative outlined in its mission, and in efforts to become a leading, credible, resource center of Armenian heritage in America, IAS plans to sponsor public events, exhibits, and concerts, engage experts in discussions about Armenian issues, prepare professional community organizers, offer internships and career counseling, and increase ties between USC and universities in Armenia.

### Lecture by TARC Chairman (*cont. from p. 5*)

members became nervous and two members attempted to affect the findings of the ICTJ. As a consequence of this breach of protocol, TARC was suspended.

Turkish members of the commission held high state positions and it was clear that they were not merely civil society members of TARC but were acting as informal representatives of the Turkish government. Thus, Phillips decided to contact U.S. officials and Turkish journalists to state that since the Turkish government supported its TARC members, the breach of protocol clearly could not have been done without the knowledge of Ankara. Forty-eight hours later, a Turkish official called him regretting the misunderstanding.

The result for TARC was a lowered profile, but the agenda moved ahead. The outcome of the non-binding ICTJ-commissioned analysis was that the events of 1915-23 constituted a genocide but that no land claims or reparations are applicable in retrospect. This decision was a milestone, ac-

ording to Phillips, since it resulted from Turks and Armenians filing a joint request. Asked whether he thought the label of genocide was justified, Phillips stated unequivocally, "I refer to the Armenian Genocide without reservation."

Commenting on TARC's accomplishments, Phillips reminded the audience that "reconciliation is a process and not an event." He indicated that TARC was at the forefront of Turkey's democratization process by forcing Armenian issues to be aired publicly and it dealt with the border issues using a diplomatic, treaty-based approach. Phillips expressed hope that these issues would someday be resolved.

A senior fellow and Deputy Director of the Center for Preventive Action at the Council on Foreign Relations, Phillips is also Visiting Scholar at Harvard University's Center for Middle Eastern Studies, and Director of American University's Program on Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding. Previously, Phillips held positions as Senior Advisor to the United Nations, Senior Advisor and Foreign Affairs Expert to the U.S. State Department, as well as analyst for NBC News.

## Two Versions of Armenian Identity in Lectures at NAASR

**March 17, 2005: Dr. Levon Z. Boyajian**

On Thursday, March 17, 2005, Levon Z. Boyajian, MD, gave a lecture entitled "The Land That Is No More: Extinction, Survival, and Armenian Identity," at the NAASR headquarters. Boyajian discussed the trans-generational consequences of the Armenian Genocide and its psycho-cultural aftereffects, noting that the destruction of the Armenians of Eastern Anatolia took place in what had been the Armenian homeland for several millennia. He asserts that the loss of this homeland, or *yergir*, the cradle of Armenian tradition and history, is one of the most important aspects of Armenian identity in the past century.

Boyajian, the son of Genocide survivors and a first-generation Armenian-American from Washington Heights in



New York City, is a psychiatrist who has studied the effects of the Armenian Genocide on subsequent Armenian generations and co-authored with Hai-gaz Grigorian the seminal study "Psychosocial Sequelae of the Armenian Genocide." He is also the author of *Hayots Badeevuh: Reminiscences of Armenian Life in New York City*, an autobiographical sketch of growing up Armenian in New York in the 1930s and 40s.

Dr. Boyajian opened the evening by explaining that Western Armenia and the culture that existed there do not exist anymore, so, in his opinion, when Armenians speak of preserving Armenian identity it is not exactly clear what

they mean. He asked the audience to offer their suggestions. The audience provided several possible sources of Armenian identity, including language, culture, history, consciousness, and the "ian" name ending.

Boyajian countered that none of these, in themselves, have anything to do with Armenian identity.

Boyajian explained that the survivors of the Genocide were the last to know the ancestral land and were faced with the crushing truth that there was no going back. "The thread of continuity [had] been severed" permanently, he said, leading him to point out that in the recent past only the experiences of the native peoples of North America were comparable to the current condition of Armenians and their homeland. For the descendants of the survivors, the homeland is mostly a fantasy known through parents and grandparents. The names themselves have become magical—Zeitun, Kharpert, Van, Moush, and others; but the descendants' mental image has no correlation to reality.

Boyajian observed that most of the Armenians who grew up in the Middle Eastern Armenian diaspora (Beirut, Cairo, Aleppo, Damascus, etc.) were orphans of the Genocide and thus had no real connection to previous Armenian culture and tradition as they grew up. They called themselves Armenians and distinguished themselves from the non-Armenians among whom they lived, but only insofar as they spoke another language or celebrated different holidays. This is perhaps where the association between speaking Armenian and Armenian identity emerged within the diaspora's consciousness.

The culture of Armenian-Americans, on the other hand, is so far removed from Middle Eastern culture in general that what developed in the United States as "Armenian culture" was on the one hand a failed attempt to resurrect something which could not be preserved, but on the other hand closer to Western Armenian culture than that of the Armenian communities of the Middle East. As long as the generation who had known the *yergir* survived, Boyajian implied, Armenian culture in the United States was close to the au-

### Upcoming Lectures at NAASR

**Sat., May 14, 12:30 -3:00 p.m.:**

Dr. George Bournoutian, "The Academic War Over Nagorno-Karabagh." Registration required.

**Thurs., May 19, 8:00 p.m.:**

Dr. Pamela Steiner, "When a Traumatized People Try To Resolve Past Hurts"

**Thurs., June 16, 8:00 p.m.:**

Robert Kalantari, "The Energy Crisis in Armenia"

thentic Western Armenian culture, which, with the passing of that generation, for all practical purposes was dead.

There was a lengthy question-and-answer period following Boyajian's presentation. Some of the comments from the audience yielded insightful commentary on the issue of Armenian identity. One audience member suggested that Armenian-Americans look to their children and grandchildren to define Armenian-ness as opposed to trying to force them into predetermined paradigms and definitions.

**April 7, 2005: Dr. Nishan Parlakian**

Dr. Nishan Parlakian, one of the leading authorities on Armenian and Armenian-American drama, gave a talk entitled "Preserving Ancestral Voices: The Theatre and Armenian Identity" on Thursday, April 7.

In the course of his lecture, Parlakian gave a sense of the history of Armenian drama, not only in the U.S. but dating back through the centuries. While doing so he also pondered such questions as "How can Armenian identity and the voices of our ancestors be transmitted across the generations?" and "What are the most effective ways of preventing these voices from being lost?"

Unquestionably, Parlakian is a strong advocate for the role of drama. He spoke with detailed knowledge and enthusiasm – the kind of enthusiasm that is born of a lifetime of experience in the theatre as a writer, director,

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**Lectures (continued from p. 7)**

translator, and professor. "You either do it or you don't do it," Parlakian quipped, and he has certainly done it.

Parlakian spoke of the development of the modern Armenian theatre, mostly in Constantinople and Tiflis (Tbilisi), and the Armenian-American theatre that developed in the early years of the twentieth century. The plays presented in these settings were entirely in Armenian. This aspect of Armenian-American culture is little known and under-documented, but it provided an inspiration of sorts for second generation Armenian-Americans like Parlakian, who got his own start in the theatre after World War II.

Members of the second and third generations of Armenian "listened to their ancestral voices," as Parlakian put it, and began to address issues that had

previously been ignored or glossed over because they were too painful or divisive. Topics such as the Genocide and its aftermath, political divisions in the Armenian-American community, and marrying outside the Armenian community, continue to interest playwrights down to the current day.

"The theatre's excitement can affect a host of people simultaneously and immediately," Parlakian declared, and to prove this he concluded the evening with two sets of readings from plays in the new collection *Contemporary Armenian American Drama: An Anthology of Ancestral Voices* (Columbia University Press), of which he is the editor.

Parlakian had arranged to have on hand for the evening Joyce Van Dyke, author of the acclaimed play *A Girl's War*, who was accompanied by several actors from the production who read scenes from her powerful play. With the audience hanging on each word, the talented actors brought life to the words, bringing the dark humor and pathos of Van Dyke's play into vivid detail. It was an unusual opportunity for an audience to experience such a reading as well as hear from a noted author.

The evening drew to a close with a reading by Parlakian himself from *Dance Mama, Dance* by Barbara Bejoian, originally of Watertown, who passed away in 2004 after a long battle with cancer. Parlakian paid tribute to Bejoian as both as a remarkable person and as a gifted writer who was taken from us too soon – but not before leaving a lasting legacy of writing. Bejoian's mother Rose, brothers Paul and longtime NAASR Board Member and current Treasurer Robert, husband Newell Thomas, and sons Casey and Ian, as well as cousins, were on hand to hear this moving tribute and to receive signed copies of the book.

The reading itself dealt powerfully with issues of Armenian politics and the internal divisions of the community. It was an effective ending to a memorable evening and summed up forcefully Parlakian's main point: that the theatre is one of the most potent vehicles for conveying the shared experiences of Armenian group and family life in a way that will continue to be meaningful with each passing generation.

**Get on NAASR's E-mail List**

Do you want to receive via e-mail NAASR's flyers, newsletters, and other announcements? If you are a NAASR member or are interested in receiving information on NAASR's activities we urge you to inform us of your e-mail address.

Just send an e-mail to [hq@naasr.org](mailto:hq@naasr.org) with the message "Please add me to the NAASR e-mail list" or be sure to include your e-mail address on your membership dues renewal form.

**NAASR Wishlist**

Since the last issue of the Newsletter, we have received the generous donation of a color laser printer from Mr. Armen Me-guerditchian of Arlington, MA. We greatly appreciate his kindness.

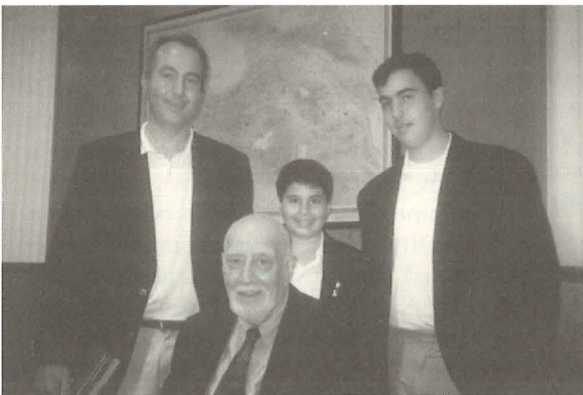
In addition, four NAASR members have generously contributed a total of \$1,000 dollars towards the purchase of a new sound system for our lecture room. We are investigating systems and are hopeful that a new one will be in place by the fall of 2005. If you would like to make a contribution to this cause, please contact us as soon as possible. Thanks!

We still need the following:

- **Bookshelves for the library**
- **Desktop computers no more than two years old or newer running Windows XP**
- **Laptop computers of the same vintage**
- **Laserprinters**
- **DVD player**

If you have something you think we need or can assist in our getting it – we ask you to call us.

All gifts to NAASR are tax deductible. Keep the Armenian Heritage alive – give to NAASR.



Dr. Nishan Parlakian, seated, with, from left to right, Newell Thomas and sons Ian and Casey.

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