Transmission of Trauma Across Generations
Growing Up with the Armenian Genocide

Sponsored by the Cohen Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies at Keene State College

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The Genocide Awareness Lecture

Since the post-Holocaust declaration of “Never again!” the world has witnessed a number of genocidal actions that remind us that the work of remembrance is tied to the work of vigilance. And vigilance leads to the active acceptance of human responsibility for others outside our immediate domain. That lesson is directly rooted in the founding purpose of the Cohen Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies: “To remember … and to teach.”

The Genocide Awareness Lecture is an annual event designed to encourage people of good will and conscience to give vigilant, public attention to our still genocidal world. The lecture features experts who can initiate thoughtful reflection and responsible engagement with the mass violence and perpetration of human atrocity that continue to hold others in our world hostage, fearful for their lives and for the lives of their children.

When we remember what happened in the Holocaust, we realize that one of the reasons genocide was possible was that the Third Reich drew the boundaries of its universe of moral obligation to exclude the Jewish people. Likewise, it excluded the Sinti and Roma peoples, Slavs, and others whom Nazi ideology deemed “unworthy of life.” Our lecture tonight underscores the abiding importance of this root feature of the genocidal mind. When genocide occurs, victims are selected because they are members of a group or population that the dominant group excludes from its universe of moral obligation.

To interrupt genocide, we must disrupt our complacent acceptance of the status quo to focus on the realities of those who live beyond our immediate concern. All human beings count in our moral universe. While this lecture series on genocide awareness does not prescribe any specific program of individual or social action or assume any single framework of meaning, it challenges each of us to draw our boundaries of moral concern inclusively and initiates an ongoing conversation about the value and the place of others in our world.

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Professor Peter Balakian is an Armenian American poet, writer, and academic. He was born in Teaneck, NJ, and grew up there and in nearby Tenafly. He earned a BA from Bucknell University, an MA from New York University, and a PhD in American civilization from Brown University. He has taught since 1980 at Colgate University, where he is currently Donald M. and Constance H. Rebar Professor of the Humanities in the Department of English and the director of Creative Writing. He was the first director of Colgate’s Center for Ethics and World Societies.

He is the author of five books of poetry, most recently June-tree: New and Selected Poems 1974–2000. His work has appeared in American magazines and journals such as The Nation, The New Republic, and The Kenyon Review. His memoir, Black Dog of Fate, is a winner of the PEN/Albrand Prize for memoir and was named a New York Times Notable Book. His book The Burning Tigris: The Armenian Genocide and America’s Response was the winner of the 2005 Raphael Lemkin Prize, is a New York Times Notable Book, and appeared on the New York Times and national bestsellers lists. His essays on poetry, culture, art, and social thought have appeared in many publications, including Art in America, American Poetry Review, and The Chronicle of Higher Education.