

The Color of Choice

ARMENIAN HISTORY AND CULTURE

Published in cooperation with the
Institute of Armenian Studies at Yerevan State University

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VOLUME 2

Vartan Matiossian

The Color of Choice

*The Armenians and the Politics of Race in the
United States and Germany (1890–1945)*



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Cover illustration: Johann Blumenbach's five racial variants. Illustration from the article on human races in Fr. Simeon Eremian, *Patkerazard bargirk' gortsnakan gitut'eants'* (Illustrated Dictionary of Practical Sciences), Venice, 1900.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data available online: <http://dnb.d-nb.de>

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www.brill.com

E-Mail: info@schoeningh.de

Cover design: Nora Krull, Hamburg

Production: Brill Deutschland GmbH, Paderborn

ISSN 2944-1129

ISBN 978-3-506-79773-5 (hardback)

ISBN 978-3-657-79773-8 (e-book)

This book is dedicated to those innumerable human lives that soulless ideologues and callous laws have not hesitated to shatter and scatter worldwide over a century. Among them have been genocide survivors like my great-uncle Margos Mateossian, who managed to enter America before the Immigration Act of 1924 closed the “golden gates,” and my grandfather Haroutioun Mateossian, who had to settle for the “other” America along with my grandmother Vartouhi and their elder child Zohrab, my father.

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A Note on Armenian Transliteration

The book follows the Armenian Romanization table of the Library of Congress. I have used Eastern and Western Armenian values as applicable throughout the text without diacritical marks, with the exception of the common pronunciation for names and surnames beginning with *ł* (*ye* instead of *e*) and *n* (*vo* instead of *o*) (e.g. *Yervant, Vosgerichian*). Common words have been transliterated according to Western Armenian phonetics (e.g., *Idalagan*). In the bibliography, I have utilized phonetic values for Eastern Armenian with diacritical marks.

Names of persons (e.g., *Artasches Abeghian, Mateos Ferrahian, Arshag Karagheusian, Schavarch Missakian, Diran Vosgiritchian*) and places (e.g. *Yerevan*) appear in their established Western transcription whenever available.

The suffix *łwł* for surnames appears in the standard form *ian*, while *yan* is used when it is preceded by a vowel (e.g., *Kanayan, Saroyan*), as well as to transliterate the variant *juł* of the same suffix in the “reformed” orthography used by Eastern Armenian speakers from Armenia or other former Soviet republics.

For periodicals, I have adopted their own transliteration (e.g., *Gotchnag, Mushag, Haratch, Droschak, Asat Hayastan*), except when it is missing, rather than phonetic transliteration, which would yield, e.g., *Gochmag, Mshag, Harach, Droshak* or *Azat Hayastan*.

Words in Armenian script follow the “traditional” orthography used in Classical Armenian and Western Armenian, as well as by Eastern Armenian speakers from Iran (e.g., *ւհոմթիւն*).

Acknowledgments

These race names are merely convenient abstractions helping us to appreciate broad facts but it must never be forgotten that we are all mosaics of inheritances and that a “race type” exists mainly in our own minds and should not be used without great reserve in scientific discussions.

H.J. Fleure (1923)

Birthplace over ancestry, nationality (or citizenship) over ethnicity, and *jus soli* over *jus sanguinis* was the legal framework I lived with in my birthplace Uruguay and my former home country Argentina, where official forms asked about the place of your birth or the nationality you have and not the color of your skin.

My years of ongoing research on the history of Armenians in South America did not uncover any remarkable barrier to their immigration and naturalization in the seven Latin American countries where they settled, from Argentina to Mexico. The barriers existed, intriguingly, in some of the countries where they had never intended to settle.

In the United States, like everybody else, I experienced the usual share of encounters of the close kind with the salad bowl of assorted skin shades, ethnic origins, and geographical terms—an optional seasoning of nationality included at times—found in the checkboxes of legal or medical paperwork.

This piqued me to deepen my knowledge about how the colors of race had shaped Armenian immigration and naturalization in the United States, but also about the genealogy of the words “race,” “white,” “Caucasian,” “Aryan,” and “Indo-European” from the beginnings of racial anthropology and comparative linguistics. I was aware of the dark history of prejudice and discrimination against Armenians running parallel to that genealogy. However, I had not realized the extent of its relation with the ideology and politics of race lurking on both sides of the Atlantic during the first half of the past century, which would restrict Armenian immigration for four decades and threaten their ability to naturalize through their potential classification as non-white in the United States and non-Aryan in Nazi Germany.

This work was in the making for fifteen years. In the early aughts, following my penchant for setting records straight, I had penned a critical essay about scholar Artashes Abeghian’s supposed ideological bending before Nazism, which appeared in the literary supplement of the daily *Haratch*, then still published in Paris. Six years later, it devolved into a fifty-page article on Nazi racial

theories and the “Aryan” origins of Armenians. Next came an unpublished paper, “‘White’ Armenians, ‘Aryan’ Armenians: Combating Racial Views during the First Half of the 20th Century,” dealing with the race-based policies adopted in the United States and the Third Reich, which I presented at the 35th anniversary conference of the Society for Armenian Studies (Los Angeles, March 2009). Its rewriting soon took a life of its own as a draft manuscript in continuous evolution amid other projects. I presented lectures and papers in New York, Yerevan, Montreal, and Beirut, and published several articles in Armenian, a language in which scholarship on the subject was almost inexistent:

- “Artashēs Abeghean, nats’iakan ts’eghayin tesut’iwnnerě ew hayots’ ‘ariakan’ tsagumě” (Artashes Abeghian, Nazi Racial Theories, and the ‘Aryan’ Origin of Armenians), *Bazmavep*, 2008, pp. 147–196.
- “Amerikean haka-gaght’akanakan hosank’ě ew hayerě (1890–1914)” (The American Anti-Immigration Current and Armenians, 1890–1914), in *Hayagitut’yuně ev ardi zhamanakashrjani martahravernerě* (Armenian Studies and the Challenges of Modern Times), Yerevan: Gitutyun, 2014, pp. 127–130.
- “Ts’eghi gaghap’arin karutsumě Miats’eal Nahangneru mēj ew hayerě (hamařõt aknark)” (The Construction of the Idea of Race in the United States and Armenians: Brief Overview), *Handes Amsorya*, 1–12, 2016, pp. 457–482.
- “Germanakan patkerats’umnerě hayots’ masin ew hay-nats’iakan ħaraberut’iwnnerě” (The German Conceptions about Armenians and the Armenian-Nazi Relations), *Haigazian Armenological Review*, vol. 40, 2020, pp. 7–50.
- “Halachean datě (1909). hayots’ k’aghak’ats’iut’ean dēm ařajin irawakan martahrawērě Miats’eal Nahangneru mēj” (The Halladjian Case (1909): The First Legal Challenge against Armenian Naturalization in the United States), *Haigazian Armenological Review*, vol. 42, 2022, pp. 131–168.

I would like to express my gratitude to Ashot Hayruni and Robert Sukiasyan for kindly accepting this book for publication in the series “Armenian History and Culture” at Brill Schöningh, and to Sven Kützemeier, Associate Editor, who expertly shepherded it through the publishing process.

I am indebted to Avedis Hadjian for generously editing the final and helping me avoid various pitfalls with valuable suggestions; to Marc Mamigonian for answering multiple queries and commenting on a full draft; and to Donald Abcarian and Barlow Der Mugardechian for reading and commenting on specific chapters. I am also very appreciative of the positive evaluation by the three anonymous peer reviewers and their well-crafted suggestions, which offered me useful insights to improve and refine the manuscript. All quotations from

English sources have reproduced the original text as it is, and all translations are my own, except when mentioned otherwise.

I have attempted to lay the groundwork for future travelers of roads less taken with the help of archival documents, newspapers and printed documents, letters, and memoirs, as well as an extensive collection of secondary sources. I am well aware that many sources have remained out of my reach, but I also hope that this will not impact significantly upon the final product. Due credit should be given to the collections of the New York Public Library, the Krikor and Clara Zohrab Information Center (Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America, New York), the St. Nerses Shnorhali Library (Eastern Prelacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church, New York), the Bergen County Cooperative Library System (New Jersey), the Armenian Missionary Association of America (Paramus, New Jersey), as well as the National Association of Armenian Studies and Research (Belmont, Massachusetts) the Armenian Research Center (University of Michigan-Dearborn), the Mekhitarist Congregation (Vienna, Austria), the National Library of Armenia (Yerevan, Armenia), and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation archives (Watertown, Massachusetts). In this time and age, the digitized newspapers and books that I mined from the National Library of Armenia, the National Library of France, the New York Public Library, the German Digital Library, the Library of Congress, Google Books, Hathi Trust, and Internet Archive, to name just a few among many such outlets, had a role that fell short of providential.

I am thankful to Benjamin Alexander and Levon Thomassian for making documents available, as well as to Vardan Azatyan, Anny Bakalian, Artsvi Bakhchinyan, Antranig Dakessian, Bedross Der Matossian, Harry S. Cherken, Jr., G.M. Goshgarian, Ashot Grigoryan, Hagop Gulludjian, Sergio Kniasian, Minas Lourian, Christina Maranci, Zaven Messerlian, Osik Moses, Khatchig Mouradian, Aris Sevag (1946–2012), Zaven Torigian, and Ischchan Tschiftdschjan, who provided or suggested elusive, sometimes crucial sources and useful leads. Many years ago, a conversation with Ara Oshagan convinced me of the need to tackle the Armenian-Nazi controversy.

Last but not least, I am grateful to my wife Nanor for her long years of continuous and patient support.

As it is customary to say, the final content of these pages is my responsibility. Their reader will hopefully find that I have toiled to cast a wide net over a subject that is narrow only in appearance and to provide a window into a past that is not past, as well as some much-needed context as we bear witness to these times of widespread global upheaval and deep sense of historical *deja-vu*.

Vartan Matiossian

March 6, 2025

Introduction: Coloring Armenians

Above all, we were listening to the siren songs of nationalism and racial superiority that seem ever latent in a culture and all too frequently rise to the surface of the body politic to blemish it in periods of postwar tension and reaction. The writings of that time which dealt with the “race” concept and cried “beware of immigration” (...) were the spiritual precursors of Hitlerism and all its diabolic nonsense about supermen and superblood.

William Bernard (1952)¹

Race and Armenians

The Great Dictator and *Casablanca* became enduring and endearing classics in Hollywood’s extensive contribution to American propaganda through World War II, where even Mickey Mouse, Popeye, and all their animated friends were involved.

The major movie studios shared their technical expertise too. In 1944, the animation division of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer completed *Weapon of War*, a six-minute film for newsreels that satirized Nazi racial and religious hatred with storyboard of the U.S. Army Corps.² The narrator also made fun of “Aryan,” the last of the three buzzwords that had framed race and language in the early nineteenth century, preceded by “Caucasian,” the designation for the white race overwhelmingly predominant in Europe, and “Indo-European,” the name for a family of extant and extinct tongues expanded from the rock of Gibraltar to the western border of China. “Aryan” was the initial label for the Indo-Iranian branch of the Indo-European family, but it soon became synonymous with the word “Indo-European.” A united mind (proto language) was presumed to have begotten a united body (race) in a proto homeland. The equation of Indo-European speakers with white race bearers gave birth to the myth of the Aryan race.

¹ *Hearings before the President’s Commission on Immigration and Naturalization*, Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1952, p. 77.

² The film is available at <https://vimeo.com/406226594>. See also Benjamin L. Alpers, *Dictators, Democracy, and American Public Culture: Envisioning the Totalitarian Enemy, 1920s-1950s*, Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina, 2003, pp. 172–173.

The national states coming into life in the same century based their foundations on the same premise fueling Indo-European studies: a homeland (national state) was the center of a population amalgamated by certain cultural features (nation) and a majority language. A more extreme version highlighted common biological features (one language + one race = one homeland).

Race was more than sheer biology. Since the late eighteenth century, racialism, namely, the combination of biological and cultural attributes as permanent markers of a race, would lead “to talk glibly of the psychical qualities of various human groups as if their physical basis and racial character had been scientifically determined.”³ Scholars and pseudo-scholars set parameters for a deeply black-and-white vision of the world:

The moral and intellectual characteristics, whose association forms the soul of a people, represent the synthesis of its entire past, the inheritance of all its ancestors, the motives of its conduct. They appear to be very variable in individuals of the same race, but observation proves that the majority of the individuals of a given race always possess a certain number of common psychological characteristics, which are as stable as the anatomical characteristics that allow of [*sic*] the classification of species, while, like these latter characteristics, the psychological characteristics are regularly and constantly reproduced by heredity.⁴

The creation and protection of a racial order was “the great historical task of making the political and social world conform to the reality of nature, with its fixed system of domination and subordination.”⁵ Hereditary factors or external influence resulted in a hierarchy of superior and inferior races, even though there was no country with a pure racial type, and in the praxis of racialism through the cruel and unfair treatment of those racially otherized: racism.⁶ The economic expansion started in the 1400s with transoceanic journeys and the creation of politico-commercial empires was gradually supersized by technological acceleration as epitomized by the Industrial Revolution. That complex web also caught Armenians, as well as other Eurasian peoples into a whirl of uncertainty that explained and justified colonialism and imperialism as the

3 Henry Pratt Fairchild, *The Melting-Pot Mistake*, Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1926, p. 32.

4 Gustave Le Bon, *The Psychology of Peoples*, New York: Macmillan, 1898, pp. 27–28.

5 Eric D. Weitz, *A Century of Genocide: Utopias of Race and Nation*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003, pp. 21–22.

6 George M. Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002, p. 70.

manifest destiny of Western civilization. Racial determinism affirmed that the achievements of the European offspring of the Aryan race had proven the physical and mental superiority of the white race:

Out of the prehistoric shadows the white races pressed to the front and proved in a myriad ways their fitness for the hegemony of mankind. Gradually they forged a common civilization; then, when vouchsafed their unique opportunity of oceanic mastery four centuries ago, they spread over the earth, filling its empty spaces with their superior breeds and assuring to themselves an unparalleled paramountcy of numbers and dominion.⁷

Its pioneering advocate was Count Joseph Arthur de Gobineau (1816–1882), a French writer and diplomat, who alleged in *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (Essay on the Inequality of Human Races, 1853) that “all civilizations derive from the white race, that none can exist without its help,” and associated the white and the Aryan races: there was no true civilization in Europe “where the Aryan branch is not predominant,” and “where the Germanic element has never penetrated, our special civilization does not exist.”⁸ Philosopher Houston Stewart Chamberlain (1855–1927), his follower in Germany, wrote in 1899 that Aryans were “physically and mentally (...) pre-eminent among all people” and entitled to be “the lords of the world,”⁹ and another follower in France, anthropologist Count Georges Vacher de Lapouge (1854–1936), stated at the same time: “Moreover, the modern Aryan, with the same qualities and an inflexible will, knows how to show that he is made to be master. His race is dominant par excellence, and in such a natural manner that the others become used to be ruled.”¹⁰

The ideological inheritance that Gobineau bequeathed to Chamberlain and Lapouge, going all the way to Adolf Hitler, did not skip American conservationist Madison Grant (1865–1937). For him, the Nordic race—the “great race” and the “master race” for which his bell tolled in *The Passing of the Great Race*

7 Lothrop Stoddard, *The Rising Tide of Color against White World-Supremacy*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920, pp. 299–300.

8 Arthur de Gobineau, *The Inequality of Human Races*, vol. I, translated by Adrian Collins, New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1915, pp. 93, 210, 212.

9 Houston Stewart Chamberlain, *The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, translated by John Lees, vol. 1, London and New York: John Lane Company, 1911, p. 542.

10 G. Vacher de Lapouge, *L'Aryen: son rôle social*, Paris: Albert Fontemoing, 1899, p. 371.

(1916)—was “the white man par excellence,”¹¹ and the “purely Nordic” population of Scandinavia represented “the nursery and broodland of the master race.”¹² The Alpine race, located in Europe and Asia Minor, appeared “to be increasing again at the expense of the master race.”¹³

Grant, who wrote in the appendix to the second edition that “only in our day and generation has this backward race even claimed a parity of strength and culture with the Master Race,”¹⁴ regarded Armenians as members of the western Asian branch of the Alpine race. An Armenian educator commented in 1926, during the apogee of “the myth of the Nordic race,” that it “would not have resonated so widely in the hearts and minds of the American people” if “a well-rooted racial prejudice against Blacks and [American] Indians did not already exist in America. This prejudice was logically directed against the Oriental races, Chinese and Japanese, and finally the Alpine and Mediterranean races of southern Europe and Asia Minor.”¹⁵

Armenian immigrants to the United States were among those feeling the impact exerted by the politics of race and the rule of law over who did and who did not belong to the population of “free white persons” that enjoyed the rights and duties of citizenship. The right reserved by the Naturalization Act of 1790 to “free white persons” had been gradually expanded by the force of circumstances: to “persons of African nativity or descent” (1866) after the abolition of slavery; to “descendants of races indigenous to the Western Hemisphere” (1940) after its extension to Native Americans in 1924; to Chinese (1943) after China became a war ally. Earl G. Harrison (1899–1955) declared in his report submitted on his resignation as Commissioner of Immigration and Naturalization in 1944 that “the only other country that observes racial discrimination similar to that reflected in our laws in matters regarding to naturalization is Nazi Germany, and all will agree this is not very desirable company.”¹⁶

11 Madison Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race, or, the Racial Basis of European History*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916, pp. 23, 150 (henceforth Grant, *The Passing*).

12 Idem, p. 187.

13 Idem, p. 125. Blacks, obviously, were “willing followers who ask only to obey and to further the ideals and wishes of the master race” (idem, p. 78).

14 Madison Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race, or, the Racial Basis of European History*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1918, p. 273. The bibliography added Gobineau and Lapouge (idem, pp. 275–277) to Chamberlain, cited in the first edition (Grant, *The Passing*, p. 229).

15 Kevork A. Sarafian, “Ts'eghayin harts'ë. Nortik ts'eghin araspel'ë” (The Racial Question: The Myth of the Nordic Race), *Hayastani Gotchnag*, July 17, 1926, p. 1032.

16 *To Permit the Naturalization of Approximately Three Thousand Natives of India: Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Immigration United States Senate*, Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1944, p. 43. See also Ian F. Haney López,

Xenophobia and nativism peaked with the Immigration Act of 1924 and then resurfaced in the 1930s under a different set of circumstances. Nazism used racial hatred, *Weapon of War* stated, to target America as “a hodgepodge country of all races,” 61 nationalities, and 259 creeds with “jealousies and prejudices to play upon.” The film may have indirectly responded to the upheaval that shook five cities in June–August 1943, starting with the Zoot Suit riots in Los Angeles and the race riots in Detroit. *The Armenian Mirror-Spectator*, a weekly published by the Armenian Democratic League (A.D.L.) in Boston, regarded them as the work of far-right bands that “have started their own war within a national war to disrupt our national unity and cripple war production, thereby directly playing into Hitler’s hands.” Other than the Ku Klux Klan, the editorial mentioned no longer active groups: the Christian Front (1938–1940), the Silver Shirts (1933–1941), the Christian Mobilizers (1939–1940), the Social Justices (1934–1936), and the Vigilantes. However, its claim that the population seemed “to have succumbed to the deadly propaganda poison of these racists, who incite the Negro against the white and the Christian against the Jew,” was not off the mark.¹⁷

One can only wonder how and why *Weapon of War* listed Armenians in a pitch for “Dr. Hitler’s Blood Tonic”: “Are you high strung and irritable? Do you stay up at nights and worry about Armenians? Peruvians? Scandinavians? And Greeks? Try a bottle and you will lick any feriner in town.” Then a litany of names—Poles, Mexicans, Negroes, Chinese, Catholics, Presbyterians, Jews, Baptists—follows until the audience listening to the Nazi salesman blows a huge raspberry and dispatches him amid the sounds of “Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean.”

Armenians had to confront the dominance of one shade of the white race over another in democratic United States and of one division of the white race over another in totalitarian Germany. Their reaction to the challenges posed by racialization and its application as racism was inscribed within the game rules imposed by the prevailing discourse. The underlying three questions that I will try to address in these pages are:

- How were Armenian whiteness and “Aryanness” born?
- When and why did they start to be questioned?
- How did Armenians react and why?

Armenian ethnic, political, and cultural longevity had scarcely a match in Europe. The Armenian highlands, or Armenian Plateau, are located to the east

White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race, New York: New York University Press, 1996, p. 44.

17 “The War Within,” *The Armenian Mirror-Spectator*, June 30, 1943.

of the classical region of Asia Minor or Anatolia, extending from the southern edges of the Caucasus to the Iranian Plateau and northern Mesopotamia and from the Euphrates River to the Kura-Arax lowlands on the west of the Caspian Sea. It has been an area rich in historical events and cultural evolution from early antiquity. The biblical account about the repopulation of the world after Noah's Ark stopped on "the mountains of Ararat" (Gen 8:4) offers symbolical evidence of the potential importance of Armenia within the context of Near Eastern and Caucasian history. Theories that place the homeland of Indo-European languages in or around Armenia have recently awakened renewed attention following developments in comparative linguistics, archaeology, and genetics. The ethnic identity and location of most political formations mentioned in cuneiform sources and their connection to the Armenian highland are still a matter of discussion. They cannot be ascertained beyond reasonable doubt before the undisputed existence of Armenia and Armenians in Greek and Persian sources of the second half of the sixth century. B.C., when theories going back more than a century used to maintain that Armenians migrated from the Balkans into their historical territory, conquering the indigenous kingdom of Urartu (Ararat). Those views, often evoked by authors quoted in the following pages and now outdated, were utilized to argue the Armenian affiliation with Europe both in the United States and in Europe itself.

The Armenian kingdom that emerged in the pre-Christian era fell in the eleventh century, and massive emigration soon created the Armenian proto-diasporic kingdom of Cilicia on the southern shore of the Mediterranean Sea. Its collapse in 1375 sparked a political interregnum that lasted until the first independent Republic of Armenia (1918–1920). The Ottoman Empire fragmented the territory of classical Armenia into a constellation of provinces and gerrymandered their political borders to dilute Armenian presence. Ottoman maps did not usually mention Armenia, which was often replaced by "Kurdistan" in the same way that the Republic of Turkey (Türkiye), the successor state to the empire, would manufacture the geographically inaccurate and oxymoronic term "Eastern Anatolia," soon uncritically adopted by Western scholarship, to the same effect.

After the modern concept of race was introduced at the turn of the nineteenth century, Armenians were initially identified as both white and Aryan, but later deemed not sufficiently white (in the United States) and Aryan (in Germany). The politics of race established a color of choice to belong to the upper tier of society, and it was not by accident that the Naturalization Act of 1790 reserved citizenship only to "free white" people in the United States, with equal emphasis on "free" and "white." The emphasis on "white" started

being lessened only after the abolition of slavery and the passing of the Revised Statutes of 1870 and 1873.

The German defeat in World War I and the humiliating conditions imposed by the Treaty of Versailles generated a nativist and xenophobic current that grew after the social and political crisis started in 1929 and facilitated Hitler's rise and triumph in 1933. Nazism would highlight the Aryan subcategory of the "white" race as the parameter for inclusion, even though the impossibility to define who an Aryan was would force the creation of the German versus non-German opposition. *Weapon of War* passingly mentioned the "lot of mumbo jumbo about Nordic Aryan supermen," which combined the Nazi distorted version of Friedrich Nietzsche's *Übermensch* with the presumed Aryan seal of distinction: to belong to the white race—moreover, to its Nordic subgroup with fair skin, blue eyes, and blond hair—to speak an Indo-European language, and to be standard bearer of European civilization.

The application of the rule of law to make Germans "learn to think in racial terms to a degree unprecedented in German history"¹⁸ targeted the Jewish population (1 percent) and was intended to regulate the life of all other ethnicities. On this point, there was a resemblance in contents, if not in form, between the United States and Nazi Germany: in the former, the judiciary ruled that Armenians were white; in the latter, a ministry decreed that they were Aryan. However, while the ruling in the Cartozian case (July 1925) was never a matter of dispute, the decree emanated from the Reich Interior Ministry (July 1933) remained under the potential risk of being ignored or overturned.

In our knowledge, it is hard to find a relation of causality and a straightforward connection between those successive challenges. Both strains of supremacy showed a conceptual difference. In the United States, it was textbook knowledge that the "so-called White or Caucasian Race embraces almost all of the historic nations" and that the Hamitic, the Semitic, and the Indo-European or Aryan were the main groups: "The members forming any one of these groups must not be looked upon as kindred in blood; the only certain bond uniting the peoples of each group is the bond of language."¹⁹ The fallacy that the Aryan race "is so nearly coincident with the White that the names for our purpose may be used interchangeably,"²⁰ however, became a sort of commonplace

18 Devin O. Pendas, "Racial States in Comparative Perspective," in Devin O. Pendas, Mark Roseman, and Richard F. Wetzell (eds.), *Beyond the Racial State: Rethinking Nazi Germany*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017, p. 120.

19 Philip Van Ness Myers, *Ancient History*, second revised edition, Boston: Ginn and Company, 1916, pp. 17–18.

20 Seth K. Humphrey, *Mankind: Racial Values and the Racial Prospect*, New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1917, p. 100.

among racial theorists. The intra-European racism embedded in Nazi ideology decoupled that interchangeability, adopting Aryans as flagship and racializing Semites (Jews) as their vilified opposite.²¹

In our case, it is pertinent to note that an extensive corpus of literature, awash in well-rehashed tropes about Armenians that were almost as widespread as antisemitic ones, was readily available for the development of supremacist thought in the United States and in Germany.²² It may have impacted less pervasively on American nativist literature, but it appears to have been a major appendage to German antisemitic tradition, and it was extensively developed after Germany stepped up its involvement in the Ottoman Empire at the end of the nineteenth century. Those tropes were further enhanced by the inspiration that Nazism took from the Ottoman collapse and the foundation of the Republic of Turkey.²³ Their systemic presence crisscrossed and watered an ideological field of prejudice and discrimination that may be justifiably called “anti-Armenism.” I have opted for this term to designate prejudice and discrimination directed in the modern period against Armenians in a restricted sense instead of “anti-Armenianism,” currently used with a broader meaning.²⁴

For the past three decades, race studies have produced extensive and highly valuable literature in English, with an interdisciplinary approach to race as a binary construct of white vs. non-white built upon hypotheses of presumed racial superiority. The Armenian experience of race in the first half of the twentieth century encompassed their transnational status, and its manifestations reverberated throughout the Armenian diaspora, but they have not been studied in all its nuances. Therefore, rather than focusing solely on an account of the vortex of immigration, naturalization and discrimination that ensnared Armenians in the United States, I have chosen to have also a say about the

21 Pendas, “Racial States,” pp. 135–136.

22 For British, American, and French literature, see Vatche Ghazarian (ed.), *Armenians in the Ottoman Empire: An Anthology of Transformation, 13th–19th Centuries*, Waltham, Ma.: Mayreni Publishing, 1997; David Vinson, *Les Arméniens dans les récits des voyageurs français du XIX^e siècle (1796–1895)*, Valence: La Bouquinerie, 2004. See also Maciej Wąs, “The Jews of Caucasus’: Perceptions of Armenians in the German and Polish Travel Literature,” in Sarah M. Ross and Regina Randhoffer (eds.), *Armenian and Jewish Experience between Expulsion and Destruction*, Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2022, pp. 115–130.

23 Stefan Ihrig, *Atatürk in the Nazi Imagination*, Cambridge, Ma. and London: Belknap Press, 2014; idem, *Justifying Genocide*. See also Hilmar Kaiser, *Imperialism, Racism, and Development Theories: The Construction of a Dominant Paradigm on Ottoman Armenians*, Ann Arbor: Gomidas Institute, 1997.

24 For an example of restricted use of “anti-Armenianism,” see Ihrig, *Justifying Genocide*, p. 77.

Armenian image in Germany before and after Nazism turned race into an element of the banality of evil that could mean deprivation or death.

In Chapter 1, I have reviewed the concepts Caucasian (racial), Indo-European (linguistic), and Aryan (linguistic and racial) and their origins,²⁵ and the Armenian position in the ethno-racial worldview of modernity. Armenians were neither self nor other, and the ambiguity of their “in-betweenness” challenged patterns of identity, as they did not fit neatly into conventional views of East and West.²⁶ They saw themselves as Europeans because of their Indo-European language, Aryan racial origin, and Christian religion.²⁷ Sharing European characteristics made them closer to the self than to the other, incomplete as both of them were.²⁸ Russian Swiss writer Victor Dingelstedt (1837–1917) attempted a summary in an interesting paragraph brimming with Orientalism:

But though an Oriental nation they are capable of being inoculated with Occidental civilisation, for in this race are mingled many Eastern and Western vices and virtues. In their Oriental soul there are admirable resources of patience. An Armenian understands almost equally well Oriental and Occidental man—whence their superiority as business men. It is through such a race of men that reconciliation between Eastern and Western ideas and mode of life may be attained.²⁹

The southern slopes of the Caucasus Mountains, where the origins of the Caucasian race were located, constituted the northeastern boundaries of Armenian historical territories. The initial recognition of Armenians as members of the Caucasian race and speakers of a language included in the Indo-European family also earned them membership in the Aryan race. However, they fell out of favor among certain sectors of the political and ideological elite in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. European colonialist and imperialist ambitions in the Near East, particularly in the Ottoman Empire,

25 See Bruce Baum, *The Rise and Fall of the Caucasian Race: A Political History of Racial Identity*, New York: New York University Press, 2006; Neil Irvin Painter, *The History of White People*, New York: W.W. Norton, 2010.

26 See Jo Laycock, *Imagining Armenia: Orientalism, Ambiguity and Intervention*, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2009, pp. 28–37.

27 Henry Morgenthau, *Ambassador Morgenthau's Story*, Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1919, p. 288.

28 Laycock, *Imagining Armenia*, p. 222.

29 V. Dingelstedt, “The Armenians or Haikans: An Ethnographical Sketch,” *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, August 1913, p. 414.

and the racism spreading over anthropological science appear to have laid the grounds to question Armenian affiliation to the Caucasian = white = Aryan circle, along with the prevalent racial, linguistic, cultural, and moral identification of Armenians and Jews, which created the extended fantasy of “Armenian Jews” from the eighteenth century.³⁰ “Whether the Armenians are Aryans or of the Semitic race,” a handbook on Turkey prepared by the U.S. Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce wrote in 1926, “they possess the intellect of the European, the physique of the Persian and the Kurd, with a goodly admixture of Jewish thrift.”³¹ Racial doubts would linger in some quarters of the United States—exemplified by restrictive covenants listing Armenians among Semites—and more powerfully in Germany until the end of the Nazi regime.

Chapter 2 explores the origin and construction of the Armenian image. The philo-Armenian discourse connected Armenia “with the primeval history of man” and argued that mythology and the Bible “declare[d] it to be the spot from which the great modern nations originally wandered,”³² looking backward to underscore the Christian heritage and the literary and cultural values that Armenians had contributed to civilization. This discourse was positioned in an antagonistic role vis-à-vis the unflattering perception of Armenians in the Old and the New World amassed by Euro-American travelers, journalists, and scholars until the early twentieth century. That rapport allowed commingling a negative image as stereotypical as the one bestowed upon Jews. It contributed to create an atmosphere of undesirability and, thus, a connection to future challenges of Armenian civil rights.

European discourse otherized Armenians as stateless commercial middlemen alleged to be a threat to national homogeneity, including the fiction that they mainly lived outside their historical territories, repeated frequently before and after British politician Benjamin Disraeli (1804–1881) enunciated it more crudely in his novel *Tancred, or the New Crusade* (1847): “Go to Armenia, and you will not find an Armenian. They, too, are an expatriated nation, like

30 The centuries-long gallery of curious cases includes Rabbi Shalom Nadoff (1901–1986), a Yemenite Jew from Palestine arrived in Ellis Island in 1926 and misidentified by photographer Lewis W. Hine (1874–1940) as an “Armenian Jew” (<https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47d9-4e87-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>). See Angela Chen, “Rightly Identified— at Last,” *The Wall Street Journal*, December 15, 2013.

31 *Turkey: A Commercial and Political Handbook*, Washington: Government Publications Office, 1926, p. 23. The handbook was reprinted in 1941.

32 James Creagh, *Armenians, Koords and Turks*, London: Samuel Tinsley and Co., 1880, p. 4. About the image of Armenia as a cradle of civilization, see Laycock, *Imagining Armenia*, pp. 55–60.

the Hebrews.”³³ In 1900, *Droschak*, the central organ of the most important Armenian political party, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (A.R.F.), wrote in a balance of its first decade of existence that Armenians were “worn out by secular oppression, unaccustomed to fight, and rich in selfish, unhealthy instincts,” and they appeared to the outside world “either as a totally unknown race or as a class of usurers in the Orient with a low moral character.”³⁴ An anonymous article in a French journal claimed that the Armenian massacres of 1895–1896 in the Ottoman Empire had silenced a public conversation about Armenian vices and that “the big amount of Semitic blood that flows through Armenian veins and the whole historical past of this small Eastern people, woven with humiliating slavery, multiple betrayals towards the states they are part of, cheating and smuggling (...)” had enabled them to take unduly advantage.³⁵ The article on Armenia in the tenth edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1902), reprinted time and again until 1926, offered a sweeping assessment of their “Jewish” association (exclusiveness, dispersion, tenacity, and adaptability) and a characterization as a sturdy, frugal, sober, industrious, intelligent, and traditionalist, yet progressive “Oriental” people, matched by a set of perceived flaws grounded in prejudicial views. Geographer Sir Charles W. Wilson (1836–1905), its author, was a veteran army officer and onetime consul-general in Anatolia who reflected and shaped British interests and views too:

On the other hand, they are greedy of gain, quarrelsome in small matters, self-seeking and wanting in stability; and they are gifted with a tendency to exaggeration and a love of intrigue which has had an unfortunate influence on their history. They are deeply separated by religious differences, and their mutual jealousies, their inordinate vanity, their versatility, and their cosmopolitan character must always be an obstacle to the realization of the dreams of the nationalists. The want of courage and self-reliance, the deficiency in truth and honesty sometimes noticed in connexion with them, are doubtless due to long servitude under an unsympathetic government.³⁶

33 See Jean-Michel Johnston and Oded Y. Steinberg, “Armenians, Jews, and Humanitarianism in the ‘Age of Questions,’ 1830–1900,” *The Historical Journal*, 66, 2023, pp. 172–200.

34 “Tasnameak. 1890–1900” (Decade: 1890–1900), *Droschak*, January 1901, p. 1.

35 Un russe, “Les Arméniens en Transcaucasie,” *La nouvelle revue*, January 15, 1904, p. 189.

36 C.W.W. [Charles W. Wilson], “Armenia,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, tenth edition, vol. XXV, London: Adam and Charles Black and The Times, 1902, p. 637.

The narrative of prejudice and discrimination crossed lines with contempt, hatred, and persecution of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, veering into genocide in the early twentieth century.³⁷ Sociologist Mehmet Ziya Gökalp (1876–1924) was an influential member of the Central Committee of the governing Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) that laid the groundwork and directed the annihilation. He was also the main theoretician of Pan-Turkism, a supremacist and exclusivist ideology seeking the unification of Turkic peoples from the Bosphorus to Central Asia, which was complemented by Pan-Turanism, the aspiration to unite Turanian (Turkic, Mongol, and Altaic) peoples, with biological racism implicitly impacting on both of them.³⁸ However, race does not appear to have been the leading cause of the Armenian genocide, which is far from having been a “racial war” waged by Armenians seeking a dominant position in the Ottoman society against the Turkish overwhelming majority.³⁹

American Racial Nationalism

Early immigrants and their descendants settled and colonized the land of the thirteen American colonies, becoming the self-styled “native American” population as they displaced and encroached on Native Americans. Citizenship was constructed as the association of “free white persons” in the body politic, and laws were written, enacted, and upheld to ensure and control the flow of political power, social positions, and economic resources. Civic or constitutional nationalism has been based on a body of equal citizens sharing inclusive political beliefs and the understanding that the values expressed in the Constitution are the steppingstone for American nationhood. Racial nationalism—a community of blood and skin color with self-proclaimed exclusive fitness for self-government—has used those values to anchor nationhood on a particular race,

37 See Francisco Bethencourt, *Racisms: From the Crusades to the Twentieth Century*, Princeton and London: Princeton University Press, 2003, pp. 316–320.

38 Stephan H. Astourian, “Modern Turkish Identity and the Armenian Genocide: From Prejudice to Racist Nationalism,” in Richard G. Hovannisian (ed.), *Remembrance and Denial: The Case of the Armenian Genocide*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999, pp. 31–35. See also Regina Galustyan, “The Roots of the Racial Nationalism of the Committee of Union and Progress: Ideas, Individuals, Influences,” *International Journal of Armenian Genocide Studies*, 1, 2022, pp. 7–22.

39 Walter John Raymond, *Dictionary of Politics: Selected American and Foreign Political and Legal Terms*, seventh edition, Lawrenceville, Va.: Brunswick Publishing Corporation, 1992, p. 428.

ancestry, and religion and to claim that those outside them are either unable or unwilling to adopt the social ethos and political creed emanating from the Constitution.⁴⁰ In 1870, journalist John Swinton (1829–1901) objected to the “infusion and transfusion” of the “depraved and debased blood” of “Chinese, Mongolian, or Yellow race with the white American race” and then recited a paean to the virtues of the white race:

The people of the United States are of the white European race, the Japhetic stock, from which have sprung the Germanic, Celtic, and Latin varieties—all immediately related to each other by historical terms—all growing side by side for thousands of years, and all developing a progressive civilization through the changes of time. (...) [T]he life, genius and power of the American Republic is with the European race which has overspreading it during the last two centuries. (...) All that here exists is owing to this white race, and is the work of this race, which is the best-based and best-built, the strongest and soundest, the dominant and predominant, the most aggressive and progressive race in the world.⁴¹

From 1790 to 1952, citizenship was limited to “free white persons” who supported the highest document of the land, along with several exceptions to “white” carved into it. The white, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant class saw the flow that did not come from the British Islands and northeastern Europe as a threat to its preponderance, a disruption of the American “race,” and a potential substitute of workforce. The offspring of convicts from Great Britain were not bound to replicate their ancestors, but the offspring of “wretched refuse” were bound to not overcome their parents. In stark opposition to Enlightenment values that appreciated the ability of people to change despite their level of degradation, the discourse of scientific racism established the immutability of races regardless of their level of exposure to the environment.

In the third chapter, I have zeroed in on the formative period of the Armenian American community at a time “when sentiments analogous to those already discharged against Negroes, Indians, and Orientals spilled over into anti-European channels, [and] a force of tremendous intensity entered the stream of American nativism.”⁴² Nativism targeted an array of ethnicities considered

40 Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001, p. 4.

41 John Swinton, “The New Issue: The Chinese-American Question,” *The New York Tribune*, June 30, 1870.

42 John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860–1925*, New York: Atheneum, 1981, p. 132, who uses the term “racial nativism.”

foreign from a religious (Catholic, Orthodox, Jewish, or even Muslim), racial (quasi-white or yellow), and ideological (unable to share American and constitutional values) standpoint and unfit for incorporation into the host society, with potential to revert American progress and push the country away from its rural and small-town roots. It dehumanized the newcomers as dumb and defective peasants who represented the lowest classes in their places of origin and came from societies and countries presumed far from Western civilization. Like in the cases of Native Americans annihilated and confined to reservations, African Americans freed after enduring centuries of chattel slavery, and Chinese labor immigrants turned into pariahs, the policing of racial boundaries needed to be zealously pursued. Race embodied popular perceptions that the “armies of refugees from southern and eastern Europe,” such as “the swarthy sons of Italy and Hungary, Turkey, Armenia, and the uttermost lands of the East (...) forwarding us what may be the advance guard of a horde that will invade us if we allow it,”⁴³ were mentally and intellectually inferior, socially and economically broken, and medically and politically undesirable.

The anti-Armenism present in European literature found its counterpoint in books and articles by American travelers and missionaries, trickling into the press and the publications of nativist authors, while pro-Armenian sympathies became more prominent in the 1890s, particularly during a brief period after the massacres of 1894–1896.⁴⁴

There were no professional ethnologists in the Ottoman Empire at the turn of the twentieth century. Geography or science textbooks in Armenian drew upon European sources for race classifications and descriptions, sometimes with a fleeting mention of Armenians as part of the white race. It is hard to say whether this played any role in their self-identification as white before coming to America, although Armenian American political and intellectual leaders may have been familiar with literature on Anglo-Saxonism.⁴⁵ Like other Ottoman ethnicities, particularly Syrians,⁴⁶ they would be compelled to take upon a racialized identity in their new country. An enterprising publisher, E.A. Yeran (Yervant Iknadosian, 1877–1958), offered some basics of Armenian racial identity in a bilingual conversation guide first published in 1910 that reached

43 “Impressions by the Way,” *Munsey’s Magazine*, October 1892, p. 125.

44 David E. Gutman, *The Politics of Armenian Migration to North America, 1885–1915*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019, p. 142.

45 Bedros Torosian, “Ottoman Armenian Racialization in an American Space (1908–1914),” *Mashriq & Mahjar*, 2, 2021, p. 40.

46 See Sarah M.A. Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009, pp. 52–80.

its fourth edition in 1920. The response to the question “What do you think of the Armenian people?” started with the following phrases, but did not mention the white race:

The Armenians are of a dark complexion.
They have black eyes and black hair,
They belong to the Aryan race.⁴⁷

Appeals to restrict the newer immigration intensified after World War I and continued targeting Armenians too, as I have shown in chapter 4. The alliance of scientific racism and eugenicism steered the course of immigration policy advocating for “the conservation and multiplication for our country of the best spiritual, moral, intellectual, and physical forces of heredity,” as paleontologist Henry Fairfield Osborn (1857–1935) wrote in his preface to the first edition of Grant’s book.⁴⁸ Eugenics fostered the bans on intermarriage and the approval of laws of sterilization and segregation against Native, African, and Asian Americans, which were on a swift rise in the 1920s.

Nativist and xenophobic clamor, favored by social and economic ups and downs, outbursts of internal insecurity, growth of postwar immigration, and the government’s political will, ended with the approval of “one of the most discriminatory systems ever implemented in American immigration history,”⁴⁹ the Immigration Act of 1924, which shut out “yellow” people from Eastern Asia until 1943 and set astringent quotas for quasi-white people from southern and Eastern Europe and Western Asia until 1965.

The legal prerequisite of whiteness for naturalization was litigated in 52 court cases between 1878 and 1952, which did not solve the matter, “since the racial and national origins categories on which the statutory and judicial distinctions were based rested on biological and anthropological quicksand.”⁵⁰

47 I.A. Yeran, *Armenian-English Conversation Illustrated*, Boston: Yeran Press, 1910, p. 147.

48 Grant, *The Passing*, pp. viii–ix.

49 Son-Thierry Ly and Patrick Weil, “The Antiracist Origin of the Quota System,” *Social Research*, 1, 2010, p. 47. On the racial conceptualization beneath the act, see Mae M. Ngai, “The Architecture of Race in American Immigration Law: A Reexamination of the Immigration Act of 1924,” *The Journal of American History*, June 1999, p. 67–92.

50 Peter Schrag, *Not Fit for Our Society: Immigration and Nativism in America*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2010, p. 142. On the Halladjian and Cartozian cases, see Phillip E. Lothyan, “A Question of Citizenship,” *Prologue*, Fall 1989, pp. 270–273; Stanford M. Lyman, *Postmodernism and a Sociology of the Absurd and Other Essays on the “Nouvelle Vague” in American Social Sciences*, Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1997, pp. 134–136; Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigration and the Alchemy of Race*, Cambridge and London: Harvard

The cases argued a variety of subjective and objective evidence, from science to common knowledge to prejudice.

Armenians, who represented about 0.04 percent of the population in 1910, faced the first of such challenges by the federal government at the circuit court of Boston in December 1909. Chapter 5 presents the background to *in re Halladjian et al.* and its aftermath. It was part of a short-lived strategy by the Naturalization Division, which started contesting the naturalization of Ottoman subjects, particularly Christian Syrians and Armenians, under the assumption that they were not European and hence non-white, and they were polygamous like Muslims. As Helen McCready Kearney wrote in her 1975 dissertation,

Arabs in the United States were generally perceived in the same negative terms as their cohabitators of the Levant: the Christian Armenians and Muslim Turks. The earlier undifferentiated perception of the Nearer Orientals displayed a remarkable tenacity within the American consciousness. (...) All Levantines were essentially alike: physically dirty, ignorant, semicivilized, superstitious, indolent, parasitic, cunning, shrewd, mercenary, fractious and violent.⁵¹

After the division of the Department of Commerce and Labor in 1914, the Naturalization Division fell within the orbit of the Department of Labor. As part of the exclusionist bid, the Department of Labor developed a strategy of asserting whiteness that the elastic interpretations of the Supreme Court

University Press, 1998, pp. 230–233; Janice Okoomian, “Becoming White: Contested History, Armenian American Women, and Racialized Bodies,” *Journal of the Society for the Study of Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States (MELUS)*, 27, 2002, pp. 217–220; Earlene Craver, “On the Boundary of White: The *Cartozian* Naturalization Case and the Armenians, 1923–1925,” *Journal of American Ethnic History*, Winter 2009, pp. 30–56; John Tehranian, *Whitewashed: America’s Invisible Middle Eastern Minority*, New York and London: New York University Press, 2009, pp. 52–55; Jason Pierce, *Making the White Man’s West: Whiteness and the Creation of the American West*, Denver, Co.: University Press of Colorado, 2016, pp. 248–250; Doug Coulson, *Race, Nation and Refuge: The Rhetoric of Race in Asian American Citizenship Cases*, Albany: SUNY Press, 2017, pp. 89–114; Neda Maghbouleh, *The Limits of Whiteness: Iranian Americans and the Everyday Politics of Race*, Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 2017, pp. 163–168; Benjamin F. Alexander, *Ararat in America: Armenian American Culture and Politics in the Twentieth Century*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2024, pp. 60–63. See also Aram Ghoogasian, “How Armenian-Americans Became ‘White’: A Brief History,” *Ajam Media Collective*, August 29, 2017 (<https://ajammc.com/2017/08/29/armenian-whiteness-america/>).

51 Quoted in Nataniel Deutsch, *Inventing America’s “Worst” Family: Eugenics, Islam, and the Fall and Rise of the Tribe of Ishmael*, Berkeley: University of California, 2009, p. 139.

supported in test cases that denied the right of naturalization to Japanese (1922) and Indians (1923). Armenians, who were less than 0.1 percent of 106 million Americans according to the census of 1920, became the next in line. In May 1924, faced with the risk of being downgraded to the status of second-class residents along with Chinese, Japanese, and Indians, they contested the federal government's demand to prove their whiteness and eligibility for naturalization in the test case *Cartozian v. United States*. I have reconstructed in chapter 6 the chain of events that surrounded the evidentiary trial held in Portland, Oregon, two weeks after the sanction of the Immigration Act. "As the cases of Halladjian and Cartozian illustrated, Armenians—as a Christian people who live in the Middle East—were a particular conundrum for the courts."⁵² The vexed question stemmed from the effort to leave out any borderline ethnicity that did not conform to the model of the Nordic master race that had offered the Aryan language to the world and shaped the prototype of "white America."⁵³ The Racial Integrity Act of the Commonwealth of Virginia defined white for the first time in 1924 as someone "who has no trace whatsoever of any blood other than Caucasian."

Armenian chances to earn a white certification depended on circumstantial evidence: an Indo-European language; the resemblance to the central European physical type; some Nordic infusion, and suitability of their culture and mores for assimilation. The host society coerced them to plead the white mantra, to declare themselves akin to Europeans, and to proclaim to be easily assimilated to the white race.⁵⁴ It was their turn as the Other that needed to grasp "how much their future prosperity and freedom depended on getting situated on the right side of the racial divide."⁵⁵

The ruling issued in July 1925 sanctioned an Armenian victory so conclusive that the federal government was forced to shelve its plans for an appeal that would have taken the case to the Supreme Court.⁵⁶ Their place under the

52 Moustafa Bayoumi, *This Muslim American Life: Dispatches from the War on Terror*, New York: New York University Press, 2015, p. 70.

53 Earnest Sevier Cox, *White America*, revised new edition, Richmond, Va.: White America Society, 1925, p. 43.

54 Manoog Der Alexanian, *When I Was a Boy in Armenia*, Boston: Lothrop, Lee and Shepard, 1926, p. 157.

55 Gerstle, *American Crucible*, p. 121. For the Syrian case, see Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*, pp. 77–78.

56 It strains credulity that Armenians experienced housing segregation and limitation of rights in the courts "prior to a Supreme Court ruling early in the 20th century that Armenians were in fact Whites (this was a reversal of a previous ruling) (...)" (Edward Fergus, Pedro Noguera, and Margary Martin, "Construction of Race and Ethnicity for and by Latinos," in Enrique G. Murillo, Jr., Sofia A. Villenas et al. (eds.), *Handbook of Latinos*

umbrella of whiteness entitled them to enjoy its benefits and rewards. The Cartozian case showed them to be Westerners in origin, culture, religion, and general outlook, editor Bedros Norehad (1901–1988) wrote in 1937 as he complained about the overall tendency to include Armenians among “Orientals,” a word that conveyed “a sense of strangeness and half-civilized cunning” and need for caution, “for, the ways of the Oriental are ‘incomprehensible’ to the western mind.”⁵⁷ The pressure of race prejudice and discrimination went on “to engulf (...) persons of non-white color and non-Occidental culture” in a variety of cases and circumstances, reaching the point that “America had—despite its protestations to the contrary—become a *herrenvolk* democracy and a white republic.”⁵⁸

Blatant cases of prejudice and discrimination against Armenians stopped being relevant in the East Coast around the 1920s, but remained painfully common in Fresno, in the Central Valley of California, “where these people who resembled Jews were harassed, glanced upon as something mongrel, barred from stores and from purchasing prime plots of land”⁵⁹ well after the Cartozian ruling. I have presented in Chapter 7 a microstudy of the Fresno case, which exemplifies the wide gap that separated abstract law from concrete manifestations of race in everyday life. Armenians had reached a leading position in the agricultural economy of the region and were perceived as non-white on account of their ethno-racial labels and stereotypical characterizations. In a survey of 1973, 36 percent of respondents from Los Angeles, which had become the main Armenian hub since the 1930s, recalled Fresno as an anti-Armenian center before World War II.⁶⁰

and Education; Theory, Research, and Practice, New York: Routledge, 2010, p. 172). For a more recent claim of a ruling by the Supreme Court in the Cartozian case, see Sarah Lewis, *The Unseen Truth: When Race Changed Sight in America*, Cambridge, Ma. and London: Harvard University Press, 2024, pp. 17, 212.

57 Bedros Norehad, “Is Racial Discrimination Unsurmountable?” *The Armenian Mirror*, February 10, 1937.

58 Lyman, *Postmodernism and a Sociology of the Absurd*, p. 160.

59 Aris Janigian, *Bloodvine*, Berkeley (Ca.): Heyday Books, 2009, p. 101. See Berge Bulbulian, *The Fresno Armenians: History of a Diaspora Community*, Fresno: California State University Press, 2000, pp. 106–120; Hasmik M. Yesayan, “Hayeri iravakan kargavichaké Freznoyi shrjanum (1880–1920-akan t’v)” (The Legal Status of Armenians in the Fresno Area: 1880–1920s), *Vem Hamahaykakan Handes*, 4, 2016, pp. 172–179. On responses in the early twentieth century, see Torosian, “Ottoman Armenian Racialization,” pp. 31–59.

60 Sheila Eileen Henry, *Occupational Mobility and the Ethnic Community: A Comparative Study of Armenians and Japanese-Americans in Los Angeles*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of California at Los Angeles, 1973, p. 41.

European Racial Nationalism

“Caucasian,” “Aryan,” and “white” were equivalent terms that also represented peoples of European descent settled outside of the continent.⁶¹ This equivalence bridged the claim to racial exclusivism in North America and Western Europe.

Although the origin of the concept of an ‘Aryan race’ may have been “a perception of racial kinship and a desire for closer, more respectful relations between what today’s racial categorizations would identify as ‘white’ and ‘non-white’ peoples,”⁶² the outcome confirmed that the road to hell was paved with good intentions. By the late nineteenth century, the Aryan idea was becoming politically useful and racially exclusive in Europe. There were dangerous and insidious categories of “better” and “worse” white people, and whiteness was narrowed down to an Aryan race, originally white, that had spread the Indo-European languages:

It is only by grasping this crucial development, I believe, that we can unpack the paradox that Aryanness came to be developed by the Nazi regime to murderous effect not only against the Jews but also against the Gypsies—whose Indian origin and Indo-European linguistic credentials had been conclusively established by philologists and Sanskritists so long previous, and that it expressed no bond of sympathy between Germans and Slavs. The racialization of the Aryan idea made the Aryan race an exclusive group very much smaller than the Indo-European speaking population as a whole.⁶³

In 1926, Australian archaeologist V. Gordon Childe (1892–1957) wrote that Aryans had “exceptional mental endowments,” along with the “exceptionally delicate and flexible instruments of thought” offered by the Indo-European languages, and “the fact that the first Aryans were Nordics was not without importance,” since “the Nordics’ superiority in physique fitted them to be the vehicles of a superior language.”⁶⁴ Sociologist Frank Hankins (1877–1970)

61 G. Spiller, “Science and Race Prejudice,” *The Sociological Review*, 3, 1912, p. 331.

62 Jennifer Snow, “The Civilization of White Men: The Race of the Hindu in *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind*,” in Henry Goldschmidt and Elizabeth McAlister (eds.), *Race, Nation, and Religion in the Americas*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 265.

63 Thomas R. Trautmann, *Aryans and British India*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1997, pp. 186–187.

64 V. Gordon Childe, *The Aryans: A Study of Indo-European Origins*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926, pp. 4–5, 212.

observed at the same time that “Aryanism metamorphoses, but it never dies.” Its revival in Germany, England, and America under various names represented “variations on the same theme”: a superior branch of humanity that had created and sustained civilizations by itself.⁶⁵

Europe had fed American racial and eugenical studies, and America reciprocated in the interwar period. Views of white and Anglo-Saxon superiority and purity were metaphors for Aryan and German. American eugenicists were thrilled by the execution of their ideological premises in Germany, where some traveled, others published, and yet others received honorary degrees. Eugenics had “become something like a patriotic preoccupation” in the United States, and German racial anthropologist Hans F.K. Günther (1891–1968) hoped that “the Immigration Laws as now passed are only the first step to still more definite laws dealing with race and eugenics.”⁶⁶ The report that, in a letter now lost, Hitler thanked Grant for writing *The Passing of the Great Race* and stated that “the book was his Bible” was not greatly exaggerated.⁶⁷ *The Conquest of a Continent* (1933), Grant’s second book, was called a “most uncompromising and aggressive plea for the maintenance of a Nordic and Protestant America, racially and nationally pure and undefiled.” The reviewer of *The New York Times* added that “substitute Aryan for Nordic, and a good deal of Mr. Grant’s argument would lend itself without much difficulty to the support of some recent pronouncements in Germany.”⁶⁸

Weapon of War threw stones from a glass house. German jurists had pored over American laws to study precedents of legalized discrimination. Liberal and democratic tradition was the “dominant political ideology” that denied “that human beings have different worth depending on their descent,” making

65 Frank H. Hankins, *The Racial Basis of Civilization: A Critique of the Nordic Doctrine*, New York and London: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926, pp. 23–24.

66 Hans F.K. Günther, *The Racial Elements of European History*, translated by G.C. Wheeler, London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1927, p. 260. On the connection of American eugenics and Nazi Germany, see Stefan Kühl, *The Nazi Connection: Eugenics, American Racism, and German National Socialism*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.

67 Leon Fradley Whitney, *Autobiography*, 1971, p. 205 (American Philosophical Society Library, Mss. B.W613b, <http://diglib.amphilsoc.org/islandora/object/leon-fradley-whitney-autobiography>). It is unlikely that the German translation of Grant’s book influenced the first part of *Mein Kampf*, also published in 1925 (Roman Töppel, “Volk und Rasse: Hitlers Quellen auf der Spur,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 1, 2016, p. 33), but it infused some of Hitler’s speeches and writings in the late 1920s and early 1930s (Timothy S. Ryback, *Hitler’s Library: The Books That Shaped His Life*, New York: Vintage Books, 2010, pp. 74–75, 94–103).

68 William Macdonald, “Mr. Grant’s Plea for a Nordic, Protestant America,” *The New York Times*, November 5, 1933. The German translation had two editions in 1937 and 1940.

“all the more astonishing how extensive race legislation is in the USA,” Herbert Kier (1900–1973) wrote in 1935.⁶⁹ The American Committee for Democracy and Intellectual Freedom performed a study of 166 American textbooks of geography, history, civics, and biology in 1939 and found that 66 percent misused “race” and 20 percent taught “what amounts to Nazi doctrines about superior and inferior races.”⁷⁰ The news report did not comment about the existence of such teaching long before Nazi doctrines had come to life. A full page article in *Das Schwarze Korps* about African Americans noted in February 1944 that the Immigration Act of 1924 had turned the United States into the first Western state to have adopted racial conclusions similar to those of Nazism.⁷¹

After the Manifest of Racist Scholars was released in Italy in July 1938, an Armenian American columnist noticed humorously that “the term ‘Aryan’ heretofore used in connection with the tall, blond German people, is now being linked to the short, swarthy Italians,” even though “the only ones able to define or draw a picture of an Aryan are the caricaturists.”⁷² Italians were said to be an Aryan southern type, while Japanese had been granted the label of “honorary Aryans” in Germany. *Weapon of War* ridiculed “the Aryan blond friend from Rome and his great superblue-eyed Nordic Aryan friend from Japan” who had “joined in superthoughts about conquests to come.”

The stereotypes promoted by German travelers, scholars, and publicists, including the racialization of physical features, played a crucial role in the perception of Armenians and included their physical and moral identification with Jews, often as part of antisemitic views or propaganda (Chapter 8). It reached new heights as part of German overtures to the Ottoman Empire that ended with their ill-fated alliance during World War I. The chronology was parallel to the Armenian massacres of 1895–1896 and the genocide of 1915–1917, but also to the nativist movement in the United States. The trend continued in the postwar period during the Weimar Republic.

Political and socio-economic turmoil undermined liberal democratic foundations in Europe in the interwar, and exclusionary policies also targeted Armenians, who remained in close peril of being served with a non-Aryan notice during the twelve-year run of National Socialism within and without Germany.

69 Quoted in James Q. Whitman, *Hitler’s American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017, pp. 121, 123. See also Kühl, *The Nazi Connection*, pp. 98–99.

70 “Schools Rebuked on Racial Errors: Prof. Boas Charges Many Use Textbooks that Support Nazi Doctrines,” *The New York Times*, July 17, 1939.

71 Kühl, *The Nazi Connection*, pp. 38–39.

72 Helen Terzian, “This Little World,” *The Armenian Mirror*, July 27, 1938.

1933 was a watershed in German-Armenian relations. Physical and moral characterizations on one hand and rationalization of Armenian erasure from the Ottoman Empire on the other had been the mainstays of anti-Armenism in Germany. The advent of the Nazi regime introduced the risk that the racial policies that Hitler had promised to implement would include Armenians, which became real during the first months of the National Socialist regime, as observed in Chapter 9. Armenians made recourse to claims of Aryan affiliation before the malleable judgment of bureaucracy and scholarship to extricate themselves from potential ranking amid citizens of non-Aryan descent in Nazi Germany, where they constituted less than 0.001 percent of the population. *Armeniertum-Ariertum*, the collection of articles published in 1934, was aimed at showing Armenians as stakeholders of the “Aryan race.”

By 1939, the number of Armenians in the countries that would later fall within the orbit of the Third Reich, excluding the European Soviet Union, was estimated to be between 185,000 and 221,000.⁷³ The Nazi cat-and-mouse games continued through World War II and were particularly perilous in the period 1941–1943 following the invasion of the Soviet Union and Turkish potential involvement (Chapter 10). The Armenian response managed to maintain a precarious racial status quo until the end of the war. The reassurance of their Aryan character was intended to defuse the danger of entrapment in the whirlwind of mass killings of war prisoners and civil population in the East. It also involved the enrollment of Soviet Armenian war prisoners within the Wehrmacht along with similar ethnic formations.⁷⁴ The collaboration by a group of Armenians, despite its lack of political transcendence, created a minefield of acrimonious disputes with scanty evidence and plentiful rhetoric retold with the arguments of patriotic duty or moral outrage.⁷⁵

The Aryan issue also resonated with some of Germany’s allies and satellites (Chapter 11), where its geopolitical ambitions would introduce further

73 See Simon Vratzian, *Armenia and the Armenian Question*, translated by James G. Mandalian, Boston: Hairenik, 1943, p. 102; *Armenier und Armenien*, Sofia: Bulgarischen-Armenischen Komite, 1941, p. 65. For a conservative estimate of 144,500, see Enno Meyer and Ara J. Berkian, *Zwischen Rhein und Arax: Neunhundert Jahre deutsch-armenische Beziehungen*, Oldenburg: Heinz Holzberg, 1988, p. 104.

74 See Meyer and Berkian, *Zwischen Rhein*, pp. 104–150; Levon Thomassian, *Summer of '42: A Study of German-Armenian Relations during the Second World War*, Atglen, Pa.: Schiffer, 2012; Zaven Messerlian, *Hayerē Hamashkharhayin B. Paterazmin* (The Armenians in World War II), Beirut: Sipan, 2020.

75 See the basic arguments in John Roy Carlson [Avedis Derounian], “The Armenian Displaced Persons: A First-Hand Report on Conditions in Europe,” *Armenian Affairs*, Winter 1949–1950, pp. 17–19; Sarkis Atamian, *The Armenian Community: The Historical Development of a Social and Ideological Conflict*, New York: Philosophical Library, 1955, pp. 396–402.

complications and Armenian refugees from the genocide were essentially stateless. The French Armenian community confronted a xenophobic wave in the 1930s and then racialization during the Occupation and the Vichy regime.⁷⁶ In Italy, the racial laws against the small Jewish population at the end of the 1930s initially threatened to place the even smaller Armenian community among non-Aryans, and its leadership responded through a project of political and cultural propaganda that had *Armeni-Ariani*, the Italian translation of *Armeniertum-Ariertum*, as its inaugural publication.⁷⁷ In the Balkans, I have discussed the cases of Romania, where stateless Armenians, a sizable portion of the community, were under far-right backlash and official pressure, and the Independent State of Croatia, which declared Armenians, who had no presence in its territory, to be non-Aryan.

The conclusion highlights the main themes of the book and summarizes the impact of steep changes in perceptions of race after the end of World War II. The American Association of Biological Anthropology has reaffirmed that race is a social, political, and legal construction, and that racial classification was associated with colonialism and the assumption of innate differences between Europeans and non-Europeans.⁷⁸ In the United States, the lessons of the “whiteness trials” of 1909 and 1924–1925, the decades-long impact of the quota law, and their supporting ideology have been left on an almost forgotten corner by a combination of centuries-long victimization with current perceptions of race and class among the descendants of maligned immigrants who had disproved the old canards of inferiority and non-assimilability, and recent immigrants themselves. On the other hand, the attempts to accommodate to the demands of an “Aryan” identity and the political choices attached to them in the Third Reich have been subjected to uncritical representations, such as the Russian translation of *Armeniertum-Ariertum* by an ethno-nationalist organization,⁷⁹ and misrepresentations, like the claims by the editors of a recent Armenian translation that its professedly “invaluable” articles would

76 See Maud S. Mandel, *In the Aftermath of Genocide: Armenians and Jews in Twentieth Century France*, Durham-London: Duke University Press, 2003; Anouche Kunth, “Dans les rets de la xénophobie et de l’antisémitisme: les réfugiés arméniens en France, des années 1925 à 1945,” *Archives juives*, 1, 2015, pp. 72–95.

77 See Agop Manoukian, *Presenza armena in Italia*, Milan: Guerini e Associati, 2014, pp. 75–100; Enrico Ferri, *Armenians-Aryans: The “Blood Myths,” the Race Laws of 1938 and the Armenians in Italy*, New York: Nova Publishers, 2016.

78 <https://bioanth.org/about/position-statements/aapa-statement-race-and-racism-2019/>, accessed on March 16, 2024.

79 *Armyane-Ariitsy* (Armenians-Aryans), *Volkhv*, supplement to *Rodnye prostory*, no. 1 (10), St. Petersburg: Kooperativ “Volkhv,” 1995. The text was translated from the Italian version.

contribute “to a more scholarly methodology of Armenian studies”⁸⁰ and that “our [Armenian] essence and our character are reflected in the German language and the German mirror.”⁸¹ History may be repeated or just rhymed, but discourses and ideologies are not always bound to pass the test of time.

80 Ashot Alexanyan, “H̄arajaban” (Prologue), in *Haykakanut’iwn-arianut’iwn* (Armenianism-Aryanism), translated by Alina Tonoyan, Yerevan: Printinfo, 2001, pp. 14–16.

81 Yuri Khachatryan, “Khmbagri khōskē” (Words from the Editor), in *Haykakanut’iwn*, p. 8.