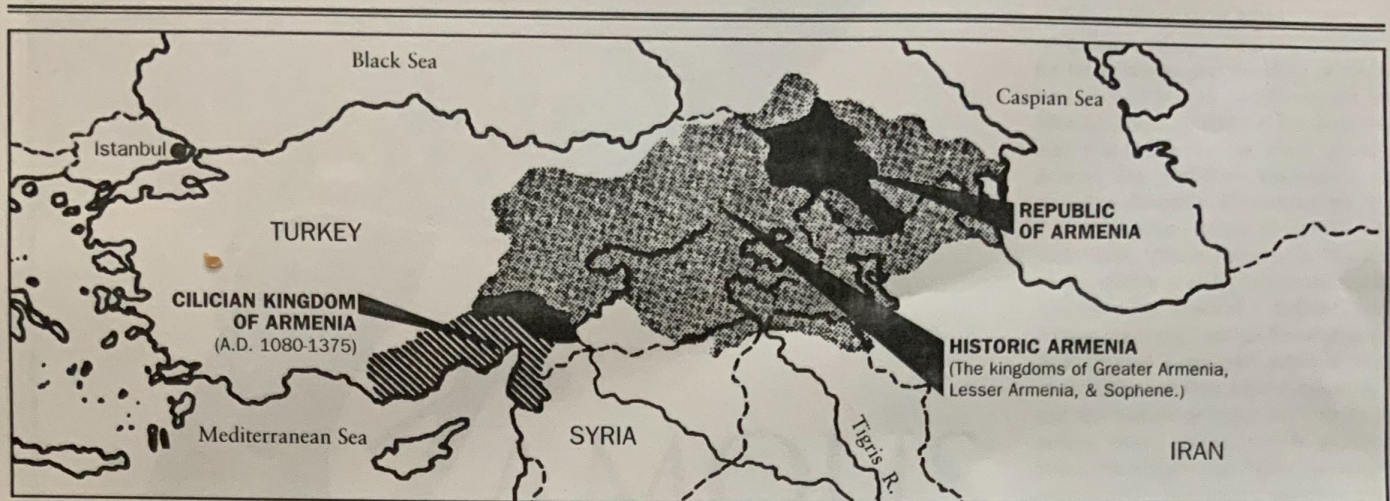


# TWO ARMENIAS

by MARK ARAX

“I SHOULD LIKE TO SEE ANY POWER IN THIS WORLD DESTROY THIS RACE, THIS SMALL TRIBE OF UNIMPORTANT PEOPLE WHOSE HISTORY IS ENDED, WHOSE WARS HAVE BEEN FOUGHT AND LOST, WHOSE STRUCTURES HAVE CRUMBLLED, WHOSE LITERATURE IS UNREAD, WHOSE MUSIC IS UNHEARD, AND WHOSE PRAYERS ARE NO MORE ANSWERED. GO AHEAD. DESTROY THIS RACE! DESTROY ARMENIA! SEE IF YOU CAN DO IT. SEND THEM FROM THEIR HOMES INTO THE DESERT. LET THEM HAVE NEITHER BREAD NOR WATER. BURN THEIR HOMES AND CHURCHES. THEN, SEE IF THEY WILL NOT LAUGH AGAIN. SEE IF THEY WILL NOT SING AND PRAY AGAIN. FOR WHEN TWO OF THEM MEET ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD, SEE IF THEY WILL NOT CREATE A NEW ARMENIA.”

—William Saroyan



There are, as any Armenian will tell you, two Armenias alive at any one time. Find the spot where Turkey, Iran and the former Soviet Union meet and there sits the literal nation of Armenia, so paltry a piece of geography that some maps can only fit the first three letters, ARM.

It is a sad, proud, stunted, token, rocky Armenia able to glimpse but not touch its mountain, Ararat, the source of its rivers and myth. The mountain, two stunning snowy peaks that do not rise gently out of rolling foothills but rather erupt like a Mayan temple into the sky, sits on the other side of the border, in Turkey, off limits to Armenians who drank from its waters for more than 2,000 years.

And then there is that second Armenia lodged in lore and planted in the soul of the six million Armenians scattered here and there, a glorious place that at its full flower stretched across the Anatolian saddleback, from Caspian to Mediterranean seas. This other Armenia – one of the great nations of the world. This other Armenia – with its own kings and saints and music and alphabet and poetry and Mt. Ararat and buffed-up heroes swinging swords on horseback.

How Armenia got from there to here is the story of bad location and insistent conquerors and the first nation to accept Christianity awakening one day to find itself in the headlong path of the Koran. It is a history cleaved by the first genocide of the 20th Century – the forgotten genocide – and the neglect and duplicity of the world's great powers and, finally, of an even more insistent band of survivors who made it across that desert of death and found a new Armenia. A wonderful and tragic compromise, this new Armenia is the best a nation buffeted on all sides could more or less hope for.

History's best guess traces Armenia back 2,500 years to the kingdom of Urartu or Ararat in what is now eastern Turkey. Perched high above the empires of the lowlands, this great plateau became a bridge between East and West; there would be no peace there.

The first invaders were Balkan tribes – the Armeni and Hayasa – who imposed their Indo-European language and culture. From a marriage of the Urartians, Armeni and Hayasa emerged the Armenians. Then came the Persians, the Macedonians and the Greeks, whose armies were always a little stronger and warfare always a little more clever than the Armenians, who naturally became confused about their identity. They began affecting a little West and a little East, a European/Oriental duality that would color them through the ages.

For two centuries before Christ, Armenia regained its independence and was once again ruled by kings of its own making. One of these leaders was Tigran the Great, a man of profuse talent and ego, "King of Kings," lover of Greek refinements, patron of the arts, land grabber. By the year 70 B.C., Tigran had become the most powerful ruler in Western Asia. In celebration of his virtuosity, he christened a new capital after himself.

This might be called Armenia's gilded age for Tigran's dominion hinged on the continued languor of the world's real powers. At some point, no longer preoccupied with each other, they looked up and discovered that Tigran, the great dilettante, had annexed the whole of Anatolia. A series of military defeats pushed him back to more humble boundaries. For the imperial nation of Armenia, it was pretty much downhill from there.

Out of Central Asia in 1065, on horseback, came a new conqueror, a tribe of nomadic Turks who were cousins of the great bandits of the world, Attila the Hun and Genghis Khan. One by one they vanquished Armenia and the territories of the Persian and Roman empires until they captured Constantinople itself in 1450 and declared a new empire, the Ottoman. For the next 500 years, the fate of two million Armenians, shorn of nation and state rights, would rest in the hands of these Ottomans, whose arrival they had preceded by 1,500 years.

For a long time, the Armenians managed to prosper if not always determine their fate. As the 20th century dawned and Turkey began losing chunks of its empire to Europe, a new Turkish nationalism bubbled up. It blamed the empire's disintegration on Turkish leaders who flinched at playing tough with the Armenians. It was a message the Turkish masses all too easily swallowed for it played on the sentiment that the Armenian had grown too big for his britches. If Turkey was a debtor nation, they reasoned, wasn't it the fault of the Armenian merchant and banker?

Like a lame man who comes to despise the crutch that mobilizes him, Turkey awoke one day to the awareness of an almost complete reliance on the Armenians, who were, after all, second-class citizens.

In took three waves of genocide to wipe out the presence of Armenians from their historic homeland, each massacre more efficient and brutal than the one before it. In 1914, as the world edged toward war, Armenia found itself once again at a crossroads. Both Russia and Turkey cast hungry eyes on the highlands beneath Mt. Ararat, a passageway to the Black Sea and the oil fields of Baku.

In 1915, with a tacit nod from its ally Germany, Turkey began a wholesale slaughter of the Armenian nation. By the time it was over three years later, 1.5 million Armenians were killed by gunshot and sword while the remaining 700,000 – those who didn't die of starvation during long forced marches across the desert – were left to wander the world. To this day, it is a crime that Turkey refuses to acknowledge, a crime for which it blames the victims.

In 1918, U.S. Ambassador to Turkey Henry Morgenthau wrote an account of the Armenian Genocide in his memoirs. An American Jew, Morgenthau had no idea that two decades later Hitler would use the forgotten Armenians as one of his pathetic rationales for invading Poland. "Who talks nowadays of the extermination of the Armenians?" the Fuhrer remarked to his inner circle.

Ambassador Morgenthau wrote of the Armenian victims: "Whatever crimes the most perverted instincts of the human mind can devise, and whatever refinements of persecution and injustice the most debased imagination can conceive, became the daily misfortune of this devoted people. I am confident the whole history of the human race contains no such horrible episode as this."

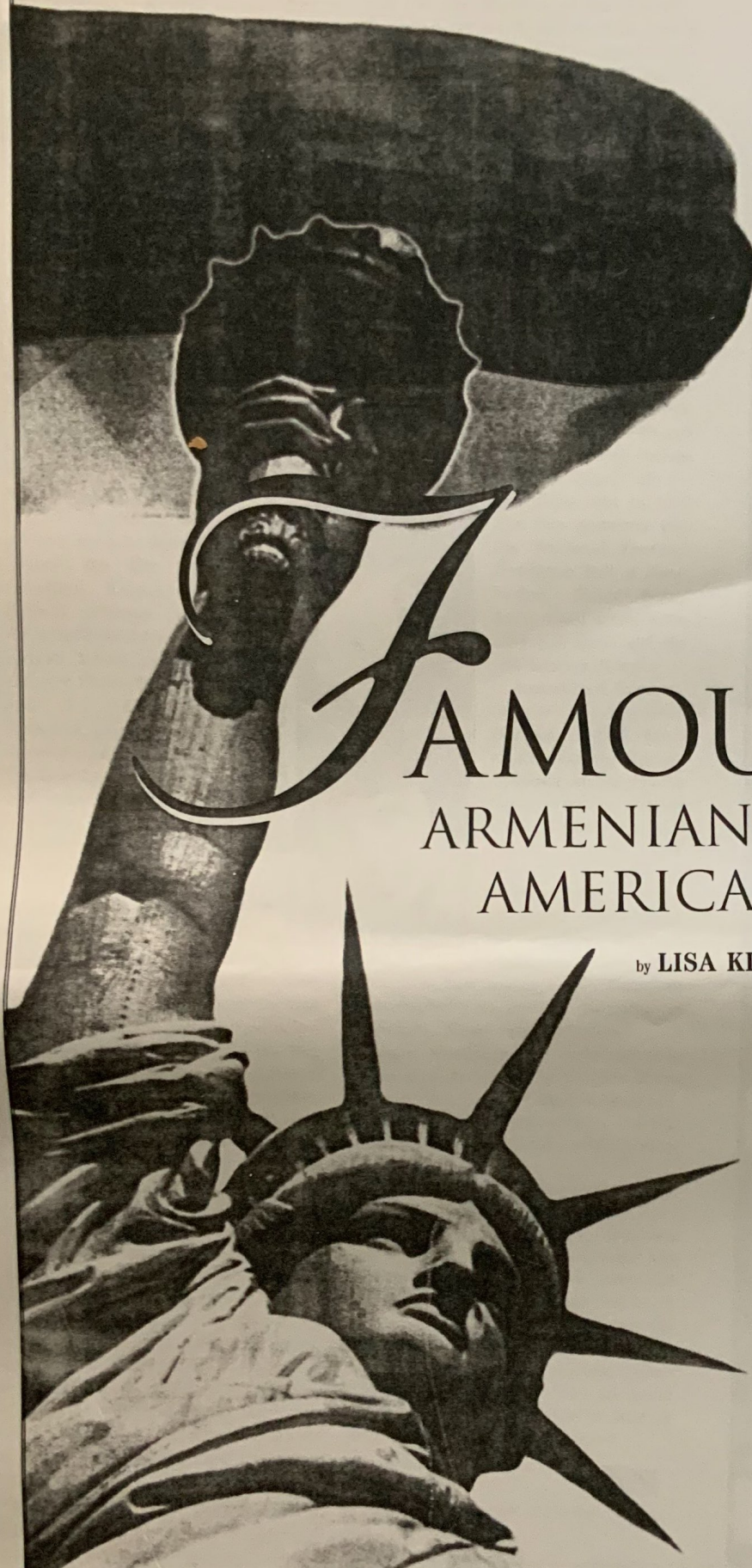
So after 70 years of Soviet rule, upheaval, an earthquake in 1988 that killed 20,000 and leveled an entire region, independence, more upheaval, after one neighbor sabotaged a huge gas pipeline and turned much of the country dark and colder, where is Armenia today?

It is alive, a nation, boasting its own capital city, Yerevan, filled with politicians of all stripes, some more feckless than others, and writers, painters, champion pianists and chess players and weight lifters, the great ancient stone churches still standing, the sweet, sad music from the apricot wood flute still playing, the genocide memorial with its blue-orange flame still flickering, whenever they can get enough gas.

And then there is Ararat, the mountain that looms on the far side, in Turkey, its snowmelt still washing down each spring, icy water thumbing its nose at the boundaries of man, trickling into the Arax River and then drawn onto the fields of Armenia, its grapes and peaches and pomegranates.

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**MARK ARAX**, Los Angeles Times reporter and author of *In My Father's Name* (Simon & Schuster), a memoir that uncovers his Armenian past and the unsolved murder of his father, Ara, in Fresno.



# F AMOUS ARMENIAN- AMERICANS

by LISA KIRAZIAN

Countless Armenian-Americans, whether born here or naturalized, have distinguished themselves in numerous professional fields. Perhaps a few of their names are recognizable but are not immediately apparent as being of Armenian origin. Take a moment to stroll down this very abridged Armenian-American Hall of Fame. And please forgive the omissions.

Among authors, William Saroyan stands out as the preeminent Armenian-American author of the 20th century. His works include the novel *The Human Comedy* and a collection of short stories about his childhood in Fresno, *My Name is Aram*. Most memorably, Saroyan declined the 1940 Pulitzer Prize for his Broadway play *The Time of Your Life*, because he felt such awards distract artists. Michael Arlen, Jr. (Dikran Kouyoumdjian) is also well-known for his novel, *Passage to Ararat*, the definitive exploration of an Armenian-American discovering his history. Vartan Gregorian, former director of the New York Public Library, became the first foreign-born president of an Ivy League college, Brown University. A professor of history by training, he now heads the Carnegie Foundation in New York. Richard Hovanessian serves as professor of Armenian and Near Eastern history at UCLA and has written definitive texts on Armenian history. Other notable writers include poet Diana Der Hovanesian, Ararat literary journal editor Leo Hamalian, novelist Marjorie Housejian and a cadre of author-journalists with the Los Angeles Times: Robin Abcarian, Mark Arax and Ralph Vartabedian.

In music, modern composer Alan Hovhanness (Harrowitium Chakmakjian) incorporated middle eastern and Asian styles of music in his stunning orchestral and choral works, including *Saint Vartan* Symphony, *And God Created Great Whales*, and *Avak, the Healer*. Lucine Amara is a beloved operatic soprano who has performed with the Metropolitan Opera. And sisters Ida and Ani Kavafian are internationally-known violinists who have performed with the world's major orchestras. In popular music, Michael Omartian has worked as a songwriter and album producer for the likes of Amy Grant and Rod Stewart; others include children's singer Raffi and country/gospel singer Dennis Agajanian.

In the entertainment world, audiences know Cher (Cherilyn Sarkisian), who began in the musical duo Sonny and Cher and then gained stature as an actress, winning the Best Actress Oscar for *Moonstruck* and performing in films such as *Mask* and *Mermaids*. Eric Bogosian, the irreverent performance artist, is known for his one-man shows such as *Pounding Nails in the Floor with My Forehead* (seen here at the Taper). Adrienne Barbeau is a veteran Broadway and television actress who played the title character's daughter in the long-running sitcom *Maude*. Mike Connors (Krikor Ohanian) is a seasoned actor best known as the title character of the 1960s-70s

television series *Mannix*. And Andrea Martin has made her mark as a comedian on SCTV and a Tony-nominated actress on Broadway.

Behind the camera, Howard Kazanjian is the producer of the legendary films *Star Wars* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Hank Moonjean is the veteran producer of the Academy Award-nominated *Dangerous Liaisons*, the *Smokey and the Bandit* series and countless films since the Golden Age of Hollywood. The late Rouben Mamoulian directed *Porgy and Bess* in 1935 and *Oklahoma!* in 1943 on Broadway (and on film) and was the first to use a mobile camera, Technicolor and a multiple channel sound track. Alek Keshishian is the young filmmaker who directed Madonna in the documentary *Truth or Dare*, and screenwriter Steven Zaillian won an Academy Award for Best Adapted Screenplay for Steven Spielberg's epic *Schindler's List*.

In medicine and science, keynote figures include the late Dr. Varaztad Kazanjian, Harvard professor and World War I reconstructive surgeon known as "the Father of Plastic Surgery," and Dr. Raymond Damadian, physician and inventor of Magnetic Resource Imaging (MRI). And there is Dr. Jack Kevorkian, the controversial proponent of doctor-assisted suicides.

In politics, Armenians are proud of George Deukmejian, Republican Governor of California from 1982-1990 and a longtime California public servant. Judge Dickran Tovrizian, Jr., was the youngest municipal judge to serve in California, and the first Armenian-American to serve as a federal judge - Governor Deukmejian appointed him as U.S. District Court Judge in 1986. Armand Arabian serves as justice of the California Court of Appeals and Walter Karabian is the former Los Angeles County deputy district attorney as well as the co-founder of the Los Angeles law firm Karns and Karabian.

On to business: the late Arshag "Archie" Dikranian, was often called the "Godfather of the Armenian Community." Beginning humbly as a vegetable seller, Archie established Premier Market on Canon Drive in 1930s Beverly Hills and thrived for decades as a businessman and philanthropist. He sustained many Armenian organizations, schools and churches with his support and leadership. Alex Manoogian founded Masco Corporation in the 1920s, a conglomerate of building products compa-

nies. He was also a dedicated philanthropist and the Life President of the Armenian General Benevolent Union, one of the world's largest Armenian charitable organizations. Kirk Kerkorian, a World War II fighter pilot turned billionaire, founded Transinternational Airlines and owned Western Airlines. He now owns MGM Corporation and other entertainment interests. His Lincy Foundation provides humanitarian airlifts to Armenia.

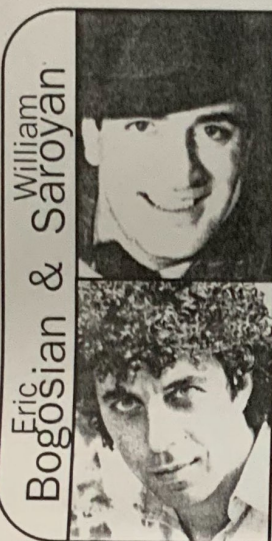
Sports lovers know Jerry Tarkanian as the towel-bearing college basketball coach on the all-time winning list who since 1956 has coached at colleges such as California State University, University of Nevada at Las Vegas and Fresno State. He also served as coach of the NBA San Antonio Spurs in 1992. Ara Parseghian led Notre Dame to national championships in 1966 and 1973, was named College Football Coach of the Year from 1964 to 1973 and then inducted into the National Football Foundation Hall of Fame. Modern tennis boasts Andre Agassi, winner at the 1994 U.S. Open and the 1996 Summer Olympics.

Accomplished Armenians in the non-American Diaspora include: Aram Khatchaturian, Russian composer of the famous *Sabre Dance*; Arshile Gorky (Vostanig Adoian), Russian painter and pioneer of Abstract Expressionism; Charles Aznavour (Shahnour Varenagh), French singer/composer and actor; the late Yousuf Karsh, Canadian photographer of famous portraits of Churchill, Shaw and Einstein; Gary Kasparov, Azerbaijan-born world champion chessmaster since 1985, the youngest in history; and Atom Egoyan, Canadian filmmaker whose film, *The Sweet Hereafter*, recently won the Grand Jury Prize at the 50th Cannes Film Festival.

And we didn't even get to architecture, cuisine or religion, although mention should be made of Leslie Ayzvazian's grandfather, Rev. A. A. Bedikian, writer and scholar, and pastor of the Armenian Evangelical Church of New York City for 45 years. To include every noteworthy Armenian-American who has dedicated himself to his community would take endless pages. But Armenian-Americans are proud of all their people, regardless of fame or field. And they all have a story to tell.

#### Lisa Kirazian

is a Los Angeles playwright and freelance writer.



William Saroyan  
Eric Bogosian & Saroyan



L to R: Leslie Ayzvazian, Cheryl Giannini



Hal Robinson and Tiffany Ellen Solano



Sarah Koskoff and Tom Mardirosian



L to R: Sarah Koskoff, Magda Harout, Leslie Ayzvazian, Cheryl Giannini