

News

Seeing humanity amid inhumanity

During Week of Remembrance event at Central Library, speakers testify to art's healing power.

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By Jason Wells

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SOUTHEAST GLENDALE — Haig Baronian, in his testimonial given to an Armenian artist as part of a photo art narrative, recounted how during his deportation south along the Euphrates during the 1915 genocide, an official escort stabbed and shot his grandmother several times when she spoke up on behalf of the children. No one was allowed to stop, the line of people forced into a continued march south.

"We moved on," he was quoted as saying.

The sheer brutality of the event, conveyed through an artistic black-and-white portrait of Baronian, has helped others move on from their own experiences and history with genocide, said Ramela Grigorian Abbamontian, assistant professor of art history at Los Angeles Pierce College.

She was addressing an audience of more than 50 people at the city-sponsored Man's Inhumanity to Man Monday evening inside the Central Library's auditorium. Her message: Art serves not as a stagnant visual, but as an active process of healing.

"The visual is an agent," she said.

In a city that is home to the largest concentration of Armenians outside of Armenia, the commemoration of Armenian Genocide that occurred between 1915 and 1923 in the former Ottoman Empire historically receives the most attention in April during Glendale's annual Week of Remembrance, but city leaders also acknowledge the horrors of other human tragedies through events like those scheduled on Monday.

And in doing so, those at the event said the city honors the memory of those who suffered, and their descendants who continue to grapple with their histories.

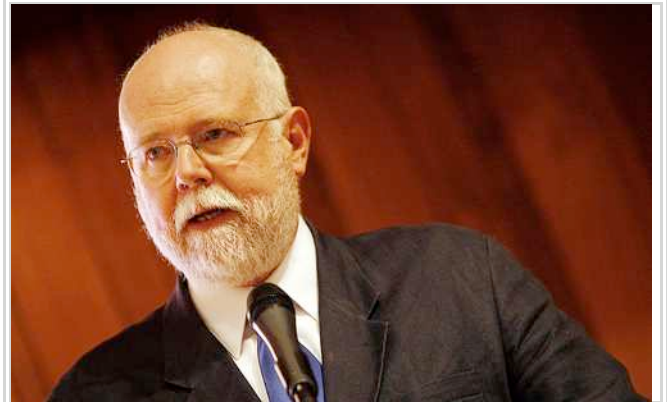
Professors from Glendale Community College discussed the Great Irish Famine and the Native American Genocide. The Rev. Berdj Djambazian, a field director for the nonprofit Pro Hope International, spoke on his experience bringing aid to the worn-torn Darfur region of Sudan, where more than 200,000 people have died.

They, together with Abbamontian, comprised the evening's itinerary of speakers on a day that had already seen several genocide commemorations throughout Glendale, with many more planned for the week.

The variety of crimes committed against, and suffered by, mass humanity is what attracted college student Beartz Moreno to the event.

"It's not just about a specific event," she said.

While that may have been true in terms of historical timelines, the underlying tone of Monday's event countered that feelings of immense loss — be it through the Irish potato famine that saw millions die between 1845 and 1852, the decimation of thousands of Native American tribes in the 1800s, or the current strife in Darfur — are shared more vigorously in a nation made up of immigrants.



Glendale Community College professor Dennis Doyle speaks to the crowd about Irish history and the famine during the Week Of Remembrance event Monday at the Glendale Central Library. (Alex Collins/ News Press)

As such, for Roger Bowerman, professor of history at Glendale Community College, said it wasn't difficult to connect the history of human subjugation between the Native American and Armenian stories.

"I think the Armenians understand what it's like to be marginalized," he said.

Glendale Community College Professor Dennis Doyle concluded his talk on the political forces that fueled the environmental culprits of the Irish famine by singing a few verses from an old Celtic folk song in reference to the fabled Irish locale that, like so many other parts of the country, saw its population plummet due to the famine.

"It's so lonely 'round the fields of Athen Rye," he sang.

But it was clear in the Central Library Auditorium that, in a city like Glendale, and during a week like this, those with histories attached to genocide are anything but alone.

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