“Anglo-Saxons of the East”: Redefining Armenians in Early Twentieth Century America

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Abstract

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This thesis focuses on an important work of Armenian American identity—*The Armenians in America* by M. Vartan Malcom. While previously known as a source of statistical and quantitative information on early Armenian American history, the text also provided a voice to Armenian Americans in an era where the American public knew them only through paternalistic aid campaigns and fundraiser slogans in the aftermath of the Armenian Genocide. To analyze *The Armenians in America* as a work to redefine the Armenian American identity, this paper turns to Jewish studies for inspiration. Jewish studies historiography boasts a highly developed framework for understanding how Jewish Americans redefined themselves in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, offering a useful tool for studying Armenian Americans as well.

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Introduction

In 1919 a New York City lawyer and Armenian immigrant named M. Vartan Malcom published a book titled *The Armenians in America*, whose primary objective was to, "present a sketch of the history, life, and activities of the Armenians in United States."[1] Throughout the book Malcom boasts of the accomplishments of Armenians in the United States, their ability to assimilate into American life, and their enthusiasm for becoming American citizens. Ultimately, Malcom argues that Armenians are the ideal immigrant group, predisposed to American values and embodying a strong desire to integrate.

Despite Malcom's desire to arrange an introduction, the American public already held a view of the Armenian people: against the backdrop of anti-Armenians violence in Anatolia in the 1894-7 Hamidian Massacres, the 1909 Adana Massacres, and finally the 1915 Armenian Genocide, most Americans were familiar with Armenians as a destitute people, suffering at the hands of the oppressive Turk.[2] Powerful players in American politics foregrounded Armenian misery, and President Woodrow Wilson declared Armenians suffering and relief a national concern in 1916. President Herbert Hoover would later remark on the pervasiveness of the Armenian relief cause, stating,

> Probably Armenia was known to the American school child in 1919 only a little less than England. The association of Mount Ararat and Noah, the staunch Christians who were massacred periodically by the Mohammedan Turk, and the Sunday School collections over fifty years for alleviating their miseries—all cumulate to impress the Armenia on the front of the American mind.[3]

Thus, America in the late 1910's was the site of profound sympathy for Armenians, but it came at a cost. Becoming the object of pity was not like being the object of scorn of fear; pity, while

[1] M. Vartan Malcom, *The Armenians in America* (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1919), vii.
[2] Mark Malkasian, "The Disintegration of the Armenian Cause in the United States, 1918-1927," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 16, no. 3 (1984): 349–50.
[3] Malkasian, 350.

capable of producing a kernel of sympathy, nevertheless implies a power imbalance between the pitied and the pitier. Thus, the trope of the starving Armenian threatened to upend the power dynamic between Armenians and a wider white American society that Armenians found provisional status within. Armenians in America—many of whom arrived long before the Armenian Genocide—lost control of their narrative as the image of the "starving Armenian" overtook their many accomplishments and points of pride. Many Armenians who held American citizenship, worked distinguished professions, and found integration in American life had to contend with the unflattering characterization of their Anatolian brothers and sisters as the objects of paternalistic aid campaigns and handouts.

The early twentieth century in America was also a period of increasing xenophobia and anti-immigrant sentiment. In 1911 the Dillingham Commission, a congressional committee established to study the effects of immigration, recommended that future legislation select for immigrants and immigrant groups suited for the process of assimilation.[4] Informed by the recommendations of the commission, the Immigration Act of 1917 marked a sharp turn towards nativism in the American political landscape. Furthermore, both the post-World War I recession and fears of losing a distinct American national identity fueled anti-immigration fervor, and these factors contributed to the passing of the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924.

Armenians in America like Malcom experienced anxieties over their visibility during a period where greater scrutiny of immigrants and integration threatened their future. This form of harm goes beyond traditional concepts of material or physical harm. Instead, it obscures the wider range of Armenian experience, dealing a blow to the relative position of Armenians in the American racial, cultural, and social hierarchy. With *The Armenians in America*, M. Vartan

[4] Katherine Benton-Cohen, *Inventing the Immigration Problem: The Dillingham Commission and Its Legacy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 234–41.

Malcom provided a voice to Armenians of this era to render them more American, pushing back against the idea of Armenians as refugees or destitute survivors found in slogans from aid campaigns and fundraising drives, allowing scholars to understand how some Armenians in the United States understood themselves and their place in America. Previously, scholars such as Robert Mirak have used this text as a source of statistical and quantitative information. However, they have ignored the larger message Malcom is trying to convey; that genocide and persecution were not the defining feature of identity for many American Armenians, and instead Armenians should have the opportunity to define themselves as Americans based on their accomplishments and actions.

Armenian Americans Through a Jewish Studies Lens

To analyze *The Armenians in America* as a text written to represent the Armenian American identity, we may look towards the study of other groups for inspiration. Jewish studies—or perhaps more specifically, Jewish American studies—historiography boasts a highly developed framework for understanding how Jews in the United States redefined themselves in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, offering us a useful tool for studying Armenians as well. In the minds of Western scholars, Armenians and Jews existed in similar liminal spaces in the Ottoman Empire and Europe, respectively. Of course, their comparison doesn't even acknowledge Ottoman Jews, who also occupied a liminal space in the Ottoman world.[5] The 11th edition of *Encyclopædia Britannica*, published in 1911, compares Armenians and Jews, "the

[5] There is a robust and growing body of scholarship on the liminality of Ottoman Jews, both in the United States and the Ottoman Empire. For more on them and their experiences in the United States and beyond, see Devin E. Naar, "Turkinos beyond the Empire: Ottoman Jews in America, 1893 to 1924," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 105, no. 2 (2015): 174–205; Devi Mays, *Forging Ties, Forging Passports: Migration and the Modern Sephardi Diaspora* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020); and Aviva Ben-Ur, *Sephardic Jews in America: A Diasporic History* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

Armenians are essentially an Oriental people, possessing, like the Jews, whom they resemble in their exclusiveness and widespread dispersion, a remarkable tenacity of race and faculty of adaptation to circumstances."[6] As Jean-Michel Johnston and Oded Steinberg recently noted, comparisons between Armenians and Jews have long persisted in the Western European imagination, in both the popular and academic imagination.[7] Armenians and Jews are often defined by their diaspora, their distinctive religious, cultural, and socio-economic traits, and their repeated marginalization and oppression.

Both groups were also the subject of their respective "questions" that pervaded European intellectual circles. The "Armenian Question," referring to the treatment and status of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, and the "Jewish Question," referring to the treatment and status of Jews in Europe, spoke to the underlying concerns of nationalists over ethnic and religious minorities.[8] Furthermore, scholars have likewise found parallels between Armenians and Jews to be a helpful case in the studies of diaspora and return, memory, and comparative genocide.[9] Johnston and Steinberg also argue that Christian Europeans of the time used Ashkenazi Jews as a lens through which to understand Armenians.[10]

While less studied, aspects of the Jewish American experience as a lens through which to view Armenians in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century America proves useful because Armenians and Jews faced similar challenges in the United States. In some cases, we find the

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[6] Charles William Wilson, "Armenia," in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 11th ed., vol. 2 (Horace Everett Hooper, 1911), 564.
[7] Jean-Michel Johnston and Oded Y. Steinberg, "Armenians, Jews, and Humanitarianism in the 'Age of Questions', 1830–1900," *The Historical Journal* 66, no. 1 (2023): 72–73.
[8] Holly Case, *The Age of Questions: Or, A First Attempt at an Aggregate History of the Eastern, Social, Woman, American, Jewish, Polish, Bullion, Tuberculosis, and Many Other Questions over the Nineteenth Century, and Beyond* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 115–19.
[9] See, for instance, Richard G. Hovannisian and David N. Myers, *Enlightenment and Diaspora: The Armenian and Jewish Cases* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999); Ina Baghdiantz McCabe, Gelina Harlaftis, and Ioanna Pepelasis Minoglou, eds., *Diaspora Entrepreneurial Networks: Four Centuries of History* (Oxford: Berg, 2005).
[10] Johnston and Steinberg, "Armenians, Jews, and Humanitarianism in the 'Age of Questions', 1830–1900," 74–75.

limits of comparison: in his book, *The Passing of the Great Race*, the influential scientific racist Madison Grant lauds Armenians who, he writes, "resisted stoutly the pressure of Islam," and constitute the "best remaining medium through which Western ideals and culture can be introduced into Asia."[11] Meanwhile, Grant characterizes Jews as swarms of vermin, driving the "man of the old stock" from the streets of American cities.[12]

The comparison vexed Malcom as well. While introducing the Armenian people in the opening pages of *The Armenians in America*, Malcom references the comparison between Armenians and Jews, writing that "it is said, and too often repeated, that the Armenians, like the Jews, are the most scattered race in the world."[13] That the comparison is "too often repeated" we can infer that Malcom thought poorly of it, perhaps drawing from a similar tradition of antisemitism as Madison Grant. Despite Malcom's misgivings, the parallels remain instructive, and not just because Armenians and Jews share a diasporic past.

Malcom's efforts to redefine Armenians in the United States parallel those by Reform Jewish intellectuals in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. Sarah Imhoff refers to these Reform Jews as "acculturated" Jews, who, "spoke English, discussed American political and cultural issues beyond the Jewish world, and thought of themselves as American. Acculturation was a matter not of birth, but of cultural participation and position."[14] These acculturated Jews aimed to introduce Jews and Judaism to an uninformed, but not necessarily hostile, American audience.[15] This framing of acculturation is useful for differentiating the many

[11] Madison Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race: Or, The Racial Basis of European History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1919), 59.
[12] Grant, 91.
[13] Malcom, *The Armenians in America*, 6.
[14] Sarah Imhoff, *Masculinity and the Making of American Judaism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), 4.
[15] Imhoff, 38.

different forms Judaism and Jewishness took in America and how they *related to* America. Not every American Jew acculturated—in fact, as Imhoff notes, many resisted the process altogether. In Armenian studies, some historians of Armenian Americans such as Robert Mirak have employed the language of acculturation to describe Armenians who "learned American ways" through interactions with the American educational system, political institutions, and labor.[16]

However, we must recognize the limits of acculturation as a useful marker. While Malcom bears hallmarks of acculturation, he also thwarts a clean definition. Yet the ideal Armenian presented by Malcom fits Imhoff's definition of acculturation. In this thesis I have tried to be specific when referring to the different groups of Jews in America, and I am primarily discussing the American Jews Imhoff identifies as acculturated Jews. Of course, other groups of Jews also dealt with the challenge of fitting themselves into the American social hierarchy. Ottoman Jews certainly struggled to define themselves in a way understandable to an American audience, and we may imagine them encountering challenges similar to those encountered by Armenians.

Overall, this novel approach partially makes up for the gaps in Armenian American historiography. By placing Jewish American side-by-side with acculturated Armenian Americans, similarities begin to take shape. In carving out a place in the United States, both groups worked to present themselves in ways that highlighted their development and Americanness while downplaying the aspects not in line with those American values.

Chapter Breakdown

[16] Robert Mirak, *Torn Between Two Lands: Armenians in America, 1890 to World War I* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 271.

I've divided this thesis into four chapters. Throughout these chapters I draw from Jewish Studies scholarship to extend the reaches of my analysis. The first chapter details the historical context of *The Armenians in America*, explaining the state of the early twentieth century Armenian community in the United States and the challenges it faced. I also discuss a looming question for Armenians in America and beyond: the possibility of an independent Armenian nation-state. The first chapter ends with an introduction to the author of *The Armenians in America*, M. Vartan Malcom, and situates him in this turbulent period.

Chapter 2 tackles the main claim of Malcom's book, that Armenians are the "Anglo-Saxons of the East." I explore what it might mean to be among the Anglo-Saxons, and why Armenians like Malcom counted themselves among this group.

The third chapter analyzes another integral characteristic of Malcom's Armenians: their Christian faith. Malcom presents the Armenian Apostolic Church to fit into normative American Protestant understanding of religion. Emphasizing themes of rationality and universality, Malcom counters Protestant missionary narratives that portrayed the Church as an antiquated institution that stood in the way of modernity.

The fourth and final chapter digs deeper into *The Armenians in America* to approach the issue of Armenian masculinity, which Malcom attempts to buttress during a time when the exploited trauma of female Armenian Genocide victims were the dominant images of the Armenian people.

I conclude this thesis with a short coda to *The Armenians in America* that hints at Malcom's adoption of America as a home for Armenians—for better or worse.

Chapter 1: Historical Context

1919 was at a year of flux for the Armenian people. Just a few years prior, the Ottoman government caried out the Armenian Genocide, resulting in the in the death of about 1.5 million Armenians. The survivors faced significant challenges in rebuilding their lives and communities, seeking refuge, and finding recognition for the atrocities committed against them. Across the Atlantic, a rapidly growing Armenian American community experienced growing pains as ships of Armenian refugees arrived in American ports.

Despite these challenges, Armenians had some reason to be optimistic about their future. Armenia declared independence from the collapsing Ottoman Empire, establishing the Republic of Armenia in May 1918. A significant achievement for Armenian nationalism, Armenians now had a nation-state of their own. With the help of the Armenian diaspora, Armenians in Anatolia also received support from many individuals and countries around the world, who recognized the atrocities committed against them. Both in Anatolia and the United States, Armenians demonstrated remarkable resilience, determination, and strength in the face of uncertainty.

This chapter attempts to capture the tension of 1919, a year that offered great hope and fear for the futures of Armenians across the world. It requires us to sit in the uncomfortable uncertainty and optimism of the year, and the uncertainty and optimism that M. Vartan Malcom wrote for. While focused primarily on Armenians in America, the future of an Armenian nation-state captivated Malcom, who articulated a vision of an advanced, Westernized republic from which American modernity could spread.

M. Vartan Malcom

M. Vartan Malcom was a lawyer in New York City and an Armenian immigrant. In 1919 he published *The Armenians in America*. Born in Sivas, then part of the Ottoman Empire, in 1883, Malcolm Vartan Malconian emigrated to the United States at the age of twelve (part of a wave of Armenian immigration that occurred during the Hamidian Massacres of 1894-7). He attended public schools in Springfield, Massachusetts, and graduated from Amherst College in 1907. Two years later he became a naturalized citizen.[17] At some point between 1909 and 1912 he changed his name from Malconian to Malcom, dropping the patronymic *-ian* suffix common in Armenian surnames and adopting an Americanized surname. Malcom's chosen name—M. Vartan Malcom—offers us a glimpse into how Malcom saw himself in America. He changed himself for his new home, yet also kept a token of his Armenian heritage.

After graduating from Amherst, Malcom attended Harvard Law School until 1909. In 1912 he married Georgine Cuendet, a Swiss immigrant, and together they had a son, Edward.[18] Malcom practiced law in New York City where he represented several prominent Armenian firms. He also served as the counsel for the Boston-based Armenian National Union (ANU) and represented the ANU at a meeting of Armenian nationalists in Paris in 1922.[19]

[17] "Record of Naturalization for Malcolm Vartan Malconian," 1909
[18] Robert S. Fletcher and Malcolm O. Young, eds., *Amherst College Biographical Record of the Graduates and Non-Graduates: 1821-1921*, Centennial Edition (Amherst: Amherst College, 1927).
[19] Transcript of Evidence, *United States v. Cartozian*, No. E-8668 (D. Or. May 8–9, 1924), in Civil and Criminal Case Files, District of Oregon (Portland), Records of the District Courts of the United States, RG 21, National Archives and Records Administration Pacific Alaska Region, Seattle, Washington.

In 1923 Malcom became involved in the legal team for Tatos Cartozian, an Armenian immigrant and subject of the racial prerequisite case, *United States v. Cartozian*.[20] Malcom also appeared as a witness, arguing that Armenians were white and thus eligible for naturalization.[21]

Following *Cartozian*, Malcom continued to practice in New York until moving to Portland, Maine in 1932. There he started a real estate firm and became a well-known member of the community. His obituary tells us that he died suddenly in 1967 at the age of 83. His obituary doesn't mention *The Armenians in America*, though it does acknowledge his service within the Armenian American community.[22]

Figure 1: M. Vartan Malcom. Photograph by John Garo. Date unknown

[20] For more on U.S. v. Cartozian, see Earlene Craver, "On the Boundary of White: The Cartozian Naturalization Case and the Armenians, 1923-1925," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 28, no. 2 (2009): 30–56; For more information on racial prerequisite cases, see Ian Haney López, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).
[21] Transcript of Evidence, *United States v. Cartozian*.
[22] "Obituary of Malcolm V. Malcom," *Portland Evening Express*, June 22, 1967.

Armenian Immigrants, Old and New

It's difficult to determine how many Armenians entered or resided in the United States during the early years of the Armenian American community. Prior to 1899 United States Bureau of Immigration records list entries by sending country, not nationality, ethnicity, or race. With the 1899 introduction of the "race" field on entry records it becomes easier to determine how many Armenians arrived in America. Using these records, Malcom writes that 55,057 Armenians emigrated to the United States between 1899 and 1917. In all, Malcom estimates that between 1894 and 1919 about 78,000 Armenians came to the United States.[23] David Gutman estimates that about 65,000 Armenians left the Ottoman Empire for the United States between 1885 and 1915.[24] Additionally, about 31,000 Armenians arrived in the United States between 1920 and 1924, before the Immigration Act of 1924 placed national origins quotas on entries.[25]

Despite the difficulty of capturing an accurate headcount, the scholarly consensus is that Armenian immigration to the United States came in waves. Robert Mirak identifies three distinct periods of Armenian migration to the United States prior to the Armenian Genocide, which he calls "phases."[26] The first group, whom Mirak refers to as "pioneers," primarily comprised young men, in some cases encouraged by American missionary-educators in Anatolia to travel to the United States.[27] Ultimately, Mirak estimates that only 1,500 Armenians resided in the United States prior to 1880.[28]

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[23] Malcom's states that 73,980 Armenians resided in the United States in 1919. This number reflects estimates made for pre-1899 entries and residences, as well as births and death estimates. For his math, see Malcom, *The Armenians in America*, 66–67.
[24] David Gutman, *The Politics of Armenian Migration to North America, 1885-1915: Migrants, Smugglers and Dubious Citizens* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), 4.
[25] Anny Bakalian, *Armenian-Americans: From Being to Feeling Armenian* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1993), 10.
[26] Mirak, *Torn Between Two Lands*, 36.
[27] Mirak, 36–42.
[28] Mirak, 44.

Mirak's second "phase" spans from 1890 to 1899, when the persecution of Armenians by the Ottoman state drove tens of thousands of Armenians to the United States. Aptly, Mirak titles this phase "flight."[29] In *The Armenians in America*, Malcom marks the Hamidian Massacres (1894-7) as the beginning of Armenian immigration "in the strictest sense of the word" to the United States because these immigrants created permanent settlements in America.[30]

Mirak titles his third phase "mass migration," spanning from 1900 to 1914, ending on the cusp of World War I and the Armenian Genocide.[31] Mirak identifies a snowball effect to the emigration; as a large number of Armenians settled in the United States, they were able to assist their friends, families, and neighbors in escaping a worsening situation in the Ottoman Empire. Driven by economic concerns and the 1909 Adana Massacres, Armenians left their ancestral homes, steadily arriving in the American ports in great numbers.[32]

Malcom was conscious of demographic changes within the Armenian community in the United States, writing after Mirak's third phase during a time of mass Armenian migration from the Middle East to France, England, and America. These refugees of the Armenian Genocide often differed from their forerunners, carrying the weight of their difference. They were un-Americanized, rough-hewn, and in need of both assistance and guidance from their accultured brethren.[33]

Mirak only reports examples of "overt discrimination" in Fresno, California, where a great many Armenian agricultural workers resided in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[34] Ultimately, however, Mirak's work presents and overall rosy portrait of Armenia

[29] Mirak, 44–45.
[30] Malcom, *The Armenians in America*, 66.
[31] Mirak, *Torn Between Two Lands*, 48–49.
[32] Mirak, 51–59.
[33] Mirak, 286.
[34] Mirak, 144–47.

integration. In this way Mirak's *Torn Between Two Worlds* exemplifies a strong current in the historiography of Armenian Americans and Armenian immigration to the United States: that it often focuses on the positive aspects of their integration journey, overlooking or ignoring the sacrifices and opposition they faced along the way. Thus, there is a dearth of scholarship on anti-Armenian discrimination in the United States, possibly because violence Armenians experienced in the Ottoman Empire eclipses it in the historiography.[35]

Armenians were not unique in this regard. For example, recent scholarship on Ottoman Arab migrants shows the discrimination those immigrants faced in the United States.[36] Noteworthy is Sarah Gualtieri's *Between Arab and White*, a study of the early Syrian diaspora in America examining the anti-Arab discrimination those migrants faced and how they reacted to it. Facing discrimination and violence such as destruction of property, racial profiling, and even targeted killings, Gualtieri observes that Syrian immigrants became greatly invested in American racial politics as they tried to improve their own position within white society.[37] Gualtieri's study provides us with a rubric for thinking about how Armenian immigrant communities may have adopted and internalized the racialized frameworks of American society.

As Armenian immigrants settled in the United States and grew invested in the racial hierarchy, they sought to improve and cement their status. However, the following waves of Armenian immigrants, entirely unacculturated, presented challenges for the established communities. Regarding the subsequent waves of immigration, we can draw from Jewish studies. In *Response to Modernity*, Michael Meyer notes that the "heyday" of classical Reform

[35] Bedros Torosian, "Ottoman Armenian Racialization in an American Space (1908–1914)," *Mashriq & Mahjar: Journal of Middle East and North African Migration Studies* 8, no. 2 (2021): 32.
[36] Torosian, 32.
[37] Sarah M. A. Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 3–11.

Judaism in the United States coincided with a great influx of Jews from Eastern Europe, who brought with them their own traditions and ways of life.

Acculturated Jews soon lost their demographic hegemony and then their positions of leadership within the expanding Jewish community. The influx of Eastern European Jews cast a shadow over the accultured Jews already in American, who suddenly needed to answer for the "idiosyncrasies of those late immigrants."[38] Meyer frames the role of the Reform movement paternalistically, showing both genuine concern for their "less fortunate brothers and sisters" as well as a desire to avoid embarrassment before non-Jews.[39] However, the migrations also led to external and internal friction. Accultured Jews, though living in the United States longer, struggled to maintain their influence in an expanding field of Eastern European newcomers. Likewise, external resentment fueled by xenophobia placed a target on the Jewish community from the outside. Accultured Jews, having dealt with discrimination and violence in the past, feared losing their influence over the American Jewish community.

It is unclear if there were similar struggles for influence in the Armenian community, but it is clear that the "old" Armenian American felt a need to guide the "new" Armenian Americans. In the aftermath of the Armenian Genocide acculturated Armenians in America, now facing a similar situation that American Jews faced in the late nineteenth century, worked to Americanize the newcomers. These acculturated Armenians taught classes, distributed pamphlets, and published books on becoming better Americans.[40] They rejected clannishness and discouraged enclaves, instead promoting the idea of the American melting pot, as the key to success in America.

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[38] Michael Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995), 292.
[39] Meyer, 291–93.
[40] Craver, "On the Boundary of White," 40–41.

Armenia and Armenians

Of course, events beyond the borders of the United States spurred the influx of Armenian migrants and refugees. Cataclysmic events such as the Armenian Genocide, the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, and the Turkish War of Independence upended life for Armenians in Anatolia, leading to the murder of 1.5 million Armenians and the displacement of over 1 million more.

The deterioration of the Ottoman Empire and the complicated peace it managed renewed calls for an Armenian national home. Armenian nationalists, articulating a vision of an independent Armenia backed by an American mandate, brought together disparate factions both within and outside the Armenian American community. However, American politics and a worsening situation in Anatolia shook—and ultimately sank—these hopes.

The Armenian nationalist and Euro-American belief that an independent Armenian nation-state could serve as a potential answer to the "Armenian Question" predates the First World War, but the conversation took on new life in America with the war's conclusion. Multiple groups comprised of powerful interests and individuals weighed in on a solution, including the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief (ACASR), later renamed Near East Relief (NER), and the American Committee for the Independence of Armenian (ACIA). James Barton chaired ACASR, while the influential Armenian-born lawyer Vahan Cardashian headed the ACIA.[41] Both organizations drew support from powerful allies, including the powerful senator Henry Cabot Lodge, and close confidants of President Wilson.[42] Support peaked in the immediate wake of the Armenian Genocide, when the American public elites aligned, coalescing behind the establishment of an Armenian nation-state.[43] Both Barton and

[41] Malkasian, "The Disintegration of the Armenian Cause in the United States, 1918-1927," 350–51.
[42] Malkasian, 351–52.
[43] Malkasian, 351–53.

Cardashian played important roles in building recognition for Armenian suffering and statehood, albeit in different ways.

However, by 1917 the consensus showed signs of fracturing. The possibility of an American declaration of war on Turkey alienated leadership in ACASR like Barton, who worried that such an action would jeopardize the safety of missionaries in Anatolia.[44] The conclusion of the Great War didn't bridge the divide. Indeed, Cardashian's papers reveal many disagreements with Dr. Barton regarding a post-war Armenia, Turkey, and America's role in both.[45] A strident nationalist, Cardashian clashed with Barton's paternalistic evangelism, souring the possibility of a grand coalition. Beyond the intrigue of ACASR-ACIA relations, the American political establishment slowly turned against optimistic Wilsonian internationalism, and Congress rejected the League of Nations Covenant in 1919. Congress struck another blow in 1920 when it refused to ratify the Treaty of Sèvres, which recognized an independent Armenian state in central Anatolia.[46]

ACIA and its dwindling allies held out hope for American recognition and support for the small Armenian Republic proclaimed in 1918 and located in the Caucuses.[47] However, in May 1919 Turkish nationalist forces in Ankara launched what would become the War of Turkish Independence. Coalescing behind General Mustafa Kemal, the Ankara government rejected the Treaty of Sèvres.[48] By the end of 1920 Turkish Nationalist forces effectively controlled Anatolia,

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[44] John R. Mardick, "The Life and Times of Vahan Cardashian," *The Armenian Review* 10, no. 1 (1957): 9.
[45] James H Tashjian, "The Life and Papers of Vahan Cardashian (Part III)," *The Armenian Review* 10, no. 3 (1957): 120–25.
[46] Malkasian, "The Disintegration of the Armenian Cause in the United States, 1918-1927," 353–54.
[47] For more on the short-lived Republic of Armenia (1918-1920) see Richard G. Hovannisian, "The Republic of Armenia," in *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times, Volume II: Foreign Dominion to Statehood: The Fifteenth Century to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 303–46.
[48] Justin McCarthy, *The British and the Turks: A History of Animosity, 1893-1923* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), 471–72.

including the six traditional Armenian *vilayets* of Erzurum, Van, Bitlis, Diyarbakır, Harput, and Sivas.[49] As the future-Ataturk's forces besieged the new state and Western powers dawdled, leaders within the Republic of Armenia turned to Russia and accepted Soviet rule in exchange for military aid.[50] In the midst of the Red Scare, Sovietization proved an insurmountable obstacle to American recognition, and what remained of a one-broad coalition for an America-backed Armenia crumbled away.[51]

Conclusion

M. Vartan Malcom, who authored *The Armenians in America* in 1919, expressed an overall hopeful vision of the future. In addition to introducing Malcom, this chapter explored the waves of Armenian immigration to the United States, emphasizing the challenges faced by established communities in integrating new immigrants.

Furthermore, the chapter examined the broader historical events that influenced Armenian migration, such as the Armenian Genocide, the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, and the Turkish War of Independence. The conversation around an independent Armenian nation-state gained momentum but ultimately faced obstacles due to American politics and the worsening situation in Anatolia. Fractures appeared within organizations advocating for Armenian statehood, and Congress rejected initiatives supporting an independent Armenia. But the tension of 1919 helps to explain Malcom's positions in *The Armenians in America*, as an Armenian nation-state was central to Malcom's vision for the future of Armenian Americans.

[49] McCarthy, 481–82.
[50] McCarthy, 516–18.
[51] Malkasian, "The Disintegration of the Armenian Cause in the United States, 1918-1927," 354–55.

Chapter 2: Race

The American public's focus on relief efforts in the Ottoman Empire reinforced a sense of cultural and political dislocation for Armenians in America. By emphasizing the idea of a distant homeland in need of rescue, humanitarians responding to the Armenian Genocide marginalized the voices of Armenian Americans who were struggling with their own experiences of discrimination and integration in the United States. By emphasizing the suffering of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, the relief workers reinforced a sense of otherness and exoticism that made it harder for Armenian Americans to integrate into white American society. Within *The Armenians in America* Malcom deploys race, and in particular the term "Anglo-Saxon," to conscript Armenians into a wider American campaign of modernity.

Adopting Racialization

Since the Naturalization Act of 1790, the United States used race to bar or grant to citizenship, restricting naturalization to "white persons."[52] However, as Matthew Frye Jacobson argues in his foundational work, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, the category of whiteness was capacious, enough to include the massive European migrations of the nineteenth century.[53] Irish, Slovenian, Italian, Greek, and other European migrants came to the United States in great numbers, changing the ethnic and racial makeup of the country. Against this backdrop of changing demographics, American nativism emerged through a marriage of scientific racism and political concerns over labor and electoral participation.[54] A "monolithic whiteness," as Jacobson

[52] López, *White by Law*, 1–2.
[53] Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 39–40.
[54] Jacobson, 68.

identifies it, could not stand against the tide of nativist resentment, and hierarchies within the category of "white" emerged.[55]

For Armenians in the early twentieth century, race proved a malleable thing—and much debated by Armenians and non-Armenians alike. In the San Francisco, near the hub of Armenian migrant workers, Asiatic Exclusion League scoffed at Armenian claims of Whiteness; "these people claiming to be of the Aryan race, are so deeply tinged with Mongol blood that they have all the instincts and traits of their forbears in eastern Asia—cunning, duplicity, lying and the usual code of Asiatic morality and attendant vices."[56] Meanwhile, the Dillingham Commission's report refers to Armenians as an "Aryan race," linguistically "more nearly related to the Aryans of Europe" than they are to the various peoples of the Ottoman.[57]

Within the Armenian community Armenians looked for ways to concretize their "probationary white status."[58] Aware of their racial precarity, and facing their own share of discrimination, some Armenians turned to reinforcing American racialist systems. In particular, Bedros Torosian details how one Armenian publication in Fresno County, California spread racist stories targeting indigenous and Black Americans, Mexicans, and other groups who fell on the wrong side of the color line.[59] For these Armenians, performing Whiteness meant engaging in exclusionary practices and adopting the language of race in America.

Occupying this liminal racial space, Malcom likewise adopted terms and arguments found in the American and European racial cosmology. Most interesting is Malcom's usage of

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[55] Jacobson, 43–52.
[56] Asiatic Exclusion League, *Proceedings of the Asiatic Exclusion League* (San Francisco: Asiatic Exclusion League, 1907), 366–67.
[57] U.S. Immigration Commission, William Stiles Bennet, and William Paul Dillingham, *Dictionary of Races or People*, vol. 5, Reports of the Immigration Commission (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1911), 16–17.
[58] Torosian, "Ottoman Armenian Racialization in an American Space (1908–1914)," 51.
[59] Torosian, 39–40.

the term "Anglo-Saxon." In *The Armenians in America*, Malcom boasts of Armenians as the "Anglo-Saxons of the East," a designation which requires unpacking.[60] First, the statement establishes a comparison; while Armenians are *not* the Anglo-Saxons of Europe, they are still alike in some way. But Malcom didn't claim that Armenians were the Poles of the East, the Irish of the East, or the Italians of the East. While those groups fell within the bounds of Whiteness, they were not the right kind of white. Jacobson argues that Anglo-Saxon as a racial designation emerged as a way to create a hierarchy within whiteness, differentiate between the Anglo-Saxon and the "other" white people, and preserve privileges possessed by the white American man.[61] Thus, we can read Malcom's claim about the Anglo-Saxons of the East as not only an entrée into whiteness but also staking a claim to a high position within its internal hierarchy.

Apartness

To lay the foundation of this comparison, Malcom first establishes the "apartness" of Armenians from the other peoples of the Ottoman Empire. By "apartness," I am referring to the externally- and self-imposed confinement of a group to the social margins of society. I borrow this idea from Eric Goldstein, who identifies this self-conscious apartness as one of the most salient aspects of (Ashkenazi) Jewish identity in his book, *Whiteness of a Different Color*. Born of a long of history of marginalization in Central and Eastern Europe, apartness became a tool of survival and identity. However, once these Ashkenazi Jews arrived in the United States, the pressure they felt from American racial discourse forced them to suppress their apartness to be seen as members of white, American society.[62] Goldstein ultimately argues that Jews' struggle

[60] Malcom, *The Armenians in America*, vii.
[61] Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 40–41.
[62] Eric Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 3.

with whiteness complicates the narrative of "successful adaptation and transformation" common in American Jewish scholarship, emphasizing instead the careful and painful trade-offs necessary to adopt whiteness.[63] He finds that the changing racial discourses of the Progressive Era forced acculturated Jews to "clarify" their status as white in American society.[64]

While Jews in America had to set aside their "apartness" to acculturate, Armenians like Malcom chose to highlight their apartness from geographic neighbors. The salience of "apartness" from the Ottoman world continued to hold salience in the Armenian identity, but for Malcom this apartness made Armenians *more* American, rather than a challenge to contend with. Malcom makes this clear when he notes that Armenians are, "frequently considered identical with the Turks, the Syrians, the Jews, the Persians, the Bulgarians, the Greeks or some other of the many peoples that likewise immigrate to [the United States] from Southeastern Europe and Asia Minor."[65] Malcom sets Armenians apart, making the argument that Armenians instead belong to the same "racial stock as all European peoples."[66] Jettisoning the possible similarities with and establishing distance from other Ottoman peoples, Malcom then emphasizing similarities with white (Anglo-Saxon) Americans.

Becoming Anglo-Saxon

Establishing the Anglo-Saxon analogy, Malcom turns to history, arguing that Armenian history and American history share important linkages—including settler colonialism. Malcom writes a striking passage to explain how Armenians—a people Malcom identifies as European—came to reside in Eastern Anatolia. "Just as the white man supplanted the Indian in America, so

[63] Goldstein, 4–5.
[64] Goldstein, 86.
[65] Malcom, *The Armenians in America*, 3.
[66] Malcom, 7.

the Armenians, centuries before the Christian era, migrated from Southeastern Europe into Asia Minor and established there the ancient State of Armenia."[67] Here, Malcom draws on theories from classical antiquity, spread by ancient historians like Herodotus, Xenophon, and Strabo, who all claimed that the Armenian people were Phrygian colonists, who in turn migrated from the Balkans.[68] By identifying Armenians as settler-colonists, Malcom places his people in the upper strata of the racial hierarchy. At the same time, Malcom functionally identifies the other peoples of the Anatolia with America's indigenous Americans.

Following the thread of settler-colonialism, Malcom also presents Armenians as a bulwark against the barbarous Asiatic races, indebting Western civilization to the Armenian people. "It is an historical fact," Malcom writes, "that the Armenian people saved modern civilization by delaying the Tartar-Turks of Asia from invading Europe earlier than they did."[69] Thus, in Malcom's mythology, Armenians occupy a defender role, protecting the other races of Europe with their sacrifice.

In the case of American Jews who claimed ancestry from Central and Western Europe, the second half of the nineteenth century became a period of racial reimagining.[70] Goldstein suggests that Jews reflected the doubts and anxieties white Americans held about their society based on racial stratification, embodying traits both of racial superiority and inferiority. "Jews could be seen as contributors to progressive capitalism or as self-interested parasites;" Goldstein writes, "as disciplined and ambitious or as ruthlessly focused on profit."[71] Conscious of white unease and wary from a history of marginalization, American Jews often (but not always) felt the

[67] Malcom, 7.
[68] Vahan M. Kurkjian, *A History of Armenia* (New York: Armenian General Benevolent Union, 1959).
[69] Malcom, *The Armenians in America*, 23–24.
[70] Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness*, 12–14.
[71] Goldstein, 2.

need to reinforce the color line, distinguishing themselves from Black Americans to draw attention away from themselves and their racial idiosyncrasies.[72]

By the mid 1890's prominent acculturated American Jewish intellectuals such as Isaac Mayer Wise included American Jews in a definition of "Anglo-Saxon" that could encompass anyone who joined the American or British missions to further civilization.[73] Writing during the Spanish-American War, Wise argued for the broadness of the Anglo-Saxon definition, stating that, "there is no reason why a Jewish American or Englishman, whatever may have been the nationality of his parents, should hesitate to proclaim himself as of the Anglo-Saxon race." In this sense Anglo-Saxon wasn't a purely racial designation, but a spreader of modernity, civilizational advancement, and Western civilization. As with the acculturated Jews, whose process of redefining didn't necessitate rejecting "the idea of Jewish racial particularity,"[74] Armenians leveraged the idea of the Anglo-Saxon as a protector of Western civilization and bringer of modernity to engage with American politics, culture, and institutions while also preserving their Armenian identity. Critically, this reading of "Anglo-Saxon" allows Malcom's Armenians to maintain their racial, ethnic, and cultural particularities while still being part of the American polity and civilizing mission.

The Anglo-Saxon and Civilization

Reading Malcom's "Anglo-Saxons of the East" claim in this way alters the meaning and brings it in line with how some envisioned the role of Armenians in solving the "Eastern Question," the debate over how to manage the decline of the Ottoman Empire—was also a

[72] Goldstein, 3–4.
[73] Goldstein, 88–89.
[74] Goldstein, 89.

debate about how different imperial forces should inject their own influences in the region.[75] Carving up and modernizing what was thought by some to be the antiquated, backwards Ottoman East was front-of-mind for civilization-minded interests in American and Western Europe, who saw a role for certain populations to take part in the process. According to this view, Armenians—especially acculturated Armenians—could be a potent vector for defusing industrialization and political reform throughout the region.

Beginning in the 1830's, the budding relationship between Anatolian Armenians and Protestant missionaries created excitement around the prospect of Ottoman political reform.[76] As the Great War drew to a close, a possible answer to the Eastern Question materialized before the Allied Powers.[77] The post-World War I League of Nations mandate system, which allowed for special administrative control over transferred territories by League member states, and the wellspring of new nation-states after the fracturing of various empires, offered an opportunity to facilitate this transformation.

Zionists thought in a similar fashion, and likewise scholars in Jewish studies have discussed the idea of Jews' role as vectors for modernity in the Middle East. The 1917 Balfour Declaration pledged British support for creating a "Jewish National Home" in Palestine, concretized by the subsequent League of Nations mandate. Jacob Norris argues that British support for a Jewish national home in Palestine blossomed in part from the belief that Jewish capital investments could modernize the region.[78]

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[75] Case, *The Age of Questions*, 4.
[76] Hans-Lukas Kieser, *Nearest East: American Millennialism and Mission to the Middle East* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), 44–47.
[77] Malkasian, "The Disintegration of the Armenian Cause in the United States, 1918-1927," 353.
[78] Jacob Norris, *Land of Progress: Palestine in the Age of Colonial Development, 1905-1948* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 9–11.

Armenians were another group that Americans and European leaders believed could be effective allies in their mission—a belief encapsulated in the words of missionary James Barton, who declared, "give the Armenian capital and a righteous government and he will turn the whole of Turkey into a Garden of Eden in ten years."[79] Armenians like Malcom, who longed for an Armenian nation-state as a compliment to their home in America, found an alignment of interests. In the final pages of *The Armenians in America*, Malcom positions Armenians as the front-line in this mission, writing,

> Their association with American institutions has broadened their vision and outlook […] thus when they go back to Armenia, they will demand American-like homes, American clothing, American railroads, telephones and roads. They will carry with them something of the spirit of America. It is no exaggeration to say that the Armenian immigrants from this country, with the skill, knowledge and experience they have gained here in the sphere of education, industry, government and living conditions, together with the aid of the American missionary forces, and let us hope with the mandate of the United States, will constitute an invaluable asset in the development of the coming Armenian Republic.[80]

Malcom believed that American assistance with the Armenian nation-state would also grant the United States a close ally in the region, a vector for economic development, industrialization, and liberal democracy. This role for Armenians, that of both the defender of Western civilization and the vanguard of modernity, is the core of Malcom's claim to Anglo-Saxondom of the East.

Conclusion

Armenians' self-racialization in the early twentieth century was a complex process influenced by the changing demographics of the United States and the racial discourses of the time. Facing racial precarity and discrimination, some Armenians sought to solidify their whiteness by reinforcing American racialist systems and engaging in exclusionary practices.

[79] Malkasian, "The Disintegration of the Armenian Cause in the United States, 1918-1927," 351.
[80] Malcom, *The Armenians in America*, 140–41.

Armenians assuming whiteness meant adopting the language of race in America and perpetuating racist narratives targeting marginalized groups.

Within this liminal racial space, Armenians like Malcom utilized terms and arguments found in American and European racial cosmology, particularly emphasizing an "Anglo-Saxon" metaphor for Armenian identity. By positioning Armenians as the "Anglo-Saxons of the East," Malcom sought to stake a claim to a high position within the internal hierarchy of whiteness, while also asserting their apartness from other Ottoman peoples. Armenians viewed their apartness as a way to highlight their Americanness and assert their belonging to the same racial stock as European peoples.

To establish Armenians' Anglo-Saxon metaphor, Malcom drew on historical narratives of settler colonialism, presenting Armenians as ancient colonists who migrated from Southeastern Europe into Asia Minor, much like how white settlers supplanted the indigenous peoples in America. This portrayal placed Armenians in the upper strata of the racial hierarchy, while associating other peoples of Anatolia with America's indigenous populations. Armenians chose to highlight their apartness from their geographic neighbors and utilized the concept of Anglo-Saxon as a means to engage with American politics, culture, and institutions while preserving their Armenian identity. By aligning Armenians with the civilizing mission of the Anglo-Saxon, Malcom portrayed them as agents of modernity and potential allies in managing the decline of the Ottoman Empire, fulfilling the aspirations of both Armenians seeking a nation-state and American interests in the region.

Chapter 3: Religion

Fearing that the missionary and humanitarian narrative would harm Armenian racial status in America, M. Vartan Malcom made a case to buttress the tentative status of Armenians. With these arguments, Malcom claims that Armenians possess desirable religious traits necessary to become good Americans. In this chapter I argue that Malcom emphasized Armenian Christianity as a defining characteristic of Armenian identity. Malcom also presents the Armenian Christianity as compatible with an American Protestant conception of "good religion," pushing against the Protestant missionary narrative of the Armenian Apostolic Church as antiquated, backwards, and in need of reform.

Religion and Armenian History

We cannot separate Armenian history in the Common Era from the history of Christianity. According to Eastern Orthodox tradition, the ancient Kingdom of Armenia was the first to adopt Christianity, when King Trdat III proclaimed Christianity as the state religion. While modern scholars debate the exact year of this proclamation, the Armenian Apostolic Church cites 314 CE as the official date.[81] Over the following 1,500 years Christianity—and Armenians' position as its first adopters—became tenants of an emergent Armenian identity and nationalism.[82]

However, when Protestant missionaries began working with Armenians in the Ottoman Empire in the 1830's, they saw the role of the Armenian Church as an obstacle to their mission of revival and reform. There were two primary reasons for this belief. First, Protestant

[81] Vrej Nerses Nersessian, "Armenian Christianity," in *The Blackwell Companion to Eastern Christianity*, ed. Ken Parry (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 23–25.
[82] Nersessian, 30.

missionaries believed that the Armenian Apostolic Church was steeped in tradition and ritual, and as a result, was unable to fully embrace the Protestant conception of modernity and progress. They saw the Church's adherence to traditional practices—such as the veneration of icons and the use of liturgical languages—as impediments to the spread of Protestant Christianity.

These missionaries saw themselves as modernizers and reformers and believed that it was their duty to bring Western ideas and practices to the Ottoman Empire. Second, Protestant missionaries were often critical of the role of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Armenian society and politics. They believed that the Church had too much power and influence over Armenians, and that it often colluded with Ottoman authorities to maintain its own power and status. Thus, Protestant missionaries saw the Armenian Apostolic Church as a barrier to this mission and believed that the Church needed to be reformed in order for Armenians to fully embrace Western ideals.

The Armenian Church and Modernity

James Barton, a prominent American Protestant missionary who worked closely with the Armenian community, published the triumphalist *Daybreak in Turkey* in 1908 to detail the progress of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) in Anatolia, with a special focus on gains made with Armenians and the growing Armenian Protestant community. But Barton both highlights and downplays the role of Armenians in their own reforms. Careful not to paint missionaries as unwanted interlopers, Barton goes to great lengths to present Armenians as a people longing for reform but unable to accomplish it without outside assistance.[83] Only through the efforts of American missionaries could Armenian Protestantism

[83] James L. Barton, *Daybreak in Turkey* (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1908), 157–68.

take shape, Barton writes, as Armenians lacked the spiritual guidance or vision necessary to bring about those reforms.[84]

Most likely for the reasons listed above, Malcom expresses a complicated opinion of Protestant missionaries and maligns their role in objectifying Armenian suffering, though he accepts the usefulness of American missionaries in establishing an Armenian state, and plainly admits their role in encouraging Armenians to come to the United States.[85] He disputes their narrative of the helpless Armenian, that "have no church, no religion, no schools," Malcom writes of the missionary's destitute Armenian, "and in fact nothing except what the missionaries furnish them with."[86] He also expresses wariness about their involvement in the future of the Armenian people, cautioning the missionaries not to allow their "zeal" to interfere with the "unity of the [Armenian] nation."[87]

Malcom, himself a member of the Armenian Apostolic Church, defends its place in Armenian culture from critique.[88] Malcom conceives of the Armenian Church as something belonging wholly to the Armenian people, "unique" in Christian history as it was "founded by an Armenian, for the Armenians and belongs to the Armenians."[89] To set apart the institution from other Christian churches, Malcom establishes the inextricability of the Armenian religion to the Armenian people, stating that it, "not only represents a distinct religion but the religion of a distinct people. It has never sought to proselytize other races or peoples or individuals to its

[84] Barton, 148–52.
[85] Malcom, *The Armenians in America*, 140–41.
[86] Malcom, 20.
[87] Malcom, 22.
[88] "Transcript of Evidence," *United States v. Cartozian*, No. E-8668 (D. Or. May 8–9, 1924), in Civil and Criminal Case Files, District of Oregon (Portland), Records of the District Courts of the United States, RG 21, National Archives and Records Administration Pacific Alaska Region, Seattle, Washington. 97-98.
[89] Malcom, *The Armenians in America*, 15.

faith."[90] Christian faith was also the symbol of what it meant to *be* Armenian during the Ottoman period, reinforced by the Ottoman *millet* system of organizing groups along religious lines.[91]

The Inextricable

To Malcom, Armenians' Christian history is inseparable from the rest of their identity, which bears some similarity to the Jewish ethno-religious identity. Judaism as a religion and Jewishness as a cultural background or ethnicity are distinct, and different scholars within Jewish Studies have used this distinction to tell different stories. Sarah Imhoff notes that bisecting the Jewish experience down a line between Judaism (religion) and Jewishness (ethnicity) ultimately reflects a Protestant conception of religion that dominates American public spiritual life. According to this notion, religion is a private, personal thing, separate from descent.[92] Some scholars refer to the pervasiveness of Protestant Christian tradition, even in religiously neutral or secular environments, is referred to by some scholars as "stealth Protestantism" or "public Protestantism."[93]

This "stealth" or "public" Protestant model also follows the distinction religious studies scholar Robert Orsi makes between "good religion" and "bad religion," a paradigm he argues scholars follow when discussing religions. According to Orsi's observations, scholars characterize "good religion" as, "rational, respectful of persons, noncoercive, mature, nonanthropomorphic in its higher forms, mystical (as opposed to ritualistic), unmediated and

[90] Malcom, 15.
[91] Garabet Moumdjian, "From Millet-i Sadıka to Millet-i Asiya: Abdülhamid II and Armenians, 1878-1909," in *War and Diplomacy: The Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 and the Treaty of Berlin*, ed. M. Hakan Yavuz and Peter Sluglett (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2011), 44.
[92] Imhoff, *Masculinity and the Making of American Judaism*, 10.
[93] Janet Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini, *Love the Sin: Sexual Regulation and the Limits of Religious Tolerance* (New York: NYU Press, 2003); Catherine L. Albanese, *America: Religions and Religion* (Belmont: Wadsworth, 1992).

agreeable to democracy (no hierarchy in gilded robes and fancy hats), monotheistic (no angels, saints, demons, ancestors), emotionally controlled, a reality of mind and spirit not body and matter."[94] Therefore, "bad religion" is the opposite: ritualistic, hierarchical, emotional, and idolatrous.[95]

Race and religion are "inextricable" in the Jewish experience in America. Imhoff remarks that "the ways that race, ethnicity, descent, bodies, and community were not merely factors interacting with religion, but in fact *constituted* religion."[96] And yet both Armenians and Jews had to present their respective religious identities in a way that aligned with Orsi's model of good and bad religion. This was especially true in the early twentieth century, when Imhoff argues that "Protestantism was then less stealth and more Protestant."[97] With this in mind, it becomes clear why Malcom felt the need to defend Armenian Christianity from attack. This also bears resemblance to the ways acculturated Jewish thinkers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century redefined their Judaism to make it acceptable to a white, Protestant American majority.[98] Acculturated Jewish intellectuals, Imhoff argues, presented their Judaism as a rational (as opposed to emotional and idolatrous) and universal (instead of hierarchical and ritualistic) religion, highlighting its development and compatibility with the stealth/public Protestantism dominant in the United States.[99]

Armenians and Reform Jews expressed themes of rationality and universality differently, though both painted their respective peoples as belonging to such a tradition. For example, the

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[94] Robert Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 188.
[95] Orsi, 188.
[96] Imhoff, *Masculinity and the Making of American Judaism*, 10.
[97] Imhoff, 12.
[98] Imhoff, 2.
[99] Imhoff, 2–3.

acculturated Jewish writers Sarah Imhoff studied articulated a Judaism compatible with liberal democracy, which helped Jews argue for Judaism as a "good, American religion."[100] According to Imhoff, influential Reform Jewish intellectuals like Kaufmann Kohler, Morris Jastrow and Abram Isaacs argued their commitment to universality, democracy, and rationality stemmed from Judaism's core tenets, which they brought to the foreground in response to a Protestant Christian-influenced conception of religion in America. Malcom also emphasizes these traits in the Armenian people, for whom religion is a central component of life. In particular he calls attention to popular vote election of the Armenian catholicos as a demonstration of Armenian capacity for democracy and self-rule.[101]

Conclusion

This chapter delved into the complex relationship between religion, identity, and the missionary narrative within the context of Armenian history. Focusing on the words of M. Vartan Malcom, we explored his efforts to emphasize Armenian Christianity as a defining characteristic of Armenian identity, countering the Protestant missionary narrative that portrayed the Armenian Apostolic Church as antiquated and in need of reform. Despite the historical significance of Christianity in Armenian history, Protestant missionaries in the Ottoman Empire viewed the Armenian Apostolic Church as a hindrance to their mission of revival and reform. They criticized the Church for its adherence to tradition and ritual, considering it incompatible with their vision of modernity and progress. Additionally, they questioned the Church's influence and collusions with Ottoman authorities.

[100] Imhoff, 38.
[101] Malcom, *The Armenians in America*, 16.

These American Protestant missionaries played a significant role in shaping the narrative surrounding Armenian reforms. Their writings highlighted the role of American missionaries in the progress of the Armenian Protestant community, often downplaying the agency of Armenians themselves. Malcom, while acknowledging the usefulness of American missionaries in establishing an Armenian state and encouraging migration to the United States, expressed caution and wariness about their involvement and the potential disruption to Armenian unity. Malcom, being a member of the Armenian Apostolic Church, defended its place in Armenian culture and identity. He argued that the Church belonged solely to the Armenian people and highlighted its unique position in Christian history. To Malcom, the Armenian religion not only represented a distinct faith but also symbolized the distinctiveness of the Armenian people. He rejected the notion that the Church sought to proselytize other groups, emphasizing its role in preserving Armenian heritage and spirituality.

Chapter 4: Gender

When the word "gender" is used in "gender studies" it can often mean "women." However, masculinity, manliness and the actions of men are nevertheless aspects of gender that require attention. Sarah Imhoff notes masculinity is often invisible since it is usually normative and taken for granted, and thus searching for masculinity requires careful reading of texts that may not present themselves as treatises on gender.[102] Reading *The Armenians in America* in this light offers us glimpses into Malcom's views on gender and masculinity.

Malcom boasts that Armenian men are excellent candidates for intermarriage with non-Armenian women. Successful intermarriages with other white peoples in America showcased the assimilability of Armenians. He notes that intermarriage between women of "Irish, Swedish, French, English, Jewish, and real Yankee extraction" is not uncommon with "educated and long resident Armenians."[103] In contrast, unacculturated Armenians who are not "educated and long resident" are to avoid intermarriage,

> Unless a foreigner [Armenian] has acquired a good command of the English language, lived here long enough not only to be able to discriminate between good and bad American girls, but really come to know and understand American ways and habits, he should not attempt to marry other than a girl of his own nationality.[104]

Thus, Malcom draws a clear line between the acculturated Armenian and the unacculturated, relegating the unacculturated Armenian man to marriage within the Armenian community. Here Malcom also employs class-based arguments for permitting or withholding Armenian intermarriage, reserving intermarriage for Armenians of refinement. Notice that Malcom makes no mention of Armenian women in this passage, (men are usually the focus of *The Armenians in America*) and the *type of man* Malcom describes here is unworthy of and

[102] Imhoff, *Masculinity and the Making of American Judaism*, 21–23.
[103] Malcom, *The Armenians in America*, 127.
[104] Malcom, 127.

incompatible with non-Armenian women. Malcom does mention Armenian women when he boasts that they seldom engage in prostitution, but otherwise they're often ignored.[105]

It must be noted that while Malcom saw intermarriage as a symbol of acculturation, American Jews overwhelmingly saw intermarriage as a threat to the Jewish community.[106] For Jews, intermarriage contributed to the loss of Jewish identity and community, whereas Malcom boasts of it as a marker of Americanization. This different approach to the "melting pot" ideal of American assimilation reveals a tension within the Jewish experience absent for Armenians, and the limits of comparison.

The Feminine Victim

From the outset of the Armenian Genocide, the image of the archetypical victim was feminine.[107] Indeed, in their studies of missionary and humanitarian aid in the Middle East, both Davide Rodogno and Keith David Watenpaugh note the prevalence of women's and children's stories in aid campaigns and fundraising drives.[108] To build a sense of moral obligation within readers, propaganda objectified genocide victims, survivors, and refugees. During the systematic deportations, mass executions, and organized despoilation of Armenians during the Armenian Genocide, Ottoman soldiers perpetrated gender-based violence against Armenian women and

[105] Malcom, 70.
[106] Lila Corwin Berman, "Sociology, Jews, and Intermarriage in Twentieth-Century America," *Jewish Social Studies* 14, no. 2 (2008): 32–33.
[107] Katharine Derderian, "Common Fate, Different Experience: Gender-Specific Aspects of the Armenian Genocide, 1915-1917," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 19, no. 1 (2005): 11–12.
[108] Davide Rodogno, *Night on Earth: A History of International Humanitarianism in the Near East, 1918-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022); Keith David Watenpaugh, *Bread from Stones: The Middle East and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015).

girls, including rape, sexual enslavement, and forced marriage.[109] Word of these atrocities proved some of the most effective for raising awareness—and funds—for Armenian relief.

In the wake of the Genocide, written account, images, and a new medium for visualizing suffering—film—aided fundraising efforts; in 1919 the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief (ACASR) released the silent film *Ravished Armenia* as part of a larger publicity campaign to draw attention to the Armenian cause. The film was an adaptation of Aurora Mardiganian's written account of the same name, recounted her suffering at the hands of the Ottoman Empire in 1915. Sold into sexual slavery in 1915 at the age of 14, Mardiganian escaped to the United States in 1917, where her story proved a sensational example of Oriental depravity and brutality. At the coaxing of the film's producers the 18-year-old Mardiganian played herself, her trauma exploited on movie theater screens across America.[110] Mardiganian was one of the highest profile faces of the Armenian genocide, but her story—that of a poor, defenseless woman in need of rescue—was not uncommon. Thus, the posterchildren for the Armenian Genocide were starving, weak, defenseless, and—perhaps most notably—feminine.

The reality did not match fundraiser propaganda, as many Armenians resisted the Genocide and shirked the yoke of defenseless victim.[111] Though Armenians had their weapons confiscated and the military-aged men systematically decimated, some took up arms to fight and often die with rifles in-hand.[112] In addition to armed resistance, Armenians and their local allies engaged in acts of "unarmed resistance," such as food procurement, preservation of spiritual

[109] Derderian, "Common Fate, Different Experience," 1–2.
[110] Leshu Torchin, "'Ravished Armenia': Visual Media, Humanitarian Advocacy, and the Formation of Witnessing Publics," *American Anthropologist* 108, no. 1 (2006): 214–16.
[111] Hasmik Grigoryan, "Food Procurement Methods during the Armenian Genocide as Expressions of 'Unarmed Resistance': Children's Experiences," *International Journal of Armenian Genocide Studies* 6, no. 2 (2021): 45.
[112] Ronald Grigor Suny, *"They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else": A History of the Armenian Genocide* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 282.

practices and information-gathering.[113] Armenians operated their own local aid networks [114] Missionary and humanitarian records ignored or downplayed the effectiveness of indigenous resistance.[115]

The Masculine Armenian

Regardless of the form their resistance took, the power of the missionary and humanitarian institutions overpowered the narrative. With this in mind, M. Vartan Malcom identified a crisis of Armenian masculinity. Writing just two years after the end of state-sponsored massacres and deportations in the Armenian Genocide,[116] and in the midst of various aid campaigns, Malcom attacked the image of a submissive, weak, feminine Armenian who put up no resistance against the violence. "People think that these Christians are butchered like flocks of sheep instead of putting up a manly defense," Malcom writes, invoking the "sheep to the slaughter" motif commonly employed by missionaries and aid organizations in their fundraising campaigns—and would later be used to describe victims of the Holocaust.[117] The usage of the word "manly" tips Malcom's hand about how he sees the connection between martial virtue and masculinity.

Malcom drives the point further, arguing that "no nation on either side of the war […] has suffered more, contributed more and shed more blood for freedom than the Armenians."[118] This

[113] Grigoryan, "Food Procurement Methods during the Armenian Genocide as Expressions of 'Unarmed Resistance,'" 41–52.
[114] For more about local aid networks that operated in the Ottoman Empire during the Armenian Genocide, see Khatchig Mouradian, *The Resistance Network: The Armenian Genocide and Humanitarianism in Ottoman Syria, 1915–1918* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2021).
[115] Rodogno, *Night on Earth*, 107.
[116] Though mass starvation and sporadic killings continued, state-orchestrated massacres concluded in January 1917. See Suny, *"They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else,"* 330.
[117] Grigoryan, "Food Procurement Methods during the Armenian Genocide as Expressions of 'Unarmed Resistance,'" 42–43.
[118] Malcom, *The Armenians in America*, 35.

passage invokes not only Wilsonian self-determination and American notions of freedom, but also Armenian masculinity.

Gender scholarship on the Armenian Genocide often focuses on the divergent experiences of men and women—and for good reason. In her article "Common Fate, Different Experiences," Katherine Derderian finds that the killing of large swatches of the male, military-aged Armenian population by Ottoman soldiers left Armenian woman vulnerable to "sexual abuse, exploitation, and forced assimilation."[119] However, there is little scholarship on what effects the centrality in narratives of Armenian women's suffering had on American and European perceptions of Armenians as a whole.

In Jewish Studies. Sarah Imhoff notes that in the American Jewish community, a similar discourse around crises of masculinity overtook intellectual circles, especially Zionist ones. Though many acculturated American Jews rejected Zionism and its characterization of diasporic life as weak and effeminate, they nevertheless agreed on the need to redefine Jewish masculinity and promote the virtues of self-sufficiency, courage, and physical health.[120]

A notable difference in the Armenian case and the Jewish case, is that Malcom felt the need to redefine Armenian masculinity against an outside force. In *The Armenians in America,* Malcom does not express distaste for the state of Armenian masculinity, rather he takes issue with the missionary and humanitarian propaganda that obscures it. On the other hand, acculturated American Jews defined a new Jewish masculinity to create an American Jewish identity.[121] In both cases, however, Armenians and Jews saw defining masculinity as a way to establish an American identity.

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[119] Derderian, "Common Fate, Different Experience," 14.
[120] Imhoff, *Masculinity and the Making of American Judaism*, 195.
[121] Imhoff, 2.

Conclusion

Malcolm's writings reveal a clear distinction between acculturated and unacculturated Armenian men, with the former portrayed as suitable candidates for intermarriage with non-Armenian women. The chapter also discusses the portrayal of Armenian women as victims in the aftermath of the Armenian Genocide. Campaigns and fundraising efforts focused on women's and children's stories to evoke a sense of moral obligation among readers. The accounts and portrayals such as the silent film *Ravished Armenia* sensationalized the suffering and victimhood of Armenian women.

The narrative control of missionary and humanitarian institutions overshadowed the resistance efforts of Armenians. M. Vartan Malcolm criticized the prevailing image of submissive and weak Armenian men who put up no resistance. He emphasized the connection between martial virtue and masculinity, invoking notions of manly defense and Armenian contributions to freedom. This chapter provides valuable insights into the complexities of gender within the Armenian context and its intersection with the Armenian Genocide. Lastly, this chapter makes clear the need for further research on the impact of gendered portrayals on Western perceptions of Armenians.

Conclusion

Malcom ends *The Armenians in America* with a prediction:

> "If conditions in Armenia are very promising, about two-thirds of the Armenians now in the United States will return to their native country within the next five years. The rest will remain here and their descendants will become absorbed in the great 'melting pot.'"[122]

Today we read this statement with a sense of dramatic irony, as the Armenia Malcom would later receive was undoubtably not the one he envisioned. But the tragedy of Malcom's prediction shouldn't make us overlook the second half of his prediction. Despite the draw of a future Armenia, Malcom envisioned America as a second home for Armenians, a place where they could be welcomed into the naturalized ranks of citizenship and integrate into American society. In some ways, Malcom's Armenia would be a colonial arm of the United States; both a nationalist victory for the Armenian people and a new cog in the machinery of a nascent international order.

In his 1924 testimony in *United States v. Cartozian*, Malcom remarked that losing access to American citizenship would mean that Armenians would "have no place to go to. They will become truly a people without a country."[123] From this we can see Malcom's belief in America as the new home of Armenians—and a place where they belong in the upper echelons of white society. Demonstrating this second point, he continues, adding that "racially, they [Armenians] will be regarded lower than [Black people] who are allowed citizenship."[124] Malcom's racism shows his full adoption of the language of American racialization, and the existential dread of

[122] Malcom, *The Armenians in America*, 141–42.
[123] Transcript of Evidence, *United States v. Cartozian*.
[124] Malcom uses the derogatory term. Transcript of Evidence, *United States v. Cartozian*.

falling to the lowest rung of the racial and social ladder. Thus, we see the arguments made in *The Armenians in America* come into full bloom.

In the wake of the Armenian Genocide, Armenians in America faced a challenge in maintaining control over their own narrative. M. Vartan Malcom's work, *The Armenians in America*, was his attempt to grant Armenians of that era a platform access to an American identity. It pushed beyond portraying them simply as refugees or destitute survivors, away from the slogans of aid campaigns and fundraising efforts. Malcom emphasizes that genocide and persecution should not solely define the identity of Armenians. Instead, they should have the opportunity to define themselves as Americans based on their achievements and contributions to their new home.

The field of Jewish studies has been invaluable in informing my research on Armenian Americans. Scholars like Sarah Imhoff and Eric Goldstein have provided unique perspectives on American Jews that have enabled me to look beyond the simplistic narrative of immigrant success and consider the difficult tradeoffs made by those communities to integrate. Their insights have pushed me to approach the study of Armenian Americans with a critical eye, recognizing the complex and diverse experiences of this community, as well as the limitations of the field.

Compared to the wealth of knowledge offered by Jewish studies, Armenian American studies still has a long way to go before it can stand on its own, and there is a need for more rigorous scholarship that explores the full range of Armenian American experiences. My hope is that my own work will contribute to this effort, highlighting areas where Armenian American studies can grow and providing a foundation for future research.

Moving forward, it will be important for scholars of Armenian American studies to build upon the existing body of literature and engage with a range of perspectives, especially those from within the Armenian American community. By doing so, we can gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of Armenian American experiences and contribute to a broader understanding of the immigrant experience in the United States. Ultimately, my debt to Jewish studies scholars has underscored the importance of interdisciplinary approaches and collaboration in advancing our understanding of immigrant communities. In the same vein, I hope this work will encourage scholars to think more broadly about the forms harm can take and the anxieties the potential for the harm can inflict. Armenians like Malcom feared that depictions of Armenians as the object of aid rather than the vector of it would harm their relative position within the American racial, cultural, and social hierarchy.

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