

PRESS RELEASE

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A Century of Armenians in America Conference Features Seven New Scholars and Seven Pioneers

The one-day conference, “A Century of Armenians in America: Voices from New Scholarship,” is a unique gathering of scholars who have contributed to the birth and development of Armenian American Studies. A major objective of this conference is to introduce to the general public seven new scholars who wrote their doctoral dissertations on Armenian Americans in the last decade. Seven pioneers in the field will share the platform with them. This conference is presented by the Armenian Center at Columbia University and hosted by the Middle East and Middle Eastern American Center (MEMEAC), in the Baisley Powell Elebash Recital Hall at the Graduate Center, CUNY, on Saturday October 9, 2004, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Conference participants hail from Yerevan, London, California, Ohio, New England, and New York City. Historian Robert Mirak, whose book *Torn Between Two Lands: Armenians in America 1890-World War I* (Harvard University Press, 1983) forged Armenian American studies, and Arpena Mesrobian, Director Emerita at Syracuse University Press and author of “*Like One Family*” – *The Armenians of Syracuse*, (Gomidas Institute, 2000), will be the honorary chairpersons of the day. The conference is organized by sociologist Anny Bakalian, author of *Armenian Americans: From Being to Feeling Armenian* (Transaction Publishers,

1993). Bakalian is Associate Director of MEMEAC and serves on the Advisory Board of the Armenian Center of her alma mater Columbia University.

The morning panel is devoted to historians. The first speaker, Knarik Avakian, is Staff Researcher at the Institute of History, National Academy of Sciences in Yerevan and Editor at the Armenian Encyclopaedia. She received her doctorate in 1995 specializing in Armenian American history. Avakian is the author of *The History of the Armenian Community of the United States of America – From the Beginning to 1924* (published in Armenian in 2000) and over 50 articles and book chapters.

The next presenter will be George Byron Kooshian, Jr., a native of Pasadena, CA. His doctoral dissertation (UCLA 2002) examines the struggles of the earliest Armenian settlers and their children's generation in Fresno. Since 1975, Kooshian has been a teacher in the Los Angeles Unified School District. He is married with three children and lives in Altadena, California.

The third historian on the morning panel will be Ben Alexander, who is currently completing his Ph.D. at the Graduate Center, CUNY. His dissertation focuses on the changing face of Armenian ethnic identity in the United States from 1915 to 1955. Ben teaches U.S. history as an adjunct at St. Francis College in Brooklyn. He is also a playwright, whose work has been produced at Off-Off-Broadway venues.

Isabel Kaprielian-Churchill, Professor of Modern Armenian and Immigration History at California State University, Fresno, will critique the morning papers. She has written extensively on Armenian immigrants in Canada and the U.S.A. Her most recent book, *Like Our Mountains: A History of Armenians in Canada*, by McGill-Queen's University Press, will be released soon.

The afternoon session features clinical psychologist Diana Vartan and family specialist Margaret Manoogian. Vartan emigrated from Iran as a teenager. She earned her Ph.D. from the University of Southern California in 1996. She has worked in a number of community mental health settings as a clinician and training supervisor, and has taught graduate and undergraduate psychology. Her psychodynamic, family systems, and multiethnic focus has helped her address the needs of many Armenian families, couples, teenagers, and children. Diana Vartan has relocated to New York City in the last year.

Manoogian is Assistant Professor of Child and Family Studies at Ohio University in Athens. She obtained her Ph.D. from Oregon State University specializing in family gerontology. Her current research explores family well-being after the 1996 federal welfare reform act. Margaret's father encouraged a strong interest and pride in Armenian culture, a legacy she is currently sharing with her two children.

The discussant for the psychological panel will be Aghop Der Karabetian, Chair of the Department of Psychology at the University of LaVerne and Associate Dean for Strategic Planning and Outcomes Assessment. He is the author of numerous articles on Armenian identity and creator of the much-used Armenian Ethnic Orientation Questionnaire. Recently, he translated into English and published his and his wife's grandfathers' genocide survival memoirs, "Jail to Jail," and "Vahan's Triumph," respectively.

In the last panel of the conference, two sociologists, Claudia Der Martirosian and Matthew Jendian, will examine generational changes. Der Martirosian escaped the Iranian Revolution with her parents at a young age. She studied at UCLA, earning a B.A. in Applied Mathematics and a Ph.D. in Sociology in 1996. She has co-authored chapters discussing the Iranian and Armenian experiences in *Irangelles* and *Ethnic Los Angeles*. She currently works as a

Statistical Consultant with UCLA Public Health Dentistry and Southern California University of Health Sciences (SCUHS).

Matthew Ari Jendian is Assistant Professor of Sociology and Director of the American Humanics Certificate Program in Nonprofit Management and Leadership at California State University, Fresno. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Southern California in 2001. Matthew is an active member of the Armenian Church and an ordained deacon. He is the proud father of Joshua and Nicholas, two of Fresno's native fourth-generation Armenian Americans.

The discussant of the last panel will be Susan Pattie who will compare and contrast the Armenian experience in the U.S. with the diaspora. Pattie is the author of *Faith in History – Armenians Rebuilding Community* (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997). She is a Senior Research Fellow at University College London. Recently, she was instrumental in the founding of the Armenian Institute in London, which is dedicated to making Armenian culture and history a living experience.

Concluding remarks will be offered by Khachig Tölölyan, Chair of the English Department at Wesleyan University. Tölölyan is the founder and editor of *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*. This award-winning publication is in its 12th year of continuous publication by the Zoryan Institute and Toronto University Press.

Thanks to the generosity of the benefactors who established the outreach efforts of the Armenian Center at Columbia, this conference aims to jumpstart new research projects on Armenian immigrants and their descendants in the United States not only by energizing the scholars who are presenting papers on October 9, 2004, but also inspiring graduate students to pursue studies in this area. Most of the new scholars had to read Mirak's or Pattie's books for their dissertations, some borrowed Der Karabetian's Armenian identity scale for their research,

and probably they all aspired to emulate Tölölyan's academic achievements. However, few have had the opportunity to meet the pioneers in person. It is hoped that mentoring partnerships, scholarly networks and even friendships will result from this historic gathering, eventually yielding a burst of new research and publications on Armenian immigrant and their descendants in America. The day will be structured in a way that will give the audience an opportunity to engage conference participants on topics of their own interest.

Do not miss this unique opportunity to learn about Armenian American history and the issues affecting this community today. The Graduate Center, CUNY is located at 365 Fifth Avenue, between 34th and 35th Streets. For more information contact Anny Bakalian, ABakalian@gc.cuny.edu or 212-817-7570. The conference program and other information can be found on www.columbiaarmeniancenter.org or web.gc.cuny.edu/memeac.