

Aurora's Sunrise

A FILM BY INNA SAHAKYAN



POV

DISCUSSION GUIDE





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Film Summary



At the age of 14, Aurora Mardiganian survived the Armenian genocide and escaped to New York, where her story became a media sensation. Her newfound fame led to her starring in *Auction of Souls*, one of Hollywood's earliest blockbusters. Blending storybook animation, video testimony, and rediscovered footage from her lost silent epic, *Aurora's Sunrise* revives Mardiganian's forgotten story.

Using This Guide

This guide is an invitation to dialogue. It is based on a belief in the power of human connection and is designed for people who want to use *Aurora's Sunrise* to engage family, friends, classmates, colleagues, and communities. In contrast to initiatives that foster debates in which participants try to convince others that they are right, this document envisions conversations undertaken in a spirit of openness in which people try to understand one another and expand their thinking by sharing viewpoints and listening actively.

The discussion prompts are intentionally crafted to help a wide range of audiences think more deeply about the issues in the film. Rather than attempting to address them all, choose one or two that best meet your needs and interests. And be sure to leave time to consider taking action. Planning next steps can help people leave the room feeling energized and optimistic, even in instances when conversations have been difficult.

For more detailed event planning and facilitation tips, visit <https://communitynetwork.amdoc.org/>.

Context and Concepts

An Animated Documentary

Aurora's Sunrise is a documentary that blends animation, footage from the docudrama *Auction of Souls*, testimony from video interviews, and newsreel footage to tell the story of genocide survivor Aurora Mardiganian (born as Arshaluys Mardigian) and the film she made with Near East Relief and Selig Polyscope. "Animated documentary" may seem like a contradiction in terms, with animation conjuring fantasy and creativity, while documentary connotes reality and sobriety. But from as early as Winsor McCay's *The Sinking of the Lusitania* (1918), which portrays via animation an unrecorded torpedo attack on the titular ship, animation has been an element of documentary film. Animation has offered a means for providing illustration and commentary, such as in Frank Capra's *Why We Fight* series (1942–1945) and Michael Moore's *Bowling for Columbine* (2002). And it has become prominent in recent years, with films like *Waltz with Bashir* (Ari Folman, 2008), *The Missing Picture* (Rithy Panh, 2013), and *Flee* (Jonas Poher Rasmussen, 2021).

Although the use of animation suggests a betrayal of photography's direct link with reality, scholars like Annabelle Honess Roe point out that the opposite is true: animation can represent unseen realities of subjective experience and consciousness. In many cases of historical horror, it can counteract the impossibility of representation, histories of denial, and the ways memory is affected by a traumatic event. In this regard, animation is exceptionally well-suited to telling the stories of Mardiganian and the Armenian genocide. The animated recollections speak to the elusiveness of the past—both the subject's idyllic time with her family and the horrific experiences she would rather forget. They also speak to efforts to erase Armenians and their genocide from history, which virtually demand creativity in response. The mixed-media construction of the film may also encourage audiences to think about how one constructs history and whose histories have a place as officially recognized stories, while others are relegated to archival fragments or deemed mere personal recollections.

Perhaps most appealing is the way the combination of different types of media invites audiences to reflect on which component holds the most authority. *Auction of Souls* is truthful and substantiated by reports and by eyewitnesses Ambassador Henry Morgenthau and Mardiganian. At the same time, it is filtered through Christian and Orientalist lenses to emphasize the identity of the victim group and appeal to an audience either linked through religion or excited by titillating stories of cruel sultans and their harems. As Mardiganian points out in one interview, the crucifixion scene, depicting naked women on crosses, was a reconfiguring of violence too horrific to consider. This mix of representational formats places Mardiganian atop the hierarchy of authority. After suffering during the genocide, experiencing exploitation in the filmmaking process, and enduring the years in which the genocide was denied, it is she, through her testimonial interviews, who takes center stage and claims authority in telling this important story.

COMMON CONCEPTS & LANGUAGE

Armenian Genocide

This refers to the systematic murder, massacres, expulsion, abduction, and forced conversion of Armenian Christians that took place from 1915 to 1923 in the Ottoman Empire, now known as Turkey. Although Armenians experienced persecution and violence within the empire for decades preceding April 24, 1915, that is considered the starting date of the genocide with the intention of eradicating the population. It is estimated that one and a half million people perished in the Armenian genocide.

Auction of Souls

Auction of Souls was the title initially given to the film adaptation of the book *Ravished Armenia: The Story of Aurora Mardiganian, the Christian Girl Who Lived Through the Great Massacres in the United States*. The film premiered under that title in London in 1919. However, the film also went by *Ravished Armenia*, especially in the United States. Both titles emphasize the more titillating aspects of the story of Aurora Mardiganian (born Arshaluys Mardigian), particularly those related to being sold into slavery as part of a harem.

Genocide

When the Armenian genocide took place, the term “genocide” had not yet been coined, nor had the act of genocide been criminalized. However, the events now described as the Armenian genocide inspired the man who gave a name to the crimes. In 1921, Armenian genocide survivor Soghomon Tehlirian assassinated Talaat Pasha, an architect of the violence against

Armenians. In Tehlirian’s defense, his counsel submitted numerous documents establishing Pasha’s intent to massacre the Armenian people. According to Samantha Power, this case caught the attention of a young Polish-Jewish student, Raphael Lemkin, who asked a professor why Pasha had not been arrested for his actions against the Armenians. As it happened, no law for these actions existed; they were not designated a crime. The logic appalled Lemkin: the murder of one man landed another in jail, but the murder of millions was legal because it happened under the jurisdiction of national sovereignty. Puzzled by this contradiction, Lemkin began to study law. For decades, Lemkin called attention to this crime, even presenting papers on parallels he saw between the Armenian case and the actions taking place under Adolf Hitler as he rose to power. Lemkin proposed the creation of a law against genocide, but had no success. The world had to wait until 1948, when the United Nations introduced its Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide. Armenians would have to wait even longer for their genocide to be recognized by U.N. member states; the United States only recognized the Armenian genocide in 2021.

The Great War

This global conflict, also known as World War I or the First World War, was fought from 1914 to 1918 between the Allied powers (France, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Russia) and the Central powers (Germany, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Ottoman Empire, and Bulgaria).

Near East Foundation

The Near East Foundation has had many incarnations. It was launched as the Committee on Armenian Atrocities, at the suggestion of Ambassador Henry Morgenthau, who had received multiple reports of massacres and deportations, and after several name changes became the Near East Foundation in 1930, which continues to exist as an NGO and development organization today. Near East Relief launched one of the first wide-scale global humanitarian responses to a foreign crisis, enabled in part by infrastructure provided by Christian missions around the world. With this it had access to reports and the means to transmit information, and it became a hub for screenings of films, including *Auction of Souls/Ravished Armenia*, which it co-produced with Selig Polyscope.

Orientalism

This term broadly refers to the representation of the Eastern world by the West. In his book *Orientalism*, Edward Said notes how these images and stories, even when alluringly exotic, serve the purpose of creating distinctions between the West and the East, rendering one a superior bastion of rational civilization and the other an inferior realm of both pleasure and barbarity.

Participants

Arshaluys Mardigian

(later renamed Aurora Mardiganian): Arshaluys Mardigian grew up in Çemişgezek in the Ottoman Empire, before being orphaned, sold into slavery, and displaced during the Armenian genocide. In 1917, a 16-year-old Mardigian arrived in America. Hoping to find her brother, she placed advertisements in local and national newspapers. These advertisements led to newspaper interviews that further publicized her story and eventually brought her to the attention of screenwriter Harvey Gates. Gates and his wife approached Nora Waln, Mardigian's legal custodian and the publicity secretary of the American Committee for Syrian and Armenian Relief (which later became Near East Relief) and asked to become the girl's guardians. The Gateses worked with Mardigian, whom they renamed Aurora Mardiganian, to write and publish her memoir, first in serial form in *The New York American* and then as the book *Ravished Armenia: The Story of Aurora Mardiganian, the Christian Girl Who Lived Through the Great Massacres* in the United States but which in the United Kingdom was called *The Auction of Souls*. While no numbers are available for the earlier printing, a reprint in 1934 is estimated to have sold 360,000 copies. The book was optioned by William Selig, owner of the Selig Polyscope film studio. The resulting film was directed by Oscar Apfel and starred Mardigian as herself. The film was released as both *Ravished Armenia* and *Auction of Souls* in 1919 as part of a major fundraising campaign for Near East Relief that involved speakers, plays, posters, and personal appearances by Mardigian.

Harvey "Henry" Gates

Gates was a screenwriter who began his career in the silent era and continued to make films until the late 1940s. He was Mardigian's legal guardian and the co-author of her survivor story in serial, book, and film form.

Henry Morgenthau, Sr.

A German-Jewish immigrant who rose to prominence as a lawyer and businessman, Morgenthau served as American ambassador to the Ottoman Empire from 1913 to 1916. In this role he received multiple reports of massacres and deportations, but his attempts to pressure the United States to intervene did not have the desired effect. Morgenthau was one of the key figures in establishing what would become Near East Relief. When he resigned from his post as ambassador, he published his account of the genocide in *Ambassador Morgenthau's Story* (1918), which offers detailed reports of the violence, as well as multiple photos that appear in the documentary. He appeared in *Auction of Souls* as himself to substantiate the truth of the docudrama's account. He continued his charitable and advocacy work throughout his life, later calling attention to the plight of Jews in Europe.

Grace Carley Harriman

Harriman was a socialite and active philanthropist with many causes. She worked on behalf of the American Committee for Syrian and Armenian Relief (Near East Relief), including giving a speech at the New York premiere of *Ravished Armenia* in February 1919 in the ballroom of the Plaza Hotel.

Key Issues

Aurora's Sunrise is an excellent tool for outreach and will be of particular interest to people who want to explore the following topics:

- Advocacy
- Cultural Erasure
- Genocide
- Film and Activism
- Media and Awareness
- Orientalism
- War, State Power, and Violence



Background Information

A Timeline of Violence against Armenians on the World Stage: From Massacres to Genocide

The Ottoman Empire's treatment of its Armenian residents became an international issue in the latter half of the nineteenth century, as foreign wars and new reporting technologies drew attention to the matter.

1877–1878: Russo-Turkish War

This conflict began when Russia, joined by a coalition of Balkan states seeking independence from Ottoman rule, invaded Turkey. By the end, the Ottomans lost a lot of territory, including Serbia, Montenegro, and Romania. Meanwhile, Article 61 of the Treaty of Berlin demanded reforms for the protection of Christian Armenians in Turkey. Demands for minority protections in this article also included the protection of Jews and Muslims in Romania. This has been identified as the start of the Armenian question—a debate in the West about the persecution and conditions faced by Armenians in the Ottoman Empire.

Meanwhile, land loss, international scrutiny, and concern that neighboring Christian nations would support any further movements for the independence of Christian minorities likely inflamed anti-Armenian sentiment.

1894–1896: Hamidian Massacres

Named for Sultan Abdul Hamid II, who dissolved the constitutional government to make himself absolute monarch, these executions, expulsions, and forced conversions came in the wake of demands for reform. This act of religious and ethnic violence can also be seen as an attempt to assert power in relation to Turkey's reputation as the "sick man of Europe" due to its territorial losses and internal struggles.

The events were widely reported and sparked debates about internal intervention and international action. In 1895, Democratic senator Wilkinson Call of Florida pleaded for the United States to intervene. Speaking before the Senate, he stated, "The United States should use peaceful negotiations or by force of arms if necessary, to stop the cruelties inflicted on the Armenians." Deeming intervention too radical, the chair of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations presented a tamer alternative that saw the United States merely condemning the actions of the Ottoman Empire.

1908: Young Turk Revolution

In 1908, a secular liberal reform movement known as the Young Turks replaced the sultan, transforming the absolute monarchy into a constitutional government. Although initially promising, the Committee of Union and Progress party started to splinter, leaving the more nationalist faction in favor of centralizing the government intact.

1909–1914: Massacres at Adana

Under the new administration there were multiple acts of aggression, including the massacres at Adana in 1909, which left 2,000 Armenians dead and 15,000 homeless within a period of 48 hours. Armenians sought the help of European nations for protective measures, leading to the Armenian Reform Agreement of February 8, 1914. This international agreement provided for European observers to be stationed in the Armenian provinces, a decision that likely deepened Turkish anxieties over its loss of territories and status.

1914

The beginning of World War I. Turkey sided with Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Not only did international protections for Armenians dissipate, but Armenians were seen as potential traitors who would fight with Russia. The community was left vulnerable.

1915–1923: The Armenian Genocide

On April 24, 1915, the Armenian genocide began when the government launched mass arrests and executions of Armenians before embarking on a larger campaign of “Turkification,” or ethnic cleansing. From 1915 through 1918, the Armenian people suffered abduction, slavery, forced conversion, rape, torture, massacres, extreme privation, and expulsion into the Syrian desert, where many perished from dehydration and starvation.

These events led to the first recorded use of the phrase “crimes against humanity” in a joint response from Russia, France, and Britain in May 1915.

World War I ended with an armistice on November 11, 1918. The Young Turk conspirators fled, but further massacres took place.

The death toll of the Armenian genocide (1915–1923) was approximately one and a half million people.

During this time, *Auction of Souls* was released as part of a fundraising campaign to aid displaced Armenians.

1921

On March 15, 1921, Armenian genocide survivor Soghomon Tehlirian assassinated Talaat Pasha, one of the Young Turks and an architect of violence against Armenians. In Tehlirian’s defense, his counsel submitted numerous documents establishing Pasha’s intent to massacre the Armenian people.

This case caught the attention of a young Polish-Jewish student, Raphael Lemkin,

who asked his professor why Pasha had not been arrested for his actions against the Armenians. The answer was that no law existed to govern what a nation chose to do to its own people. The logic appalled Lemkin: the murder of one man landed another in jail, but the murder of millions was deemed legal because it happened under the jurisdiction of national sovereignty. Puzzled by this contradiction, Lemkin pursued the study of law. For decades, Lemkin called attention to this crime, even presenting papers on parallels between the Armenian case and the actions taking place under Adolf Hitler as he rose to power. In 1945, Lemkin served as advisor to the chief U.S. counsel of the Nuremberg trials, Robert H. Jackson.

1948

The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide was adopted by the United Nations.

The United States ratified the convention 40 years later, in 1988.

1965

Uruguay became the first country to recognize the Armenian genocide officially.

2021

President Biden became the first U.S. president to recognize the Armenian genocide. The leaders of 30 other nations had already done so.

Representation

In September 1896, *The Ram's Horn*, a Chicago-based religious magazine, published a cartoon entitled “Tears, Idle Tears!” The sketch depicts a turbaned man poised to plunge a dagger into a helpless woman, identified by a nearby banner as Armenia. A globe in military gear sheds tears at the sight before him, moaning, “Oh!! This is aw-ful!! Ain’t it?” indicating that the whole world is watching but failing to take action. It is a telling image. It speaks to the degree of representation of this crisis, the sense of international obligation produced by witnessing suffering at a distance, and the Orientalist framing of the crisis that emphasized the barbarity and Muslim identity of the perpetrator.



TEARS, IDLE TEARS!

The Weeping World—“Oh!! This is aw-ful!! Ain’t it?”

—*Ram's Horn* (Chicago), Sept., 1896

All of these elements were still in place when Arshaluys Mardigian (renamed Aurora Mardiganian) was put to work in the Selig Polyscope and Near East Relief co-production, *Auction of Souls*. This film, in keeping with many representational strategies of reports and illustrations, highlighted the religious dimension of the violence. It called attention to the Christian identity of the victim group in a plea for Western (and ostensibly Christian) identification with and sympathy for this foreign and imperiled community. Plus, the familiarity of Christian iconography provided an easy hook for moral engagement and outrage.

Similarly, Orientalism offered a lens through which the West could imagine the East as exotic and threatening. Here, too, there was already a set of images and tropes people could draw upon. Indeed, images of rapacious sheiks and their harems were common in popular culture at the time, including in Selig Polyscope's 1908 film *In the Sultan's Power: Auction of Souls* relied on these associations to tell its story.

These aesthetic motifs were used to pique interest and concern and translate complicated foreign affairs into a simpler narrative. At the same time, they fed ethnic hatred and led to multiple erasures. This is true of the stories of Arab assistance in the Syrian desert and the horrors of Mardigian's own experience, transformed into a titillating story of adventure.



Advocacy

Mardigian’s journey to the United States was facilitated by the American Committee for Syrian and Armenian Relief. This organization was formed by means of an arrangement between the U.S. State Department and the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, a Protestant Evangelist organization and the largest American missionary operation in Turkey. It was established to launch an emergency drive for the collection of funds and ultimately became one of the first global humanitarian projects. Affirmed by an act of Congress as Near East Relief in 1919 (and still in operation today as the [Near East Foundation](#)), the organization was crucial to raising awareness and money in the United States while administering aid overseas. That work was represented and made possible by the 30-million-dollar fundraising campaign that *Auction of Souls* supplemented both as a book and then as a film—all with Mardigian’s help. In the United States, the film premiered as *Ravished Armenia* in February 1919 in the Grand Ballroom at the Plaza Hotel in New York, then launched a 21-city tour with ticket prices ranging from two and a half to ten dollars. Screenings took place in theaters and hotel ballrooms and often featured speakers, special luncheons, and performances. Ambassadors and state and military officials would introduce the film and substantiate its claims. As the documentary shows, Mardigian also toured with the film, making numerous appearances where she was billed as the “Joan of Arc of Armenia.” Screenings were also held in the United Kingdom and France and at missions around the world.

In his account of Near East Relief and its work, American missionary and chairman of the organization James L. Barton wrote of the importance of publicity: “The task before the Committee was to make the need for relief in the Near East known to the people of America, to secure the confidence and approval of the organization itself, and then to persuade by letter, personal solicitation, or through organizational channels” the contribution of funds. He continued that “newspapers were of invaluable assistance” in the distribution of “word pictures.” The religious press (including Catholic and Jewish newspapers) helped distribute articles prepared by Near East Relief. The organization also developed a monthly magazine for its contributors that contained photographs, reports, and praise regarding the work done so far. These efforts kept the crisis in the public eye while maintaining a donor base.

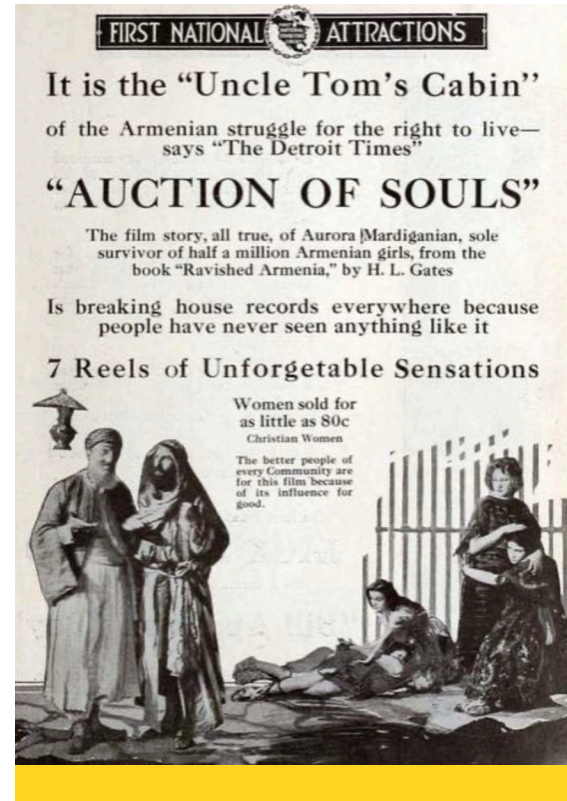
Images were also a part of the publicity work. Posters, some of which are replicated in *Aurora’s Sunrise*, depicted orphans and women holding children with evocative statements like “Give or We Perish” or “Hunger Knows No Armistice.” Child victims were foregrounded in these campaigns, as was the responsive figure of America. These images reached the public through multi-tiered distribution campaigns, posters, and advertising space often donated by agencies.



It was in this context that *Ravished Armenia* was released. Grace Carley Harriman, a socialite and philanthropist who is depicted in *Aurora's Sunrise*, saw film as a valuable part of the humanitarian campaign. Before a screening she explained:

The whole purpose of the picture is to acquaint America with ravished Armenia ... to visualize conditions so that there will be no misunderstanding in the mind of any one about the terrible things which have transpired.... It is proposed that before this campaign of information is complete, as many adults as possible shall know the story of Armenia, and the screen was selected as the medium because it reached the millions, where the printed word reaches the thousands.

The success of *Auction of Souls* inspired more film projects. Barton brokered an arrangement between missionaries and news media. In exchange for access, newsreel photographers helped to produce short films under the imprimatur of Near East Relief. The films showed orphanages and refugee camps and provided information about local campaigns, letting audiences know where they could donate their money or labor.



These films were shown widely in schools and churches and at public gatherings. Simultaneously, the relief organization explored commercial venues, such as movie theaters, and implemented celebrity-based publicity. In 1924, the group enlisted child actor Jackie Coogan in a national milk collection campaign. A viewer who attended the cinema to see one of Coogan's films was required to donate a can of condensed or evaporated milk in addition to buying a ticket. James Barton's *Story of Near East Relief* recounts one of these aid shipments, "The milk was collected, packed and shipped to New York. Coogan himself accompanied the shipload of contributed milk to Greece." Many of these trips were documented on film, in such movies as *Jackie Coogan in Athens*, which showed him interacting with children at relief sites and orphanages. Already a vehicle for selling pictures, Coogan became a vehicle for selling the campaign.

This is only a tiny part of North East Relief's massive global campaign. Visual media, the fusion of entertainment and education, grassroots engagement, and the role of celebrity—both Mardigian as a "real-life celebrity" and Jackie Coogan as child star—were prominent.

A Forgotten Genocide

Much has been done in Turkey to erase and deny the reality of the Armenian genocide, motivated primarily by the desire to “prove” two things: that Western Armenia has never been the natural homeland of Armenians, and that Turks have never committed genocide. For instance, in the immediate aftermath of the violence, Young Turk leader Talaat Pasha refuted claims of organized killing. When Pasha faced possible action from the League of Nations, he ascribed the mass death to Armenian bandits and local officials. Despite all the attention the Armenians garnered from humanitarian responses to the Wilsonian Armenian mandate — a plan President Wilson developed to establish an Armenian state in the Near East which was rejected by congress in 1920 — the American desire for action was soon supplanted by a desire to maintain strategic alliances in the face of an oncoming war.

Denial continued in what Anush Hovanissian has called a “cultural genocide,” i.e., an attempt to eradicate the memory of Armenians in Turkey. This includes the misrepresentation of Armenian history, the deliberate neglect of Armenian monuments, the renaming of Armenian places (Ararat is now called Afei Dagi, for instance), and prosecution of those teaching Armenian



This image appeared in Henry Morgenthau’s memoir *Ambassador Morgenthau’s Story* with the caption “Those who fell by the wayside” and appears in *Aurora’s Sunrise*.

language and history. As early as 1920, Turkish general Kâzım Karabekir declared that in Turkey, “There has been neither an Armenia nor a territory inhabited by Armenians.” Almost a century later, the Turkish penal code criminalized statements claiming an Armenian genocide. Under that statute, Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink was prosecuted in 2006, as was Nobel laureate novelist Orhan Pamuk in 2021. Dink was assassinated in 2007 by a Turkish ultranationalist.

This cultural erasure has been felt beyond Turkey’s borders. When *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh* (1933), Franz Werfel’s popular novel of Armenian resistance during the massacres, was optioned by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer in 1934, then Turkish ambassador Münir Ertegün Bey informed the U.S. State Department that the production of this film could have unfortunate repercussions on diplomatic relations with Turkey and other sympathetic nations. As the State Department pressured the Hays Office to quash the film, letter writing and print media campaigns launched by the embassy threatened an international boycott of not only all Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer films, but American films altogether. Production on the film ceased immediately.

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DISCUSSION PROMPTS

The discussion prompts, which follow specific chapters of the film, are an invitation to dialogue. Please select discussion questions that are relevant to your community.

Starting The Conversation

Immediately after the film, you may want to give people a few quiet moments to reflect on what they have seen. You could pose a general question (examples below) and give people some time to themselves to jot down or think about their answers before opening the discussion. Alternatively, you could ask each participant to share their thoughts with a partner before starting a group discussion.

The Importance of Memory: *Aurora's Sunrise* ends with a statement about the importance of remembering historical events, especially injustices.

- Why is it important to remember historical events?
- How do we carry memory forward?
- What role do you think films play in establishing and perpetuating memory? What are some potential benefits and drawbacks in allowing films to play this role?

What Makes a Documentary?

Aurora's Sunrise uses multiple forms of media to illustrate Arshaluys Mardigian's experiences during and after the Armenian genocide. These include footage from *Auction of Souls*, video of interviews with Mardigian over the years, and animation.

- Do you see some of these types of media as more accurate or true to reality? What makes one more truthful than the others?
- Do you see animation as antithetical to or in keeping with the goals of documentary filmmaking? Why?
- Why might the filmmakers have opted for animation as a way of telling Mardigian's story?

Advocacy and Popular Culture

Aurora's Sunrise focuses on and uses the film *Auction of Souls*, which was a key part of a larger campaign to draw attention to the plight of Armenians and to raise money. This campaign also included posters, public speakers, and short films promoting the work of Near East Relief, some of which featured child star Jackie Coogan.

- How does *Aurora's Sunrise* utilize or represent these campaign strategies in its own narrative?

- Are some kinds of images or representations more useful than others in encouraging people to act? Why or why not?
- What motives drove the renaming of Arshaluys Mardigian as Aurora Mardiganian? What are the implications and effects of that decision? How might this be related to the depiction of Mardigian and her experiences of genocide in *Auction of Souls*? Is this something we still see today?
- Mardigian reenacted her suffering in her performance in *Auction of Souls*. What do you think that felt like? What struggles do you think other survivors go through when asked to revisit their trauma for the purposes of a documentary or activist campaign?
- *Aurora's Sunrise* chronicles the grueling experience of making and touring with a film. Can an activist campaign exploit those it is trying to help? How can this be avoided?
- How do the events depicted in *Aurora's Sunrise* connect to contemporary uses of popular culture and celebrity in the service of advocacy? How have things changed? How have they stayed the same?
- If you were going to make a similar campaign today, what kinds of media would you use? How and why?

Resources

[Armenian National Institute](#)

Founded in 1997, this Washington, D.C.-based not-for-profit organization is dedicated to the study and affirmation of the Armenian genocide through research, education, and outreach. This website offers many resources, including photographs and digital scans of key documents.

[Egoyan/Auroras 2007-15](#)

In 2007, Canadian filmmaker Atom Egoyan mounted the multi-projection installation Auroras, which shows seven women of culturally diverse backgrounds telling Arshaluys Mardigian's story. This multiplication both invokes the way Near East Relief used lookalikes when Mardigian became exhausted and speaks to the many similar stories throughout history and the impossibility of hearing or recording them all. Marc Roussel recorded a trip through this installation, which is available [here](#).

[Human Rights Watch Film Festival](#)

Founded by the international NGO Human Rights Watch, this festival speaks to the ongoing conviction that film provides a way to bear witness to distant suffering and to bring people closer together and mobilize change. Screenings take place around the world in this 30-year-old festival.

[The Impact Field Guide & Toolkit](#)

[Doc Society](#) is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to connecting documentaries to global audiences. It has produced a guide to using documentaries in activist campaigns and shares many case studies on its website.

[Near East Foundation](#)

Near East Relief continues to exist today as the NGO Near East Foundation, dedicated to social and economic development in the Middle East, Africa, and the Caucasus.

[Take One Action! Film Directory](#)

The Take One Action Film Festival in the United Kingdom is based on the idea that film is a useful tool for social change. In addition to running screenings, the festival offers this directory of films on a wide range of subjects.

[U.N. Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect](#)

This United Nations website provides resources regarding the work of the office in combating genocide, the history of genocide, and current developments, such as countering hate speech as an incitement to violence.

Credits & Acknowledgments



About the Author, Leshu Torchin

Leshu Torchin is senior lecturer (associate professor) of film studies at the University of St Andrews. She has researched and published widely on the representation of genocide in film and the use of media in activism. She is the author of [Creating the Witness: Documenting Genocide in Film, Video, and the Internet](#) and co-editor of and contributor to [Film Festival Yearbook 4: Film Festivals and Activism](#). Her articles on *The Missing Picture*, filmmaker Rithy Panh's chronicle of his experience during the Cambodian genocide, and *The Look of Silence*, Joshua Oppenheimer's followup to *The Act of Killing*, have appeared in *Film Quarterly*. She has also published in journals, including *American Anthropologist* and *Film & History*, and collections, including [The Routledge Companion to Cinema and Politics](#) and [Anne Frank Unbound: Media, Imagination, Memory](#).

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