



SPRING / SUMMER  
2021

# MGRUBLIAN CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

# FIGHTING FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE DIGITAL SPHERE



Claremont McKenna College remained closed to in-person instruction during the spring 2021 semester. However, students and the Center participated in and sponsored many virtual events raising awareness of human rights across the globe. This issue highlights those events as well as student opportunities, activism, research and more.

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# TRUTH & ACCOUNTABILITY: ETHNIC CLEANSING IN THE MODERN AGE



**Sheila Paylan**  
Human Rights Lawyer



**Raiss Tinmaung**  
Human Rights Activist



**Stephen Smith**  
USC Shoah Foundation

At the end of the fall 2020 semester the Mgrublian Center co-hosted a conversation among prominent human rights experts about current genocides and responsibility for preventing such atrocities. This event was held in recognition of Human Rights Day and the UN International Day of Commemoration and Dignity of the Victims of the Crime of Genocide and the Prevention of this Crime. Other sponsoring organizations included the Armenian General Benevolent Union, the Promise Institute at UCLA, and the USC Shoah Foundation. The event was moderated by Professor Wendy Lower, director of the Mgrublian Center and Geoffrey Robertson, Queens Counsel and human rights barrister, gave opening remarks before the panel discussion began.

Panelists included: Kate Mackintosh, the inaugural executive director of the Promise Institute for Human Rights at UCLA School of Law; Raiss Tinmaung, an activist with the Rohingya Human Rights Network; Sheila Paylan, a human rights lawyer who works with the Armenian government; and Stephen Smith, professor of religion and executive director of the USC Shoah Foundation. This well attended program occurred as Armenians in Azerbaijan were forced to flee from Nagorno-Karabakh and thus the discussion focused on the definitions of ethnic cleansing and relevant cases of today.



**Kate Macintosh**  
Promise Institute for Human Rights, UCLA School of Law

# FILM SCREENING: SONGS OF SOLOMON

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SONGS OF SOLOMON

On January 22, 2021, the Mgrublian Center co-hosted a screening of the iconic film *Songs of Solomon*, as well as a conversation with its director Arman Nshanian. The film follows a brave Turkish woman who at a time of severe persecution, risks her own life and the life of her family to save her best friend who is hunted down because of her Armenian heritage. This epic portrayal takes place in Constantinople (1881-1915), and leads the audience on an emotional journey to the last concert given by Archbishop Solomon, also known as Komitas.

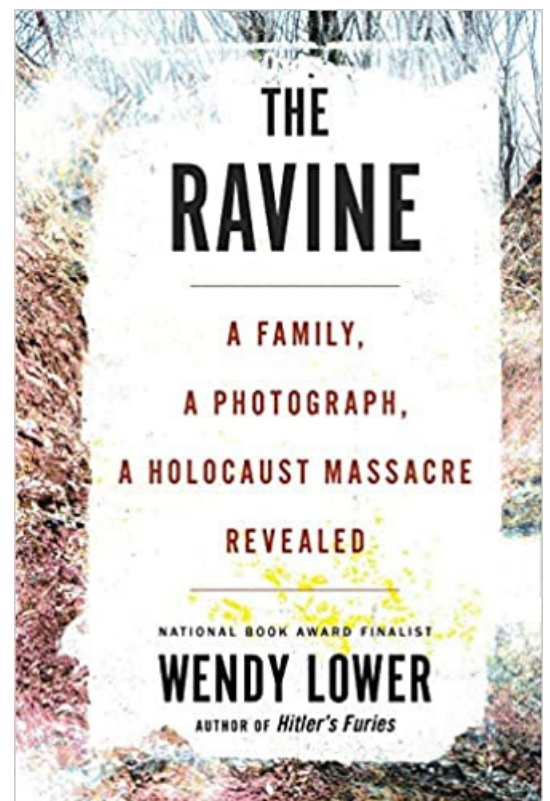
Following the screening, the event featured a conversation between director Nshanian and film critic Carlos Aguilar who discussed the making of the film and its message about the dangerous effects of intolerance. The event was co-hosted by the Promise Institute for Human Rights at UCLA School of Law, the Promise Armenian Institute at UCLA, and the Armenian General Benevolent Union.



# THE RAVINE: A FAMILY, A PHOTOGRAPH, A HOLOCAUST MASSACRE REVEALED

In the early spring of 2021, Professor Wendy Lower, director of the Mgrublian Center for Human Rights, released her new book: *The Ravine: A Family, a Photograph, a Holocaust Massacre*. Inspired by a photograph of a family during the Holocaust, Lower carefully researched the history behind the image and explored the idea of family in Nazi ideology.

In 2009, Wendy Lower, author of *Hitler's Furies*, was shown a photograph at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. The image depicts the murder of a mother and her children in a small Ukrainian village during WWII. While documentation of the Holocaust is vast, there are virtually no images of Jewish families at the actual moment of murder, in this case by German officials and Ukrainian collaborators. In the image, a Ukrainian shooter's rifle is inches from a woman's head, obscured in a cloud of smoke; she is bending forward, holding the hand of a barefooted little boy, and cradling another small child against her body.



Wendy Lower's forensic and archival detective work—in Ukraine, Germany, Slovakia, Israel, and the United States—recovered layers of detail concerning the open-air, public massacres in Ukraine. The identities of mother and children, of the killers—and, remarkably, of the Slovakian photographer who openly took the image, as a secret act of resistance—are dramatically uncovered. Finally, in the hands of this experienced scholar, a single image unlocks a new understanding of the place of the family unit in the ideology of Nazi genocide. *The Ravine* was published in February 2021 by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt and was featured in the *New York Times*, *Times of London*, *El Pais*, *Der Spiegel*, and other media outlets.

# REMEMBERING EVA FLEISCHNER, FOUNDING ADVISORY BOARD MEMBER



**Eva Fleischner, 1925-2020**

On March 10, Professor Emeritus John Roth gave a virtual lecture eulogizing Eva Fleischner. The event was sponsored and held by the National Catholic Center for Holocaust Education at Seton Hill University.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L7Pbklw6pGA>

Dr. Eva Fleischner, a loyal and distinguished member of the Mgrublian Center's founding advisory board, died in Claremont on July 6, 2020, one day before her 95th birthday.

Born in Vienna in 1925 to a Jewish father and Catholic mother, Fleischner fled the Nazis to England and eventually settled in the United States in 1943. She would go on to become a well-known scholar of Jewish-Christian relations, first attending Radcliffe College where she graduated magna cum laude in 1946, then earning her doctorate at Marquette University with a dissertation on "The Impact of the Holocaust on German Christian Theology since 1945." She taught religion and philosophy at Montclair State University (1972–1991).

Fleischner published with distinction on topics such as teaching the Shoah, women who rescued Jews during the Holocaust, and relations between Christians and Jews. Her publications include "'Who Am I?' The Struggle for Religious Identity of Jewish Children Hidden by Christians during the Shoah," a chapter in *Gray Zones: Ambiguity and Compromise in the Holocaust and Its Aftermath*, the 2005 volume based on the Center's first international conference, February 5–7, 2004.

In 1999–2000, Fleischner was one of six Catholic and Jewish scholars—including Gerald Fogarty, Michael Marrus, John Morley, Bernard Suhecky, and Robert Wistrich—who served on the International Catholic-Jewish Historical Commission, which examined and reported about the available records on Pope Pius XII and the Holocaust. The Commission's work laid early groundwork for the fuller 2020 opening of the Vatican archive's files on Pius XII's wartime actions. Fleischner generously donated to the Center her copies of the documents supplied to the Commission by the Vatican. They are housed in the Center's Roth Library.

# REPRESENTATION AND RESPONSIBLE LEADERSHIP



**Candace Valenzuela '06**

On March 23rd, the Mgrublian Center, along with the Women and Leadership Alliance, the Berger Institute for Individual and Social Development, and the Kravis Leadership Institute, cosponsored CMC alumna Candace Valenzuela's presentation at the Athenaeum: *Representation and Responsible Leadership*. Her talk, which was the keynote of the 2021 Women and Leadership Workshop, centered around the political process and the importance of representation. Ms. Valenzuela emphasized that government leaders should always strive to work directly for the people in their communities. Below is a short excerpt of Candace's many life achievements.

Candace Valenzuela '06 has devoted her life to fighting for opportunities for others, especially for access to education. She first ran for her local school board to improve Texas schools, becoming the first Latina and first African-American woman to serve on the Carrollton-Farmers Branch school board. In 2020, running on a platform to stand up for all Texas children and their families, Valenzuela was the Democratic nominee for Congress in Texas's 24th District. She is an advocate for greater fiscal transparency and expansion of STEM education, vocational training, and coding academies in district schools.

The daughter of U.S. Army veterans, Valenzuela was born in El Paso, Texas, into a family with generations of military service. Her great-grandfather came to the United States from Mexico, eventually fighting in World War I. Subsequently, her grandfather fought in World War II. She often says that her father once jumped out of airplanes for a living, while her mother fixed them. Her lived experiences motivate her views and political passions. The first in her family to graduate from college, Valenzuela attended CMC on a full scholarship. Appreciative of such an opportunity, she is determined to fight for access to education for all.

In addition to her public Athenaeum presentation, Candace also met with students and answered their questions about her CMC experiences, her political career and her work/family balance.

# PETRI DISH, U.S.A.

It all started in Professor Derik Smith's class: American Prison Texts. Matt Leder '22, then a sophomore at CMC, had always been interested in criminal justice and racism and taking Professor Smith's class was a perfect opportunity to further his knowledge. Then, in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic took the entire world by storm, forcing many colleges to shift to a virtual format, including CMC. Professor Smith took the opportunity to highlight the high numbers of COVID cases in prisons across the U.S., making them essentially, "petri dishes" for the virus the subsequent illness it creates.

Leder decided to further investigate this phenomenon. As a previous Research Fellow with the Mgrublian Center his freshman year (2018-19), Leder had already developed skills as a documentary film maker, spending his fellowship creating a documentary featuring Holocaust survivors living in Los Angeles. With subsequent support from the Gould Center, he utilized those skills to create his latest documentary that would expose the unbearable living conditions in prisons which have arisen during COVID times. He interviewed many people to get a full scope of how the pandemic worsened an already broken system: a grandfather, incarcerated in a Louisiana prison, died of COVID-19 two days before his scheduled release; a correctional officer was reprimanded for wearing a mask; in a low security prison of about 200 people, only 8 tested negative for COVID-19. Leder's film, **Petri Dish, USA**, highlights these stories and other heartbreaking statistics facing the prison community.

Matt Leder hopes that by sharing these stories he will highlight how significantly the pandemic impacted prisons, and showcase just how broken the American justice system is.

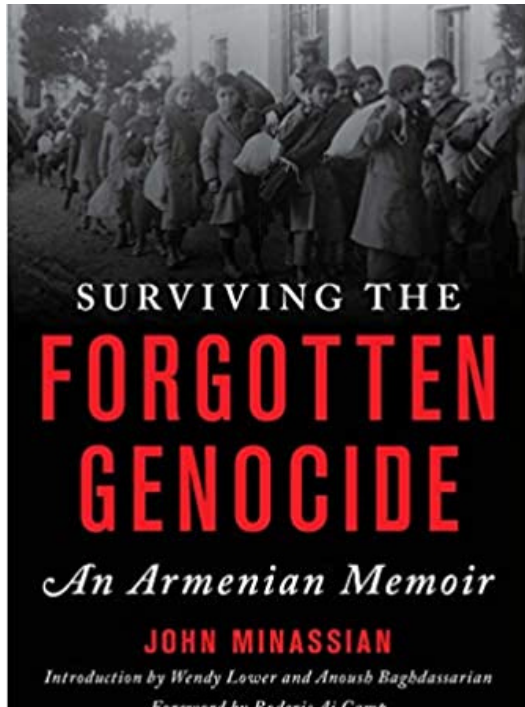
To see more of his amazing work, please check out his Instagram: @petridish\_usa



Matt interviewing James Smith, an expert in epidemiology from the UNC School of Public Health



# ANNUAL MGRUBLIAN CENTER LECTURE ON ARMENIAN STUDIES



On April 19th, the Center's annual lecture on Armenian Studies featured the publication of the memoir of Armenian genocide survivor, John Minassian. The highly attended event was hosted via the CMC virtual Athenaeum with all audience members receiving a copy of the memoir. Below is a summary of book.

The twentieth century was an era of genocide, which started with the Turkish destruction of more than one million Armenian men, women, and children—a modern process of total, violent erasure that began in 1895 and exploded under the cover of the First World War. John Minassian (grandfather of CMC Professor Roderic Camp) lived through this as a young man, witnessing the murder of his kin, concealing his identity as an orphan and laborer in Syria, and eventually immigrating to the U.S. to start his life anew. A rare testimony of a survivor of the Armenian genocide, one of just a handful of accounts in English, Minassian's memoir is breathtaking in its vivid portraits of Armenian life and culture and poignant in its sensitive recollections of the many people who harmed and helped him. His memoir documents the wartime policies and behavior of Ottoman officials and their collaborators; the roles played by foreign armies and American missionaries; and the ultimate collapse of the empire.

This second edition (pictured above) was published in March 2020 by Rowman & Littlefield and was the combined effort of many CMC faculty, staff and former students who worked tirelessly to edit, annotate, and add context to Minassian's journey. The virtual Athenaeum event was very well received and helped connect the Center to additional survivor families and museum collections and is the beginning of a new research effort to preserve testimony from additional genocide survivors and their descendants.

# SENIOR AWARDS: HONORING THE CLASS OF '21



**Jaelin Kinney**



**Tallan Donine**

The Center congratulates all of the graduates from the class of '21, for persevering through the many challenges posed by the campus shutdown and the ongoing pandemic. They are to be commended for their dedication, creativity, and resilience and we wish them all the best as they start their post-CMC journeys. As we do each year, we also want to celebrate a few very special students who have shown an ongoing commitment to human rights, Holocaust, and genocide studies, throughout their tenure at CMC.

## **2021 Awards**

### **Jaelin Kinney: Best Thesis in Human Rights**

Thesis: *"The Cyber Age of Authoritarianism: A Comparative Case Study on Chinese Censorship and Syrian and Venezuelan Digital Authoritarianism"*

Jaelin will attend law school in the fall at Loyola Marymount while working part-time as an auditor for Afirm.

### **Tallan Donine: Best Overall Student in the Human Rights, Holocaust, and Genocide Studies sequence & Elbaz Family Postgraduate Fellow 2021**

Tallan will spend her one year Elbaz Family postgraduate fellowship at the Simon-Skjoldt Center of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. She will primarily conduct research for the Center's "Lessons Learned in Preventing and Responding to Atrocities" project aimed at reviewing previous policy responses to mass atrocities in order to improve future decision-making. She will also provide assistance for the Center's mass atrocities Early Warning Project and aid other internal processes.

# SUMMER INTERNS

Each summer the Center funds students to intern with international and domestic human rights organizations. Student interns engage in the field of human rights by working for organizations that promote human rights or raise awareness about related issues; undertaking research for a scholarly project (including senior theses); or developing an independent program in a field related to human rights studies. Students gain practical experience and knowledge about the ways that political and economic policies and leadership must be combined to understand and overcome human rights abuses and genocide in today's world. These experiences are invaluable to the overall education our students receive and also often lead to future employment or research opportunities.

As part of the summer internship program, the Center has established partnerships with leading organizations including Human Rights Watch (NY), Amnesty International, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, Claremont Canopy, the Enough Project, the POLIN museum in Warsaw, and the Jewish Museum in Riga, Latvia. Students have the opportunity to secure an internship at one of these partnered sponsors or through their own networks.

## **2021 Summer Interns**

Kristen Lu '24 - ReRooted

Akriti Poudel '23 - ReRooted

Anya Syed '23 - Human Rights Watch (NY)

Athulya Nath '23 - Claremont Canopy

Nisha Singh '23 - Haysbert Moultrie, LLC

Chloe Wibawa '23 - Haysbert Moultrie, LLC

Cristi Cruz '24 - Connecticut Against Gun Violence

Michael Gadinis '24 - Connecticut Against Gun Violence

Alexandra Punishill '24 - Connecticut Against Gun Violence

Yara Ismael '22 - Amnesty International

Shaliya Heard '24 - Kurdish Refugee Relief Foundation

Valentina Gonzalez '23 - Abaunza Group

# FALL 2021 PREVIEW

September 3rd, 11am-1pm: Club & Institute Fair

September 10th, 3-5pm: Mgrublian Center Open House

September 14th, 5:30pm: Intern Welcome Back Dinner

September 30th, 4:15pm: Laleh Ahmad '20 & Jenny Gurev '20: *2020 Elbaz Family Postgraduate Fellowship Presentations*

October 5th, 5:30pm: *Genocide, Covid-19, and Structural Violence*,  
Adam Jones, CMC Athenaeum.

October 12th, 5:30pm: *The Middle East: Hot Topics and Challenges in the Region Today*,  
Hagar Chemali, CMC Athenaeum.

October 22nd, 12-1pm: *Femicide, Human Rights, and New Visions for Feminism in Latin America*, Hillary Hiner & Nayla Vacarezza

November 9th, 5:30pm: *Hitler's Jewish Refugees: Hope and Anxiety in Portugal*,  
Marion Kaplan, CMC Athenaeum.



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For more information, please visit <https://human-rights.cmc.edu/>

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