I. Historical background of Armenia

A. Armenians an ancient middle eastern people existing since 100 A.D. Unique language with distinct letters and grammar.
B. Early connections with Christianity. First nation to adopt Christianity (301 AD). Most are Orthodox Christians.
C. Borders extended from current Republic of Armenia through most of Turkey.

II. Ottoman Empire

A. Ottoman Turks captured Constantinople in 1453, allowing the Armenians to practice Christianity but delegating them to second-class citizenship (millet system)
   1) Extra taxes, limited participation in judicial proceedings, restrictions on property and civil rights
   2) As nationalism spread through Europe in the 1800s, some Armenian intellectuals sought reforms from the Ottoman government, though few demanded independence
B. The Ottoman Sultan (Abdul-Hamid II) responded to requests for Armenian equal rights by ordering massacres
   1) Hamidian Massacres (1894-1896) resulted in 100,000 to 300,000 Armenian deaths and many Armenians fled to Europe and the U.S. Some converted to Islam to stay alive.
   2) Western newspapers and missionaries witnessed the massacres and reported them. Aid for Armenian victims was the first international mission of the American Red Cross
C. Rise of Young Turks (1908) in opposition to rule of the Sultan. Sought to create a modern state. Sultan was overthrown by one group, the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP).

1) Armenians hoped for equal rights, but a pan-Turkish group took control
2) Hamidian supporters massacred 30,000 Armenians in the city of Adana. No punishment for those involved in the massacre
3) The Ottoman Empire lost territory to Russia, which had Armenians in its army. Many Turks feared Armenians might commit traitorous acts.

III. World War I

A. The Ottoman Empire joined World War I in 1914 to oppose Russia.
B. Russia defeated the Ottomans in the winter of 1914-1915. Armenians were blamed for the defeat.
C. Beginning on April 24, 1915 Armenian leaders, intellectuals, and businessmen were executed by the ruling CUP.

1) Armenian women and children were deported to Syria or forced to march south and east.
2) As many as 500,000 (and perhaps 1.5 million) Armenians were killed from 1915 to 1918 and most of those who survived were expelled from the newly established nation of Turkey

IV. International Response

A. Extensive coverage in western news sources such as the New York Times. Children in Britain and the U.S. were told to clean their plates and to "remember the starving Armenians"
B. U.S. officials witnessed and reported atrocities

1) Consul Leslie Davis reported on 10,000 Armenian bodies dumped in a ravine
2) Ambassador Henry Morgenthau met with Ottoman leaders, demanding an explanation for the deportations
C. The Triple Entente (Russia, France, Great Britain) warned the Ottoman Empire in 1915 that it "in view of these new crimes of Turkey against humanity and civilization," the leaders would be held responsible for the massacres
D. The American Near East Relief Committee donated $110 million to Armenian relief

V. Aftermath

A. The three leading CUP members were court-martialed in absentia by Turkish courts for leading the Ottoman Empire into World War I and sentenced to death. At least two were killed by Armenian nationalists.
B. The Treaty of Versailles appointed Commission on Responsibilities and Sanctions which accused several Ottoman officials of "offenses against the laws and
customs of war and the principles of humanity." Those arrested were later exchanged for British prisoners being held in Turkey.

B. Polish lawyer Raphael Lemkin, who coined the phrase *genocide* in 1943, attended the German trial of an Armenian who had assassinated an Ottoman leader. "Why is a man punished when he kills another man? Why is the killing of a million a lesser crime than the killing of a single individual?" Lemkin asked.

C. Turkey has never admitted the Armenian Genocide.

1. Official position: the deportations and killings were not deliberate or governmentally ordered, but were justified because Armenians posed a threat as Russian sympathizers.

2. In 2004 Article 204 made it a criminal offense, punishable by 10 years in prison, to discuss the Armenian Genocide in Turkey.

D. 1989 U.S. Senate proposal to recognize the Armenian Genocide caused Turkey to block the visit of U.S. Navy ships and suspend some U.S. military facilities in Turkey.

E. 2008 Obama campaign promise: "Two years ago, I criticized the Secretary of State for the firing of U.S. Ambassador to Armenia, John Evans, after he properly used the term 'genocide' to describe Turkey's slaughter of thousands of Armenians starting in 1915. … as President I will recognize the Armenian Genocide."