

## Illinois Teachers Learn about the Greek Genocide

On October 15, Dr. Constantine Hatzidimitriou gave the keynote address at the Illinois Council for the Social Studies (ICSS) Annual Conference to an audience of over 120 high school teachers. The ICSS is the state affiliate of the National Council for the Social Studies and this was its annual state conference with over 30 workshops on various topics dealing with the social studies.

Dr. Hatzidimitriou's topic was "The Forgotten Genocide: Teaching Students about Human Rights, Diversity and Historical Thinking." In his introduction, Dr. Hatzidimitriou compared the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires and the former Soviet Union, which discriminated against and frequently persecuted their minorities, with the United States, which traditionally has prided itself as being a nation of immigrants. He asserted that our nation's diversity should, indeed, be viewed as strength rather than a weakness.

After giving a brief description of the Greek Genocide and its connections to that of the Armenians, Dr. Hatzidimitriou focused his comments on the destruction of Smyrna in 1922. Utilizing a power point with numerous primary source materials – including photographs and U.S. State Department documents culled from his own research, he explained the horrific events that occurred while the city burned. Thousands died on the quay while trying to escape the fire. Forcibly separated from the women and children,



Armenian and Greek men were deported to the interior – thousands of them murdered along the way. Despite Turkish denials, eyewitness accounts clearly revealed that Turkish soldiers burned the Armenian, Greek, and European sections of the city.

Although their ships were offshore, European and American powers did nothing to help – even playing music on board in an attempt to silence the screams coming from the burning city. Only after the Turkish leaders gave their approval did these ships evacuate the survivors. Later, the United States intentionally helped to cover-up Turkish responsibility for these terrible crimes, because of the desire to obtain oil leases from the Turkish government.

Dr. Hatzidimitriou's remarks were made even more powerful as he shared his own family's history. His mother and many of her family were among those rescued from the burning city.

Dr. Hatzidimitriou is the Director of School Improvement and Project Director for several Teaching American History grants within the New York City Department of Education. He has written three books, including American Accounts Documenting the Destruction of Smyrna, as well as numerous articles relating to education, Byzantine and Modern Greek history.

Also at the conference, Anastasia Skoupas and Ron Levitsky, educators representing the Pontian Greek Society of Chicago, presented two workshops, "Despair, Death, and Denial – the Armenian, Assyrian, and Greek Genocides." The first workshop offered an introductory history of these genocides. The second discussed effective ways of teaching genocide. Teachers received many classroom materials. In addition, the Pontian Greek Society of Chicago sponsored a table in the Exhibit Hall. Teachers browsing through the Hall stopped to learn more about the Armenian, Assyrian, and Greek Genocides.

On Saturday, November 6, the Pontian Greek Society of Chicago will host its third annual Academic Conference on the Pontian and Anatolian Greek Genocide. The event will take place at the Westin Hotel in Rosemont, IL, from 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. International scholars will present papers on various aspects of this genocide. The conference is free and open to the public (an optional lunch with the presenters is \$30). For more information, contact George Mavropoulos at 630-303-4361 or [gmavropoulos@hotmail.com](mailto:gmavropoulos@hotmail.com). You can also visit [www.pontiangreeks.org](http://www.pontiangreeks.org)