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Is 'The Promise' more a wartime history lesson or love story?

Between 1915 and 1918, the former Ottoman Empire exterminated 1.5 million Armenians living in what is known today as Turkey. Since then, the Turkish government has aggressively repudiated any reference to genocide, preferring to use terms like "war relocation" to describe the mass killings and has punished and suppressed efforts to publicize the carnage.

Due to the strategic importance of Turkey to American interests in the Middle East, U.S. presidents, ambassadors and secretaries of state have avoided using the word "genocide" in connection with these events.

On Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day, April 24, President Donald Trump, following the example of his predecessors, avoided using the G-word by referring to the killings as "one of the worst mass atrocities of the 20th century." (And former UN ambassador Samantha Power tweeted, "I am very sorry that, during our time in office, we in the Obama administration did not recognize the #Armenian Genocide.")

"The Promise" is the first American feature film about the Armenian genocide — although

Turkish backers have produced a competing film called "The Ottoman Lieutenant" to counter its message.

Directed and co-written by Terry George (who also directed "Hotel Rwanda," the award-winning film about the Rwandan genocide), "The Promise" was financed for an estimated \$100 million by the late Armenian-American billionaire studio magnate and casino titan Kirk Kerkorian.

George uses the storyline of an old-fashioned love triangle as a vehicle to convey audiences through war zones, refugee camps and corpse-strewn villages — it becomes the lifeline that pulls us through the barbarity.

The story begins in 1914. Mikael Boghosian (Oscar Isaac) lives in a village of Armenians

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within the borders of the Ottoman Empire. An apothecary who longs to become a doctor, he



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promises to marry a young woman in his village, Maral (Angela Sarafyan), and uses her dowry to pay for medical school.

He moves to the cosmopolitan city of Constantinople to study, where he lives with well-to-do rel-

atives and falls in love with his young cousins' beautiful, Sorbonne-educated, touched-by-tragedy tutor, Ana (Charlotte Le Bon).

Ana's boyfriend Chris (Christian Bale) is an American journalist who writes for The Associated Press and uses the privileges granted him as an American and a member of the press to rescue refugees and publicize Turkish atrocities.

As World War I begins, the German-allied Ottomans view Armenians as a threat. Mykial is "conscripted" and deported to a work camp. Believed to be dead by family and friends, he escapes and flees to his old village where his bride-to-be awaits — and where Chris and Ana will soon arrive with a wagon full of rescued orphans.

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But one can't help but ask: Is "The Promise" the most exquisitely produced and widely distributed educational film in the history of cinema? Or, is it a workmanlike war romance that aspires to be "Dr. Zhivago" but falls short of the mark?

The answer is, both.