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A modern-day cause of the spread of disease is “ethnic cleansing,” forcing an entire group of people to move to a different location. In 1863-1864, the Russians started possibly the first ethnic cleansing in history, forcing the Circassians of southern Russia to move to the Ottoman Empire. The removal of large group of people from their home, concentrating them in holding areas, and then packing them on ships for deportation across the Black Sea led to the rapid spread of disease. (The ships were dubbed “Death Ships” as so many passengers died of disease.)



“The Mountaineers Leave the Aul” by Pyotr Nikolayevich Gruzinsky, 1872

“The Russians conducted the majority of their ethnic cleansing of Circassia between October 1863 and April 1864. Numerous massacres of unarmed men, women and children ensued. Those the Russians spared were driven to the coast in convoys, even peaceful clans to the coast who were willing to submit to any terms. The Russians refused to allow them to take provisions. Many fled to die in their cherished mountains, and unknown thousands died en route to the shore.

Once at the shore, the Circassians were left in the open air without food, water, and often even clothing. Disease and starvation ran rampant....Transportation to Turkey was delayed as Evdokimov quibbled over fees with private contractors, leading to more deaths. Once the survivors arrived in Anatolia they continued to die of disease, starvation and exposure, since the Russians had told the Ottoman government only 50,000 refugees were coming, when in fact it was closer to one million. The Turks were caught unprepared and despite repeated requests the Russians refused to stop the deportation. Throughout the entire process, at least 625,000 people died. About 30,000 were allowed to remain as agricultural advisors, although Evdokimov allowed the Cossacks to harass them in hopes they too would emigrate. As a result, the 1880 Circassian population was lower than it was in 1865.”

Richmond, Walt. “History’s Forgotten Genocide.” *History News Network*. Web. 19 Aug. 2018.