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### The Life of Simon Wiesenthal as Told by the New York Times

Mary Cate Kelleher  
*Salve Regina University*

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The Life of Simon Wiesenthal as Told by the *New York Times*

By  
Mary Cate Kelleher  
ENG 490/02

Prepared for  
Dr. Donna Harrington-Lueker  
English Department

Pell Scholars Honors Program  
Salve Regina University

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On September 21, 2005 *The New York Times* ran a front page article declaring the death of acclaimed Nazi-Hunter Simon Wiesenthal. The story, written by award-winning *New York Times* journalist Ralph Blumenthal, functioned both as an obituary and as a tribute to the late Holocaust survivor's life. In it, Wiesenthal's forty years in the public eye, filled with accomplishments and disappointments, controversy and criticism, encouragement and at times nonchalance, were honored nobly. Between the years of 1963 and 2003 *The New York Times* published seven-hundred thirty-one articles mentioning either Wiesenthal or the Center named for him in Los Angeles. Studying Wiesenthal's life as portrayed by these articles, one sees him evolve from a virtual unknown to an activist worthy of the Nobel Peace Prize.

*The New York Times*, having the reputation that it does, is capable of representing not only the social, political and economic states of the United States but also that of the world. Laurel Leff quotes *Time Magazine* in her book *Buried by the Times*: "What Harvard is to U.S. education, what the House of Morgan has been to U.S. finance, *The New York Times* is to U.S. journalism" (9). She goes on to describe its dedication to foreign news: "*The Times* made more of a commitment to foreign news than any other American newspaper. At the outbreak of World War II, *The Times* had more than 30 correspondents in Europe...In 1941, *The Times* was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for 'the public educational value of its foreign news report.' The 'precedent-setting' prize was made for 'a supreme journalistic achievement'"(9).

Given the nature of Wiesenthal's work, the effect that the media can have on a public figure's persona and the unpredictability of the interests of society, I studied Simon Wiesenthal's life as depicted by *The New York Times* because I had access to the

Historical *New York Times* database. Using the database I researched every archived article mentioning Wiesenthal and the Center in Los Angeles.

Through the study of these articles, three stages emerge as landmarks of Wiesenthal's public life. The first stage, the Nazi-hunting period which lasted through the 1970s, takes Wiesenthal from an unknown survivor of the Holocaust to a heroic figure with two kinds of articles typecasting him: he was either portrayed as a man with a mission, hell-bent on revenge; or he was a courageous victim who overcame the odds to bring justice to an unkind world. It was during this time that Wiesenthal most actively sought out and arrested war criminals. In the second stage we see Wiesenthal the pop-culture icon, as documentaries, made-for-TV movies and HBO specials about the Holocaust are produced in response to society's rising global awareness in the '80s. Several of these films received acclaim while others were criticized for trivializing a serious event. Given his new-found fame, even Wiesenthal was not immune to the trials and tribulations that come along with being a celebrity. Graeme Turner says in his book *Understanding Celebrity* that, "the celebrity may have achieved things that suggest they 'deserve' their eminence, but that is not going to protect that individual from the celebrity process, nor affect how it actually operates over time" (19). As a result of this process Wiesenthal's integrity is questioned when minor media wars with other public figures such as Kurt Waldheim occur during political controversy. The third stage, beginning in the early to mid-'90s, saw Wiesenthal fade into the background as the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles stepped into the spotlight as an organization aggressively fighting for human rights and promoting tolerance. From this time until his death in 2005

Wiesenthal is respected theoretically but represents an icon of the past rather than a contemporary hero.

To study the life of Wiesenthal through the *Times* articles written about him requires a bit of background. To understand his chosen line of work one must know about his past and the events leading up to that critical moment when he walked into the war crimes office at Mauthausen concentration camp. One might expect to find that the man that is represented by the media is quite different from the man Wiesenthal describes himself to be.

Always a very private man, Simon Wiesenthal wrote several books but mostly pertaining to his work and his role as a public figure. In his 1989 publication *Justice, Not Vengeance*, Wiesenthal writes: “I am married, I have a daughter, I have grandchildren – they mean everything to me, but they are of no interest to the general public. Of interest alone is my life in relation to Nazism: I have survived the Holocaust and I have tried to preserve the memory of the dead...It is solely in this function, as a witness, that I write now” (Wiesenthal 1). It is for this reason that he commissioned his close friend Peter Michael Lingens to write the first chapter which functions as a profile of Wiesenthal’s more personal life.

Wiesenthal was born on December 31, 1908 in Buchach, located in the central region of Galicia, where Jews represented the majority of the population. As a result, while Jews in other parts of Eastern Europe had grown accustomed to being “at the bottom of the pile,” Wiesenthal was raised to have a deep pride in his Jewish heritage, making the humiliation suffered later on during the Holocaust more unbearable than the physical pain (2).

Wiesenthal's father was a successful commodity dealer who traded in sugar ("Simon Wiesenthal: The Man"). He died on the Russian front in World War I and Wiesenthal fled Buchach with his mother and brother to Vienna for a short time before returning two years later. The town was constantly being overrun, and during a brief occupation by the Ukrainian cavalry a drunken soldier cut Wiesenthal's thigh right through to the bone with his saber. He was twelve years old (Wiesenthal "Justice" 6).

As a teenager Wiesenthal attended the Gymnasium where he met and fell in love with Cyla Müller, whom he would later marry. He spent the next four years at the Czech Technical University in Prague where he studied architecture. In 1936 he and Müller were married and he opened an architectural office specializing in handsome residencies (Wiesenthal "Murderers" 26). The Nazis marched into Lvov in 1941 and Wiesenthal was still able to work as an architect for a short time. As the German occupation intensified, however, all the Jews were forced to move into the ghetto. During the move, they could only bring what they were able to carry. Wiesenthal remembers himself and his wife being directed into forced labor, while his mother looked after their household (Pick 31).

In the summer of 1942 Wiesenthal's mother was picked up by the Nazis while he and his wife were working. Wiesenthal was haunted by his mother's death throughout his life. He remembers:

My only hope is that my mother died quickly, before she reached Belzec, the extermination camp to which she was being taken, and that she was spared the march to the gas chamber. She had a bad heart. It was 23 August 1942. That date, for me, signifies my mother's death. She was sixty-three. Many people have lost their mother – through illness or old

age, but by natural causes. Such people can bury their mother and shed tears at the funeral; they can grieve by the grave, and be close to her. The Nazis robbed me of that possibility. My mother's grave has become a part of me (32).

Wiesenthal and his wife lost eighty-nine family members in the Holocaust, and even Wiesenthal's survival was the result of a succession of miracles (Wiesenthal "Justice" 7).

When Wiesenthal was first arrested on July 6, 1941, he was found hiding in a cellar. He was taken to the Brygidki prison where all the Jews were lined up facing a wall, each standing next to a wooden box. A Ukrainian began shooting from the left while two others put the bodies into the wooden boxes and dragged them away. The shooting stopped ten yards from Wiesenthal. Soon after he was recognized by a Polish guard whom he used to employ and who helped him escape (Wiesenthal "Justice" 8).

In 1942 he and his wife moved into the ghetto and began work at the Janowska concentration camp. They worked in railway repair, where Wiesenthal made contact with Polish resistance fighters who agreed to provide his wife with false papers to escape in return for the plans of the railway station. He didn't see his wife again until several months after the war had ended (9).

Meanwhile, Wiesenthal painted swastikas and slogans at the railway shop under the supervision of two Nazis who were becoming critical of Hitler's movement and saw to it that the Jews were treated fairly. In 1943 Wiesenthal and three others were chosen to be executed in honor of Hitler's birthday, and of all the men lined up before the "tube" where their bodies would fall after being shot; he was the only one to survive. His Nazi supervisors at the railway station had sent for him to be brought back for a special task.

This event had two profound impacts on Wiesenthal's life. First, he was guilt-ridden over his survival and it was this guilt that inspired much of his work after the war. Second, it influenced his idea of collective guilt. He has said to his friend Heinrich Guenther, one of the Nazis who helped to ensure his survival: "You are living proof that it was possible to survive the Third Reich with clean hands. You are proof that there is no such thing as collective guilt" (10).

In 1943 the guards helped Wiesenthal escape and he stayed with friends, hiding under the floorboards of their home during raids. On April 15, he was found and arrested for the third time. Tired of running Wiesenthal made his first suicide attempt by cutting his wrists with a razor blade (11). He made two more attempts later on, once with poison and another time by hanging (Farnsworth SM11), but the Nazis treated him so that he could be executed according to regulations. Not long afterwards an aircraft exploded nearby and the pandemonium that followed allowed Wiesenthal to join a group of Jews who were being deported, and he wound up back at the Janowska concentration camp (Wiesenthal "Justice" 11).

Recognized by the camp commandant, Wiesenthal was greeted with cordiality and ordered: "Get off to your hut! No work for you, and you'll have double rations" (12). Towards the end of the war Wiesenthal and thirty-four other survivors were brought to Buchenwald concentration camp and then to Mauthausen. By this time he weighed only 110 pounds and he was placed in the death bloc, where he remained until the camp was liberated by the Americans on May 5, 1945 (13).

The Americans set up a "war crimes" unit at the camp while they helped the survivors get back on their feet where they documented prisoner testimony and began



building cases against the more notorious of the Nazis. Wiesenthal's career as a Nazi-hunter began almost immediately, when he stumbled into this unit of the camp command to make a complaint. He had been slapped across the face by Kazimierz Rusinek, a former inmate who had taken over part of the command, and Wiesenthal claims that this particular blow hurt him more than any other received by SS men over the previous years. He said: "Now the war is over, and the Jews are still being beaten" (13). Rusinek was made to apologize publicly for his actions. Wiesenthal accepted his apology but refused to shake his hand. Rusinek went on to become communist Poland's Vice - Minister of Culture and a leading anti-Semitic propagandist (Levy 69).

Wiesenthal, impressed by what he had seen in the war crimes unit, returned a few days later to offer his services. He was ordered to "take it easy for a while and come back when" he gained some weight. The Americans encouraged him to return to his former profession after he regained his health, but Wiesenthal felt he had nothing left to return to and applied to the war crimes unit. His excellent memory and testimony earned him an acceptance and he was sent out with an Army captain to patrol the countryside and make arrests (71). Wiesenthal also joined the Jewish Committee, where he became vice-chairman. It eventually became the Jewish Central Committee and its function was to gather survivors' testimonies and make lists of names of the people who passed through (73).

In 1947 Wiesenthal left the war crimes unit and opened the Jewish Historical Documentation Center in Linz. He kept the lists he had made when working with the Americans and made files organized by geographic location, the names of criminals and the names of witnesses (80). The Documentation Center began with a network of helpers

who were soon to disperse as they got their deportation papers, but Wiesenthal's center quickly gained a reputation that it maintained for decades as a place where one could get a response (Wiesenthal "Justice" 20).

...the reputation lived on: the knowledge that in Austria there was a man called Wiesenthal who was searching for Nazi criminals. And that one could write to him. And that there would be a reply. In that sense a worldwide network continues to exist, far greater than the one his adversaries accuse him of: all victims and opponents of the Nazi regime, wherever they may live – from Israel to South America, from Poland to Turkey – are potential colleagues of Simon Wiesenthal; all they need do is write to him. The address on their letters, frequently, is not much more than 'Wiesenthal, Austria' (20).

Wiesenthal's photographic memory made him an incredible investigator, and his personal experiences made him not only an empathetic listener but a great judge of character. Biographer Alan Levy wrote:

All good criminal investigators (and journalists) need this irrational mystical identification: they have to be convinced of a trail in order to follow it...Soundness does not consist in rejecting intuition but in verifying it is correct. Wiesenthal was capable of doing this to an almost incredible degree. In over forty years of searching for Nazi culprits there has only been one case when his 'client' was able in court to prove that he had made an error... (16)

Years of hunting Nazis earned Wiesenthal both criticism and respect throughout the world. His quest to bring every Nazi guilty of war crimes to justice evolved over the years from seeking justice to ensuring that new generations of children were educated about the Holocaust and taught universal acceptance of those around them. In his book *Justice Not Vengeance* Wiesenthal writes, "But we, the survivors have an obligation not only to the dead but also to future generations: we must pass on to them our experiences, so they can learn from them. Information is defense" (351).

It is with this in mind that I began to look at his activities as portrayed by *The New York Times*. It may be considered common knowledge that in the world of celebrity a lot of the rules change. Celebrities are built up only to be torn back down; their words are reproduced out of context and wind up communicating something entirely different from what they meant. In honest journalism no misrepresentation is intentional, but it's no surprise that Wiesenthal's life in the public eye did not always represent the ideals that he so adamantly stands for in his autobiographies.

Simon Wiesenthal first appears in *The New York Times* on November 21, 1963 for identifying former Nazi Karl Silberbauer, who was responsible for the arrest of Anne Frank and her family. Not yet known as the "Nazi Hunter" or for his role in the capture of Adolf Eichmann, which dominated the paper in the earlier '60s, his credentials were brief and somewhat cryptic: "Silberbauer was identified by a Jewish engineer, Simon Wiesenthal, head of the Jewish Documentation Center in Vienna" ("Sleuthing" 41). The one-page article then goes on to describe how Wiesenthal found the information that led to Silberbauer's arrest. The headline referred to Wiesenthal as a "Sleuth," and this title stuck for the in-depth profile that was done in February of 1964.

Press coverage of Adolf Eichmann's arraignment and trial was chaotic. Known as one of the most wanted Nazi war criminals for heading the Gestapo's Jewish Section and held responsible for the deaths of six million European Jews, every move during his trial was recorded and every detail was questioned. Every party responsible for his capture was celebrated, but Wiesenthal was not mentioned as having had a part in all of it until *New York Times* foreign correspondent Clyde Farnsworth introduced him to the world in his article "Sleuth With 6 Million Clients" in 1964. With the frenzy of the Eichmann trial having come to an end and the upcoming deadline of the twenty-year statutes of limitation laws in Austria and West Germany that would shield any remaining Nazi war criminals from being prosecuted, Wiesenthal emerged as an unsung hero. The atrocities of the Holocaust were still fresh in everyone's mind from the Nuremberg and Eichmann trials and Wiesenthal was portrayed here as a great man who rose above the negativity and set out to bring justice to all those who died.

The focus of the article, besides crediting Wiesenthal for his work on the Eichmann case and the man who arrested Anne Frank, was to shed light on his goal of "trying to get a corrective article added to the United Nations convention on genocide. The article, [Wiesenthal] says, need only state that genocide is punishable without regard to statutes of limitation" (Farnsworth SM11).

Wiesenthal goes from "sleuth" to "private war crimes investigator" in *Times* correspondent Arthur Olsen's article "A German Dilemma," which debates Nazi war criminals' constitutional rights given the statutes of limitations versus the global conscience that can't in good faith allow mass murderers to go free. In an article about a month later Wiesenthal is referred to as "a private nemesis of Nazi evildoers," a phrase

that implies the age-old battle of good versus evil that periodically makes an appearance over the course of Wiesenthal's career. Although the article cites Wiesenthal as saying that he "is the first to deny that his motivation is revenge - political, personal or racial..." ("Nemesis" 11), it opens the possibility of vengeance as a motive and perpetuates the good versus evil cliché.

Coverage of Wiesenthal throughout the 1960s follows this sort of Superman approach, implying danger whenever possible, citing his successes as "scores" ("Plan" 3), his mission "relentless" ("Relentless" 2), and focusing on the length of his searches ("Three-Year" 2) or his chastising of officials for being lenient with Nazi criminals ("Austria Accused" 3). Most of these articles are written by stringers temporarily commissioned by *The Times* .

Wiesenthal receives more in-depth (and less exaggerated) coverage at the end of the decade when he identifies Mrs. Russel Ryan as Hermine Braunsteiner, "a cruel, brutal and sadistic woman who unnecessarily beat and tortured defenseless prisoners" (Sibley 5) living in Queens. She was the first ex-Nazi to be found in the United States, and as a result the case received a considerable amount of media attention.

In 1971 Wiesenthal is referred to as "an eminent expert Nazi-hunter" in *Times* columnist C.L. Sulzberger's investigative article about the whereabouts of Nazi war criminal Martin Bormann, "This Ghost Didn't Go East" (47). Stories involving Wiesenthal's investigations take on a more serious edge than in the previous decade and rather than being called a "Nazi hunter" he is a "private investigator of Nazi war crimes" (Hudson 4) or "the man who tracked down Adolf Eichmann" ("Nazis' Foe" 11).

In 1974 a TV special was made and aired about Wiesenthal titled, "Simon Wiesenthal: A Conscience for Our Time." Reporter John J. O'Connor wrote that it is "an unusually compelling half-hour...that concentrates on his motivations and persistence, sometimes in the face of resistance even from fellow Jews who might prefer not to reopen old sores" ("TV" 63). Public support continues when Wiesenthal grows impatient with German justice, complaining, "Death is faster than German justice...And soon there will be no more witnesses against these people" in *Times* reporter Craig R. Whitney's story titled "After 30 Years, Trials of Nazis Drag On"(57).

After the discovery of Hermine Braunsteiner in Queens, the search for Nazis in the United States picked up momentum and Wiesenthal's at times contentious relationship with the United States began. A 1977 article by Robert Jay Lifton credits Wiesenthal for the arrest of Braunsteiner and called the case "a key event in the story of Nazis in America" because it made it almost impossible for people to ignore the issue (236). Lifton argues that "The media have demonstrated their capacity to trivialize the subject of Nazis as much as any other" and supports the prolonged search for Nazi war criminals in the future:

One must ponder the differences between justice and vengeance, but on such issues a measure of anger is inseparable from engagement. All things considered, I would say we must insist upon the importance of tracking down and bringing to justice every last Nazi war criminal, be he 50 or 90, not for the pleasure of seeing him languish in jail for his remaining years, but to insist that crimes of this kind be acknowledged, that the ideal of justice is not forgotten (Lifton 236).

In March of 1976, Wiesenthal met with a group of senators and Congressional Aides to discuss the possible sixty-two suspected war criminals living in the United States. Referring to Wiesenthal as the "Tracer of Eichmann," *The Times* reports that "he had found the attitude of American government officials to be 'very sympathetic'" ("Tracer" 3). It is also in this article that the readers are reminded of how important the issue of remembrance is. Wiesenthal is quoted as saying, "I remember the jokes in the Twenties about Hitler. It began with harmless jokes and ended with Auschwitz" (3).

The end of the decade saw a renewed interest in study of the Holocaust, which resulted in a rise of media coverage of any events dealing with the issue. The number of *New York Times* articles mentioning Simon Wiesenthal jumped from eighty-five in the entire decade of the 70s to two hundred forty-six in the 80s. Twenty of the eighty-five articles in the 70s appeared in the last year and a half of the decade. An article by Special to *The New York Times* reporter Douglas E. Kneeland raised the issue of "revisionist writings" and "the slaughter of Vietnamese civilians" during the Vietnam War for rising awareness. "In attempting to explain the 'new Holocaust consciousness sweeping the country,' Rabbi Marvin Hier, dean of the Wiesenthal Center, said he believed that...the Skokie issue, neo-Nazism and 'revisionist' writings had combined to give society a 'big guilt conscience' because the subject 'has been swept under the carpet' for more than 30 years" (44).

Another possibility for the rise in media coverage of Wiesenthal and Holocaust studies was the hunt for Dr. Josef Mengele, also known as "The Angel of Death." Interest in this case was high due to the heinous experiments Mengele performed on concentration camp inmates, specifically children and twins. Wiesenthal is known for his

relentless search for Mengele and the difficulties he had with the Paraguayan government allowing his capture. In 1979 Wiesenthal offered a \$50,000 reward for information leading to his arrest ("Headliners" E6). Throughout the early '80s *The Times* followed the Mengele search closely, and it was widely known that after his remains were found in 1985 Wiesenthal disputed the evidence and continued his search until 1992, when genetic testing was done on the bones, ending the decades-long hunt ("Genetic" A7).

Wiesenthal, as well as hunting out Mengele, aided in the search for Raoul Wallenberg, who disappeared after World War II and is held in high esteem for saving thousands of Jews during the Holocaust. A 1980 article cites Wiesenthal as referring to Wallenberg as a "holy man." "Wiesenthal said that it was more important to find Wallenberg than to find Nazis, and he believed that Wallenberg must be regarded as alive unless the Russians can furnish better evidence than they have of their claim that he is dead" (Lester and Werbell SM15). When Wallenberg's case was reopened in the Soviet Union in 1981, Wiesenthal testified at the hearings (Vinocur "Swedish" A3).

Wiesenthal's role as a credible and reliable source of information without being surrounded by the speculative terms identifying him as a hunter or a sleuth implies that he has finally earned an indisputable permanent place in international news as a respected and knowledgeable informant.

Wiesenthal had gone from a virtual unknown to a hero by taking on the challenge of bringing every Nazi guilty of war crimes to justice. The media attention brought on by his mission portrayed him in an almost fictional manner comparable to storylines commonly found in comic books. Having proven himself continuously since 1963 as a man worthy of respect and renown, his celebrity took on a more legendary persona in the



'80s as documentaries, films and TV melodramas were produced. Most of the projects functioned primarily as tools of education, while others trivialized the events of the Holocaust in an effort to attract more viewers under the guise that people weren't interested in history anymore.

The first series of documentaries made about the Holocaust came out in 1981 and 1982. The first, titled "The Hunter and the Hunted" included interviews with Wiesenthal as well as some former Nazis who were still in hiding. The review of the documentary, by reporter C. Gerald Fraser, highlighted a quote by filmmaker Bill Bemister describing the former Nazis' opinions of Wiesenthal. "Mr. Rauff considered himself a dying man and...joked about Mr. Wiesenthal's attempts to have him extradited to Germany, saying that the Nazis were now old men whom death would claim before Mr. Wiesenthal" (GU3).

Five months later, the Simon Wiesenthal Center's Oscar-nominated documentary "Genocide: The Story of Man's Inhumanity to Man" was released. The film itself is incredibly effective, differing from other Holocaust documentaries I've seen with graphic images and heart-wrenchingly convincing testimonies read by Elizabeth Taylor and Orson Wells. Wiesenthal's views are strong throughout, making a point of identifying the other groups of people persecuted by the Nazis. His conviction that the Holocaust was not just a Jewish problem was criticized by some of his peers, but the movie itself is a very positive image for Wiesenthal. The *Times* review by film critic Janet Maslin highlights Wiesenthal's introduction, which warned viewers that the Holocaust could happen again. Maslin writes, "'Genocide'...may not cast new light on the Holocaust. But it

corroborates the horror in sharp detail, furthering Mr. Wiesenthal's avowed aim of making it impossible to forget" (64).

In 1985 the news stories that Nazi war criminals were hiding out in the United States inspired a trend of "TV Melodramas" based on the events. Much like the news stories in the '60s, they had a tendency to trivialize the stories into suspense thrillers. *The Execution*, starring Loretta Swit and Rip Torn was among these. Operating much like a soap opera it was not much of an educational tool and the plot had great potential to fail miserably and take away any credibility the project had. Overall, though, it was done tastefully and with respect to the true to events. Some of the filming took place at the Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles and was supported by its employees. Some of the dialogue in the movie refers to both Wiesenthal and the Center as reliable resources for survivors and as a result adds to the positive light being shed on them. Freelance writer Stephen Farber wrote about *The Execution* and several other dramas like it in his *Times* article "Nazi War Criminals Inspire TV Melodramas." Farber describes *The Execution* as "part revenge melodrama, part sexual soap opera and part Holocaust tragedy" (C18). This description is accurate, but implies more tacky undertones than there actually are. Farber quoted John Loftis, a consultant to the production of "Kojak: The Belarus File," who defended the productions saying, "Americans are reluctant to read history, and so maybe this kind of fictional treatment is necessary to educate people" (C18).

A few months prior, Simon Wiesenthal addressed a standing-room only audience about his life and career (Kriss WC16), disproving Loftis's idea that Americans only respond to "fictional treatment" of historical facts. Audience member Joyce Schacter is quoted in the article as saying: "In a sense, I feel I'm one of the masses that gives lip

service to the fact that these atrocities were a horrible thing. Very few people have taken the initiative about it except to be disapproving and critical of the atrocities.”

*Murderers Among Us: The Simon Wiesenthal Story*, a four-hour dramatization of Wiesenthal’s life was filmed for an HBO miniseries in 1988. The film began with the liberation of Mauthausen, the concentration camp where Wiesenthal was last held captive. The film focuses on the personal toll that Wiesenthal’s career took on himself and his family. It allows the public a more personal and rarely seen glimpse of the part of Wiesenthal that tends to shy away from the public. Dealing with the issues that both his wife and daughter faced on a daily basis, it showed a transition in Wiesenthal’s mission from justice to remembrance. *Times* reporter Henry Kamm writes of it, "Rather than depicting in detail the oft-told tale of Mr. Wiesenthal's tenacious hunt for those who submerged their past in new places and changed identities, the film focuses on the personal cost of this obsession with justice to Mr. Wiesenthal and his family" ("Simon Wiesenthal" H27). In a review of the series in April of 1989, John J. O'Connor writes, "In a very real sense, this portrait of Simon Wiesenthal signals the end of a crucial phase in Holocaust history. Time itself is running out. Mr. Wiesenthal is now in his 80's" ("Portrait" H31).

Although Wiesenthal’s celebrity was rising, he was hardly distracted as he continued his work. The newfound public awareness increased support of his mission while simultaneously opening the door for physical attacks and verbal criticism. On June 12, 1982 a blurb appeared in *The Times* on page 5 when a bomb exploded outside Wiesenthal's house in Vienna. Although no one was hurt, significant damage was caused to Wiesenthal's house and to neighboring houses ("In Austria" 5). In August, Ekkerhard

Weil, the man responsible for the attack was arrested and another blurb appeared on page 3 ("German Seized"). At the trial in December 1983, Weil attacked Wiesenthal and had to be restrained. This also received a small blurb and appeared on page 25 ("Wiesenthal Assaulted"). The same article referred to the Nazis as "fugitives" rather than the typical "war criminals."

The lax attitude towards Nazis implied here is made mention of in a Letter to the Editor in 1985. The sender, Charles H. Kremer, is responding to an article by Simeon Baker titled "Some Nazis Got Off Easy" that describes the U.S. "Government's role in encouraging Nazi criminals to emigrate to the United States to work in defense plants, the intelligence community and space and propaganda agencies." Kremer calls attention to society's general ignorance of "The Nazi Hunters [that] Deserve to Be Remembered." Kremer writes, "If not for the selfless energies of people like Simon Wiesenthal, David Horowitz, Paul Sifton and Rochelle Saidel, these Nazis would still be living freely and comfortably in the United States of America" (A18).

In another Letter to the Editor, Uwe E. Reinhardt similarly hails Wiesenthal's persistence in his mission of justice. "I have always admired Simon Wiesenthal, who has reminded the butchers of this world that there will be no haven for them in a civilized world - never. In thinking about brutal dictators, we should take a clue from him" (A22). This outcry of public support reveals that although he is not loved by all, he is certainly respected by many.

1988 marked a tumultuous year for Wiesenthal in his native country of Austria. Like any other celebrity Wiesenthal was not immune to the public's thirst for controversy or the critical eye of his peers, especially when after twenty years of activism his so-far

spotless record appeared to have a smudge. On January 21st he was being interviewed by Franz Ferdinand Wolf, the publisher of the weekly magazine *Profil*, when a man in the audience shouted at him, "You are a murderer! You are a crook!" (Kamm "Austria"). This interview kicked off Austria's "Year of Reflection" to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of its annexation from Germany. The *New York Times* article describing this event goes on to explain Austria's participation in the Nazi party and the genocide that took place and ends with what seems like an innocent observation of the difference of opinion between Wiesenthal and Austrian President Kurt Waldheim on their country's role in World War II.

Waldheim and Wiesenthal had been at the center of controversy and criticism for several years. The controversy started during Waldheim's campaign for presidency in 1986 when an investigation into his past for any Nazi affiliation or activity done by Simon Wiesenthal in 1978 resurfaced. Wiesenthal's investigation had turned up nothing and he remained "convinced that Waldheim had not been a member of the Nazi party" (Segel A26). On March 25, 1986 *The Times* published a blurb mentioning Wiesenthal's efforts to find evidence against Waldheim in Yugoslavia. Wiesenthal noted that lack of evidence may have made it possible for Waldheim to slip through the cracks ("Wiesenthal Asks" A5). An essay by William Safire a month later calls "Waldheim's entire postwar life a lie" and describes Wiesenthal as "having shown unusual lassitude in this case" (A19).

Since the start of the controversy Wiesenthal's involvement required him to constantly defend his comments and integrity as a Nazi-hunter. On April 22 Wiesenthal furiously denied remarks attributed to him in defense of Waldheim at a news conference

by Waldheim's son ("Wiesenthal Denies" A4). A month later an article by Special to *The New York Times* reporter James M. Markham describes Wiesenthal's criticism of the World Jewish Congress for "stirring anti-Semitic sentiment...through its campaign against Kurt Waldheim" and *The New York Times* for "giving prominence to stories that imply that Waldheim is guilty of war crimes" (4).

In June Waldheim was elected president of Austria despite the controversy. The following November *The Times* published an article with the headline "Waldheim, Ostracized, Cuts Lonely Figure in Presidency," also by James M. Markham. In it, Waldheim is described as "one of the loneliest political figures in Europe, shunned by ambassadors and statesmen and effectively unable to travel abroad because of lingering doubts over his war record" (A1). The same article mentions an incident in Vienna in which Wiesenthal ended a lecture he was giving at a seminar on Jewish issues and walked out upon Waldheim's delayed arrival.

In February of 1988 *Times* reporter Serge Schemann's article "Waldheim Report Leaves Austria as Divided as Before" cites Wiesenthal as one of the several people "urging resignation." It also referred to Wiesenthal as "a former ally of the President."

Two days later *The Times* issued a correction:

An article Wednesday about reactions to a commission's findings on the war record of President Kurt Waldheim of Austria characterized Simon Wiesenthal's background incorrectly. Mr. Wiesenthal, head of the Jewish Documentation Center in Vienna, had been acquainted with Mr. Waldheim and had spoken in support of restraint on the Waldheim issue

until the evidence was complete. But he was never Mr. Waldheim's ally ("Corrections" A3).

Not long afterwards *Waldheim: The Missing Years*, a book investigating the public controversy over his presidency and his wartime activities, was published and a display ad selling the book quoted Wiesenthal as saying it was "absolutely brilliant (Display Ad 38)." A month later writer Shirley Hazzard wrote a review of the book that mentioned Wiesenthal's investigation of Waldheim in 1978: "Wiesenthal, investigating Mr. Waldheim at Israel's request, discovered his service in the Balkans; but according to Mr. Herzstein, Mr. Wiesenthal 'had no reason to be suspicious' since he was 'unaware' that Mr. Waldheim had concealed the episode." Hazzard's response: "This seems inconceivable"(BR3).

Defending himself in a letter to the editor in May, Wiesenthal explains his side of the story further and writes that it's "unfair to judge my thoughts and deeds of 1979 with the knowledge we have in 1988"(Wiesenthal "Letter" BR44). From here the issue is laid to rest for several years but the controversy proves to be more damaging later on, Wiesenthal's reputation never fully recovering from the debate and harsh criticism during this period.

Despite the controversy Wiesenthal remained active in international relations and maintained his role as a respected public figure. A highlight for Wiesenthal in November of 1988 was the opportunity to meet Andrei Sakharov, an event neither man thought would ever happen. "It was a moment both seemed to savor - perhaps because until now there was no place the 67-year-old Soviet human-rights campaigner and the 79-year-old Vienna based Nazi-hunter could meet" (Bohlen 6). A few days later Wiesenthal was

honored by Chancellor Helmut Kohl from West Germany "for helping guide a new generation of Germans back into the 'large family of free nations'" (Saxon A8). The rest of article describes Kohl's deep admiration for Wiesenthal, his feelings on the guilt of Germany for the Holocaust and quotes passages of his speech that moved the audience to give him a standing ovation at the conclusion of his lecture.

In an article titled "Message From Vienna" *Times* editor A.M. Rosenthal wrote about Wiesenthal with what can be interpreted as deep admiration, while reflecting on what we can learn as a society from his life.

Well, good friend, tell me what truths you have discovered in the 40 years of hunting down the murderers of the innocent. Tell me, what message does Simon Wiesenthal have that I can pass along to those who fear that the evil in man that spawned the Nazi killers may one day spill out again (A31)?

Going on to describe Wiesenthal's documentation center, his belief in the idea that the life he has chosen for himself is indeed a lifetime commitment, his belief in the "brotherhood of Nazism's victims" and the opposition he has faced from other respected "men of thought" like Elie Wiesel, Rosenthal pays an honest tribute to a man he sees as respectfully "searching out his own meaning."

This second period in Wiesenthal's media life comes to an end as the Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles, independent of Simon Wiesenthal but named for him, steps more into the limelight. Having gone from a hero to a legend in his own right by reminding the world of the possibilities of evil, his presence in the media slowly begins to decline as the interests of society progress from study of the past to dealing with more contemporary



human rights issues. The final stage of *New York Times* coverage begins in 1989 when the Wiesenthal Center takes a stand against the entertainment industry. Over the next ten years the Center takes on the role of a new generation of crusaders, while Wiesenthal continues on in the same fashion he always has, standing up for what he believes in and still defending himself against critics.

The first controversy began in 1989 when the rap group Public Enemy rehired Richard Griffin as their “minister of information.” Reporter Jon Pareles writes that Griffin had been fired by the group previously for making anti-Semitic remarks to the press, and his rehiring angered Jewish groups like the Simon Wiesenthal Center. Representing the center in the article is Rabbi Abraham Cooper who says, “No one can argue that anyone suffers more from racism than the black community. When individuals in the black community cannot or will not speak out against bigotry when it emanates from one of their own, they are actually helping the forces of racism in America” (13).

In January of 1991 the Center denounced a song by Madonna, titled “Justify My Love” that quotes the Bible passage: “I know your tribulation and your poverty and the slander of those who say that they are Jews, but they are not, they are a synagogue of Satan.” Rabbi Abraham Cooper said this phrase could “contribute to those who seek to promote anti-Semitism’ and said that neo-Nazi groups had used such imagery to promote racist ideology among youth” (“Madonna” 11). In the same article Madonna apologized for the misunderstanding and explained her use of the quote: “I certainly did not have any anti-Semitic intent when I included a passage from the Bible on my record. It was a commentary on evil in general. My message, if any, is pro-tolerance and anti-hate. The song is, after all, about love.”

In June of 1995 *The Times* ran an article about another complaint by Rabbi Hier at the Wiesenthal center. This time Michael Jackson was the culprit having “used the expressions ‘Jew me’ and ‘kike me’ as lyrics on his latest album. Rabbi Hier explained, “It’s the ambiguity that I’m afraid of when it reaches his 20 million buyers around the world.” Hier “accepted Mr. Jackson’s assertion that his intent was to denounce prejudice and not advocate it” (“Jewish” D20). An article by *Times* reporter Dinitia Smith published the next day explained Jackson’s letter of apology to the Wiesenthal Center and the disclaimer that would be put on all new copies of the record to explain the meaning of the song (14).

Another issue commonly dealt with by The Wiesenthal Center throughout the ‘90s was the danger of new technology being used to spread negative messages. In May of 1991 a video game whose theme involved Nazi death camps was uncovered in Austria and Germany that Rabbi Cooper “said he believed...were neo-Nazi propaganda aimed at influencing youths through a technology that their parents are largely unfamiliar with” (“Video Game” A10).

In 1993 the Wiesenthal Center countered this negative use of media by using it to spread a different kind of message at the Museum of Tolerance, which opened for the first time in the midst of the controversial Rodney King trial dealing with racism and police brutality. According to reports in *The Times*, Simon Wiesenthal joined hundreds of other Holocaust survivors for the dedication ceremony. The article described some of the special features of the museum that were organized specifically for the recent events. “Using the latest in computer- television technology, visitors have a choice of several

riot-related topics to explore, like the acquittals of the officers, the role of television or the looting and burning and individual acts of courage” (“Near Riots” A16).

In 1995 the internet was simultaneously the biggest benefit to education and communication and the most detrimental thing to advocates of tolerance like the Wiesenthal Center. An article by Keith Schneider looked into the rise of hate groups online and the fear of civil rights leaders that “the new technology could produce a mass hate movement in the United States” (“Hate Groups” A12). After the Oklahoma City bombing the Center had new concerns about the internet, and that was the ease with which people could find information on how to make bombs. With the advances in technology the Wiesenthal Center began to “track the computer communications of the far right” (Schneider “Talk” A22).

In 1996 the Wiesenthal Center continued to investigate messages of hate and intolerance on the internet and began advocating censorship. The Center’s urging of internet providers to “censor offensive material” sparked a debate on rights, with both sides citing the First Amendment as a defense. In an article by Peter H. Lewis Rabbi Hier said “Internet providers have a First Amendment right and moral obligation not to provide these groups with a platform for their destructive propaganda.” While some opposition called the Wiesenthal Center’s action “outrageous and hypocritical,” the chairwoman of the Electronic Frontier Foundation said, “This is where it gets really rough, because emotionally it is so appealing. Yes, most of the stuff is despicable. But it is still censorship” (A10).

In 1999 the Wiesenthal Center released an interactive report on CD-ROM that investigated hate on the internet. Rabbi Cooper says in an article by *Times* reporter

Michel Marriott “What used to be done in the stalls of bathrooms is now done online” (G1). In April the Center is quoted in an investigative report on the perpetrators of the Columbine High School shooting. The Center’s researchers had found a website created by one of the shooters, Eric Harris, months prior to the shooting that contained “various anarchy and bomb-making listings,” but Rabbi Cooper said “there were no threats that merited contacting law-enforcement officials or enough hate language to be listed on the institute’s hate site list” (Johnson and Brooke A1).

The center’s presence in the news was the result not only of aggressive activism, but its capabilities of using new technology to reach a new generation. While the Center was dealing with irresponsibility in the entertainment industry and trying to put an end to hate messages on the internet and in video games, Wiesenthal revisited the Waldheim controversy that began nearly a decade earlier and defended his reputation in none other than his native Austria.

In September of 1993 Betrayal, a new book by Eli M. Rosenbaum, about Kurt Waldheim severely criticized Wiesenthal’s actions throughout the affair that had started in the ‘80s. The *Times* article by reporter Ralph Blumenthal describes the book as claiming that Wiesenthal covered up suspicious information to protect himself, that he exaggerated his role in Eichmann’s arrest and that he is “guilty of malpractice in the field of Nazi-hunting.” Several people and organizations jumped to his defense, including Kurt Waldheim and the Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles. Waldheim “called Mr. Wiesenthal ‘an honest, correct man’ who resisted pressure to condemn someone without proof and yet did not shy from differing with Waldheim.” The Wiesenthal Center “demanded inquiries into a cover-up” and Rabbi Marvin Hier said, “None of our work would be

possible without Simon Wiesenthal. He started this battle one day after the Second World War – he paved the way.” The article ends with another commentary on Wiesenthal, offered by author Alan Dershowitz, who said that “once Mr. Wiesenthal befriended Mr. Waldheim it may have been hard to ‘demonize’ him. ‘There are no heroes, even Jewish heroes, without clay feet’” (Blumenthal “Book” 19).

At one time revered for his noble cause and respected for his work Wiesenthal found himself defending his reputation. In a letter to the editor Wiesenthal offered up the details of what he said happened during his investigation of Waldheim. He also acknowledges that the nature of his profession draws a certain amount of hostility and criticism, saying that “hardly a week goes by without my receiving some sort of threat...Most neo Nazi publications stir hatred against me; the deniers of the Holocaust throughout the world vie with one another in this respect” (Wiesenthal “Letter” A20).

Not long after another letter to the editor supports the book’s claims that Wiesenthal exaggerated his role in the capture of Eichmann. It contains quotes from the man who led the operation against Eichmann saying that “Wiesenthal ‘had no role whatsoever’ and that ‘information supplied by Wiesenthal ...was utterly worthless.’” The author of the letter, Kalman Sultanik of the World Jewish Congress, goes on to accuse Wiesenthal of “concealing his failures in the case of Kurt Waldheim as well” (A34).

The official review of the book in question supports Wiesenthal more than any of the previous published articles. Reviewer Jacob Heilbrunn calls Rosenbaum’s passages on Wiesenthal “gleeful and mean-spirited” and accused the author of “drawing a moral equivalence between Kurt Waldheim and Simon Wiesenthal.” He writes “[Wiesenthal] is

a survivor of the death camps. In annulling the distinction between the victims and the perpetrators, Mr. Rosenbaum obscures the true story of the Waldheim affair” (326).

Mark Bernheim contests Heilbrunn’s interpretation of the book in yet another letter to the editor, in which he defends Rosenbaum’s message. Bernheim insists that Rosenbaum’s intention was to “claim that Mr. Wiesenthal is fallible.” He goes on to share in the opinion of Rosenbaum that Wiesenthal covered up his mistake to save his reputation (BR35).

In December, *Times* reporter Henry Kamm gave Wiesenthal another chance to defend himself and went to Vienna for an interview. After repeating the story he had told so many times before Wiesenthal said, “Everything I said in defense of truth was immediately interpreted as a defense of Waldheim” (“Wiesenthal Defends” A14). Rosenbaum wrote a letter to the editor a week later saying that in all the accounts Wiesenthal had given of his story none were consistent. He ends the letter with the accusation that it is Wiesenthal’s fault that Waldheim was able to deceive the world for years (22).

This controversy was never settled, and in Wiesenthal’s native country of Austria it caused even more problems later in the decade. This was apparent in October of 1996 when news coverage turned to talk of a Holocaust memorial being built in Vienna.

Called “the brainchild of Simon Wiesenthal,” it was greeted with opposition from several people and groups in the community. The article, “How Public Art Turns Political” by *Times* reporter Michael Kimmelman, questioned the motives behind the memorial and who it was actually being built for: the Jews or the Austrians? The article also discussed Wiesenthal’s unpopularity among Austrian Jews, “who think he did not

adequately condemn Kurt Waldheim when Mr. Waldheim ran for president ten years ago” (C15).

It wasn't settled until two years later when a jury that was comprised of people like Simon Wiesenthal and art curators came to an agreement that the memorial would be based on the design of artist Rachel Whiteread and represent Jews as “people of the book.” The *Times* article describing it repeated the Viennese dislike of Wiesenthal for the Waldheim affair and Holocaust survivor Rita Koch's opinion that “The Jews don't need the monument. Only Wiesenthal needed it for his ego” (Perlez A8). Completed in October of 2000 all the old controversy was revisited in an article by Michael Kimmelman that announced the memorial's completion. The overall message is a positive one about remembrance, but nearly fifteen years later Wiesenthal is still dealing with criticism for his role in the Waldheim affair (“Behind” E1).

Despite the problems of the decade Wiesenthal maintained public respect throughout the world and managed to continue spreading his message of remembrance. In 1990 an article by Rhoda M. Gilinsky described a 13-year old boy's admiration for the Nazi-hunter. The boy in question, Peter Bradley Freund, had decided to donate his Bar Mitzvah money to the Simon Wiesenthal Center after learning about Wiesenthal's mission. In his speech given at the Bar Mitzvah Freund expressed his desire to “follow in the path of Mr. Wiesenthal...I would like to teach others about the Holocaust as he has done. Since his goal in life is to let people remember, I'd like to help him fulfill his dream” (1).

In 1995 Wiesenthal once again made the papers for Nazi-hunting when former SS guard Hans-Ernst Schneider was found in Germany. Having changed his name to

Schwerte, he had become the rector of a university and was a well-known intellectual in his community. The article by *Times* reporter Alan Cowell cites Wiesenthal as a reliable source of information and as a result he functions as one of the key interview subjects, saying: “There are many Schwertes in other fields, but the fact that he could become the rector of a university is unique” (A3). This reveals that not only is Wiesenthal still active in his role of seeking justice but that he is also still recognized as an international authority on the subject despite the controversy that plagued him over the years.

Wiesenthal remained quiet after the turn of the century, allowing the Center bearing his name to carry on his mission. He formally bowed out on April 22, 2003, saying "I have found the mass murderers I was looking for, and I have outlived all of them...If there's a few I didn't look for, they are now too old and fragile to stand trial" (Haberman B1). Reporter Clyde Haberman goes on to criticize this statement by Wiesenthal and investigates the idea that the search for Nazis has come to an end.

The next day another article by an unknown author paid more respect to Wiesenthal before assuring readers that "There is still work to be done. It was Mr. Wiesenthal who first understood its importance" ("Simon Wiesenthal" A26). "At age 94, after 50 years of arduous detective work, Mr. Wiesenthal has earned both our admiration and the right to retire."

It is this kind of respect for Wiesenthal that remains constant throughout the course of his career. Despite the Waldheim controversy and criticism from other organizations like the World Jewish Congress, no one can deny the profound impact he has had on the world and the positive effects it will have on future generations. Because of his work the Holocaust lives on as more than a thing of the past that can be easily



forgotten. Even after his death the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles that is named for him carries on his legacy.

Comparing the *New York Times* version of Simon Wiesenthal to the one learned about in biographies and films reveals two very different undercurrents to identical facts. Most of the films and books offered praise and acknowledgement of heroic acts and noble motivations while the *New York Times* continued to seek out new ways to tell an old story, oftentimes clinging to controversy and scandal to sell more papers. In the first period we saw Wiesenthal the Nazi-hunter, the storytelling at times almost cartoonish in its suspense. In the second period we saw Wiesenthal the celebrity, complete with a controversial media war and a series of films. In the third period Wiesenthal revisited the Waldheim controversy while the Wiesenthal Center combated the entertainment industry and dealt with contemporary human rights issues. By the time of his death, Wiesenthal had accomplished what he had set out to do with both supporters and critics all over the world. His obituary in the *Times*, written by Ralph Blumenthal, accurately states the facts of his life in the public eye, honoring his achievements and acknowledging his failures.

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