



**CFP:** Simon Wiesenthal Conference 2016  
**The Life and Times of Simon Wiesenthal**  
**Date:** 14-16 November 2016  
**Location:** Palais Epstein, Vienna  
**Organiser:** Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies (VWI)

Simon Wiesenthal has been the subject of numerous biographies, ranging from the highly critical to the near hagiographic. Most recently, Tom Segev has published a judicious assessment of this complex, driven figure, who became the world's most famous 'Nazi hunter'. His life has also been filmed as documentary and fiction.

To mark the opening of its new building and to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the death of Simon Wiesenthal, the VWI is organising an international three-day conference, which seeks to locate Wiesenthal's life and work in their social and political context. At the same time, it wishes to illuminate less well-known aspects of Wiesenthal's life and personality and to use his life as a lens to understand the post-Holocaust world.

While not wishing to pre-empt the choices of topic, the conference organisers are particularly interested in encouraging original contributions in the following areas:

### **Images of Nazi Criminality**

While in the immediate post-war period Wiesenthal always stressed the monstrosity of Nazi crimes, he seems to have become more conciliatory towards the end of his life. Did Wiesenthal's views and language really change over time? Can the 1960s really be regarded as a watershed and if so, did these changes mirror wider cultural or attitudinal shifts? What were the contexts of these shifts? Did Wiesenthal's work help promote or even construct a specific lasting image of Nazi perpetrators? Did his activities in any way influence Nazi prosecution and the law and if so, how?

### **Dealing with the Nazi Past**

In 1952, Wiesenthal wrote that "it is self-evident to us that Austria is not responsible for the actions of the Third Reich". Yet after several decades his views on Austria were apparently much more critical and he contrasted them unfavourably with "the Germans", who in his view had acknowledged their responsibility. In this period, Wiesenthal developed a better working relationship with the German legal authorities than with those of Austria.

To what extent does this difference reflect wider a historical and cultural divergence between West German and Austrian society in respect of the Holocaust? What differences emerged in the discussion of the key legal issues such as a 'statute of limitations' – *Verjährung*?

### **Local, National and International Networks**

In post-war Vienna, Wiesenthal started as a lobbyist on the margins of Austrian politics, especially on the People's Party side. At the same time, he steadily built up his contacts with foreign journalists, diplomats and jurists. While in Austria he was long regarded as merely a local Jew, by the end of his life he had become a moral voice and a world brand, with a wide range of contacts to politicians and celebrities worldwide, but also entangled in several conspiracy theories and involved in many conflicts, like those with the Jewish World Congress or with Elie Wiesel.

How should we assess this trajectory? What made Wiesenthal's transformation into an international celebrity possible? How does this influence not only Wiesenthal's image today but also our approach to and knowledge of the mass murder of the Jews?

### **Concepts on Collaboration and their Questioning**

The role of the *Judenräte* was controversially highlighted at the time of the Eichmann trial by Hannah Arendt. The accusation and the reality of so-called Jewish collaboration was also a life-long concern for Wiesenthal and one, which was intimately bound up with his own personal survival. After the war, he placed Jewish collaborators in a same category as non-Jewish collaborators. He himself found it difficult to live with the fact that he had suffered less than some others and that he owed his life to the "decency of some Germans". The embellishments of his own story as described by his biographer Tom Segev have to be seen in this context, but they also raise difficult question of facts and fictionality of Holocaust survival as well.

Is there a connection between his life story and his perception of these concepts of guilt? Last not least, how useful is the concept of 'survivor guilt' in understanding Holocaust survivors?

### **Wiesenthal, Vienna and the Nazi Past**

Wiesenthal had a long and complex relationship with Vienna. As a boy, he spent two years in the city. After he moved to Vienna from Linz in 1947, he became the target of frequent, often vitriolic attacks while on the other hand he was frequently involved in internal disputes of the Vienna Jewish Community.

What does his relationship with Vienna tell us about Austria's post-war trajectory – especially in the face of his conflicts with Bruno Kreisky and his interventions on behalf of Kurt Waldheim? How did Wiesenthal adapt to the Viennese context in which he worked and lived until his death?

### **Wiesenthal's Jewish contexts**

Finally, we call to consider Wiesenthal's relationships with the Jewish world (organisations, political and religious streams, leaders) against his own family background; to elaborate his views about the future of the Jews in Europe and elsewhere.

The conference languages will be German and English. Applications should be written in German or in English and include an outline of the topic of no more than 600 words as well as a short CV and a list of publications. Please send your application by email with the subject "SWC 2016" to

**cfp@vwi.ac.at**

no later than

**4 September 2016.**

The contributions at the conference should last no longer than 20 minutes. A jury appointed by the organisers will make the decision on the acceptance of proposals. You will receive an immediate confirmation of the receipt of your proposal. If you do not receive a confirmation, please send a reminder.

The VWI will cover accommodation fees. The institute is also endeavouring to find separate funding for travel costs.