



Wiesenthal, Simon

(b. 1908, d. 2005) Nazi hunter. Born in Galicia, Wiesenthal studied architecture in Prague and was living in Lvov, Poland when World War II broke out. He was arrested with his family, and spent the rest of the war in forced labor and concentration camps, including Janowska, Plaszow, Gross-Rosen, Buchenwald, and Mauthausen. He survived, and on May 5, 1945 was liberated from Mauthausen by American troops.

After the war Wiesenthal decided to dedicate himself to hunting down Nazi war criminals so that they could be brought to justice. At first he worked for the War Crimes Department of the United States army in Austria. In 1947 he founded the Jewish Historical Documentation Center in the Austrian city of Linz. However, over the next few years, the public lost interest in tracking down former Nazis, so Wiesenthal was forced to close the center in 1954.

In 1961 public interest in catching Nazis and putting them on trial gained momentum, when senior SS officer Adolf Eichmann was captured by Israeli secret service agents in Argentina and brought to trial in Jerusalem. At that point, Wiesenthal reopened the Jewish Documentation Center in Vienna and continued his investigation of former Nazis. During the 1960s and 1970s he hunted down many Nazis, some well known, some less so. Among the more notorious Nazis caught by Wiesenthal were Franz Stangl, the commandant of Sobibor and Treblinka; Gustav Wagner, the deputy commandant of Sobibor; Franz Murer, the commandant of the Vilna Ghetto, and Karl Silberbauer, the police officer who arrested Anne Frank and family.

In 1977 the Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies was opened in Los Angeles, and in 1980 the US Congress awarded Wiesenthal a gold medal for his work. Besides Nazi-hunting, Wiesenthal has also devoted himself to memorializing the victims of the Nazis. He has written many works on the Holocaust, including *The Murderers Among Us; Sunflower; Max and Helen;* and *Every Day Remembrance Day: A Chronicle of Jewish Martyrdom*. Wiesenthal's memoirs, *The Murderers Among Us*, have been made into a film about Wiesenthal's life, starring Ben Kingsley.

