

UNITED STATES
HOLOCAUST
MEMORIAL
MUSEUM ushmm.org

ELIE WIESEL

ELIE WIESEL BORN



- Elie Wiesel was born to a religious Jewish family in the town of Sighet, which was in the Transylvanian region of Romania.
- Wiesel had two older sisters and one younger sister.
- This postcard shows the main market square in Sighet prior to World War II.

SEPTEMBER 30, 1928

ADOLF HITLER APPOINTED CHANCELLOR OF GERMANY



- German president Paul von Hindenburg appointed Adolf Hitler, the head of the National Socialist German Workers' (Nazi) Party, as chancellor of Germany.
- In the spring of 1933, Nazi Party supporters attacked Jews on the streets of Germany, boycotted Jewish-owned stores, and burned books.
- The Wiesel family lived hundreds of miles away and were not affected by the early Nazi persecution of German Jews.

JANUARY 30, 1933

REICH CITIZENSHIP LAW



- The Nuremberg Race Laws set a legal definition for who the German government considered to be “Jewish.”
- Under the law, German Jews lost their citizenship and were also forbidden from entering into relationships with non-Jews.
- This chart helped explain the law to Germans.
- Sighet is not part of Germany, so the Wiesel family was not affected by these laws.

SEPTEMBER 15, 1935

KRISTALLNACHT ATTACKS



- Nazi supporters launched a coordinated and violent attack against Jews in the areas controlled by Germany.
- They burned hundreds of synagogues, destroyed stores and homes owned by Jewish families, and arrested 30,000 Jewish men and boys who were then imprisoned in concentration camps.
- Sighet was not controlled by Germany at this time, and Elie Wiesel was not affected by these attacks.

NOVEMBER 9-10, 1938

ANTISEMITISM IN ROMANIA



- Romanian authorities pursued a harsh policy of antisemitism, encouraged by members of the fascist Iron Guard movement, who wanted to expel Jews from Romania.
- As a child, Elie Wiesel witnessed Jews being attacked on the streets and saw antisemitic graffiti on buildings. Even though Wiesel was not living under Nazi control, he still experienced antisemitism.
- This is a photo of Vicky Hershkovits, who lived with her family in Bixad, Romania, forty miles from Wiesel's hometown of Sighet. In the late 1930s, her father's bus company was taken away because he was Jewish.

1938-1939

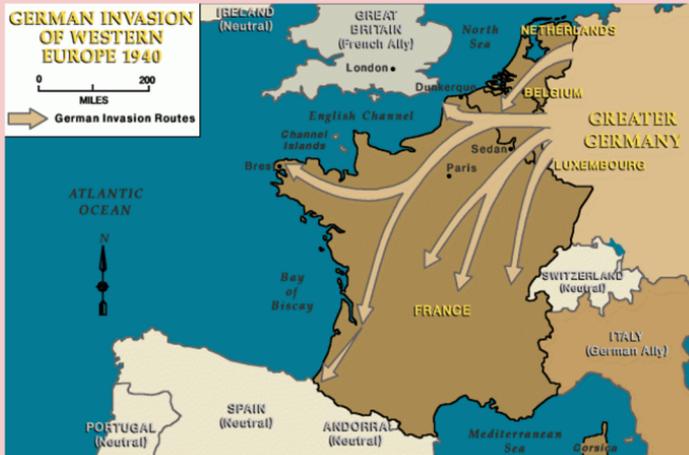
GERMANY INVADES POLAND



- Nazi Germany invaded Poland. Great Britain and France, which had an alliance with Poland, declared war on Germany. World War II officially began.
- Elie Wiesel later wrote, “We were at war, but I did not feel threatened. For me life went on as before.”

SEPTEMBER 1, 1939

GERMANY INVADES WESTERN EUROPE



- The German military invaded and occupied the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg. They also invaded France, dividing it into Nazi-occupied and Nazi-aligned zones.
- Thousands of “foreign” Jews were rounded up and sent to concentration camps in southern France.

MAY 10, 1940

FIRST PRISONERS ARRIVE AT AUSCHWITZ



- The SS opened a large concentration camp called “Auschwitz” near the town of Oswiecim in Nazi-occupied Poland.
- The first prisoners of Auschwitz were German and Polish men (both Christian and Jewish). Most of them were imprisoned as political opponents of the Nazis.
- This mugshot shows 18-year-old Zbigniew Matys, a Polish prisoner. He was prisoner number 71.

JUNE 14, 1940

SIGHET GIVEN TO HUNGARY



- Nazi Germany forced Romania to give up territory. Transylvania, including the area of Sighet--where the Wiesel family lived--was granted to Hungary.
- Hungarian race laws, passed between 1938-1941, classified the Wiesel family as Jewish and took away many of their rights.
- This map appeared in American newspapers.

AUGUST 30, 1940

HUNGARY JOINS THE AXIS



- Hungary joined the Axis powers, a group of countries aligned with Nazi Germany.
- Thousands of Jewish men in Hungarian territory (which now included Sighet, where the Wiesels lived) were forced to join labor battalions doing war-related construction. Many, including most of the men in this picture, died.

NOVEMBER 20, 1940

GERMANY INVADES THE SOVIET UNION



- Breaking a August 1939 non-aggression pact, Nazi Germany launched a surprise invasion of the Soviet Union and the areas occupied by the Soviet Union (including Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia). Hungarian troops aided in the invasion.
- Mobile killing squads (*Einsatzgruppen*) followed behind the German lines, murdering Jews and other victims by shooting and gassing in gas vans. Approximately two million Jews died this way.

JUNE 22, 1941

“FOREIGN” JEWS DEPORTED FROM HUNGARY



- Hungarian authorities rounded up and deported approximately 30,000 “foreign” Jews who could not prove Hungarian citizenship.
- In late August 1941, *Einsatzgruppen* units murdered most of these Jews in Kamenets-Podolsk, a city in western Ukraine. This photograph shows Jews at the killing site.
- Only a few escaped, including a man Wiesel called “Moshe the Beadle,” who returned to Sighet and warned the Jews living there of the massacres.

JULY-AUGUST 1941

U.S. ENTERS WORLD WAR II



- The Japanese military launched a surprise attack on the US Pacific fleet at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.
- The United States declared war on Japan.
- On December 11, Nazi Germany declared war on the United States.
- The United States officially entered World War II and joined the Allies.

DECEMBER 7, 1941

MASS MURDER BEGINS AT CHELMNO



- The SS and Nazi police authorities opened the Chelmno killing center to murder Jews, Poles, Soviet POWs, and Roma in Nazi-occupied Poland.
- Chelmno was the first stationary facility where the Nazis used poison gas for mass murder. At least 172,000 people were murdered at Chelmno.
- These toys were excavated from the grounds of Chelmno.

DECEMBER 8, 1941

WANNSEE CONFERENCE



- German government officials and Nazi Party officials held a conference at the Wannsee Villa in a suburb of Berlin. They discussed the logistics of the “Final Solution.”
- The “Final Solution” was a code name for the mass murder of European Jews.
- The mass murder of Jews had already begun by the time the conference took place. At the Wannsee conference, the Nazis discussed how to coordinate the expansion of the killing.

JANUARY 20, 1942

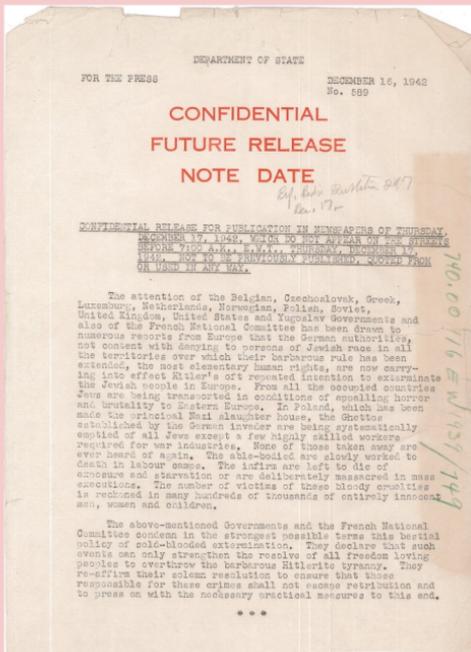
OPERATION REINHARD BEGINS



- Operation Reinhard was the code name for the plan to murder approximately two million Jews in the *Generalgouvernement*, or German-occupied Poland.
- They opened three killing centers: Treblinka, Belzec, and Sobibor. At least 1.5 million Jews were murdered in these centers. The Belzec killing center began gassings on this day.

MARCH 17, 1942

ALLIES CONDEMN MASS MURDER



- News of the “Final Solution” was reported in American newspapers in late November 1942.
- The United States, Great Britain, Soviet Union, and other Allied governments issued a declaration condemning the Nazi policy of “cold blooded extermination” and promised to punish the perpetrators after the war.

DECEMBER 17, 1942

GERMAN DEFEAT AT STALINGRAD



- The German military surrendered after battling for seven months to capture the Soviet city of Stalingrad (now Volgograd).
- Soviet victory at the battle of Stalingrad marked a turning point in World War II. Soviet forces began to push the German military back.

FEBRUARY 2, 1943

WARSAW GHETTO UPRISING BEGINS



- In summer 1942, Nazi authorities deported approximately 300,000 Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto and murdered them in the Treblinka killing center.
- When German troops entered the ghetto to deport the remaining Jews, armed Jewish resistance fighters attacked. The Nazis greatly outnumbered them.
- Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto fought for nearly a month using makeshift weapons before they were defeated by the Nazis.

APRIL 19, 1943

SOBIBOR UPRISING



- Prisoners at the Sobibor killing center launched an uprising, killing a dozen German and Ukrainian guards.
- Three hundred prisoners escaped the camp; 58 of them, including these men, survived the Holocaust.
- Nazi officials closed Sobibor, the final “Operation Reinhard” camp to close.

OCTOBER 14, 1943

FDR CREATES WAR REFUGEE BOARD



- In response to pressure from Congress, from the public, and from inside the government, President Franklin Roosevelt created a new government agency, the War Refugee Board, to try to rescue European Jews.
- This agency streamlined humanitarian aid, helped Jews escape Nazi territory, and saved tens of thousands of lives.
- Yet by the time the War Refugee Board was created, approximately 5 million Jews had already been murdered.

JANUARY 22, 1944

GERMANY OCCUPIES HUNGARY



- Nazi Germany invaded and occupied Hungary to prevent the country from leaving the Axis and joining the Allies.
- The Wiesel family was under Nazi control for the first time.

MARCH 19, 1944

SIGHET GHETTOS CREATED



- At least 14,000 Jews living in Sighet and the surrounding villages were crowded into two ghettos.
- Since the Wiesels' house was located within the area designated for one of the ghettos, the family was able to stay in their home.
- This photograph shows one of the ghettos in Sighet in summer 1944.

APRIL 18-20, 1944

HUNGARIAN DEPORTATIONS TO AUSCHWITZ BEGIN



- Nazi authorities and Hungarian police began deporting Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz-Birkenau, a camp in German-occupied Poland which included both a killing center and forced labor factories.
- Between May-July 1944, more than 440,000 Hungarian Jews arrived at Auschwitz. This photograph was taken by the SS of a transport arriving in late May 1944.

MAY 15, 1944

SIGHET JEWISH COMMUNITY DEPORTED TO AUSCHWITZ



- Nazi authorities and Hungarian police deported Jews living in the Sighet ghetto by train to Auschwitz-Birkenau. The trip lasted several days.
- At Auschwitz, SS-officers separated men and women. Elie Wiesel and his father, Shlomo, were selected to work. Wiesel's older sisters, Hilda and Beatrice, were also selected for forced labor. The SS murdered Wiesel's mother, Sarah, and younger sister Tziporah in the gas chambers.

MAY 17-20, 1944

ELIE WIESEL GIVEN TATTOO



- Soon after arriving in Auschwitz, Elie Wiesel received a tattoo on his left arm, marking him as prisoner A-7713.
- The Auschwitz-Birkenau camp was the only location where prisoners received tattoos. At other camps, prisoners were assigned numbers, but were not tattooed with these numbers.
- In this postwar photograph, two Auschwitz survivors show their tattoos.

MAY 24, 1944

D-DAY INVASION



- American, British, and Canadian naval and air forces invaded the beaches of Normandy, France.
- The opening of the long-awaited “second front” put tremendous military pressure on Nazi Germany and gave a psychological boost to the Allies.

JUNE 6, 1944

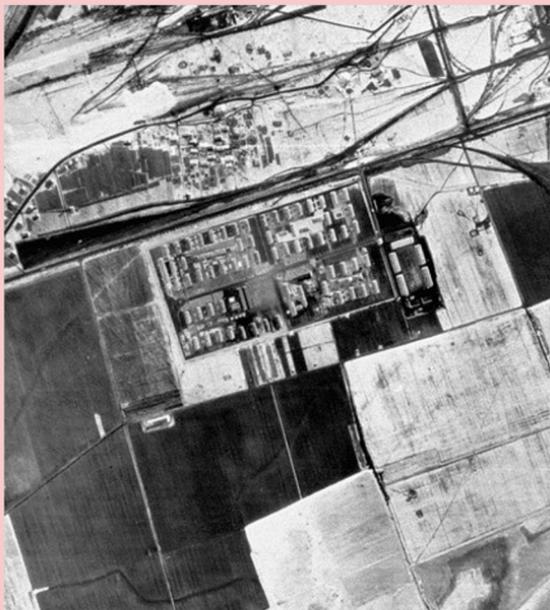
ELIE WIESEL SENT TO BUNA



- *SS*-officers sent Elie Wiesel and his father Shlomo to the Auschwitz III-Monowitz camp, also called “Buna,” a forced labor facility several miles from the main Auschwitz camp. I.G. Farben, a major German corporation, used prisoner labor at their *Buna Werke* factory there, tasking them with making synthetic rubber [Buna].
- There they were forced to work in jobs that were often physically demanding with very little food. *SS* officers also conducted frequent “selections,” sending prisoners who could no longer work to the gas chambers.

MID-JUNE 1944

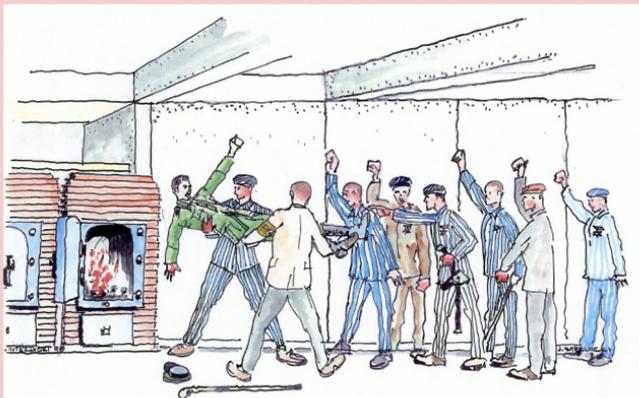
US AIR FORCES BOMB BUNA



- American bomber planes attacked the forced labor factories at Buna, where the SS was attempting to create synthetic oil and rubber for the German war effort. This is a US aerial reconnaissance photo of Buna.
- Wiesel wrote, “We were not afraid. And yet, if a bomb had fallen on the blocks, it would have claimed hundreds of inmates' lives. But we no longer feared death, in any event not this particular death. Every bomb that hit filled us with joy, gave us renewed confidence.”

SEPTEMBER 13, 1944

SONDERKOMMANDO UPRISING



- Members of the special command (Sonderkommando) in Birkenau, Jewish prisoners forced to work in the gas chambers and crematoria, launched an uprising. They managed to blow up one of the crematoria and kill several SS guards.
- The revolt was quickly defeated, and SS officers murdered the participants, as well as four female prisoners who had smuggled firepower to them.
- John Wiernicki, a Polish non-Jewish Auschwitz survivor, painted this depiction of the uprising in 1998.

OCTOBER 7, 1944

AUSCHWITZ REPORT IN U.S. NEWSPAPERS



- American newspapers nationwide published articles about Auschwitz-Birkenau, like this *Miami News* article. The articles included graphic details of the process of the arrival, selection, and gassing of prisoners.
- The information stemmed from a report written by two prisoners who had escaped Auschwitz in April 1944.
- In response, the *Washington Post* printed an editorial entitled "Genocide." It was the first time this new word was used in an American paper.

NOVEMBER 26, 1944

AUSCHWITZ EVACUATED



- With Soviet troops approaching Auschwitz, the SS evacuated more than 60,000 prisoners, including Elie and Shlomo Wiesel, on foot in the freezing cold and in open train cars.
- Nine days later, Elie and Shlomo Wiesel arrived at the Buchenwald concentration camp in the middle of Germany.

JANUARY 18, 1945

SOVIET TROOPS LIBERATE AUSCHWITZ



- Soviet troops liberated Auschwitz and found 6,000 sick and starving prisoners, including children, who had been left behind.
- Auschwitz was the last operating Nazi killing center.

JANUARY 27, 1945

SHLOMO WIESEL DIED



- Shlomo Wiesel died in the middle of the night at the Buchenwald concentration camp.
- Elie Wiesel later wrote, “I woke up at dawn on January 29. On my father's cot there lay another sick person. They must have taken him away before daybreak and taken him to the crematorium. Perhaps he was still breathing....No prayers were said over his tomb. No candle lit in his memory. His last word had been my name. He had called out to me and I had not answered.”

JANUARY 28 or 29, 1945

BUCHENWALD LIBERATED



- American troops liberated the Buchenwald concentration camp near Weimar, Germany.
- US military photographers captured a photograph of Elie Wiesel in his bunk [he is seventh from the left on the middle barrack]. He was sixteen years old when he was liberated.

APRIL 11, 1945

GERMAN FORCES SURRENDER



- German officials unconditionally surrendered.
- The next day (May 8th), as the war in Europe formally ended, the Allies celebrated “V-E Day” (Victory in Europe.)
- Japan surrendered in August 1945, officially ending World War II.

MAY 7, 1945

ELIE WIESEL

SENT TO CHILDRENS' HOMES



- The *OSE*, a Jewish organization which aided children, took 427 child survivors from Buchenwald, including Elie Wiesel, to France.
- Wiesel lived in children's homes in Ecouis and in Ambloy with other religiously observant teenage boys. There, they received medical care, counseling, and schooling. He is seen in profile in the back of this photograph.

JUNE 2, 1945

ELIE WIESEL REUNITES WITH HIS OLDER SISTERS



- Hilda Wiesel, who survived the Holocaust and was recovering in Paris, saw a photograph of her younger brother, Elie, in a newspaper.
- He traveled to Paris and they reunited. Several months later, they discovered that their sister Beatrice had also survived.
- Wiesel can be seen in the back of this photograph, taken around this time.

SUMMER 1945

ELIE WIESEL IN PARIS



- Elie Wiesel continued his religious study, working with tutors while living at several different homes near Paris for young adults who had survived the Holocaust. In 1948, Elie Wiesel also began studying at the Sorbonne, a prestigious college in Paris.
- He also began working as a journalist for a Yiddish newspaper, reporting news of the Arab-Israeli War of 1948 (sometimes called Israel's war for independence).
- This photograph shows Jewish displaced persons in Paris in 1947.

1945-1948

STATE OF ISRAEL DECLARED

Jews Create New State of Israel In Holy Land as British Quit Mandate; Truman Promptly Recognizes Nation

Speed of American Recognition of Israel Surprises World

PRESIDENT ACTS WITHIN MINUTES

Zionists Elated, United Nations in Turmoil, Arabs Stunned

By JOHN M. HEIGHTOWER
Washington, May 14 (AP)—President Truman, in a move that surprised the world, tonight recognized the new Jewish State of Israel in Palestine a few minutes after it was proclaimed.

The news caused intense elation among the Zionists, stunned the Arabs and threw the United Nations into turmoil.

The action placed the great weight of American prestige behind the claim of the Jews to govern the homeland they have carved out for themselves in the Holy Land.

In 47 terse words, Mr. Truman proclaimed: "The government has been informed that a Jewish State has

EMBATTLED BIRTH FOR JEWISH STATE



Haganah reported Syrian forces across border in North and Egyptian forces probing in South (black arrows) of Palestine. Troops of Lebanon, Iraq and Trans-Jordan (grey arrows) were reported in readiness. Meanwhile Jews proclaimed the State of Israel, first Hebrew nation in 2,000 years, as the British formally quit Palestine.

New-Born Jewish State Faces Immediate Test of Arab War

ARAB NATIONS, EGYPT READY TO HURL TROOPS AT FRONTIERS

Leaders of New Israel Prepared to Meet Bloodiest Assaults

BULLETIN

Tel Aviv, Israel, Saturday, May 15 (AP) — Air raiders bombed this all-Jewish city at about dawn today.

First reports said there were "some casualties" near the power and light stations.

Tel Aviv was under complete blackout all night but no sirens were sounded during the raid. Civil guards were alerted and 15 to 20 ships in the port area moved out to sea.

The number and identification of the raiding planes was not immediately announced.

The planes swooped over Tel Aviv little more than 12 hours after Jewish leaders proclaimed the existence of a new Hebrew state of Israel.

Some bombs fell in the vicinity of the power station along the Yarkum River near Tel Aviv.

Tel Aviv, Israel, Saturday, May 15 (AP)—Britain surrendered her 25-year-old mandate over Palestine at midnight and one minute later

- Jews in the British mandate of Palestine declared independence and established the state of Israel.

MAY 14, 1948

UNITED NATIONS REFUGEE CONVENTION



- The United Nations adopted the Convention Related to the Status of Refugees, which defined the rights and responsibilities of refugees and host countries under international law. The United States did not sign the 1951 Refugee Convention.

1951

ELIE WIESEL WORKS AS A JOURNALIST



- Elie Wiesel, based in Paris, traveled the world as a journalist, including trips to Israel, India, Brazil, and the United States.

1949-1955

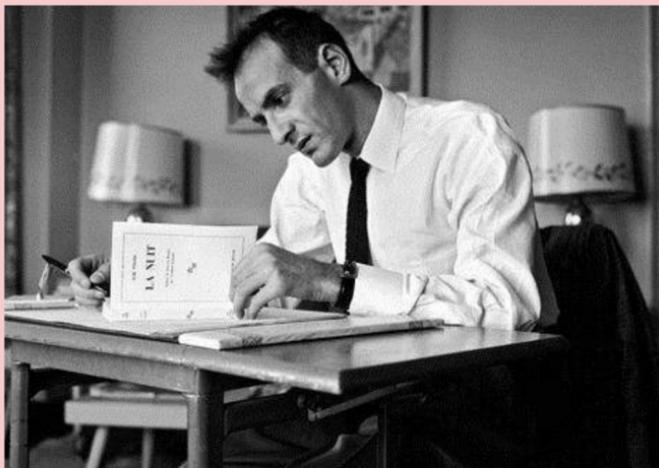
ELIE WIESEL WRITES *AND THE WORLD REMAINED SILENT*



- Elie Wiesel finished his Holocaust memoir, *Un di velt hot Gesvign* (*And the World Remained Silent*), which he wrote in Yiddish.
- The book was published in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in December 1955. Soon after the book came out, Wiesel moved to the United States.

1955

NIGHT IS PUBLISHED



- *In 1957, La Nuit*, an edited version of *And the World Remained Silent*, was published in France.
- On September 15, 1960, *Night* was published in English. A “New York Times” review called it a “remarkable close-up of one boy’s tragedy.”

1957-1960

DAWN IS PUBLISHED



- Wiesel's novel, *Dawn*, was published in English.
- In his lifetime, Wiesel published more than forty novels, books of essays, plays, and memoirs, most focusing on Judaism and religious mysticism.

1961

ELIE WIESEL BECOMES A PROFESSOR



- From 1972-1976, Elie Wiesel served as a professor of Judaic Studies at the City University of New York.
- In 1976, Wiesel was appointed Andrew Mellon Professor of the Humanities at Boston University, where he taught classes devoted to broad philosophical or literary themes and classes devoted to specific religious texts.
- He taught at Boston University until his death in 2016.

1972

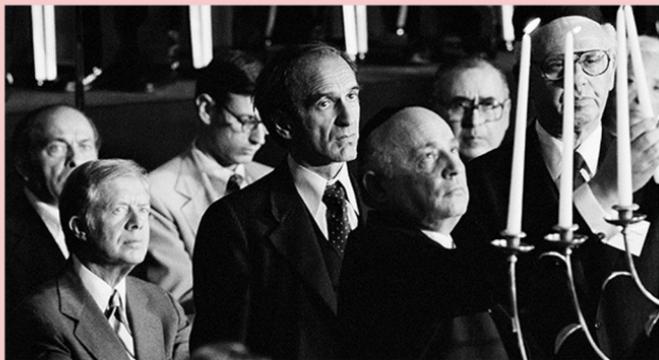
PRESIDENT'S COMMISSION ON THE HOLOCAUST CREATED



- President Jimmy Carter created a President's Commission on the Holocaust.
- He appointed Elie Wiesel as the chairman of the commission, which made recommendations for how the United States should commemorate the Holocaust. One of the commission's recommendations was the creation of a national museum.

NOVEMBER 1, 1978

WIESEL SERVES AS CHAIRMAN OF THE HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL COUNCIL



- Elie Wiesel served as the founding chairman of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council, which oversaw the planning and creation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.
- This photograph shows Wiesel at a Holocaust remembrance ceremony with President Jimmy Carter.

1980-1986

WIESEL AWARDED CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL



- President Ronald Reagan awarded Elie Wiesel the Congressional Gold Medal of Achievement.
- At the ceremony, Wiesel criticized Reagan for an upcoming trip to Germany, where the president planned to lay a wreath at a cemetery in Bitburg, Germany, where 49 SS officers are buried.

APRIL 19, 1985

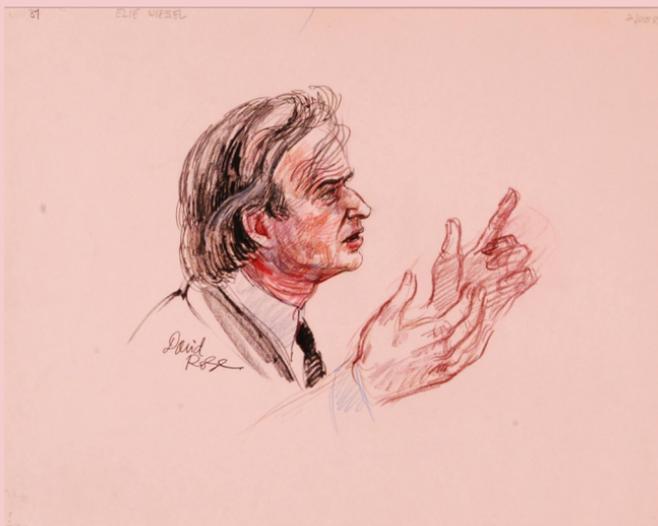
WIESEL AWARDED NOBEL PEACE PRIZE



- Elie Wiesel was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.
- The Nobel Committee called Wiesel “a messenger to mankind...of peace, atonement, and human dignity.”
- This photo shows Wiesel with his teenage son, Elisha, and a member of the Nobel Committee.

OCTOBER 14, 1986

WIESEL TESTIFIES AT KLAUS BARBIE TRIAL



- Elie Wiesel testified at the trial of Klaus Barbie, a former SS officer nicknamed “Butcher of Lyon.”
- Wiesel said, “No justice is possible for the dead....Memory. It is about doing justice to memory.”
- This is a courtroom sketch of Wiesel created during the trial.

JUNE 2, 1987

OPENING OF THE US HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM



- The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum officially opened.
- At the dedication ceremony, Wiesel turned to President Bill Clinton and urged him to do something about the ongoing violence in Bosnia.
- Wiesel is in the front row, second from the right in this photo taken at the ceremony.

APRIL 22, 1993

WIESEL VISITS AUSCHWITZ WITH OPRAH WINFREY



- Oprah Winfrey dedicated an episode of her television show, *Oprah*, to discussing *Night*, which she had chosen as a book club selection.
- The episode included an interview between Winfrey and Elie Wiesel, which was filmed on a visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau.
- Schools throughout the United States watched this episode.

MAY 24, 2006

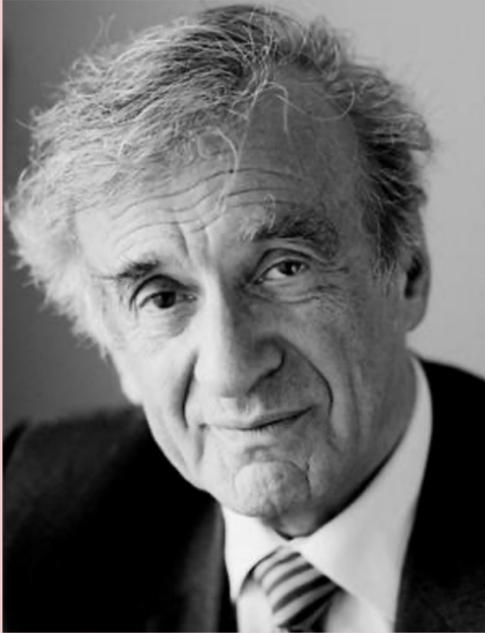
WIESEL VISITS BUCHENWALD WITH PRESIDENT OBAMA



- Elie Wiesel accompanied President Barack Obama on a visit to the Buchenwald concentration camp.
- Wiesel called the trip “a way of coming and visiting my father’s grave.”

JUNE 5, 2009

ELIE WIESEL DIES



- Elie Wiesel died in New York City at age 87.

JULY 2, 2016