

Documents on Elie Wiesel

Quick navigation 🔍

Mr. Irving, take me to ...

Poseur: Elie

Wiesel,
survivor; author
of book: "Night",
about his
horrible
sufferings at the
hands of the
Nazis; speaking
fee: \$25,000 per



lecture plus chauffeur-driven car



[All pictures added by this website]

The Nation.

February 19, 2001

MINORITY REPORT

Wiesel Words

by CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

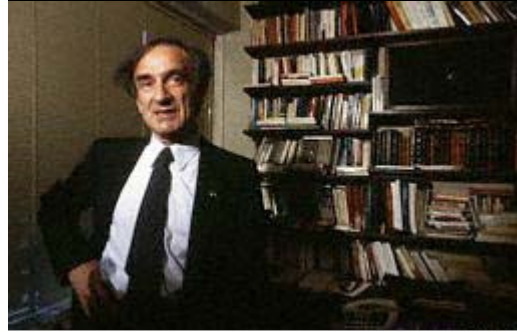


IS THERE a more contemptible poseur and windbag than **Elie Wiesel**? I suppose there may be. But not, surely, a poseur and windbag who receives (and takes as his due) such grotesque deference on moral questions. Look, if you will, at his essay on Jerusalem in the New York Times of January 24.

As a Jew living in the United States, I have long denied myself the right to intervene in Israel's internal debates.... My critics have their

conception of social and individual ethics; I have mine. But while I grant them their right to criticize, they sometimes deny mine to abstain.

Such magnificent condescension, to grant his critics the right. And it is not certain from when Wiesel dates his high-minded abstention from Israel's internal affairs; he was a member of **Menachem Begin's** Irgun in the 1940s, when that force employed extreme violence against Arab civilians and was more than ready to use it against Jews.



At all events, his dubious claim above is only a pompous preface to discarding nonintervention in the present because Jerusalem is at stake, and "the fact that I do not live in Jerusalem is secondary; Jerusalem lives within me." (Again the modesty.) There are, sad to say, serpents in Wiesel's internal Eden, and they too must be patronized:

That Muslims might wish to maintain close ties with this city unlike any other is understandable. Although its name does not appear in the Koran, Jerusalem is the third holiest city in Islam. But for Jews, it remains the first. Not just the first; the only.

"Might wish." "Ties." "Understandable." "Third holiest." Even these lordly and dismissive gestures clearly cost Wiesel something. After all, he announces that the city is "mentioned more than 600 times in the Bible," which (assuming for a moment that one ought to think like a religious fundamentalist in the first place) would give a Christian Arab -- these being at least 15 percent of the Palestinian population -- quite a strong claim on the old place. (Incidentally, let me ask any reader how often the city is mentioned in the Torah.) But for Wiesel all Arabs are Muslims, and even if they happen to live in Jerusalem, this is nothing to the way that Jerusalem dwells within Wiesel. Indeed, it would evidently dwell more comfortably within him if they did not live in it at all. Do I exaggerate? I don't think so. In a propaganda tour of recent history, he asserts that in 1948, "incited by their leaders, 600,000 Palestinians left the country convinced that, once Israel was vanquished, they would be able to return home."



This claim is a cheap lie and is known by Wiesel to be a lie. It is furthermore an utterly discredited lie, and one that Israeli officialdom no longer cares to repeat. Israeli and Jewish historians have exposed it time and again: Every Arab broadcasting station in the region, in 1947 as well as 1948, was monitored and recorded and transcribed by the BBC, and every Arab newspaper has been scoured, and not one instance of such "incitement," in direct speech or reported speech, has ever come to light. The late



historian and diplomat **Erskine Childers** issued an open challenge on the point as far back as the 1950s that was never taken up and never will be. And of course the lie is a

Big Lie, because **Expulsion-Denial** lies at the root of the entire problem and helps poison the situation to this day. (When Israel's negotiators gingerly discuss the right of return, at least they don't claim to be arguing about ghosts, or Dead Souls.)

In a brilliant reply to Wiesel published in Vesti, Israel's largest Russian-language paper, **Israel Shamir** compares him rather leniently not to Jabotinsky but to the Knight of the Doleful Countenance and his mad quest for purity:

Be reasonable, old man. Stay within the frame of the story and within the bounds of common decency. **Don Quixote** did not drive his jeep into Toboso to rape his old flame. OK, you loved her, and thought about her, but it does not give you the right to kill her children, bulldoze her rose garden and put your boots on her dining-room table.

Shamir speaks of the beautiful city that Palestinians centuries ago "adorned with a magnificent piece of jewelry, the Golden Dome of Haram al-Sharif, built their houses with pointed arches and wide porches, and planted cypresses and palm trees." He's wasting his time on Wiesel, who says that Palestine was a desert before he arrived there as one of Begin's thugs, and who slanders the people he helped dispossess, first by falsely saying that they ran away from their beloved ancestral hometown and second by disputing their right even to feel nostalgia for it.

In 1982, after **Gen. Ariel Sharon** had treated the inhabitants of the Sabra and Shatila camps as target practice for his paid proxies, Wiesel favored us with another of his exercises in neutrality. Asked by the New York Times to comment on the pogrom, he was one of the few American Jews approached on the matter to express zero remorse. "I don't think we should even comment," he said, proceeding to comment bleatingly that he felt "sadness -- with Israel, and not against Israel." For the victims, not even a perfunctory word.



As I write, it looks as if the same Sharon will become Israel's prime minister. If you recall, he occupied West Beirut in September 1982, after the assassination of the Maronite Prime Minister **Bashir Gemayel**, on the announced and highly believable pretext that Palestinian civilians would need protection from Phalangist reprisal. He then sent into their undefended camps the most extreme faction of the Phalangist militia and backed up the dirty work of these notorious fascists with flares during the night, and rear-guard cover during the day, for thirty-six hours before having them escorted out in triumph and thanked for their work. In other words, the bulk of US overseas military aid is about to be

lavished on a man who stood with hands on hip, in belt and boots and steel helmet and binoculars, and saw a mound of human corpses rise, and who thought it good. For this outcome, the soil has been manured by the beautiful thoughts of Elie Wiesel.■

📖 Elie Wiesel index . . . we need more, more, more!

Website footnote: Elie Wiesel even claims to be one of these prisoners at Buchenwald. The US Signals Corps picture was posed by US troops soon after they entered the Buchenwald camp near Weimar. Have readers any information on the picture? [✉] Alan Heath (of Poland) responds (9.2.01): "The person in the top right hand corner whose face only is visible is **Mel Mermelstein** who recalls how it was taken in his book *By Bread Alone*." Our comment: Mermelstein and Wiesel both claim to have shared bunks at Buchenwald? Some people just want to be the corpse at every funeral and the bride at every wedding.



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