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## Tolerance as a Way to Remember

Natalie Figueroa

*Chapman University*, [figue132@mail.chapman.edu](mailto:figue132@mail.chapman.edu)

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## Tolerance as a Way to Remember

Natalie Figueroa

Museums, as interesting and engaging as they can be, always have a specific agenda, message, and narrative that is portrayed to their visitors. As Tony Bennett wrote in *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*, the nineteenth century museum “...provided a context in which the visitor might rehearse and recapitulate the ordering of social life promoted by those institutions of discipline and regulation which provided a new grid for daily life.”<sup>1</sup> The Museum then becomes a method, presented by a larger institution, that leads visitors to conceptualize the ordering, or way, of society that currently exists or is being presented. It asks visitors to consider the context of the Museum, the Museum’s message, and the role the visitor has in the Museum. Often, the visitor’s role is a practice that serves to improve the visitor’s relationship with the self.<sup>2</sup> The visitor is then able to recognize their human agency. Twenty-first century museums continue to demonstrate the role of human agency. One example is the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles, California, as they aim to produce visitors, or “progressive subjects,” that are inspired to take action when confronted with religious and social intolerance.

Through the content and ordering of the museum exhibits, the Museum of Tolerance aims to combine learning about the Holocaust with learning a crucial lesson from the Holocaust—namely, the importance of tolerance. The Museum seeks to present its mission by focusing on history, memory, and politics. With that in mind, this paper argues that the Museum of Tolerance presents Holocaust history in such a way as to educate visitors both about the Holocaust and about tolerance as a response to the Holocaust. With this mission, the Museum becomes less about the Jewish community, particularly Holocaust survivors, in Los Angeles, who were affected by the Holocaust, and more about the development of social and religious tolerance as a form of Holocaust Remembrance. The goal of this mission is to embrace the entire civic community. The fusion of remembrance and tolerance does not go without its tensions in the articulation of the Museum’s mission, its relation to the surrounding community, and in the physical design of the museum exhibits.

The name as displayed on the Museum’s website, “Museum of Tolerance: A Simon Wiesenthal Center Museum,” articulates the Museum’s mission to further tolerance within the world. It also connects and clearly communicates the institution that is responsible for the Museum. The Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles is one of two locations by the Simon Wiesenthal Center.<sup>3</sup> Understanding who Simon Wiesenthal was and what the Simon Wiesenthal Center is, as well as their association with the Museum of Tolerance, is incredibly important to identify and appreciate the Museum of Tolerance as a Holocaust-centered museum in the context of tolerance. The history and name behind the Museum signify the importance of tolerance in

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<sup>1</sup> Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 47.

<sup>2</sup> Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, 47.

<sup>3</sup> “Museum of Tolerance,” Simon Wiesenthal Center: Leadership with a Global Outreach, accessed March 13, 2018,

confronting all forms of prejudice and discrimination, which is a primary function in the Museum's mission.

The mission of the Museum is rooted in the mission of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, which was established in 1977 by Rabbi Marvin Hier, dean of administration at the Orthodox Jewish college, Yeshiva University in Los Angeles.<sup>4</sup> The center was housed in a wing of the university and consisted of a Holocaust library with at least 10,000 volumes, exhibits and lecture halls staffed by faculty, and a documentation center.<sup>5</sup> Seminars, forums, and conferences sponsored by the center were "geared to reach the unaffiliated and uninformed members of the Jewish community as well as to serve as a primary education resource about the Holocaust for the general community."<sup>6</sup> Holocaust survivor, educator, and famous Nazi hunter Simon Wiesenthal had "...initially intended to help the Jewish Federation Council set up its Holocaust museum but changed his mind after a visit from Hier and his backers in 1977."<sup>7</sup> Having found the Jewish Federation to work bureaucratically and slowly, and "on a basis of routine," the quick and dynamic way in which Hier and his backers worked appealed greatly to Wiesenthal. As a result, he became one of Hier's strongest supporters, reaching an agreement with him in which Wiesenthal's Vienna-based Documentation Center would be paid five thousand dollars a month in exchange for the Los Angeles Holocaust studies center using his name. Thusly, the Simon Wiesenthal Center opened, and eventually founded the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles and Jerusalem.<sup>8</sup> In addition to using his name, Hier's center would be able to occasionally call on Wiesenthal for speeches, receive a duplicate set of extensive archives after his death, and exchange information.<sup>9</sup> However, Tom Segev in his biography *Simon Wiesenthal: Life and Legend* states that Wiesenthal was never paid by the center for using his name:

One day he had a visitor from Los Angeles who asked his permission to name a new center for Holocaust studies after him. Wiesenthal consulted his attorney, and Rosen told him that the center was a serious enterprise, larger in scope than Yad Vashem, and in competition with the Holocaust museum then under construction in Washington. Wiesenthal assented. He did not request and did not receive any payment for agreeing. The project caught his fancy and the proposal that it be named for him was flattering.<sup>10</sup>

According to this biography, it appears as though Wiesenthal did not want people to think that the agreement was about money, despite the fact that the donations to his center in Vienna were a large part of the deal. The money came into question again when Wiesenthal noticed, and confronted Hier about, the decreasing size and number in donations that were going to his center in Vienna. Wiesenthal informed Hier that donations had decreased significantly and the money

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<sup>4</sup> Russell Chandler, "First U.S. Center for Studies of Nazi Holocaust Slated," *Los Angeles Times*, published August 22, 1977, Los Angeles Times Historical.

<sup>5</sup> Chandler, "First U.S. Center for Studies of Nazi Holocaust Slated," Aug 22, 1977.

<sup>6</sup> Heir quoted in Chandler, "First U.S. Center for Studies," Aug 22, 1977.

<sup>7</sup> Mathis Chazanov, "Museum of Tolerance: Proposed \$5-Million State Grant for Wiesenthal Facility Provokes Some Concern Over Church, State. Separation," *Los Angeles Times*, published May 19, 1985, Los Angeles Times Historical.

<sup>8</sup> Mathis Chazanov, "Museum of Tolerance: Proposed \$5-Million State," May 19, 1985, Los Angeles Times Historical.

<sup>9</sup> Mathis Chazanov and Mark Gladstone, "Quest for Tolerance: Grant Plan for Holocaust Museum Questioned," *Los Angeles Times*, published May 26, 1985, Los Angeles Times Historical.

<sup>10</sup> Tom Segev, *Simon Wiesenthal: Life and Legends* (New York: Schocken Books, 2010), 350.

that he had expected was now going to Los Angeles. This issue of money was solved without difficulty because of Hier's "streamlined fund-raising operation,"<sup>11</sup> and in 1984, Wiesenthal began to receive the \$5,000 a month as stipulated by the agreement. However, by 1994, a year after the Museum of Tolerance opened to the public, the amount was raised to \$7,500 a month.<sup>12</sup> Even after the monetary issue was resolved, the partnership did not go without frustration and disagreements on both sides. Despite the tensions that occurred between Hier and Wiesenthal, their agreement and partnership became a beneficial, and political, move that utilized and promoted Wiesenthal's personal name and mission. By asking to use Wiesenthal's name for his center, Hier was able to live up to the partnership's serious enterprise prediction that Wiesenthal's lawyer had suggested prior to Wiesenthal accepting. Undeniably, the partnership and use of Wiesenthal's name aided in the success of Hier and the eventual recognition of the Center.

By 1977, Simon Wiesenthal had already spent decades hunting Nazi perpetrators and their collaborators. He had made a name for himself as a famous Nazi hunter who located war criminals so that they could be put on trial. Unlike many other survivors, Wiesenthal felt that justice must be served immediately after the end of the war. He was often frustrated by the fact that Americans, British, Austrians, and most deplorably, the Jews themselves, were doing nothing to capture perpetrators.<sup>13</sup> He remained dedicated in finding war criminals as a way of never forgetting those who were murdered in the Holocaust. In fact, one of the many reasons Wiesenthal dedicated his life's work to hunting war criminals was because he felt that when it came time for him to meet the millions of Jews who had perished in the Holocaust, and they asked, "what have you done?", he would be able to reply, "I did not forget you."<sup>14</sup> By the end of 1952, Wiesenthal had records of about two-hundred war criminals, many of whom were prosecuted and brought to justice.<sup>15</sup>

Wiesenthal also played a massive role in the search for and capture of Adolf Eichmann, who had managed the logistics behind the mass deportation of Jews to ghettos and death centers. In fact, "Wiesenthal composed a highly detailed report on the Eichmann family, including dates of birth, marriage, and death and similar facts, information that was required for an absolutely positive identification of the quarry."<sup>16</sup> Wiesenthal's involvement with Eichmann's capture went beyond preparing detailed documents as Mossad operatives, Israeli agents, called on him more than once "...in order to verify that Ricardo Klement [Eichmann's alias] was actually Adolf Eichmann" even though it was fifteen years after Wiesenthal had begun his hunt for Eichmann.<sup>17</sup> When Mossad operatives captured Eichmann and brought him to Israel, "the information on his whereabouts was not the result of a professional intelligence effort..." but rather in large part because of Wiesenthal's dedication and relentless searching.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Segev, *Simon Wiesenthal: Life and Legends*, 357.

<sup>12</sup> Segev, *Simon Wiesenthal: Life and Legends*, 357.

<sup>13</sup> Segev, *Simon Wiesenthal: Life and Legends*, 112.

<sup>14</sup> Dave Smith, "Wiesenthal's Warning: Debt to Dead and their Children," *Los Angeles Times*, Published Nov 10, 1977, Los Angeles Times Historical.

<sup>15</sup> Segev, *Simon Wiesenthal: Life and Legends*, 108.

<sup>16</sup> Segev, *Simon Wiesenthal: Life and Legends*, 143.

<sup>17</sup> Segev, *Simon Wiesenthal: Life and Legends*, 144.

<sup>18</sup> Segev, *Simon Wiesenthal: Life and Legends*, 145.

As a result of his efforts in capturing Eichmann, Wiesenthal's name became known around the world. About half a year before the start of the Eichmann trial, and months after Eichmann's capture, Yad Vashem, an international Holocaust remembrance center organized a press conference in order for Wiesenthal to tell his story.<sup>19</sup> In the beginning of the media assault that ensued after Eichmann's capture, in consideration of diplomatic relations with Argentina, Israel refrained from admitting that their agents had abducted him and claimed that Eichmann was captured by Holocaust survivors. The Israeli politicians wanted to hide the true story and in order to do so they got the media to focus on Wiesenthal, largely as a result of the Austrian Interior Ministry and Israeli embassy in Vienna referring reporters to him.<sup>20</sup> As Tom Segev writes: "...Wiesenthal deserves to be remembered for his contribution to the culture of memory and the belief that remembering the dead is sanctifying life."<sup>21</sup> Consequently, after the recognition that Wiesenthal received as a Nazi hunter, Hier made the decision to ask him to lend his name to the Holocaust studies center in Los Angeles. In doing so, Hier and the center honors Wiesenthal and his dedication to hunting perpetrators and bringing them to justice as a way of remembering the dead and sanctifying life.

With Simon Wiesenthal's name and legacy as a jumping-off point, Hier created the Simon Wiesenthal Center, which would become more than just the Holocaust studies and research center as originally intended; it was becoming the human rights organization that it is today. However, in the process of Hier developing the Simon Wiesenthal Center, Wiesenthal himself felt left out and used. He was unhappy about not being consulted on the center's activities and often first had to read about them in the newspapers. Wiesenthal claimed the center was operating as a one-man enterprise and "...rebuked Hier for attributing too much importance to the center's public relations, remarking that the media projects could be a by-product but should not be allowed to supplant the center's main function as a place of serious, in depth research."<sup>22</sup> Hier's "one-man enterprise" continued as Wiesenthal wrote in 1984 "that the relationship between the center and me is so as if I would be dead and the center is only using my name" and stated in 1986 that the only use Hier had for him was his name.<sup>23</sup> The differences between Wiesenthal and Hier continued on a personal and philosophical level, with Wiesenthal wanting the center to be dedicated to research while Hier began to consider the center as a "Jewish defense agency."<sup>24</sup> These differences created some tensions within the institution, which may have served as a key reason why the Simon Wiesenthal Center decided to establish a Museum of Tolerance. The Museum of Tolerance became an important place of in-depth research and education, ultimately taking on Wiesenthal's original vision of a Holocaust studies center while Hier developed the Simon Wiesenthal Center into a human rights organization.

The original mission of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, which aimed to educate the uninformed members of the community about the Holocaust, expanded into a larger mission that required a more public role, one that upholds the "leadership with a global outreach" part of their

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<sup>19</sup> Segev, *Simon Wiesenthal: Life and Legends*, 148.

<sup>20</sup> Segev, *Simon Wiesenthal: Life and Legends*, 148.

<sup>21</sup> Segev, *Simon Wiesenthal: Life and Legends*, 10.

<sup>22</sup> Segev, *Simon Wiesenthal: Life and Legends*, 358.

<sup>23</sup> Segev, *Simon Wiesenthal: Life and Legends*, 359.

<sup>24</sup> John Dart, "L.A. Rabbi's Organization Commands International Attention," *Los Angeles Times*, March 10, 1990, 425.

name as identified on the website. According to the present Simon Wiesenthal Center's website, their mission is as follows:

The Simon Wiesenthal Center is a global human rights organization researching the Holocaust and hate in historic and contemporary context. The Center confronts anti-Semitism, hate and terrorism, promotes human rights and dignity, stands with Israel, defends the safety of Jews worldwide, and teaches the lessons of the Holocaust for future generations. With a constituency of over 400,000 households in the United States, UNESCO, OSCE, Organization of American States (OAS), the Latin American Parliament (PARLATINO) and the Council of Europe.<sup>25</sup>

Considering Hier's commitment to public engagement on various topics within the Jewish community around the world, the expansion of the research center into a human rights organization was a logical evolution of Hier's quick and dynamic vision for the center. However, as time progressed, Wiesenthal wanted the main function to remain an education center that functioned as a place of serious, in-depth research. Therefore, the Simon Wiesenthal Center's current statement reflects the differing aims of Wiesenthal and Hier, with the Wiesenthal Center reflecting Hier's aims and the Museum of Tolerance reflecting Wiesenthal's aims. Despite these differences, Hier claimed they both wanted "...the very same thing...The Simon Wiesenthal Center to become a leading institution of its kind which will be a lasting legacy to [Wiesenthal's] life works."<sup>26</sup> Therefore, it becomes apparent that contradiction, or the tension between goals, had been an essential component of the center and the Museum from the very beginning. Today, the center continues to offer and share a library and archive as they "collect material that supports the mission of the Simon Wiesenthal Center and the Museum of Tolerance, with primary emphasis on the Holocaust, genocide, antisemitism, and Jewish communities around the world," and has become a nonprofit organization that explores humanitarian and political issues which are reflected in the archive and library expansion of materials "...to include tolerance, racism, multiculturalism, civil rights, and human rights."<sup>27</sup>

Simon Wiesenthal had a significant role in the establishment of the center that in turn founded the Museum. As a Holocaust survivor, Simon Wiesenthal experienced anti-Semitism which lead to the genocide of Jews during World War II, and it was this experience of antisemitism and resulting genocide that became the basis for a museum that advocated social and religious tolerance. The Holocaust, despite having been dropped from the center's name, continued to be a large part of the Simon Wiesenthal Center's Museum of Tolerance. By adding the Wiesenthal Center to the name, the history and knowledge of Simon Wiesenthal and the Holocaust studies center becomes ingrained in the museum's mission, demonstrating how the Museum of Tolerance is a Holocaust-centered museum presented through the context of tolerance. By including tolerance in the name, the museum emphasizes the importance of

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<sup>25</sup> "Understand Simon Wiesenthal Center's Mission," About the Simon Wiesenthal Center, Simon Wiesenthal Center: Leadership with a Global Reach, accessed March 13, 2018, <http://www.wiesenthal.com/site/pp.asp?c=lsKWLBpJLnF&b=6212365><http://www.wiesenthal.com/site/pp.asp?c=lsKWLBpJLnF&b=4441471>

<sup>26</sup> Segev, *Simon Wiesenthal: Life and Legends*, 360.

<sup>27</sup> "What's in the Library and Archives?" Library and Archives, Simon Wiesenthal Center: Leadership with a Global Reach, accessed April 1, 2018, <http://www.wiesenthal.com/site/pp.asp?c=lsKWLBpJLnF&b=4441267>

tolerance, in various contexts, within the world. Holocaust remembrance is maintained through the Museum's content and through its Hebrew name, Beit Ha'Shoah—the House of the Holocaust.<sup>28</sup>

Though there was no indication that building a museum was an objective for either Hier or Wiesenthal during the early stages of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, the Museum of Tolerance came about in a time where it was apparent that religious, political, and social tensions were troubling both the Jewish and larger civic community of Los Angeles. The “tolerance” aspect of the name became all the more significant as there were simultaneous tensions developing in the same geographical location where the Museum was being conceived and constructed. With that being said, it made sense for the Museum to not solely focus on the Holocaust but to broaden its scope to embrace the entire civic community. Therefore, the tensions that the Los Angeles community faced were not to be ignored. While the Jewish community was concerned with assimilation, anti-Semitism, and the needs of the Soviet Jewry, there were also tensions within the civic community that heightened these concerns. The tensions included the United States' international relations with the Soviet Union and Israel, and most prominently the racial tensions among African Americans and Whites in Los Angeles.

Beginning in the early 1960s, just about twenty years after World War II ended, many within the Jewish community, specifically Jewish leaders, were concerned about the dangers of assimilation and intermarriage. In 1964, a newspaper article was published titled, “Jewish Community ‘Faces Challenge’.”<sup>29</sup> In this article Dr. David Lieber, president of the University of Judaism in Los Angeles, stated that organized Jewish life has to be reassessed “...in the light of contemporary pressures and needs.”<sup>30</sup> Rather than coping with problems from the 20s and 30s, Lieber stated that organizations such as synagogues and schools needed to be more in tune with contemporary life. According to Lieber, in order for the trend of Jewish assimilation to be reversed, the community “... must have the courage and vision to create new forms and institutions which will adequately prepare [the Jewish community] to meet the future” and in doing so, address the challenge of reintroducing Jewishness back into the home and life of the modern Jew.<sup>31</sup> Dr. Lieber was not the only Jewish leader fearing the loss of Jewish religious life in the United States, especially within Los Angeles. Another news article published the same year, “New Jewish Federation Council Director Tells of Challenge Ahead,” speaks of similar, if not the same, fears and challenges. Isidore Sobeloff, the Jewish Federation Council director stated, “[Their] problem in the free society of America is to use the freedom we have but not to lose the closeness we had in the old country.”<sup>32</sup> They wanted to retain their Jewish identity in an “emerging and developing” Jewish community.<sup>33</sup>

While the Jewish community in Los Angeles faced the task of maintaining their Jewish identity, they also continued to face prejudice, intolerance, and discrimination. Although

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<sup>28</sup> Sheldon Teitelbaum and Tom Waldman, “The Unorthodox Rabbi” *Los Angeles Times*, July 15, 1990, 10, *Los Angeles Times Historical*.

<sup>29</sup> “Jewish Community ‘Faces Challenge,’” *Los Angeles Times*, August 19, 1964, *Los Angeles Times Historical*.

<sup>30</sup> “Jewish Community ‘Faces Challenge,’” *Los Angeles Times*, August 19, 1964.

<sup>31</sup> “Jewish Community ‘Faces Challenge,’” *Los Angeles Times*, August 19, 1964.

<sup>32</sup> Charles E Davis, “New Jewish Federation-Council Director Tells of Challenge Ahead,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 25, 1964, *Los Angeles Times Historical*.

<sup>33</sup> Davis, “New Jewish Federation-Council Director,” October 25, 1964

“barriers kept coming down,” there still remained a few “restricted” communities or areas where obstacles continued to exist.<sup>34</sup> In a “Dear Abbey” column from 1968, a man asked if he should change his name to a more Christian-sounding name because he was not Jewish and did not want to be perceived as a Jew.<sup>35</sup> The Jewish community’s fear of both assimilation and anti-Semitism continued throughout the 1980s as international tensions intensified and Holocaust deniers challenged the reality of the Holocaust.

The international relations tensions between the United States and both the Soviet Union and Israel caused concern for the Jewish community in Los Angeles and across the United States. In the 1970s and 1980s, Soviet authorities were not allowing Jews to emigrate to Israel. This was brought to international attention through the Shcharansky case. Natalia Shcharansky pleaded for help as her husband had been arrested by the Soviet police due to his activism for Soviet Jews’ rights. Months before her husband’s arrest, her brother disappeared after a demonstration for Jews’ right to emigrate to Israel.<sup>36</sup> To help raise awareness of their plight, Natalia Shcharansky led a delegation of 100 activists on a Passover Flight for Freedom from Los Angeles to San Francisco to ask Soviet Consul General Alexander Zinchuk for her husband’s release, which was unsuccessful.<sup>37</sup> This issue would continue into the late 1980s as President Reagan urged Soviet leaders to let Soviet Jews emigrate at the unveiling of the cornerstone at the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC.<sup>38</sup> As international condemnations increased, the Soviet Union government, under the eighth and last leader of Mikhail Gorbachev, began to open its borders increasing their emigration quotas.

During this time, the United States and Soviet Union, in the midst of the Cold War, expressed their struggle for dominance in part through psychological warfare, with the development of nuclear arsenals, the space race, and proxy wars in other parts of the world. They were the two most powerful countries in the world, with warring ideologies and profound political and economic differences. These differences would manifest through each country’s involvement in the Middle East. The Soviet Union supported the Arab countries while the United States supported Israel. Tensions in the Middle East escalated fears among the Jewish community in Los Angeles, specifically in 1974, when an Arab oil embargo was declared. Jews in Los Angeles feared a rekindling of antisemitism as a result.<sup>39</sup>

Serious as the fears above were, a greater source of anxiety in the Los Angeles Jewish community was focused on civil rights and the struggle of the black community to achieve respect and standing. With the Civil Rights movement taking place in the 1960s, racial tensions were not uncommon throughout the United States, including Los Angeles. In August 1965, a twenty-two-year-old black resident, Marquette Frye, was pulled over in the South Central section

<sup>34</sup> Robert Musel, “Gains of U.S. Jews Pose Problem: Results of Growing Assimilation Cause Leaders Concern,” *Los Angeles Times*, Nov 5 1967 Los Angeles Times Historical.

<sup>35</sup> Abigail Van Buren, “Read Abbey: Unrestricted Look at ‘Not Jewish,’” *Los Angeles Times*, July 4, 1968, Los Angeles Times Historical.

<sup>36</sup> Barry Siegel, “A Jew’s Plight: From Russia with Fear,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 31, 1977, Los Angeles Times Historical.

<sup>37</sup> Siegel “A Jew’s Plight,” March 31, 1977.

<sup>38</sup> “Reagan Urges Soviets to let Jews Emigrate,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 6, 1988. Los Angeles Times Historical.

<sup>39</sup> Stanley Karnow, “Some US Jews Fear Anti-Semitism Could Be Rekindled,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 29, 1974, Los Angeles Times Historical.



of Los Angeles on suspicion of reckless driving by Lee W. Minikus, a white California Highway patrolman. Frye was pulled over just two blocks from his home and as back-up police cars arrived on scene the crowd of onlookers, which included Frye's mother, grew. Frye began to be uncooperative and as onlookers watched the exchange unfold, they found the amount of force used by the police officers to be excessive. The issue then escalated into a violent exchange between the police and a large crowd of about 1,000 black residents.<sup>40</sup> Riots broke out in outrage of police brutality lasting for six days and resulting in \$40 million in property damage and the death of thirty-four people. The Watts riots were considered the city's worst unrest and "was the largest and costliest urban rebellion of the Civil Rights era."<sup>41</sup>

This racial unrest between African American and the White establishment burst again into violence in the 1992 Rodney King Riots. These riots also occurred in South Central Los Angeles and lasted over a six-day period after the acquittal of four Los Angeles Police Department officers who were videotaped using excessive force in beating Rodney King during his arrest. There was widespread looting, assault, arson, and murder. The estimated property damages were about one billion dollars with about sixty-three people killed, about 2,383 people injured, and 12,000 people arrested.<sup>42</sup> With the Rodney King riots escalating racial tensions that had been brewing over decades, the need for tolerance became dramatically evident.

Though there is no museum dedication speech or source that connects these tensions and events directly to the Museum of Tolerance and their mission, these tensions and events are prominently represented in the Museum's tolerance exhibit. In this exhibit, there is a display that shows various Martin Luther King Jr. and civil rights movement clips, and houses a signed copy of Martin Luther King Jr.'s book, addressed to Rabbi Hier. By including the civil rights movement in the narrative of tolerance, the Museum of Tolerance approaches its meaning and the consequences of intolerance by focusing on the dynamics of discrimination.<sup>43</sup> Due to the riots becoming a crucial part of the narrative of tolerance in Los Angeles at the time that work began on the Museum in 1986, the Museum and Center sought to present this discrimination narrative to their visitors. While their exhibit focuses on the civil rights movement primarily in the South, the events and riots that took place in Los Angeles in 1992 are also included. The riots indicate, once again, the consequences of intolerance but through a more contemporary lens that is focused more closely to home. Thusly, tolerance education is provided in parallel with Holocaust history and memory as the Museum attempts to provide context for the visitor in order to recapitulate the ordering of social life and recognize where and how tolerance fits into history and contemporary life.

When looking at the Museum of Tolerance, their history and vision webpage has a subtitle that states, "A Museum to Educate and Enlighten."<sup>44</sup> This indicates that the Museum of

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<sup>40</sup> Sorin Adam Matei and Sandra Ball-Rokeach, "Watts, the 1965 Los Angeles Riots, and the Communicative Construction of the Fear Epicenter of Los Angeles," *Routledge* 72, no. 3 (September 2005), 302.

<sup>41</sup> "Watts Riots," Civil Rights Digital Library, [http://crdl.usg.edu/events/watts\\_riots/](http://crdl.usg.edu/events/watts_riots/)

<sup>42</sup> "Los Angeles Riots," History Channel, <https://www.history.com/topics/the-los-angeles-riots>

<sup>43</sup> "Martin Luther King Jr. Day," Museum of Tolerance,

[http://www.museumoftolerance.com/site/c.tmL6KfNVLtH/b.5063265/k.65C8/Martin\\_Luther\\_King\\_Jr\\_Day.htm](http://www.museumoftolerance.com/site/c.tmL6KfNVLtH/b.5063265/k.65C8/Martin_Luther_King_Jr_Day.htm)

<sup>44</sup> "Our History and Vision," About Us, Museum of Tolerance: A Simon Wiesenthal Center Museum, accessed March 13, 2018

[http://www.museumoftolerance.com/site/c.tmL6KfNVLtH/b.4866027/k.88E8/Our\\_History\\_and\\_Vision.htm](http://www.museumoftolerance.com/site/c.tmL6KfNVLtH/b.4866027/k.88E8/Our_History_and_Vision.htm)

Tolerance, under the leadership of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, has taken on the specific mission to educate and enlighten, a mission that once was the sole purpose of the Simon Wiesenthal Center as a Holocaust studies, research center. Alongside this mission, the Museum advertises itself as a "...human rights laboratory and educational center dedicated to challenging visitors to understand the Holocaust in both historic and contemporary contexts and confront all forms of prejudice and discrimination in our world today."<sup>45</sup> The Museum then gives the visitors a choice between the Holocaust, a historical depiction of intolerance and discrimination, and the tolerance section that gives visitors a contemporary depiction. Through both contexts, the visitors have the opportunity to rehearse the ordering of social life, particularly through their interactive exhibits. From there, visitors can begin to recognize the necessity for tolerance, the acceptance of beliefs, behaviors, and people that do not necessarily live the way that is ethnocentrically expected. As the Museum states, it aims to teach and challenge visitors about tolerance in response to the intolerance, prejudice and discrimination that plague the world today.

The human rights laboratory then becomes a place where museum-goers are given the opportunity to "research" their own beliefs and consider the consequences of intolerance by interacting with the Museum's exhibits. When they enter, museum visitors are given a choice to go through the Holocaust section or to go through the tolerance section. The Holocaust section guides visitors through a timeline of scenes that depict the rise of Nazi Germany and the escalation of prejudice and discrimination that lead to the Holocaust. These scenes are narrated through speakers and both pace and guide the visitor throughout the section. On the other hand, the tolerance section is at the visitor's own pace as they can interact with various exhibits including GlobalHate.com, a recreation of a 1950s diner, and a visual history wall. This choice between the two sections allows visitors to pick between historical or contemporary contexts of tolerance.

Within the Holocaust section of the museum, one of the main and most memorable displays occurs after the visitor has followed the guided chronological presentation and reaches the replica of the gate into Auschwitz-Birkenau. The Museum visitor is given the opportunity to go left or right, choosing their identity between "able-bodied" and "children and others." The visitors get a choice that most victims of the Holocaust did not get. Despite the decision the visitor chooses, however, they end up in the same place, a gas chamber. This gas chamber becomes a crucial and eye-opening moment for museum visitors as they come to the realization that despite making the choice to go left or right, they were lead into a gas chamber and death. Once in the gas chamber, visitors are confronted with real faces, images, and testimonies of what happened in the death camps during the Holocaust. This exhibit within the Holocaust portion of the Museum emphasizes the worst, but very real, consequences of intolerance, prejudice, and discrimination. By demonstrating a historical context of tolerance, through the Holocaust, the Museum reminds visitors that the Holocaust began with a world that was intolerant, unaccepting, and selfish.

In the tolerance portion of the Museum, visitors are immediately confronted with a wall of hate words. They enter into an area where hate websites are on display, and then are directed into "a recreation of a 1950s diner, red booths and all, that 'serves' a menu of controversial

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<sup>45</sup> "Our History and Vision," About Us, Museum of Tolerance: A Simon Wiesenthal Center Museum.

topics on video jukeboxes.”<sup>46</sup> As visitors are able to explore the various websites that display hateful and discriminatory messages about religious, racial, or ethnic groups, they are able to see the amount of hate and intolerance that continues to exist within the contemporary world. Many of these websites include games that “other” and even kill a targeted group of people. This exhibit gives visitors a different perspective that can be viewed alongside the historical context of the Holocaust and demonstrates continued acts of discrimination and hatred in order to exemplify and emphasize the consequences of such hatred and intolerance. Therefore, the Holocaust and Tolerancenter offer a connection that visitors can identify when going through the two sections. The history of the Holocaust, in regards to the Nazi party’s attitudes and propaganda, alongside the contemporary GlobalHate.com exhibit, demonstrate the dangerously similar attitudes towards various groups of people. The various hate websites illustrate the desire to kill specific groups of people, just as the Nazis did with their final solution plan. Therefore, visitors are confronted with hate, prejudice, and discrimination in order to foster the realization that there must be a change within the world and that history must not continue to repeat itself.

Along with the hate website exhibit, visitors enter the mock diner where they are able to vote on who they believe is responsible in situations that are shown. This exhibit is meant to “relay the overall message of personal responsibility...as scenarios focus on bullying, drunk driving, and hate speech.”<sup>47</sup> The exhibit is meant to be ever-changing in order to keep it current.<sup>48</sup> One of the clips shows a man in a diner who begins to make racist comments while in an argument with someone else. After the clip, visitors get to vote on who is in the wrong, the bystanders looking uncomfortable or the person making racial slurs in the public altercation. Once the visitors place their vote, a video depicts how the situation would change depending on each choice that was offered. In another clip, candidates offer their views and visitors can vote on their ideal candidate. The process plays out similarly to that of the previous video as clips then begin to show the results of their decisions. This brings the visitor’s, or an individual’s, personal responsibility into consideration. It becomes a reminder for visitors that their actions or inaction contribute to intolerance or tolerance. As many did during the Holocaust, the average person can and often does become a bystander to hate, intolerance, prejudice, and discrimination.

As visitors go through the Museum and interact with the exhibits, it becomes apparent that viewer participation is crucial to the Museum’s experience. The goal is for the viewers to engage with an exhibit and consider what that information means to them. One of the main goals of the Museum, in keeping with Wiesenthal’s life philosophy, is to remember. The Museum of Tolerance takes remembrance one step further in attempting to influence action and change in the world through their innovative viewer participation exhibits.

As demonstrated through the “David Levinthal’s *Mein Kampf*” chapter in *At Memory’s Edge*, the narrative in Levinthal’s photographs become complete only when the viewer becomes a participant.<sup>49</sup> Levinthal’s photographs “...are meant to evoke, not mime, and to stimulate the

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<sup>46</sup> “Tolerancenter,” Museum of Tolerance: A Simon Wiesenthal Center Museum, <http://www.museumoftolerance.com/site/c.tmL6KfNVLtH/b.4865953/>

<sup>47</sup> Tolerancenter,” <http://www.museumoftolerance.com/site/c.tmL6KfNVLtH/b.4865953/>

<sup>48</sup> Matea Gold, “Exhibit Asks: Who’s to Blame?,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 28, 1996, <http://articles.latimes.com/1998/feb/20/local/me-21139>

<sup>49</sup> James E Young, *At Memory’s Edge* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 51.

imagination but not stimulate historical realities.”<sup>50</sup> The Museum of Tolerance not only evokes the visitor, as Levinthal does with his viewers, but also stimulates historical and contemporary realities in the context of tolerance, whether it be voting on who is in the wrong at the 1950s diner or choosing to go left or right at the Auschwitz-Birkenau entrance. Hier’s groundbreaking use of technology in the Museum, with its innovative exhibits, challenges and confronts visitors in order to recognize their personal role in furthering tolerance or intolerance. The Museum of Tolerance seeks to remind visitors of the past but also to remind them to make informed ethical choices that further tolerance today.

The idea of tolerance as a way to remember recalls Tony Bennett’s *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*, where the nineteenth century museum was considered a way for visitors to practice and review social life, or social ordering, through institutions that promote and provide a new framework for daily life.<sup>51</sup> The Museum definitely attempts to do this by updating their exhibits to be relevant. Even without information or direct sources on how often the Museum changes its exhibits, it is apparent that they keep their exhibits current enough that visitors, a significant number of whom are students, understand the significance of Holocaust remembrance and tolerance in the modern world. With that being said, the Museum upholds the Simon Wiesenthal Center’s mission to confront anti-Semitism, hate and terrorism, and promote human rights and dignity. Although the Museum of Tolerance partially obtains its objectives, they avoid defining how that extends to controversial topics, such as the Israeli and Palestinian relations. As such questions remain unanswered, it becomes important to consider the tensions and inconsistencies of the Museum and its institution throughout their history, development, and their current state especially as they use the visitor’s role to become an agent of action and change within the world.

The Simon Wiesenthal Center’s initial goal was to reach the uninformed and unaffiliated members of the community and educate them about the Holocaust. Since then, it has grown into a widespread human rights organization that created the Museum of Tolerance in order to maintain its original focus and mission to remember and educate. The Museum of Tolerance not only endorses the Center’s mission but was established as a Holocaust-centered museum that embraces and touches the entire civic community through various examples of intolerance. Though the Museum of Tolerance does not have a significant amount of information about Simon Wiesenthal and his life work, they do have a small exhibit that replicates his office with some of the documents and artifacts of his work. Thus, Simon Wiesenthal and his life work continue to be honored as Museum visitors are provided with his history and mission of sanctifying life by remembering the dead.

As museum visitors remember the Holocaust in terms of tolerance, they are urged to confront anti-Semitism, prejudice, discrimination, hate, and terrorism through the lessons of the Holocaust, giving visitors the brutal reality of what indifference and intolerance does to people. Therefore, the center and museum are inseparable, even with their unresolved tensions. It is “...not an ordinary museum of artifacts and documents” but a museum that not only teaches visitors about the Holocaust but reminds us to act.<sup>52</sup> The history, two mission statements, and the

<sup>50</sup> James E Young, *At Memory’s Edge*, 51.

<sup>51</sup> Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, and Politics*, 47.

<sup>52</sup> Museum of Tolerance: A Simon Wiesenthal Center Museum, “Our History and Vision”

Simon Wiesenthal Center's Museum of Tolerance indicate to visitors that only by learning and expressing tolerance can one truly remember the Holocaust.

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\*Bibliography does not include the extensive list of *Los Angeles Times* newspaper articles consulted and cited as suggested by the Chicago Manual Style guidelines.