

Third Place Winner
Division II – 10-12th Grades
Finding a Voice for the Voiceless
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In the aftermath of World War II and the events of the Holocaust, many Nazis had fled Germany and were hiding in various countries, including the United States. At the same time, many countries were busy rebuilding and could not devote resources to pursuing justice for these war criminals, or they did not place a high priority on doing so and tacitly allowed former Nazis to live as expatriates within their borders. This allowed these war criminals to avoid answering for the atrocities in which they had participated. Elliot Welles, a Holocaust survivor who immigrated to the United States after World War II, took it upon himself to do work that no one else was doing and many had not even considered previously. At a time when the United States and other countries were harboring Nazis, Elliot Welles devoted his life to finding Nazi war criminals and bringing them to justice. At first, he conducted this work alone, but later he became the director of the B'nai B'rith Anti-Defamation League task force devoted to hunting Nazis (Margalit 3). By refusing to let the world forget about the atrocities of the Holocaust and the responsibility borne by those who carried them out or allowed them to happen, Welles risked resentment, isolation, ostracization, and even his life. His commitment despite the apparent risks showed an immense amount of moral courage.

Before Elliot Welles began unapologetically hunting these former Nazis-- indeed before even the events of the war and Welles's time as a prisoner in a concentration camp-- he was born in Vienna, Austria. In his early teens, during the Nazi regime, he was deported to Riga, Latvia, (Los Angeles Times 6). By the end of the war in 1945, Welles had survived both the Riga Ghetto and the Stutthof Concentration Camp. His mother, however, had not. In 1949, Welles moved to New York and worked several small jobs until eventually finding a position as a waiter in the German enclave on the Upper East Side. This job helped Welles begin to build connections and to start searching for the man who killed his mother. The search led Welles to Germany, where he pestered officials to let him look at government records. He managed to locate the SS officer who killed his mother and reported his find to the German government, which led to an arrest. Despite the fact that, after the subsequent trial and conviction, the officer only received two to three years in jail, Welles had found his calling: hunting Nazis.

To pursue his newfound ambition, Welles took up a job with the Anti-Defamation League back in the United States as director of the special B'nai B'rith task force dedicated to hunting Nazis. His work led him around the world in search of Nazis hiding in many countries, including here in the U.S.. By the 1970s, ex-Nazi leaders had found several key countries to flee to where they could escape notice and continue to spread their doctrine, even starting youth corps in some places. At the time, the United States was harboring as many as 300 Nazis (Lichtblau 1), and Welles' hunting of these Nazis made him a pariah to the United States government as well as other governments. In some cases, Welles was barred from the countries where he tried to work, including his home country of Austria. It was only in 2002, after many years (and only four years before his death), that Welles was granted citizenship back in Austria (CIA 2). Despite the risks

and challenges he faced, Welles continued to pursue moral justice and was a key figure in the capture, trial, and incarceration of Boļeslavs Maikovskis, a Latvian Nazi collaborator (Margalit 6), and Josef Schwammberger, a former labor camp commander. Throughout his career, Welles fought for justice and what he thought was right no matter what obstacles he faced from powerful global governments.

In recent news, there has been coverage of a rise in hate crimes, especially those targeted towards Jews. One recent attack on my mother's childhood synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania showed me that there were still people in the world who aligned with the Nazi doctrine, just as there are even Nazis still alive today who were active during World War II. Thinking about the existence of these people who identify as Nazis has made me more strongly identify with my own background as a Jew in defiance of their beliefs. The story of Elliot Welles inspires me to fight for the right to be who I am, no matter what the risks. While Welles fought on a large scale, his story inspires me to fight in my own community for my identity not to be erased or forgotten.

Throughout American and even global history, marginalized people have been oppressed by more powerful elites, and it has taken moral courage to stand up for those oppressed people and fight for what is right. Elliot Welles spoke out for justice and for the rights of an underrepresented group to be given that justice, and his moral courage should inspire everyone to fight for such peoples in their own communities. Regardless of the size of the group of those oppressed, be it a single person or an entire nation, we should emulate the moral courage that Elliot Welles showed by speaking out for the voiceless in society. To live in a society where people are able to freely express their identity with no risk to their wellbeing, there have to be others willing to fight for that freedom of expression for everyone.

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