



History on Trial: My Day in Court with a Holocaust Denier

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In her acclaimed 1993 book *Denying the Holocaust*, Deborah Lipstadt called putative WWII historian David Irving "one of the most dangerous spokespersons for Holocaust denial." A prolific author of books on Nazi Germany who has claimed that more people died in Ted Kennedy's car at Chappaquiddick than in the gas chambers at Auschwitz, Irving responded by filing a libel lawsuit in the United Kingdom -- where the burden of proof lies on the defendant, not on the plaintiff. At stake were not only the reputations of two historians but the record of history itself.

History on Trial: My Day in Court with a Holocaust Denier Details

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From Reader Review History on Trial: My Day in Court with a Holocaust Denier for online ebook

Matt says

“I don’t see any reason to be tasteful about Auschwitz,” World War II “historian” David Irving told a Calgary audience in 1991. **“It’s baloney. It’s a legend.”** Irving had written a book in 1977 called *Hitler’s War* that attempted to rehabilitate the reputation of the *Führer*. Since then, he had begun giving talks to groups who were – if we are being extremely generous – skeptical of the Holocaust. Later in his speech, undoubtedly with a naughty-boy relish, Irving slyly mused that **“in fact...more women died on the back seat of Edward Kennedy’s car at Chappaquiddick than ever died in a gas chamber at Auschwitz.”**

I assume that people laughed at this. It seems the kind of well-polished bon mot that Irving’s audiences would find terribly witty. In 21st century internet terms, it almost seems mild. When I see things like this, I take a deep breath and remember that the world is full of assholes.

Professor Deborah Lipstadt responded differently. In 1993 she wrote *Denying the Holocaust*, devoting several hundred words to Irving and his craft. She went beyond merely calling him a jackass, which is where my focus would have been. Instead, she accused him, among other things, of distorting evidence, manipulating documents, and generally altering the historical record to suit his crypto-fascist purposes.

In 1995, Irving sued Lipstadt in Great Britain where the burden is on the defendant to prove the truth of their allegedly libelous statements. (In America, where slander and libel laws must contend with the First Amendment, the burden is on the plaintiff. At least for now). *History on Trial* is Lipstadt’s account of that trial, which resulted in a resounding victory for her.

This is a book I liked a lot. Yet, as I reflect on it now, the first things that come to mind are criticisms. To the point that I’m not sure if I’d recommend it.

The problem, I think, stems largely from a question of tone. Lipstadt writes in the first person, appearing as both participant and authority. Blending the subjectivity of memoir with the objectivity of history is a delicate task, and I’m not sure Lipstadt nails it. She can be off-putting in her certainty, churlish even towards her own experts. Anyone who fails to agree with her *instantly* is given a disappointed aside. The only way to redeem yourself is to eventually adopt her point of view. Lipstadt is unremittingly glum and humorless in her outlook. Yeah, I get that the Holocaust is not a forum for laughs. But it’s also helpful to have a little perspective. I kept wanting her to lighten up a bit. This is a fight about Holocaust scholarship, not the Holocaust itself. She paints herself as a victim, while at the same time describing her nice hotel in London, the fancy operas she attended, the fancier parties with the fanciest chocolates. We’re not exactly talking the trials of Job. Getting sued sucks. But if you do, this is the way to do it.

The lead-up to the trial is especially grating, filled with distracting and unnecessary personal asides. I wanted more of the trial preparation aspect. Instead, Lipstadt basks in the adoration she received for fighting the good fight. During the trial, she often breaks the flow of her own narrative to interject hyperventilated responses to every twist and turn. These started to resemble the literary version of a bad soap opera reaction shot. She doesn’t seem to trust that her story is good enough without her dire interpretation of the proceedings.

Irving verses Lipstadt proves to be an inverse David and Goliath. That is, the bad guy – Irving – is David with a sling. Lipstadt has the high-priced legal team, famous historians like Richard Evans as high-priced

experts, and the support of Penguin Publishing. All this force is arrayed against one man, acting as his own attorney. Don't get me wrong. This is Irving's fault. He filed the suit and brought it on himself. Lipstadt can't be faulted for responding Chicago-style, bringing big guns to Irving's knife fight. Moreover, Irving's hateful brand of historical misrepresentation deserves to be squashed. Still, there came a point where I felt like Lipstadt's crew was punching down.

Frustratingly, Lipstadt never explain how a civil trial in Great Britain works. To be sure, she talks about the unusual burden of proof, and the specific roles of barristers verses solicitors. However, I never understood the formal presentation of evidence. In the U.S., the plaintiff presents her case, the defense gets a chance to present his, and then a judge or jury makes a decision. Here, witnesses for the plaintiff and defense seemed to be called willy-nilly, with no particular order. It almost felt like an inquisitorial, rather than adversarial process. I don't know if that's the explanation, or if Lipstadt rearranged trial events for a better story, or if the British use some kind of hybrid system.

Finally, I didn't like Lipstadt's scorched earth tactics. She has a lot of critical remarks for people representing even mild opposition. For instance, she censures the esteemed historian John Keegan without ever attempting to see his standpoint. Meanwhile, her own strong views – such as her belief that Jews shouldn't marry non-Jews – go unexamined (except by Irving, who gloatingly notes they share some ideas).

Despite this, the inherent drama of the trial itself covers a lot of sins. As a lawyer and an amateur historian (self-appointed), I found the spectacle of a judge deciding historical fact to be both fascinating and extremely troubling. Lipstadt's experts, Richard Evans, Robert Jan van Pelt, Christopher Browning, and Peter Longerich are all exceptionally smart individuals, and it is great seeing them in action, using their vast knowledge and facility with primary sources to knock aside the flimsy arguments of Holocaust deniers.

Especially riveting is Jan van Pelt's testimony on the massive confluence of evidence that proves the existence of Auschwitz's gas chambers. Irving's position, and that of many deniers, is that the buildings alleged to be gas chambers are not gas chambers at all. The reason? There are no holes for dropping in cyanide pellets. This dictum is captured in the asinine "no holes, no Holocaust" imbecility proffered by deniers. (There are, if I may be allowed, many holes in this logical construction). Jan van Pelt crushes Irving on this point, and it is grand.

Perhaps the thing most lacking, more important than tonality, is a bit more self-reflection. This is a free speech case – it concerns Lipstadt's freedom to call a spade a spade.

Yet the free speech issue in this case rests on a knife's edge. I can see how it might go the other way, with unpopular historical positions being smothered, rather than debated (this was Keegan's fear). Lipstadt can't. She is too self-righteous to recognize that when you start saying a historical event is an objective truth, not subject to examination, testing, and reinterpretation, that you chill scholarship. This is why so many people were uncomfortable with her case, even though Irving started it, and Lipstadt obviously had to respond for both professional and fiduciary reasons.

The Holocaust happened. It is the most heavily documented crime in history. There are videos, photographs, documents, the remains of concentration camps. There are confessions, memoirs, diaries, and letters. There are thousands of eyewitnesses, both perpetrator and victim, who have left accounts. There is the rent torn in the fabric of the universe, the result of millions of innocent people murdered. Anyone who tries to deny the essence of this has something dark within their soul.

There are all kinds in this world. There are those who believe that 9/11 was an inside job, meant to spur a Middle Eastern war. There are those who will tell you that the 20 children butchered in their elementary school less than two weeks before Christmas never existed, their deaths – their very lives – a hoax to spur gun control. They will tell you that Hitler lived only to serve the Jews.

This is a tough crowd. I sympathize with Lipstadt's contempt for Irving and his disciples. But the fight is not entirely hopeless.

The holes, you see. The holes at Auschwitz that were always there because the gas chambers were there, these holes were found by a man named Charlie Provan. He was a Holocaust denier who'd been told the facts were not factual, were to the contrary ridiculous and impossible. Provan read a manuscript by an SS man named Kurt Gerstein. He once claimed that seven to eight hundred Jews were packed into a death-room of 25 square meters. Deniers cried *nonsense!* Gerstein was clearly lying; therefore, according to denier logic, it was turtles all the way down. But Charlie wasn't sure. So Charlie had his kids strip to their skivvies, made them huddle together, measured the space they took up, and then used math to determine that yes, it was possible. Later, he went to Auschwitz and found the damn holes. He also discovered the Holocaust. Heck, there are rumors that even Irving acknowledges the death chambers at Auschwitz, though he'll minimize them to the end.

The truth will out.

Tracy Rowan says

I was stymied by the task of writing this review for a long time. I didn't know where to start because this is a subject so emotionally charged that it's difficult to discuss. Then I realized that this was one of the central issues of the book and the trial. How do you approach Holocaust denial? Do you even dignify that position by bothering to argue it?

This is the question Deborah Lipstadt has to answer when historian David Irving brought a lawsuit against her for calling him a Holocaust denier, and a liar. He brought the suit in London because British law required Lipstadt to prove that her accusations were true rather than placing the burden of proof on Irving himself as plaintiff as American law would have done. Lipstadt could have made it all go away by settling -- and there was pressure on her to do so, even from parts of the Jewish community -- but she chose to fight the suit because not to would have been to imply that it was okay to deny the murder of millions of Jews (and others, though that doesn't actually enter into the narrative.)

The account of the trial shows clearly how frustrated Lipstadt was with the process, with the fact that her legal team would not allow her to testify, nor would they allow Holocaust survivors to take the stand. She didn't understand either position and butted heads with her lawyers on more than one occasion. She took exception to her barrister treating a visit to Auschwitz as a forensic visit rather than a memorial one. Her responses were utterly understandable and based on emotion, and that is why her team made the choices they did. The law doesn't deal in emotional arguments, it deals in facts. The weight of tears cannot be measured against the weight of evidence.

Lipstadt and her team didn't have to prove that millions of people died and that Hitler was ultimately responsible, they just had to prove that in misrepresenting facts and changing words from primary documents, Irving lied. They didn't have to prove that anti-Semitism and racism are wrong, they only had to prove that Irving was a racist and anti-Semite. And only a painstaking examination of fact could ever prove those things.

The book is a powerful one, particularly in our time when racism, anti-Semitism, and all manner of ugly, troll-like behavior is being enabled at the highest levels of government. Irving's behavior feels familiar to this contemporary American, a man who cannot admit either mistakes, or wrong-doing, and who is not only

a Holocaust denier but who, on the night when the verdict was given in Lipstadt's favor, went on British television to talk about how, in the end, the decision was actually quite favorable to him. It wasn't, it was devastating to him, but he was either incapable of understanding that or he simply refused to admit it.

When asked if he would then stop denying the Holocaust, Irving replied, "Good lord, no."

I should add that before I wrote this review I also watched the film, and found it excellent. I think they're complimentary, and one enhances the other. Either way, if you're at all interested in the case, one which I did find I remembered from the late 1990s, the book and to a lesser extent the film, is well worth your time.

Elliot Ratzman says

David Irving, Holocaust denier, is a walking psychology case study in narcissism, chronic lying, cognitive dissonance, and willful ignorance. In British court, he sued historian Deborah Lipstadt for describing him as a Holocaust denier in her book. This is a page-turning account of the suit, the trial, and the aftermath; it is also a recommendable description and appreciation of the craft of Historians. The most annoying thing about this book is Lipstadt's incessant fretting, anxious worrying, and presumptuous interference in the masterfully conducted defense constructed by her British lawyers. Historians Richard Evans and Robert Jan Van Pelt delivered hundreds of pages of meticulous research refuting Irving's shoddy scholarship and Hitlerphilia. Irving, who some thought was merely a historian with an alternative take on WWII, turns out to be a full-blown racist and genuine anti-Semite. The trial showed definitely that he cooked claims, falsified sources, distorted evidence. Good show!

Chris says

Edited on the 18 Dec 2016. Teaching this next year so re-read.

Book is better on the re-read.

I need to point out that the only reason why I gave this book three stars is that sometimes the style feels a little a like a list. I'm not sure how Lipstadt could have made an English trial more lively, but I'm trying to be fair.

Lipstadt is da bomb! She is my new hero! She is awesome! And her lawyers are awesomer (yes, I know that it is not really a word, but really there is no other way to put it).

I would highly recommend reading this book after reading Deborah E. Lipstadt's Denying the Holocaust, if only for context. I pick this book up because of that and because newspaper accounts of British libel law and how it effects freedom of speech.

If you are interested in history, research, and freedom of thought, read this book.

Jed Sorokin-Altmann says

I'd say it's the lawyer in me, but my artist/art history-professor Dad couldn't put down Deborah Lipstadt's book "History on Trial: My Day in Court with a Holocaust Denier" either.

Lipstadt, a renowned Jewish studies professor at Emory University was sued for libel by British author and holocaust denier David Irving, who alleged that Lipstadt calling him a denier in one of her books was untrue and defamatory.

The British legal system is very different than ours when it comes to defamation. Unlike the United States, where the burden of proof is on the plaintiff to demonstrate that words were libelous, in Britain, the burden is on the defendant to prove that his or her words were true.

This book is one part legal thriller, one part history, and one part autobiographical. It describes how Lipstadt dealt with the pressures to consider a settlement, the need to find money for a defense fund, the difficulty of a historian of her stature being unable to speak to these issues herself and having to let herself be defended through counsel and witnesses, and the painfulness but importance of being part of a trial to prove that the holocaust occurred.

Some other reviews on Goodreads accuse Lipstadt of being biased, a complaint I find absurd. Of course she is biased-this is HER story. It's autobiographical, and like all autobiographies, it does not, and cannot, pretend to be objective or attempt to tell all sides of the story. This is Lipstadt's perspective about what happened to her.

The book manages to be suspenseful, even for those who know the verdict. I highly recommend it.

Steve Smits says

Having seen the recent movie (Denial) I thought the book might be worth the read. The movie was good, but the full-length treatment that a book provides is always certain to be more satisfying. The titles of each are suitable for attracting the interest of viewers and readers, but overlook, I think, what is also on trial here: historians, historiography and freedom of speech.

David Irving is a prolific writer of histories of Hitler and World War II, well-known for taking iconoclastic and revisionist views on Hitler's culpability for the massacre of the Jews in the "Final Solution" atrocities carried out by Germans. He also wrote a book on the bombing of Dresden by the allies that criticizes this as needless to the war effort and as a putative war crime because of the magnitude of casualties. Deborah Lipstadt is a professor of Modern Jewish History and Holocaust Studies at Emory University. She had been following the activities of Holocaust deniers and in her book "Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory" wrote that Irving deliberately falsified and misconstrued facts and data about the Holocaust to the point of claiming that whatever killings that occurred were not known to or sanctioned by Hitler and that the gas chambers of Auschwitz did not exist. She was concerned that, rather than being considered a crank, Irving had garnered considerable favorable attention in literary reviews and among some recognized historians.

Irving sued Lipstadt and Penguin, her UK publisher, for defamation. Defamation suits in Britain, unlike in America, place the burden of proof on the person making the allegedly defamatory statement(s); in other words, the defendant must prove the truth of her words. (Under US law the plaintiff must prove that the

words were untrue and in the case involving public figures that the utterance was recklessly made.) The defendants would be liable for punitive awards, court costs, apology and retraction and, importantly, ceasing any further publication of the offending words. Irving had brought such suits, or threats of suits, in the past and this had caused publishers to settle for fear of losing. In this case, Lipstadt and Penguin determined to contest the suit and employed a first-rate team of legal minds and historians to prove that Irving had intentionally distorted and manipulated facts in his histories. Moreover, that his motivation for so doing was his virulent antisemitism as demonstrated by his public utterances and close ties with extremist groups around the world.

Through exhaustive review of sources and examination of Irving's writing and speeches, the defendants were able to prove conclusively that Irving went far beyond the pale of plausible interpretation of facts and willfully distorted evidence that did not support his preconceived conclusions. They showed also that Irving was a rabid and extreme antisemite who had made the most shocking and appalling statements about Jews and Holocaust survivors. Irving agreed with the defense to have the case heard before a judge and not a jury and had decided to represent himself. In his testimony and cross-examination of defense experts he was astoundingly inept, often contradicting himself from one day to the next. (Among the defense experts were Richard J. Evans, perhaps the world's most highly respected historian on 19th and 20th Germany, and Robert Jan Van Pelt whose research and knowledge of Auschwitz is unparalleled.)

Lipstadt recounts the trial with the drama it deserves. It concludes with a smashing victory by the defense. Irving was completely discredited and his reputation put into shreds. He foolishly appealed the judge's 375-page decision only to see his standing as a scholar further diminished. This case garnered international attention and, given the risks to his reputation, it is puzzling why Irving wouldn't have found it wiser to ignore Lipstadt's criticisms. Such is the price to be paid for a large ego and delusions driven by self-regard.

Here's why I think the movie and book are misnamed. Most people who have heard of the Holocaust "denials" understand it to be the work of crackpots and extremists. While we should worry about such fanatics as they tend toward violence, there is little chance that their views will ever garner credulity. But, Irving is different because his work had been fairly well-reviewed and moderately well-accepted by the academic community. Irving was perceived to be an iconoclast and revisionist whose research was thorough if his interpretations and conclusions were off base. This reception of Irving was, however, entirely unjustified and, disturbingly, no one looked closely at his treatment of his source material. When they finally did -- impelled by the court action he brought -- his falsifications, distortions and manipulations were patently clear. Why hadn't anyone done this before? One thinks of how outlandish it would be if scientists failed to check other scientists' data when evaluating their hypotheses and theories. Does not the academic world of historians bear the same obligation? Now, certainly, there is a place for revisionist interpretations in the study of history; we should actually be thankful for it. It is also appropriate to give wide latitude for divergent analysis and interpretation of the meaning of historical events, but this should not extend giving a pass to overt falsehoods, bias and purposeful manipulation of objective truth. The examination of Irving's use of his sources, when it finally occurred, revealed the most egregious dishonesty that was plain to see by anyone who bothered to look. In the aftermath of the trial, some historians criticized the dismantling of Irving's research by stating that any historian should fear such close scrutiny as the flaws in their work might certainly be detected; that's an astonishing statement that undermines our faith in scholarly integrity.

Finally, there's the issue of freedom of speech. Some commentators said that the efforts to discredit Irving served to inhibit the freedom of speech that's the foundation of academic freedom. Such view is entirely wrong headed. It was Irving who, by his legal action, was inhibiting (Lipstadt's) free speech. Certainly, the prospect of being sued for one's speech puts a chill on it. Lipstadt at the outset thought it likely that Penguin would cave in; it was logically in the firm's self-interest to do so. Moreover, academic freedom does not extend to freedom to lie without fear of challenge; indeed it is the dialectical nature of scholarly discourse that does most to advance truth. Irving should not have received a "pass" from his peers and thankfully someone finally (and courageously) called him on this.

Colleen says

My interest in this book waxed and waned but ultimately I'm glad I read it. The author, Deborah Lipstadt, a well-educated, opinionated, and headstrong Jewish woman wrote a book called *Denying the Holocaust*, in which she described the historian, David Irving, as very dangerous because he was a well-respected author who continually tried to defend Hitler and the Nazis and denied the Holocaust had occurred. Because of the way British law works Lipstadt was the one who had to prove Irving was a liar when he brought a lawsuit against her. The most fascinating part of the book was hearing the polar opposite opinions of Lipstadt and Irving, each of whom so unwaveringly believes he/she is right. Even more fascinating were the absolutely delusional beliefs of David Irving. Here is a man so cocky and arrogant that he made terrible statements about Jews, insulted women and a number of other minority groups and thought he could get away with this in court. He made many "wink-wink" comments to the judge (who was solely responsible for the trial, not a jury) as if the two were buddies who both knew Jews were inferior, deserved what they got, and that the Holocaust didn't happen. In the face of overwhelming evidence that the Holocaust did occur, that he consorted with neo-Nazis and spoke at their rallies, and that his books were inaccurate and biased, Irving continuously denied he was a denier and claimed to have no knowledge of whom he was speaking to at those rallies. He incriminated himself and his work over and over again. It was unbelievably unbelievable.

Lucy says

I appreciated the premise of the book, but there were entirely too many moments when she irritated me for me truly to "like" the book. For instance, she seemed to have completely forgotten the fact that people other than Jews were killed in the Holocaust. Her stance on certain things (which I did not see as necessarily pertinent to the topic of the book and which I frankly disagree with) was quite clear.

Kirsty says

In 1993, Deborah E. Lipstadt published a book called *Denying the Holocaust*. In this, she called British historian David Irving, a prolific author of books on World War Two, 'one of the most dangerous spokespersons for Holocaust denial'. She went on to say that he was a 'Hitler partisan wearing blinkers', and that 'on some level Irving seems to conceive himself as carrying on Hitler's legacy'. In the entire book, she devoted no more than two hundred words to Irving. Despite this, and as he had done on previous occasions, Irving decided to file a court case against both Lipstadt and her publisher, Penguin, for the 'accusations' which she levelled upon him. These cases, and the 'provocative books' which he himself wrote, gave Irving 'a certain notoriety'. *Denial: Holocaust History on Trial* follows the entire trial, in which Lipstadt was victorious, from beginning to end.

Denial is described as a 'riveting, blow-by-blow account of this singular legal battle, which resulted in a formal denunciation of a Holocaust denier that crippled the movement for years to come. Lipstadt's victory was proclaimed on the front page of newspapers around the world, such as *The Times* (UK) which declared that "history has had its day in court and scored a crushing victory.'" Elie Wiesel declares that Lipstadt's book is an 'absorbing narrative of an event that has reverberated throughout the world [and which] will be read with interest and gratitude by future generations'. *The San Francisco Chronicle* deems it 'possibly the most important Holocaust-related trial since Adolf Eichmann was tried in Israel in 1961.'

As the trial was to take place at the Royal Courts of Justice in the United Kingdom, American lecturer and author Lipstadt faced very different judicial proceedings to those which she would have endured in the United States; a 'mirror image', no less. In the United Kingdom, she was the person who had to prove that what she said about Irving was true; in the United States, it would have been up to Irving to prove Lipstadt wrong. She had to assemble a legal team in the United Kingdom, as well as a research assistant under her care at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, where she worked as a lecturer in Modern Jewish and Holocaust Studies, to work tirelessly on amassing an extensive body of evidence. She essentially had to prove to the courts that the Holocaust happened.

Denial brings together Lipstadt's extensive journal entries, as well as transcripts of the trial. It has been split into three sections, which deal with 'The Prelude', 'The Trial', and 'The Aftermath'. Lipstadt begins by setting out her interest in, and personal reasoning for, studying Modern Jewish History and the Holocaust, and then the process of how she came to research deniers, something which posed a challenge for her from the very beginning.

At first, I found Lipstadt's prose style rather accessible and easy to read, but it soon became bogged down with so much detail from the trial. At times, when a lot of participants are present in conversations or briefings, it can tend to get a little confused. This is not due to the way in which Lipstadt sets things out; rather, it has to do with the naming of characters, and the ways in which she refers to them. There is little consistency in places here; for instance, she speaks to historian Chris Browning, referring to him as 'Browning' in one sentence and 'Chris' the next. This is easy enough for the reader to work out, of course, but it does feel a little jarring at times.

The confusion which I felt in particular passages may have been expected; due to the nature of the book, a lot of intricate legal language is used, and is not always explained in context. Lipstadt discusses of the personal impact which the trial has upon her, although not always in as much detail as seemed fitting. The pacing felt a little off at times, too, and some sections tended to feel a little plodding in consequence. At times, there is a curious sense of detachment in *Denial*, despite Lipstadt herself being such an important part of the case. This may be because she is unable to speak during the trial upon the advice of her lawyers, who do so on her behalf.

I am still baffled as to how anyone can dispute the horrors of the Holocaust; there is so much firsthand evidence available to the modern historian, all of it heartbreaking. I very much admire Lipstadt for bringing such despicable Holocaust deniers to the fore in her work. As Lipstadt notes, 'In a way, I found it harder to write about deniers than about the Holocaust itself. The Nazis were defeated. Deniers were alive and kicking and reveling in their efforts.'

Despite this, I did not get on that well with the way in which the trial was presented in *Denial*. As I read, I was continually asking myself whether I was enjoying the book. Of course, given its nature and content, *Denial* has a lot of merit. I found that overall, however, my reading experience felt rather negative. Whilst the material here is fascinating, I did not feel as though the reportage of the trial was as well executed as it could have been.

K says

Deborah Lipstadt is my new go-to for Tisha be-Av reading. Here, she gives a detailed account of the lawsuit to which she was subjected when Holocaust denier David Irving sued her for libel. Lipstadt won the case, and Irving was repeatedly discredited as a pseudo-historian drawing the target around the arrow in pursuit of his antisemitic agenda, which was unequivocally demonstrated throughout the trial.

The level of detail strengthened Lipstadt's case against Irving but also made this a bit of a challenging read, especially on a fast day. I also think I might have been slightly better off with one of Lipstadt's other books as a Tisha be-Av read. This one looked at the Holocaust through the lens of discrediting Irving and defending historical truths/intellectual honesty as opposed to The Eichmann Trial which was more emotionally evocative as a Tisha be-Av read. That being said, this was not a bad choice for Tisha be-Av. Lipstadt's writing is both intelligent and accessible, and I always come away from her books with a sense of reading time well spent.

BAM The Bibliomaniac says

A book for all Seasons: book about a tragedy

Laura says

From IMDb:

Acclaimed writer and historian Deborah E. Lipstadt must battle for historical truth to prove the Holocaust actually occurred when David Irving, a renowned denier, sues her for libel.

With Rachel Weisz, Tom Wilkinson, Timothy Spall.

Kimba Tichenor says

In 1993, Deborah E. Lipstadt, a full professor at Emory University, published "Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory. The following year, she found herself subject to a libel suit by David Irving, a British amateur "historian", who had published numerous books on Hitler and World War II. Irving accused her of defamation of character because she had labeled him a Holocaust denier whose allegations were based on his ideology of anti-Semitism. This book is her account of the libel trial, which in 2000 ended in an unambiguous and resounding victory for Lipstadt: Irving's version of events surrounding the Holocaust and the bombing of Dresden did not constitute differences of historical interpretation, but were lies based on fabricated and/or manipulated evidence for ideological purposes.

Lipstadt, who on the advice of her lawyers remained silent throughout the trial, utilizes this book to voice the fears and concerns that plagued her throughout the trial. Thus, the book is both a memoir and historical account of the trial. Yet in looking at numerous reviews on Goodreads of the book, I have found myself dumbfounded by some of the criticisms launched against the author. Some reviewers have criticized her for "whining" about her dilemma and for her honest account of how she second-guessed her team of lawyers at the time of the trial, for example questioning whether it was a wise decision for her not to testify in her own defense. Yet, I cannot imagine any historian who found themselves in a similar position not harboring some of these same feelings. After all, it was her body of historical work that was being called into question and thus, a defeat in court could ruin her professionally and financially. Not to mention, the libel case had been brought in Britain and not in the United States; consequently Lipstadt found herself dealing with a legal system that she did not fully comprehend. For example, unlike in the United States, the defendant -- not the plaintiff -- shoulders the burden of proof. Thus if she failed to launch a vigorous defense, she would have lost

the suit! In addition to these legal challenges, the context in which the trial took place also raised the stakes. The 1990s witnessed a rise in xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and Holocaust denial in the United States, Britain, Germany and elsewhere. For example, the year prior to the publication of her 1993 book, a group of right-wing extremists had set fire to a memorial at Sachsenhausen, a former Nazi concentration camp located outside of Berlin. Additionally, Irving enjoyed a good reputation among some historians; this reputation allowed him to give a certain respectability to Holocaust denial. Against this backdrop, Lipstadt's fears that her case might not end in resounding victory were not without grounds. She also understood that much more was at stake than her career -- had Irving won his libel case the repercussion for freedom of scholarship and for Holocaust history would have been devastating.

Even more disturbing than criticisms of her "whining" about her legal representation were those who criticized Lipstadt for failing to reference in any depth other groups targeted and killed by the Nazis. The fact is this book does not pretend to be a comprehensive history of the Holocaust or of the victims of Nazism. It is the history of a libel trial -- one in which the author came under personal and professional attack by a Holocaust denier whose motive for denying the Holocaust was anti-Semitism. Consequently, her defense as presented in the book focuses on the systematic murder of Jews by the Nazi regime and the motives of her accuser. The sad reality is that the vast majority of Holocaust deniers do so because they are anti-Semites. Thus, they do not for example call into question the Nazis' murder of communist resistance fighters, the disabled, the mentally ill, or gypsies. Instead, they call into question the gassing of Jews in extermination camps. That so many readers (not all) failed to grasp why the book focused on Jewish victims is disturbing, as one does not know whether to attribute it to lack of critical reading skills, ignorance of the historical context, or a latent form of anti-Semitism.

As Lipstadt concludes:

"Since antisemitism and, for that matter, all forms of prejudice are impervious to reason, they cannot be disproved. Therefore in every generation they must be fought."

Yeva B says

I loved this book, and I find it funny how many other reviewers were put off by a Jewish woman describing her anxiety and taking the matters so personally. I think she was more stoic than many would have been in her situation when a vicious antisemite decided to attack her reputation and livelihood. I think this book was beautifully written and brought me to tears on multiple occasions. Lipstadt put enormous trust into her legal team and followed their instruction at every turn, even when she didn't understand said instructions. In terms of the judge, well, I was made very anxious at how sympathetic he seemed towards Irving throughout the trial, and it wasn't me in court, I could only imagine her anxiety.

When I said funny up there, I meant unnerving. I find it unnerving how many reviewers were unable to empathize with Lipstadt. I mean it was only the genocide of her people on the line.

Kate says

Interesting combination of history book, courtroom drama, and commentary on historical method. Lipstadt does a very good job of combining all these elements and transitions between them in a way that seems natural. It could have easily gone terribly wrong--for example, I doubt that a general American audience knows much about either British court procedure or the exact mechanics of concentration camp elevators. It could have been very confusing trying to juggle explanations for both of these at the same time, while also demonstrating why David Irving's historical analysis was not properly done. Yet Lipstadt manages to do it all, and to keep the narrative interesting and well paced at the same time. The book was an effortless read, and yet I learned a lot.

So why only 3 stars? I felt that she was not impartial enough. She described the details of the trial accurately, but her descriptions of the participants and their motivations were very biased. Maybe it's not fair to expect impartiality from a personal account, but I really thought that as a historian she should know better, and found her very frustrating. Here are some examples: She describes Irving as somehow sinister-looking. I'll admit that his opinions and behavior are pretty frightening, but I've seen pictures of the guy. He's just an average-looking old dude, not really Disney villain material. She notices that a certain woman in the audience is sympathetic to Irving's ideas, and promptly nicknames her "Brunhilda". Again, Irving's ideas were very disturbing, but ethnic slurs? Really? Or does she think that it doesn't count because the woman is not actually German? Lipstadt repeatedly describes her own disappointment with the judge, because he is apparently polite to Irving and encourages him as he presents his case. But what else is an impartial judge supposed to do before all the evidence is in, especially considering that Irving had no lawyer to help him? She's happy later on when the judge rules in her favor, but we never see that moment of introspection where she admits that she was perhaps just a tad bit unfair to the judge. In fact, lack of introspection is the operative word here. She describes herself as "pulsating with anger" when Irving claims that she's just as biased against interracial marriages as he is. Her explanation? "I was deeply troubled by intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews because it threatened Jewish continuity. Color and ethnicity were entirely irrelevant to me." So I guess as a Jewish woman who dates non-Jews I would be deeply troubling to her. But hey, it would be because of religious bigotry, not racism, so that makes her special, and she's certainly above criticism by garden-variety bigots like Irving. It's not really that I expect her to be 100% PC all the time--this is her personal story after all. But it would have been nice to have an unbiased account, especially in a book which is a criticism of a biased historian.
