

OPINION

‘Denial’ is the movie for the election season

By **Jeffrey Salkin** | October 26, 2016



Remember that famous **scene** in “Seinfeld” where Mrs. Seinfeld browbeats Jerry into seeing “Schindler’s List”? “You have to see it!”

For Helen Seinfeld, the act of seeing “Schindler’s List” was not mere entertainment; it was a moral, even religious, imperative.

“**Denial**” falls into that same entertainment/moral category. It is the “must see” movie of this election season.

“Denial” is the story of Emory University professor, **Deborah Lipstadt**, and how she was forced to defend herself in a libel trial in England. The British author, **David Irving** (portrayed in the film by **Timothy Spall**) brought the suit against her because she had called him a “Holocaust denier” in her book **Denying the Holocaust**. According to laws in the UK, in a libel suit, the “libeler” is considered guilty until proven innocent.

The trial was long and draining — emotionally, financially, physically, and spiritually. Lipstadt was defended by the noted English barrister and

scholar, **Anthony Julius** (who was Princess Diana's divorce attorney, and the author of one of the best **books** on anti-Semitism that I have ever read — and that says a lot), as well as **Richard Rampton**, brilliantly portrayed by the noted actor **Tom Wilkinson**. The film includes soul-searing footage in Auschwitz, as members of the legal team and their consultants visit the infamous concentration camp on a fact-finding mission.

There is much to say about “**Denial**.” After seeing it, I decided to re-read Deborah's **book** on the ordeal.

First, I have a personal relationship with Professor Lipstadt, going back to my days in Atlanta (and even before), and I consider her one of my heroines. Rachel Weisz's portrayal of Deborah deserves an Academy Award — if for nothing else than her perfect evocation of Deborah's New York/Queens accent and cadence. It was a loving tribute to a marvelously impressive woman, who lived up to her biblical **namesake** (and the film shows Deborah also drawing inspiration from a statue of **Boudica**, the ancient British Celtic queen who led a rebellion against the Romans).

Second, the movie alludes to one of the most important, but necessarily least known, aspects of the case (though it is more clearly described in Deborah's book on the trial).

That is the fact that significant American Jewish philanthropists, quietly but resolutely, “passed the hat” to help pay for Deborah's defense. Here, the credit goes to the late, lamented **Rabbi Herbert Friedman** of the Wexner Foundation, who told Deborah: “It's time to get organized. Irving set his sights on you, but it's the entire Jewish community he is aiming at.”

Les Wexner made it happen. And so did the **American Jewish Committee**, under the leadership of **David Harris**, the **Anti-Defamation League**, and the **Simon Wiesenthal Center**.

The story of “Denial,” therefore, is the story of American Jews working together, behind the scenes, to pursue justice. It is also the story of how

Emory University itself was a full partner in Deborah's defense.

Herb Friedman was right: this was not just Deborah's fight; it belonged to the entire Jewish community.

And **third**, this movie is absolutely crucial — and the timing of its release could not have been better and more pertinent.

Why? Because it is about a very relevant theme that runs through American life today.

What is the nature of David Irving's ideology?

Listen to the **poem** that he taught his daughter — prompted by seeing black or racially-mixed children on the street:

I am a Baby Aryan
Not Jewish or Sectarian
I have no plans to marry an
Ape or Rastafarian.

Sound familiar?

But, more than that: David Irving made s_____ up.

Yes, he was intellectually dishonest. But this dishonesty goes far beyond mere shoddiness and sloppiness.

It is a dishonesty that has, at its core, sheer mendacity and hatred.

The issue of making s_____ up goes far beyond David Irving and Holocaust deniers. It has fully migrated into **UNESCO**, which has denied the historical Jewish connection to sacred sites in Jerusalem.

And, let the record note: the scenes of neo-Nazis confronting Lipstadt

outside the trial are eerily reminiscent of the rise of the American alt-right.

Go see the movie.

And fight those tendencies within certain dark corners of American political life — that would emulate David Irving and his supporters.

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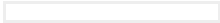
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