



FILM: **DENIAL**

FDG RATING: 3.0

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Mick Jackson: *Director*  
Rachel Weisz: *Actress: Deborah Lipstadt*  
Timothy Spall: *Actor: David Irving*  
Tom Wilkinson: *Actor: Richard Rampton*

DATE: December 11, 2016

## DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **DENIAL**

*Denial* is a methodical portrayal of courtroom proceedings in the 1996 libel suit that David Irving, a discredited British historian, brought against Deborah E. Lipstadt, author of the 1993 book "Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory."

The story begins when Deborah is delivering a lecture about the Holocaust to her students in Jewish studies at Emory University in Atlanta and references Holocaust deniers. Irving, an admirer of Hitler, has crashed the lecture, and yells from the back of the auditorium, that he in fact, is the infamous Holocaust denier. He tries to goad Deborah into a debate, and when she refuses, he offers \$1,000—money in hand—to anyone who can show that Nazis actually killed Jews by gassing them at Auschwitz.

In her book, Deborah has called Irving a Holocaust denier, falsifier, and bigot, and said that he manipulated and distorted real documents. Clearly cause for a libel suit. Supreme egotist, Irving, sues Deborah and her publisher, claiming these accusations are challenging his credibility (and lucrative career) as a historian. He also sees this as an opportunity to grandstand his views on a large judicial stage. An eye-opener for us, British law considers the defendant guilty until proven innocent so the burden of proof is on Deborah to prove that the Holocaust really occurred—no easy task since the Nazis made sure to destroy all evidence of their horrific genocide. Irving insists there were no gas chambers at Auschwitz and that any deaths were the results of illness and starvation.

To her huge irritation and disappointment, Deborah's lawyer, Richard Rampton, insisted that she not testify and forbade the testimony of several Holocaust survivors she had promised would be able to tell their story. The legal approach needed to be laser focused, pinpointing the definitive lies-falsehoods in Irving's writings. Rampton knew the survivors' stories would be a distraction and Irving would only humiliate them. In the end, Deborah feels that their voices were still heard as she wins the case.

Rachel Weisz gives a solid impassioned performance speaking with a heavy New York accent that worked for most, but seemed a bit overdone to a couple others. Tom Wilkinson was superb as always as her attorney Richard Rampton. As one of our astute viewers noted, Mr Rampton would not make eye contact with Irving, purposely refusing to validate him. And Timothy Spall was a stellar obnoxious David Irving. But the methodical story weighed down the great performances. We compared the film to *Spotlight* which also had a methodical plot as journalists sought to amass enough evidence for their big story. But we agreed that, although *Spotlight* was more complicated, we were pulled into the victims' stories which made a more emotionally compelling film experience. Nonetheless, *Denial* deeply resonates as we see, even today, how powerful people can fabricate facts and make lies seem like truth.

Judging the film as "well done", with enlightening historical insights, but lacking in heightened drama, we agreed on a rating verdict of 3.0. (5 is best on our scale of 1-5.)



See you at the movies!

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