



Deborah E. Lipstadt

History on Trial
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Deborah Lipstadt, "Why I Wrote *History on Trial*"

This book tries to convey the experience of going from a relatively quiet existence as a professor at an American university to being a defendant in a six year legal battle that garnered world wide attention. For ten weeks in the winter of 2000, I sat in a British courtroom barely 15 feet from my antagonist and silently listen as he expressed contempt for me and my work in front of a judge and the world media. My scholarly work was deconstructed in a court of law and my attire, personality, and personal beliefs were dissected in the press. Much of what was reported about me — age, sources of support, and political beliefs — was simply wrong. However, I had no way of challenging it. Throughout the course

of the trial, at the insistence of my attorneys, I did not give press interviews or testify in court. Though my words were at the heart of this struggle, I had to depend on others to speak for me. For someone who fiercely prized controlling her life this was excruciatingly difficult.

But there were great obstacles that faced me long before I entered the courtroom. I had to raise 1.5 million dollars to pay for my defense. Luckily a group of people — including Steven Spielberg, Leslie Wexner, and Edgar Bronfman — stepped forward to coordinate raising the funds. My university supported me in an unprecedented fashion. I wanted readers to know, not only of Irving's mendacity, but of this support. My interaction with survivors was a profoundly powerful aspect of this trial. They sat in court listening as Irving made fun of them and claimed that they were either liars or psychotic.

My experience provides an important lesson for those who must fight prejudice and extremism. In the courtroom, we stripped Irving's mask of respectability from him. So too, even as we conduct an unrelenting fight against those people who spew hatred, we must not imbue them with an existential importance. Ultimately, victory comes when we demonstrate not only how irrational, but how absolutely pathetic, these haters are.