

Review: Denial

Denial is a riveting courtroom drama that unfortunately squanders its opportunity to delve deeper into the issues it presents

By [Emily Taylor](#), Muse Editor (2017/18)

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★★★★☆

Director: Mick Jackson

Starring: Rachel Weisz, Timothy Spall, Tom Wilkinson, Andrew Scott

Length: 1hr 50m

Rating: 12A

This review contains minor spoilers.

One thing that can be said in favour of this film is its timeliness. Though called *Denial*, it could also be titled 'Alternative Facts'. (Thought you could escape Trump in this section, you were wrong). You know, saying the holocaust didn't happen is just offering up an 'alternative fact'. Based on true life, this film the courtroom drama that ensued when David Irving (Timothy Spall), holocaust denier, racist and all-around asshole tries to sue Deborah Lipstadt (Rachel Weisz) for defamation as she called him a 'falsifier of the truth'.

This film is full of solid performances, though the highlights are Tom Wilkinson and Andrew Scott as the lawyers defending Lipstadt. The former offering the perfect foil to Weisz' morally upstanding Lipstadt, and the latter offering a dry comic undertone to a film that might have gotten too dark for most audiences. The scenes at Auschwitz itself are as harrowing and moving as they should be and it's to the film's credit how well it handled its key subject - with respect but without sacrificing the drama of the film. Timothy Spall too gives a great performance, whilst still making your skin crawl he doesn't allow his portrayal move into a stereotype and even attempts to give him a sympathetic edge which in the end makes him feel human.

However the film is far from perfect. I have the strong opinion that the perfect run time of a film is 90 minutes - too many films overstay their welcome - but this is the very rare case of a film that should have

been longer. The court case took years, so it has to skip over huge chunks of time, especially the period where the case was prepared. I'd go even so far to suggest this is a story that would make for a great miniseries over a film. The style of the film even feels similar to these shows. It's simply too much material to cover in a film and though the film makes a valiant effort too much goes unsaid.

As I stated in the opening the film touches on timely issues, most crucially the normalization of the alt-right and the 'post-truth' age we now live in, whatever that means. However, it never gains its own insight on these issues, as it is too preoccupied by just telling the beats of the expansive story. Irving seems to truly believe that he isn't a racist despite his speeches at neo-Nazi rallies, but the film leaves it at that, unfortunately, which is perhaps the most interesting aspect of the film. Perhaps it was a slight flaw to focus on Lipstadt, despite a solid performance by Weisz. She was perhaps the least involved in the investigation and doesn't really amount to much more than an audience surrogate to whom the lawyers could explain all the legal jargon. The most interesting aspects of the case, the investigation of the lawyers and the character of Irving, are then relegated to the background and a slightly clunky character arc surrounding Lipstadt is pushed to the foreground. Though the film does treat its sensitive topic with the utmost respect, it is the moments surrounding Lipstadt's character where the film can fall into melodrama - as she stares solemnly at a statue of Boudicca as the score swelled, all subtly had been momentarily thrown out the window.

It is a film that is worth a watch mostly due to solid performances and the true story itself is riveting enough to hold the audience's attention, however probably best to catch it on television as that is probably where the film belongs.



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