

The ruling against David Irving

Excerpts from High Court Judge Charles Gray's ruling in the David Irving libel suit

Tuesday April 11, 2000

It is my conclusion that no objective, fair-minded historian would have serious cause to doubt that there were gas chambers at Auschwitz and that they were operated on a substantial scale to kill hundreds of thousands of Jews.

It appears to me to be incontrovertible that Irving qualifies as a Holocaust denier. Not only has he denied the existence of gas chambers at Auschwitz and asserted that no Jew was gassed there, he has done so on frequent occasions and sometimes in the most offensive terms. By way of examples, I cite his story of the Jew climbing into a mobile telephone box-cum-gas chamber; his claim that more people died in the back of Kennedy's car at Chappaquiddick than died in the gas chambers at Auschwitz; his dismissal of the eyewitnesses en masse as liars or suffering from a mental problem ... I reject as being untrue the claim made by Irving in his evidence that in his denial of the existence of any gas chambers at Auschwitz, he was referring solely to the gas chamber constructed by the Poles after the war for the benefit of visitors to the site or, as Irving put it, as a 'tourist attraction.'

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Having grossly underestimated the number who lost their lives in the camps, Irving is prone to claim that a greater number than that were killed in Allied bombing raids on Dresden and elsewhere. He has, moreover, repeatedly claimed that the British Psychological War Executive ingeniously discovered the lies that the Nazis were killing Jews in gas chambers in order to use it as propaganda.

Irving is anti-Semitic. His words are directed against Jews, either individually or collectively, in the sense that they are by turn hostile, critical, offensive and derisory in their references to Semitic people, their characteristics and appearances ... Irving has made claims that the Jews deserve to be disliked; that they brought the Holocaust on themselves. He speaks regularly at political or quasi-political meetings in Germany, the United States, Canada and the New World. The content of his speeches and interviews often displays a distinctly pro-Nazi and anti-Jewish bias. He makes surprising and often unfounded assertions about the Nazi regime which tend to exonerate the Nazis for the appalling atrocities which they inflicted on the Jews. He is content to mix with neo-facists and appears to share many of their racist and anti-Semitic prejudices.

The charges which I have found to be substantially true include the charges that Irving has for his own ideological reasons persistently and deliberately misrepresented and manipulated historical evidence; that for the same reasons he has portrayed Hitler in an unwarrantedly favourable light, principally in relation to his attitude towards and responsibility for the treatment of the Jews; that he is an active Holocaust denier; that he is anti-Semitic and racist and that he associates with right-wing extremists who promote neo-Nazism.

Unrepentant Irving blasts "perverse" judgment

Historian vows to appeal the failed libel case which branded him a Holocaust

denier

Steve Busfield
Tuesday April 11, 2000

Historian David Irving has admitted he cannot afford to cover the bills for his disastrous libel case defeat, but has vowed to fight on.

Speaking after Mr Justice Gray, the judge in the High Court libel action delivered a damning 333-page judgment, branding him a Holocaust denier, falsifier of history, a racist and an anti-Semite, Irving remained totally unrepentant.

Speaking from his large apartment in Mayfair, central London, the 62-year-old was highly emotional and admitted he felt "tired. Very tired."

He said he would appeal against the judgment, although it is unclear how he can afford to do so. The bill for costs is already estimated to run to more than £2m.

"I would describe the judgment in two words - firstly, indescribable, and secondly, perverse," he said.

He refused to talk about how the potentially crippling costs of losing the libel action could affect him.

"Why is everyone talking about money? I'm not interested in money. It is all about reputation."

But when asked if he had sufficient funds to cover the bills, Irving answered simply: "No." He remained unabashed: "I am not at all anti-Semitic. It is not anti-Semitic to be critical of the Jews."

"But the leaders of the Jewish communities around the world have used the most horrific methods to try and destroy me. They had bottomless pockets to afford justice and say go ahead and destroy that bastard - which they just did."

"At the end, I suppose, it is my own fault for having explained myself inadequately clearly," he said.

Irving remained ambiguous about his views on race: "My own feelings about race are precisely the same as 95% of the people of my generation. That is all I will say."

"If the British soldiers on the beaches of Normandy in 1944 could look forward to the end of the century and see what England has become, they would not have bothered to advance another 40 yards up the beach," he added.

He also claimed he was not bitter, saying: "Some people are vindictive, but that is not in my nature. I am a Christian through and through."

David Irving's libel defeat is a cause for celebration. Now, argues writer DD Guttenplan, who sat through the trial, we can engage in clear-headed discussion

about the Holocaust

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[The Guardian](#)

When I went to see Judge Charles Gray in his chambers, the day before his first hearing in the David Irving libel trial that ended this week, he confessed anxiety. "There is some risk," he explained, "of one's being asked to become a historian. Judges aren't historians."

For their own reasons, both sides agreed that (whatever else the trial was about), history, in Leopold von Ranke's phrase, "what actually happened," had no place in the courtroom. But facts have a kind of gravitational pull of their own, and by the end, everyone involved - Gray, Irving, Deborah Lipstadt, her lawyers, the experts who testified and those of us who merely listened - spent a great deal of time hearing about what happened to the Jews of Europe and about how the knowledge of what happened has been preserved.

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Unlike myth, history is not tidy, and the events that became known as the Holocaust are as complex as any genuine - as opposed to literary - calamity. There is the added confusion created by the efforts of the perpetrators to cover-up their crimes. But there was also a final bar to understanding perhaps unique to the Holocaust - that we believe we already know all about it. Of all the "lessons" of the Holocaust, Pastor Martin Niemöller's account of his own complicity in the escalating brutality of life in Nazi Germany is probably the best known. His litany of indifference, "First they came for the Jews, but I was not a Jew..." is one of the things everybody knows about the Holocaust, along with the bars of soap made from the fat of murdered Jews, and the gas chambers at Dachau and Belsen. But what everybody knows about the Holocaust isn't always true.

Although the grisly tale of the soap figured in some of the earliest accounts of Nazi-occupied Europe, it is now rejected by historians as a fabrication - similar to the atrocity stories of Allied propaganda during the first world war. Dachau did have a gas chamber, but it was never used. This week the BBC referred to the "death camp" at Belsen, but there were no gas chambers at Belsen.

Nor did the Nazis come first for the Jews; as Peter Novick explains in his brilliant and provocative new book, *The Holocaust in American Life*, "First they came for the Communists" - a circumstance acknowledged by Niemöller, who continued, "but I was not a Communist - so I said nothing. Then they came for the Social Democrats, but I was not a Social Democrat - so I did nothing. Then came the trade unionists, but I was not a trade unionist. And then they came for the Jews, but I was not a Jew - so I did little. Then when they came for me, there was no one left who could stand up for me." The Holocaust Museum in Washington DC is just one of those who, in Novick's phrase "prudently omits" Communists from Niemöller's homily.

But prudence and political calculation have influenced our knowledge of the Holocaust from the beginning. Even the word itself - from the Greek *holos*, for whole, and *kaustos*, for burnt - is contested. In some circles, the Hebrew word *Shoah*, meaning destruction, is preferred. The Princeton historian Arno Mayer coined the term "Judeocide" to describe the subject of his study *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken?* For a long time after the war, the fate of European Jewry was hardly mentioned, partly because, as the cartoonist Art Spiegelman's father says in *Maus*, his survivor's tale in cartoon format, "No one wants anyway to hear such stories," and partly because in camps liberated by British and American troops including Dachau, Belsen and Buchenwald, only a minority of the prisoners were Jews. In Ed Murrow's famous 1945 broadcast from Buchenwald the words Jew and Jewish are never spoken.

In her first book, *Beyond Belief*, Lipstadt wrote that even when confronted by the evidence, many correspondents were reluctant to admit to themselves and their readers the reality of genocide. She attributes some reluctance to anti-Semitism. Novick, who teaches history at the University of Chicago, suggests a different reason for postwar reticence: with the realignment of the cold war, talk of the Holocaust was inimical to US interests. In 50s America few besides Communists shouted "Remember the six million!"

For most Americans, including Jews, the Holocaust was "the wrong atrocity" - mention of it was at best an embarrassment, at worst a cause for suspicion. Today the Holocaust is ubiquitous. Films such as *Schindler's List*, television programmes, novels, memoirs all add to what we know - or think we know - about what Raul Hilberg called "the destruction of the European Jews". His book with that title was published in 1961. The first reviews were mostly hostile: it was years before Hilberg won prizes. Merely consider the reception of Benjamin Wilkomirski's *Fragments* (1995) to see how much has changed: it won the National Jewish Book Award for autobiography. Even after evidence mounted that Wilkomirski was really Bruno Dössekker, a Swiss musician whose account of a childhood in the camps is fictional, *Fragments* attracted readers, such is the appetite for Holocaust literature.

How did this change come about? Novick mentions a gradual easing of the cold war, outbreaks of neo-Nazism in Germany and the US, the 1952 publication of *Anne Frank: The Diary of A Young Girl*, adapted to stage and screen. But the single greatest catalyst was the trial of war criminal Adolf Eichmann. Much of the initial response was negative. But as the trial wore on, the mass of detail overcame scepticism. The trial was televised, and for the first time the American public was confronted with the Holocaust distinct from the general carnage of war.

Now, nearly 40 years after, Eichmann's name again echoed in a court. For over nine weeks in Courtroom 73 of the Royal Courts of Justice the Holocaust has been on trial as Charles Gray presided over *David Irving v. Penguin Books Ltd and Deborah Lipstadt*. Towards the end of the trial, which, thanks to British libel laws, forced Lipstadt to prove the truth of the claim in her book *Denying the Holocaust* that Irving knowingly distorted or suppressed evidence regarding the Nazi massacre of European Jewry, it was announced that the Israeli authorities had agreed to release Eichmann's diaries. But the problem of Lipstadt and her lawyers couldn't be solved by new evidence. The problem was how to interpret what was already there.

To Irving, author of numerous books on the Third Reich, the Holocaust is "an ill-fitting legend". He didn't deny many Jews died; he denied that any of them were killed in gas chambers, that Hitler directly ordered the annihilation of Jewry, and that the killings were in any significant way different from the war's other atrocities.

In Hilberg's insight, the destruction of European Jewry was a bureaucratic process, the result of "a series of administrative measures". In their pursuit of the *Endlösung* - the Final Solution to the Jewish question - the Nazis left the detritus of any large organisation: memoranda, requisition forms, purchase orders and blueprints. A million Jews were murdered at Auschwitz and all had to be taken there by train in the middle of a war in which the railways were the lifelines of the German army. The Zyklon B gas to kill them had to be paid for. And the ovens that disposed of the bodies had to be specially built, by Topf and Sons, a firm that patented the design. For each Stück - piece, as the Nazis referred to a Jew - processed, items had to be accounted for: money, dental gold, hair. Hilberg mapped this bureaucracy in three volumes, but the essential facts are in a series of tables. Deaths by cause shows that more than 800,000 Jews died from "ghetto-isation and general privation," more than 1.3m by "open-air shootings," and up to 3m were murdered in camps - as many as 2.7m in specialised extermination centres such as Sobibór, Treblinka, and Belzec; 150,000 died in other camps, including concentration camps such as Dachau and Buchenwald.

In deaths by country, Hilberg's list ranges from the 3m Jews of Poland to the fewer than 1,000 from Luxembourg, and in deaths by year charts the genocide's rise and fall. But the total is the same: 5.1m Jews. Other historians dispute Hilberg's arithmetic, arguing for 6m. Scholars remain divided on when and why the Nazis shifted from encouraging Jewish emigration (which saved half of Germany's Jews) to extermination (which murdered 90% of Greece's Jews). They argue about the role of the camps in the German economy.

Irving used these disagreements to get into the debate. But his arguments were of a different order. He filed for libel in September 1996; that spring, his US publishers, St Martin's Press, had cancelled the publication of his *Goebbels: Mastermind of the Third Reich*. Given his history, controversy was to be expected, even courted. Publishers Weekly pronounced the book "repellent"; Jewish organisations expressed outrage; Deborah Lipstadt was quoted as saying that St Martin's would hardly sign up a white supremacist for a book on race relations.

St Martin's at first stood firm, but between a March Daily News report about the uproar and Frank Rich's April New York Times column calling Irving "Hitler's Spin Artist," it lost nerve and cancelled publication. The principal effect of this, as Christopher Hitchens pointed out in *Vanity Fair*, was to transform a man with "depraved ideas" about the Holocaust into a poster boy for free speech. This lent the book the cachet of suppressed literature, and gave rise to Gordon Craig's declaration, in a review in the *New York Review of Books*, that "silencing Mr Irving would be a high price to pay for freedom from the annoyance that he causes us". Craig continued: "He knows more about National Socialism than most professional scholars in his field, and students of the years 1933-1945 owe more than they are always willing to admit" to his research. "Such people have an indispensable part in the historical enterprise, and we dare not disregard their views." On Tuesday, Mr Justice Gray found otherwise.

The argument is familiar. In the late 70s, French intellectuals were convulsed over *l'affaire Faurisson*. Robert Faurisson, professor of literature at the University of Lyons, wrote in *Le Monde* the "good news" that the gas chambers had not existed. "The alleged Hitlerian gas chambers," he said, "and the so-called genocide of the Jews form a single historical lie whose principal beneficiaries are the State of Israel and international Zionism."

Hitchens described Irving as "not just a Fascist historian, but a great historian of Fascism". He also assumed that what Irving really wanted was a debate with his critics. If that had been Irving's objective, all he had to do was bide his time. "Someone," Hitchens asserted, "will no doubt pick up where St Martin's left off." Instead, Irving blamed Lipstadt for his troubles in the US and sued her and her publisher, Penguin Books, for libel in England. At which point it became more difficult to defend the proposition that what was at stake was Irving's freedom of speech.

Faurisson's chief antagonist, French classicist Pierre Vidal-Naquet, argued: "To live with Faurisson? Any other attitude would imply that we were imposing historical truth as legal truth, which is a dangerous attitude." Vidal-Naquet opposed his government's use of torture in Algeria and supports the rights of Palestinians. Perhaps because both his parents were deported by the Nazis (his mother died in Auschwitz), he felt it just as important to expose Faurisson's distortions as to support his right to distort. His scepticism about the role of the state has no echo in Lipstadt, unlike his argument against debating the Holocaust.

He wrote: "Confronting an actual Eichmann, one had to resort to armed struggle and, if need be, to ruse. Confronting a paper Eichmann, one should respond with paper... In so doing, we are not placing ourselves on the same ground as our enemy. We do not debate him; we demonstrate the mechanisms of his lies and falsifications, which may be methodologically useful for the younger generations." We need only set this passage from *Assassins of Memory*, his restrained, yet devastating, response to Faurisson, beside a similar passage from *Denying the Holocaust* to see the extent of Lipstadt's indebtedness. "Not ignoring the deniers does not mean engaging them in debate; it means not doing that. We cannot debate them for two reasons, one strategic and the

other tactical... The deniers long to be considered the "other" side. Engaging them in discussion makes them exactly that. . They are contemptuous of the very tools that shape any honest debate: truth and reason. Debating with them would be like trying to nail a glob of jelly to the wall." Though she relies on his arguments, Lipstadt is no Vidal-Naquet. She lacks his intellectual breadth, clarity of thought and expression, and, sadly, his stature as a Jew who has never confined his political engagement to Jewish causes.

In Israel, as you might expect in a country where in the 40s the slang for Holocaust survivor translated as soap, the battle over representing the Nazi genocide has always been bare-knuckled and open. The arguments go back to the war, when supporters of mainstream Zionism sought to discredit the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe (agitating noisily for rescue) as a vehicle of the right-wing Zionist terrorist group Irgun. As indeed it was. David Ben-Gurion and other Zionist leaders were not thought lessly "writing off" European Jewry, Peter Novick says, but just making a "chilling... appraisal of what was and was not possible".

Though it is impolite to mention it, there are still live questions about the Holocaust. The dispute between intentionalists, who say that genocide was always part of Hitler's plan, and functionalists, who argue the Final Solution evolved in response to changing conditions and fortunes of war, is far from settled. Another open, though stifled, question is about the number of survivors. Irving's claim that Jews inflated the number of victims to extort money from Germany merely demonstrates his ignorance. The payments to Israel were for resettling refugees, and it would have been in Israel's interest to exaggerate the number of survivors, not the number of victims. But that doesn't mean there weren't individuals who, to qualify for payment, claimed to have spent the war hiding in Poland when they had been living, in relative safety if not comfort, deep in the Soviet Union.

More delicate is the question of survivor testimony. According to Elie Wiesel: "Any survivor has more to say than all the historians combined about what happened." Would Wiesel censure Lipstadt for saying: "Lots of survivors who arrived at Auschwitz will tell you they were examined by [Dr Josef] Mengele. Then you ask them the date of their arrival, and you say, 'Mengele wasn't in Auschwitz at that point'." Would he censure her, or any historian, for daring to ask for evidence, documents, corroborating testimony? That is what historians do. And when they are prevented from doing it, either by Jewish groups who feel that the Holocaust belongs to them or by Zionists seeking to preserve Israel's "moral capital", the result is a blurring between memory and propaganda that serves only the interests of the Nazi perpetrators and their political legatees.

Yet time and again those who insist on the truth in all its complex, unsentimental, paradoxical, and ambiguous detail are shouted down. It isn't only anti-Semites who, in T S Eliot's phrase, find a "large number of free-thinking Jews undesirable". The many obstacles thrown up by the history of our understanding of the Holocaust make Judge Gray's ruling all the more remarkable.

But his reasoned arguments are unlikely to make an impact on either the Holocaust deniers or their opponents. Holocaust deniers, as the latest incarnation of a paranoid tradition, are by nature impervious to fact. For them, Irving's defeat confirms his martyrdom; the scale of his undoing proves the power of the forces against them. For the growing Holocaust industry, victory over Irving is more likely to be a stimulus than a restraint.

In her statement after the trial, Lipstadt described the struggle against denial as unending. Let me be clear: Lipstadt deserved to win. But the encouragement that her victory will give to some groups supporting her - such as the Board of Deputies of British Jews or the Anti-Defamation League of the B'nai Brith - in their efforts to police public discussion of the Holocaust and of Israeli policies, is no cause for celebration.

Thanks to the efforts of her lawyers and their experts, we now know a great deal about what is wrong with Irving's scholarship. But the trial did not contribute to our understanding of the Holocaust. There was one aspect of Judge Gray's decision that, left unchallenged, will make greater understanding of the Holocaust even less likely. Time and again, he referred to what an "objective historian" might do. But if judges aren't historians, historians shouldn't be expected to be judges. Irving's problem wasn't detachment but dishonesty. The Holocaust has always had a political as well as historical meaning; in America, that meaning has shifted a great deal from the days when conservatives saw a Communist behind every mention of the 6m.

Perhaps with Irving safely consigned to the dustbin of history, the rest of us can join the debates that, in scholarly circles, have raged for some time. This may mean giving up comfortable certainties about the distinctness of Jewish suffering, the exterminationist nature of German anti-Semitism and the redemptive force of Zionism. But if the effect of the Irving decision is to strengthen the hand of those who wield the Holocaust like a totem, or a truncheon, then truth and history might as well never have had their day in court.

- DD Guttenplan is currently writing an account of the trial for Granta Books, to be published next year. A longer version of this was first published in Atlantic Monthly.



Irving 'should not be deemed a historian'

[The David Irving libel trial: special report](#)

Friday February 11, 2000

[The Guardian](#)

David Irving did not deserve to be called a historian, a leading academic told the high court yesterday.

Richard Evans, professor of modern history at Cambridge University, said that he was not prepared for the "sheer depth of duplicity" which he encountered in Mr Irving's treatment of historical sources relating to the Holocaust.

Mr Irving, the 62-year-old author of Hitler's War, who is suing for libel over claims that he is a "Holocaust denier", said that Professor Evans's "sweeping and rather brutal" dismissal of his career stemmed from personal animosity.

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"I think you dislike what I write and stand for and what you perceive my views to be," he told Prof Evans, who has been called as an expert for the defence by author Deborah Lipstadt and Penguin Books.

Prof Evans, who has produced a 740-page report on Mr Irving's historical method, said he had no personal feelings towards him and had tried to be as objective as possible.

He said he previously had little knowledge of Mr Irving's work - although he knew of his reputation as someone who was in many areas a sound historian - and was "shocked" at what he found.

He said that the proceedings had reinforced his view in the report that Mr Irving "has fallen so far short of the standards of scholarship customary among historians that he doesn't deserve to be called a historian at all".

Mr Irving said that he was "scrupulously fair" in everything he did in public life - "the total opposite of being unscrupulous and manipulative and deceptive as you say in your report".

Prof Evans said he agreed that Mr Irving had a very wide knowledge of the source material for the third reich and had discovered many new documents.

"The problem for me is what you do with them when you interpret them and write them up."

Prof Evans said that Mr Irving's published writings and speeches contained numerous statements which he regarded as "anti-Semitic" - to the extent that he blamed the Jews for the Holocaust.

He dismissed the theory that there was a "worldwide Jewish conspiracy" to suppress Mr Irving's works - or undermine Germany in the 1930s - as "a fantastic belief which has no grounds in fact".

Prof Evans said that he had examined a sufficient selection of Mr Irving's output to justify his view that he did not use acceptable methods of historical research.

In his report, he said that Mr Irving had relied in the past, and continued to do so, on the fact that readers, listeners and reviewers lacked "either the time or the expertise" to probe deeply enough in the sources he used to discover the "distortions and manipulations".

He accepted that people should be allowed to challenge the "general consensus" of history but asserted that there was a duty to conform to academic standards in the evaluation of evidence.

Mr Irving, who is representing himself, is claiming damages over the 1994 Book, Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory, which he says has generated waves of hatred against him.

The defendants have accused him of being a liar and a falsifier of history.

The hearing continues.

History on trial

David Irving may be isolated in his high court battle, but a growing number of respectable academics are criticising what they have dubbed the 'Holocaust industry'.

[Special report: the David Irving libel trial](#)

David Cesarani
Tuesday January 18, 2000
[The Guardian](#)

At times during his legal battle in the high court, David Irving, a man of natural military bearing, resembles a beleaguered Wehrmacht general in some god-forsaken pocket on the eastern front, desperately trying to beat off the Jewish-Bolshevik hordes. At least, one suspects, that is rather how he sees it.

He stands or sits alone on one side of the courtroom, while the large defence team occupies most of the rest of it. In his opening statement he referred several times to the existence of an "international endeavour" to destroy his name and career as a writer. He menacingly promised that "the Jewish community, their fame and fortunes, play a central role in these proceedings".

Lest there be any doubt about that particular role, he avers that he was "the target of a hidden international attempt" to silence him. Naming names, Irving has pointed the finger at the American Jewish Anti-Defamation League and its equivalents in Britain, Canada, and Australia. Bizarre as they may be, these accusations will resonate beyond the odd collection of his supporters huddled in the Irving corner of the public gallery.

To the young man clad in a black parka, black roll-top sweater, black trousers and black baseball cap sitting among them, the notion, no matter how paranoid, of an international Jewish conspiracy to destroy a hero of the far right will appear just so much common sense. Rather more worryingly, it may feed into the growing backlash against the so-called "Holocaust industry" which, for very different reasons, is taking hold in mainstream media and academic circles.

Few reasonable people will dispute the right of Jews in this country and elsewhere to join forces with other Jews, as well as legions of non-Jewish anti-fascists, in opposing neo-nazism and the Holocaust denial that is associated with it. But some are questioning whether memorialisation of the Holocaust, as well as Holocaust studies in schools and universities, are not being used wrongly, or simply getting out of hand.

While Irving disputes the accepted facts of the Holocaust, posing as the victim of powerful forces with a vested interest in the established version, serious writers on both sides of the Atlantic who scorn his methods and arguments are questioning the purposes to which the Holocaust is being put. They are asking if it deserves a special, protected place in the public consciousness.

The government's announcement in October 1999 that it was considering the establishment of a Holocaust Memorial Day in the UK gave evidence both of the heightened intensity of Holocaust awareness and the reaction to it. Richard Ingrams in the Observer complained that "not a day goes by without the Holocaust being mentioned in one context or another".

Earlier in the year the announcement that the Imperial War Museum North was planning a joint venture with the Manchester Shoah Centre provoked Brian Sewell in the Evening Standard to condemn the "bandwagon" effect. "Can we not say to the Jews of Manchester," he asked, "that enough has been made of their Holocaust and they are too greedy for our memories."

Most recently, Sam Schulman in the Spectator warned that "a new kind of anti-semitism may emerge in the 21st century, in reaction to the attempt to make 'the Holocaust' central to our civilisation." As with all such journalistic provocations there is more than an element of the self-fulfilling prophecy, but the critique is not confined to columnists hungry for a topic that will trigger an avalanche of letters to the editor.

In 1999, Tim Cole, a British academic responsible for ground-breaking research on the wartime Budapest ghetto, published *Images of the Holocaust: the Myth of the "Shoah Business"*, which slammed the redemptive and kitschy representation of the Holocaust seen in films and museums the world over. He dubbed this, perhaps foolishly, the "myth" of the Holocaust.

It is not hard to show that what we know as the Holocaust, or Shoah, is a narrative that was constructed over the years and only gained popular currency from the late 60s onwards. Cole, building on the work of US scholar James Young, argues that the Holocaust is invested with different meanings depending on the society in which it is recalled. As Young showed, it helps to tell a nation's story through the Jewish experience.

But Cole singles out the use of exhibitions and memorials to combat Holocaust denial. "Museums such as the US Holocaust Memorial Museum and movies such as *Schindler's List* have as a self-conscious goal not simply teaching the public lessons from the past, but also the aim of disproving the claims of those who deny the Holocaust."

In his eyes this is a mistake, since "it amounts to attempting to counter the questioning of the reality of the 'Holocaust' by offering in its place a representation of the 'Holocaust' which only tends to blur the critical distinction between reality and representation". Worse, it's self-defeating: "It was not until it emerged as an iconic event that it was perceived to be an event which was deemed to be worth denying." Memorialisation provokes denial.

The intellectual backlash has been more prominent and problematic in the US. Next month will see the publication in Britain of *The Holocaust In American Life* by the respected US historian Peter Novick, in which he maintains that "it was Jewish initiative that put the Holocaust on the American agenda". The story of Jewish martyrdom was used by American Jewish leaders from the 70s on to provide a narrative that could unite the diverse American-Jewish community and deter assimilation, he argues. It was also a handy way to clobber anti-semitism and justify US support for Israel.

Novick uncovered many policy statements by leaders of the American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Congress and the Anti-Defamation League to sustain his thesis. He was on more speculative ground when it came to explaining the receptivity of American society to a tale of Jewish misery in Europe, although this was the most interesting part of his argument.

The 60s saw the end of the melting-pot ethos in American society and the rise of the "new ethnicity". It became fashionable to be a hyphenated American. This "particularism" enabled American-Jews, and specifically Holocaust survivors, to tell their stories for the first time. Moreover, their experience harmonised with America's self-image as a sanctuary for history's victims. Victimhood proved especially useful to American Jews who wanted to defend their privileges against other ethnic groups, notably African-Americans, without appearing too powerful or greedy.

Americans accepted the prioritisation of the Holocaust because it made them feel good: they stood shoulder to shoulder with the people who had endured the worst of the 20th century. Remembering genocide in a "warm glow of virtue" became a vicarious alternative to actually doing anything about it.

These arguments are echoed in a more reductive form by Norman Finkelstein in his forthcoming book *The Holocaust Industry*, which was prefigured by his hostile review of Daniel Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners* in the *New Left Review* in mid-1997. Finkelstein, a left-wing and anti-Zionist political scientist, claims that the "Holocaust industry" was created by the pro-Israel lobby in the US after 1967 to justify aid for Israel. "The Holocaust' is in effect the Zionist account of the Nazi holocaust. It was seized upon and methodically marketed because it was politically

expedient." It is at this point that the backlash against the so-called Holocaust industry collides disturbingly with the events in the high court and their background.

On the far left throughout the 70s and 80s it was common to find the argument that Jews cultivated knowledge of the Holocaust to buttress Israel's right to exist at the expense of the Palestinians and repel criticism of its occupation policies. These themes lay at the heart of Jim Allen's 1987 play *Perdition*, tellingly resurrected last year. In this drama, based coincidentally on a libel trial, the defence counsel argues that "Israel is a paid watchdog: a nation built on the pillar of Western guilt and subsidised by American dollars."

Similar reasoning was located on the far right. It found expression in Irving's introduction to the Leuchter Report, which purported to show that there were no gas chambers at Auschwitz. According to Irving, "Since 1949 the state of Israel has received over DM90bn in voluntary reparations from West Germany, essentially in atonement for the 'gas chambers of Auschwitz'", which he declared a "myth".

Of course, there is a world of difference between this and the unease felt in many quarters about the prominence of the Holocaust in society, culture and politics today. But in their efforts to chart the origins of the "Holocaust industry", its critics fall into the trap of ascribing too much influence and power to the Jews, while the motives they ascribe to Jewish organisations are reductive and harmful.

The Holocaust is the object of fascination today not just because it is a gripping chapter of history, but because it has stunning contemporary relevance. In a Europe that has recently witnessed "ethnic cleansing", the past has become the present. As events in Rwanda showed, genocide is not just a matter of academic research. The routine violation of human rights and the benighted treatment of refugees inevitably evoke past experiences and call for these to be studied and, with respect for all the crucial variations of scale and character, recalled as a warning.

For it is too easy to dismiss reference to the Holocaust as an easy way of demarcating good and evil. The issues that the Holocaust throws up, such as racism, eugenics and biological politics, are precisely the dilemmas we face today. It was for this reason that the British historian Michael Burleigh concluded his study of Nazi "euthanasia" policies, *Death and Deliverance*, with a passionate discussion of what the Australian philosopher Peter Singer currently says about the right to life.

In the global marketplace of moral values, the Holocaust seems one instance of applied evil that everyone can agree about. The globalisation of media has made the Holocaust a ubiquitous subject, not the other way round.

The struggle for compensation for slave and forced labourers of the Nazi era would not have won such support were it not, partly at least, for the inclination to hold multinational corporations to account for their treatment of employees. The ethical standards that are being demanded from big business have given a reciprocal relevance to conduct of business under the Third Reich. Such interest hardly existed a few years ago.

Most importantly, the impatience with Holocaust memorialisation rests on a continuing, stubborn resentment of Jewish difference. Behind Peter Novick's criticism of "particularism" is an assimilationist agenda. In Finkelstein's anti-Zionism this is quite explicit. The critics of the proposed Holocaust Memorial Day who instead want a "genocide day" seem unable, or unwilling, to comprehend the specificity of the Jewish fate in the 20th century and the right of a people to commemorate its suffering after decades when it was all but ignored by the world.

Jews are still living with the pain of that silence. It was not of their making or choosing. The ways of commemorating the Holocaust that may make amends for that silencing process are legitimate subjects for argument, but there is a danger of an inadvertent coalition between the man who sees himself as the victim of a "hidden international conspiracy" and the critics of the "Holocaust industry" who depict it as a manipulative ramp for the benefit of one ethnic interest group and the State of Israel.