

Denying the Holocaust

www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/genocide/deniers_01.shtml

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Deborah Lipstadt discusses how misinformation and false claims are used to question the reality of the Nazis' attempt to exterminate Europe's Jews.

It never happened

Holocaust deniers are people who contend that the Holocaust - the attempt by Nazi Germany to annihilate European Jewry during World War Two - never happened. According to the deniers, the Nazis did not murder six million Jews, the notion of homicidal gas chambers is a myth, and any deaths of Jews that did occur under the Nazis were the result of wartime privations, not of systematic persecution and state-organised mass murder.



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Deniers dismiss all assertions that the Holocaust took place as conscious fabrications, or as psychotic delusions. Some even claim that Hitler was the best friend the Jews had in Germany, and that he actively worked to protect them. According to deniers, Jews have perpetrated this hoax about the Holocaust on the world in order to gain political and financial advantage, and it was in fact Germany that was the true victim in World War Two.

Documented genocide

Rudolf Höss, former Commandant of Auschwitz during his war crimes trial © Holocaust denial is a form of anti-Semitism, positing that Jews have concocted a giant myth for their own ends. It persists despite the fact that the Holocaust is one of the best documented genocides in history, with a wide array of evidence documenting virtually every aspect of it.



For example, approximately a million Jews on the Eastern Front were shot during 1941-42, and buried in large pits. This is known partly because the *Einsatzgruppen*, the mobile killing units that coordinated these massacres, prepared detailed reports on the murders - reports that contained precise death tolls, broken down into men, women and children.

These reports were sent to high ranking officials in Berlin, and to army, police and SS officers, as well as diplomats and even prominent industrialists. This wide distribution suggests that the perpetrators felt no shame at what they did. Had these killings not been part of Berlin's policy, the reports would never have been so widely distributed.

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Deniers argue that evidence such as this was forged, after the end of World War Two, by people working for world Jewry. They claim that forgers created these and other documents - complete with complex internal reference markings, on typewriters that perfectly matched those used by the various German units said to have written the documents - and then planted thousands of these perfect forgeries in numerous different archival collections (in exactly the right file and in precisely the right sequence) all over Europe.

Not only is such a scenario fantastically improbable, it fails to explain why these supposedly incredibly talented forgers did not succeed in producing the one piece of paper that deniers demand as 'proof' that genocide took place under the Third Reich - an order from Hitler authorising the destruction of the Jews.

Confessions

Children on their way to the Auschwitz gas chamber © Many perpetrators confessed to what they had done during the war, after it was over. For example, Otto Ohlendorf, commander of one of the *Einsatzgruppen* units, testified quite openly that between June 1941 and 1942 his *Einsatzgruppe* murdered 90,000 people.



Deniers dismiss confessions by German perpetrators that a 'Final Solution' to the 'Jewish question' was indeed a part of the Nazi programme - by saying the confessions were produced under torture. They say that those who confessed knew their admissions would result in a death sentence, so would not have confessed except under duress - and that their accounts of their wartime activities should thus be disregarded.

This, however, ignores the fact that some of the more detailed confessions were written after the perpetrators had been sentenced to death. It also ignores the fact that many of the perpetrators described - sometimes in great detail - what happened, but insisted that they either had nothing to do with it or were forced by their superiors to participate.

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Thus this argument fails to take into account the statements of Nazis such as the Commandant of Birkenau concentration camp, Rudolf Höss, who described the mass murders that took place in his camp in a document written after he had been sentenced to death. It also fails to account for Adolf Eichmann who, in the memoir he wrote during his trial, spoke of the gassing of the Jews.

Some deniers explain away the confessions by positing that after the war these Germans were subjected to a barrage of propaganda, and themselves become victims of the hoax. One must marvel at the power of those supposed to be responsible for this hoax. Not only did they win the cooperation of the world's greatest military and political powers, forge thousands of documents in record time without being detected, and create physical evidence attesting to an annihilation programme, but they even convinced the very people said to be a part of the hoax that it had actually happened.

Disappearances

Buchenwald camp survivors © Some deniers posit that the Jews said to have been killed under the Nazi regime actually survived the war, and succeeded in avoiding detection by going to places such as the Soviet Union or the United States. In these countries, the deniers claim, there were already so many Jews that no one noticed a couple of million more.



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Deniers such as Arthur Butz offer other equally fantastic explanations as to the supposed 'disappearance' of millions of Jews. Many of those who were reported killed in the war, he suggests, actually survived - but did not re-establish contact with their pre-war relatives because they were in bad marriages. After the war they found other partners, established better relationships, started a new life and failed to correct the record. This improbable explanation of why these people deserted their families would be hilarious, were the topic not so serious.

The real facts are much better documented. For example, it is known that Nazis used gas buses at one point to murder Jews (eventually they abandoned this system because it was not efficient enough). This is known partly because SS-Major General Dr Harald Turner, chief of the German Administration in Serbia, wrote to Karl Wolff, chief of Heinrich Himmler's personal staff, on 11 April 1942.

In the note Turner describes a 'delousing van' - the quotation marks around the word already suggest that it is a euphemism - then makes it quite clear what this means:

Already some months ago, I shot dead all the Jews I could get my hands on this area, concentrated all the Jewish women and children in a camp and with the help of the SD got my hands on a 'delousing van', that in about 14 days to 4 weeks will have brought about the definitive clearing out of the camp...

Additional details about these buses are to be found in a letter from Willy Just to SS Lieutenant Colonel Walter Rauff on 5 June 1942. In the letter, Just describes how a load of '97,000 have been processed'. He leaves little doubt about the nature of the load, when he writes about it pushing against the door as a result of 'fear aroused by the darkness'.

Just also offers Rauff a series of suggestions on how the vans might be improved. Since there was a problem of 'off-road manoeuvrability', he suggests that the cargo area be reduced. This would make the operation more efficient, because '... were the cargo area smaller, but fully occupied, the operation would take considerably less time, because there would be no empty space.'

Deniers find it impossible to 'explain away' these kinds of documents so they generally ignore them.

Denying Auschwitz

Most of all, deniers focus on the extermination camp run by the Nazis at Auschwitz. They claim - despite overwhelming documentary and physical evidence as well as eye-witness accounts by both perpetrators and victims - that it was not an extermination camp. They ignore or try to explain away evidence that leaves no doubt as to Auschwitz's nefarious purposes. A small sample of the many pieces of documentary evidence demonstrates the far-fetched nature of their claims.

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Though the Germans made concerted attempts to avoid direct references to the gassings that took place in the camp, sometimes even those in the upper echelons slipped up. On 29 January 1943, for example, SS Captain Bischoff, head of the Auschwitz Central Construction Management, wrote to officials in Berlin regarding Crematorium 2, and in this letter he referred to a *Vergasungskeller* (gassing cellar).

In the Auschwitz archives one can inspect the architectural drawings for Crematoria 4 and 5. These call for 30 x 40cm windows, through which Zyklon B was to be thrown. In February 1943 the Auschwitz Construction Office issued a work order for the 'production of 12 gas-tight doors (window shutters) approximately 30/40cm'. In Auschwitz there remain a number of decrepit 30 x 40cm window shutters. The remnants of a gas-tight seal are still visible around their edges. The handle for closing the windows is on the outside, a decidedly impractical arrangement for any room, unless one wanted to ensure that those inside could not open them.

On 28 February, according to the civilian contractors' daily time-sheets, the gas-tight shutters were installed. A time-sheet dated 2 March 1943, and submitted by the contractor for work on Crematorium 4, mentions a 'concrete floor in gas chamber'. These documents indicate that by March 1943 workers officially designated a room in Crematorium 4 a 'gas chamber'. The drawings, work order, time-sheets, and remaining windows constitute a simple but stunning example of the confluence of evidence concerning the gassing of prisoners at the camp.

Deniers also claim that the gas chambers were actually delousing chambers or morgues. But the documentary evidence proves this a bogus claim. In a letter dated 31 March, Bischoff refers to a 'gas [tight] door' for Crematorium 2, which was to be fitted with a rubberised sealing strip and a peephole for inspection. The deniers fail to explain why a door for a delousing chamber or morgue would need a peephole.

Another claim is that the gas chambers were air-raid shelters. This argument ignores the fact that these supposed shelters were too small to house the camp inmates, and were over a kilometer away from where the guards were quartered - a decidedly silly arrangement if these shelters were meant to protect them. Furthermore, the doors had a metal grille over the peephole on the inside of the door - to protect the glass from being broken from within - exactly the opposite of where it would be were it the door for an air-raid shelter. And indeed there were proper one- or two-person air-raid shelters for guards around the camp. They are still visible at the perimeter of Birkenau.

Most importantly, to support their position, deniers also have to ignore testimony given by perpetrators such as Hans Stark, a member of the Auschwitz 'Gestapo.' At his trial Stark described the killing process.

| *As early as autumn 1941 gassings were carried out in a room...[which] held 200 to 250 people, had a higher than average ceiling, no windows, only a specially insulated door with bolts like those of an airtight door [Luftschutzer]. The room had a flat roof, which allowed daylight in through the openings. It was through these openings that Zyklon B in granular form would be poured.*

Stark told the court that, because the Zyklon B '... was in granular form, it trickled down over the people as it was being poured in. They then started to cry out terribly for they now knew what was happening to them.'

Evidence

In February 1943 Auschwitz camp building authorities complained to Topf, the company that built the crematoria equipment, that they needed ventilation blowers 'most urgently'. Why the urgency, if this was an air-raid shelter, morgue, or delousing chamber?

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Deniers hypothesise that the urgency was a result of official fears that the camp would be hit with a typhus epidemic, which would cause a tremendous spike in the death toll. Without the proper ventilation system, the crematoria would not be able to operate.

Deniers try to bolster their argument about the typhus by pointing to documents which show that at this point in time the planned monthly incineration rate of Auschwitz had been boosted to 120,000 bodies. Deniers claim this was because of the typhus epidemic. However, the camp's projected population was 150,000. For the deniers' explanation to make sense, in one month an epidemic would have to kill four-fifths of Auschwitz's population and the Germans would have to repopulate the camp with 120,000 people. This claim exceeded the absolute worst case epidemiological scenario.

On 6 March 1943, one of the civilian employees working on the construction of Crematorium 2 referred to the air extraction system of '*Auskleidekeller* [undressing cellar] 2'. No normal morgue could require an undressing room, particularly one that was 50 yards long. In that same month, there were at least four additional references to *Auskleidekeller*. It is telling that civilians who, according to the deniers, were in Birkenau to work on underground morgues, repeatedly referred not to morgues but to the ventilation of the 'undressing cellars'.

In the same letter the employee asked about preheating the areas that would be used as the gas chamber. If these were morgues they should be cooled, not preheated. Heating a gas chamber, on the other hand, would speed the gassing process by more quickly vaporising the gas from the Zyklon B.

A letter dated 31 March 1943, regarding Crematorium 3, spoke of it as having a *Gastür*, a gas door. Deniers argue that this could mean many things. But the inventory attached to the handover documents for the crematorium states that it had a *Gasdichttür*, a 'gas-tight door'. One might argue about the meaning of *Gastür*, but it is hard to squabble over a gas-tight door.

Deniers have said for years that physical evidence is lacking because they have seen no holes in the roof of the Birkenau gas chamber where the Zyklon was poured in. (In some of the gas chambers the Zyklon B was poured in through the roof, while in others it was thrown in through the windows.) The roof was dynamited at war's end, and today lies broken in pieces, but three of the four original holes were positively identified in a recent paper. Their location in the concrete matches with eyewitness testimony, aerial photos from 1944, and a ground photo from 1943. The physical evidence shows unmistakably that the Zyklon holes were cast into the concrete when the building was constructed.

There is much additional evidence affirming Auschwitz/Birkenau's role as a killing centre. There is no reputable evidence that affirms the deniers' claims.

Diary of Anne Frank

Anne Frank © Deniers have repeatedly attacked the authenticity of the famous *Diary of Anne Frank*, which tells of the young Jewish author's experiences as she and her family hid from Nazi persecution in Holland. It seems they believe that by creating doubts about this popular book, which is often a young person's first encounter with the literature of the Holocaust, they can generate broader doubts about the Holocaust itself. Their attacks on the diary became so widespread, that eventually the Netherlands State Institute for War Documentation, the archives to which Anne's father left the work, subjected the glue, paper and ink of the diary to extensive forensic tests. They found them all to be from the 1940s.



The investigators compared Anne's handwriting in the diary to other samples of her writing, including letters she wrote before going into hiding, and traditional student autograph books she signed before the war. The tests found the handwriting to be that of the same person. In fact, every test to which the diary was subjected proved that this was a genuine World War Two era work by a teenager.

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Deniers also argue that there are multiple versions of the *Diary of Anne Frank*. This, they claim, proves it is a fraud. Actually, there are multiple versions of the diary, and Anne herself explains why this is so. In 1944, a Dutch government official, broadcasting from London, urged the population to save eyewitness accounts of their wartime experience, including memorabilia and diaries. Hearing this, Anne, decided to rewrite some of the entries. She also used her diary as a basis for a novel, *The Annexe*. Hence the different versions.

Deniers also make the claim that the diary is in green ballpoint pen, something that was not readily available during the war. And there are, in fact, some minor stylistic marginal notes in green ink. However, as the Dutch investigation demonstrated, the only ballpoint writing is on two scraps of paper included among the loose leaves, and these have no significance whatsoever in terms of content. Moreover, the handwriting on the scraps of paper differs markedly from those in the diary, indicating that they were written by someone else, an editor perhaps.

The final result of the Dutch investigation was a critical 712-page edition of the diary containing the original version, Anne's edited copy, and the published version as well as the experts' findings. While some may argue that the Netherlands State Institute for War Documentation used an elephant to swat a fly, once again it becomes clear that the deniers glibly make claims that have no relationship to the most basic rules of truth and evidence.

All this evidence, and much else, demonstrates the nature of the deniers' claims. Much of this information was entered into the High Court of Justice in London as evidence when the author of this article was sued for libel by David Irving, a man who has written many books on World War Two, a number of which deny the Holocaust.

Irving sued for libel because he had been described as a Holocaust denier in one of the present author's books. He contended this was not true, because his claims about the Holocaust were correct. The judge in the case, Judge Gray, however, found Irving, who introduced virtually all of the standard denial arguments into his submission, to be indeed a Holocaust denier.

Dismissing Irving's claims that the gas chambers were an impossibility, the judge noted that that the 'cumulative effect of the documentary evidence for the genocidal operation of the gas chambers' was not only 'considerable' but 'mutually corroborative'.

Judge Gray, who found the eyewitness and documentary evidence to be 'striking[ly]... consistent', concluded that 'no objective, fair-minded historian would have serious cause to doubt' the existence of gas chambers at Auschwitz, which were used on a substantial scale to kill Jews. He found Irving's arguments - and by extension the claims of deniers in general - to be 'perverse and egregious'.

Furthermore, the judge said that Irving had 'significantly misrepresented what the evidence, objectively examined, reveals'. (For the complete judgement, the daily transcripts, and the expert witness reports see www.hdot.org - the link is given below.)

Holocaust denial is a form of virulent anti-Semitism. But it is not only that. It is also an attack on reasoned inquiry and inconvenient history. If this history can be denied any history can be denied.

Holocaust deniers have, thus far, been decidedly unsuccessful in convincing the broader public of their claims - although many people worry that after the last of the Holocaust survivors has died (most are now in their 80s)

deniers will achieve greater success. However, historians, carefully relying on a broad array of documentary and material evidence, a small sample of which is mentioned in this article, can and already have demonstrated that Holocaust denial is a tissue of lies.

Find out more

Books

Lying About Hitler by Richard Evans (Basic Books, 2001)

History on Trial: My Day in Court with David Irving by Deborah E Lipstadt (to be published in 2005)

The Case for Auschwitz: Evidence from the Irving Trial by Robert Jan van Pelt (Indiana University Press, 2002)

Auschwitz: Technique and Operation of the Gas Chambers by Jean-Claude Pressac (Beate Klarsfeld Foundation, c.1989)

Auschwitz: The Nazis and the 'Final Solution' by Laurence Rees (BBC Books, 2005)

Denying History: Who says the Holocaust never happened and why do they say it? by Michael Shermer and Alex Grobman (University of California Press, 2000)

Links

www.hdot.org: This site contains the transcripts from David Irving v. Penguin, UK and Deborah Lipstadt, as well as the expert reports, various court submissions, and the judgement.

<http://www.holocaust-history.org/>: This site is an extensive archive of documents, photographs, recordings and essays regarding the Holocaust, including direct refutation of Holocaust-denial.

About the author

Deborah Lipstadt is director of the Rabbi Donald A Tam Institute for Jewish Studies, and Dorot Professor of Modern Jewish and Holocaust Studies, at Emory University, Atlanta. Among her publications are *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory* (Free Press/ Macmillan, 1993) and *Beyond Belief: The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust* (Free Press/Macmillan, 1993). Her most recent book is *History on Trial: My Day in Court with David Irving*, published in 2005.