

The Biography of an Unlikely International Lawyer

Daniel Terris, *The Trials of Richard Goldstone*

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The Trials of Richard Goldstone is a well written account of the life of Justice Goldstone. The author traces the life of Justice Goldstone (born in 1938) from his years as a young boy, then as a Wits University student, a lawyer, a Supreme Court judge in South Africa, and his role as the first Chief Prosecutor of two international criminal tribunals. The biography is divided into careful, distinct chapters which outline Justice Richard Goldstone's family background meticulously, discussing his upbringing, university life, legal practice, role on the bench and his most remarkable achievement – his appointment as a Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (the ICTY) in 1993 and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (the ICTR) in 1994.

The Trials of Richard Goldstone is set apart by Terris's skilful writing, which makes the book a pleasure to read. The author succeeds in capturing the reader's attention and keeping one 'hooked' from the first page to the last. The main strength of *The Trials of Richard Goldstone* is Terris's articulation of extensive information about Goldstone. It provides a full account of the personal, political, and legal conundrums which confronted him at different stages in his life and career. The book is useful not only for those without prior knowledge about Goldstone, but also for those who wish to know more about privilege under apartheid, the experience of attending a top South African law school and serving as a judge, the politics of South Africa's transition from apartheid to constitutional democracy, and fame in the prosecution of some of the most heinous crimes against humanity.

Like many biographies of its kind, the impact of *The Trials of Richard Goldstone* is perhaps limited by its attempts to paint Justice Goldstone in a favourable light. These attempts, for the most part, seek to justify some of the decisions he took during his career on the bench. Consequently, there is some overemphasis on the merits of Goldstone's views, some of the choices and decisions which profoundly shaped his career as a judge and a Chief Prosecutor of both the ICTY and the ICTR.

A weakness of *The Trials of Richard Goldstone* is the attempt to portray Goldstone as a martyr of justice and a principled, fearless defender of human rights. A more nuanced account, noting that arguably Justice Goldstone did not have the original intent to pursue a career in international criminal justice, and that his primary expertise did not lie in international criminal law, would have added complexity to the celebratory trope of Justice Goldstone as an avenger for the victims of heinous crimes. Several instances in the biography show that Terris is at pains to spin some of Goldstone's controversial views, such as his affirmation of unjust apartheid laws, his 'hanging antics' on the Supreme Court and Appellate Division, and his controversial retraction of critical aspects in the report on the atrocities committed by Israel in Gaza.

Nevertheless, Terris succeeds in showing that Justice Goldstone was a politically-seasoned individual whose wit, skill, personal network, and – at times – good luck assisted his appointments to the Supreme Court, Appellate Division and as a Constitutional Court judge. Also, Terris makes it clear that Justice Goldstone's unexpected rise to the ad hoc international criminal tribunals was perhaps in part due to his being in the right place at the right time, with the right social capital and connections. If Terris's interpretation and analysis are to be taken seriously (which I believe they are), one gets the impression that Justice Goldstone was, in part at least, interested in gaining personal glory (through political means), as much as he was in the pursuit of human rights. Indeed, it is clear in this biography that in his newfound role in international criminal justice, Justice Goldstone was influenced by personal politics alongside his efforts to end the impunity of human rights atrocities. Terris shows that Justice Goldstone valued his family, Jewish faith, self-image, and legacy. To what extent this outlook influenced the retraction of a critical report into possible war crimes and crimes against humanity in Gaza, remains up for debate. Some more critical reflection on his personal politics and the troubled politics of international legal opinion would have added depth to what is otherwise an excellent biography.

In a nutshell, *The Trials of Richard Goldstone* is a pleasure to read. Terris provides a vivid account of Justice Goldstone's legal career and the role of politics in global peace and justice. However, the biography would have benefited immensely from a more critical account of his life and career. Notwithstanding this caveat, Terris illustrates Goldstone's notable achievements with great skill. I recommend *The Trials of Richard Goldstone* to any person who wishes to know more about the advent of the international criminal tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. The biography also provides insight into South Africa's apartheid past, judging on the bench, and the politics of constitutional adjudication.

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