

Reaction paper

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FIRST LAST 15 November Reaction Paper: “ David Cole Interviews Dr. Franciszek Piper, Director Auschwitz Museum”

There are few historical events which are as contentious or divisive as the Holocaust. David Cole is a Jewish-American Holocaust revisionist who traveled to Poland in 1992 to inspect the Auschwitz prison camp where “ Jews, prisoners-of-war, resistance fighters, Gypsies, and other people considered enemies of the Third Reich” were imprisoned and forced to work (Cole). The resulting video was a reinterpretation of the standard historical consensus which defined the Holocaust as “ the genocide of six million Jews and the execution of five million non-Jews through the use of homicidal gas chambers” (Cole).

As he toured Auschwitz, Cole described humanitarian structures such as a “ disinfestation complex,” theater and swimming pool inside of the camp. These structures call into question the function of the prison. If prisoners were sent to Auschwitz to be murdered, why should the Germans provide hygiene, entertainment and exercise to them? Coles interview with Dr. Franciszek Piper, curator of the Auschwitz State Museum, is the focus of the video. Cole disputes the Holocausts existence because there is no proof, “ theres no picture, plan or wartime document dealing with homicidal gas chambers or a plan to exterminate Jews” (Cole). He tries to provide a “ perfectly normal explanation” for the materials and exhibits which define the Holocaust (Cole). Poison gas was used for disinfection, dead bodies were caused by a Typhus epidemic and discarded clothing came from naturally deceased prisoners.

The interview with Dr. Piper is primarily concerned with the Auschwitz gas chamber. Cole questioned the function of this building because it had been

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changed since the end of the war. While Piper believed that four holes were drilled in the ceiling of this building for the purpose of killing prisoners, Cole believed that these holes were drilled after the camp was liberated by Soviet forces during the camps reconstruction. Cole points to aerial photographs as evidence of the new construction. Cole also cited the lack of Zyklon B residue in the chamber as proof that it was never used to kill humans. Cole then turned from the institution to the numbers. Traditionally, the Holocaust is stated to have killed eleven million Jews and non-Jews. These figures are based on Soviet claims made after the war which Cole does not accept. Cole compared it to American prison camps where, “ anywhere from several hundred thousand to over two million” Germans died (Cole). To him, this was evidence that all camps of this era were dangerous regardless of national affiliation.

While David Cole does bring up some interesting points about the nature of historical memory and national propaganda, it is hard to ignore the tragedy which was Auschwitz and the individuals who died there. We can not know for sure if Hitler had a final solution for the Jews. We must also question the validity of Soviet reports and the presence of American war crimes during World War Two. The history of warfare is tragic and sometimes horrifying. The Holocaust might be questioned by some researchers but what can not be denied is the death of millions of human beings of many nationalities, religions and races during the war. They were murdered in service of national, religious and socially hygienic directives which make little sense to us today. While we should never forget the atrocities which took place in German prison camps like Auschwitz, we should also remember that war is horrible on all fronts, regardless of the political propaganda which follows.

Cole, David and Bradley Smith. David Cole Interviews Dr. Franciszek Piper, Director, Auschwitz State Museum., 1992. Film.

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