

Laurence Rees. *Auschwitz: A New History*. New York: Public Affairs, 2005. Pp. 327. Paper \$30.00.

The Auschwitz concentration camp was one of the most notorious institutions of the Nazi's genocidal regime, facilitating the murder of over a million people. Executing enemies of the state has been presented as the camp's primary purpose. However, in *Auschwitz: A New History*, Laurence Rees seeks to expand the perspective on Auschwitz history, analyzing the camp before, during, and after its operation, revealing a complicated and protracted system that functioned on many levels. In order to expand its appeal to non-historians, the book is accompanied by a documentary series produced by the BBC. The recipient of an honorary doctorate from Sheffield University in 2005, Rees explores many facets of the camp in order to explain the inner workings of Auschwitz. His sources are comprised of documents from the Nazi administration and interviews with over one hundred former Nazi guards and inmates. Highlighting the conditions of the prisoners, the actions of the Nazis, and world events that impacted the development of the camp uncovers a deeper meaning behind one of the Third Reich's most notorious institutions.

While Nazi government leaders are mentioned, Rees focuses on those with personal experiences at Auschwitz. These individual stories provide a bottom-up perspective by providing an intimate illustration of events that extends beyond merely analyzing figures like Hitler or Himmler. The testimonies encapsulate what occurred in the camp from numerous viewpoints; stories of struggle and death, but also of survival.

As remembered by the individuals interviewed, not all Nazis were brutal homicidal monsters and not all prisoners were subservient. For example, one Nazi soldier fell in love with a female prisoner and another was outraged by the treatment of Jews in the camp. Jewish prisoners also relayed stories of survival and hardships endured from guards and fellow inmates. Jewish commandos killed their peers for resources and groups conspired to escape. Rees's portrayal of these individual experiences adds a new level of complexity to the memory of Auschwitz.

Not always a killing center for the Holocaust, Auschwitz started as a detention center for Poles, Communists, and Soviet prisoners of war. Commandant Rudolf Hoss eventually remodeled the nascent institution to mirror the Dachau concentration camp. In early 1942, the Nazis implemented their infamous transcontinental deportations, drastically increasing the Jewish population and subsequent death rates at Auschwitz. Moreover, Rees adds to our understanding of what happened to inmates after liberation in January of 1945, a subject that has been neglected by most scholars. Some were able to return to their homes and reintegrate into society. Others were excluded from their previous communities and faced struggles in regaining their pre-war life. There was not a universal post-war experience for those that survived, proving Auschwitz was "not just brutal; it was designed to break the will of the inmate" (6). From its inception, Auschwitz's history was more complicated than just murder; Rees shows how the institution thoroughly transformed inmates into enemies of the state.

*Auschwitz: A New History* is a compelling book and an important addition to Holocaust literature. Historians and college students with an interest in the Holocaust will find value in the firsthand accounts. Images of the camps, ghettos, prisoners, and staff provide rare visuals. Despite his unofficial academic credentials, Rees's work provides a competent and well-written narrative of the infamous Third Reich camp.

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