OUR CLASS
By Tadeusz Słobodzianek • English version by Ryan Craig
Directed by Nick Sandys
April 2 – May 11, 2014
Featuring David Darlow and Linda Gillum

In a time of terror, what would you do?
Performing at the Greenhouse Theater Center, 2257 N Lincoln Ave, Chicago • Tickets at www.remybumppo.org

Featuring David Darlow and Linda Gillum

Greenhouse Theater Center, 2257 N. Lincoln Ave, Chicago
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Field Guide created by Michael Dalberg
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OUR CLASS Uniforms
An Interview with Jeremy Floyd

Jeremy Floyd, Costume Designer for OUR CLASS, is originally from the Deep South (Alabama to be exact). Having started his long academic journey at the University of South Alabama where he earned his BFA in Costume Design and Technology, he took a break for a few years of sun in LA as a makeup artist, and later attended the University of Kentucky where he received an MA in Theatre. Immediately thereafter, he continued his education at Northwestern University, where he earned an MFA in Costume Design. He has worked as a costume designer all along that path, and has been based in Chicago since 2007.

Having been drawn to working with the Remy Bumppo Theatre Company due to the smart and insightful theatre created there, and the attention the company pays to having a thoughtful and educational approach to theatre, Jeremy took on the costume design for OUR CLASS. Despite being quite busy, Jeremy was able to take a moment and answer a few questions regarding his approach to the costume design.

Regarding OUR CLASS, what was your “hook” into the show?

_I think the biggest thing about Our Class that drew me in was its unbiased viewpoint. I grew up thinking about the time leading up to and during World War II as a time of black and white; there were obvious “good guys” and “bad guys.” When first reading this play, I found myself unable to make those easy separations amongst the characters. That gray area, along with the beautiful language and well-crafted narratives, really gave me a chance to see these people for more than just archetypes they could represent._

What were the major influences in your design?
One of the most intriguing things about Our Class is the broad time span over which it takes place. We start our journey in the 1930’s and end up in the early 2000’s; that’s a lot of time to cover! I found myself looking at photographs from 70 years of history and not feeling confined by the time. I used images from all over Central and Eastern Europe and even from France and Belgium. I never found it helpful in the storytelling to confine the design to a specific time and place. I was on a search for these people, not necessarily these people in the photographs that were taken in a small town in Poland in 1935. That’s not to say the images from small towns in Poland were not extremely important and useful, I just didn’t feel like they had to be a limitation. Specifically, I found myself drawn towards the photographs of Hugo Jaeger and Herbert Sonnefeld, but there were dozens of photographers (some known and some anonymous) that helped bring these characters to life.

Is there a major component that anchors your design?

When I started looking at this play, I just kept seeing these people in warm tones. In this cold world of death and fear, it was important that these people always held a sense of warmth. This pushed the idea that we would hold these disparate people together with a rather tight color palette. Keeping all of the clothes in a “sepia” world with the occasional pop of subdued color was a way to create that warmth in a very real way. There is also a softness that comes with a sepia palette that keeps the edges a little fuzzy, like a memory, or the photographs of Jaeger. Jaeger’s photos often show people in horrible situations, but they often have smiles on their faces. Even in the worst of times, humanity can find something to make them smile.

Were there particular challenges that you needed to overcome for this design?

The biggest challenge for this production was spanning 70 years of life without the actors leaving the stage. It was important that no one left the space. We didn’t want to lose sight of anyone, even after death. We also wanted to communicate that these people collected clothing like memories. Their garments were more than just clothes; they were pieces of their past that continued to build up over time, weighing them down in a very literal sense. This sense of accumulated memories meant each piece of clothing needed to specific. A cap is more than just a head covering, and a sweater is more than just something to keep warm.
How does your design support the concept for the show and the other designs?

I always strive to support the actors’ journey and development in a production. Clothes say so much about a person and that is no different in a play. I hope that the costumes allow for the actors to feel like the characters in body as well as mind. The clothes are also serving as part of the atmosphere/world. Clothing might be used as a property or to create a piece of the environment, just as a chair might be used to create a table. There is a sense of ensemble in the production that extends beyond the cast and into the design.

Want to know more about the designs?
Find live interviews with Properties Designer Jesse Gaffney, OUR CLASS Director Nick Sandys, and more at:

RemyBumppoFieldGuide.org under THINKTALK
OUR CLASSroom
An Interview with Joe C. Klug

Joe C. Klug, Scenic Designer for OUR CLASS, is originally from Kansas City. He did his undergraduate studies at Kansas State University. There he studied Scenic Design and Scenic Painting. Currently, he attends the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, and is a second year M.F.A. candidate in the Scenic Design Program. He has been designing sets since high school, and began his work designing scenery for the Repertory Theatre acting class at his high school.

It was through his educational path that Joe met Remy Bumppo Producing Artistic Director Nick Sandys at a portfolio review in Chicago, in which Joe was presenting a design for HEDDA GABLER. This conversation with Nick, and a desire to be part of the intellectual work which Remy Bumppo is famous for that brought Joe, ultimately, to designing for OUR CLASS. Despite his education keeping him out of Chicago, Joe was able to find a moment to answer a few questions regarding his approach to the scenic design of OUR CLASS.

Regarding OUR CLASS, what was your “hook” into the show?

My hook into the play was the time period and the events of World War II. It is a time period that I have always been interested in. The impact of World War II and what happened has affected the outlook and the way many countries operate. Specifically about the show was the dramaturgical research about how this event has affected the people of Poland and how much controversy there has been over the event. It sparks a lot of questions about humanity and how we as people deal with tragedy as a collective.

What were the major influences in your design?

The major influence for the scenic design came from an image provided by our costume designer. What I was drawn to was the very utilitarian look and feel of Eastern European buildings. Within one picture, there was a cement structure with decay and a very cool color of wall versus the warmth of the kids and their clothing. It actually was this spring board that put the scenery into motion.
The play focuses on the people, and their relationships. So I wanted to provide an environment where they were central. I created a very cool, harsh militaristic environment where the warmth of the people and the human “things” (their luggage, clothes, etc.) shine forward and pop.

Is there a major component that anchors your design, and why?

The history and the layers of the script were other major influences on the scenic design. I wanted to capture this aspect in the design. Creating a world where you could see that history and those layers was important. I went with a brick room that has been cemented over and, due to age, begun to crumble away and reveal the inner layers and foundation. Much like the characters as the show goes on, this tragic event always rises to the surface no matter how much the characters try to suppress it. I wanted the environment to reinforce this and follow this same arch of the show.

Were there particular challenges that you needed to overcome for this design?

I think that a large challenge was the space of the Greenhouse Downstairs Mainstage. How do you create an environment that can support eleven people being on stage the entire show in that small space? After many rough white models and spending a lot of time exploring the nuances of the space, I think we found a good solution for this show in this theatre. Ultimately, I had great Collaborations with Nick Sandys, Mike Durst, and John Boesche, and we were able to create a truly striking environment. One that allows Mike to shape with lighting and John to reinforce the tension filled moments with projections.

What do you hope people walk away from this show thinking or feeling?

I think theatre and art are meant to provoke thought about life, people, and situations. So for me I hope the audience walks away thinking about the show and talking about the show. Sparking a conversation that forces people to look and see past the day-to-day and think about something bigger and larger. That is art, and that is what I hope people leave with.
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RemyBumppoFieldGuide.org under THINKTALK
1918: Independent Polish state restored at end of WWI. Poland is led by Józef Piłsudski, AKA “The Marshall.” The children of these freedom fighters become known as “The Columbus Generation.”


August 12-25, 1920: Battle of Warsaw—decisive Polish victory over Soviets; ends Polish-Soviet War.

1926: Remaining anti-Jewish legislation is eliminated in Poland.

March 20, 1933: Nazi government opens the Dachau concentration camp outside of Munich for “political prisoners.”

November 9/10, 1938: Kristallnacht (Anti-Jewish crimes committed throughout Germany and its occupations.)

August 23, 1939: Soviet-German non-aggression pact.

1940: Soviet Secret Police massacre 22,000 Polish army officers and civil servants.

August 15, 1940: Nazi government memorandum calls for Jews to be relocated from Europe to Madagascar at a rate of one million Jews per year, for four years.

June 23, 1941: Germany army enters Jedwabne village; Poles greet German army with swastika arch.

July 10, 1941: 1,600 Jews locked within a barn and burned alive in Jedwabne pogrom.

July 7, 1941: Pogrom in Radziłów. Survivors flee to Jedwabne.

July 5, 1941: Pogrom in Wąsosz. Survivors flee to Radziłów.

June 22, 1941: Germany invades the Soviet Union.

July, 1941: Jews in Wizna deported to ghetto in Łomza. Escapees flee to Jedwabne.

May 10, 1940: Germany attacks Western Europe.

April, 1940: Pogrom in Warsaw.

October 8, 1939: Germans establish a ghetto in Piotrków Trybunalski, Poland.

August 23, 1939: Germany invades Poland, starting World War II in Europe.

September 1, 1939: Germany invades Poland from the east; Red Army occupies Jedwabne, greeted by a newly erected arch made by Jewish citizens.

End of September, 1939: Two Polish officers engage in plunder and small pogrom in Jedwabne.

September 17, 1939: The Soviet Union occupies Poland from the east; Red Army occupies Jedwabne, greeted by a newly erected arch made by Jewish citizens.

August 15, 1940: Nazi government memorandum calls for Jews to be relocated from Europe to Madagascar at a rate of one million Jews per year, for four years.

1941: The Germans start to build the three concentration camps: Auschwitz, Treblinka, and Majdanek.
January 16, 1942: Mass deportation begins of more than 65,000 Jews from Łódz to the Chelmno killing center.

May 7, 1945: Germany surrenders to the western Allies.

1945: Jedwabne and Radziłów are returned to Poland.

April 19, 1945: Warsaw ghetto uprising begins.

July 22-September 12, 1942: Germans deport over 300,000 Jews from the Warsaw ghetto to the Treblinka killing center.

January 27, 1945: Soviet troops liberate the Auschwitz camp complex.

April 18, 1945: Death march of nearly 60,000 prisoners from the Auschwitz camp system in southern Poland.


April 30, 1945: Adolf Hitler commits suicide.

June 6, 1944: D-Day: Allied forces invade Normandy, France.

May 15, 1944: Germans deport 440,000 Jews from Hungary.

April 19, 1943: Warsaw ghetto uprising begins.

August 1, 1944: Warsaw Polish uprising begins.

June 6, 1944: Japan surrenders.

April 4, 1949: The United States, Canada, and Western European countries sign the North Atlantic Treaty, forming NATO.


1946: The Cold War begins.

1947: Poland becomes Communist People's Republic. Polish United Workers' Party takes control.

1949: Two-week investigation of the massacre at Jedwabne.


1955: Poland joins the Soviet-run Warsaw Pact military alliance.

November 9, 1989: Fall of the Berlin Wall. Communism ends in Poland.

April 30, 1945: Adolf Hitler commits suicide.

May 7, 1945: Germany surrenders to the western Allies.


May 15, 1945: Germans deport 440,000 Jews from Hungary.

April 19, 1943: Warsaw ghetto uprising begins.

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1944: Soviets retake Jedwabne and Radziłów.

1945: Jedwabne and Radziłów are returned to Poland.

1947: Poland becomes Communist People's Republic. Polish United Workers' Party takes control.

1949: Two-week investigation of the massacre at Jedwabne.


1955: Poland joins the Soviet-run Warsaw Pact military alliance.


1978: Karol Woytyła, a Pole, becomes Pope John Paul II.


1980: Solidarity, an anti-communist/non-violent movement, begins.

1981: Martial law is enacted in Poland. Solidarity is banned.

2000: Jan T. Gross' book *Neighbors* is published, and shines new light on the massacre at Jedwabne.

2001: *Neighbors* documentary is released.

2003: Institute of National Remembrance released a statement saying they found no other living perpetrators who hadn't already been brought to justice over the July 10, 1941 massacre.

2004: Institute of National Remembrance released a statement saying they found no other living perpetrators who hadn't already been brought to justice over the July 10, 1941 massacre.

2005: Institute of National Remembrance released a statement saying they found no other living perpetrators who hadn't already been brought to justice over the July 10, 1941 massacre.
POLAND

History and Education

An excerpt from the OUR CLASS Sourcebook, written by Skye Robinson Hillis, and Erin Shea Brady, with additional visuals

The First World War

In WWI, the Poles were drafted into the armies of Germany, Austria and Russia. They were forced to fight each other in a war that was not theirs. Although many Poles sympathized with France and Britain they found it hard to fight with them on the Russian side. They also had little sympathy with the Germans. Pilsudski considered Russia as the greater enemy and formed Polish Legions to fight for Austria but independently. Other Galician Poles went to fight against the Italians when they entered the war in 1915, thus preventing any clash of conscience. Almost all the fighting on the Eastern Front took place on Polish soil.

When the outbreak of the revolution occurred in Russia, Polish army units had joined together to form the First Polish Corps under General Jozef Dowbor Munsnicki. They tried to reach Poland but were disarmed by the Germans. Escapees and volunteers reorganized themselves into a new army and fought alongside the British. Later they managed to reach Poland.

All sides had promised the restoration of Poland, however, the Poles regained independence through their own actions when Russia and the Central Powers collapsed as a result of the War. November 11th was named National Independence Day in Poland.

After the rise of the independent Second Polish Republic in 1918, the most important task was the standardization of the educational system. This process lasted until 1920. Between 1918 and 1939 the newly independent Poland faced the task of reconstructing a national education system from the three separate systems imposed during the time of foreign control by Germany, Austria, and Russia. One of the first legislative achievements was the law "Concerning School Obligation" in February of 1919. It mandated compulsory attendance of the 7-year primary school from ages 7 to 14. Schools were to be free and accessible for all children.
Common education was intensively developed between 1922-1929. In the grammar schools an eight-year system existed, which was divided into two stages. During the first three years, the schools took the general (comprehensive) approach, teaching all students the same material. During the next five years, students were grouped into specialized areas of study for part of their schooling. The school diploma opened up the prospects of further studies. Independent grammar schools were accessible after primary school, and they prepared students for education in the secondary schools. Secondary and high schools remained barely accessible because of high tuition fees.

The Impact of the War on Education

Between 1918 and 1939, the newly independent Poland faced the task of reconstructing a national education system from the three separate systems imposed during partition. Although national secondary education was established in the 1920s, the economic crisis of the 1930s drastically decreased school attendance. Among the educational accomplishments of the interwar period were establishment of state universities in Warsaw, Wilno (pictured below), and Poznan (available only to the upper classes), numerous specialized secondary schools, and the Polish Academy of Learning.

Between 1939 and 1944, the Nazi occupation sought to annihilate the national Polish culture once again. All secondary and higher schools were closed to Poles, and elementary school curricula were stripped of all national content during this period. In response, an extensive underground teaching movement developed under the leadership of the Polish Teachers' Association and the Committee for Public Education. An estimated 100,000 secondary students attended classes in the underground system during the Nazi occupation.

Under communist regimes, the massive task of postwar education reconstruction emphasized opening institutions of secondary and higher education to the Polish masses and reducing illiteracy. The number of Poles unable to read and write had been estimated at 3 million in 1945. In harmony with the principles of Marxism-Leninism, wider availability of education would democratize the higher professional and technical positions previously dominated by the gentry-based intelligentsia and the wealthier bourgeoisie. Because sweeping industrialization goals also required additional workers with at least minimum skills, the vocational school system was substantially expanded. At least in the first postwar decade, most Poles welcomed the social mobility that these policies offered. On the other hand, Poles generally opposed Marxist revision
of Polish history and the emphasis on Russian language and area studies to the
detriment of things Polish.

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THE SHTETL
Traditional Jewish Communities

An excerpt from the OUR CLASS Sourcebook, written by Skye Robinson Hillis, and Erin Shea Brady, with additional visuals

Shtetl in Jewish History and Memory
Of flying fiddlers & the gefilte fish line.
By Joellyn Zollman

These images are informed by the portrayal of shtetl life in a variety of media, from fiction to film. Sholem Aleichem's Tevye the Dairyman (which most of us know better as Fiddler on the Roof) and artist Marc Chagall's whimsical depictions of Ukrainian Jewish life (with images of floating fiddlers) contribute to the contemporary vision of the shtetl as a small Jewish town in Eastern Europe where a population of poor but industrious Jews worked and studied, all the while seemingly accompanied by a klezmer soundtrack.

It doesn't take a professional historian to realize that such a static representation of the populous and geographically disperse Jewish communities of eastern Europe doesn't reflect historical reality. The popular "fiddlers" image of shtetl life neglects the great diversity of ideas and experiences that characterized these communities. This article examines the shtetl as a historical phenomenon.

What Exactly Is a Shtetl?

The word "shtetl" is Yiddish, and it means "little town." Shtetls were small market towns in Russia and Poland that shared a unique socio-cultural community pattern during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Shtetls ranged in size from several hundred to several thousand residents. Forests and fields often surrounded these small towns. Gentiles tended to live outside of the town, while Jews lived in the town proper. The streets were, for the most part, unpaved, the houses constructed of wood. Public spaces included synagogues (often wooden), the beit midrash (studyhouse), shtiblekh (smaller, residential houses of prayer), a Jewish cemetery, Christian churches (Russian Orthodox or Roman Catholic, depending on the location), bathhouses, and, of course, the marketplace.
The Jewish community was typically governed by a community council, a kahal. The kahal oversaw civil and religious affairs, from collecting taxes to dispensing charity. While religion guided daily life, it was not, as is often portrayed, the sole occupation of Jewish males. In reality, the scholarly class was a small, elite segment of society. A majority of shtetl Jews, both men and women, worked to support their families, usually in commercial or artisanal trades, and then, more commonly, as time and industrialization marched on, in factories.

Modernization, migration, emigration, and revolution contributed to the decline of the shtetl. The Holocaust destroyed any remaining vestiges of shtetl life.

**Shtetls Were Separate and Distinct**

Thousands of shtetls existed in Eastern Europe at the turn of the 20th century, and while many of Jewish communities shared a similar organizational structure, they were not all the same. Politics, dialect, and religious customs varied across Eastern Europe, as evidenced by what has come to be known as the "gefilte fish line." This is an imaginary line that extends across Eastern Europe, dividing those Jews to the west who season their gefilte fish, a traditional Sabbath dish, with sugar from those to the east who season the fish with pepper.

This culinary equator highlights the fact that each shtetl had its own history and traditions, inspired by the local milieu. Each shtetl had its own recipes, stories, legends, and klezmer tunes. Even Judaism varied. Hasidism thrived in scores of shtetls, with many communities simultaneously supporting several distinct groups of Hasidim. Where there were Hasidim, there were likely Mitnagdim, the opponents of Hasidism, who practiced traditional historical Judaism. From different flavors of gefilte fish to different flavors of Judaism, the small market towns of Eastern Europe supported their own identities.

**Not an All-Jewish Saga**

Non-Jews often made up the majority of a shtetl's population. Scholar Gennady Estraikh explains, "It's a distorted picture of the shtetl which completely excludes its non-Jewish residents or reduces them to extras (e.g. the Shabes goyim, Gentile helpers for the
Sabbath chores) in an all-Jewish saga.” In reality shtetls were characterized by daily contact between Jews and Gentiles.

Jewish-Gentile relations ranged from peaceful to explosive. Shtetl memories, however, tend to focus on the pogroms--anti-Jewish riots--to the exclusion of more harmonious daily interactions. Without question, pogroms were promulgated by Gentiles and devastated Jewish communities, but these incidents of anti-Jewish violence do not tell the whole tale of Jewish-Christian relations in the shtetl. Shtetls were market towns, and, as such, their residents, Jewish and Gentile, merchant and farmer, buyer and seller, conducted daily business transactions and maintained social contacts as well.

**Shtetl Memories**

Why does the shtetl loom so large in contemporary Jewish consciousness? For American Jews, a majority of whom are of Ashkenazic (Eastern European) descent, the shtetl serves as a mythical point of origin. This simple, down-to-earth culture--guided by what seems to contemporary observers a colorful combination of religion and folk wisdom--is where we came from. And while shtetl life was inexorably changed by industrialization and modernization, it was destroyed by the Holocaust. Thus, shtetl life is sanctified with an aura of martyrdom.

In Jewish history and Jewish memory, shtetls pulse(d) with yiddishkeyt (Jewishness). Rabbis and rebbes and Yiddish and klezmer and perhaps even an occasional flying fiddler characterized these small market towns, but they were also defined by much more than these stereotypical images.

On a micro level, each shtetl had a unique local history. On a the macro level, societal changes--including the economic upheaval caused by industrialization and demographic change, and the ideological upheaval wrought by socialism and Zionism--made life in the shtetl a dynamic experience. A more nuanced vision of shtetl life makes it easier to appreciate why so many Jews left the place we now view with such nostalgia even before that centuries-old way of life was ended by the Holocaust.

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JEDWABNE

An excerpt from the OUR CLASS Sourcebook, written by Skye Robinson Hillis, and Erin Shea Brady.

After being controlled by Russia for two years, Jedwabne, a small town in northeastern Poland, was captured by Germany on June 22, 1941. One of the first questions the Poles asked the Nazis, their new rulers, was if it was permitted to kill the Jews.

Brutal killings by the Poles immediately began, and included a Jew stoned to death with bricks as well as a Jew slashed with a knife, his eyes and tongue cut out. According to Jan Gross's book, Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland, the Nazis tried to persuade the Poles to keep at least one Jewish family from each profession, but the Poles responded, "We have enough of our own craftsmen, we have to destroy all the Jews, none should stay alive."

Gross writes that Jedwabne's mayor agreed to help facilitate a massacre and that Poles from local villages came in to watch and celebrate the event as a holiday. About half the men of Jedwabne's 1,600 Catholic community participated in torturing Jedwabne's 1,600 member Jewish community, corralling them into a barn, which was then set ablaze.

Until recently, a stone memorial in Jedwabne blamed the massacre on Nazi and Gestapo soldiers, but Gross's book uncovered that the mass execution was actually performed by locals, who, for decades, had shifted the blame away from themselves. Since Neighbors publication, Poland has been engaged in a nationwide debate over whether or not to accept blame for the atrocities Poles committed against the Jews during the Holocaust, or to continue to pass them onto the Nazis.

Sixty years after the massacre, on July 10, 2001, about three thousand people helped Poland's president, prime minister, local officials, Jewish leaders and relatives of the murdered commemorate the deceased by unveiling a monument at the site of the slaughter. "This was a particularly cruel crime. It was justified by nothing. The victims were helpless and defenseless," President Aleksander Kwasniewski said in an apology long awaited by the international Jewish community. "For this crime, we should beg the souls of the dead and their families for forgiveness. This is why today, as a citizen and as president of the Republic of Poland, I apologize."
The monument now reads, "In memory of the Jews of Jedwabne and surrounding areas, men, women, and children, fellow-dwellers of this land, murdered and burned alive at this site on 10 July 1941."

Although the new monument does not blame the Nazis, some are angered that it does not specifically mention the Poles.

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NEIGHBORS by Jan T Gross – The Story Behind Jedwabne

The majority of source material that inspired Gross to write Neighbors comes from this testimony given on April 5, 1945, by Szmul Wasersztajn. This testimony details the brutal murder of 1600 Jews in Jedwabne, Poland:

Before the war broke out, 1,600 Jews lived in Jedwabne, and only seven survived, saved by a Polish woman, Wyrzykowska, who lived in the vicinity.

On Monday evening, June 23, 1941, Germans entered the town. And as early as the 25th local bandits, from the Polish population, started an anti-Jewish pogrom. Two of those bandits, Borowski (Borowiuk?) Wacek with his brother Mietek, walked from one Jewish dwelling to another together with other bandits playing accordion and flute to drown the screams of Jewish women and children. I saw with my own eyes how those murderers killed Chajcia Wasersztajn, Jakub Kac, seventy-three years old, and Eliaz Krawiecki.

Jakub Kac they stoned to death with bricks. Krawiecki they knifed and then lucked his eyes and cut off his tongue. He suffered terribly for twelve hours before he gave up his soul.

On the same day, I observed a horrible scene. Chaja Kubrzanska, twenty-eight years old, and Basia Binsztajn, twenty-six years old, both holding newborn babies, when they saw what was going on, they ran to a pond, in order to drown themselves with the children rather than fall into the hands of bandits. They put their children in the water and drowned them with their own hands: then Basia Binsztajn immediately jumped in and immediately went to the bottom, while Chaja Kubrzanska suffered for a couple of hours. Assembled hooligans made a spectacle of this. They advised her to lie face down in the water, so she would drown faster. Finally, seeing that the children were already dead, she threw herself more energetically into the water and found her death, too.
The next day a local priest intervened, explaining that they should stop the pogrom, and that German authorities would take care of things themselves. This worked, and the pogrom was stopped. From this day on the local population no longer sold foodstuffs to the Jews, which made their circumstances all the more difficult. In the meantime rumors spread that the Germans would issue an order that all the Jews be destroyed.

Such an order was issued by the Germans on July 10, 1941.

Even though the Germans gave the order, it was Polish hooligans who carried it out, using the most horrible methods. After various tortures and humiliations, they burned all the Jews in a barn. During the first pogrom and the later bloodbath the following outcasts distinguished themselves by their brutality: Sleszynski, Karolak, Borowiuk (Borowski?) Mietek, Borowiuk (Borowski?) Waclaw, Stanislaw, Szelawa Franciszek, Kozlowski Geniek, Trzaska, Tarnoczek Jerzyk, Ludanski Jurek, Laciezcz Czeslaw.

On the morning of July 10, 1941, eight Gestapo men came to town and had a meeting with the representatives of the town authorities. When the Gestapo asked what their plans were with respect to the Jews, they said, unanimously, that all Jews must be killed. When the Germans proposed to leave one Jewish family from each profession, local carpenter Bronislaw Sleszynski, who was present, answered: We have enough of our own craftsmen, we have to destroy all the Jews, none should stay alive. Mayor Karolak and everybody else agreed with his words. For this purpose, Sleszynski gave his own barn, which stood nearby. After this meeting the bloodbath began.

Local hooligans armed themselves with axes and special clubs studded with nails, and other instruments of torture and destruction and chased all the Jews into the street. As the first victims of their devilish instincts they selected seventy-five of the youngest and healthiest Jews, whom they ordered to pick up a huge monument of Lenin that the Russians had erected in the center of town. It was impossibly heavy, but under a rain of horrible blows the Jews had to do it. While carrying the monument, they also had to sing until they brought it to the designated place. There, they were ordered to dig a hole and throw the monument in. Then these Jews were butchered to death and thrown into the same hole.
The other brutality was when the murderers ordered every Jew to dig a hole and bury all of the previously murdered Jews, and then those were killed and in turn buried by others. It is impossible to represent all the brutalities of the hooligans, and it is difficult to find in our history of suffering something similar.

Beards of old Jews were burned, newborn babies were killed at their mothers’ breasts, people were beaten murderously and forced to sing and dance. In the end, they proceeded to the main action – the burning. The entire town was surrounded by guards so that nobody could escape; then Jews were ordered to line up in a column, four in a row, and the ninety-year-old rabbi and the shochet [Kosher butcher] were put in front, they were given a red banner, and all were ordered to sing and were chased into the barn. Hooligans bestially beat them up on the way. Near the gate a few hooligans were standing, playing various instruments in order to drown the screams of horrified victims. Some tried to defend themselves, but they were defenseless. Bloodied and wounded, they were pushed into the barn. Then the barn was doused with kerosene and lit, and the bandits went around to search Jewish homes, to look for the remaining sick and children. The sick people they carried to the barn themselves, and as for the little children, they roped a few together by their legs and carried them on their backs, then put them on pitchforks and threw them onto smoldering coals.

After the fire they used axes to knock golden teeth from still not entirely decomposed bodies and in other ways violated the corpses of holy martyrs.

Gross touches on a variety of points that provide some context for Jedwabne before and after the events of July 10th.

BEFORE:
The town, according to Gross, was dry and ugly, though beautiful rivers and swamps surrounded it. Due to the dryness of the land, Jedwabne had a long history with fire—the town’s beautiful wooden synagogue had burned to the ground just before World War I.

Generally speaking, the relationship between the Poles and the Jews in Jedwabne was pleasant. According to census figures of 1931, the town population totaled 2,167, and over 60% were Jewish.

An elderly polish Jedwabne resident who was interviewed fifty years later described the town as such:
“Here there were no big differences in opinion or whatever, because they were, in this little town, on good terms with the Poles. Depending on each other. Everybody was on a first-name basis, Janek, Icek...Life here was, I would say, somehow idyllic.”

However, there were outbursts of anti-Semitic violence, particularly around Easter, “when priests evoked in their sermons an image of Jews as God-killers”.

Gross takes care to say that although the specifics of Jedwabne town life at the time are hard to come by, “there is no reason to single out Jedwabne as a place where relationships between Jews and the rest of the population during those twenty months of Soviet rule were more antagonistic than anywhere else”.

When the Soviets took over Jedwabne, underground Polish organizations were formed, and then later destroyed by the Soviets in June of 1940. It is natural to attempt to forge a connection between the Soviet destruction of these organizations and the mass murder of the Jews by the Poles, as both were extremely violent acts. However, no direct link can be made. [For more, visit page 25-27 of “Neighbors”]

However, in the weeks leading up to the massacre, Jews were mistreated by the Soviets and the Germans, who were welcomed by the local population in the summer of 1941. “Some were killed, but the principal threats Jews faced were beatings, confiscation of material property, and humiliations – men caught [walking] in the street could be ordered to clean outhouses with their bare hands”. Many of the Poles began helping the Germans as they terrorized the Jews. Then, as Wasersztajn details in his testimony, the moment that the Germans gave the go-ahead, the massacre began.

AFTER:
One of the most interesting things about the murder of the Jews in Jedwabne is the conspiracy that has developed in its wake. For many years following the massacre, it was assumed and believed that the Nazis and the Bolsheviks committed the crimes in Jedwabne. However, testimonies began to surface. In July of 2000, an elderly inhabitant said:

Neither on this day [when the pogrom took place] nor on the preceding day did I see any Germans coming from the outside to Radzilow. A gendarme stood on the balcony and looked at the scene. But our people did it.
In Gross’ first chapter, he addresses the Polish denial:

One important aspect of the Jedwabne story concerns the slowdawning of Polish awareness of this horrendous crime. How did this event figure (or, rather, fail to figure) in the consciousness of historians of the war period – myself included? How did the population of Jedwabne live for three generations with the knowledge of these murders? How will the Polish citizenry process the revelation when it becomes public knowledge?

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**Film**


*Nazi Plan, The*. Dir. George Stevens. 1945. This documentary film was used as evidence at the Nuremberg Trials.


**Websites**


Yad Vashem, a Holocaust Memorial: [http://www.yadvashem.org/](http://www.yadvashem.org/)

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