



*Neighbors: The
Destruction of the
Jewish Community
in Jedwabne, Poland*

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Jan T. Gross

Even before its publication in 2001, this dramatic retelling of neighbors turned murderers generated unprecedented discussion in Poland and beyond. Renowned Polish historian Jan Gross related the events of one summer day in 1941 when half of the

Polish town of Jedwabne massacred the other half. Altogether, up to 1,600 men, women, and children, all but seven of the town's Jews, were killed—clubbed, drowned, gutted, and burned to death not by Nazi fanatics but by their Polish schoolmates, grocers, and friends. For sixty years, this shocking, brutal story had remained buried.

By stitching together eyewitness accounts with other evidence into an unusually powerful narrative, Gross compellingly reconstructed the horrific event remembered by locals but overlooked by his Polish compatriots and unknown to world historiography. His investigation reads like a detective story, and its unfolding yields wider truths about Jewish-Polish relations, the Holocaust, and human responses to occupation and totalitarianism. Gross's study forced a reconsideration of twentieth-century Polish and Holocaust history and induced the president of Poland to preside over a replacement of the previous memorial stone at Jedwabne.

Neighbors provoked so much debate that the Press published a follow-up volume entitled *The Neighbors Respond* (2004), in which Holocaust scholars Antony Polonsky and Joanna Michlic collected articles, interviews, opinion pieces, and transcripts of public discussions from Poland and elsewhere to shed light on the intellectual, moral, and historical tensions that arose from the airing of this human catastrophe.