The floodgates of widespread anti-Jewish urban violence were really opened in Kraków, the ancient capital of Poland, two months after the Rzeszów pogrom. The August 11, 1945, events in Kraków were also incited by a rumor of ritual murder. A Polish mob initially assaulted the synagogue where Jews had allegedly killed a Christian child, and then pursued Jews throughout the neighborhood and in other parts of town. Scores of police were among the assailants. An indictment brought against twenty-five people soon after the pogrom named five soldiers and six militiamen.1

It is not clear how many Jews were killed in Kraków—estimates vary from one to five victims. Dozens were grievously wounded. Stanisław Hartman was visiting someone that day in the hospital on Kopernika Street. “Militamen kept bringing people drenched in blood by horse-drawn drozhkis. Listening to what nurses were saying was even worse than looking at the wounded—We won’t keep them here. We’ll dress their wounds and let them go away. ‘Dress their wounds,’ but how do I capture the tone of their voices . . . ?”2 By coincidence, a Jewish woman,

“In this chapter many people are identified by name. Among the most frequently mentioned are the following: Henryk Błaszczyk, a boy whose false accusation triggered the events; Walenty Błaszczyk, his father; Major Kazimierz Gwiazdowicz, the deputy commander of the Kielce voivodeship Citizens’ Militia (MO), i.e., the regular police; Colonel Wiktor Kuznicki, the Kielce voivodeship commander of the Citizens’ Militia; Major Władysław Sobczynski, the Kielce voivodeship commander of the Security Service (UB), i.e., the secret police.
Hanna Zajdman, who was wounded during the pogrom and brought to the hospital on Kopernika Street, left an account of her experience with the Jewish Historical Commission on August 20, 1945: “I was carried to the second precinct of the Militia, where they called for an ambulance. There were five more people over there, including a badly wounded Polish woman. In the ambulance I heard the comments of the escorting soldier and the nurse, who spoke about us as Jewish scum whom they had to save, and that they shouldn’t be doing this because we murdered children, that all of us should be shot. We were taken to the hospital of St. Lazarus on Kopernika Street. I was first taken to the operating room. After the operation a soldier appeared who said that he would take everybody to jail after the operation. He beat up one of the wounded Jews waiting for surgery. He held us at gunpoint and did not allow us to take a drink of water. A moment later two railroadmen appeared and one said, ‘It’s a scandal that a Pole does not have the civil courage to hit a defenseless person,’ and he hit a wounded Jew. One of the hospital patients hit me with a crutch. Women, including nurses, stood behind the doors threatening us, saying that they were only waiting for the surgery to be over in order to rip us apart.”

The synagogue where it all started, as well as many Jewish apartments and stores, were plundered. Unlike in Kielce, however, where the discipline of these units disintegrated, the Security Service and a military detachment brought into town were able to stem the spread of violence once they were deployed in force. Hartman, who by the time he wrote his memoirs was among the most eminent Polish mathematicians, recalled two pogroms he had witnessed during his lifetime: the one in Lwów in the summer of 1941 (after Nazi troops occupied the city), and the one in Kraków in the summer of 1945. And even though the violence of the 1941 pogrom in Lwów, where several thousand Jews had been killed, was incomparably greater, “the second one,” he wrote, “was more horrible.”

The psychological impact of anti-Jewish mob violence in independent Poland—for someone who was out of touch with the public mood that thus manifested itself—was profoundly shocking. Many of the best representatives of the Polish intelligentsia reacted at the time with disbelief and unmitigated despair to the events in Kraków. Evidently, if a pogrom could take place in a city renowned for its cultural treasures, museums, and universities, then Jews were vulnerable to mass violence anywhere in Poland.
The Taste of Cherries

On July 1, 1946, an eight-year-old boy from Kielce, Henryk Błaszczyk, disappeared from his home. He had hitched a ride to see playmates in a village twenty-five kilometers away, where the family had lived until barely six months earlier, and because he liked the cherries grown by a former neighbor. When he did not come home that evening his parents got worried, and by eleven o'clock they reported him missing to the police. Two days later, around seven P.M., the boy returned, loaded with cherries.

Later in the evening Walenty Błaszczyk, Henryk’s father, went back to the police precinct where he had originally reported the boy’s disappearance. He informed the officer on duty that his son had been kidnapped by Jews, from whom he had managed to escape. As he was seriously drunk when he showed up in the police station, and as it was already eleven P.M., Błaszczyk was sent away and told to come back the next morning to file a report.

The Opening Phase

About eight A.M. on July 4, Walenty and Henryk Błaszczyk, accompanied by a neighbor, Jan Dygnarowicz, returned to the police precinct at number 45 Sienkiewicza Street. They walked by the Jewish Committee’s building at 7 Plany Street (situated only 150 meters from the police station) where the young Błaszczyk had allegedly been kept in the basement. It was a large building, which housed various Jewish institutions operating in Kielce and where up to 180 Jews (over half of Kielce’s Jewish residents at the time) were sheltered in mid-1946. The boy, after some prodding, fingered a small man in a green hat standing nearby as a person who gave him a package to carry into the building, where he was then seized. When this story was related to the commander of the police precinct, Sergeant Zagórski, he ordered that the Jew in a green hat be

“The number of residents in the building fluctuated, as many people were merely passing through town; hence the inability to identify several victims of the pogrom who were recent arrivals. Such multifunctional Jewish community centers—where a local Jewish Committee, a dining facility, a prayer room, or a dormitory to accommodate homeless or transiting Jews would be located—were common at the time in larger cities in Poland.
brought in for questioning. A policeman named Stefan Sędęk, from the investigating division, took over.

The Błaszczys, father and son, with their neighbor Dygnarowicz, as well as a few police investigators in plain clothes, went back to the building on Plany to detain the man. On the way, the group told passersby that the boy had been kidnapped by Jews and escaped, and that they were about to arrest the Jews and liberate other Polish children held in the building. A crowd began to assemble.

Kalman Singer, the man in the green hat, was brought over to the precinct under escort, where he was promptly beaten up by a policeman named Zająć. The head of the Jewish Committee in Kielce, Dr. Seweryn Kahane, also went to the police station, worried that “a misfortune might come about” if the arrested Jew was not let go. Dr. Kahane was received by Sergeant Zagórski. Kahane pleaded for Singer’s release: the boy could not have been kept in the cellar against his will, he pointed out, because the building had no cellar. The Silnica creek ran nearby and the ground was too wet.

At the time, Zagórski was busy lecturing foot patrolmen about hygiene. Briefly interrupting this, Zagórski explained to Kahane that Singer was going to be questioned to clarify the matter. Then he went on with the lecture, Kahane returned to the building at Plany 7, and Singer was kept in the precinct.

Soon a second group of five plainclothesmen and nine uniformed police marched to the building on Sędęk’s orders to search and secure it. They were followed by a crowd of civilians, with whom the policemen were talking back and forth about kidnapped Polish children. The crowd was shouting that Jews had killed a Christian child (“za milicjantami szli gromada przechodnie wykrzykujac, ż Żydzi tej nocy zamordowali dziecko”). In effect, those who left the precinct house on the morning of July 4 to search the building at Plany 7 were not a police patrol on assignment, but a posse. And, true to form, they behaved like one.

*Policeman Sędęk was arrested on the evening of July 4 and questioned the next day about his decision to send a large group of uniformed police to check on Błaszczys’s allegations. Question: How many policemen did you send to Plany Street? Answer: Together with the boy I sent 3 plainclothes agents and 8 or 9 policemen in uniform. Question: Why did you send 8 or 9 uniformed policemen to Plany Street? Answer: I sent 8 or 9 uniformed policemen especially for guard duty so that people would not assemble at the place of the event. Question: Your answer indicates that you were perfectly aware that a crowd might assemble there. Answer: Yes, I knew very well that the presence of a larger group of uniformed policemen might draw a crowd. Question: If you knew that surrounding the house where
Assault on the Building at Planty 7

Until about nine A.M., only the local precinct was involved in handling the Błaszczys’ complaint. The voivodeship deputy commander of police, Major Kazimierz Gwiazdowicz, was then informed over the phone about the ongoing investigation and promised to come over shortly. Sometime between nine and nine-thirty, the commander of the Security Service, one Sobczyński, got alerted that a crowd was gathering near the building at Planty 7, and that police were investigating a complaint about a kidnapped Polish child. He sent some officers with a small guard detachment to the building, then called Major Gwiazdowicz from the regular police and told him that this was a provokacja, a false accusation deliberately meant to stir unrest, and a matter for the Security Service; the uniformed police, Sobczyński said, should be pulled out.11

In the meantime, the crowd outside Planty 7 was growing. People were agitated, gawking at the police who were searching the premises for children and for weapons, which Jewish residents were ordered to surrender, while making sure that no Jews escaped from the building. When they established that Planty 7 had no basement, a policeman named Szełag gave young Błaszczyk a dressing-down in front of the building for telling a fib. Those who saw this were outraged: the police were trying to cover up the crime! As Officer Mucha of the Security Service, accompa-

the Jews were living would draw a crowd, why did you send such a large group of uniformed police? Answer: I only knew that the boy had escaped from a basement, I didn’t know that the basement was at the Jews’. Question: So, you only knew that he escaped from a basement, but whose basement it was you didn’t know? Answer: Yes, I didn’t know anything else, only that he escaped from a basement. Question: If a child escaped from a basement at his father’s would you also send twelve people to carry out an investigation? (Stanisław Meducki and Zenon Wrona, eds., Antyżydowskie wydarzenia kieleckie 4 lipca 1946 roku, vol. I, pp. 234–35).

Sędek was lying. Everybody at the precinct “knew” that the boy had escaped “from the Jews.” That was, in a manner of speaking, the whole point. The purpose of such naïve dissembling would be difficult to fathom unless Sędek had something to hide. In a later interrogation on July 31, he revealed, I believe, what he was trying to cover up: “I got no instructions from [the precinct commander] Zagórski about the number of plainclothesmen and policemen to send over. I sent those who volunteered to go” (“Wyślemy rych, którzy zgłosili chcić pościa, tjj. ‘na ochotnika’) (Meducki, Antyżydowskie, vol. I, p. 239). This, most plausibly, is exactly what happened: after Błaszczyk told the story of his son’s disappearance, whoever was in the precinct went after the Jews (and to rescue the children, of course).
nied by a small detachment of uniformed agents, approached Planty 7, he “saw 5 or 6 policemen with shotguns observing the attic, as if someone was about to escape from the building.” Inside, Dr. Kahane was on the phone to Sobczyński asking for help and demanding that the police searchers be withdrawn. Mucha also got on the phone to Sobczyński. He was told that the army and firemen were being called in to disperse the gathering crowd. Two carloads of Security Service personnel pulled in front of the building and about a dozen agents moved to detain some of the policemen present. An altercation resulted, with the crowd rooting for the policemen, three of whom were taken away by Security Service agents.

Now people outside the building began throwing rocks and inching toward the building. Officer Mucha again called Sobczyński demanding urgent intervention. When he could not get through, he left Planty 7 through an adjacent schoolyard to go seek help in person. In the meantime Kahane’s deputy in the Jewish Committee, Chil Alpert, called the Soviet military adviser stationed in town only to be told “that they don’t have units in Polish uniforms and don’t want to send soldiers in Russian uniforms, or the Poles will be saying that Russians were murdering them.”

In the “Chronicle of the Tragedy” prepared by Meducki and Wrona, the timeline entry for “10:00—10:30 A.M.” begins with the following paragraph: “The army made an appearance in front of the Jewish building: forty soldiers from the KBW [the Corps of Internal Security], thirty from the 4th regiment of the 2nd Infantry Division, five officers from the intelligence department, and thirty military policemen and soldiers from the city garrison. The crowd momentarily calmed down when soldiers arrived. Some soldiers and policemen entered the Jewish building. Second Lieutenants Marian Rypyst and Jędrzejczak called on the Jews to surrender their weapons. Six or seven handguns were collected. Not all residents turned in their weapons, saying that they had permits to carry. Depositions concerning the events that followed are contradictory.”

As a matter of fact, the depositions are not contradictory. They differ as to details and emphasis, but one could hardly expect anything else given the chaos and mayhem they describe. They do converge as to substance, however, whether coming from Jewish victims, law enforcement

*Henryk and Walenty Błaszczyk were probably at this point taken into custody by the Security Service as well.
personnel on the scene, or the perpetrators and witnesses interrogated during the trials.

When the army arrived, recalls Chil Alpert, the Jews in the building “sighed with relief, convinced that this was our rescue. And shooting began. But directed at us, not at the assailants.” A Security Service agent present on the scene later surmised that the soldiers “did not have clear orders” when they arrived at Planty 7. In any case, the first wave of deadly violence was unleashed as uniformed representatives of the state—the police and the military—intervened against the Jews, and as their intervention promptly degenerated into a murderous assault.

Witnesses do not agree who fired the first shot—a policeman, a soldier, or, as some suggest, one of the Jewish residents—but, like a starter’s signal, it spurred those present on the scene to deadly violence. “The police and the military,” we read in the July 18 report submitted to the PPR’s Central Committee by a group of Communist Party officials who arrived in Kielce during the pogrom, “were not disciplined. Instead of quelling the disturbance, they mingled with and succumbed to the influence of the crowd. Police, together with the military, were the first to forcibly enter the building. Policemen pulled Jewish victims from the building and handed them over to the crowd outside... An excited crowd was shouting slogans against the Jews, against the PPR, and against the UB. The crowd was on very good terms with the police, and it enthusiastically cheered the military.”

Soldiers entered the building to search for Polish children, and military discipline disintegrated. The military did not have “official” orders to shoot and kill the Jews. In fact, no order authorizing the use of firearms was ever issued on that day, which was part of the reason the massive assaults against the Jews could not be contained. Once it became manifest that the soldiers were acting against the Jews, the pent-up aggression of the crowd overflowed.

*Before breaking ranks, arriving soldiers were taunted by the crowd. An elderly man interviewed by Marcel Lozinski in 1987 wept at the recollection of being slapped on the face and then called “Stalin’s flunky” (“pacholiki Stalina”) when his unit was initially deployed to bar the crowd from approaching the building. But it was not clear at what stage of the pogrom his unit was brought to the scene. Edward Jurkowski, sentenced to death in the first Kielce trial for inciting to violence, shouted at a noncommissioned officer standing right next to him “that if he was a hero, he should go and beat the Jews” (Meducki, Antyjedynkie, vol. 1, pp. 122–23).

A telling instance of how violence by a uniformed individual was applauded by onlookers can be found in the indictment prepared for the November 18, 1946, trial: ‘Piotr Szylng, a warden in the Kielce prison, who came to the site [when his shift at work was over]
“I barricaded the door to the office with an armoire and a table. Suddenly I heard screams as they broke into the building. Because until the arrival of the soldiers the crowd did not come inside. After a few moments, they pounded on the door with rifle butts and ordered me to open it immediately or else they would shoot.” Chil Alpert was then robbed of 3,000 złoty, forced out of the room into the staircase, and pushed down between a double row of soldiers and civilians who were beating the Jews along the way. “I got to the very narrow exit door and in the square I saw a looming, black crowd, and empty space in front of it, surrounded by the military. I saw how those who were standing in front of me were thrown into the crowd by the soldiers, including my brother-in-law, Benjamin Fajtel.” In the recollection of Ryszard Salata, a policeman who remained outside, “Jews were brought from the building into the square, where the population cruelly murdered them, and the armed soldiers did not react, they only covered their ears and fled somewhere, and some went back into the building and kept bringing out other Jews.” Stanisław Rurarz, who hit one of the Jews “three times with a stone on the chest, in the right leg, and also in the head, but with a very small stone” (”malutkim kamieniem”) remembered how four Jews, one after another, were dragged out of the building to be killed in the courtyard. “Two of them were pulling out this Jew, by hands and feet, like a calf.”

Albert Grynbaum, a Security Service agent, was on the second floor of Plasty 7 when the military detachment arrived around ten A.M. “I assembled about 40 Jews in one room and didn’t let the soldiers in. I told them that their task was to restore order in the street, rather than carry out the search... Soldiers went to the second floor [by U.S. usage, the third floor]... and a few minutes later two Jews came to tell me that the military were killing the Jews and plundering their possessions. This was when I heard shots.”

—and saw a Jewish woman trying to run away, caught her and started to beat her and kick her until she fell down. The assembled crowd, witnessing this act, proceeded to throw Szyling in the air, shouting “Niez Żyć” (“Long live”), at which point the woman who had fallen took advantage of the confusion, got up and ran away” (Meducki, Antysewskie, vol. I, p. 252).

“According to the 1997 investigation, civilians were let into the building by the military commander of Kielce, Major Stanisław Markiewicz. He allowed a group to enter the building, he told interrogators, intending to prove that there were no corpses of Polish children inside, and the crowd rushed in (“Raport głównej komisji badania zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu—IPN o wyniku śledztwa w sprawie wydarzeń kieleckich 4.07.1946” [hereafter GKBZpNP-IPN], p. 20).
Baruch Dorfman was in the kibbutz on the third floor of the building, where

some 20 people locked themselves in a small room. But they started shooting at us through the door, and they wounded one person, who later died from the injuries. They broke in. These were soldiers in uniform and a few civilians. I was wounded then. They ordered us to go outside. They formed a double row. In the staircase there were already civilians and also women. Soldiers hit us with rifle butts. Civilians, men and women, also beat us. I was wearing a uniform-like vest, perhaps that’s why they did not hit me then. We came down to the square. Others who were brought out with me were stabbed with bayonets and shot at. We were pelted with stones. Even then nothing happened to me. I moved across the square to an exit, but I must have had such a facial expression that they recognized that I was a Jew who’d been taken out of the building, because one civilian screamed, "A Jew!" And only then did they attack me. Stones flew at me. I was hit with rifle butts. I fell and lost consciousness. Periodically I regained consciousness; then they hit me again with stones and rifle butts. One wanted to shoot me when I was lying on the ground but I heard somebody else say, "Don’t shoot, he’ll croak anyway." I fainted again. When I came to, somebody was pulling me by the legs and threw me onto a truck. This was some other military, because I woke up in a hospital in Kielce.²⁴

Several Jewish survivors left similar testimony about being delivered into the hands of the crowd by soldiers and then beaten unconscious and robbed in the courtyard by a mixed crowd of men and women. After being struck down by the initial blows, many pretended to be dead, and a few survived as a result.²⁵ Natan Lapter, after feigning death, was shot in the leg and searched, and his money was stolen by two soldiers. A man named Ferkeltaub had his boots pulled off by soldiers after he had been put on the truck that took him to the hospital. He was also feigning death and “didn’t resist since [he] was afraid that they would finish [him] off.”²⁶

Witnesses remember Jews being flung out of the building directly into the street below. “I saw how policemen threw two Jewish girls off the second-floor [third-floor] balcony and the crowd in the courtyard finished them off,” recalled the seamstress Ewa Szuchman, who miraculously escaped injury and was deposed on July 6, two days after the
pogrom.27 Zenon Kukliński, arrested in a bloodstained vest (and later sentenced to death in the first Kielce trial), described how a bleeding Jew, “thrown down from a floor above, ... brushed against [his] jacket” and how he “pushed the Jew away.” Under cross-examination it turned out that two Jews were assaulted in this episode, and that Kukliński stoned and robbed at least one of them: “The Jew was unconscious when he fell on my chest. He was all covered with blood. People took him and threw him away. I didn’t hit the Jew with a stone. There were two Jews over there. The second one, I didn’t touch at all. I don’t know where the coat came from. My wife screamed at me when I was beating the Jew to quit it and to go.”28

Around eleven o’clock Dr. Kahane was killed by a shot in the back while he was once again phoning for help. The Security Service officer Kwaśniewski was on the other end of the line: “I then heard a loud shot and silence in the receiver.”29

Several high-ranking officers were milling around in the vicinity of the building—Sobczynski; Gwiazdowicz; the town’s military commander, Markiewicz; a Colonel Kupsza, the commanding officer of the 2nd Infantry Division; and a Soviet adviser, Colonel Szpilewoj. None of them took decisive action to suppress the crowd. There was no overall coordination or command over the police, military, and security forces. This was a spectacle of total confusion, with an idle fire truck sitting somewhere in the middle of the square, its hoses cut by the mob.

Sometime between ten-thirty and eleven, Colonel Kuźnicki, the police commander for the Kielce voivodeship, called his superior in Warsaw, General Franciszek Jóźwik, and asked to be given overall command of the action. Since the Security Service and the military “together with the public” were beating the Jews, argued Kuźnicki, they ought to be withdrawn and the police should be given authority to disperse the crowd. Kuźnicki was rebuffed and told to coordinate his actions with the UB.30

Around noon there was a momentary lull in the pogrom, as another detachment of the infantry under Major Konieczny and Captain Bednarz moved in, fired a salvo in the air, pushed the crowd away from the courtyard, and brought trucks to evacuate killed and wounded Jews to a nearby hospital. At this point, prosecutor Jan Wrzeszcz appeared on the scene, intending to start an investigation. “When I asked who was in overall command of the action, I was told that there were several units on the scene and each acted on its own... I turned to officers standing nearby and told them that the crowd had to be dispersed, and the use of
firearms had to be considered. I was told in no uncertain terms ["w formie ostrej"] that nobody would issue such an order and that the soldiers would not carry it out. . . . I understood that one should not count on energetic action by the military and I said that all the surrounded Jews had to be evacuated on trucks. . . . They didn’t agree to this, either. 31

In frantic telephone calls, meetings, and conversations conducted during the early part of the day by various military, police, and administrative officials, there is constant talk of help being on its way. In the meantime there was nobody to issue orders, take decisive action, or even remove the imperiled Jews from Planty 7. Instead, the building was cordoned off by the soldiers and policemen on the scene, but they proved to be no obstacle to the second wave of attackers already on their way. Within an hour, the Jews who remained inside were assaulted again and scores were killed in the second surge of the pogrom by workers from the Ludwików Foundry who arrived en masse after midday. They came running, wielding tools, iron bars, and other improvised weapons. Some fifteen to twenty Jews were murdered in the ensuing hour and a half.

The whole area turned into a vast killing field and it was littered with bloody mementos long after the events of the day. Saul Shneiderman arrived in Kielce with a group of foreign journalists on the following day. He went to the main site of the pogrom, the building at Planty 7. "The immense courtyard was still littered with blood-stained iron pipes, stones and clubs, which had been used to crush the skulls of Jewish men and women. Blackening puddles of blood still remained. . . . Blood-drenched papers were scattered on the ground. . . . I picked up some. . . . These were letters addressed to the victims by their relatives in Palestine, and Canada, and the United States." 32 Three days later Helena Majtliis drove across town in a military jeep to the hospital where she would be enconced for several days nursing the wounded. The city streets, she remembered with horror, were still covered with blood. 33

To sum up the events, then: after the regular police launched their investigation of a child-kidnapping complaint and a restless crowd of onlookers began to assemble to watch the proceedings, the military detach-

"In the official log of the industrial guard detachment from the Ludwików Foundry the following entry was recorded at twelve-thirty on July 4: "’During the lunch break, about 600 workers forced the gate and went in the direction of town, to Planty Street. . . . According to depositions left by policemen who were present in the square at the time, when the workers arrived nothing could be done any more for the remaining Jews’ (Bożena Szaynok, Pogrom Żydów w Kielcach 4 lipca, 1946, p. 51)."
ment that arrived at Plany 7 around ten o’clock in the morning joined in the ongoing action of the police directed _against the Jews_. When the soldiers arrived, the killing started in earnest, and the mob outside was promptly drawn into the fray. Uniformed representatives of the state and its law enforcement agencies pointed their weapons at the building and used their firearms exclusively against the Jews.

According to autopsy reports from Kielce’s hospital describing the condition of eleven of the women and twenty-six of the men killed during the pogrom, five of the men died from gunshot wounds, while the rest of the victims had their skulls crushed by multiple blows. Later it was established that the official autopsy reports for the first Kielce trial were falsified, and in reality more victims died of gunshot wounds. Bodies were brought to the hospital morgue almost naked, robbed of possessions and clothing. Fifteen remained unidentified.

Medical reports indicate two Poles among the dead. We don’t know whether the two Poles were killed “by mistake,” or while trying to stop an attack against some Jews. In the sentencing issued on July 11, 1946, during the first trial of Kielce pogrom perpetrators, we read that the two Poles were murdered “while defending the dignity of a Pole’s good name” ("w obronie godności dobrego imienia Polaka"), but the circumstances of their deaths are not described in the proceedings. The sentencing also specifies that among the dead “there were three Polish soldiers bearing the highest combat decorations.” The reference here is, undoubtedly, to Jews who served in the Polish army, as crowds also challenged Jewish-looking soldiers in the streets of Kielce.

Szarnyk gives a total of seventeen victims who died from gunshot wounds (Pogrom, p. 60), while the autopsy report of July 5–6, 1946, quoted in GKBZpNP-IPN (pp. 31, 32), lists eleven victims who died by gunfire. Among thirty-five wounded Jews whose medical examination results were filed at that time, five males had gunshot wounds.

One Julian Chorzązak, in response to a prosecutor’s question, explained during his trial: “I was slowly walking over water and stones [a shallow creek, the Silnica, flows near the building at Plany 7]. A man was passing by, and they said he was a Jew, so I hit him. But an officer said that he shouldn’t be beaten, that he is not a Jew. If I’d known, I wouldn’t have slapped him” ("Zebrzm wiodział, to bym nie wlepił") (Meducki, Antrzywodskie, vol. I, p. 163). Antoni Safaj, deposed as a witness, gave a more extensive account of a similar episode that took place in the street under his windows. “I saw a group of about 20 people who were beating a Pole with stones and clubs, telling him that he was a Jew. But one person recognized him as a Pole and they stopped beating him. It turned out that this was Citizen Pardola from Radomsko Street. When Citizen Pardola was released they all went toward Plany Street” (Meducki, Antrzywodskie, vol. I, p. 117). Safaj went along. He later recounts an episode in which a Jew was stoned to death.

One such episode, involving Corporal Maks Erlbaum, is particularly well documented and was brought out during the November 18, 1946, trial of fifteen pogrom participants. Erlbaum, who survived the assault, testified during the trial. Another episode of assault against
The shooting death of Regina Fisz and her newborn baby prominently figured in the first trial of the perpetrators, held July 9–11. A Dr. Ocepa, testifying as a medical expert, identified a woman six months pregnant among the dead as well. A Dr. Majewski spoke of a pregnant assault victim who survived, but whose belly and uterus had been pierced, causing her to lose her child. Forty-two corpses were buried in Kielce’s Jewish cemetery on July 8. By witnesses’ count, as many as eighty others had been wounded during the pogrom, with scores being injured by bullets.36

A public appeal for calm, carefully crafted later during the day on July 4 by the Kielce voivode and representatives of the clergy, made a point of the commendable restraint of the police and military personnel: “During the events the authorities maintained complete calm, preventing greater bloodshed,” reads the document. “In a sign of the far-reaching goodwill of the authorities, not a single shot was fired against the people” (“Do ludzi nie oddano ani jednego strzalu”).37 Evidently, the two dozen Jews killed and wounded by gunshots did not make the cut as the people.” The communiqué does not mention at all that Jews had been killed during the day’s violence. Indeed, as we shall see later, in a number of statements issued immediately following the pogrom the word “Jew” hardly appears.

In light of what we know about the events, the self-restraint and “goodwill” of the authorities were by virtue of necessity. The officers in the military would not have issued orders to shoot at the crowd, and if they had, the soldiers would not have obeyed them. But the language of the official communiqué inadvertently reveals the state of mind and real concerns of the authorities. The bloody confrontation that took place on July 4 in Kielce had two antagonists. One would be wrong, however, to identify them as pogrom perpetrators and their Jewish victims. Rather,

a soldier in uniform was witnessed by Antonina Biskupska, the only woman among the accused in the first Kielce trial, who saw “how the crowd pulled at one soldier’s uniform, threw his cap off, and was beating him. People were saying that he was a Jew. I saw that his face was bleeding and I heard how he was screaming. ‘I was with the partisans, leave me in peace.’ And the crowd screamed ‘Give us a stick, hit him hard. Who cares who he was with?’” (“Niezbyt być skąd chce”) (Meducki, Antyrzędowiskie, vol. 1, p. 130).

The communiqué was not issued in the end, due to the objections of a visiting PPR Politburo member, Zenon Kliszko. Forty years later, in his memoirs, Voivode Wislicz still held a grudge over Kliszko’s dismissal of his successful efforts to draft a joint document on this issue with church representatives in Kielce.

Or, in a literal translation of the word ludzi—“human beings”—“not a single shot was fired against human beings.” Jerzy Danielez notes this linguistic peculiarity of the text in his 1996 study. “Apparently,” in the minds of the appeal’s authors, he writes, two categories needed to be distinguished, as “there were Jews and there were people (human beings)” (Jerzy Daniel, Żyd w zielonym kapeluszu, p. 78).
the two sides in the bloody encounter were the people of Kielce and some unspecified objects (as “Jews” were not mentioned in official statements) of their antipathy. And the authorities, understandably, were anxious to project an image of themselves as siding with the people in this gruesome affair.

The Breakdown of Law Enforcement

For the better part of the day, no one was in charge of the effort, such as it was, to restore order and end the pogrom. To begin with, an anti-Jewish riot quickly snowballed into an episode of mass violence unprecedented in postwar Poland as to the numbers of participants and victims. According to a rough estimate by Witold Kula, soon to become a world-famous economic historian, as much as a quarter of the adult population of Kielce was actively involved.\(^8\) Once the moment to nip the riot in the bud was gone, a well-coordinated, disciplined, and ably executed effort by all the law enforcement personnel on the scene would have been necessary to stop the violence. But the two organizations responsible for law and order in the city—the Security Service (UB) and the regular police, the Citizens’ Militia (MO)—were barely cooperating even prior to the July 4 debacle. As interrogations of the police commander and of his counterpart from the Kielce Security Service revealed—both men were arrested soon after the pogrom and put on trial jointly in December 1946—the two profoundly disliked each other.

The voivodeship police commander, Colonel Kuźnicki, was stung by the UB’s patronizing attitude toward the MO. Even before the altercation in front of Planty 7, policemen had been arrested by the Security Service for various infractions. Kuźnicki did not appreciate that his subordinates were sometimes detained by the UB without a courtesy call informing him beforehand. Major Sobczyński, who headed the local office of the Security Service, complained on the other hand that the militia commander had little sympathy for the current regime and had appointed several former Home Army officers to positions of responsibility in the police.\(^9\) Sobczyński and Kuźnicki fought a continuous turf war. As a general rule all breaches of security with political implications were supposed to be handled by the Security Service. But the division of labor was not sharp in the Kielce voivodeship.*

* A particularly vexing episode took place in December 1945, when the police detained an antiregime nationalist underground group, NSZ, and conducted an investigation of the group and its activities. After his arrest following the Kielce pogrom, Colonel Kuźnicki
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This was not at all unusual for the period: the undefined, fluid character of armed groups which engaged in plunder behind a political façade; security police interchangeably using the terms “bandits,” “nationalists,” and “reactionaries”; local people and local police tangled up in a network of personal and organizational ties dating back to the underground struggle against the Germans; young people in general confused and unsure of their loyalties. But for all its unoriginality, tension between the local police and the Security Service in Kielce contributed mightily to the rapid escalation of anti-Jewish violence on July 4.

On that day, the mob assembled very quickly. Every minute that went by without decisive intervention by law enforcement made the situation less manageable. As early as nine-thirty in the morning, Sobczynski had called Kuznicki’s deputy, Major Gwiazdowicz, who was in charge of the city police. Why was a search of the Jewish Committee building being carried out by a detachment of uniformed police, asked Sobczynski, and did Gwiazdowicz know what was going on? The latter replied that he had been fully apprised of the matter. The police were following up on a complaint that Jews had detained one Polish child in the building and murdered another.

Sobczynski had already been informed by his agent on the scene of the mounting tension and violence, and he rebuked Gwiazdowicz: the complaint was a “political provocation” (ergo, at a minimum, a matter for the Security Service to handle), and he should order the police out of the building. “We will see later whether it is a provocation,” Gwiazdowicz retorted. To Sobczynski’s urgings that as a political matter this should be handled by the UB, “Gwiazdowicz replied that he knew himself what he had to do, and he didn’t need to hear any comments.”40

Sobczynski and Gwiazdowicz gave diverging accounts of their con-

explained that the police proceeded with the investigation because the Security Service refused to take custody of the prisoners when they were turned over without the weapons confiscated at the time of their arrest. Were not the weapons “material proof of the crime which should have been turned over to the Security Service together with the detained?” asked Kuznicki’s interrogator. “I kept the weapons,” answered the police colonel, “because my people did not have enough” (Meducki, Antyżydowski, vol. 1, p. 326).

This was a time of shortages, and Kuznicki’s explanation sounds plausible. The police may well have been short of weapons. Mutual trust did not build between the two local law enforcement agencies, however, when soon after their arrest eighteen of the detainees escaped from police custody, while their files and various personal belongings held in deposit were simultaneously lost. Kuznicki ordered an investigation of the disappearance, he said, “but what happened exactly” he did not remember. “In any case,” he explained, “there were not National Armed Forces (NSZ) members, but bandits; seventeen-year-old children. Oh, well,” he added, “there were four former Home Army members among them” (ibid., p. 327).
versation on that day (Gwiazdowicz, for instance, insisted that he actually obeyed Sobczyński’s orders), but they jointly testified to their mutual dislike. Their telephone conversation on the morning of July 4, as the pogrom unfolded, ended up, Gwiazdowicz complained, with Sobczyński slamming down the receiver.  

The disorganization was compounded by Colonel Kuźnicki’s firm belief that he “could not come to an agreement with Sobczyński.” For this reason, he explained, he disobeyed a direct order from the commanding general of the Citizens’ Militia, General Franciszek Jóźwiak, whom he phoned in Warsaw on the morning of July 4. Jóźwiak ordered Kuźnicki to coordinate with the Security Service to quell the developing pogrom, but “I did not carry out the order,” Kuźnicki stated under interrogation. For that—i.e., for his profound dislike of Sobczyński—he was later sentenced to one year in prison. In the trial held on December 13, 1946, where the three leading police and security officials on the scene, Kuźnicki, Gwiazdowicz, and Sobczyński, were together accused of incompetence in dealing with the mass disturbances on July 4, he was the only one found guilty.

In addition to the lack of coordination, one may also consider as a factor bearing on the indecisiveness with which they proceeded to restore order that none of the people on the scene with institutional authority were particularly fond of Jews. Sobczyński was known for entertaining anti-Semitic views.* Sobczyński, in turn, denounced Kuźnicki as an anti-Semite. During an afternoon emergency meeting on July 4, the police colonel, according to Sobczyński’s testimony, allowed that the Jews might have killed a Polish child, and he had spoken derisively about Jews on earlier occasions. Confronted with this deposition, Kuźnicki explained during interrogation on October 18, 1946, that he had merely advanced a hypothesis “that the events . . . were a provocation which perhaps the Jews themselves had organized.” His deputy, Major Gwiazdowicz, when deposed on August 6 (and trying to save his own skin), delivered the goods against Kuźnicki without hesitation: “In his office, in the presence of several people whose names I don’t recall now,

“One of his officers, Lieutenant Kwasek, confirmed this in a deposition on August 1, 1946. In asking himself why Sobczyński, who was usually very energetic, “was very calm on this day [of the pogrom], as if he didn’t care . . . ,” Kwasek noted that “During my work I somehow felt that Major Sobczyński was prejudiced against people of Jewish nationality, and I was told about this by a colleague, Captain Kwasniewski” (Meducki, Antysemityzm, vol. 1, pp. 344–345).
he said that in the Security Service there were only Jews and that Szpilewoj [the Soviet adviser in Kielce] is also Jewish.”

In the meantime, Gwiazdowicz himself had to explain how he felt about the Jews. Sobczyński testified that he saw him in the crowd on July 4 (and other security officers on the scene confirmed this testimony) listening to and applauding antiregime and anti-Semitic speech making. Why did you clap? Gwiazdowicz was asked by his interrogator. In reply, he spun a convoluted story, which concluded with “someone screaming ‘Long live the Polish army,’ [while] the crowd took up this slogan, screaming ‘Long live.’ And then I said ‘Bravo, bravó, long live’ and I made a clap” (“powiedziałem bravó, bravó, niech żyje i zrobilem kłaśnięcie”) — an expression just as awkward in Polish as it is in English.45 That singular “clap” was meant, of course, to play down what he had done: he clapped only once. And when asked why, as some witnesses reported, he shook the hand of the speaker, Gwiazdowicz replied that he actually took this man by the hand in order to lead him into Planty 7 to show him that there were no captive Polish children inside.

Forty years after the events, the then voivode of Kielce, Eugeniusz Wislicz-Iwańczyk (who at the time was bedridden after a motorcycle accident, but nevertheless took part in some deliberations during the day of the pogrom), set forth in his memoirs a host of anti-Semitic stereotypes. The beginning of his memoirs is at once quite telling, with a cari-

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*Meducki, Anryżyłowski, vol. I, p. 336. In broad outline, these stories about Colonel Kuznicki were confirmed by the militia’s Police Captain Roman Olszański-Przybylowski, who was later appointed Kuznicki’s successor (ibid., pp. 346–48). He also added that the second-ranking police officer on the scene, the said Major Gwiazdowicz, was Kuznicki’s flunky, and at the same time a drunkard (ibid., p. 349).

Truly bizarre, also, are his recollections concerning the statements of two soldiers involved in the execution of the perpetrators sentenced to death in the first Kielce murder trial: “I will never forget a most interesting visit in my apartment from the commander of the [execution] platoon, a very young and extremely nice lieutenant,” writes Wislicz. After some small talk, the voivode, “interested in the psychology of this young man,” who kept smiling throughout, asked him: “Why are you so cheerful, Lieutenant…? Should not someone in your situation experience some sort of pangs of conscience? Judges and prosecutors should feel pangs of conscience, I am merely carrying out their will by obeying orders…” (Meducki, Anryżyłowski, vol. II, p. 92). Later Wislicz talked to a member of his personal security detail who had witnessed the execution. When the condemned men were brought to the execution site, over a ditch dug out in a forest clearing, one of them, the policeman Mazur—the one who killed Mrs. Fisz and her newborn child—managed to free himself of the manacles and started to run toward the cover of the trees. The platoon commander ordered all of the condemned men to lie down, and soldiers shot the fleeing Mazur in the back in an eerie replay of the manner in which he himself had killed Regina Fisz. “I wished him luck in my heart,” said the security policeman to the Kielce voivode, who then described his interlocutor approvingly as a young man whose parents had been killed by the
catured portrayal of the Jewish inhabitants of the building at Platy 7 as the idle rich, unwilling to go to work, ostentatiously wearing “expensive suits and golden rings” (which naturally irritated the impoverished Polish population of the city), while the first head of the Security Service in Kielce, a Jew, Major Kornecki, was “provocatively breaking the law.”

But the heart of the matter is that such opinions were those generally prevailing at the time, and that authorities at both local and national levels (an occasional denunciation of anti-Semitism in official propaganda notwithstanding) were unwilling to confront the population on this issue. As the pogrom was unfolding and the workers of the Ludwików Foundry had just broken out en masse to join in, the first secretary of the Polish Workers’ Party (that is, the Communist Party) in Kielce, one Kalinowski, refused to address the crowd in order to quell their aggression because, he said during an emergency meeting at midday with several officials in his office, “he didn’t want people to be saying that the PPR is a defender of the Jews.”

The breakdown of law enforcement in Kielce on July 4 had thus an underlying institutional cause. Several people at the summit of political power knew of the pogrom as it was unfolding. The Politburo member responsible for security, Jakub Berman, and the minister of public security, Radkiewicz, were in touch with Major Sobczyński. The overall commander of the militia, General Franciszek Józwiak, was contacted by Colonel Kuźnicki. The vice minister of national defense, General Marian Spychalski, was called by the chief of staff of the 2nd Infantry Division, Major Konieczny. The national secretary of the Polish Socialist Party, Józef Cyrankiewicz, phoned the local secretary of the PPS. And the response of these various leading figures, as far as we can tell, was uniform—not because they were in cahoots, but because politically it was obvious to each of them what had to be done; or rather, it was obvious to each of them what they had to make sure did not happen.

Józwiak did not give any directions to Kuźnicki; he merely ordered Kuźnicki to coordinate the militia’s intervention with the Security Service. Berman and Radkiewicz told Sobczyński “all kinds of nonsense,” re-

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Germans and who from the tender age of fourteen had fought in the anti-Nazi guerrillas (ibid., pp. 92–93).

“A representative of the Polish Socialist Party reinforced the message during a post-Kielce pogrom mass meeting in Lublin on July 17: “We don’t feel sympathy toward the Jewish nation, and neither does any other nation. We would like to see them [move] somewhere else” (Szaynok, Pogrom, p. 65).
jecting his suggestions to take radical measures against the crowd. Spychalski told Konieczny “not to shoot at the crowd under any circumstances,” a position repeated by military officers on the scene to the prosecutor Jan Wrzeszcz. And the Communist Party secretary in Kielce refused to address the second wave of pogromists on the way to the murder scene, so as not to give the impression “that the PPR was a defender of the Jews.” A resolution drafted the next day by the bedridden Kielce voivode together with local church representatives stated explicitly—and touting this as a demonstration of responsible statecraft—that “not a single shot was fired at the people” during the events: this, to repeat, after soldiers and the police on the scene killed and wounded by gunshots two dozen Jews.

These discrete episodes and statements add up to a coherent story. Evidently, the political leadership of the regime, as well as its representatives in the city, responded to the news from Kielce by avoiding any action which might indicate that authorities were siding with the Jews against “the people.” It was entirely clear to the leading figures of the regime—whether in the Party, in the police, in the Security Service, or in the military—that political expediency allowed no course of action that the general public might construe as benefiting the Jews. In lieu of rushing to the defense of imperiled citizens—the Jews of Kielce who were being murdered—the guiding concern of the authorities was to persuade the public that they were not unduly preoccupied with safeguarding the Jews.

A Change of Venue

In the early afternoon, as the energy of the assault on Plasty 7 spent itself, pogrom activities mutated and spread around the city. “Groups of civilians walked around town searching for Jews and checking people’s documents.” A saleswoman on the way home for lunch during midday break was stopped by a “man in a uniform, with a shotgun, I don’t know whether he was a soldier or a policeman, because when in fear one does not know, and he took me for a Jewess. . . . I was frightened, I couldn’t defend myself, I already thought that they would kill me, that I would not live, but he finally let me go.” The more conscientious vigilantes might

*Not ever, but especially not in the immediate aftermath of the “Three times yes” referendum, which the authorities were publicly claiming to have won.
pull down men's trousers to check whether they were circumcised, which perhaps saved some people from "undeserved" beating or death."

For once the UB commander, Sobczyński, took preventive measures. In response to rumors that Jewish residents would be assaulted during the night he ordered that "Jews be brought from their private apartments over to the Security Service headquarters. By the evening some fifty people were assembled," he estimated. On the following day, Saul Shnei
derman and a group of foreign journalists met a small crowd of Jewish survivors at the headquarters.

These Jews were sheltered effectively from surrounding violence, but Jews being transported from the pogrom scene to a hospital, or taken into custody by the military, were not necessarily out of harm's way. Sobczyński foresaw that when the wounded were brought to a medical facility the crowd would follow, and he dispatched what turned out to be sufficient manpower to guard against the attempted break-in. But the Jews could not be protected against other patients or medical personnel. Similarly, those who were taken out in trucks by the military and brought to the army barracks were not out of danger. A certain Ferkeltaub, we remember, was robbed of his boots by escorting soldiers while already on the truck, and thought it prudent to pretend he was dead while being transported.

The evidence concerning this aspect of the pogrom is scant; probably no Jews were killed in the custody of the military or in the hospital, but what can be gleaned of their circumstances is not reassuring. During the first Kielce trial, on July 10, Ewa Szuchman was deposed as a witness. She spent the entire day of the pogrom at Plany 7 and, as we already know, escaped unharmed. In reply to an innocuous question by the defense attorney, Chmielewski, about how the violence subsided and in what way the army took control of the situation, she answered that the military evacuated her and the remaining Jews from the building around six P.M., brought them to the barracks in the Stadion section of Kielce.

"Corporal Maks Erlbaum, in army uniform bearing a sidearm, was challenged to prove that he was not a Jew. A woman, Jadwiga Manecka, grabbed him by the hand and got him surrounded by the crowd. Erlbaum reached for his documents and then saw a passing lieutenant, to whom he showed his military identification, begging to be saved. Lieutenant Marczuk (he was later put on trial together with Manecka for his behavior) looked at the documents, said that Erlbaum was a Pole, and continued on his way even though Erlbaum was trying to hold on to his belt and asked to be escorted out of danger. There was no rubric stating denomination in the booklet, but a helpful schoolboy looking over the lieutenant's shoulder shouted that Erlbaum had a Jewish name. Manecka then suggested that they pull down his pants. The crowd started to beat him, and he was saved by a Security Service agent who led him to safety (Meducki, Antyjedynki, vol. I, pp. 253, 273, 274, 304)."
and then, she continued: “I heard how one military man said while pointing at us: ‘Why did you bring them, you should have killed them.’ To a soldier’s remark that there were children among us, he replied ‘You don’t know what to do with children, grab by the legs and pull apart in opposite directions.’” At this point the prosecutor interrupted her testimony and admonished defense attorneys not to bring up issues related to the military, because investigation of this matter was still in progress.

Indeed, the role soldiers played during the pogrom was not addressed at any stage of the trial, even though—actually, perhaps precisely for this reason—among the more than one hundred people arrested on that day were thirty-four soldiers and officers from regular army units and six soldiers and officers from the Internal Security Corps (Korpus Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego, KBW), a uniformed branch of the Security Service. It was in the KBW barracks that Ewa Szuchman heard the words she repeated during the trial, and when she inadvertently opened the subject she was immediately cut off. Similarly, one of the attorneys who asked whether soldiers fired shots in the direction of the building on Planty was compelled by the court to withdraw the question.

As to the city hospital in Kielce, we know that nurses initially mistreated wounded Jews there. “Patients were afraid to eat in the hospital . . . , they feared that the staff might poison them,” recalled Chil Alpert, who after the death of Dr. Kahane remained in charge of what was left of the Kielce Jewish community. Alpert went to Częstochowa to bring Jewish medical personnel to care for the wounded, but he persuaded only one nurse, Helena Majtliš, to come along. Majtliš spent over two weeks in Kielce, from July 8 through July 23, barely sleeping because she was the only nurse assisting a single Jewish doctor in caring for the wounded.

“Attorney Chmielewski explained that he only wanted to clarify circumstances which were brought up in the indictment. Attorney Oknińczyk explained that while the defense did not intend to raise controversies during the trial [nie ma zamieru rozdrabniania procesu], the proceedings should elucidate the background against which these events took place. Otherwise the defense could not responsibly fulfill its weighty duties” (Meducki, Antyżydowskie, vol. 1, p. 183).

One elderly Pole interviewed by Łoziński in 1987 reported being told that when patients in the hospital where he was brought from the hospital, “a lot of the less sick ones got up to murder them” (“to się dużo tych lepszych chorych zwało żeby ich wymordować”), but he didn’t know what actually happened (Łoziński interview).

In 1987, when Marcel Łoziński interviewed her for Witnesses, she still had a certificate of recognition for her services signed by Alpert. Majtliš spoke very highly of various Polish
Before Helena Majtlis reached town, Yitzhak Zuckerman (better
known by his nom de guerre, Antek) arrived in Kielce from Warsaw on
July 5. Zuckerman was the last commander of the wartime Jewish Fight-
ing Organization (Zydowska Organizacja Bojowa, ZOB). When the
news of the pogrom reached the Central Committee of Polish Jews in
Warsaw, he immediately set out for Kielce with a carload of medical sup-
plies. Despite the heavy military presence in town, Zuckerman con-
cluded that for their own safety Jews should be taken out of the city as
soon as possible. The authorities gave him all the assistance he needed to
organize the evacuation, as well as a military escort. A special medical
train under Zuckerman’s command took the bulk of the wounded, as well
as any other Jews ready to leave on July 6, to Łódź.

In his long memoirs, Zuckerman rarely loses his composure. But
the sight of so many Jews massacred after the war affected him deeply:

I wanted to remove all the wounded Jews immediately, and this
is where things got screwed up: one of the wounded Jews knew
me, called me Antek, and started speaking Yiddish to me. I im-
mediately sensed an attitude of sabotage on the part of the doc-
tors, the medics, and the nurses. . . . There was a moment when
my nerves gave out and I couldn’t maintain my poise. I pulled
out a gun and ordered all the patients removed in fifteen min-
utes. The whole time the ambulances waited outside and the be-
havior of the staff seemed organized. Now they began running
and carrying out orders. The army obeyed my orders, and the
patients were quickly loaded onto the ambulances. As the army
escorted them from the hospital to the railroad station, I orga-
nized the departure of the Jews from the courtyard of the UB
and, naturally, I couldn’t persuade all the Jews to leave.57

The wounded who remained in Kielce must have been too sick to
travel. Many of them, suffering from savage blows to the head, were still
unconscious when Helena Majtlis arrived. Her first task was to transport
the wounded from the city hospital to the military hospital in Kielce,
“because of fears that the city hospital might be attacked, and because
the staff over there mistreated the patients.” As Majtlis did not speak
Yiddish, the wounded Jews initially shunned her: “at first, when I ap-

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specialists—a surgeon and a neurologist—who were called for consultation as needed, and
were always available and helpful.
proached them, some tried to hide under the bed." She soon gained their trust, as an old man with a cut to the bone across the right side of his skull and face cried in gratitude for the way she carefully dressed his wound. "Now I understand that you are Jewish," he told her. At the city hospital, a nurse had sharply pulled off his dressing and, when he screamed with pain, had slapped him in the face.58

**Passionless Killings**

Mr. Suszko was a student in Kraków in 1946. Back home in Kielce, he was on the way to the station in the early afternoon of July 4 to catch a train that would take him to the seashore for summer vacation. Suszko had recently spent two weeks in jail following student demonstrations in Kraków on May 3, a prewar national holiday. He prudently tried to stay out of trouble now, taking a circuitous route so as to avoid "excesses" in the city center. But as luck would have it he came upon a crowd in an open meadowlike space by the Siłnica creek.

People were already tired. "After several hours of excesses a thin crowd surrounded a Jew, a twenty-some-year-old man, who was bleeding profusely. I remember that he had a vest and a white shirt, and he wasn't screaming or moving anymore. With head hanging low he was just standing in the middle of that creek, in the water, surrounded by a crowd that was stoning him. They were throwing stones in a somehow detached, leisurely manner—a stone would fly, people saw whether the man fell, then somebody else would throw a stone," and in the meantime they were busily carrying on conversations ("tam był taki napad, rozgadańia"). "They shared their impressions, observations, how this one caught a Jew here, and that one somewhere else. A young craftsman (butcher?), some thirty years old, wearing a leather apron, was a star of the show," talking animatedly and gesticulating.

It struck Suszko as "most tragic" in the whole scene "that the crowd was already passionless. . . . After several hours of these events, people were tired but in spite of everything they were lifting stones and throwing them calmly, as if the death of a human being, killing of a person, were not at stake here. This was the most incredible sight. Simultaneously, the

"Rzemieślnik," "craftsman," and "rzeźnik," "butcher," sound somewhat similar; Suszko uses *rzeźnik* first, but later, in an exchange with the interviewer, uses *rzeźnik*—a Freudian slip. I suppose, given the scene that he was describing.
simple everyday quality of these conversations in contrast to this man who was probably killed, ... it was shocking.”

Evoking the picniclike atmosphere of the occasion, and the conversations in which people tried to impress one another by saying that “they saw more than the other person” (“this was very embarrassing ... as if the events that were discussed did not involve the killing of several people”), Suszko becomes conscious in front of the camera of his own indifference, reproaching himself for saying nothing to anybody at the time and instead going on vacation where he didn’t give the matter another thought. Belatedly, he portrays himself as a member of the crowd rather than a mere observer, and instead of “I saw this,” the episode now becomes for him, “I was there.” Suszko is visibly disturbed and saddened by the realization that he contributed a nonresponse to the day’s events, and together with everybody else thus imparted to the killing of Kielce Jews—this radical transgression of norms of coexistence—a kind of normalcy.

Conversations Between Strangers

Regina Fisz and her newborn son were also murdered in an episode of passionless killing. The story is well known because Abram Moszkowicz, taken out together with her to be killed, managed to escape. He then found Regina Fisz’s husband and together they went to the police and identified the killers, who were put on trial with the first dozen of the Kielce pogrom perpetrators. From their depositions and Moszkowicz’s testimony, we can reconstruct what happened.

Moszkowicz was in Regina Fisz’s apartment at number 15 Leonarda Street in the early afternoon on July 4 when three policemen came to search for weapons. They behaved properly, took a drink of water, advised Mrs. Fisz to keep her doors locked, and left. Soon thereafter a Polish cleaning woman rushed in to tell Mrs. Fisz that she overheard some drunkards in a nearby restaurant saying that something untoward might happen to her and that she should leave. But Mrs. Fisz declined. The city streets were dangerous anyway, and she felt safest at home. Some fifteen minutes later a man banged on the door asking to see Mrs. Fisz’s husband, but she answered that he was away. Then a group of four men—three civilians accompanied by a policeman—showed up, identifying themselves as police, and she let them inside.

The four men were strangers to one another, though Police Corpo-
ral Mazur of the militia and a baker, Kazimierz Nowakowski, whose shop was right across from police headquarters, knew each other by sight. On July 4, Mazur was in charge of the guard detachment at the headquarters. Several of his subordinates, unauthorized, went into town. At some point he set out to find them and, undoubtedly, also to personally find out about the goings-on in the city. While walking through Partyzantów Square, Mazur met Nowakowski, who approached him with a proposition: “I have a little job ["mam robotę"]: Jews are living on Leonarda Street. One needs to close the apartment, take them out, and ‘do it.’”

Mazur did not need much persuading. Joined on the way by a “shoemaker [Józef Śliwa] and one more elderly civilian [Antoni Pruszkowski],” they went to the apartment of Regina Fisz where they ordered the Jews to come along.* In the meantime a crowd gathered in the street as the group came down. The abductors, noted Moszkowicz, “didn’t know where to go and told us to walk straight along Leonarda Street,” while the crowd followed behind.62

Moszkowicz read the situation correctly. As they marched their prey along, the four men were trying to figure out how to accomplish what they set out to do. “When we reached Leonarda Square,” Mazur continued in his deposition, “Nowakowski said that I should kill the Jews in the park near police headquarters. But I didn’t want to, since shots would be heard and everything would come out. So he said we should kill them in the street, but I didn’t agree. And while figuring out what to do I saw a truck. So I stopped it. I approached the driver and told him that we had Jews whom we wanted to take out to kill. The driver agreed, he only asked for a thousand złoty, and I said, ‘It’s a deal.’ When we were approaching Leonarda Square the crowd wanted to beat the Jews but the shoemaker and the elderly civilian calmed the crowd down by saying that the Jews would be killed, that ‘We ourselves will do them.’” 63 Mazur climbed next to the driver and everybody else got on the truck. They drove to a place in a forest eight kilometers away, near a village called Cedzyna.

During this brief ride, Regina Fisz and Abram Moszkowicz kept

*Sliwa, the shoemaker, was married, with no record of prior arrests; Pruszkowski was a homeowner, married, with three children, and also no record of prior arrests. The two younger men who made up the foursome that killed Regina Fisz and her newborn son, Corporal Stefan Mazur and Kazimierz Nowakowski, were bachelors. Nowakowski owned a house and a bakery in Kielce. Altogether these were solid, employed, lower-middle-class and middle-class citizens (Meducki, Aryanizacja, vol. 1, pp. 151, 152).
talking to their abductors, begging to spare their lives. Mrs. Fisz offered to pay 150,000 złoty, leave town immediately, and never come back. The four men considered the offer briefly, but decided that it was too risky, as she could identify them later. They took the valuables the Jews had on their persons—a few thousand złoty, seventeen American dollars, two rings, a pin, and a pair of earrings. “We agreed to pretend that we were not paying attention, so that the Jews would try to escape and I would shoot them then,” said Mazur to police investigators, and when the Jews took the bait Mazur promptly turned around and shot the fleeing woman dead from behind.64 Then they gave chase after Moszkowicz who was carrying the child, but he managed to escape. In his flight he dropped the baby, and Mazur killed the newborn with a bullet in the head.

“At that point, people from the village were already standing in a large group nearby and they saw me shooting. The driver said to one civilian who was riding a bike that they should bury the bodies. Then we returned to Kielce and at the corner of Bodzentynska Street we got out and went to a restaurant. The driver joined us as well.”65

The company drank some vodka and had a good meal, which cost them one thousand złoty. Mazur got a two-hundred-zloty advance against anticipated profits from the sale of the victims’ valuables, the driver was paid two dollars, and they exchanged addresses and agreed to meet again. Śliwa and Pruszkowski went to a jeweler to sell the loot. Later in the evening, Mazur went to visit Nowakowski for a drink. The baker complained that the price Śliwa and Pruszkowski had fetched at the jeweler’s, three thousand złoty in all, was too low, so they returned the money and took back the goods.66

No one seemed overly preoccupied with concealing the crime, and there was a lot of coming and going in the aftermath of the murder. On

“The shoemaker, Śliwa, trying to persuade the court of his innocence (he explained during the trial that he went along for the ride “in order to protect the murder victims, when civilians tried to harm them after they were released out of town”), said that he motioned the Jews to run away as the four men were (seemingly) absorbed in a conversation (Meducki, Antiżydowski, vol. I, pp. 175, 176). In light of what Mazur revealed about their “plan” to induce the Jews to flee, this only further incriminated Śliwa, of course. In a bizarre twist of fate, as we already know, one week later Mazur would be killed in an analogous scene, while attempting to flee the execution squad. Mazur was queried about his actions during the trial and his answers later were repeated in journalistic accounts of the pogrom: “The judge: How could the defendant shoot a little child? Didn’t you have pity? The defendant: Of course, but even if one had pity what is there to do when the mother is no more? What can one do, the child would cry” (Daniel, Żyd w zielonym, p. 48).
the following day Mazur, accompanied by yet another policeman, went back to Leonarda Street: “I opened the apartment from where, as the super told me, some things had already been stolen during the night. The super was with us, and also somebody from the neighboring apartment. When the super asked who would pay her for all this [the things they were taking] I said, ‘All is in order, it’s okay to take the stuff, the Jews are not coming back anymore.’”

The Jews did come back, though not without the intervention of two small miracles that kept Moszkowicz alive. In the first place, he managed to escape pursuit by the murderers of Regina Fisz and her child. After running for his life, Moszkowicz crawled on all fours into a field of rye, where he collapsed and lost consciousness. When he recovered, late that afternoon, he decided to report the incident to the police. As he started on foot toward Kielce he noticed some people observing and following him from afar. As he approached town, a man rode by on a bicycle and shouted, “Jew!” In the vicinity of the hospital on Aleksandra Street a group of young men armed with poles, metal rods, and stones awaited Moszkowicz. He was asked to produce identification papers. A man looked over the documents and said briskly to the others, “A Jew, beat him up.” Moszkowicz was then pounded unconscious by this vigilante group. When he regained consciousness, a stranger returned his documents and walked him to a police patrol, which took him to the hospital. Two days later, having recuperated somewhat, he went to Leonarda Street and told the story to Regina Fisz’s husband. They returned to the crime scene, accompanied by the police. Local children showed them where the bodies were buried.

The murder of Regina Fisz and her child reminds us that the pogrom in Kielce did not target only individuals who were purported to have killed a Christian child, or Jews who were Communists, or those who occupied positions of power and influence. Regina Fisz and her son fall outside these categories. Similarly, the gang that checked Moszkowicz’s papers in front of the hospital needed only to know that he was a Jew before they attempted to kill him. As many Polish citizens of Kielce searched for, tracked down, and then attempted to murder all the Jews within their

*Regina Fisz and her child were exhumed from their forest graves and interred at the Jewish cemetery in Kielce, with all the other pogrom victims, during official ceremonies held on July 8.
reach, we come to the realization that the pogrom cannot be narrated as a story about a frenzied mob. What stands out on this gruesome occasion is the widely shared sense in Polish society that getting rid of the Jews, by killing them if necessary, was permissible.

Perhaps the most arresting moment in the story, to my mind at least, comes when the policeman Mazur hails a passing truck in the street, tells the driver that he needs transportation to kill some Jews, and the driver agrees to offer his services for a fee. One does not know what is more startling in this brief encounter—the gall of a policeman in stopping a random stranger to make such a proposition, or the callousness of the stranger who accepts such a proposition on the spot. It does not matter who the protagonists are in this absurdist dialogue. The only thing that matters is that it could have taken place, indeed that it did take place, and that it was a perfectly comprehensible exchange between strangers in Poland in Anno Domini 1946.

Mazur and his murder associates did not know one another to begin with. Barring evidence that they were psychopaths, or otherwise mad, only one reading of binding social norms might allow such a spur-of-the-moment association—and that is a shared understanding that Jews could be killed with impunity. Would the murderers otherwise call on casual bystanders, peasants from Częstochowa, to bury the bodies of a woman and a newborn child killed in their plain view?

A shoemaker, a bakery owner, a police corporal, and the fourth participant in the murder, who owned a house in Kielce and worked as a caretaker in the city hall—law-abiding (none had any record of prior arrests) middle-class citizens—then bonded over their common experience. They treated themselves to an expensive meal in a restaurant, went about settling their affairs, dividing the spoils, selling with profit what they had plundered from the Jews, as if they had just availed themselves of yet another good business opportunity. They publicly consummated their joint endeavor and its proceeds. They didn’t feel compelled to conceal their deeds from other strangers. The only thing that made the policeman uncomfortable was that he took the money—“I didn’t do it for mercenary reasons,” he insisted in court. He was not the only defendant who seemed more embarrassed by accusations of plunder than of beating and murdering Jews.*

*Another defendant in the first Kielce trial, Władysław Biała, who was also a policemen and was also sentenced to death, adamantly denied in court that he ordered the Jew he was caught beating, Mojżesz Cukier, to take off his shoes (Medwicki, Antysemityzm, vol. 1, pp. 181, 193).
On the Railroad

We already know that Jews were particularly vulnerable to attack on trains in postwar Poland and that the violence of the Kielce pogrom spilled out of town along the railway network. The Kielce train station turned into a death trap for Jews who came to or traveled through town before the military was deployed there in force.

In the morning of July 4 a man named Brunon Piątek and an engineer named Elzanowski went to the Kielce-Herbskie train station to meet Piątek’s wife, who was scheduled to arrive from Wrocław. Later Piątek made a statement about events he witnessed and passed it on to the UB office in Kielce, but was never called to make a formal deposition. In 1984 he wrote his recollections again for the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, convinced that a record of these “nightmarish events” should be preserved and that nobody else can do it because all present at the time in the Kielce-Herbskie train station actively participated in chasing after or barring escape routes to Jews who were helplessly trying to run away. . . . I know this very well because while facing mortal danger and talking with the surrounding crowd I was constantly scanning the area trying to spot a railroad security guard or some other help. But I didn’t see anybody of the sort, and no help ever came. In the distance I only spotted this individual carrying a shotgun, who carefully went around from one corpse to another, checked them over, and even knelted beside them. Today I realize that he was simply robbing the dead.  

This could not be because the label of a thief represented a greater stigma than that of a killer. Indeed, robbery always accompanied the killing of Jews, but its logic was radically different, even opposite. Unlike killing, plunder was egoistic. Killing could be revenge, punishment, retribution, justice, or whatever a Communist, a God-killer, or a child molester rightfully deserved, and a dead Jew represented a collective good—benefiting all in whose interests it was to get rid of the Jewish presence altogether. Killing a Jew reduced the burden of everyone else involved in the cleansing operation, while plundering reduced opportunities for all by taking away what others could have appropriated instead. A plundered Jew benefited only the plunderer and shortchanged the others. While one kind of behavior could be appreciated by fellow citizens, the other generated envy.
We do not know how many trains bearing Jews pulled into the Kielce-Herbskie station before the military established a strong presence there and prevented further killings.  

Such train-station attacks took place in several locations. The episodes were typically brief, lasting not much longer than a scheduled stop. They involved collaboration of passengers traveling on the train with willing individuals already present in the station. The use of heavy iron objects—rail sections or pieces of railroad equipment—to crush people’s skulls was reported. Jews had to be identified before being murdered and it appears that boy scouts played a particularly active role in this process. Men in uniforms with shotguns—railroad guards or traveling soldiers—joined in these rapid assaults and often used firearms.

Both Piątek and Elżanowski were employed in managerial positions, at the Ludwików Foundry. When they arrived at the train station several men were milling around on the platforms. Shortly thereafter a train appeared, and as it was coming to a stop Piątek noticed people being pushed out of railway cars. Those who resisted were pulled out by men already present in the station, who then immediately attacked them.

“The manner of killing was to throw stones at Jews, who helplessly ran around platforms and tracks until they fell. Then the fallen prey was finished off with iron weights.” Taken aback by the sudden eruption of violence, Piątek and Elżanowski tried to intervene by confronting the persecutors, and found themselves threatened by an angrily screaming crowd: “You Jewish knaves! Jews have killed our children and you dare to defend them!”

“My situation deteriorated further,” Piątek continued, “when one of the Jews whom they were killing, a young and strong man, realized that we were trying to help, and while already prostrate on the ground

By noon the troops were already deployed in the Kielce main station. A Mr. Nowak arrived just then on a train from Częstochowa and with all the other passengers was brought into a fenced-off area previously used by the Germans during periodic population round-ups. Then, one by one, the passengers’ documents were checked and they were slowly released into town (Witness).

Anszel Pinkuszewicz, in a testimony deposited at Yad Vashem, mentions that the station dispatcher in Pickosów, some eight kilometers from Kielce, held the train longer in the station to give more time for an impromptu pogrom organized by the passengers (Szyznok, Pogrom, p. 59).

I am somewhat puzzled by this, but their role stands out in the available evidence. Perhaps in early July an unusually high number were traveling to or from their summer camps, for instance. It may also be that on overcrowded trains (at the time people traveled even on rooftops for lack of available space) a slender youth could more easily go up and down a railroad car to look over the passengers.
grabbed me with all his strength by the knees. The tormentors grabbed the Jew, however, and two pulled him away by the legs. I thought that I would not be able to remain standing, and if I fell they would surely finish me off. But the Jew was already bleeding profusely from the head and his grip weakened. Two murderers dragged him a few steps away and then a third man ran up, knelt by the victim, and with a heavy iron weight systematically smashed the Jew’s head. The man who finished off the victim was relatively young and weak, and in pounding with the heavy iron weight he bent low over the head of the murdered man. When he stood up, I saw his face spattered with bloody mush from the victim’s ruptured head. He must have felt wetness on his face and his mouth as well, for he instinctively wiped it with his arm and licked around the lips. I will never forget this repulsive sight.”

Nobody official tried to stop the massacre in the station. There were individuals on the scene wearing uniforms, and some of them carried shotguns, but they joined in the killings. For the most part, Jews were clubbed and stoned to death, though a few shots were fired as well. Altogether Piątek counted seven dead Jews.

It was a close call for Piątek and Elzanowski, especially as the latter froze and stood watching the crowd in a daze. Elzanowski’s identification papers were checked by the mob but in the end both men were let go. Piątek went back to work at the Ludwików Foundry, which by then was almost deserted (its crew, as we remember, mounted the second wave of deadly assaults on the building at Planty 7). In the gatehouse, Piątek met a few industrial guards and the beaming secretary of the local labor unions. “To my question ‘Where are the workers?’ he [the secretary] answered that they went to town, for a demonstration. I told him then about the murders at the train station and that Elzanowski barely escaped alive, to which he replied, ‘It serves him right; he shouldn’t defend the Jews.’”

That Jews were being murdered did not seem to shock many people in Poland in 1946. It was accepted matter-of-factly by individuals from many walks of life, including those who did not, and probably would not, lend a helping hand to any such endeavors. What foundation of moral economy is necessary to admit such a possibility as a course of normal events?

Piątek’s itinerary then took him home. He stopped by Elzanowski’s apartment to check whether the engineer had returned safely, and wandered onto a stone bridge over the Szlina some distance away from
Plany 7. A Soviet officer he had met on various official occasions was standing on the bridge, accompanied by his wife. It was evident from the officer’s body language and comments that he enjoyed the spectacle.73

“Unfortunately, most of the people I encountered were in a cheerful mood on account of what was going on [‘Niestety w radosnym nastroju z powodu wydarzeń była większość spotkanych ludzi’]. In every conceivable place people were getting drunk.”74

Piątek’s testimony—which we find echoed, in two examples: in the narrative by one of Łoziński’s interviewees about the leisurely stoning of a Jewish youth; and in the report filed by visiting PPR Central Committee instructors—offers insight into the local people’s collective state of mind. The presumed death of innocent Polish children would be a reason for mourning, not for celebration, and if the canard that brought thousands of Kielce inhabitants into the streets were anything but a Pavlovian signal that activated an embedded prejudice, they could not have enjoyed the day.

Three more of Łoziński’s interviewees also described the murder of Jews at the train station. A woman who arrived in Kielce from Częstochowa on July 5 remembered a commotion on the train, which made her look out a window. One day after the pogrom, corpses were still strewn along a section of the railroad tracks, and people gawked as the train passed them by. Some Jews were killed and thrown off passing trains, but for the most part, as in the episode at the Kielce–Herbské station recounted earlier, they were murdered in train stations as news of the pogrom traveled out of Kielce and found a receptive audience keen to emulate the effort.

The Mr. Nowak mentioned earlier tells a characteristic story about trains to and from Kielce meeting at a station along the way. He journeyed from Częstochowa to Kielce on July 4, and in Włoszcza a his train stopped across the platform from one going in the opposite direction. As passengers shouted news of the Kielce pogrom from one train to the other (namely that Jews had murdered Christian children and that inhabitants of Kielce were taking their just revenge), forthwith individuals suspected of being Jewish were pulled from the Częstochowa train and the killings began. “I saw with my own eyes how an elderly Jewess who sold lemonade was killed, she ran into a rye field and was stoned to death.” Soldiers on the train positioned themselves in open windows and shot at Jews trying to run away. A Jewish youth fell on the platform and “a railwayman dropped a section of rail on his head, which burst open.”75 The whole episode lasted but fifteen minutes, until the trains departed for their destinations.
Very much like Piątek and Elzanowski, Nowak remembered that he was petrified. He had been told once that he resembled a Jew in physical appearance and he realized that if he were fingered and called a Jew in Włoszczowa station, nothing could save his life. The rapidity and total randomness of the assaults was breathtaking. And if violence subsided while the train was in motion it was held in abeyance only until the next stop. The tension built gradually until the next eruption as excited pogrom participants geared themselves back into action, and as Jewish travelers, if any, hunkered down timidly lest they be found out.

Józef Sztarkman traveled on the night train from Wrocław to Kielce together with his brother-in-law Henryk Gitelis. (This was probably the very train Piątek’s wife was supposed to take, if she had not postponed the trip until the following day.) They were deposed on July 8, 1946, and vividly remembered all the events.

For a traveling companion, Sztarkman and Gitelis had a young veteran who must have served in the Polish armed forces abroad. He wore a uniform blouse with foreign insignia and talked most of the way about his exploits during the war. They passed the time pleasantly enough until the train reached Piekoszów. There, as in the Włoszczowa episode recounted by Nowak, while the Wrocław train stopped in the station a train from Kielce pulled in, and the story of Christian children killed by Kielce Jews for matzo immediately spread around. A pogrom ensued in the station right away, with the young man playing a leading role in the events.*

At the next station, Szczukowskie Górki, the veteran disembarked again and people were killed there as well. When the train arrived in Herby, or Kielce-Herbskie, again “he jumped out and went on with the killing, it is a fact that several people were murdered. I don’t know how many because I was afraid that I would be recognized [as a Jew],” said Sztarkman in his deposition. This was almost certainly the very same episode that Piątek recounted forty years later; as we follow it through the eyes of passengers on the train it appears as but one link in a chain of events which must have been replicated on several trains traveling this route on July 4.†

*Upon hearing the “news” he immediately ran out of the car inciting anti-Jewish violence and went on to kill an elderly Jewish woman as Sztarkman and Gitelis watched from inside the train. Another passenger on the train, Anszel Pinkuszewicz, whose testimony is deposited in Yad Vashem, saw a Jewish-looking army officer shot twice and killed in the same station. He also witnessed the stoning to death of the elderly woman (Szynok, Pogrom, p. 59).

†The Central Committee of Polish Jews estimated that some thirty people were killed on the railroad in Kielce pogrom–related assaults (Szynok, Pogrom, p. 60). If anything, this is a conservative estimate.
Sztarkman and Gitelis were lucky. They must have somehow bonded with the man during an earlier phase of the journey and consequently he couldn’t conceive of them as being Jewish. But there were certainly others looking around for suitable victims. A sixteen-year-old boy scout, Kazimierz Redliński, was on a train to Częstochowa on that day. After the word got around that Jews were murdering Polish children in Kielce, Redliński joined in the search for Jews among the passengers, and—we read in the indictment of the November 18, 1946, trial, where he was prosecuted along with fourteen other defendants—“when the train stopped at stations he pushed the Jews out of the cars into the hands of crowds who robbed them and then killed them, most frequently by stoning their victims to death. While the train was in motion Redliński put the strap of his scout cap under his chin, thus emphasizing his pseudo-official status, and walked along railroad cars, searching for Jews among the passengers.”

In view of his youth and membership in the scouts Redliński fetched only a suspended sentence of five years in prison. But on July 7, with victims of the pogrom still unb Buried, a joint meeting of the Kielce voivodeship committees of the Socialist and the Communist Parties issued a strong indictment of young people’s behavior. “The mass participation of young scouts on the day of the pogrom [“masowy udział młodszych harcerskich w dniu pogromu”] proved that their upbring ing is in the hands of irresponsible people, who stoke racial and religious hatred among the young.” The third and last recommendation put forth in the joint resolution called for “suspending the local scouting leadership because many scouts were involved as instigators during the pogrom” (“za liczny udział harcerzy w roli podstępnej do ekscisów”). Apparently, teenagers contributed more than their share to the unseemly sight of uniformed individuals taking part in the killings of their fellow citizens. The conspicuous role of boy scouts in these gruesome events is particularly disturbing, for they represent, in a manner of speaking, a secular form of purity: as the “altar boys” of the nation.

“Meducki, Andrzejewski, vol. 1, pp. 253–54. See also testimony by Michał Klein, a decorated army veteran, who was on a train to Częstochowa on that day and reported witnessing assaults against two Jews by a mob at the Kielce train station. “When the train got in motion some civilians and scouts started walking through passenger cars looking for Jews.” At subsequent stations people were repeatedly pulled out of the train and killed (Memorandum of the Jewish Committee in Częstochowa to the CKZP in Warsaw, July 10, 1946, “Witnesses’ Testimonies,” in AAN, MAP, 787/22).
Many people approached by Marcel Łoziński for interviews about their recollections of the pogrom refused to talk with the filmmaker. Those who consented were thus a self-selected group. For several, the interview seemed to provide a long-awaited opportunity to try framing their memories in a coherent narrative. One can see on the screen that they are not so much answering the interviewer’s questions as letting us eavesdrop on their internal dialogue, a conversation on the subject they were at last engaged in with themselves.

A thoughtful and elegant man introduced in the film as “a historian” is one such interviewee. A ten-year-old boy at the time, he hadn’t seen anything in particular by “objective” standards and only spent a quarter of an hour on July 4 in the Kielce station, sitting politely in a train compartment at his mother’s side. But, as he came to realize over the years, the journey had marked him for life. As he slowly articulates answers to the interviewer’s questions, he is visibly trying to put into words an internal landscape that has haunted him for decades.

As the train carrying a ten-year-old future historian pulled to a stop in Kielce,

there was some sort of excitement in the atmosphere which penetrated into the compartment, but without clear information about what was going on. I wouldn’t say that one could hear shots, but it is possible. . . . At a certain moment the doors opened and a young boy squeezed in. I felt that he was a bit older than myself, but to the ten-year-old boy I was at the time, he seemed young. I cannot tell at present whether he was wearing a scout uniform, but I was sure that he was a scout; perhaps he was wearing some part of the uniform [a scouting cap with a chin strap, maybe?]. I remember him as a scout. And this boy carefully looked over people who were in his field of vision, and disappeared.

Some time later a few men showed up—more than one; I don’t remember the number exactly. I cannot say for sure if they wore uniforms but I know that these were armed railway guards,

*At some point he picked up a book from the table and quickly found a passage where Thucydides describes how he used witnesses’ testimony in The Peloponnesian War.*
and they took a man from our compartment. Today I know that he was a Jew, a man with Semitic features; I am saying this today, at the time I couldn’t tell... I don’t know what happened to this man. My mother absolutely didn’t allow me to even approach the window. People said that this man was shot by those railroad guards right there.

What can I add?... a flabbergasting reaction of the people—I mean the absence of any reaction. On the one hand there was... a sense that something bad, not good, was taking place, but that it could not be helped. It was happening because it had to be that way. And no attempt to respond, to defend, nothing of the sort. I remember later that as the train left and was on its way to Częstochowa people said that somebody was thrown off the rooftop [because of overcrowding, people frequently traveled on the rooftops of train cars].... This would bring discredit to Polish society at any time, but if something like this takes place one year after the war, well...

Irrespective of the instigators, because I understand that there had to be some, I think that they are unimportant because the population participated in this, at least passively, people like myself who did not react... I am helpless [to explain how such a pogrom could have taken place one year after the war]. This is totally incomprehensible to me... one can speak about long-embedded anti-Semitism but this is not enough.... This had an enormous influence on me. If I am not an anti-Semite, having been brought up in this society, it is for two reasons—because my father was one, and because of what I witnessed in Kielce. Awareness that I had been brushed by death, aimlessly capricious death, pointing its finger at completely random people... frightening. And the young boy who took part in this. I don’t know what knowledge he was equipped with to recognize proper targets.... Maybe he was thirteen years old, maybe fourteen, maybe fifteen, I cannot tell.

Obviously, as a ten-year-old boy, I couldn’t have done any-

*There existed such a specialized service, the Szuba Ochrony Kolei (SOK), and its members were colloquially called sekści, the word Łoziński’s interlocutor uses in the interview.*
thing; besides, my mother would not let me. But I know today that I was one of many people—my age is of no importance—who did not react at all to this. The remainder of the trip passed as if nothing happened. . . . The entire society behaved this way. For decades this matter was covered under a veil of silence.80