

The Holocaust in Poland & Lithuania; Coming to Terms with a Dark Past

Professor Polonsky's lecture will address the process of coming to terms with the difficult anti-Semitic past in Poland and Lithuania. In Poland this process began much earlier and has gone much further, partly with the wide-ranging debate provoked by the revelation that in the small town of Jedwabne in July 1941, the local Polish population, incited by the Germans but with no significant German participation, murdered their Jewish neighbours.

The situation in Lithuania is more complex. In recent years, attempts have been made to investigate the Lithuanian involvement in the mass murder of the Jews in their country. These have provoked a nationalist reaction which has led some Lithuanian officials to downplay Jewish suffering and to claim that some Jews in the Soviet partisan movement including the Israeli historian, Yitzhak Arad, a former director of Yad Vashem, were guilty of war crimes and should be interrogated. At the same time, the Lithuanian authorities have made some efforts to expand Holocaust education.

The lecture will attempt to sum up how the situation looks in the two countries today.

Professor Polonsky is part of a working party set up by the State Department, the Lithuanian Ministry of Education, and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.