In May 2000 a slim volume, *Neighbors: The History of the Destruction of a Jewish Village*, was published in Poland. It caused a seismic shock in public consciousness and spawned a vast literature of debate, polemic, and public soul-searching there and, to a lesser extent, elsewhere in Europe and the USA when translations appeared a year later.¹ The book's author, Jan Gross, is a Polish historian now at New York University. His book describes the murder, on 10 July 1941, of virtually all the Jewish residents of the small Polish village of Jedwabne by their Polish neighbors. Some were stabbed to death, others killed with clubs, stones, bricks or hooks. Two women deliberately drowned their children and themselves in a pond to avoid their persecutors. The rest were herded into a barn and burnt to death. Gross estimates that sixteen hundred people, roughly half the total population of the village, were killed. The estimate is controversial, but that hundreds were killed, and that their neighbors killed them, is not. (It has now been authoritatively confirmed by the government-appointed Institute of National Remembrance, which spent almost two years investigating the crime.)

Jedwabne had been occupied by the Nazis throughout the preceding month, after they had expelled the Soviet troops who had occupied the region (under the Nazi–Soviet Pact) for the previous twenty months. Gross readily allows that the murders would not have occurred without the pathological disturbance caused by these two brutal and brutalizing occupations and, more specifically, without the consent of the Nazi occupiers. But he insists that it was the Polish

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¹ This is an expanded version of my article that appeared in the *Australian Review of Books*, April 2002. Most of the Polish journal and newspaper articles discussed here are available on the Web at http://www.pogranicze.sejny.pl/jedwabne/. Some non-Polish articles can be found within that site (click on ‘glosy obcojęzyczne’), and an excellent selection from the Polish discussion is available in English translation at http://free.ngo/pl/wiez/jedwabne/index.html. The book was published in English by Princeton University Press, under the title *Neighbors. The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland*. The citations that follow are only examples of the many that could be provided for each of the points referred to.
population of Jedwabne, 'ordinary men,' not the Nazis, who were 'willing executioners' in Jedwabne.

The book must shock anyone who reads it. The shock stems from various sources: the horrific, bestial nature of the events described; the wrenching immediacy of the accounts Gross quotes from survivors, victims, eyewitnesses and perpetrators; the unrelenting probing character of Gross's prose, charges, questions and inferences. But it has shocked Poles in special ways. I will return to those ways.

In April 1997 the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission (HREOC) published *Bringing Them Home*, a report on the practice of removal of Aboriginal children from their parents, which had gone on for much of the last century, until it was discontinued in the 1960s. The numbers taken are controversial. The report estimates that, from 1910 to 1970, between one in three and one in ten Aboriginal children were removed, but its higher estimates are widely doubted. The Australian political scientist, Robert Manne, who is writing a book about the history of that policy, has suggested that between 20,000 and 25,000 children were removed. The public response to the report, and controversies and polemics spawned by it, have been striking. The then Leader of the Opposition, Kim Beazley, wept in Parliament as he spoke about the report. It dominated public attention like few other issues. I doubt that anyone expected an almost seven hundred page government-commissioned report to have such a fallout. Certainly, the government printer did not. Like *Neighbors*, it sold out in no time and had to be reprinted. The intensity of the reaction is partly due to the character of the recorded testimony, which contains many heart-rending accounts, but partly, too, Australians were affected by those stories in ways that foreigners might not have been. For it matters that it was an Australian story.

*Neighbors* is a small book that profoundly shook and reshaped the moral tone and content of Polish public debate. *Bringing Them Home* is a large one that had a similar effect here. One-off publications rarely have such power. That in itself might be grounds for comparison between them, but are there others?

Many in Australia would say no. *Neighbors* is a book about the participation of the Poles of Jedwabne in the extermination of the Jews of Jedwabne. That, in turn, was an early item in the Holocaust, a uniquely murderous activity with no redeeming features. The child removals that were the subject of *Bringing Them Home* involved no killing, were on some interpretations well-intentioned, and, some would claim, led at least at times and in part to good consequences (education, assimilation, etc.). Indeed, many participants in Australian debates are infuriated by any comparison at all between any aspect of our history, including the murder of Aborigines and the dispossession and decimation of Aboriginal

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