

POGROMS. In general usage, a pogrom is an outbreak of mass violence directed against a minority religious, ethnic or social group; it usually implies central instigation and control, or at minimum the passivity of local authorities. The term came into widespread usage after the riots of 1881 and 1882 in the Russian Empire. While the standard Russian bureaucratic term for mass unrest was “disorders” (*besporiadki*), the occasional use of the word *pogrom* to describe the events of 1881 and 1882 popularised the term in the West. The *Oxford English Dictionary* records its first use in the *Times* of London on 17 March 1882 (“That the ‘*Pogromen*’ [riots against the Jews] must be stopped . . .”), defining the word as “an organized massacre in Russia for the destruction or annihilation of any body or class: orig. and esp. applied to those directed against the Jews.” In Soviet historiography, the word was applied to violence carried out by reactionary groups against opponents of the tsarist regime, and it thereby gained a political but lost a specifically “Jewish” connotation. In contemporary Russian, *pogrom* is used for violence directed against any ethnic group.

The common usage of the term *pogrom* to describe any attack against Jews throughout history disguises the great variation in the scale, nature, motivation, and intent of such violence at different times. One unifying theme is that the position of Jews as variously a religious, social, and ethnic “Other” made them convenient targets for violence in Eastern Europe during periods of political unrest and social upheaval. The Cossack uprising against Polish rule in the Ukraine in 1648 (*gzeyres takh*), for example, targeted Jews as religious aliens, and also as agents of the Polish feudal system. [See *Gzeyres Takh Vetat*.] Jews suffered in similar fashion during the internal anarchy that characterized the decline of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, exemplified by the depredations of armed bands known as *haidamaky* in the 1760s. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, pogroms were a phenomenon of the Polish borderlands of the Austrian, German, and especially the Russian Empires, where a complex social, political, and economic matrix complicated inter-ethnic relations.

Pogroms in the Russian Empire. Anti-Jewish violence in the Russian Empire before 1881 was a rare event, confined largely to the rapidly expanding Black Sea entrepôt of Odessa. In Odessa, Greeks and Jews, two rival ethnic and economic communities, lived side by side. The first Odessa pogrom, in 1821, was linked to the outbreak of the Greek War for Independence, during which the Jews were accused of sympathizing with the Ottoman authorities. Although the pogrom of 1871 was occasioned in part by a rumor that Jews had vandalized the Greek community's church, many non-Greeks participated, as they had done during earlier disorders in 1859. The 1871 pogrom was the first to attract national attention. A number of commentators in the Russian press presented the riot as a popular protest against Jewish economic exploitation of the native population. The Odessa pogrom led some Jewish publicists, exemplified by the writer Perets

Smolenskin, to question belief in the possibility of Jewish integration into Christian society, and to call for a greater awareness of Jewish national identity.

The pogroms of 1881 and 1882, which occurred in waves throughout the southwestern provinces of the Russian Empire, were the first to assume the nature of a mass movement. Typically, the pogroms of this period originated in large cities, and then spread to surrounding villages, travelling along means of communication such as rivers and railroads. Violence was largely directed against the property of Jews rather than their persons. In the course of more than 250 individual events, millions of rubles worth of Jewish property was destroyed. The total number of fatalities is disputed but may have been as few as 50, half of them *pogromshchiki* who were killed when troops opened fire on rioting mobs.

The first pogrom of the 1881–1882 series occurred in Elisavetgrad (Kirovgrad) in the Ukrainian province of Kherson on 15 April 1881 (new style, 27 April) during the week following Easter; further augmenting tensions was the unsettled atmosphere created by the assassination of Emperor Alexander II on 1 March (13 March) 1881. The Elisavetgrad pogrom spawned a spate of copycat violence in the region, as news of the disorders got around. A serious pogrom occurred in Kiev, on 26 April (7 May); it lasted for three days and spread to villages in Kiev and surrounding provinces. The violence continued sporadically until winter. A pogrom erupted in Warsaw on Christmas Day, 1881. Pogroms returned to Ukraine in the spring of 1882, the most serious of which was in Balta, Podolia province, on 29 April (10 May) 1882. A greater willingness by the authorities to resort to deadly force in the repression of pogroms finally ended their endemic character in the summer of 1882. The pogroms of 1881 and 1882 strengthened new political movements among East European Jews, especially the trend in Jewish socialism that would lead to the creation of the Bund, and the type of proto-Zionism exemplified by Hoveve Tsiyon (Lovers of Zion).

It was widely believed by Jewish contemporaries that, given their scope and duration, the pogroms were centrally organized and directed, probably by elements within the government itself. The ostensible purpose was to deflect popular resentment from the government to Jewish scapegoats. This belief was strengthened by the renewed outbreak of pogroms in the twentieth century. The assumption of official culpability dominated secondary literature on the pogroms until it was effectively challenged by Hans Rogger and I. Michael Aronson. Subsequent research by John Klier has shown that there is no evidence of instigation or planning in the archival record.

Serious but isolated pogroms occurred in Ekaterinoslav in July 1883, and Nizhnii Novgorod in June 1884. While there were occasions of violence that included attacks on Jews, such as the 1892 riots in the factory

settlement of Iuzovka, Ekaterinoslav province, there were no more serious pogroms until the twentieth century.

The Kishinev pogrom began on Easter Day, 6 April (18 April) 1903 in the capital of the Russian province of Bessarabia. In the course of three days of rioting, almost fifty Jews were killed. Kishinev provoked worldwide outrage, and became the archetypal pogrom, not least through its memorialization in Hayim Nahman Bialik's poem "Be-ir ha-haregah" (In the City of Slaughter), which established the trope of Jewish passivity in the face of pogrom violence. It was widely believed, in Russia and abroad, that the pogrom was instigated by the Russian authorities, in particular the minister of Internal Affairs, Viacheslav Konstantinovich Plehve. Plehve's presumed guilt was established by a forged dispatch, published in the *Times* of London, to the governor of Bessarabia, advising him that a pogrom was imminent, and that he should not use deadly force to suppress it. Kishinev galvanized Jewish political activism in the Russian Empire, particularly through the creation of armed Jewish self-defence units, which first appeared during the pogrom in Gomel, Mogilev province, on 29 August (9 September) 1903.

Anti-Jewish violence assumed a mass character during the events of the Russian Revolution of 1905 to 1907. Equating Jews with "revolution," loyalist groups—later to be formally organized in such bodies as the Union of the Russian People, and generically known as "The Black Hundreds"—attacked Jews and other groups of suspect loyalty, like students and rural teachers. Counterrevolutionary riots in Odessa and Kiev claimed hundreds of Jewish victims. Both civilian and military authorities were widely condemned for their ineptitude and passivity during these events, although there is no firm evidence of official instigation.

Sporadic violence continued in the aftermath of the revolution, most notoriously on 1 June (13 June) 1906 in Białystok, in the Kingdom of Poland, where a pogrom claimed more than 70 victims. The increasing incidence of Jewish self-defence, often

organized by revolutionary parties such as the Bund that were intent on confrontation with the authorities, complicates the attribution of responsibility for these events. The Russian government, for its part, sought to characterize the pogroms in Gomel and Białystok as "Jewish pogroms," or attacks by Jews against the Christian population.



Bundist self-defense group at the cemetery with the corpses of three of its leaders who were killed in a pogrom during the Russian Revolution of 1905, Odessa. (Courtesy YIVO Institute for Jewish Research)

Wartime Pogroms. The notoriously Judeophobic Russian military was extremely brutal toward Jews, whether encountered as enemy aliens in the occupied Hapsburg territory of Galicia, or as Russian subjects in the Pale of Settlement. The policies of the Russian High Command during World War I included summary execution of Jews for alleged spying, the taking of hostages, and mass expulsions, at times on a province-wide basis. Taking their cue from these policies, military units, very often Cossack and other cavalry units, carried out pogroms against Jews throughout the war, with minimal interference by their officers. The actual number of Jewish victims is unknown, but the scale of Jewish suffering was immense.

The Russian Civil War was fought on many fronts between 1919 and 1921. It was waged by disparate groups, motivated by politics (the Reds and the Whites), nationalism (Ukrainians and Poles), social protest (the agrarian Greens), and simple greed. The absence of any strong central authority ensured that the entire civilian population was victimized by one military force or another. All the contending armies, regular and irregular, conducted pogroms against Jewish communities. Only the commanders of the Red Army occasionally punished troops guilty of pogrom-mongering. The White forces often used antisemitism as a tool for ideological mobilization. Two groups were particularly prone to pogroms, the anti-Bolshevik Volunteer Army commanded by General Anton Ivanovich Denikin, and forces loyal to the Ukrainian national government, the so-called Directory, headed by Simon Petliura. The irregular forces fighting in the name of the Directory, the Otamans, were particularly notorious for anti-Jewish murder, torture and rape. Anti-pogrom declarations issued by the Directory were decried by Jewish groups as mere window-dressing. In fact, the Directory had little effective control over the forces fighting in its name.

While ideology no doubt played some role in prompting pogroms, much of the violence was occasioned by the collapse of governmental authority, the brutalization caused by years of inhumane warfare, and a criminal desire to loot and plunder. There are sharply differing estimates on the total number of Jewish casualties during the Civil War, but the minimum credible estimate is 50,000 fatalities.

Petliura's alleged culpability for pogroms was the pretext for his assassination, in Paris, by Shmuel Schwartzbard on 25 May 1926. During the sensational murder trial that followed, Schwartzbard's defense team obtained an acquittal by depicting the crime as a political act of justified retribution. The trial did much to complicate Jewish-Ukrainian relations.

Pogroms were also a feature of the Polish-Soviet War of 1920, and the clashes between Polish and Ukrainian nationalists in the borderlands. The most notorious attacks were carried out by Poles in Lwów from 22 to 24 November 1918, and in Pinsk on 5 April 1919.

The deterioration of relations between Jews and Poles in interwar Poland, complicated by the aggressive anti-Jewish policies of the National

Democrats (Endecja), led to several incidents of interethnic violence and pogroms. The most notorious of these were in Grodno (7 June 1935), Przytyk (9 March 1936), and Brześć nad Bugiem (Brest; 13 May 1937).

After the Holocaust. There were attacks on Jews in Poland immediately after the end of World War II, most notably in Kielce on 4 July 1946, where more than 40 Jews were murdered by a mob. This violence derived in part from the brutalization of Polish society during the war and the impact of the intense campaign of Nazi antisemitism. It occurred against the backdrop of political struggle between Communists and anti-Communists. The fact that the pogrom was triggered by accusations that Jews had kidnapped a Christian child suggests that long-established prejudices and superstition also played a role.

A wide variety of attacks upon Jews have been characterized as pogroms. The diversity makes it impossible to attribute the violence to one set of specific factors. It can be said, however, that, contrary to the stereotype, pogroms were seldom the work of governments; rather, they tended to occur in times of political crisis, when the usual restraints of government and standards of civil conduct were weak or nonexistent.

While pogroms tended to occur in extraordinary situations and were not perpetrated by the majority of the community, fear of pogroms nonetheless became an integral part of the collective memory of East European Jewry. In the late Soviet period, this enabled unscrupulous agitators, like those of the antisemitic Pamiat' movement in 1989 and 1990, to terrorize Soviet Jews by spreading rumors of impending pogroms in cities such as Moscow and Saint Petersburg. The entrenched belief that central governments could easily provoke pogroms obscured the fact that while they were a horrifying phenomenon, pogroms were not a common feature for most of East European Jewish history.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Henry Abramson, *A Prayer for the Government: Ukrainians and Jews in Revolutionary Times, 1917–1920* (Cambridge, Mass., 1999); I. Michael Aronson, *Troubled Waters: The Origins of the 1881 Anti-Jewish Pogroms in Russia* (Pittsburgh, 1990); Jan T. Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton, 2001); Edward H. Judge, *Easter in Kishinev: Anatomy of a Pogrom* (New York, 1992); John D. Klier and Shlomo Lambroza, *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History* (Cambridge and New York, 1992); Hans Rogger, *Jewish Policies and Right-Wing Politics in Imperial Russia* (Berkeley, 1986); Robert Weinberg, *The Revolution of 1905 in Odessa: Blood on the Steps* (Bloomington, Ind., 1993).

JOHN KLIER

The article presented above is a sample entry from *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, to be published by the Yale University Press. Copyright 2005 YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, Inc. Reproduced by permission of Yale University Press and the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, Inc. All rights reserved.