

THE FIEDORCZYK LECTURE



POLISH STUDIES
CENTER

Central Connecticut State University

**THE FIEDORCZYK LECTURE
IN
POLISH AMERICAN STUDIES
1989**

**THE POLISH STUDIES PROGRAM
Central Connecticut State University
New Britain, Connecticut**

The Fiedorczyk Lecture in Polish American Studies

The Rt. Rev. Msgr. Alphonse J. V. Fiedorczyk endowed the Polish Studies Program at Central Connecticut State University with a \$10,000 gift for the establishment of the annual Fiedorczyk Lecture in Polish American Studies. The Lecture was established in the memory of the Vincent Fiedorczyk Family.

Msgr. Fiedorczyk, the son of Polish immigrants, was born in New Britain, Connecticut on September 10, 1910. He attended Sacred Heart School in New Britain, and later graduated from St. Mary's College at Orchard Lake, Michigan. He went on to attend St. Bernard's Seminary in Rochester, New York, and then Grand Seminaire de St. Briec in France, which he completed in 1935, the year of his ordination to the priesthood. He returned to his home parish to serve as a curate for eight years. In 1943 he joined the U.S. Army as a first lieutenant in the Chaplain Corps, and after 26 years of Army service retired with the rank of Brigadier General.

During World War II Msgr. Fiedorczyk served as chaplain with this 79th Infantry Division in Europe, and was decorated with the following honors: The Legion of Merit, The Bronze Star, the French Croix de Guerre with Fouragere, and the World War II Victory Medal. He also served in Korea and two post-war tours in Germany.

Upon completion of his military service, Msgr. Fiedorczyk returned to Connecticut to the Bridgeport Diocese, where he was subsequently assigned to Holy Name Parish in Stamford. He served fourteen years in Stamford, and was a critical figure in the revival of the parish's Polish profile.

First and foremost a priest, Msgr. Fiedorczyk always kept in the forefront during his 52 years of service the injunction "to preach and to offer sacrifice." He also viewed service to the Polish community as an integral part of his priestly duties, and was deeply concerned with the preservation and promotion of the history of the Polish community in America. He encouraged the Association of Polish Priests in Connecticut to commission *Immigrant Pastor* by Prof. Daniel Buczek, the important biography of the pioneering Msgr. Lucyan Bojnowski of New Britain. Msgr. Fiedorczyk was also a long-time member of the Polish American Historical Association. He was active in Polish affairs at Sacred Heart University in Bridgeport, and at Central Connecticut State University. He donated his papers and memoirs (over two thousand pages) to the Connecticut Polish American Archives and Manuscript Collection at CCSU.

Msgr. Fiedorczyk, after a long illness, passed away on November 16, 1987.

Mieczysław B. Biskupski, the Fiedorczyk Lecturer for 1989, received his PhD from Yale University, where he worked with the eminent Polish historian, Piotr S. Wandycz. He was co-editor of *Pastor of the Poles: Polish American Essays* (1982), and, together with James S. Pula, co-editor of *Polish Democratic Thought* (1990). His articles have appeared in *East Central Europe*, *The Slavic Review*, *The Polish Review*, *Polish American Studies*, *PNCC Studies*, and *The International History Review*, among others. Dr. Biskupski is currently Associate Professor of History at St. John Fisher College in Rochester, New York, a former President of the Polish American Historical

Association, and a Director of the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences in America.

On behalf of the Polish Studies Program, it is my pleasure to present to our friends and supporters the Second Fiedorczyk Lecture in Polish American Studies, "American Polonia and The Resurrection of Independent Poland, 1914-1919", which Prof. Biskupski delivered on April 6, 1989. In disseminating this lecture, we hope, as Msgr. Fiedorczyk wished, to promote the further study and preservation of the history of the Polish community in America.

Stanislaus A. Blejwas
CSU University Professor of History
Coordinator of Polish Studies
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**AMERICAN POLONIA AND
THE RESURRECTION OF
INDEPENDENT POLAND, 1914-1919**

**Fiedorczyk Lecture in Polish American Studies
Central Connecticut State University
April 6, 1989**

Mieczysław B. Biskupski
Department of History
St. John Fisher College

1989 marks the 75th anniversary of the outbreak of World War I. That war, which destroyed so much, also created, or rather re-created an independent Polish state on the map of Europe. Seventy-five years ago today few would have suspected that Poland, partitioned among its neighbors in the 18th century and for five generations absent from the affairs of the world, would be returned to life within less than five years.

How Poland came to re-appear on the map of Europe is a fascinating and enormously complex question that requires us to consider many factors. Here I have chosen the task of exploring but a single possible cause, one contributing factor to a large process, -specifically what role the Poles of America played in the resurrection of their ancestral homeland.¹

I should like to begin by reducing the dimensions of my task. First, in my judgment, the Poles were a rather minor actor in the drama of their own national rebirth. This is not to say that they were unnecessary; quite the contrary: the existence of a large community exhibiting a high degree of national consciousness was the first essential element before any action regarding Poland in 1914 - or any other year - could take place. But, the Poles themselves did not control the large forces that changed the face of the world between 1914 and 1918; they were principally objects rather than subjects, and could influence events only at the margins.² This having been said, it follows logically that any component of the Polish people - in our case the Poles living in America - could only contribute a portion of what was, in totality, a small role. I emphasize this element not to diminish the historical significance of American Polonia's contribution, but rather to explain what means could and did come to their use. If we appreciate the limitations inherent in their position, their achievements are both more comprehensible and more admirable.

Having reduced our task to manageable proportions, let us set the stage. First, we must realize that American Polonia between 1914 and 1918 was an actor in two simultaneous, occasionally overlapping, but always distinct stories: First it was an element within the larger American host society, secondly, it was an element of the international Polish diaspora, constituting, because of its size, what some called the "fourth partition" of Poland. American Polonia thus always had two agendas to regard and two communities to work within.

Second, let us now consider what American Polonia did within the confines affecting it. Here we come to what I regard as the most intriguing and least known aspect of the story. For what American Polonia did during World War I - or seemed to do - looks far different depending on how closely we examine it. This can be demonstrated by presenting the outline of Polonia's achievement first, and then looking more closely at some of its aspects. Hence, let us review the standard history of Polonia's role in the war.

¹ The role of Polonia in Poland's re-emergence is a major theme in my "The United States and the Rebirth of Poland, 1914-1918" (Ph.d. diss., Yale University, 1981), two vols.

² This point is developed in M. B. Biskupski, "War and the Diplomacy of Polish Independence, 1914-1918." *Polish Review* vol. XXXV, No. 1 (1990).

By 1914 the Polish community in America numbered two and one-half to four millions.³ It was concentrated largely in the urban areas of the eastern seaboard and Great Lakes basin. An impressive community structure had built up consisting of a great many Roman Catholic parishes, and the secular fraternal - like the Polish National Alliance and the Falcons on the national level or smaller regional or state institutions - these institutional links were further strengthened by a press network consisting of dailies and weeklies several boasting impressive national circulation figures.⁴ Whereas there were many important centers of Polish life in America, Chicago was indisputably supreme - headquarters of the largest fraternal, the greatest newspapers, boasting the largest concentration of Polish-speakers in America. Chicago was self-consciously the "Stolica" in contradistinction to the "Prowincji" like Rochester, New York or New Britain, Connecticut.

European events had major influence on this immigrant community. By 1912 the Balkan Wars has an especially large effect on Polonia. The possibility was raised of a European Great Power conflict that might place the "Polish Question" once more on the agenda of international diplomacy. In reaction, Poles everywhere - including the United States - felt a need to coalesce, to concentrate their forces for what might indeed be the longed-for historic moment. As a result a national executive committee was formed in December 1912 in Pittsburgh - the so-called National Defense Committee (KON, Komitet Obrony Narodowej), bringing virtually all of organized Polonia under its aegis, a national fund-raising effort was begun, and the several para-military organizations within Polonia, notably the Falcons, but also the Union of Polish Youth (ZMP, Związek Młodzieży Polskiej), began intensive efforts to prepare Polonia youth for combat.⁵

Within little over a year thereafter in 1914 the Great War indeed broke out in Europe and Polonia efforts became intensified and focused on two particular themes: raising money for relief to war-ravaged Poland (which suffered egregiously during the War) and trying to raise a substantial Polonia military force and send it into action, hoping that national gain for the Polish cause would result from military exploit⁶.

³ There is a vast literature speculating upon the size of Polonia in this - or any other - era, vide Biskupski, "Rebirth of Poland," I, 3-4.

⁴ Histories of the fraternal, both national and local, are still serious needs in Polonia's historiography. The recent efforts by Donald E. Pienkos concerning the Polish National Alliance (PNA: A Centennial History of the Polish National Alliance of the United States of North America, 1984) and the Polish Falcons (One Hundred Years Young: A History of the Polish Falcons of America, 1887-1987, 1987) are not without use though disappointingly superficial and unreliable. For a discussion of these questions vide Stanislaus A. Blejwas's Review of PNA in Polish American Studies, vol. XLIII, No. 1 (Spring, 1986), 98-102, and M.B. Biskupski, "Flawed Centennial: A Whig Interpretation of the Polish Falcons in America 1887-1987", Polish American Studies, vol. XLVI, No. 2 (Autumn, 1989), 70-74.

⁵ Vide Miroslaw Franćić, Komitet Obrony Narodowej w Ameryce 1912-1918 (Wrocław, 1983). Regarding the ZMP vide the brief sketch in Andrej Brożek, Polish Americans, 1854-1939 (Warsaw, 1985), 225.

⁶ Regarding the widespread desire within Polonia to raise volunteer units vide M.B. Biskupski, "Pierwszy występ "Szarej Eminencji": Józef Retinger, Polonia amerykańska, i sprawa wojska polskiego na obczyźnie 1914r", Niepodległość, vol. XX (1987) and the opening portions of Joseph T. Hapak, "Recruiting a Polish Army in the United States, 1917-1919 (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Kansas, 1988).

Polonia efforts were energetic but disorganized and unavailing until the spring of 1915 and the arrival of piano virtuoso Ignacy Jan Paderewski. The maestro not only proved a point of coalescence round which Polonia could rally, but he also had two other signal accomplishments. He was able to personify the Polish cause - first understood as the cause of Polish relief and then gradually transmogrified into the cause of Polish independence - before non-Polish American audiences. This gained financial support and broad sympathy for Poland in the United States. This ultimately led to Paderewski's third great triumph. His celebrity status within American society, his authority over American Polonia, and his earnest and effective championship of the Polish relief effort ultimately gained him the attention, and inevitably, given Paderewski's legendary charm and eloquence, admiration and support of the highest political circles in the United States: Members of Congress, officials in the State Department, the president's intimate advisor Colonel Edward M. House and even Woodrow Wilson himself. Paderewski therefore became a one-man lobby for the Polish cause and one with peculiarly impressive access to the corridors of power⁷.

Thanks in no small degree to Paderewski, Wilson was won over to the Polish cause and gradually expressed himself publicly with increasing precision regarding Poland. Meanwhile, the Poles in America created a political directing body, the National Department (WN, Wydział Narodowy)⁸, affiliated themselves with the emigre Polish leadership in Western Europe, particularly the Polish National Committee (KNP, Komitet Narodowy Polski) in Paris presided over by Roman Dmowski and with the Poles in Russia, and began a major effort to recruit a Polish Army in the United States⁹.

Immediately after the United States entered the war in April 1917, Paderewski led American Polonia on a national recruiting effort that eventually saw some 25,000 American Poles recruited, trained and sent to France to fight under Polish colors on the Western front. This was American Polonia's most dramatic success during the war. By 1918 Wilson listed the creation of an independent Poland as the Thirteenth of his famous "Fourteen Points" and American Polonia was unified as never before - or since.

With War's end Paderewski returned to Europe and, thanks in no small part to his influence with the American government and loyal support from American Polonia, he was able to become free Poland's first Prime Minister in 1919.¹⁰ This triumph was in many ways the vicarious victory of American Polonia for it was among the Poles

⁷ Vide M.B. Biskupski, "Paderewski as Leader of American Polonia, 1914-1918," Polish American Studies (vol. XLVIII, No. 1, 1986).

⁸ For the WN vide Louis Joseph Zake, "The Development of the National Department (Wydział Narodowy) as Representative of the Polish American Community in the United States, 1916-1923" (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Chicago, 1979).

⁹ Regarding the KNP role vide Marian Leczyk, Komitet Narodowy Polski a Ententa i Stany Zjednoczone, 1917-1919 (Warsaw, 1966); for recruiting vide Joseph T. Hopak, "The Polish Military Commission, 1917-1919," Polish American Studies (vol. XXXVIII, No. 2, 1981).

¹⁰ Vide M.B. Biskupski, "The Origins of the Paderewski Government in 1919: A Reconsideration in Light of New Evidence," Polish Review, vol. XXXIII, No. 2 (1988) 157ff. For the larger context vide Zofia Sywak, "Ignacy Paderewski, Prime Minister of Poland 16 January to 9 December 1919" (Ph.D. diss., St. Johns Univ., 1975).

here that the meastro had built his political and emotional base.

The foregoing account is, I should contend, substantially correct and has been widely repeated. However, it obscures as much as it presents and misrepresents a good deal of American Polonia history. Let us look below the surface - if only just a bit. I should like to examine just three of the themes raised by the outline to demonstrate how much more complex and ambiguous was American Polonia's role in the war. The three themes I have selected go to the heart of Polonia's history, viz.: its structure, its leadership and its relationship to the United States.

Turning first to what I call the structural question, let us consider what has been neglected. The striking feature about organized Polonia life in the World War One era was its factionalism; more rancorous and cut-throat in these years than in any other. The factionalism of the era contained all of the traditional Polonia elements: personal enmity, greed, competition for status and power; but the really great issue was a devilishly complex division between the left and the right in Polish politics which was overlapped and occasionally obscured by a difference within Polonia over what side to support in the Great War. Essentially the Polish American right - consisting of the Roman Catholic clergy, the leaders of the major fraternal, the major publishers - tended to be pro-Entente in the War (meaning they supported victory for England, France and Russia over Germany and Austria). Contrariwise, the Polish American left - the labor movement, the anti-clerical intelligentsia, etc. - tended to have the opposite view of the war. Here things get complicated. The Polish American left was not really rooting for the Kaiser. In reality, they were so bitterly opposed to the reactionary czarist regime in Russia that, as a result, supported czarism's opponents which happened to be Germany and Austria. Much the same could be said for the Polonia right which was violently anti-German, delighted to side with France and England, and supported czarist Russia only by necessity and holding its nose. The fact that the right-left split became entangled in the war issue led to hideous and occasionally comic complexities. For example the Polish American left, devoutly democratic, would find itself denounced as agents of reactionary Germany and flunkies of the aristocratic Junker militants which, though in some sense technical true, is yet nonsensical. Since the left in Polonia perforce was associated with the Central Powers, the result was to discredit the left as a force in Polish politics. And this tendency grew as America moved toward belligerent status. When the United States finally entered the war in 1917, the Polish left was discredited for their association with Germany and Austria. Since the victorious supporters of the Entente within Polonia were also the Polish right, it meant that it had won a victory in Polonia politics thanks to its alignment regarding the war.

The consequences of this result are larger than they first seem. Does it not appear odd on the face of it that American Polonia, composed overwhelmingly of poorly paid, poorly educated urban proletarians, a community overwhelmingly Democratic in its party registration, should have been dominated by the political right? There is something bizarre about Jan Smulski, the most prominent American Pole of the War years, campaigning for Republican Charles Evans Hughes in 1916 among his fellow Poles who

were overwhelmingly Wilson Democrats. Note well that in Poland itself the same combination of forces - i.e. the left - anti-Russian and hence pro- German and Austria, while the right supporting England, France and Russia - led to the victory of Józef Piłsudski, the hero of the Polish left - not the right.

When then did the left lose and the right win American Polonia? Certainly, the fact that the Polish left was out of synchronization with the American decision to enter the war against Germany and Austria provides the short answer. But there is a larger explanation. I have my own theory which I shall share with you. In my judgement World War I saw the victory of what we might call, for lack of a better term, the Polonia "Establishment" over what we may deem the "Outsiders". The victory ultimately went to those who controlled the national Polonia press and fraternalists - hence the Chicagoans - over those who were outside the main structures of Polonia organization: the socialists¹¹, the Polish National Catholic Church (PNCC)¹², the Poles living in small communities, the non-fraternal members. It is problematical whether this was a victory for the majority over the minority. What seems more clear, however, was that it was a victory for those elements more fully integrated into American life over those who are still immigrants, indeed emigres, as concerns their leadership. The Smulskis and Fronczaks who dominated the organized Polonia establishment were mostly German Poles, long resident in the United States, who spoke English flawlessly - Smulski held a law degree from Northwestern University, Fronczak a doctorate from the University of Buffalo. It was Chicago's victory over the provinces, the organizations victory over the outsiders¹³. If this is so, and I am convinced that it is, it means that American Polonia's greatest contribution to Polish history, its role in the resurrection of an independent Poland, was led by the element within the Polonia community farthest along the path to total assimilation into American life and hence least Polish.

But if this is a paradox, it produced yet further paradox for it led to this strange conjunction. By the end of World War I, American Polonia was dominated by the political right, but Poland itself was under the control of the charismatic hero of the Polish left - Piłsudski. The left was a defeated minority within Polonia, but vigorous and powerful within Poland. As a result the representatives of the newly established free Poland had a great deal of difficulty coming to deal with organized American Polonia. The letters and memoirs of Poland's first representative - Konstanty Buszczyński, Consul General in New York City, are a political declaration of incredulity and confusion: Polonia must be mad, it is certainly fractious and its divisions are both numberless and incom-

¹¹ Note the comments by James R. Barrett about the Polish socialists being "cut . . . of from the great mass of Polish immigrants," in his "Comment: Polish Immigrants and the Mentality of the Unskilled Immigrant Worker, 1900-1922," *Polish American Studies*, vol. XLVI, No. 1 (Spring, 1989), 102. An important recent discussion is Mary E. Cygan "Polish American Socialism" (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1989).

¹² Regarding the PNCC vide M.B. Biskupski, "Bishop Hodur, the Piłsudskiites, and Polonia Politics of the Eve of World War I: Documents and Commentary," *PNCC Studies*, vol. 7 (1986), 39-52.

¹³ I have discussed this briefly in "The Polish National Defense Committee in America, 1912-1918" *Polish American Studies*, vol. XLIV, No. 2 (1987).

prehensible. Yet, at the same time, Polonia observers would make the same observations about Polish politics: confusing, faction-ridden. What had happened is that whereas Piłsudski had won in Poland, his political opponents had won in the United States. The two Polish communities, homeland and trans-Atlantic diaspora, were out-of-synchronization. This incompatibility helps explain why Polonia so rapidly lost interest in Polish affairs after 1919. Indeed, an even better topic for a historian than what Polonia did for Poland in 1914-1918 is what it didn't do in 1919-21¹⁴.

Historians have often cited the creation of an independent Poland as a dramatic event forcing Polonia to choose between returning or settling permanently in America. If they chose the latter - as virtually all did - they would then have to realize it meant they were choosing in a real sense not to be Polish and, concomitantly to at least start becoming American. This is a standard thesis and I do not quarrel with it; rather I add the following¹⁵. During the Great War Polonia and Poland had created different political constellations each presuming to speak for the future restored homeland, the winning factor in one locale proved to be the loser in the other. The result was a fundamental estrangement at the very beginning of the existence of free Poland in 1918-1919. Having gotten off on "the wrong foot" as it were, rapid disillusionment was more likely than not. As a result the tendency already apparent before 1918 became set - for the Poles Polonia is a milch cow to be financially tapped by an emotional appeal to ancestral patriotism - yet Polonia was to have no policy role in Polish affairs. For Polonia, the Poles are quaint but basically impossible to deal with. It is in some ways distasteful but perhaps not an unworkable arrangement - after all we still have it.

But what about Polonia's contribution to Polish independence? Let us look at it a bit more carefully by examining leadership. Paderewski was the leader of American Polonia, but he was no American Pole - he was an emigre, a temporary resident at best. The real leaders of American Polonia - were either ostracized by Paderewski - (like the KON on the left, or PNA leader Kazimierz Sypniewski on the right¹⁶) or reduced to the status of mere lieutenants, "flunky" would more accurately convey their significance. Paderewski used American Polonia, he didn't lead it - this becomes clear from a study of the interaction between the maestro and the leaders of Polonia. Paderewski jealously maintained all policy making powers within his own grasp. Polonia's role was to provide money, volunteers for the army, and otherwise perform obediently on command. But why would Paderewski be so autocratic in his captaincy of Polonia? His vanity and egomania provide part of the answer, but are alone insufficient. The answer is that Paderewski had enormous ambitions for himself and these ambitions were wedded to American Polonia. During World War I Paderewski wish-

¹⁴ Instructive in this context is Paderewski, the hero of American Polonia, whose political fortunes quickly deteriorated in Poland in 1919. He attempted a comeback, significantly by mobilizing the resources of American Polonia, c.f. M.B. Biskupski, "Paderewski, Polish Politics, and the Battle of Warsaw, 1920," Slavic Review, vol. 46 No.(1987).

¹⁵ Tadeusz Paleczny, Ewolucja ideologii i przemiany tożsamości narodowej Polonii w Stanach Zjednoczonych w latach 1870-1970 (Kraków, 1989), 175ff.

¹⁶ Sypniewski's Post-World War I career in Polonia politics is discussed in Pienkos, PNA, esp. 133ff., however regarding the war years vide Biskupski: "America and the Rebirth."

ed to move to headquarters of international Polish politics across the Atlantic, from the traditional 19th century haunts of Polish political emigres, to the United States. This was to be a vast coup d'état and, subtracting the colossal vanity and self-serving ambition of Paderewski, it made considerable sense. World War I was to show that the migration of power in the world had already reached the Atlantic shores, Europe was rapidly becoming the past, America the future. If there is such a sea-change in the geo-political realities of the world, should not a weak dependancy like Polish politics accept the inevitable? Paderewski's desire to make Washington the capitol of Polish political activity demonstrated that the maestro wanted to make himself the center of Polish activity, but it also reflected the fact that the power of the United States in international affairs was waxing, that of London and Paris waning. It was not Paderewski's fault that the United States failed to play the role that history - and Paderewski - had given it.¹⁷

Therefore when Polonia became a formal part of the international Polish political combination, when it affiliated itself with the European Poles in the fall of 1917, it was in reality surrendering its ambitions to lead Polish politics, it was settling for a subordinate role - to be led by emigre Poles in London and Paris. Arthur Walworth has called 1918 "America's Moment"; well, the same era was American Polonia's "moment", a time when it seemed possible to transfer the center of gravity of the Polish political world, when American Polonia had come of age as a community¹⁸. If World War I caused Polonia's national consciousness to reach a zenith, it was also the beginning of a gradual decline¹⁹. But note that even at its high-water mark Polonia was led by Poles and not Polonians. Does this seem odd? Perhaps it should not. After all Polonia coalesced to restore Poland not to serve Polonia. It was for many reasons logical that the leadership in such an enterprise be composed of Poles - those linked directly to Europe - and not hybrids like Polish-Americans.

The third and final theme I should like to examine more closely is American Polonia's relationship with the United States government and American society. It was in the interest of Paderewski and his faction in Polonia to represent themselves as peculiarly influential with the American government, with having gained extraordinarily important support for the Polish cause from the Administration. Here we have a nice balance - the maestro's influence with the American government depended on the degree to which he could speak for, or claim to speak for, Polonia, whereas his influence in Polonia reflected in good part Polonia's conviction that he had influence with the Americans. This was a dynamic process of mutual interaction which could either grow or decline but could not remain static. The result was an effort to bluff both sides. Washington came to believe that Paderewski and the political right in Polonia represented virtually all the Poles in America. It wasn't until near the end of the war in 1918 that Washington began to have doubts and by that time the larger problems of a peace settlement to

¹⁷ Vide Biskupski, Paderewski as Leader.

¹⁸ Vide Arthur Walworth, America's Moment 1918: American Diplomacy at the End of World War I (New York, 1977).

¹⁹ Paleczny, Ewolucja, 175-176.

“make the world safe for democracy” proved so enticing to Woodrow Wilson that the relatively minor matter of Polish political factions got lost in the shuffle. In sum, Paderewski was less than he seemed or, put another way, Polonia was more divided, more fractious than the Americans knew. Ironically, had they known the truth, they would have been less likely to support Polish political aspirations. After all, the real force behind American support for the resurrection of Polish independence was Wilson’s - and others - conviction that Paderewski represented a moral cause, a crime (the partitions) to be put right by American virtue. This type of simple moral mission appealed to American vanities and the moralizing inclinations of its president. Had Wilson suspected that Poland was a hornets’ nest of political difficulties, bitterly hostile factions with contrasting views of the future, it would have appealed far less to Wilson, and to the Americans in general.

The corollary is also true. Contrary to the constant celebration of Wilson, Colonel House and the United States in general by Paderewski and his Polonia allies, the Americans had never given any specific promises to return historic Poland to the map. Even the “Fourteen Points” only said that Poland “should” be re-created, not that it “must” be. Wilson, his State Department, his closest advisors, and quite probably American opinion in general, envisioned Poland as a small, unobtrusive state and were not even in favor of the restitution of Gdańsk.²⁰ This is not to say that American support was not important, but rather that it was far less sure and complete than Polonia wished to believe it to be. The bitter truth is that in 1914-1918, or 1939-45, or now, Poland matters very little to the United States, and Polonia’s ability to increase the magnitude of that concern was and is severely circumscribed.

What has the retrospective re-evolution yielded? At the very least, I trust, an indication that American Polonia’s role in the resurrection of Polish independence was a far more complex and fascinating phenomenon than is usually realized. And, that this is true because American Polonia is a far more complex, more fascinating historical creation. It is - or at least it was in 1914-18, the zenith of its history - neither the “fourth partition” of Poland, nor a segment of American society speaking broken-English. It was its own world, with its own internal dynamics and path of evolution. It was a community in flux which for one brief era played a role in the historic drama of Polish history at a decisive moment. American Polonia should not be conceived as a bit of Polish history played out *in partibus infidelium*, nor as a rather exotic locale for students of American urban or working class history. American Polonia has its own history comprising elements both Polish and American but from these sources fashioning its own characteristics and peculiarities²¹. This then is what purpose I have attempted to serve in my remarks - not so much to tell you about what Polonia did for Poland during the World War I era, but to use that era to demonstrate that Polonia deserves attention for what it was and, perhaps, amidst the ruins, still is.

²⁰ See M.B. Biskupski, “Re-creating Central Europe: The United State ‘Inquiry’ into the Future of Poland in 1918”. *The International History Review*, XII, No. 2 (May, 1990), 249-79.

²¹ Vide Pałeczny, *Ewolucja*, passim.

POLISH STUDIES

The Polish Studies Program at Central Connecticut State University is a unique endeavor. It contributes to the diversity and strength of Central as a University, and is the only active program of its kind in New England with roots both on the campus and in the community.

The Program, inaugurated in January, 1974, seeks to preserve and to stimulate an awareness of Poland's history and of her contribution to European and world civilization. The Program's core are courses in history, politics, culture, literature, language, and on the Polish American ethnic community. The Polish Heritage Collection in the University Library, numbering over 6,000 catalogued books and periodicals, and the Connecticut Polish American Archives and Manuscript Collection, a depository of research materials and memorabilia, supplement the course offerings.

The Program's activities also include evening and weekend lecture series and cultural events, including exhibits, the screening of motion pictures, concerts, and poetry readings. Educational materials for teachers are available from the Curriculum Laboratory in the University Library, and there is scholarship aid for students pursuing Polish Studies and for students of Polish American origin.

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Our ultimate objective is to endow a chair of Polish and Polish American Studies at CCSU.

For further information about the Program contact the Coordinator of Polish Studies, Central Connecticut State University, New Britain, CT 06050. (203) 827-7469.

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