

The Fiedorczyk Lecture

in Polish American Studies



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**THE FIEDORCZYK LECTURE
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“The Poles’ Other|The Poles as Other”

John J. Bukowczyk



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The immigrant parishes are central to the history of the Polish Diaspora in America, as are the clergy who ministered to the immigrants and their children. In Connecticut, where the first Polish parish, St. Stanislaus in Meriden, was erected in 1891, over 350 priests, both diocesan and religious, have served the state's Polish Catholics. Thirteen were elevated to the rank of domestic prelate, ten of whom were the second-generation children of the original immigrants. The second-generation monsignori were uniquely talented, highly educated, and skilled orators. Had they opted for secular careers, they would have succeeded as professionals, educators, businessmen and entrepreneurs, or as politicians. However, they elected to serve their communities by answering a call to the priesthood. As second-generation immigrant children, they bridged the transition of the immigrant communities into ethnic American enclaves. As witnesses, they recognized the importance of chronicling the history of this transformation. A triumvirate of Polish monsignori — Alphonse J. V. Fiedorczyk, John Paul Wodarski, and Louis B. Blecharczyk — not only shaped the evolution of second and third generation Polish Americans, but were also instrumental in encouraging the research about and the preservation of Connecticut's Polish history.

Alphonse Fiedorczyk, the son of Polish immigrants, was born in New Britain, Connecticut, on September 10, 1910. He attended Sacred Heart School in his native parish and later graduated from St. Mary's College at Orchard Lake, Michigan. He then studied at St. Bernard Seminary in Rochester, New York, and at the Seminaire de St. Brieuc in France, which he completed in 1935, the year of his ordination to the priesthood. Father Fiedorczyk returned to his home parish to serve as a curate for eight years. In 1943, he joined the U.S. Army Chaplain Corps. Lt. Fiedorczyk served as a chaplain with the 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 postwar tours in Germany. After 26 years of military service, he retired with the rank of Brigadier General. Msgr. Fiedorczyk returned to Connecticut to the Bridgeport Diocese, where he was subsequently assigned to Holy Name Parish in Stamford. He served fourteen years as pastor 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 viewed service to the Polish community as an integral part of his ministry and was deeply concerned with the preservation and promotion of the history of the Polish community in America. He endorsed the proposal of his friend, Msgr. John P. Wodarski, and encouraged the Association of Polish Priests of Connecticut to commission *Immigrant Pastor* by Prof. Daniel Buczek, an 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 to the Connecticut Polish American Archives at CCSU.

In 1987 the Rt. Rev. Msgr. Alphonse J. V. Fiedorczyk endowed the Polish Studies Program at Central Connecticut State University with an annual Lecture in Polish American Studies in memory of the Vincent Fiedorczyk Family. After a long illness, Msgr. Fiedorczyk passed away on November 16, 1987.

The publication of the *Fiedorczyk Lecture* for the permanent record is made possible with funds from the Stanislaw and Anna (Kobierska) Wodarski Endowment in the CCSU Foundation, Inc. The Endowment was established by Msgr. John P. Wodarski to help underwrite the publication of the *Fiedorczyk Lecture*. Wodarski was born in 1905 in Salem, Massachusetts. His family moved to Hartford in 1911. Wodarski studied for the priesthood at St. Thomas Seminary in Bloomfield, at the Polish Seminary of Ss. Cyril and Methodius at Orchard Lake, Michigan, and at the University of Fribourg, where he was ordained on July 12, 1931. During World War II he served as a chaplain in the 20th Armored Division and was awarded the Bronze Star for heroism on the field of battle. Upon returning to Connecticut, he became Director of the Hartford Diocese Catholic Youth Organization and later headed the Diocesan Office for Communication. From 1961 until his retirement in 1992 he was pastor of Holy Cross Parish in New Britain.

Active in the organization and promotion of the religious, cultural, and educational life of Connecticut's Polish community, he was acknowledged as "the pastor of the Poles." He was involved in Connecticut's commemoration of the Millennium, in

the remembrance of Polish Gentile survivors of the Holocaust, and in the efforts to establish a Polish Studies Program at then Central Connecticut State College. Wodarski, member emeritus of the University's Polish Studies Advisory Committee, shared with his close friend Msgr. Fiedorczyk a commitment to the preservation of the history of America's Polish Community. He supported the writing of professional histories of Connecticut's Polish parishes and the biography of Msgr. Bojnowski. A member of the Polish American Historical Association, Wodarski helped underwrite the translation and publication of Rev. Wacław Kruszcza's classic *A History of the Poles in America to 1908*. Wodarski has donated numerous books to the Polish Heritage Collection at the CCSU Library and was instrumental in arranging for the donation of the papers of the Association of Polish Priests in Connecticut to the University's Polish American Archive.

The third member of this Polish triumvirate, Msgr. Louis B. Blecharczyk, was a close friend of Fiedorczyk and Wodarski. Born in Akron, Ohio, in 1908, and raised in Connecticut, he was ordained at the University of Fribourg on February 7, 1935. He served in various Polish parishes before being appointed pastor of St. Joseph's in Norwich, where he served until his retirement in 1980. Msgr. Blecharczyk was a past president of the Association of Polish Priests of Connecticut and chairman of Connecticut's religious observance of the Millennium of Poland's Christianization. When Karol Cardinal Wojtyła of Cracow visited Connecticut in 1969, Msgr. Blecharczyk, on behalf of Connecticut Polonia, greeted the future Pope. Among the honors that Msgr. Blecharczyk received were the order of *Polonia Restituta* from the Polish Government-in-Exile (1969), the Gold Medal of the Diocese of Norwich (1975), the St. George Medal in recognition for his service to Catholic youth through the Boy Scouts of America (1975), and the Haller Swords Medal (1977) from the Polish Army Veterans, Post 132 of Norwich. Msgr. Blecharczyk died on September 21, 1992.

Msgr. Blecharczyk was an eloquent bilingual preacher much in demand throughout his priestly career, which spanned 57 years. He loved preaching the Gospel and the contributions of the Polish Church to the welfare of its citizens, especially during the years when Poland was partitioned. Msgr. Blecharczyk organized outstanding celebrations commemorating the Polish Constitution of May 3, 1791, and was, in the words of his friend Msgr. Wodarski, "never known to pass up an invitation to speak on Polish faith and patriotism."

Fiedorczyk, Wodarski, and Blecharczyk, their fellow monsignori — Stanislaw Musiel, Lucjan Bojnowski, Jan L. Ceppa, Wladyslaw Nowakowski, Franciszek Wladasz, George Bartlewski, Henry Dziadosz, Tadeusz Malinowski, Alfred Sienkiewicz, and Daniel Plocharczyk — and all the religious of every denomination who served the immigrants from the lands of the former Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth, are a unique part of the history of the Polish diaspora in Connecticut and in America.

John J. Bukowczyk is Professor of History at Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan. He received his Ph.D. from Harvard University (1980), and is a specialist in immigration and ethnic history. Professor Bukowczyk is the author of *And My Children Did Not Know Me: A History of the Polish-Americans* (1987), *Poletown: Urban Change in Industrial Detroit: The Making of Detroit's East Side, 1850-1990* (1991), and editor of *Polish Americans and Their History: Community, Culture, and Politics* (1996). Professor Bukowczyk's scholarship is widely recognized. He holds the Haiman Medal from the Polish American Historical Association (1994) and is also the recipient of the Association's Halecki (1987) and Swastek (1985) prizes. The American Historical Association presented Professor Bukowczyk with the William Gilbert Award for Best Article on Teaching History (1996). Most recently, Wayne State University awarded him the Charles Gershenson Distinguished Faculty Fellowship (1997-1998).

The Polish Studies Program is pleased to present Professor Bukowczyk's lecture on "The Poles' Other/The Poles as Other." Bukowczyk raises important issues about how Americans of Polish origin define themselves and perceive their history. In disseminating this lecture, we hope, as have Monsignors Fiedorczyk, Wodarski, and Blecharczyk, to promote the further study and preservation of the Polish community in America.

Finally, appreciation is extended to Ms Teri Szylobryt, a graduate assistant in the History Department, for her editorial assistance.

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“The Poles’ Other/’The Poles as Other”

Tenth Annual
Fiedorczyk Lecture in Polish American Studies
Central Connecticut State University
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John J. Bukowczyk
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Detroit, Michigan

I wish to speak today about historians, about the writing of history (specifically, Polish immigration and ethnic history), and about historical topics as well as historical silences.

One might usefully, although circuitously, begin such an excursion by recalling an admonition offered up by the great, late English historian, E. P. Thompson, which has exerted a profound impact upon the modern practice of a related historical sub-discipline, namely, working-class history. In the now famous preface to his monumental study, *The Making of the English Working Class*, Thompson wrote, not about ethnicity, but about class: "I do not see class as a 'structure', nor even as a 'category', but as something which in fact happens (and can be shown to have happened) in human relationships." In short, "class is a relationship, and not a thing."¹

To be sure, ethnicity is more of a "thing" than class is. It has connoted a set of values and attitudes; customs, practices, usages, and behaviors; identities, consciousness, and meaning which have had, in a sense, a life of their own and, as such, have been transmitted — "handed down" — across generations. In a more romantic — and, it might be argued, a more sinister incarnation — ethnicity also has implied immutable ties of race, of "blood." But it is the contention of this paper that Thompson's advice about class also can benefit our understanding of ethnicity. While ethnicity is much more of a "thing" than class is, ethnicity also is — or, at least, implies — a relationship, in fact, a set of relationships — between ethnic groups and the "larger" (or dominant) society, between ethnic groups and their homeland societies and cultures, between and among persons who consider themselves members of the same ethnic group, and finally, between ethnic group and ethnic group. Ethnic cultures, communities, and identities are not formed and forged in the isolation of a social vacuum; rather, they are the product of a complicated dialogue of social interactions.

So what have these insights about the relational nature of ethnicity (and class) given us? Thirty-five years after Thompson wrote about class *relationships*, workers are still largely absent from "business histories" while the treatment of employers — of

¹ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), pp. 9, 11

“capitalists” — is still largely attenuated in most “labor histories.” In recent years, social historians nonetheless have done a fine job in inserting a sense of class dynamics and process into the histories of labor and working-class communities they have written. On their part, immigration and ethnic historians also have made their own conceptual breakthroughs in understanding ethnicity and ethnic life as a series of relationships. Of more salience to us here, so have historians of the Polish immigrant experience.

The ethnic relationship which, for many years, perhaps most occupied the attention of scholars from both within and outside the group involved immigrant connections to the host or receiver society, that is to say, the United States. The single most powerful conceptual influence on this scholarship was Thomas and Znaniecki's study of immigrant “disorganization,” *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (1918 - 20), a sociological classic which, incidentally, did much to launch the celebrated “Chicago school” of sociology.² Much of the subsequent scholarship on Polish immigrants and American society was written under the powerful influence of the adjustment/acculturation/assimilation paradigm which Thomas and Znaniecki and other Chicago sociologists had developed. As a body of research, these works have been drawn together and critically discussed in Irwin Sanders and Ewa Morawska's fine bibliographical overview, *Polish-American Community Life: A Survey of Research* (1975).³ From these works we can extract a broad interpretive line that summarizes the immigrants' relationship with the society around them: they describe a progressive succession of ethnic identities — from Poles in America, to American Poles, to Polish-Americans (with the hyphen), to Polish Americans (without the hyphen), and finally to Americans of Polish descent.

The genre of scholarship examining immigrant relations with American society may be expanded to include studies that have addressed the relationship of immigrants (or immigrant institutions) with various American institutions. Most numerous and notable

² See John J. Bukowczyk, “Introduction,” 3-15; and Kathleen Neils Conzen, “Thomas and Znaniecki and the Historiography of American Immigration,” 16-25, in *The Poles in America*, special issue of the *Journal of American Ethnic History* 16, no. 1 (Fall 1996).

³ Irwin T. Sanders and Ewa Morawska, *Polish-American Community Life: A Survey of Research*, Community Sociology Monograph Series, vol. 2 (n.p.: Community Sociology Training Program, Department of Sociology, Boston University, and Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences in America, 1975).

among these have involved immigrants and the Roman Catholic Church. Just as Thomas and Znanieki's work can be seen to have begun serious study of immigrant relations with the larger American society, it was the monumental investigation of Polish parishes in America, Rev. Wacław Kruszką's *Historia Polska w Ameryce [Polish History in America] (1905 - 1908)*⁴ (now made more accessible to English-speaking audience in a new translation edited by James S. Pula⁵), which framed the field for subsequent study of Polish immigrants and the American Church. Kruszką, of course, aimed to demonstrate the religious and social maturity of American Polonia in order to advance the then ongoing campaign for Polish equality in the Church hierarchy in America (równouprawienie). In doing so, Kruszką advanced an integrationist position which, it can be said, largely harmonized with the assimilationist paradigm.

While this scholarship certainly did examine the relational aspects of the Polish-American ethnic experience vis-à-vis the larger American society, except for a few recent studies,⁶ to date it has not looked at the *racial* dimension of that relationship, specifically (as might be said today), the "otherness" of the Poles in a nativistic American society whose ranks were divided, in the parlance of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, between "'white' men and foreigners."⁷ This remains a gaping hole in both group and so-called "mainstream" scholarship. But, in so far as this body of work has located the Poles in the master narrative in American history (and, secondarily, the master narrative in American Roman Catholic Church history), from a historiographical standpoint it nonetheless arguably has been the most significant of the strands of inquiry I shall discuss today.

But from the group's own perspective, less significant were these works on assimilation than work which bore on the far more salient relationship of Polish immigrants (and ethnics) to their

⁴ Wacław Kruszką, *Historia Polska w Ameryce: Początek, wzrost i rozwój dziejowy osad polskich w Ameryce Północnej (1901-1904)*; Milwaukee, Wisc.: Wydawn. "Kuryer Polski," 1905-1907).

⁵ Wacław Kruszką, *A History of the Poles in America to 1908*, ed. James S. Pula, tr. Krystyna Jankowski, 4 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1993, 1994, 1998, with vol. 4 forthcoming).

⁶ See, for example, Thomas S. Gladsky, *Princes, Peasants, and Other Polish Selves: Ethnicity in American Literature* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992).

⁷ John A. Fitch, "The Explosion at Bayonne," *The Survey* (October 21, 1916), 62, quoted in John J. Bukowczyk, "The Transformation of Working-Class Ethnicity: Corporate Control, Americanization, and the Polish Immigrant Middle Class in Bayonne, New Jersey, 1915-1925," *Labor History* 25, no. 1 (Winter 1984): 69.

Polish homeland: for many of them, this constituted the core of their Polish ethnic identity. On the one hand this topic literally involved Polonia's relationship, at first, to the Polish nationalist movement and, after its success, to a re-established united, sovereign, independent Poland. But during the long period of the partitions, when the Polish nation-state had been submerged, the Polish immigrants' "homeland" consisted of a Polish Nation which was part cultural formation, part idea, and part the social and cultural community — Polonia — which immigrant Poles had constructed here, in what came to be known as Poland's "fourth partition." Accordingly, the scholarship on the relationship of Poles to their "homeland" is bifurcated. Much of it centered around Polish nationalist politics in the immigrant organizations and enclaves in America. But a lot also addressed cultural matters and issues, like language maintenance, cultural survival, folkways, organizational life, parish formation, and the like. Embedded in this body of work was a distinct interpretive line — actually two such lines. First, on the "homeland" and cultural aspects of Polish-American ethnic identity, scholars took note of the debates that raged in immigrant enclaves over the fundamental nature — secular or religious — of "Polishness." This body of work gave rise to what we might think of as the grand, formative synthesis which defined the core of immigrant ethnic identity as co-equally Polish *and* Roman Catholic. This outcome, discussed by many scholars before and since, perhaps received its most cogent statement in historian Victor Greene's seminal political study (with the revealing title), *For God and Country*.⁸ This Polish Roman Catholic construction of Polish-American ethnic identity, it might be noted in passing, fits well into the formulation of ethnicity throughout immigrant America, as described by historian Timothy Smith, namely, "the redefinition of ethnic boundaries in religious terms" and the attendant construction of ethnicity here as, in fact, "ethno-religion."⁹ Yet this body of work on the "homeland" and cultural aspects of Polish-American ethnicity also offered up a second conclusion which challenged the validity of the progressive assimilation paradigm both as an empirically accurate description and as normatively desirable position. In its place, this strand of scholarship argued

⁸ Victor Greene, *For God and Country: The Rise of Polish and Lithuanian Ethnic Consciousness in America, 1860-1910* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1975).

⁹ Timothy L. Smith, "Religion and Ethnicity in America," *American Historical Review* 83, no. 5 (December 1978): 1155-1185, quote: 1168.

that, for hyphenate “ethnic Americans” like the Poles, “hyphens could connect as well as divide.”¹⁰ Perhaps one therefore can say these words merely represent the “flip side” of assimilation, but I think the theoretical literature which influenced them, their assumptions and premises, the questions they posed, and what one might call their normative “vision” of ethnicity as a distinct and separate identity, as well, a positive social and cultural good, and their embrace of “cultural pluralism” (rather than assimilation) as a model of what America could—and *should*—become distinguishes these homeland-oriented works as a distinct genre in their own right.

Polonia’s nationalist struggles of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century both yielded an ethno-religious identity — Polish and Roman Catholic — and located Polish-Americans within the American society and polity, but we must not let the routinization of these relationships conceal Polonia’s serious internal stresses and strains whose resolution formed the dark underside of Polish ethnic identity. Poles, of course, had encountered “otherness” in their relationship with the “Americans” whom they met in the new world they had entered, but in forging an ethnic identity here, they also encountered “otherness” within Polonia itself. In fact, it would be more accurate to say not that they “encountered” otherness, but that they “defined” and “constructed” it. In deciding who amongst themselves was not a “true Pole,” Poles decided who amongst them was. By proscribing some of their potential countrymen and co-nationals from authentic group membership, they defined and reinforced the boundaries of religion, community, nationality, and ethnic identity. In fact, such acts of exclusion were both inextricable from and essential to the process of inclusion, that is to say, of ethnic group definition and formation: in short, we are what we are not/what we are not defines who we are.

In recovering and examining the various relationships that have defined Polish-American ethnicity, group scholars have been slower and more circumspect about the study of how Poles interacted with and related to other Poles who, at least in the romantic and racialized national ideal, *should* have been their own “blood.” The very existence of intragroup conflict gave lie to the myth of the one, true Polish Nation and thus remained a kind of dirty secret, not spoken

¹⁰ John J. Bukowczyk, *And My Children Did Not Know Me: A History of the Polish-Americans* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 70.

of by filiopietistic group writers whose (actually rather noble) political and ideological *raison-d'être* was to guard the interests of Poland and Polonia and protect the reputation of what they knew to be their fractious, contentious co-nationals from their enemies and detractors whom they believed were legion. It therefore registers as a signal accomplishment, when historians of the Polish experience in America eventually began, in the 1960s, candidly and objectively to examine what have been arguably the two major internal divisions which ruptured the putative unity of Polonia and to incorporate these narrative strands into the history of Polish America.

The first of these, which by now has been rather fully integrated into the history of Polonia, involves the complicated and painful story of the independentist and nationalist controversies which roiled many a Polish Roman Catholic parish during the heyday of mass migration and, more notably, the establishment of the Polish National Catholic Church, to date still the most significant schism within the Roman Catholic Church in the United States. Many of us still remember the still recent time when historians writing in the Roman Catholic scholarly tradition or influenced by it refused to call Bishop Hodur's church by the name it called itself — the Polish National *Catholic* Church (PNCC) — calling it instead the Polish *National* Church, that is to say, the designation, preferred by partisan Roman Catholic clerical writers like historian Rev. Miecislaus Madaj,¹¹ which meant to challenge its religious legitimacy. Raised up in a religiously and ethnically more heterogenous world than Father Madaj's and in generally more secular times, I myself have found it a bit difficult to understand — on a deep, emotional level — how intensely felt this religious rift was for persons like himself and for his Polish National Catholic counterparts. In retrospect, it seems to me now that both believed that at stake was the very soul of Polonia and the historic destiny of the Polish Nation. Most of my own Polish-American contemporaries give scant thought to such things. A theoretically informed study of the independentist and schismatic movements, as well, the PNCC, remains to be written, but existing scholarship nonetheless has established their clear significance among the pantheon of relationships that have defined Polish-American identity.

¹¹ Rev. Madaj was longtime archivist of the Chicago Roman Catholic Archdiocese and executive secretary of the Polish American Historical Association.

Polonia's second great internal division involving relationships between Poles and other Poles and, in turn, Polish ethnic identity centered around Cold War politics and what to this day has remained a virtually invisible undercurrent in Polonian discourse, the taboo symbol of ethnic treason during a period when the Soviet Union had made Poland into a "satellite" and the Poles into a "captive people." I am, of course, referring to the Polish-American left, and in the years from World War Two to the present, perhaps more commonly and derisively known as the "pro-Communist" Poles. In the same way that mention of Polish National Catholics in largely Roman Catholic, largely devout audiences gave rise to awkward discomfort and disapprobation, the courageous mention now of this sensitive topic well might fire passion among listeners whose relatives — or who themselves — knew Communism in Poland first-hand. Alternately, it might also prompt the disclaimer of silence and forgetting — that there were no Communists in our patriotic Polish America. But influenced by the rise of the so-called "new social history" of the 1960s and 1970s — or, as it was democratically characterized, "history from the bottom up" — Polonia's scholars have begun now to recover the hidden left-wing strands than ran like the proverbial red thread through the Polish-American past and to record the activities and influences — and the mere presence! — of Polonia's diverse radicals, socialists, anarchists, labor organizers, agitators, and in most recent times, Communists and "fellow travelers." Thus we now have — or soon will have — provocative studies of Anton Czolgosz, President McKinley's anarchist assassin; of the Polish socialist movement during the turn of the century; and Rev. Stanislaus Orlemanski, founder of the pro-Soviet Kosciuszko Polish Patriotic League in 1943.¹² Together, these studies of ideological and religious schism have underscored the complicated relationship among Poles and between Poles and "Polishness," the diversity of immigrant and ethnic understandings of Polish-American identity, and its nature as hotly contested cultural and political terrain.

There was, however, a third set of intra-ethnic relationships which bore on the maintenance of ethnic solidarities and the construction and understanding of Polish-American ethnicity. These involved the distinctions among the Poles who made up the dif-

¹² These topics have been worked on by, respectively, William G. Falkowski, Mary Cygan, and Robert Szymczak.

ferent waves of Polish emigration. Since the earliest days of the emigration, Poles of different classes constructed ethnic identity and Polish culture differently, but as class distinctions had been embedded in Polish society and, accordingly, in “traditional” Polish culture, the construction of Polish-American ethnicity accommodated — and incorporated — these dialectically into (if one can coin a word) a “classed” whole. The earliest construction of Polish-American ethnicity — or, as it then was called (and differently nuanced), “nationality” — had to cope with cultural differences among Poles from Poland’s three partitions — the Prussian Poles, Russian Poles, and Galicians — as well, the regional sub-groups — Mazurians, Kashubes, Górali — who, but for what one might call the “accident” of history, themselves might have succeeded in constructing separate nationalities and forming nation-states of their own, as we see some of the ethnic minorities previously submerged within the former Soviet Union have done (and, indeed, are doing) since the collapse of the Soviet system. How the existence of regional sub-groupings might have affected the construction of Polish-American ethnicity has yet to receive its due in the scholarly literature. Since the era of the mass peasant migrations, meanwhile, additional waves of Polish immigrants also have arrived and some of these, too, have been studied. The tensions between the immigrants and ethnic descendants of the peasant migrations “for bread” of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and the post-WWII wave of so-called “displaced persons” (political émigrés, veterans, former prisoners, and those literally displaced by wartime invasions and destruction and postwar boundary changes) have begun to be studied.¹³ More intra-ethnic difference was introduced by later immigration waves: a new Polish influx after the 1965 liberalization of U.S. immigration law and the late 1960s repression in Poland undertaken by authorities there, the Solidarity-era political émigrés, and the post-Solidarity cohort of economic immigrants. Scholars have begun to study these newcomers, with their different historical memory and experiences, all of whom challenged Old Polonia’s understandings of Poland and “Polishness.”¹⁴

¹³ See, for example, Bukowczyk, *And My Children*, 93-96; Anna D. Jaroszyńska-Kirchmann, “Displaced Persons, Émigrés, Refugees, and Other Polish Immigrants: World War II Through the Solidarity Era,” in *Polish Americans and Their History: Community, Culture, and Politics*, ed. John J. Bukowczyk (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996), 152-179.

¹⁴ See Mary Patrice Erdmans, *Opposite Poles: Immigrants and Ethnicity in Polish Chicago, 1976-1990* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998); Erdmans, “Recent Political

While the subsequent history of Polonia has been the familiar history of its “priests and people,” its organizations and associations, its family, community, and work life, it would be plausible to argue that Polonia’s history — the history by which Poles (and Polish Americans) have demarcated and defined themselves — has been the story of Polonia’s relationship with its various “others” — with Polish National Catholics, with socialists and Communists, with the Poles from the various immigration waves, but, finally and perhaps most tellingly, also with the other ethnic groups (and their members) that Poles have encountered, first, in Poland and, then, in the American villages, towns, and city neighborhoods in which they settled here. These contacts and connections, above all, have been least studied among all of the various relationships by which and through which Polish Americans have constructed, delimited, and understood their ethnic identity, their “ethnicity.”¹⁵ It puzzles me why this has been the case, although one can attempt some informed speculations — about simply how difficult it is to study more than a single ethnic group at a time; about how Poles had wanted to leave ethnic tensions behind them, about how ethnic conflict was seen (rather hypocritically) as illegitimate in a democratic United States; about how connections with and, therefore by implication, the history of other ethnic groups simply might not have been seen (wrongfully, I think) as salient to Polish-American community formation; or (from the perspective of amateur psychology) about how unsettling it might have been to the Poles to be compelled by circumstance to “live amongst strangers” whom the Polish immigrants therefore rendered invisible. This rather silent aspect of the Poles’ relationship to their ethnic “others” — and thus to themselves — merits a specialized study in its own right.

In immigrant America, Poles commingled with diverse ethnic

Action on Behalf of Poland: The Interrelationships among Polonia’s Cohorts, 1978-1990,” in Helena Znaniecka Lopata, *Polish Americans*, 2d rev. ed. (1976; New Brunswick, N.J., and London: Transaction, 1994), 213-242.

¹⁵ Among the few works that have ventured into this area are Greene, *For God and Country* (on Poles and Lithuanians); Joseph Parot, “Ethnic versus Black Metropolis: The Origins of Polish-Black Housing Tensions in Chicago,” *Polish American Studies* 29, nos. 1-2 (Spring-Autumn 1972): 5-33; Thaddeus C. Radzialowski, “Ethnic Conflict and the Polish Americans of Detroit, 1921-42,” in *The Polish Presence in Canada and America*, ed. Frank Renkiewicz (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1982), 195-207 (on Poles and African Americans); Dominic A. Pacyga, “To Live Amongst Strangers: Poles and Their Neighbors in Industrial Chicago, 1865-1930,” *The Poles in America*, special issue of *Journal of American Ethnic History* 16, no. 1 (Fall 1996): 55-73 (on Poles and various groups). Relations with Germans and Irish also received some attention in the various studies of religious independentism, lay trusteeism, schism, etc.

ethnic groups — Irish, Germans, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, Italians, African Americans, etc. — but of all the various ethnic “others” whom they encountered within and on the physical or social outskirts of their communities, their most fundamental and salient “other,” the quintessential counterpoint to the Polish experience, has been “the Jews”; and their most profound, difficult, problematical, textured, rich, nuanced, and symbolic interethnic relationship — perhaps mutually so — has been the relationship between Polish Catholics and Polish Jews (or as it is more commonly and revealingly rendered, Catholic *Poles* and Polish *Jews*) both in the history of Poland and in the history of Polish America.

Since the nineteenth century, the migration stream that drew population from the multi-ethnic lands of the Old Polish and Lithuanian Commonwealth included both ethnic Poles as well as Jews. Their separate yet connected histories together in the “Old Country,” as well, the divergent development of their respective communities in immigrant America together have underscored the importance of the “other” for the definition of Polish — and arguably also Jewish — nationality for two nascent peoples, resident in a non-country or in a diaspora, the one seeking to “resurrect” a mythic Polish Nation by welding *pan* and peasant, the other seeking a Zionist homeland in the Pale or in Palestine. The political formlessness of the multi-ethnic Polish partitions in an era of resurgent nationalisms, all this set within the colonial context of late nineteenth-century Great Power imperialism, have made the Polish/Jewish and Jewish/Polish relationship an especially complicated one. From the Polish nationalist perspective, Poland’s Jews in the first instance posed a political problem perhaps little different from that posed by the regional or other ethnic distinctions which divided the Commonwealth’s population. But the racial construction of “the Polish Nation,” that is, Polish nationhood, which gained ideological and political ground among many Poles, won over diaspora Polonia, and resonated with racialized nationalisms on the rise throughout Europe during the era, erected an impermeable barrier between now *racial* Poles and Polish Jews, their historical and therefore most salient racial “other.” The twentieth-century history of Poles and Jews that unfolded subsequently, after the rise of the Nazis, further complicated their relationship to each other and to “Polishness” and Polish ethnic identity.

There has developed a broad body of historical literature

(much of it written by Jewish scholars) on the history of Jews in Poland. The titles and sub-titles of some of these volumes are indicative of the prevailing narrative within this scholarly tradition: "stranger in our midst," "on the edge of destruction," "bondage to the dead," "a failed brotherhood."¹⁶ Several fine works also have appeared recently that open new lines of inquiry into the Polish/Jewish relationship in Poland. Among these, Matthew Frye Jacobson has undertaken a comparative examination of Polish and Jewish (and Irish) "diasporic" nationalisms, Richard Lukas has written on ethnic Polish losses in the Holocaust, and Eva Hoffman has given us — Poles and Jews — a sensitively drawn, nuanced study of Polish/Jewish relations in eastern Poland in her 1997 book, *Shtetl: The Life and Death of a Small Town and the World of Polish Jews*.¹⁷ Interest in Poland's Jewish history and culture among Roman Catholic Poles apparently is, at present, perhaps at an all-time high, suggesting that more pathbreaking work of this kind should be forthcoming in the near future.¹⁸

By contrast, the integration of Polish *Jewish* immigration history into Polish-American history and the objective, candid examination of the critical Polish/Jewish relationship vis-à-vis "Polishness" and Polish-American ethnicity have proceeded much more slowly and much less far to date. In recent years, there has been, of course, the fine comparative study by historian Barbara Stern Burstin, *After the Holocaust: The Migration of Polish Jews and Christians to Pittsburgh*, which won the 1990 Oscar Halecki

¹⁶ See, for example, Celia S. Heller, *On the Edge of Destruction: Jews of Poland between the Two World Wars* (1977; Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994); *The Jews in Poland*, ed. Chimen Abramski, Maciej Jachimczyk, and Antony Polonsky (1986; New York and Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987); *The Jews of Poland Between Two World Wars*, ed. Yisrael Gutman, Ezra Mendelsohn, Jehuda Reinharz, and Chone Schmeruk (Hanover, N.H., and London: Brandeis University Press, published by the University Press of New England, 1989); Hillel Levine, *Economic Origins of Antisemitism: Poland and Its Jews in the Early Modern Period* (New Haven, Conn., and London: Yale University Press, 1991); Magdalena Opalski and Israel Bartal, *Poles and Jews: A Failed Brotherhood* (Hanover, N.H., and London: Brandeis University Press, published by the University Press of New England, 1992); Gershon David Hundert, *The Jews in a Polish Private Town: The Case of Opatów in the Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992); *Stranger in Our Midst: Images of the Jew in Polish Literature*, ed. Harold B. Segal (Ithaca, N.Y., and London: Cornell University Press, 1996); Michael C. Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1997).

¹⁷ Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Special Sorrows: The Diasporic Imagination of Irish, Polish, and Jewish Immigrants in the United States* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1995); Richard C. Lukas, *The Forgotten Holocaust: The Poles under German Occupation, 1939-1944* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1986); Eva Hoffman, *Shtetl: The Life and Death of a Small Town and the World of Polish Jews* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997).

¹⁸ See Ian Buruma, "Poland's New Jewish Question," *New York Times Magazine* (August 3, 1997), sec. 6, 34-41, 55.

Award (for best book on the Polish experience in the United States) presented by the Polish American Historical Association (PAHA).¹⁹ But little other like work has surrounded it. In order to mark the fiftieth anniversary of PAHA, in 1990 I myself had the privilege of organizing first a conference, then a special issue of the *Journal of American Ethnic History (JAEH)* on "The Poles in America," and finally also a volume of historiographical and synthetic essays entitled *Polish Americans and Their History: Community, Culture, and Politics*, published in 1996 by the University of Pittsburgh Press (in which, incidentally, our gracious host, Prof. Stanislaus Blejwas, contributed an outstanding essay on the development of Polish-American politics).²⁰ Of the various objectives this project attempted, in hindsight, it appears to me that a central one — and its signal accomplishment — was "integrating the history of Poland's Jewish emigrants into a Polish-American history writing that hitherto has focused almost singularly on Poles from the Roman Catholic tradition and its offshoots."²¹ The project yielded a probing *JAEH* article by Dominic Pacyga, entitled "To Live Amongst Strangers," much of which focused on Polish/Jewish frictions in industrial Chicago.²² The Pittsburgh volume also included a pathbreaking piece on "Jewish Emigration from Poland Before World War II," written by Daniel Stone (who, in fact, was recruited to the project by Prof. Blejwas),²³ which one reviewer has lauded as an effort "to invent the field of Polish-American-Jewish history."²⁴

As the integration of the Polish National Catholics into the Polish-American historical narrative encountered resistance in mainstream scholarly circles within Polonia, so too some criticism has fallen upon this integrative and holistic approach, if not specifically upon our effort to incorporate the Jewish strand into Polish-American history writing. An unsigned note in *The Sarma-*

¹⁹ Barbara Stern Burstin, *After the Holocaust: The Migration of Polish Jews and Christians to Pittsburgh* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989).

²⁰ Stanislaus A. Blejwas, "Polonia and Politics," in *Polish Americans*, ed. Bukowczyk, 121-151.

²¹ Bukowczyk, "Preface," in *Polish Americans*, ed. Bukowczyk, x.

²² *Supra*, note 15.

²³ Daniel Stone, "Jewish Emigration from Poland Before World War II," in *Polish Americans*, ed. Bukowczyk, 93-120.

²⁴ Patricia A. Gajda, "Polish Americans and Their History: Community, Culture, and Politics," *Sarmatian Review* 18, no. 2 (April 1998): 541.

tian Review (SR) castigated the “perspective” of our project as not a Polish one, but that of an unspecified “Other,” charging that it had “adopt[ed] the terms of discourse imposed on Polish Americans from the outside. . . .” “[A]nti-colonialist discourse has provided us with better tools for self-assertion,” the writer observed: “for Polish Catholics the rebirth of their independent homeland was a source of great joy and pride.”²⁵

The colonial analogy drawn by the anonymous SR writer is well made: the Poles, the Irish, the Jews, the Arabs, the Vietnamese, the Mexican Americans, and many sub-Saharan Black Africans, though with varying specifics, have shared broad, common nationalist themes rooted in colonial, neo-colonialist, and imperialist relationships of political dependency, class exploitation, and foreign domination. Yet it is a romantic wish and revanchist enterprise to imagine that post-World War Two Polish-American writers, scholars, and intellectuals might embrace a “purely Polish” perspective or that such a perspective is even now possible in a post-modern world wherein, “multiculturalism” notwithstanding, global capitalist economics and post-industrial mass culture rather thoroughly have hybridized or homogenized the ethnic specificities of both “whites” as well as “peoples of color” and, specifically, wherein Polish Americans in large measure have been subsumed in the category “white European,” many of them embracing an identity of “whiteness” as a kind of social promotion. For that matter, it is difficult to credit the assertion by the SR writer of the fiction of a unitary set of “Polish interests” that the perspective of a demonized “Other” somehow betrays. Here I do *not* mean to invoke the (rather self-deprecatve) stereotype: “where there are ten Poles, there are eleven opinions.” Rather, ideological, political, economic, religious, class, and other differences among Poles — and Polish Americans — have inclined them to see Poland’s, Polonia’s, and their own interests differently and, influenced by their own democratic and egalitarian ethnic traditions, they openly have expressed and vigorously have defended their differing views.

At base, the SR formulation of Poland and, by implication, Polish-American ethnic identity reprises the nineteenth-century na-

²⁵ “*Polish Americans and Their History: Community, Culture, and Politics*,” *Sarmatian Review* 17, no. 2 (April 1997): 462-463.

tionalist position on the nature of “Polishness” — religious, ideological, and, perhaps, racial. Other group scholars likewise have invoked these elements to answer the question: What is a Polish-American?²⁶ But in doing so, these writers and scholars have cultivated a selective amnesia about Poland’s nationalist heritage. The wellspring of Poland’s modern nationalist and anti-colonialist struggle taught by *our* history lies not (or not exclusively) in the religious vision of Wałęsa, Wyszynski, and Wojtyła or, before them, Paderewski, Haller, and Dmowski, nor even in the burning messianism of Mickiewicz, Krasinski, and Słowacki, but in the secular, revolutionary patriotism of Tadeusz Kościuszko and the Constitution of the Third of May. Both envisioned an encompassing, tolerant Polish “citizenship,” a secular Polish “nationality,” and a liberal, pluralistic, democratic Polish state. In America, the secular vision found expression in the early nationalist position of the Polish National Alliance. Interestingly, by 1945 the founders of the Polish American Historical Association also established a membership policy which made that venerable scholarly body, whose founding the aforementioned volume commemorates, an ethnically inclusive or neutral professional scholarly organization, “not limited to persons of Polish descent,” and therefore pointedly *not* an “ethnic” organization.²⁷

If we find it humane, valuable, and useful to deracialize “Polishness” (as well, other ethnicities) and to renegotiate Polish-American identity and ethnicity along inclusive civic rather than exclusionary religious, ideological, or biological lines, it is left for us not only to examine the manifold relationships by which Polish-American ethnic identity has been defined or to incorporate the history of Polonia’s various “others” into a Polish-American historical narrative but, in doing so, also to acknowledge and morally and intellectually engage (if I might borrow from that great English-language writer of Polish extraction, Joseph Conrad-Korzeniowski) the “heart of darkness” in the history of the Poles’ relationship with their single most salient “other,” the “heart of darkness” in Polish/Jewish relations. I am, of course, referring to what is Polonia’s most taboo of subjects: Polish anti-Semitism.

²⁶ For example, historian James S. Pula identifies three “recurring themes of the Polish experience in America: an affection and concern for their ancestral homeland, a deep religious faith, and a sense of shared cultural values.” See Pula, *Polish Americans: An Ethnic Community* (New York: Twayne, 1995), 1.

²⁷ Inside back cover, *Polish-American Studies* 2, nos. 1-2 (January-June 1945).

I do not believe, as it has been rather hatefully — or hurtfully — written (alas, I do not recall where), that the Poles take in their anti-Semitism “with their mothers’ milk”; but however it might be explained away, I also do not believe that so many Jewish writers all could err completely in their impression about the state of Polish/Jewish relations in this regard.

Polish-Americans have written much (often defensively, apologetically, accusatorially) about Polish/Jewish relations; no less, the editor of the *Sarmatian Review* rightly still could pronounce the topic “much understudied.” [italics added]²⁸ Indeed, they have done well to have defended the ethnic group from those false allegations of antisemitism that have appeared and to have recalled a Polish historical record in which Poles and Jews shared a country and, in some measure, a culture; in which both were co-victims of the Nazis (a point well made by Rev. John T. Pawlikowski, O.S.M., in a previous Fiedorczyk Lecture (1994);²⁹ and in which many Christian Poles died defending their Jewish “others,” their Jewish brothers who were, variously, neighbors, workmates, countrymen and countrywomen, and often comrades-in-arms. But no less do Polish-American scholars, writers, intellectuals, and the like bear the solemn responsibility to acknowledge and probe — critically, candidly, and objectively — anti-semitic elements and strands in Polish history and in the Polish American experience.

But it does not stop here. It is also not possible that so many Polish-American writers could have been so utterly and completely mistaken in their impression that, in America, Polish-Americans frequently have encountered anti-Polish attitudes, perhaps analogously racial in content, in some members of the Jewish-American community. (And I certainly do *not* include among these criticism of Polish Americans for a nagging refusal to acknowledge anti-Semitism in Poland or in the Polish-American community, which refusal is morally repugnant and intellectually indefensible.) By turn, therefore, the responsibility also falls upon scholars of the Jewish experience in America, perhaps especially those themselves of Jewish background, to acknowledge and critically, candidly, and objectively investigate those anti-Polish racial attitudes

²⁸ [Ewa M. Thompson], “From the Editor,” *Sarmatian Review* 18, no. 2 (April 1998): 526.

²⁹ Rev. John T. Pawlikowski, O.S.M., “Polish Americans and the Holocaust,” in “*Perspectives in Polish History*,” ed. Stanislaus A. Blejwas, Occasional Papers in Polish and Polish American Studies, no. 1 (New Britain: Central Connecticut State University, 1996).

which, perhaps, some of us have encountered in our own personal or professional lives. In my estimation, at the present time anti-Polish attitudes among Jewish Americans may be a more consequential problem than anti-Jewish attitudes among Polish Americans, not because of greater frequency or intensity (neither of which is necessarily the case), but rather because, in the contemporary American social context, Polish Americans as an ethnic group have less social prestige and are unquestionably less advantaged or socially or culturally influential than their Jewish American counterpart. But I also should note in passing, first, that it does not seem to me that Polish Americans have been nearly so salient for Jewish-Americans as Jewish Americans have been salient for Polish Americans; and, second, that except in their historical dimensions (which, to be sure, have been both fairly recent and very considerable), neither set of attitudes (anti-semitic attitudes among Polish Americans or anti-Polish attitudes among Jewish Americans) ranks as the kind of major contemporary American social problem or issue as, say, anti-Black racism in American society or neo-Nazi anti-semitic provocations (in which, judging by the publications of, for example, the Southern Poverty Law Center which heroically has tracked such acts, Polish Americans have taken no or, at worst, virtually no part).

As Eva Hoffman gracefully has shown of Polish-Jewish relations in Poland, it seems to me that a sensitively drawn study of Polish/Jewish, Jewish/Polish relations in the ethnic histories of both communities will reveal a story much more complicated than a saga of mutual animosity or hostility. I think the work of historian Daniel Stone suggests the same. From the perspective of a scholar who has studied inter-ethnic relations, which is to say, by definition a "border-crosser," I myself think that, amidst the anti-Polish or anti-Semitic moments, often long moments, in the relations between Polish Americans and Jewish Americans which have borne so formative an influence on, at least, Polish-American ethnicity and ethnic identity, one can see much warmth, comfortable familiarity, and cultural hybridization and interchange that have been a rather unseen and unheard inter-group leitmotif. Some portion (and certainly not all) of what has passed for, been received as, and perhaps became racial anti-Semitism in the Polish-American community has, in fact, been or started as envy, defensiveness, bruised feelings, wounded pride, one might even say self-hatred

directed outward. As scholars (of Polish or Jewish background), it behooves us all to try to understand how Polish and Jewish perceptions, expressions, behaviors, and cultural interpretations and translations have informed, influenced, overdetermined, channeled, or lent meaning to the Polish/Jewish and Jewish/Polish encounter in both the Old World as well as in immigrant and ethnic America. This would interconnect and enrich both ethnic histories. Only by studying these relationships in their entirety would we approach a complete history of Polonia.

I wish to applaud Professor Blejwas and our many other colleagues in Polish-American historical circles who courageously have confronted these kinds of issues during the course of their scholarly research, teaching, and professional activities and, in doing so, have given us all a wise model to emulate.

Thank you.*

* A later version of this lecture appeared as "Polish Americans, Ethnicity, and Otherness," *The Polish Review*, XLIII, No. 3 (1998), 299-313.

Polish and Polish American Studies

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