

Halina Parafianowicz

Wydział Historyczno-Socjologiczny
Uniwersytet w Białymstoku

Woodrow Wilson and Poland: Between Myth and Reality. Some Reflections

The purpose of the article is to address the issue of Woodrow Wilson's policy towards Poland and his legend as seen from the perspective of the one hundred year anniversary of his contribution to the reality of European politics. My primary aim is to combine Wilson's myth based on his idealism, charisma, and personal contribution to the revival of the Polish state, with some elements of the old myth of America as a "promised land" and a "land of freedom and democracy", and a new one – a growing fascination with America that widely spread through Poland and Central Europe after WWI.

Since the mid-19th century America had become a dreamland for many Europeans. After the first huge wave of so-called "old immigration" in the last decades of the 19th century, the next one began – a "new immigration", predominantly from East-Central Europe, including also people from partitioned Poland. 19th century published texts on travel to and life in the United States, the letters of immigrants, and their financial support for families in the homeland by sending greatly valued dollars, strongly influenced the image of America as the "promised land", a country of liberty, freedom, and opportunity for all newcomers. For decades to come a positive and sometimes downright legendary image of America was strengthened by the Polish Americans (so-called Polonia) who had escaped poverty and oppression by their neighbors and settled in the United States. They played quite an active role in maintaining and circulating the image of America.¹

The outbreak of WWI had raised some expectations and the hopes of Poles and other oppressed nations in East-Central Europe for their independence. Many leaders of Polonia lobbied President Wilson and his close associates, above all

¹ See, H. Parafianowicz, *American Exceptionalism: The American Dream and the Americanization of East-Central Europe*, [in:] *World and Global History. Research and Teaching. A CLIOH-WORLD Reader*, ed. by Seija Jalagin, Susanna Tavera, Andrew Dilley, Pisa 2011, pp. 107–121.

Colonel Edward M. House, on behalf of Polish independence. The most significant role was played by Ignacy Paderewski, the great musician, an expressive and emotional speaker very active on behalf of his homeland oppressed by its neighbors. During his concerts at the White House and in various places in the U.S. he became quite effective in gaining sympathy for the idea of Polish independence. In November 1915 Paderewski first met House, who was immediately attracted to the great artist and flattered by his attempts to gain the rebirth of Polish independence. House became an advocate of a free Poland and the Polish musician himself cleverly cultivated his influential and powerful friend.²

New Year's Day in 1916 was proclaimed "Polish Day" and Paderewski as an "unofficial ambassador" converted some American politicians and government officials to the Polish cause, including Josephus Daniels, Colonel House, and the President himself. Edith Bolling Wilson was also impressed by the great musician and devoted patriot. During his concert and while talking to Wilson at the White House he passionately explained the "injustice and crime of the Polish partitions". She recollected:

I shall never forget Mr. Paderewski's face as he stood pleading the cause of his country. It was so fine, so tragic, so earnest. As I knelt there above them I felt I was witnessing through his eyes all the suffering and degradation of his countrymen. His hair was like a nimbus around his head. To have seen together these two men who were making the world better and happier is a memory I shall always cherish.³

In his "Peace Without Victory" address delivered before the Senate on January 22, 1917 Wilson declared his principles. It was a sort of a synthesis of liberal hopes for a lasting peace settlement and justice for all, big and small nations as well. According to his words, it would be a peace among equals, without annexations and indemnities, based on "a justice of freedom and of right". The President spoke also of the future of Poland:

I take it for granted, for instance, if I may venture upon a single example, that statesmen everywhere are agreed that there should be a united, independent and autonomous Poland, and that henceforth inviolable security of life, of worship, and of industrial and social development should be granted to all peoples who have lived

² Ch. E. Neu, *Colonel House. A Biography of Woodrow Wilson's Silent Partner*, Oxford 2015, p. 302; R. H. Ferrell, *Woodrow Wilson and World War I, 1917–1921*, New York 1985, p. 145; K. Lundgreen-Nielsen, *Woodrow Wilson and the Rebirth of Poland*, [in:] *Woodrow Wilson and a Revolutionary World: 1913–1921*, Chapel Hill 1982, p. 109; R. Landau, *Ignace Paderewski, Musician and Statesman*, New York 1936, pp. 113–118.

³ Edith Bolling Wilson, *My Memoir*, Indianapolis – New York 1938, p. 113.

hitherto under the power of governments devoted to a faith and purpose hostile to their own.⁴

The message, and particularly the phrase “united, independent and autonomous Poland”⁵ was received with a great enthusiasm by Poles. It was consequently presented in the Polish media, mostly in the newspapers, as the true support of a neutral country and its president who sympathized with the Polish independence movement and supported it. In a way, it was rather wishful thinking, yet the message was perceived as a sign of the particular good will of America and the President himself for the reconstruction of an independent Polish state.

For the sake of historical accuracy it should be admitted that both the Central Powers and Russia by that time had already promised autonomy for Poland. But a declaration by America, of a neutral power not involved in the war and European conflicts, gave new meaning and hope. So the statement – in spite of its rather vague pronouncement – was itself quite important, mostly because of its moral and international impact. In 1917, the Polish question, instead of remaining an internal affair of Russia and each of the three oppressors had become a publicly recognized international problem by America and its leader.⁶

Shortly after, in April of 1917 the United States entered into the war with Germany, which had a great impact on subsequent events, also for national movements in East-Central Europe. Wilson, more drawn into international affairs, continued to seek more adequate and noble inspirations and motivations for U.S. involvement and foreign policy. America became an active participant in the war and a crusader against “militarism, imperialism and injustice”, as well as the creator, in the name of Wilsonian ideals, of a new international order. The United States was dedicated to building a “new world order”, which should also benefit “mankind as a whole”. The President’s fascinating phrases proved to be a mighty instrument of propaganda in the world. The idea of a special mission of America was pretty common and supported by his countryman. Such rhetoric was appreciated also in Europe, particularly among East-Central European societies.⁷

⁴ *The Politics of Woodrow Wilson. Selections from His Speeches and Writings*, ed. by August Heckscher, New York 1956, p. 265; L. L. Gerson, *Woodrow Wilson and the Rebirth of Poland, 1914–1920*, New Haven 1953, p. 71.

⁵ This was rather laconic remark and some how not clear or even contradictory, particularly in meaning of terms “independent” and “autonomous”.

⁶ J. R. Wędrowski, *Wizje i realia. USA a Europa środkowoschodnia, 1919–1923*, Warszawa, pp. 30–33. More on the international aspects – T. Komarnicki, *Rebirth of the Polish Republic: A Study in the Diplomatic History of Europe, 1914–1920*, London 1957.

⁷ More, see J. M. Cooper Jr., *Breaking the Heart of the World. Woodrow Wilson and the Fight for the League of Nations*, Cambridge 2001.

The United States and President Wilson became for a time the chief exponents of democratic ideology and moral principle in politics, especially in the eyes of small European nations. U.S. participation in the war effort and its political involvement in the region in the decisive years 1917–1918, influenced the growth of expectations for American support of the national movements in East-Central Europe. Ignacy Paderewski, Roman Dmowski, Thomas G. Masaryk and other leaders undertook many more efforts to gain American assistance for their plans.⁸

President Wilson focused his attention on the future of the post-war world, seeking – outside the Department of State – the help and professional assistance of various specialists gathered around the Inquiry Group, which the president had established in the summer of 1917. The team of 150 experts from different disciplines (history, economy, ethnography, geography, etc.), under the direction of Dr. Sidney Mezes and strongly influenced by Colonel House, had researched various international problems. They prepared a great amount of materials such as memoranda, reports and suggestions to guide Americans in the future peace conference and decision making. The Polish committee (as one of a section of the Inquiry Group), presided over by Prof. Robert H. Lord and with the participation of two Poles – Henryk Arctowski and Stanisław Zwierzchowski (Zowski) – prepared memoranda and recommendations on Polish problems and future borders.⁹ Some of the recommendations and Paderewski's influence on Colonel House resulted in Wilson's message on January 8, 1918.

According to scholars and biographers of Wilson, House had played a crucial role in U.S. policy-making and in the support for the independence of oppressed people in East-Central Europe, and particularly of Poland. Paderewski once told Colonel House:

Words cannot express what I feel for you. It has been the dream of my life to find a 'providential man' for my country. I am now sure that I have not been dreaming vain dreams, because I have had the happiness of meeting you.¹⁰

Edward M. House was a "providential man" for Paderewski and an "alter ego" for President Wilson, who once said: "Mr. House is my second personality.

⁸ There is extensive literature on the subject including my own writing, e.g. *Ameryka wobec aspiracji niepodległościowych narodów Europy Środkowej w czasie I wojny światowej*, [in:] *Lata Wielkiej Wojny. Dojrzewanie do niepodległości 1914–1918*, red. D. Grinberg, J. Snopko, G. Zackiewicz, Białystok 2007, pp. 54–71; *Od autonomii do niepodległości: sprawy czeskie i słowackie w polityce USA (1917–1918)*, "Studia Podlaskie", t. XII, 2002, pp. 93–110.

⁹ L.L. Gerson, *Woodrow Wilson...*, pp. 82–84. More on work of the Inquiry, L. E. Gelfand, *The Inquiry. American Preparation for Peace, 1917–1919*, New Haven 1963.

¹⁰ G. L. Alexander, J.L. Alexander, *Woodrow Wilson and Colonel House: A Personal Study*, New York 1964, p. 191; *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House Arranged as a Narrative by Charles Seymour*, Boston 1936, v. II, p. 340. House's voluminous diary and correspondence contain a lot of important material on the international matters, including some interesting comments on Poland.

He is my independent self. His thoughts and mine are one".¹¹ House's expertise, comments, and suggestions were in many cases the main source of the president's knowledge on the international situation and thereafter his own ideas. Without any doubt such intimacy and confidence impacted seriously and sometimes decidedly the outcomes and the final version of the president's statements and messages. Anyway, it was Colonel House who played the key role in convincing President Wilson to give special attention to Polish matters in his messages, and particularly on January 8, 1918.¹²

In his message (later known as the Fourteen Points Message) on the new order in the post-war world, the American president supported the idea of Polish independence, which he expressed in point 13:

An independent Polish state should be erected, which should include the territories inhabited by indisputably Polish populations, which should be assured free and secure access to the sea, and whose political and economic independence and territorial integrity should be guaranteed by international covenant.¹³

As we see, none of the phases was precise, which may be (and was) interpreted in quite different ways, although nobody then questioned the ambiguity or hidden meaningfulness of the 13th point. Later on some scholars focused on the language and analysed it more precisely, searching for the reasons why the president used the word "should", whereas in the case of other problems, he said "must". Wilson corrected the entire message and changed some phrases in it. According to Colonel House, if there "was no difference of opinion as to the justice of a question" the word "must" was used. In other examples, where there was controversy, the president changed it to "should".¹⁴ So, in the final version of the 13th point the president changed the phrases "must be erected" and "must include" (mandatory/obligatory) and instead put "should be erected" and "should include".

The January 8, 1918 message, and particularly point 13, had made Wilson a hero and a special political friend in Polish eyes and encouraged his later legend. In public speeches and newspapers he was presented not only as a "crusader for democracy", a "new Messiah" or an "apostle of freedom" for the oppressed nations but, first and foremost, as a "supporter" and "advocate" of Polish independence. Pamphlets were published and disseminated on the "great American

¹¹ G. Hodgson, *Woodrow Wilson's Right Hand. The Life of Colonel Edward M. House*, New Haven – London 2006, p. 1, 172.

¹² E. R. Kantowicz, *Polish-American Politics in Chicago 1888–1940*, Chicago 1975, pp. 111–112; L. L. Gerson, *Woodrow Wilson...*, pp. 67–83.

¹³ *The Politics of Woodrow Wilson...*, p. 304.

¹⁴ See, *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, ed. by Arthur S. Link, v. 45, Princeton 1984, pp. 306–309; L. L. Gerson, *Woodrow Wilson...*, p. 84.

president and friend of Poland”, his idealism and moral leadership in building “peace and justice” in a world devastated by the Great War, revolutions, famine and chaos.¹⁵ The American president was pictured by Poles as the champion of Poland and its independence and became a greatly respected legendary figure. In spite of a later more critical approach, mainly formulated by historians, Wilson’s message had a great moral and diplomatic value for Poles convinced of, or rather wishing for, more effective American support for Polish independence.

The idealistic image of America and Wilson became even stronger during the Peace Conference. In Paris Wilson was spontaneously greeted by a crowd of admirers as the “American saviour”, who had helped to destroy militaristic Germany and who seemed to promise international justice and peace. In England and Italy he was warmly greeted as well. During the Peace Conference, the American president was considered by the majority of Europeans and especially by the oppressed nations as a “crusader for liberty” and a “moral leader in a corrupted world”.¹⁶

For Poles, the American president became not only a “national hero” but also a sort of “super-arbiter” in international affairs. Grateful Poles organized demonstrations to honor America, and Polish leaders sent many telegrams of gratitude and appreciation to the President. At this time Wilson became the most popular man in Poland. His messages were perceived as signs of the particular good will of America and the President himself who had supported the reconstruction of an independent Polish state.¹⁷

After the end of the First World War, the dismemberment of the Habsburg Empire, the revolution in Russia, and the ensuing danger of spreading communism, made East-Central Europe the focus of attention of many European and American politicians. Newly reborn Poland, a “land between” defeated Germany and revolutionary Russia was carefully observed by the American establishment. It could be a “useful bulwark” between Russia and Germany and a “most profitable investment ground” for friendly Allied capital.¹⁸

¹⁵ A. Lange, *Tomasz Woodrow Wilson*, Warszawa 1918; D. Żołyński, *Prezydent Woodrow Wilson i jego akcja pokojowa. Na podstawie depesz agencyjnych oraz innych źródeł*, Lublin 1919. More, H. Parafianowicz, *Woodrow Wilson i jego legenda w międzywojennej Polsce*, “Dzieje Najnowsze” 2001, v. 1, pp. 59–70.

¹⁶ H. Parafianowicz, *Restoration of Poland and Czechoslovakia in Woodrow Wilson’s Policy: The Myth and the Reality*, [in:] *From Theodore Roosevelt to FDR: Internationalism and Isolationism in American Foreign Policy*, ed. by Daniela Rossini, Staffordshire 1995, pp. 55–67. Wilson became also very popular in Italy (Daniela Rossini, *Woodrow Wilson and the American Myth in Italy. Culture, Diplomacy, and War Propaganda*, Cambridge 2008).

¹⁷ “Gazeta Warszawska”. In January–March, 1919 there were many articles and positive comments on Wilson and his policy; R. Dmowski, *Polityka polska i odbudowanie państwa*, Warszawa 1989, v. I, p. 336.

¹⁸ For more on the Paris conference and American role in decision making, see, A. Walworth,

The United States was the first country to recognize Poland's independence in January 1919. Diplomatic relations and the American Legation in Warsaw were established on May 2, 1919, when Hugh S. Gibson presented his credentials. He was the first envoy in the history of Polish-American relations, quite a suitable and fortunate choice for many reasons, also for the country of his assignment. Gibson was personally sensitive to Polish affairs, especially at the beginning of his assignment. He became quite close with Ignacy Paderewski, the Prime Minister, and showed many times an understanding of his and Poles' dilemmas and controversies. A professional diplomat, quite friendly yet not uncritical, Gibson observed with sympathetic understanding Polish matters and by occasional interviews and comments contributed to the promotion of a better image of Poland in the American press.¹⁹

From the beginning of his duties in Poland Gibson became involved in the preparations for Herbert C. Hoover's visit to Poland during his summer journey in Central Europe in 1919. It was a sort of semi-official visit ("instead" of President Wilson, as was commented in the Polish media) to recognize the condition of the country and identify its needs and provide more aid by the American Relief Administration (ARA). In Poland Hoover stayed for a few days (August 12–17, 1919), visiting Warsaw, Lvov and Cracow and talking to Polish officials. He was cordially greeted and cherished as a humanitarian and a close collaborator of the American president, a "true friend of Poland" and a "strong advocate" of its independence.²⁰

During the most dangerous months of the war with the Bolsheviks in 1920 Poles had no doubt that the U.S. remained sensitive to the needs of the newly-reborn country, so they expected and searched for more help and assistance.²¹

Wilson and his Peacemakers: American Diplomacy at the Paris Peace Conference, 1919, New York 1986; I. Floto, *Colonel House in Paris. A Study of American Policy and the Paris Peace Conference 1919*, Princeton 1973. House, as intimate friend of the President and special assistant for foreign policy, had shaped also the content of the League of Nations. After March of 1919 (after Wilson's visit to the U.S. and his absence in Paris) there were increasing tensions between the President and House and their relationship then ended.

¹⁹ More on his mission in Poland, see H. Parafianowicz, *Hugh S. Gibson's Diplomatic Service in Poland after the First World War*, "Białostockie Teki Historyczne" 2014, v. 12, pp. 159–174.

²⁰ H. Hoover, *The Memoirs. Years of Adventure 1874–1920*, v. I, New York 1951, pp. 355–362; H. Parafianowicz, *Zapomniany prezydent. Biografia polityczna Herberta Clarka Hoovera*, Białystok 1993, pp. 58–59.

²¹ It's a quite important aspect of the U.S. approach, involvement and aid during the war of 1920, truly ominous for Polish independence and Western civilization as well. In spite of various historical sources, there are some useful archival materials published in: J. Cisek, *American Reports on the Polish-Bolshevik War 1919–1920*, Warszawa 2010. See also, A. Cienciąła, P. Wandycz, eds., *Wojna polsko-bolszewicka 1919–1920 w ocenach historyków*, Warszawa 2003; A. Cornebise, *Typhus and Doughboys: The American Polish Typhus Relief Expedition, 1919–1921*, Newark 1982; J. Cisek,

On July 31, 1920 Prime Minister Wincenty Witos sent a cable to President Wilson expressing the Polish Government's

deep and sincere gratitude for America's generous help and continuous sympathy extended to this country. Poland, for her part, not only has American welfare and American interest strongly at heart, but the entire Polish people consider Polish American friendship to be one of the greatest assets in the future prosperity of both countries. Let me add, Mr. President, that you having been the most staunch promoter and defensor of Polish Independence are at this hour of the country's greatest need nearer and dearer than ever to every Polish heart.²²

The Wilsonian legend survived in Poland long after he had become unsuccessful (after the deterioration of his health, which caused him to be absent and less active in policymaking and the failure of the ratification of the Versailles Treaty) and almost forgotten in his homeland in the early 1920s. In recognition of Wilson's achievements in 1919 he was awarded the Nobel Prize and in 1922 in Poland the Order of the White Eagle.²³ Great devotion to him was shown on July 4th each year in Warsaw and many towns in Poland, earning the nickname "Polska Wilsonowska" ("Wilsonian Poland").

A newly established (after WWI) periodical, "Ameryka", was dedicated to the "promotion of American ideals and everything American". The Polish-American Society founded by Paderewski in 1919 and the Polish-American Chamber of Commerce and Industry established in 1921 undertook various activities and events propagating friendship between the U.S. and the reborn Poland. Polish officials on many occasions emphasized Wilson's ideals and appreciated his active role and personal contribution to the independence of Poland and to world peace. He was owed a special gratitude for the "friendship" and "bringing the Gospel of freedom" to the oppressed people of East-Central Europe. The propagation of America, its democracy, the high values by the Polish government and its representatives as well as by American consular and diplomatic agencies and Polonia resulted in the creation of a very positive image of America and spread its legend widely.²⁴

Kościuszko! We Are Here. American Pilots of the Kosciuszko Squadron in Defense of Poland, 1919–1921, New York 2002.

²² J. Cisek, *American Reports...*, p. 228.

²³ E. Bolling Wilson, *My Memoir...*, p. 343. She wrote that "the only foreign decoration my husband ever accepted was the Order of the White Eagle (...). In 1922 when the Polish Government asked to present Mr. Wilson this medal, he could think of no polite reason for refusing and the Polish Minister brought it to the house in November".

²⁴ H. Parafianowicz, *Fascynacja Ameryką i amerykańską demokracją w Polsce po I wojnie światowej*, [in:] *Konstytucja Stanów Zjednoczonych Ameryki. Reminiscencje w 220. rocznicę uchwalenia*, pod red. J. Daszyńskiej, Łódź 2009, pp. 117–134.

Besides Wilson there was another American hero recognised and cherished in inter-war Poland – humanitarian Herbert Hoover. The ARA organised by him and the aid for millions of European children, mothers, orphans, sick people etc. established the closest, very positive and quite emotional link between the U.S. and Europe. The ARA activities contributed also a lot to promote American charity, idealism, generosity, and the superiority of its economic and political system, etc. Hoover became one of the best known Americans and a very popular hero in Poland. He received numerous accolades and was awarded the honorary citizenship of several Polish cities and the citizenship of the Polish Republic as well.²⁵

In Warsaw Hoover Square was established (renamed again in 2008) on Krakowskie Przedmieście Street. On October 29, 1922 a monument of gratitude to America, the work of Xavery Dunikowski, was unveiled at an impressive ceremony. The dignitaries of Poland and diplomats were joined by 100,000 school children, who all gathered to demonstrate their gratitude to the man and nation who saved hundreds of thousands from starvation and failure.²⁶ In the years to come both American politicians – Hoover and Wilson – were admired and almost worshiped by many Poles.

President Wilson's death and funeral in February 1924 were commemorated with requiem masses and ceremonies in Poland and other East-Central European countries as well. February 5, 1924 was proclaimed a day of mourning in Poland. Banners on governmental buildings in Warsaw and other towns were hauled down. On the same day, in a special session of the Polish parliament, its speaker Maciej Rataj delivered a message to commemorate President Wilson. He emphasised his role in the rebirth of Polish independence.²⁷

There were several masses and meetings to commemorate President Wilson and his achievements in Poland. Polish officials gratefully emphasised Wilson's idealism and ideals and his great contribution to world peace. He was owed a special gratitude for "being a friend of Poland in a difficult time" and for "bringing the Gospel of freedom" to the oppressed people of East-Central Europe. In the following weeks there also were organised informal lectures to commemorate President Wilson, and special meetings at Polish schools to inform pupils about his achievements.²⁸ His policy toward Poland was presented in a very positive, sentimental, and almost mythical way.

²⁵ H. Parafianowicz, *Mit Herberta Clarka Hoovera w międzywojennej Polsce*, "Dzieje Najnowsze", nr 1, 1984, s. 99–113. There were streets named after Hoover in 4 Polish towns: Baranowicze, Grodno, Tarnów and Stanisławów.

²⁶ G. J. Lerski, *Herbert Hoover and Poland. A Documentary History of a Friendship*, Stanford 1977, p. 32.

²⁷ "Gazeta Warszawska", February 4, 1924; "Ameryka", 1924, no 2, p. 34; H. Parafianowicz, *Restoration...*, pp. 63–65.

²⁸ "Ameryka", 1924, no 2, p. 35.

Wilson's name and his contribution to the rebirth of Poland was raised in the Polish media every year during July 4th celebrations. The day became a very special event in Warsaw and in some towns in Poland. There were parades, picnics, lectures about America and remarks of gratitude in the messages of Polish officials. It was a good occasion for comments and articles in the newspapers about American democracy and mutual friendship. In 1926 during the celebrations of the 150th anniversary of U.S. independence the fascination with America in Poland reached its peak.²⁹

A special declaration of esteem, gratitude, and friendship for the U.S. ("A Polish Declaration of Admiration and Friendship for the United States of America") was dedicated to American friends. An amazing collection of 111 albums (as a gift and a gratitude) was presented to the United States with approx. 5–5.5 million signatures of Polish people. Among the signatures, official seals, photographs there are also many original and unique illustrations by leading Polish painters and graphic artists of the time, such as Stanisław Czajkowski, Ferdynand Ruszczyk, Władysław Skoczylas, Ludomir Slendziński and Zofia Stryjeńska. The volumes were presented to President Coolidge on October 14, 1926 at the White House and soon after were transferred to the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress.³⁰

Wilson's name returned to popular attention in 1928 during the tenth anniversary of Polish independence. In a memorial book published for the occasion, there were expressed words of deepest respect to America and the late President. The Minister of Foreign Affairs repeated that: "The name of great President Wilson in Poland is cherished with reverence and high esteem".³¹ Telegrams to President Calvin Coolidge and American officials repeated again "a deep appreciation and gratefulness for ever" to America and President Wilson.

It is worth noting that in Polish towns, including Warsaw, streets, squares, public buildings and hospitals (in Białystok) were named after America and President Wilson. His great admirer and friend Paderewski sponsored a monument

²⁹ More on it see, *W rocznicę narodzin Stanów Zjednoczonych Ameryki. Księga zbiorowa wydana staraniem Komitetu Centralnego Obchodu 150-lecia Niepodległości Stanów Zjednoczonych Ameryki*, Warszawa 1926; A. Janowski, *W 150 rocznicę ogłoszenia niepodległości Stanów Zjednoczonych Ameryki*, Warszawa 1926. The role of President Wilson in the rebirth of Poland was highly evaluated in various speeches and comments. From the "depths of hearts" Poles declared that they would always "treasure his name and names of Americans friends".

³⁰ Z. Kantarosiński, 'Emblem of Good Will'. *A Polish Declaration of Admiration and Friendship for the United States*, Washington 1997, pp. 1–19. This unique collection was briefly exhibited by order of President Coolidge and then for decades it was stored at the Library of Congress. Some seventy years later part of the collection was displayed at the Library of Congress. Recently all 111 volumes were digitalized <https://www.loc.gov/collections/polish-declarations>.

³¹ *Dziesięciolecie Polski Odrodzonej. Księga Pamiątkowa 1918–1928*, Kraków–Warszawa 1928, p. 237.

dedicated to President Wilson's memory.³² It was erected by President Ignacy Mościcki in Poznań on July 4, 1931 in a park named after Wilson a few years earlier, in 1926.³³

Edith Bolling Wilson was invited to attend the ceremony dedicated to the memory of her husband. She came to Poland with her niece and was cordially welcomed by Polish officials in Warsaw. On July 4 in Poznań she was greeted with delight by dignitaries, local officials, the diplomatic corps, and many Poles, who wanted to express their "everlasting gratitude to America and its president". The American Ambassador John Willys delivered a special message from President Herbert Hoover, who recalled Wilson's contribution to the independence of Poland and the friendship between the two nations. The information and comments in the Polish newspapers were focused on the personal role and achievements of the American president in the rebirth of Poland. Poles expressed their "deepest respect and gratitude to the great republic" and to a "devoted friend" and praised Wilson's help in the establishment of the state, its government and borders. In a way, they also demonstrated the integrity and indisputable character of the Polish borders, linking it with the policy of Woodrow Wilson, who had played an important role in the Paris conference and its decisions.³⁴

Polish politicians sent telegrams and thank you notes to President Hoover and Colonel House, and demonstrated their friendship towards America. It is worth mentioning that Paderewski also sponsored the statue of another American, a "true Polish friend" – Colonel House. His monument, as a "debt of gratitude of thankful Poles", was erected in Warsaw on July 4, 1932.³⁵

Edith Bolling Wilson, a devoted wife and – as she named herself – a "steward" had been the most staunch supporter of President Wilson. Her great influence on her husband and his policymaking became also a source of controversy.³⁶ She had stood by him during the illness, and in the post-White House years she undertook a good deal to create and spread a positive image of the presidency, also after his death. Ray S. Baker was chosen by her as an official biographer of Wilson, with whom she shared materials and documents for his research and

³² Paderewski in memoirs kindly remembered his great friend, President Wilson, and particularly the American aid in a trying time for Poland and their enduring friendship (I. J. Paderewski, *Pamiętniki*. Spisała M. Lawton, Warszawa 1961, p. 493).

³³ "Kurier Poznański", July 1, 1931, p. 3; July 4, pp. 1–2, 4.

³⁴ "Gazeta Polska", July 4, 1931, p. 1; July 5, p. 1; "Głos Narodu", July 8, 1931, p. 1; "Robotnik", July 5, 1931, p. 1; G. J. Lerski, *Herbert Hoover...*, p. 100.

³⁵ "Gazeta Polska", July 5, 1932, p. 8.

³⁶ More on her role as the first lady: A. Hatch, *Edith Bolling Wilson. First Lady Extraordinary*, New York 1961; I. Ross, *Power with Grace: The Life Story of Mrs. Woodrow Wilson*, New York 1975; J. Giblin, *Edith Wilson: The Woman Who Ran the United States*, New York 1992; J.S. McCallops, *Edith Bolling Galt Wilson: the Unintended President*, New York 2003.

writing.³⁷ The widow of the American president dedicated her life-long activities to promoting Wilson's visions, his policy and greatness,³⁸ also during her visits in Europe, particularly in the headquarters of the League of Nations in Geneva.

It is worth noting that in a huge collection of Wilson's papers, edited by Arthur S. Link³⁹ in 69 volumes there is rather a scant amount on his activities on so-called Polish matters. Particularly, if we are searching for Woodrow Wilson's own ideas and plans connected with Polish issues, such as frontiers or government, etc. In spite of his two messages of 1917 and 1918 it is hard to find his own words and writings on Poland and Polish problems. Also in many biographies of Wilson which have been published over the decades and still appear, Poland and her problems – as we may see – are only mentioned briefly and mainly in the context of his message on January 8, 1918. In many books on Wilson and his presidency Poland's name is not mentioned at all.

Certainly, the American president played an important role in the restoration of Poland, but later it was largely exaggerated, especially in the press. It is not easy to say if such adulation was fully justified, or to what extent. Some of those opinions, however, reflected the style of writing and the level of journalism. The positive, sometimes quite naïve, opinions about Woodrow Wilson showed a real gratitude and appreciation by Poles. Other comments by Polish officials were motivated also by political and tactical reasons. Apart from the sometimes naïve mythology about the personal role of Wilson, it was an important contribution to the independence of the Polish Republic.

The image of the American president as a devoted political friend of the reborn state seemed to be politically useful also in the years to come. It became even more necessary in the 1930s, when Poland and its borders became an object for the territorial revisionism of Germany. U.S. policy and, above all, the execution of the war debts and isolationism became a bitter disappointment for Europeans. The extremely positive image of America, based mostly on the "old myth", the wishful thinking and sentimental expectations raised by Wilson's policy, became more and more inadequate to the reality, hard to defend even by their supporters during the economic crisis of the 1930s.

³⁷ R. S. Baker, *Woodrow Wilson: Life and Letters*, v. 1–8, Garden City 1927–1939. Interestingly enough that in 8-volumes published subsequently in the inter-war period, Poland was just mentioned a few times and briefly.

³⁸ She showed it on each page of her memoirs dedicated: "To My Husband WOODROW WILSON who helped me build from the broken timbers of my life a temple wherein are enshrined memories of his great spirit which was dedicated to the service of his God and humanity" (E. Bolling Wilson, *My Memoir...*, p. 360). The critical psychological study of Wilson, prepared by S. Freud, W. C. Bullitt in the 1930s was published after death of Edith Wilson (*Thomas Woodrow Wilson, Twenty Eight President of the United States: A Psychological Study*, Boston 1967).

³⁹ *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, ed. by Arthur S. Link, Princeton, N.J. 1965–1994, v. 1–69.

After WWII Woodrow Wilson's achievements were almost forgotten and erased from the official narrative in Poland, although his positive role in the rebuilding of Polish independence was remembered by the older generation of Poles. His famous messages to the American Senate and Congress (respectively in 1917 and 1918) were briefly mentioned in history textbooks. Yet his role and contribution to the rebirth of Poland during and after WWI was somehow neglected and not researched for decades by Polish scholars.⁴⁰

The revival of great interest in WWI on the occasion of the 90th anniversary of the Great War and then a centenary of the event directed more attention to Wilson and his policy, also in Poland. There were various official ceremonies and scholarly events commemorating America's and its president's role in building the new international order after the Great War. In recognition of Woodrow Wilson's achievements, and particularly of his support for Polish independence, many towns changed the names of streets and named them after him.⁴¹ The American president was honored, above all, for point 13 of his famous message of January 8, 1918, in which he had declared the need to establish an independent Polish state. Regardless of the multitude of factors contributing to the rebirth of Poland, this was unquestionably one of them. Wilson's important statements and U.S. policy had definitely played a positive role for the future of Poland and the Poles, after years of oppression and partition by its neighbors.

Woodrow Wilson and Poland: Between Myth and Reality. Some Reflections

Summary

President Wilson's addresses – the one of January 27, 1917 to the Senate, and especially that of January 8, 1918 to Congress, were of great importance for the internationalization of the Polish cause. The latter address and its 13th point, which postulated the need to recreate the Polish state, played a particularly important role. Its shape was influenced to a large extent by Ignacy Paderewski's efforts and the sympathetic support of Col. Edward M. House, although it was Wilson himself who carried out the final changes.

The American president's address of 1918 had an enormous impact on his popularity in Poland, which, in the following years turned into a specific cult

⁴⁰ J. R. Wędrowski, *Stany Zjednoczone...; Wizje i realia...*, Recently, P. Zaremba, *Demokracja w stanie wojny. Woodrow Wilson i jego Ameryka*, Warszawa 2016. It is worthy of notice that there is no Polish biography of Woodrow Wilson.

⁴¹ There are streets named after Wilson in Kraków, Łódź, Opole, Radom, Przemyśl, Częstochowa, Legnica, and also in small towns – Józefów, Chojna, Zielonka, Brwinów, Knurów, Jarosław, Zambrów, etc.

of his person and the myth of America. In 1922 he was awarded the Order of the White Eagle for merits in the reconstruction of Polish independence, and each year on July 4 Poles recalled the debt of gratitude they owed to him and America. In 1931, his monument, funded by Master Paderewski, was unveiled in Poznań.

Key words: Woodrow Wilson, independence of Poland, Herbert Hoover, myth, America

Woodrow Wilson i Polska: mit a rzeczywistość

Streszczenie

Orędzia Prezydenta Wilsona do Senatu z 27 stycznia 1917 r., a zwłaszcza do Kongresu z 8 stycznia 1918 r. miały duże znaczenie dla umiędzynarodowienia sprawy polskiej. Szczególnie istotną rolę odegrało to drugie orędzie i jego 13 punkt postulujący potrzebę odbudowy państwa polskiego. Na jego kształt wpłynęły w dużym stopniu zabiegi Ignacego Paderewskiego oraz życzliwe poparcie płk. Edwarda M. House'a, choć ostateczne zmiany naniósł Wilson.

Orędzie amerykańskiego prezydenta z 1918 r. wpłynęło na jego ogromną popularność w Polsce, co w kolejnych latach przerodziło się w swoisty kult jego osoby i mit Ameryki. W 1922 r. za zasługi w odbudowie niepodległości Polski został on odznaczony Orderem Orła Białego, a 4 lipca każdego roku Polacy przypominali o długi wdzięczności jemu i Ameryce. W 1931 r. w Poznaniu uroczystie odsłonięto jego pomnik, ufundowany przez Maestro Paderewskiego.

Słowa kluczowe: Woodrow Wilson, niepodległość Polski, Herbert Hoover, mit, Ameryka

Bibliography

Primary sources

Baker R.S., *Woodrow Wilson: Life and Letters*, v. 1–8, Garden City 1927–1939.

Cisek J., *American Reports on the Polish-Bolshevik War 1919–1920*, Warszawa 2010.

Dmowski R., *Polityka polska i odbudowanie państwa*, Warszawa 1989, v. I.

Dziesięciolecie Polski Odrodzonej. Księga Pamiątkowa 1918–1928, Kraków–Warszawa 1928.

Heckscher A., ed., *The Politics of Woodrow Wilson. Selections from His Speeches and Writings*, New York 1956.

Hoover H. C., *The Memoirs. Years of Adventure 1874–1920*, v. I, New York 1951.

- Lerski G. J., *Herbert Hoover and Poland. A Documentary History of a Friendship*, Stanford 1977.
- Paderewski I.J., *Pamiętniki*. Spisała M. Lawton, Warszawa 1961.
- A Polish Declaration of Admiration and Friendship for the United States of America*, <https://www.loc.gov/collections/polish-declarations>
- The Intimate Papers of Colonel House Arranged as a Narrative by Charles Seymour*, Boston 1936.
- The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, ed. by Arthur S. Link, v. 45, Princeton 1984.
- Wilson Edith E., *My Memoir*, Indianapolis – New York 1938.
- W rocznicę narodzin Stanów Zjednoczonych Ameryki. Księga zbiorowa wydana staraniem Komitetu Centralnego Obchodu 150-lecia Niepodległości Stanów Zjednoczonych Ameryki*, Warszawa 1926.

Secondary Sources

- Alexander G. L., Alexander J.L., *Woodrow Wilson and Colonel House: A Personal Study*, New York 1964.
- Cieniwała A., Wandycz P., eds., *Wojna polsko-bolszewicka 1919–1920 w ocenach historyków*, Warszawa 2003.
- Cisek J., *Kościuszko! We Are Here. American Pilots of the Kosciuszko Squadron in Defense of Poland, 1919–1921*, New York 2002.
- Cooper J. M. Jr., *Breaking the Heart of the World. Woodrow Wilson and the Fight for the League of Nations*, Cambridge 2001.
- Cornebise A., *Typhus and Doughboys: The American Polish Typhus Relief Expedition, 1919–1921*, Newark 1982.
- Ferrell R. H., *Woodrow Wilson and World War I, 1917–1921*, New York 1985.
- Floto I., *Colonel House in Paris. A Study of American Policy and the Paris Peace Conference 1919*, Princeton 1973.
- Gelfand L. E., *The Inquiry. American Preparation for Peace, 1917–1919*, New Haven 1963.
- Gerson L.L., *Woodrow Wilson and the Rebirth of Poland, 1914–1920*, New Haven 1953.
- Giblin J., *Edith Wilson: The Woman Who Ran the United States*, New York 1992.
- Hatch A., *Edith Bolling Wilson. First Lady Extraordinary*, New York 1961.
- Hodgson G., *Woodrow Wilson's Right Hand. The Life of Colonel Edward M. House*, New Haven – London 2006.
- Janowski A., *W 150 rocznicę ogłoszenia niepodległości Stanów Zjednoczonych Ameryki*, Warszawa 1926.
- Kantarosiński Z., 'Emblem of Good Will'. *A Polish Declaration of Admiration and Friendship for the United States*, Washington 1997.
- Kantowicz E. R., *Polish-American Politics in Chicago 1888–1940*, Chicago 1975.

- Landau R., *Ignace Paderewski, Musician and Statesman*, New York 1936.
- Lange A., *Tomasz Woodrow Wilson*, Warszawa 1918.
- Komarnicki T., *Rebirth of the Polish Republic: A Study in the Diplomatic History of Europe, 1914–1920*, London 1957.
- Lundgreen-Nielsen K., *Woodrow Wilson and the Rebirth of Poland*, [in:] *Woodrow Wilson and a Revolutionary World: 1913–1921*, Chapel Hill 1982.
- McCallops J. S., *Edith Bolling Galt Wilson: the Unintended President*, New York 2003.
- Neu Ch. E., *Colonel House. A Biography of Woodrow Wilson's Silent Partner*, Oxford 2015.
- Parafianowicz H., *Mit Herberta Clarka Hoovera w międzywojennej Polsce*, "Dzieje Najnowsze", nr 1, 1984, s. 99–113.
- Parafianowicz H., *Zapomniany prezydent. Biografia polityczna Herberta Clarka Hoovera*, Białystok 1993.
- Parafianowicz H., *Restoration of Poland and Czechoslovakia in Woodrow Wilson's Policy: The Myth and the Reality*, [in:] *From Theodore Roosevelt to FDR: Internationalism and Isolationism in American Foreign Policy*, ed. by Daniela Rossini, Staffordshire 1995, pp. 55–67.
- Parafianowicz H., *Woodrow Wilson i jego legenda w międzywojennej Polsce*, "Dzieje Najnowsze", 2001, v. 1, pp. 59–70.
- Parafianowicz H., *Od autonomii do niepodległości: sprawy czeskie i słowackie w polityce USA (1917–1918)*, "Studia Podlaskie", t. XII, 2002, pp. 93–110.
- Parafianowicz H., *Ameryka wobec aspiracji niepodległościowych narodów Europy Środkowej w czasie I wojny światowej*, [in:] *Lata Wielkiej Wojny. Dojrzwianie do niepodległości 1914–1918*, red. D. Grinberg, J. Snopko, G. Zackiewicz, Białystok 2007.
- Parafianowicz H., *Fascynacja Ameryką i amerykańską demokracją w Polsce po I wojnie światowej*, [in:] *Konstytucja Stanów Zjednoczonych Ameryki. Reminiscencje w 220. rocznicę uchwalenia*, pod red. J. Daszyńskiej, Łódź 2009, pp. 117–134.
- Parafianowicz H., *American Exceptionalism: The American Dream and the Americanization of East-Central Europe*, [in:] *World and Global History. Research and Teaching. A CLIOHWORLD Reader*, ed. by Seija Jalagin, Susanna Tavera, Andrew Dilley, Pisa 2011.
- Parafianowicz H., *Hugh S. Gibson's Diplomatic Service in Poland after the First World War*, "Białostockie Teki Historyczne" 2014, v. 12, pp. 159–174.
- Ross I., *Power with Grace: The Life Story of Mrs. Woodrow Wilson*, New York 1975.
- Rossini D., *Woodrow Wilson and the American Myth in Italy. Culture, Diplomacy, and War Propaganda*, Cambridge 2008.
- Walworth A., *Wilson and his Peacemakers: American Diplomacy at the Paris Peace Conference, 1919*, New York 1986.
- Wędrowski J. R., *Stany Zjednoczone a odrodzenie Polski: Polityka Stanów Zjednoczonych wobec sprawy polskiej i Polski w latach 1916–1919*, Warszawa–Kraków 1980.

Wędrowski J. R., *Wizje i realia: USA a Europa środkowoschodnia 1919–1923*, Warszawa 1990.

Zaremba P., *Demokracja w stanie wojny. Woodrow Wilson i jego Ameryka*, Warszawa 2016

Żołyński D., *Prezydent Woodrow Wilson i jego akcja pokojowa. Na podstawie depesz agencyjnych oraz innych źródeł*, Lublin 1919.