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Polish Immigrants in America:
American Aid After the Polish Revolution of 1830

Ethan Ryan

History 407: The US in the Age of Atlantic Revolutions

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In 1815, the Congress of Vienna met in Austria to restore Europe to the way the continent was before the Napoleonic Wars. The Congress of Vienna created the Holy Alliance, which split the Kingdom of Poland into multiple partitions. The alliance members each ruled over one of the partitions of Poland, enforcing their rule on the Polish people.¹ Tadeusz Kościuszko's spirit and aid towards Russia during the war gave the Russians a positive view of the Polish people and, shortly after the Congress concluded, the members of the Holy Alliance returned Poland to a size close to what it was before the Napoleonic Wars.² Though Poland had nearly restored to the pre-war state, the Russian Empire and Alexander I retained rule over the country. This rule was incredibly oppressive and, under cadet Piotr Wysocki, Polish revolutionaries came together to gather arms in November 1830 and began their uprising against the harmful Russian Empire.

The Polish Revolution of 1830, also known as the November Uprising, began in Warsaw in November of 1830. The rebellion was in response to the oppression of the Polish citizens under the Russian Empire, which ignored the requests of the newly created Polish state and continued to go against their new constitution. During the July Revolution in France, the Russians planned to use the Polish army as a deterrent against French forces, which was the spark that ignited a revolution amongst Polish rebels.³ The rebels, led by Piotr Wysocki, attempted to carry out a coup at the Bewelder Place in Warsaw, intending to assassinate the Grand Duke Constantine. Constantine was the Governor of the Kingdom of Poland and was placed in his position in 1819 by his brother, Tsar Alexander I. His role in Poland was to militarize and discipline the Poles, and by assassinating the Grand Duke, Polish revolutionaries believed that they could fully restore power to Polish leaders. After the failure to overthrow the

¹ The Holy Alliance consisted of Austria, Prussia, Russia, and France. Their ultimate goal was to end any revolutions that did not have a goal of reinstating a monarch, and to establish- as well as defend- standing monarchies.

² Adam Lewak, "The Polish Rising of 1830," *The Slavonic and Eastern European Review* 9, no. 26 (1930): 350.

³ *Ibid*, 354.

Bewelder Place and assassinate Grand Duke Constantine, the Russian Empire placed the Polish citizens under an even stricter rule, and a year-long revolution for independence ensued.

Americans across the Atlantic had already observed the Polish Revolution and offered aid to Polish revolutionaries as soon as the plea arose. Notable Americans like James Fenimore Cooper “rallied behind the [Polish] cause” amid the rebellion.⁴ Americans gathered aid and money to assist the Poles in their rebellion, even eventually donating a large portion of land in Illinois to the Poles exiled to America after their rebellion.⁵ The Polish Revolution of 1830 reminded Americans of their fight for independence from Great Britain a few decades prior, and that memory became a driving force behind their wish to help the Polish insurgents. Americans believed that they owed a debt to the Poles due to Polish military leaders like Casimir Pulaski and Tadeusz Kościuszko, who had shown immense bravery in the fight for independence during the American Revolution.⁶ After the Polish Revolution of 1830, Americans supported and promoted Polish success by collecting monetary donations, petitioning in Congress, and advocating for the acceptance of Polish immigrants into American culture. The assistance that the Poles received from Americans allowed the Polish exiles to grow as a community, especially in Chicago, Illinois, and New York City. The exiles moved to land as far as Texas, where Polish communities still thrive to this day.

American leaders and advocates, like James Fenimore Cooper, an American author from New Jersey, and Samuel Morse, an inventor from Massachusetts, sent monetary donations to Poland. The Polish Revolution also gained the aid and attention of the French aristocrat and long-time American advocate, Marquis de Lafayette. Lafayette became the communicator

⁴ Keith A. Sutherland, “America Views From Poland: Perspectives from the Final Partition to the Rebirth of the Polish Nation,” *The Polish Review* 23, no. 4 (1978): 6.

⁵ David Geraghty, “Emigrants and Land Grants, 1787-1852” (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 2009), 291-295.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 284.

between the Americans and Polish citizens, and alongside James Fenimore Cooper, the two created the American-Polish Committee to gather more Americans to “support the insurrection and sustain the embattled Poles.”⁷ In an address to the American people in the American-Polish Committee in 1831, James Fenimore Cooper stated that the Polish exiles had shown themselves worthy of living in a republican nation. He reminded the members of the American-Polish Committee of the correlation between the fight for independence in Poland and their War for Independence in the 1770s, as well as the support they got from Eastern European natives like Casimir Pulaski and Tadeusz Kościuszko. While rallying the Americans of the American-Polish Committee, Cooper urged the members to “appear as charitable mediators in this holy cause” and that their donations would “assuage many griefs.”⁸

James Fenimore Cooper had also grown close with some Polish exiles, giving him another reason to support the Polish cause. One of Cooper’s close friends was the Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz, who was behind an earlier attempt to overthrow Russian rule in Poland before the 1830 revolution.⁹ Marquis de Lafayette also became acquainted with some Poles, including Tadeusz Kościuszko during his time in America during the rebellion. Lafayette was so infatuated with Kościuszko’s successes in both Poland and America that he desperately wished to own his portrait and became enamored with Polish culture through Kościuszko.¹⁰ Both leaders of the American-Polish Committee had become involved with Polish affairs that did not even regard the Polish Revolution, and this involvement gave the two even more reasons to assist the Poles in their battle for independence and eventual growth in the United States.

⁷ Ibid, 285.

⁸ James F. Cooper, “An Appeal to the American People,” *New York American*, 5 September 1831, Accessed 28 September 2021.

⁹ Robert E. Spiller, “Fenimore Cooper and Lafayette: Friends of Polish Freedom, 1830-1832,” *American Literature* 7, no. 1 (1935): 56.

¹⁰ Ibid.

As both a member of the American-Polish Committee and the communicator between Americans and the Polish insurgents, Marquis de Lafayette used his voice as an extension to rally aid money for the Polish cause. Along with the monetary support, Lafayette also supported the Poles in terms of politics and military. At extremes, when other European countries sent Polish exiles away, Lafayette welcomed them into France.¹¹ With France being a close and easy relocation for the revolutionaries, word spread about Lafayette's eagerness to help and aid, and Paris became a haven for the exiles. The American-Polish Community appointed Lafayette to collect the donations for the Polish effort and put him in charge of sending all money to Poland. Lafayette and the American-Polish Committee in New York received money directly, and Lafayette acted as the midpoint to send the money to the Poles, even if the Poles lost their revolution. In the case of the latter situation, the committee planned to use the collected funds to assist those affected by the rebellion. Lafayette began a Franco-Polish Committee in Paris and gathered more donations to combine with the American-Polish Committee in New York.

Lafayette received the resulting donations from the combined efforts of the American-Polish and Franco-Polish Committees, who had raised monetary donations totaling over \$2,000 (nearly \$60,000 in modern-day currency), and followed instructions to send these donations to the Polish cause.¹² Although the Polish citizens accepted these donations gratefully, the 1830 Revolution was inevitably not successful and resulted in Russia taking almost all control over Poland and dismantling the remnants of a Polish government that remained in Warsaw.¹³ After being exiled to multiple countries in Europe, Polish revolutionaries began moving to America, which was considered a "last resort" for the exiles.¹⁴ Even though Polish

¹¹ Lloyd S. Kramer, "The Rights of Man: Lafayette and the Polish National Revolution," *French Historical Studies* 14, no. 4 (1986): 527.

¹² Sutherland, "America Views from Poland," 6.

¹³ Lewak, *The Polish Rising*, 355.

¹⁴ Geraghty, "Emigrants and Land Grants," 291.

immigrants were more likely to prefer places like Paris over the United States, the United States welcomed the exiles with promises of land grants and legal papers for the group to thrive in various cities across the country.

Once Polish immigrants arrived in America, most settled in the Northeast and New England states, while James Fenimore Cooper and Irish-American Matthew Carey petitioned in Congress to have land set aside for the Polish immigrants in the Midwest.¹⁵ The Polish immigrants were eager to begin their lives in America, found jobs, and settled down in the Northeast. Two hundred and thirty-five Polish exiles arrived in America following the revolution in Warsaw, and a number of these immigrants created a Polish Exile Committee. Along with the American-Polish Committee, the two groups petitioned before Congress to grant lands in the west for the Polish exiles. In a letter from the Polish Exile Committee to the House of Representatives, the exiles stated that they wished to “live a life of active industry” and described how “a grant of land... will enable us to live by our industry.”¹⁶

In Jacksonian America, land grants had become a heavily politicized battle. The Whigs were more than eager to offer land to those who needed it, including immigrants and the Polish exiles. Democrats under Andrew Jackson, however, were not as ready to give up their precious land grants at low prices.¹⁷ Many Americans saw Illinois as open land and sought after large land grants in the Midwest with full pockets, which caused inflated prices of land grants. The *Illinois Advocate*, a paper with Democratic views, stated that Henry Clay- a prominent leader in the Whig party- would make men “wood hewers and water drawers to the aristocracy and

¹⁵ Matthew Carey settled in Philadelphia in 1784 and quickly became acquainted with Benjamin Franklin and Marquis de Lafayette. He founded three different newspapers in Philadelphia and had membership in the American-Polish society. Carey often wrote letters to other prestigious Americans regarding the Polish population and how they should be assisted, most of which are heavily documented as the “Matthew Carey Papers”.

¹⁶ U.S. House of Representatives, *In Favor of Granting Patents to Polish Exiles*, by Lewis Williams, 24th Congress First Session, No. 1490, Washington, D.C., 1836.

¹⁷ Daniel Feller, *The Public Lands of Jacksonian Politics*, (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 123.

monopolizers of the old state.”¹⁸ In response to the *Illinois Advocate*, the *Louisville Public Advertiser* denounced the plot to “prevent the emigration of people from the east and to the west.”¹⁹ Political publications and newspapers like the *Illinois Advocate* and the *Louisville Public Advertiser* constantly battled back and forth in their articles, arguing over whether or not the immigrants should be allowed in the country and if they should be allowed to purchase land grants.

These arguments lead to a mixed opinion from the American public regarding the Polish exiles. Progressives, like readers of the *Louisville Public Advertiser*, saw land grants as the ideal way to grow as a country. The Progressives believed that giving land grants to the Poles would encourage the growth of America as a melting pot, while conservative readers of the *Illinois Advocate* thought that the granting of land to the Poles would only decrease American power and allow immigrant groups to take land from rightful Americans. However, with collected monetary donations from the American-Polish Committee, the Polish immigrants paid for their land over in Illinois to settle and live. Eventually, the United States Congress granted 36 sections of land, the equivalent of a single township, to Polish refugees in Illinois.

By the time Polish immigrants were settling into their new lives in New England, the American public had moved on from the interest in Polish struggles. Leaders in New England had given lodging and employment to the Polish community in the area, but they began to focus on Americanizing the eastern Europeans. The leaders did not want the American public to view the Polish immigrants as “wholly foreign” and valued the educated over “drunkards... or vagabonds.”²⁰ Americans in the Northeast pressured the Poles to learn English and receive an

¹⁸ Ibid, 172.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Geraghty, “Emigrants,” 307-308.

English education, which- in the long run- helped them adapt to the American melting pot that had been growing for decades.

Over in England, the Polish exiles met a strong distaste from anyone who was not an English radical. However, the radicals of England quickly allied with the Polish exiles who arrived in their country after the revolution.²¹ The two hundred and twelve Polish soldiers exiled in England in 1834 immediately became the cannon fodder for anti-socialist propaganda in the country. English radicals quickly took the Polish revolutionaries under their wing, but the immigrant group still faced discrimination in England. The Polish exiles who arrived in England believed the English would “delay the liberation of the Polish people” by forcing them to Anglicanize themselves instead of continuing the culture they had already been growing for years in Warsaw and all of Poland.²² This erasure of culture led the Polish exiles to prefer life in the United States, where the exiles received plenty of assistance from the American people.

The Poles took notes during the revolution and often kept them in personal memoirs, documenting the details of the revolution and what was driving the Polish revolutionaries to revolt against oppressive Russian rule in Warsaw. In memoirs written by Russians and Ukrainians during the rebellion, the writers noted that Polish peasants and farmers heavily supported the revolution.²³ The Polish revolution was considered a revolution of the lower class and is often documented as an inspiration for the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia- nearly one hundred years later.²⁴ The Poles still consider the revolution of 1830 a crucial historical point in the fight for independence from Russia, and when the revolution failed, the Polish

²¹ Peter Brock, “Polish Democrats and English Radicals 1832-1862: A Chapter in the History of Anglo-Polish Relations,” *The Journal of Modern History* 25, no. 2 (1953): 141.

²² *Ibid*, 143.

²³ Julia Konarivska, *Memoirs of the Participants of the November Uprising of 1830-1831 as a Source of Studying the Polish Liberation Competitions*, (Zhytomyr, Ukraine: Ivan Franko Zhytomyr State University Press, 2016).

²⁴ M. K. Dziewanowski, “Joseph Pilsudski, The Bolshevik Revolution and Eastern Europe,” *The Polish Review* 14, no. 4 (1969): 17.

revolutionaries perceived their efforts as an embarrassment for the Polish effort and community. The Polish revolutionary effort needed desperate help in the revolution, and when other European countries turned down the pleas from the Poles for assistance, they looked to different continents. The revolutionaries found the aid, in the form of other revolutionaries, they needed in the United States- a republican nation that they wished they could come to reflect one day when they separated from the Russian rule that had them under strict rule and observation.²⁵

With James Fenimore Cooper in New York, the American people had joined the effort of Polish success with the American-Polish Committee. Cooper vocalized his encouragement for the blending of American and Polish communities, telling the American public that their aid for Polish immigrants arriving in the country would “be offered to those who are willing to sacrifice all for liberty” and “those who are willing to work out their own redemption.”²⁶ Most Polish exiles found employment in the labor industry, working in factories and on farms. They happily helped with the growth of industrialized America, and as the Polish-American community grew, Poles found success in the Midwest, mostly Illinois, with the creation and growth of the city of Chicago.²⁷

The goal with the Polish land grant in Illinois was to create a “second Poland,” or colloquially, “Little Poland.” There were Americans who believed that the creation of a “Little Poland” would not be as successful as the American-Polish Committee wished, like Albert Gallatin, who wrote that the funds raised by the American-Polish Committee in Boston needed to be used wisely, as the movement of over two hundred Poles from New York to Illinois would be too expensive.²⁸ Due to the anticipated high cost, Gallatin suggested that the Polish community

²⁵ Konarivska, *Memoirs of the Participants of the November Uprising*.

²⁶ Cooper, “An Appeal to the American People.”

²⁷ Dominic Pacyga, *Polish Immigrants and Industrial Chicago: Workers on the South Side, 1880-1922* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 132.

²⁸ Jerzi Lersky, *A Polish Chapter in Jacksonian America: the United States and the Polish Exiles of 1831* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1958), 137.

move to Chicago on the lake since the exiles were “too poor to bear the expense of such a journey.”²⁹ The American-Polish Committee in Illinois sent a letter of welcome to the Polish exiles in New York and Boston, and with that, a move to Chicago became appealing to the Poles. The immigrant group thanked Congress for their generosity regarding the land, and in June of 1834, Congress made the monetary pledge known as the “Polish Donation” to assist the move and open up land in Illinois for the Polish exiles.³⁰

In 1842, the Polish exiles were finally settled in Illinois and created the first Association of Poles in America. The main goal of the Association of Poles in America was to bring the Polish community in America together under the common goal of mutual aid. The first meeting of the Association concluded that “every Pole, regardless of position, race, or religion, had a right to become a member of the association” to garner a strong connection between the community.³¹ The Polish community also began their first periodical in America, the illustrated *Poland, Historical Literary Monumental*. The creation of this magazine solidified the Polish immigrants as an established community in America and allowed them- along with help from the Americans in Illinois- to continue to grow in Chicago as part of the American melting pot.

Although the Association of Poles in America was dismantled in 1848 when the leader of the Association, Henryk Kałusowski, returned to Poland to participate in another revolution, the Polish community still thrived all over America. The Poles created many other communities and organizations across the country, including the Democratic Society of Polish Exiles created in New York as an anti-slavery organization that worked with other American radicals in the

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Lersky, *A Polish Chapter*, 155.

³¹ Ibid, 156.

Northeast.³² The Poles became active in the American political community all over the country, but they remained a prominent population in Chicago and Illinois as a state.

In learning how to coexist with Americans that already lived in the cities and neighboring towns that the Poles now flourished in, the Polish immigrants became “absorbed with material pursuits.”³³ This attitude grew to capitalism, away from the socialism that the Poles knew when they arrived in America, following what was “[fitting] with what was happening in America” during the Polish migration.³⁴ Chicago became a more popular destination for the Polish community as the Polish population in Chicago grew, and most Polish immigrants and Polish-Americans ended up favoring Chicago over New York City.

As the Polish community moved to Chicago began to settle and create lives in the city, many names of Polish-Americans became prominent in the country for helping with the growth of Chicago. A Polish revolutionary, Erazm Jerzmanowski, participated in the January Uprising in Krakow in 1863 and was exiled to France. Following his success in France, Jerzmanowski moved to America, where he founded multiple gas companies, including one in Chicago in the late 1880s. Jerzmanowski’s success led him to become one of the wealthiest people in America.³⁵ Decades after Jerzmanowski’s success in the early 1900s, wealthy businessmen in Chicago commissioned Polish-American architect John S. Flizikowski to design a multi-use building on the commercial street of Lincoln Avenue. Flizikowski constructed his building on land purchased from the Poles that lived there, and all profits from the building went back to the Polish community.³⁶

³² Ibid, 159.

³³ Sutherland, 12.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Tomasz Pudłocki, “Erazm Józef Jerzmanowski (1844-1909): Biography of the Great Polish Patriot of the 19th Century,” *Bulletin der Polnischen Historischen Mission* 15 (2020): 319.

³⁶ Pacyga, *Polish Immigrants and Industrial Chicago*, 135.

Although Jerzmanowski and Flizikowski's successes came decades after the movement of Polish exiles to the Chicago area, those successes would not have been possible without the assistance of Americans like James Fenimore Cooper and Albert Gallatin. These men were crucial in advocating for the success of the Polish communities in America, with Cooper encouraging Americans to accept the Polish into their community, while Gallatin opened the path for a "Little Poland" in Illinois. The Polish community has thrived in the Chicago area since the late 19th century and continues to be one of the larger "immigrant" communities in the city today, with over 800,000 people of Polish descent living in Chicago and outer Chicago suburbs in 2000.³⁷

To conclude, the American aid following the Polish Revolution of 1830 helped the Polish community in America grow and thrive in places like New York City and Chicago. Monetary donations from pro-Polish committees, congressional aid, and ongoing support of the Polish community in the 19th century allowed the immigrant group to grow and prosper in the decades following, leading up to the modern-day, where Polish-American communities in Chicago and New York City continue to thrive, where the immigrant group is most prominent. People like James Fenimore Cooper, Marquis de Lafayette, and Albert Gallatin (among many others) were the sole motivators behind the growth of the Polish community and the encouragement of Americans to support the exiles. The American-Polish Committee had over thirty elected officials, along with many other donors. The elected officials took care of the legal and monetary issues regarding the committee, and with donations arriving from all over the country, the elected officials sent money to Marquis de Lafayette to send to the Poles. Without the aid of these Americans, the Polish community would most likely have never grown to the size that it did.

³⁷ Rob Paral, *The Polish Community in Metro Chicago: A Community Profile of Strengths and Needs* (Chicago, Illinois: Polish American Association, 2004), 1.

The Polish Revolution of 1830, while seen as a disappointment at the time, allowed for Polish exiles and people of Polish descent to grow and find success on either side of the Atlantic. James Fenimore Cooper, Lafayette, and the American-Polish Committee gathered the money that the Poles needed to arrive in America and move to their respective cities, and once the Poles arrived in the country, Albert Gallatin helped the Poles rally in Congress for said cities. Once the Poles had gathered their help from Cooper, Lafayette, and Gallatin- along with dozens of members of the American-Polish Committee- they were able to settle and assert themselves as an immigrant group in America. While success in the Polish Revolution would have given Poland their independence from Russia much sooner, it was not a complete failure. The failed revolution allowed Polish exiles to spread their culture into America, and to this day, the Polish community remains a vocal and important community in cities across the United States.

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