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## American Studies in Poland

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The article presents the development and current state of American Studies in Poland as a discipline, starting with its historic and political background, through institutional foundations, to current research and teaching, especially from the social scientific perspective. The article argues that American Studies went from virtual absence in Stalinist Poland to post-1989 rapid expansion and continues to attract students despite the lack of institutional and disciplinary independence. Even though it is mostly affiliated to English programs, it continues to go outside the boundaries of the traditional approaches of history and literature to include cultural studies, political science, sociology, communication, and law.

**Key words:** American Studies; Poland; research; publications; monographs; scholarship; Americanists

### Background

The origins of American Studies (AS) worldwide are usually traced back to the three-volume *Main Currents in American Thought* by Vernon Louis Parrington, winner of the 1928 Pulitzer Prize, combining literary and historical research methods. Following a corresponding course of study, named "History and American Civilization," Henry Nash Smith obtains the first PhD from Harvard in 1940, setting a precedent for other university programs first in the US, then also in other countries.

In his 1957 article "American Studies as a Discipline," Roy Harvey Pearce notes: "My title, as do most titles like it, conceals a rhetorical question. It is, of course: Is American Studies a discipline? Is it (to follow the ACD on "discipline") a branch of learning which can be differentiated by its rules of operation from other branches? And the answer implied in asking the question is one which, at the outset at least, most of us would immediately give: No, not really, not now, not yet; but American Studies could well *become* a discipline" (179).

Methodologically, American Studies starts to incorporate other approaches that focus on the study of culture and society. Some argue it should incorporate a variety of disciplines, as different as economy and psychology, some opt for

a narrower perspective. Without getting into a debate between the proponents and opponents of various schools, such as the early “Myth and Symbol” tradition or the post-1960s turn towards the study of the “denied” aspects, such as slavery, colonization, immigration, etc., through an adoption of minority studies and popular culture, it is important to note the field is diverse, self-doubting, and intellectually fertile.

However, analyzing the boundaries of AS’s interdisciplinarity in the *American Sociologist* half a century later, J.K. Dubrow comes to the conclusion that even though American Studies and sociology share some research interests, they rarely quote each other, which is attributable to the fact that they differ in their histories and methods; while sociology sees itself as a science (which is occasionally questioned by other, more established disciplines), American Studies does not, having roots in history and literature. That is true of American Studies’ relationship with other related disciplines as well.

American Studies has had enough identity and institutional challenges of its own at home, let alone abroad, where it started to spread in the aftermath of World War II, with much support from the US government. Being an *area study*, it is a multidisciplinary field, which is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, having a common object of examination—the United States of America—it provides a well-rounded body of knowledge concerning the country’s multiple aspects. Thus, it stimulates its students to become familiar with, if not fluent in, a wide variety of the more traditional academic disciplines, mostly humanistic and social scientific. On the other hand, it does not fit well within the conventional Polish academia, modelled after the German system, where students usually follow a path of study within a single faculty program, from a BA to an MA or a PhD program, and sometimes even to a full-fledged academic career. Unlike the Anglo-Saxon model, where students take advantage of several majors and/or minors even within a single undergraduate program, sometimes as diverse as the famous Oxford PPE, encompassing philosophy, political science, and economics, the Polish system promotes a single disciplinarity. Thus, what Poland’s AS students are actually exposed to, largely depends on their program’s academic affiliation and the period.

Given Poland’s Cold War history, it comes as no surprise that the discipline has been somewhat politically-charged. In fact, before 1989, it was not a separate field of study. Most courses on the US were offered within so-called philology curricula at a number of best public universities, such as those of Poznań, Warsaw, Łódź, and Krakow. On the one hand, that meant that courses were offered in English, unlike in some other countries, where a good prior knowledge of English was not required for students to be enrolled. On the other hand, the courses were mostly limited to linguistics, poetry, prose, drama, and culture. Besides, the study of the US was possible in individual social science courses, mostly in the faculties of political science and economics, though, where the program of study was subject to political distortions typical of Marxist education, picturing the US as an imperialist country whose elites take advantage of the working class. Education was expected to serve a propagandistic purpose: preach the superiority of the planned economy over “exploitative” capitalism and of socialism over imperialism. Admittedly, this was a hopeless endeavor on the part of the powers that be since the sympathies of the students and the general public were largely with the supposed oppressors of the working man,

at least since the late 1950s. In short, anything American became the forbidden fruit, the opposite of Communist drab.

However, the deep roots of Poland's fondness for the United States go back much farther, to both countries' parallel histories of foreign oppression and a love of and fight for freedom. While the US worked towards shedding the British domination, Poland faced 123 years of partitions under Prussian, Russian, and Austrian rule. As a consequence, Poland's military commanders, Kazimierz Pułaski and Tadeusz Kościuszko, became important, shared national heroes for both nations as they fought for US independence, too. In his famous 14 point-plan, delivered to Congress on January 8, 1918, President Woodrow Wilson was instrumental in bringing back Poland's nationhood when he insisted that "an independent Polish state should be erected which should include the territories inhabited by indisputably Polish populations, which should be assured a free and secure access to the sea, and whose political and economic independence and territorial integrity should be guaranteed by international covenant."

When free but struggling economically, Poland continued to benefit from American assistance, most notably through the American Food Administration, headed by the future President Herbert Hoover, who was highly esteemed for providing food supplies for 300,000 starving Polish children. Additionally, the outbreak of WWII brought a disappointment in Poland's formal European allies, France and Britain, in the so-called phony war when in the aftermath of Hitler's attack on Poland they declared a war on Germany but failed to act, leaving the US as the only powerful Western ally Poles felt they could count on.

After the war, the American government's Radio Free Europe and President Ronald Reagan's hardline anti-Soviet rhetoric, combined with his arms race policy and cooperation with Margaret Thatcher and Pope John Paul II, as well as George H. Bush's 1989 visit to Poland and assistance in a peaceful power transition between the Communist government and Solidarity through the short-lived Presidency of General Jaruzelski, all worked towards the perception of the US as Poland's closest ally. It is no wonder that the early 1990s saw a peak in the social perception of Polish-American relations, with 80% of Poles claiming they were very good.

Admittedly, a decade later the Iraq war changed that, but both countries remain close in a somewhat asymmetric way; in fact, an affinity for the United States remains one of very few policy directions that the current Law and Justice governments—which otherwise reject most post-1989 policies—support almost unconditionally. All this has created a highly positive cultural and political framework, facilitating the development of American Studies in Poland, which saw an upsurge of interest with enrollment going through the roof during the last three decades.

## **Institutional Foundations**

From the onset, American Studies in Poland was closely tied with the study of English, which has a longer history. In fact, the first university-level English course was taught at the Warsaw Polytechnic by Krystyn Lach-Szyrma as early as 1826 while the first chair in English was established at the Jagiellonian University in 1908. After Poland survived WWI and regained independence in 1918, the first English

departments were established in Poznań (1921), Warsaw (1922), and Lwów (1924), with KUL (Catholic University of Lublin) replacing a section with a department in 1946 (Kujawińska-Courtney 165).

After a virtual absence during the Stalinist period, English came back in late the 1950s only to become the most popular foreign language taught in Poland since 1989, at all levels. According to R.D. Carter, at the turn of the century Poland had the fourth highest number of English Studies degrees awarded in the world, after the US, Britain, and India, with 6,000 MA degrees handed between 1996 and 2000 alone (2).

Gradually, American Studies began to separate from English, whether as specializations (majors), departments, or other university entities. In 1976, on the strength of *détente*, Warsaw University's American Studies Center opened as a research institution, though degree programs were not introduced until early 1992. A similar center was created at the University of Łódź in 1997. While the former is still operative and has recently joined forces with its Latin American equivalent to form the Institute of the Americas and Europe, which in itself reflects a rising significance of Spanish in the United States, the latter institution became part of the Faculty of International and Political Studies, just like its Jagiellonian University twin, created in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, this time with a Polish Diaspora section.

The main institutional networking vehicle for Polish scholars in the field has been the Polish Association for American Studies (PAAS), set up in 1990, a year after the political transition. In order to bring Polish Americanists together, a PAAS Newsletter was launched. Collecting and editing news from Polish university departments was a novel idea at the time, definitely more American than Polish, but I remember it as not excessively demanding since there were so few departments to speak of in mid-1990s, all of them in the faculties of English. Thus, I managed to put together the first two online issues of the Newsletter (nos. 8 & 9) within hours, with subsequent issues being edited first biannually, then yearly, in other departments.

Today, American Studies departments have a variety of institutional foundations, ranging from cultural studies and social studies (University of Warsaw), political science (Jagiellonian University, University of Łódź), to law and administration (Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw). However, most American courses are still taught in English programs, sometimes under the auspices of separate American departments.

Attesting to the growth of American Studies in Poland, the latest PAAA Newsletter issue lists as many as 19 university departments devoted entirely or partly to the study of the United States, including Białystok, Gdańsk, Katowice, Lublin, Olsztyn, Opole, Rzeszów, Szczecin, and Zielona Góra, with several universities being listed with two different departments and Warsaw University as many as three. Moreover, some major university departments are still absent from that directory, as they fail to provide data on their activities. The rule of thumb is that American Studies departments are affiliated to English programs while other, additional options include cultural studies and international relations. Additionally, individual courses on select aspects of the United States, ranging from art to politics, security, and economy are taught in other divisions of Polish universities.

It is imperative to note that American Studies in Poland would not have developed as rapidly without the US government's assistance, mostly through the Fulbright Program. In the late 1950s, as a result of the Polish Ministry of Higher

Education's decision, Fulbright grants for outgoing scholars were awarded only to English majors. At the time, English was taught only at the University of Warsaw and the somewhat more state-independent Catholic University of Warsaw. In 1959, the first Fulbright grant was awarded to Franciszek Lyra, one of the three English students who had written their MA thesis on time. As his choice of host institutions was limited to state universities by the US government then, he picked Indiana University due to its central location, so that he could easily drive around and collect research data. Upon arrival, the new exchange student from Poland was asked by the host institution whether he would like to pursue a doctoral degree, which he was happy to do. At the time, this was a unique opportunity that gave him a great advantage. Last but not least, economic differences between Poland's planned economy of shortage and the prosperous post-World War II American market were shocking. The Fulbright Commission was also instrumental in regularly bringing a host of American professors to Polish universities, thus significantly promoting academic, cultural, and political impact.

In the later years, English began to be taught at other Polish universities while Fulbright grants could be awarded to other majors, so that now, typically, only one in twenty Fulbright grantees is an English major. Winners are also free to be affiliated to non-state universities of their choice, depending on their research area, preferences, and connections. Another active supporter of academic exchange between the two countries is the Polish-American Kościuszko Foundation, based in New York City. Both institutions offer a variety of programs, for both American scholars coming to Poland and to Polish faculty and doctoral students planning to visit the US. While American scholars are more likely to teach, their Polish counterparts are more focused on research. Having enjoyed grants from both institutions, I can recommend them wholeheartedly, suggesting that an Ivy League host does not necessarily guarantee a smoother institutional integration since private universities are independent from the sponsoring federal state.

## Research and Teaching

The first extensive Polish description of the new country that was the United States comes from Jan Ursyn Niemcewicz (1758-1841), who frequented the Polish courts of the count Czartoryski family and king Stanisław August Poniatowski. While travelling around the Western world, he knew the pre-revolutionary French society, lived in the US for eight years and was, among others, a secretary to Tadeusz Kościuszko, as well as knew personally George Washington. A testament to his overseas impressions are two collections, *Pamiętniki czasów moich* [Memoirs of my times] and *Podróże po Ameryce 1797-1807* [American itineraries 1797-1807].

Almost a century later, in 1876, Henryk Sienkiewicz, the author of *Quo Vadis*, travelled across the country. He started in New York City, which he did not care much for, made a stop in Chicago and then Wyoming, where he saw Indians for the first time, but mostly focused on California, which he fell in love with. While there, he put together "a colony" for Helena Modrzejewska, a Polish actress who followed in his footsteps with her husband and subsequently received ecstatic reviews despite performing in her native tongue. Sienkiewicz described his observations on the

US in letters sent to *Gazeta Polska*, which were published in 1880 as *Listy z podróży (do Ameryki)* [Letters From a Travel To America]. In 1959, Columbia University Press put out an English version entitled *Portrait of America. Letters of Henryk Sienkiewicz*.

In 1918, the founder of the first Polish sociology department, Florian Znaniecki, a graduate of the Jagiellonian University, co-published his multiple-volume work on the *Polish Peasant in Europe and America* while sharing his positions between the Adam Mickiewicz University of Poznań and the University of Chicago, later Columbia, and eventually crowning his academic career with the position of the President of the American Sociological Association.

The first major Polish overview monograph devoted to the United States was not published until 1962 when Józef Chałasiński's *Kultura amerykańska* [American culture] came out.

Carter calls the history of American Studies in Poland "a story of steady growth" since the 1930s (30), pointing out that during the interwar period only 4 per cent of Polish MA theses in English and none of the recovered seventeen doctoral dissertations were devoted to an American literary or cultural topic. The main interests of the Polish students of English were then British literature, and to a much lesser degree – linguistics; American Studies was a distant last.

This gradually changed in the post-war period, reflecting a shift in the global position of the United States which dropped its policy of isolationism and began to dominate internationally in political, military, economic, and – last but not least – cultural terms. As a result, early 21<sup>st</sup> century English programs have more American Studies faculty alone than the overall number of interwar doctoral dissertations produced in all areas of English. In the meantime, American Studies, like all Polish arts and sciences, experienced a period of politicization of academia, most notably in the Stalinist period, when works of literature were used instrumentally for propagandistic purposes in order to show the inferiority of the capitalist system and the abuse of the working man there. As a result, many scholars of that period steered clear of current issues, opting for either long-dead authors or neutral subjects, like nature, e.g. Walt Whitman and Mark Twain.

Overall though, 20<sup>th</sup> century authors are most frequent among MA topics, with prose being consistently more popular than poetry, and drama finding quite a following (Carter 32). The same is true of faculty interests. A small 2006 Polish entry for the *European Journal of American Studies* lists 42 names of Polish scholars, some of them tenured professors (i.e. holding a *doktor habilitowany* degree) at the time, affiliated to either Warsaw, Krakow, Łódź, Wrocław, Lublin, Gdańsk, or Silesia Universities. Even at the time of that online publication, the list was not complete. Now, some of those scholars are retired and/or have changed jobs but their work remains relevant to this article. Virtually all have been active in American literature (or culture), with a focus on 20<sup>th</sup> century works. These include: Krzysztof Andrzejczak (Łódź), Andrzej Ceynowa (Gdańsk), Jerzy Durczak (Maria Curie-Skłodowska Univ. of Lublin), Joanna Durczak (Maria Curie-Skłodowska Univ. of Lublin), Piotr Dziejdzic (Silesia), Jadwiga Maszewska (Łódź), Agata Preis-Smith (Warsaw), and Zygmunt Mazur (Jagiellonian University) in contemporary American fiction. Only a few scholars have written on both 20<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century American literature, namely Andrzej Kopcewicz (Poznan), Zbigniew Maszewski (Łódź), Agnieszka Salska (Łódź), and Marek Wilczyński (then Poznan, now Warsaw). These, for the most

part, are the scholars that have been active in institutionalizing Polish American Studies in the early 1990s.

Junior faculty and graduate students who are mentioned in the 2006 *European Journal of American Studies* have had definitely different research interests. While some pursue contemporary literature (Paulina Ambroży, Poznań; Kacper Bartczak, Łódź; Jacek Gutorow, Opole; Zofia Kolbuszewska, Lublin; Grzegorz Kość, Warsaw), many reach to the margins, either through Chicano literature (Grażyna Zygańdo, Łódź), Afro-American literature (Ewa Łuczak, Warsaw), or Native American literature (Piotr Zazula, Wrocław), gay fiction and autobiography (Tomasz Basiuk, Warsaw; Marta Mazurek, Poznań; Tomasz Sikora, Sosnowiec), women's literature and gender studies (Agnieszka Graff, Warsaw; Dominika Ferens, Wrocław; Krystyna Mazur, Warsaw; Beata Williamson, Gdańsk), science-fiction and cyberpunk (Paweł Frelik, Warsaw).

Even though 19<sup>th</sup> century American literature is a much less frequent choice for the main research interest now, the fact remains this is the research specialty of "the most outstanding Polish scholar as regards comparative literature bordering on American Studies," Prof. Tadeusz Sławek (University of Silesia, Sosnowiec).

Other scholars currently active in American Studies who pursue non-literary or non-cultural topics have usually been affiliated to, and/or pursued degrees from, other, more traditional faculties, such as history (Krzysztof Michałek, Warsaw; Piotr Ostaszewski, SGH of Warsaw; Halina Parafianowicz, Białystok; Włodzimierz Batóg, Kielce; Irmina Wawrzyczek and Zbigniew Mazur, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University of Lublin), political science (Stanisław Filipowicz, Warsaw; Bohdan Szklarski, Warsaw; Longin Pastusiak, Warsaw), and film/art (Jerzy Kutnik, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University of Lublin).

Over the last decade, American Studies departments have grown both in number and size, and due to their non-philological institutional affiliations, especially in Kraków, Warsaw, and Łódź, they produce research in non-literary disciplines, mostly international relations, law, and political science. Specialized monographs with a narrower focus include areas as diverse as US foreign policy (Karol Derwich, Marcin Fatałski, Marcin Grabowski, Łukasz Kamiński, Andrzej Mania, Paulina Matera, Grzegorz Nycz, Piotr Ostaszewski, Magdalena Trzcionka, Łukasz Wordliczek, Rafał Wordliczek, Małgorzata Zachara), US political (Longin Pastusiak, Bohdan Szklarski, Maciej Turek) and legal systems (Wojciech Kwiatkowski, Paweł Laidler), political philosophy and thought (Magdalena Modrzejewska, Rafał Prostack, Piotr Skurrowski, Tomasz Żyro), religion (Paulina Napierała), society (Anna Bartnik, Isabella Rusinowa, Adam Walaszek), political communication (Tomasz Płudowski), media (Rafał Kuś), film (Elżbieta Durys), and education (Radosław Rybkowski). Since 2003, Jagiellonian University Press, most notably, publishes a Polish-language series, *Prace amerykańnistyczne*, with mostly social scientific monographs by their own faculty.

Monographs devoted to literature and culture are too numerous to list; they are published on a regular basis by most university presses, as well as in the below-mentioned series, mostly in English. Namely, under the editorship of Tomasz Basiuk, Peter Lang Verlag runs an English-language series called *New Americanists in Poland*, devoted mainly to literature, ethnography, cultural and queer studies. Another series of this kind is the Gdańsk Transatlantic Studies in British and North American Culture.

Journals, naturally, offer a venue for more immediate, shorter pieces. Just as *American Quarterly* is the official journal of the American Studies Association and *Prospects* an annual of American Cultural Studies, *American Studies*, a journal published since 1976 by the American Studies Centre, University of Warsaw, was suggested for the official publication of the PAAS starting with its 16<sup>th</sup> issue, which, however, did not come to be. This relative profusion did not prevent other universities from establishing their own journals, with *Ad Americam*, launched by the Jagiellonian University in 2000. In 2006, *American Studies* became *The Americanist*, co-edited by Agnieszka Graff and William Glass, later to be renamed *The New Americanist*. While the Krakow journal mostly publishes Polish authors, the new incarnation of the Warsaw biannual has international scholarship. However, American Studies scholars also publish in other journals devoted to their respective areas of interest, mostly literature and culture.

Impressive in scope, general overview monographs devoted to American culture for the Polish readership include *Historia literatury amerykańskiej*, vol. I-II (edited by Agnieszka Salska, 2003); *Historia cywilizacji amerykańskiej*, vol. I-IV (Zbigniew Lewicki), and numerous books on US Presidents by Longin Pastusiak.

Due to extensive teaching in popular three-year BA and two-year MA programs, there is also a need for textbooks. American Studies programs mostly use foreign, usually American or British textbooks, anthologies or articles, which is understandable given that instruction is offered in the target language and the teaching objective is to familiarize students with the American/British perspective, not ours. From my own MA program, I remember professors using the Norton Anthology of American (and English) Literature a lot while students often purchased their own copies of classic works of fiction, most readily available in British Penguin editions. Outside the realm of literature, initially post-1989, American social scientific scholarship was scarcely available and usually accessed during foreign research stays at either the JFK Institute in Berlin or various American Universities via research grants and fellowships. Fortunately, in the following years, better domestic libraries and worldwide online database access have removed yet another obstacle.

Even so, more and more courses on the US are offered in Polish. Unfortunately, few general textbooks have been translated into Polish, with the most notable exception being the British Routledge *American Civilisation* by two scholars working in Norway, David Mark & John Oakland. Driven by the idea of filling that gap, I put together a general overview textbook written by Polish authors, the three-volume *Ameryka. Społeczeństwo, kultura, polityka* [America: Society, culture, politics] (2008). A similar project was carried out six years later, producing *Ameryka. Polityka, prawo, społeczeństwo* [America: Politics, law, society] (ed. Zbigniew Lewicki, 2014, 2016, with the third edition published as *Ameryka. Instytucje i społeczeństwo 1607-2017* [America: Institutions and society 1607-2017], 2017, by three authors based at UKSW). An overview monograph, *Ameryka współczesna* [Contemporary America], was also published by Sławomir Grzegorz Kozłowski, a Polish scholar living in the US (Lublin, 2008).

An important addition to AS scholarship comes from journalism. In the Communist period, journalists such as Stanisław Głąbiński, Zygmunt Broniarek, Krzysztof Teodor Toeplitz, and Zygmunt Kałużyński covered extensive territory ranging from film to society but their coverage was obviously limited by censorship. Nowadays,

a rich, quality selection of contemporary American national reporting and letters is provided regularly by Wydawnictwo Czarne, whose *Seria amerykańska* includes translations of such renowned authors as Paul Theroux, Charlie Leduff, Lawrence Wright, Jack Kerouac, Patti Smith, and Bob Dylan. A number of one-time Polish correspondents to the US, such as Piotr Kraśko, Tomasz Lis, Marek Wałkuski, and Dorota Warakomska, as well as Andrzej Lubowski, a Polish-born, California-based newspaperman-turned-businessman, write extensively on contemporary America, both for newspapers and in book form (*Kontuzjowane mocarstwo* [An injured superpower], Zbig).

Libraries affiliated to the American Embassy and the consulates also offered a diverse selection of works, helping promote American Studies in Poland. Most of these collections were later handed over to Polish universities, with the one at Warsaw's American Studies Center (OSA) holding as many as 40,000 volumes. All these sources provide the Polish aficionado of "the land of the free, home of the brave" with ample intellectual stimulation, both academic and otherwise.

## Conclusions

*Amerykanistyka*, as AS is called in Polish, continues to attract many students, produces a rising number of academic works, and despite institutional problems with interdisciplinary degree compatibility (less of an administrative problem under the Bologna system), offers a rich and increasingly varied body of knowledge, a window onto "the leader of the free world," this time around through an array of perspectives, allowing for a more contemporary, diverse, multi-faceted, critical, and complete examination of American cultural and social institutions and practices. Given that the largest reference work for American Studies had 6,500 published entries in its first edition (Salzman), Polish scholarship offers only a tiny, yet steadily rising and truly heart-felt contribution.

On the basis of the changing self-image of American Studies in Poland since the first online issues of the *PAAS Newsletter*, at least two further observations can be made. On a more general note, it is hard to ignore the eagerness with which American capitalist cultural patterns were initially emulated in a post-Communist, academic environment, with literary and cultural journals being discussed during "business meetings" as they would be called. It is clear now how much the idea of America was connected with a business mind-set and how much it was welcome after half a century of the iron curtain. This stems from the fact that the American business model of social organization was widely considered superior and it paved way for Poland's economic liberal policies that went unquestioned for most of the transition period. Naturally, American Studies as a university major benefited from this perceived superiority of American culture as it promised students a gate to an envisioned better world.

However, the peak of Poles' uncritical fascination with the United States belongs in the early 1990s and has dwindled since due to both countries' participation in the Iraq war, the embarrassing discovery of a secret CIA prison in north-eastern Poland, the continuing and unilateral visa requirement (lifted only on 11/11/19), the overall asymmetric relations, as well as Poland joining the EU, where the country's citizens

can study and work at will. Nevertheless, the bilateral relations at the state level remain close. Rightly or wrongly, the current Law and Justice government finds ideological common ground with the Trump administration in “putting their own country first,” questioning international organizations, and promoting social conservatism, if divergent in economic policies. Poland remains a devoted ally of the US, meeting the 2%-of-GDP-expenditure-on-defense target, and purchasing American weapons. In fact, most major post-1989 Polish political parties support a strong pro-American foreign policy, although some would gladly see more assertiveness on the Polish part.

Regardless of the ideology of the party in power, Poland’s public discourse continues to put a high premium on the US, which apart from reflecting the sole global power’s gravitas in international affairs, still benefits from the special place the United States has had in the hearts of Poles and in Poland’s history. This transpires daily in the Polish news media, where – unlike in France or Spain – American news stories feature prominently, usually constituting one of just a few countries regularly reported on. Admittedly, without a colonial past, Poland does not have an equivalent of France’s *francophonie*, Spain’s *latinidad*, or Britain’s *Commonwealth* to report on. So a virtual absence of regular reporting on Central America, Africa, Asia, or Australia in the Polish media is mostly attributable to the country’s lack of colonial ties.

The US also remains a routine example to compare Poland’s institutions against even though cultural and historic patterns would suggest Europe as a more suitable point of reference. What attests to the high salience of American issues in Polish media culture is that the extended US presidential election night is the only consistently regular program of its kind other than the domestic election night.

More to the point for the academic study of the United States, since the 1990s, Polish teaching of American Studies has gradually tried to expand the typical philological curriculum of linguistics and literature with an extensive offer of courses looking as much at politics as race, class, or gender, and inviting methodologies of sociology, cultural studies, and other disciplines. This was typical of Western universities at the time, yet hardly common in Poland. Limited to foreign-language programs, these efforts were not deemed politically controversial yet, as they reflected the university curricula of the countries under study and, as a result, relied heavily on foreign academic texts. Much to the surprise of many Polish Americanists’, though, the 21<sup>st</sup> century brought an instrumental politicization of those standard Western academic perspectives, which became subject to an engineered social panic in the late 2010s in Poland while “class” started to be frowned upon by conservatives as a suspiciously Marxist (read: Communist) concept. At the moment, while especially “Marxist gender and queer studies,” as they are referred to, find themselves under heavy fire from the Polish Catholic church and the political right, university curricula remain mostly untouched.

As for the much-needed institutionalization of the discipline itself, “The Polish Association for American Studies has been getting ready to take steps towards establishing American Studies as a separate discipline through proper official channels,” wrote its then-President Marek Wilczyński in 2006. Unfortunately, to this day, these preparations have not produced any results, which remains the biggest challenge in the years to come. Otherwise, the Polish variety of American Studies

thrives despite being absent from a Ministry-approved list of disciplines degrees are obtained in, it is only a so-called specialization within more traditional disciplines, most commonly English philology and international relations.

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