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25 Years of *Ad Americam*: Reflections and Reminiscences

The 25th birthday of *Ad Americam. Journal of American Studies* is celebrated at a very special time for America and the world. Donald Trump has just started his second term with a bang, and a month after his inauguration, he has turned the world upside down. With his decisions and actions, the new-old president is deconstructing the understanding of America's greatness, rejecting or drastically changing the ideas and images about the United States that had been built over decades. Ideas and images that we knew and were fascinated by when, 25 years ago, we founded *Ad Americam. Journal of American Studies*.

Ad Americam, in Latin, means more or less the same as "To America" or "relating to America". Back then, in 2000, Poles were considered one of the most pro-American nations in the world. Polish people loved America because it was perceived as generous, democratic, modern and tolerant. Many wanted to go and live in America, which embodied dreams of prosperity, success and freedom. To a large extent, our ideas about the United States were shaped by American soft power, which had at its service not only diplomacy, but also American business and the American culture industry. Since the second decade of the 20th century, America has worked very hard to build its image as a modern, friendly country — a country that cares for the whole world. Today, in 2025, Trump's decisions are subordinated to his slogan America First, which basically means that America no longer cares about the image of a generous, open and caring world leader.

The leader has become arrogant and self-absorbed. Democracy, America's greatest political and social achievement and pride, also seems to have little value.

In 2000, our situation as a university department dealing with American studies was also completely different. At that time, we were still operating as an independent research unit of the Jagiellonian University under the name 'Inter-Faculty Center for American Studies', which was founded in 1991 by Professor Andrzej Mania — one of the founding fathers of American studies in Poland. Although our headquarters were located in the very center of Krakow, at *Rynek Główny* (Main Market Square), we occupied only a few rooms in an old Renaissance tenement house. Today, we are a large academic establishment educating undergraduate, graduate and PhD students and conducting research not only in the area of American studies, but also in Canadian, Latin American and migration studies.

From many perspectives, a quarter of a century is a long time; a lot can be done, researched and published — and many students have been educated. All of these changes and experiences resonate in *Ad Americam. Journal of American Studies*. When, in 1999, I (then a PhD student) approached Professor Andrzej Mania with the comment that we should consider establishing a scientific journal devoted to American studies, he said: "Good idea. Go for it. No money." So, the first issue was a home-grown enterprise. I obtained funds from acquaintances and friends who worked in business or municipal institutions in Kraków and could support this completely unpredictable undertaking as part of their PR activities. Marek Sokołowski, a very talented young (at the time) graphic designer, chose appropriate fonts and prepared the logo. No pay. I still remember our disputes about the red dot on the 'i' in *Ad Americam*, which did not impress me at first. Today, I consider it the most intriguing graphic element of the cover. The logo created at that time (together *with* the red dot) and the cover design matrix remain *Ad Americam's* hallmark to this day. They are still chic and elegant.

The graphics for the first issue cover were prepared by my friend — the outstanding Polish painter Bożena Lesiak. Now, I look fondly at this upright figure of a young, energetic woman, boldly looking to the future, who marches bravely on our first cover. The first issue in the main section focused on images of women in American culture. Ironically, the topics analyzed in the first issue ranged from the area of feminism and gender studies to American gay theater, whereas today, in February 2025, media reports that Trump officials have ordered every academic institution in the US to eliminate programs that promote diversity and equal opportunity.

Additionally, it must be mentioned that, although we did not have financial support from the university, we received a lot of help and substantive support from both Professor Andrzej Mania and Professor Tadeusz Paleczny, who was a kind and understanding reviewer of the first issue of *Ad Americam*.

Since the first issue was published and the Jagiellonian University authorities accepted it, funds were already reserved for publication. For several subsequent issues, it was also possible to implement the original concept, so that each issue would be thematically profiled, with articles on the main topic of the issue being published in the *Focus on* section. In addition, the permanent sections were *Culture and Society* and *History and Politics*. In later years, the collected texts did not always allow for such an arrangement. When Łukasz Wordliczek took over the management of the journal, he devoted a lot of time and effort to building its position in the academic journals market. He gathered many academic authorities for the journal's editorial board, took care of the appropriate review process and entered the journal into the list of journals of the Ministry of Higher Education as well as various academic journal databases.

Over the course of 25 years, from an inconspicuous academic initiative that grew out of the passion of Professor Andrzej Mania and the spontaneous idea of doctoral students, we have created an important and recognizable academic unit of American studies and a consistently developing, aspiring academic periodical. It is a pity that the object of our studies, although still interesting and fascinating, seems to be heading towards areas that we will study more often with confusion than admiration.

Jolanta Szymkowska-Bartyzel
First Managing Editor of *Ad Americam*