

ATTENTION PLEASE!

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

One of our primary goals as the **Polish American Congress** is **opposing and exposing examples of bigotry aimed at Polish Americans and Poland** (see: “Polish American Congress – Mission Statement”).

This has been, in my case, the main motivation for joining the PAC years ago – the defense of Polish self-image from the derogatory attacks, and upgrading the public image of Americans of Polish heritage. Upon coming to the States, I was astounded by so many instances of virulent anti-Polishness in the public sphere.

We all know from our everyday experiences over the years how textbooks, serious historical works, movies, magazines and newspapers have presented historical events regarding Poland in a twisted or potentially malicious way through:

Distortions: e.g. WW II beginning in 1940 instead in 1939, or with the suggestion that it was due to irresponsible Polish diplomacy which unnecessarily involved France and the UK in the war, when it was the other way around. In a British movie, a Pole instead of contributing to the Allies’ war effort by breaking the Enigma code, works for the Germans. Jan Karski presented as a single and lonely hero – sort of a “High Noon Sheriff” on a private, dangerous and desperate mission with no Polish Underground State behind him which was enforcing death punishment for those who acted against Jews. And most distorting of all, no Zegota, hence, there is nothing about a clandestine organization whose sole objective was to provide haven and aid to hiding Jews.

Omissions: e.g. French Resistance, but no AK; Ghetto Uprising but not Warsaw Rising; Allied forces when listed including Argentina which joined in April 1945, but not Poles with the fourth fighting force after USSR, US, UK with over 600,000 in military, but no presence in the Victory Parade in London; Danish exemplary rescue of 6000 Jews with one person killed in the process, but nothing that the penalty for helping and harboring a Jew in Poland was death, and the murder of the whole family. Again, nothing mentioned about Żegota, a special organizational structure which channeled all assistance to Jews, what sacrifices it involved, and how many perished – not by the hundreds but by the thousands, all executed for rendering help. Hence, Schindler is remembered as a hero, but Irena Sandler, who saved thousands of Jewish children, is forgotten; Wallenberg honored for rescuing Hungarian Jews, but Henryk Ślawiak not.

Suppression of facts: e.g. No Polish contribution remembered in solving Enigma code (Rajewski, Rozycki, Żegalski), no Katyn Massacre, no massive deportations mentioned and three million people killed not included in fatality calculations.

Downright lies: e.g. Accusations of Polish collaboration with the Germans, but no allegations against the French, Belgians, Dutch, Norwegians, Slovaks. Elie Wiesel blaming the Holocaust on “Poles, Hungarians, Germans” – we vehemently oppose including Poles at all, let alone in that order. Soviet invasion and occupation in 1939 presented as protection of minorities and “bringing peace and order”.

Slander: e.g. “The Complete Maus”. This highly regarded cartoon series has been widely used in the classroom “where only

the highest standards of factuality should prevail". Poles are presented as well-fed pigs enjoying good and comfortable life under German rule, admiring Hitler and taking part in the persecution of Jews

Stupendous ignorance: e.g. President Obama, a Harvard Law graduate in an official speech honoring Jan Karski said: "Polish death camps", but in this case he was not, and is not alone in so called "misspeaking", however at least one example should be recalled. It is a knowledgeable, well-versed party qualified to join our President. Amy Chua, professor of law at Yale, describing extreme intolerance back in time wrote "In Poland over 50,000 Jews were massacred between 1648 and 1654". Yes, they were murdered but not by Poles; it is just right as calling 9/11 "The greatest American act of terrorism", or - precisely - using the phrase "Polish death camps".

Total absurdities: e.g. L. Dawidowicz's claim that "the first shots fired (in 1943) at the Germans in occupied Europe were those of the ghetto fighters".

General lack of rational judgments: e.g. Why to be bewildered that Zofia Kossak-Szczucka, a moving force behind founding of Żegota, rescued Jews "In spite of her anti-Semitism", and that "bizarrely, yet honestly ..." (M. Gilbert) her political views didn't change even after being sent for her actions to a concentration camp - please, tell me where is the logical connection in this? Does it defy logic that political convictions (anti-Semitism, e.g.) do not define moral attitudes and standards? This incomprehension is quite often; another example in this respect: Dr. Jan Mosdorf, leader of ONR, who "in spite" of his political anti-Semitism was

killed helping Jews in a concentration camp, or Monsignor Godlewski, a catholic priest, an open anti-Semite before the war, and many others like them.

Targeted manipulation of the presentation of history - artificially and fallaciously construed, but unfortunately is extremely effective: Lanzmann's "Shoah", a film with a preconceived notion of the Poles' complicity in the extermination of Jews is described as "a masterful work of art - but at the same time a cunning distortion of the truth"; pseudohistorical, in terms of methodology, booklets by Jan Tomasz Gross, "The Neighbors" and its follow up, have served as tools to extend the blame for a horrific atrocity committed by a few Polish hoodlums, with the unquestionable inspiration and participation by the German authorities, to the whole nation. Surprisingly - or maybe not - he found a good number of willing responders and followers also among Poles, and within the ignorant public worldwide.

At least in the case of textbooks and historical works, however accurate they claim to be, all this is called often "**shortcomings and errors**". The question is how could they have happened and how can this be corrected? Should it be attributed to **sloppy scholarship or ill-will**? If the first - maybe no access to accurate primary (!) sources; if the latter, what, if anything, can be done? **That is a question, indeed.**

Assuming the first, which is a convenient explanation, but also most probable, an organized effort has to be mustered to give the rest of the world *an opportunity* to **learn about the Polish history through translated Polish textbooks, classics, modern day literature, and of course, the spoken word.**

We must begin to bring about such a movement, and right now we are presented with a golden opportunity.

Dr. Ewa Kurek from Lublin is going to be with us for a couple of days. She specializes in wartime history, specifically Polish--Jewish relations of this era. As one of her reviewers wrote, "her level of knowledge is far above that of the usual authors on this subject".

It is extremely important to promote an un-biased and factual presentation of history. As said before, we consider this our mission. We are incredibly lucky to have an expert capable of such a presentation visiting us soon.

Dr. Ewa Kurek will speak in the Bay Area and in Sacramento at five meetings about her book: "Polish-Jewish Relations 1939-1945: Beyond the Limits of Solidarity", which reconstructs the wartime history based on her 20 years of detailed archival research.

The presentations will be held:

Friday, October 11, at 7:30 p.m. East Bay Polish American Association

909 Mellus St, Martinez (in Polish)

Saturday, October 12, at 4:30 p.m. Polonian Cultural and Pastoral Center 1601 South Ave., Sacramento (in Polish)

Sunday, October 13, at 12p.m. Nativity of Our Lord Catholic Church 240 Fell St., San Francisco (in Polish)

and at 3 p.m. Presidio Room at the Presidio Branch of the San Francisco Public Library, 3150 Sacramento St., San Francisco (in English)

Monday, October 14, at 7 p.m. St.Br. Albert Parish
10250 Clayton Rd., St Jose (in
Polish)

As I repeat once more, these meetings provide for the opportunity to promote the expansion of an un-biased, factual and in our particular interest, Polish history. As our heritage is shared amongst us, our children, and their progeny, so should be our mission to advance the correction of mistakenly recorded or presented history.

Please come and bring others with you to find out directly for yourself what Dr. Kurek has to say. Her book, in English or Polish, will be available.

The Consulate General of Poland in Los Angeles wrote in its announcement: "Like in her other books, Ewa Kurek has the courage to raise important questions and the courage to search for equally important answers."

Come - there is no other way to find it out - believe me, it will be worthwhile!

I hope to meet you there one of these days.

So long!