

The American War of Independence as Reflected in Polish Textbooks in 20th and 21st Century

La Guerra de Independencia americana reflejada en los manuales polacos de los siglos XX y XXI

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Abstract

The Polish scholarly literature has not yet attempted to present the way the American War of Independence has been reflected in Polish history textbooks. The article does not claim to be exhaustive. The author has tried, by taking up the topic, to refer to the research on school textbooks conducted in Poland and to extend it with the topic concerning the American Revolution in the years 1775-1783. The author examines the way these events are depicted in Polish textbooks of the 20th and 21st centuries, through the prism of transformations in Polish historiography. The topic of the American Revolution is an extensive one in Polish education. The sensitive issues include the problem of slavery. Furthermore, the issue of the Constitution, as the most important piece of legislation – the achievement of the revolution. It is also quite evident in terms of school textbooks that the attention of students has been directed towards three heroes over the decades – George Washington, Casimir Pulaski and Tadeusz Kosciuszko. The participation of representatives of European countries in the American Revolution and the updating of their pantheon has also been discussed.

Keywords

American revolution, history textbooks, polish historiography, educational system

Resumen

La literatura académica en Polonia todavía no ha intentado mostrar las maneras en que la Guerra de Independencia americana se ha reflejado en los libros de texto de este país, y este artículo no pretende ser exhaustivo. La autora, abordando este tema, ha llevado su análisis al tema de la Revolución americana de los años 1775 a 1783. Examina así los acontecimientos retratados en los textos polacos de los siglos XX y XXI a través del prisma de las transformaciones de la propia historiografía polaca. El tema de la Revolución americana tiene gran significación en la política educativa de este país. Los asuntos sensibles incluyen el problema de la esclavitud, además del tema de la Constitución, entendida como la pieza más importante de la legislación y logro de la Revolución. Atendiendo a los manuales de texto escolares es bastante evidente que la mirada de los estudiantes ha sido dirigida durante décadas a tres héroes: George Washington, Casimir

Pulaski y Tadeusz Kosciuszko. En el artículo también se estudia la participación de representantes de países europeos en la Revolución americana y la actualización de su panteón.

Palabras claves

Revolución americana, manuales de texto de historia, historiografía polaca, sistema educativo.

Introduction

The War of Independence of the United States of America, otherwise known as the American Revolution, from 1775 to 1783, has acquired pivotal importance in the history of the country. Undoubtedly, it was an important part of the breakthrough from which a new nation and a new statehood emerged. This breakthrough was political, socio-economic, and cultural. Not only was a new state sovereignty formed, but also a new political system, whose essence and evolution towards an ever-wider political democracy has influenced the history of other countries.

A historiographical view of the War of Independence of the United States of America has already been presented in the Polish scholarly literature,¹ indicating a significant influence of the current political situation in Poland on the scope of interest in its history and the interpretation of events related to it, to be discussed later in the study. However, no attempt has yet been made to present the way this event has been reflected in Polish history textbooks. The educational policy of the Polish state, the reorganization of school structures, the ideological aspects of teaching and upbringing, the shape of school curricula and textbooks, as well as the practice of education, are fairly well described in the Polish scholarly literature, which provides an exemption from a more detailed examination of it.² Undoubtedly, as has rightly been shown, educational policy in the Polish state, aimed at using the school to shape such citizens who would support a given system of government or the prevailing worldview of the time.³ This article does not claim to be exhaustive. In approaching the subject, the author has attempted to relate to the ongoing research on school textbooks in Poland and to extend it with a topic concerning the American Revolution of 1775-1783.⁴

¹ Zofia Libiszowska, "Stany Zjednoczone w historiografii polskiej", *Acta Universitatis Lodziensis. Folia Historica*, [vol.] 57 (1996): 5-23; Marian Marek Drozdowski, *Revolucja amerykańska w polskiej myśli historycznej i społecznej*, *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, [vol.] 82, 1 (1975), 69-99.

² Zbigniew Osiński, *Reformowanie polskiej edukacji historycznej w XX wieku. Kształt reform a potrzeby, zainteresowania i możliwości ucznia*, in: *Szkolnictwo pijarskie w czasach minionych a współczesne problemy edukacji historycznej*, [vol.] 3, edit. Mariusz Ausz, Krystyna Wróbel-Lipowa (Krakow: Wydawnictwo eSPe, 2010), 7-44. See also the discussion of the literature there.

³ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴ Regarding the coverage of selected themes from universal history in Polish history textbooks: Anita Młynarczyk-Tomczyk, *Obraz stosunków polsko-ukraińskich w programach nauczania i w podręcznikach do historii przeznaczonych dla liceów pedagogicznych w latach 1944-1970*, in *Stosunki polsko-ukraińskie w szkolnej edukacji historycznej od XIX do XXI wieku: materiały konferencji naukowej, 21-22 października 2004 r.*, Cedzyna k. Kielc, edit. Hanna Wójcik-Łagan (Kielce: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jana Kochanowskiego w Kielcach 2005), 257-273. Regarding the image of Poland in foreign compendia: Adam

The selection of textbooks presented in the article focused on choosing representative compendiums that cover the period of the War of Independence of the United States of America. These textbooks are mandatory in primary and secondary schools for each of the periods discussed here from the history of Polish education (20th and 21st centuries). It is also worth briefly outlining the characteristics of the textbook recipients. Undoubtedly, school students in the Second Polish Republic were much different from their peers at the beginning of the 21st century. During the Second Republic, after 123 years of partition, popularizing education was not an easy task. The school network was small, and expanding it quickly posed a problem. There was also a shortage of qualified teachers. The availability of secondary schools remained an issue throughout the Second Republic; they were still unattainable for the majority of Poland's population at that time, primarily for economic reasons. From the first years after the Second World War, under significant ideological influence, making primary education accessible to all young people became a top priority in Poland. In 1971, work began on a new model of the educational system, which aimed to guarantee, among other things, universal secondary education. Although the structural reform of the educational system was eventually abandoned, the percentage of primary school graduates continuing their education in full secondary schools systematically increased.⁵ One of the most important objectives of educational policy in Poland at the beginning of the 21st century was to level educational differences among children from different backgrounds and at different stages of development, while also taking into account the possibility of identifying and further supporting the most talented pupils.⁶

Historiography of the American War of Independence (outline)

It is more common in historiography to use the term American Revolution than the War of American Independence.⁷ While recalling some aspects of Polish historiography

Suchoński, *Zmitologizowane wątki dziejów Polski w zagranicznych podręcznikach do nauczania historii*, in: *Tradycja i mity w edukacji historycznej w dobie reformy*, edit. Stanisław Roszak, Małgorzata Strzelecka, Mariusz Ziółkowski, (Toruń: Stowarzyszenie Oświatowców Polskich, 2004), 109-117; Marek Andrzejewski, "Obraz Polski w austriackich podręcznikach szkolnych do historii", *Echa Przeszłości*, [vol.] 9 (2008), 241-253.

⁵ Edukacja w II Rzeczypospolitej, <https://niepodlegla.gov.pl/o-niepodleglej/edukacja-w-ii-rzeczypospolitej/> [Access 01.04.2024]; Encyklopedia PWN. Hasło: Polska. Oświata. Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa <https://encyklopedia.pwn.pl/haslo/4575102/polska-oswiata-polska-rzeczpospolitaludowa.html> [Access 01.04.2024].

⁶ For more details, see: Marzena Kletke – Milejska, *Zreformowany system edukacji i jego wpływ na kształcenie i wychowanie dzieci w publicznych szkołach podstawowych. Studium politologiczne. Praca doktorska napisana pod kierunkiem dra hab. Mariana Mitręgi* (Katowice: 2007), 64-127.

⁷ T. Brainard, *History of the war of independence of the United States of America* (New Haven Conn, 1839); Sir Lewis Namier, *England in the Age of the American Revolution* (London: Second Edition, 1930); Arthur M. Schlesinger, *The Colonial Merchants and the American Revolution, 1763-1776* (New York: Columbia University, 1918); Herber Aptheker, *The American Revolution 1763-1783* (New York: International Publishers, 1960); Zofia Libiszowska, *Opinia polska wobec rewolucji amerykańskiej w XVIII wieku* (Łódź: Ossolineum, 1962); Zdzisław Sułek, *Polacy w republikańskiej armii amerykańskiej podczas wojny o niepodległość Stanów Zjednoczonych 1775-1783*, in: *Polskie tradycje wojskowe*, [vol.] 3: *Tradycje walk wyzwoleniczych „Za naszą i waszą wolność”*, edit. Józef W. Dyskant (Warszaw: “Bellona”, 1995); Harry M. Ward, *The War for Independence and the Transformation of American Society War and Society in the United States, 1775-1783* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2003); John Fiske, *The American Revolution* (New York: Independently Publisher, 2021); Michał J. Rozbicki, *Kultura okresu rewolucji i wczesnej republiki*, in *Historia Stanów Zjednoczonych Ameryki 1763-1848*, [vol. 2], edit. Andrzej

concerning this event, it is worth pointing out that Polish public opinion reacted vigorously to the growing conflict in the American English colonies and to the course of the revolution itself.⁸ Influenced by the work of the reformers of the time, Stanisław Staszic and Hugo Kołłątaj, the first Polish central educational authority, the Commission of National Education, recommended the introduction of topic of the American Revolution into school textbooks. Interest in this subject increased again after Poland had regained its independence, in November 1918.⁹ President Thomas Woodrow Wilson who addressed the issue of Poland's independence in point 14 of his speech, as well as the establishment of diplomatic exchanges with the reborn Republic of Poland, contributed to the enormous popularity, and interest of the United States and its President among the Polish people.¹⁰

After the Second World War, Poland returned to the political map of Europe. With a different shape of borders and following the division of the great powers, it found itself in the Eastern Bloc, in the zone of domination of the Soviet Union. The journalistic campaign of half-truths about North America and its "voracious imperialism" intensified at this time. The misery of minority groups, problems of poverty, and racism were overemphasized. The censorship was severe, but as the scholarly literature shows, Polish historians, even in the worst of times, went no further in their criticism of America than American historians themselves did.¹¹ Since the Solidarity movement (1980), there has been a rapid increase in Polish visits to America and opportunities for scholarships and grants. Polish historians have been undertaking scholarly translations; many of them have also become authors of monographs and dissertations.¹² The historiography of the 21st century has deepened the previous research on selected individuals¹³ and episodes of the American Revolution.¹⁴

Also important, and requiring separate attention, is the subject of Polish participation in the American War of Independence, which is strongly emphasized in Polish historiography. Not only the sacrifice of Tadeusz Kosciuszko and Casimir Pulaski

Bartnicki, Donald T. Critchlow i in (Warszawa: PWN, 1995), 121-126; Sara McIntosh Wooten, *Women of the American Revolution* (New York: Mondo Pub., 2007).

⁸ Marian Marek Drozdowski, *Rewolucja amerykańska*, 69.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 86.

¹⁰ Zofia Libiszowska, *Stany Zjednoczone w historiografii polskiej*, 11.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

¹² *Ibid.*, 18.

¹³ Dariusz Nawrot, "Kwestia nominacji Tadeusza Kościuszki na generała brygady armii amerykańskiej", *Acta Universitatis Lodzensis. Folia Historica*, [vol.] 110 (2022): 99-111; Longin Pastusiak, *Polacy w wojnie o niepodległość Stanów Zjednoczonych: Kościuszko, Pulaski i inni: czy pierwszym Polakiem w Ameryce był uczestnik wyprawy Kolumba?* (Warszawa: Bellona, 2015).

¹⁴ Michael Burgan, *Great Women of the American Revolution* (Minneapolis Compass Point Books: 2005); Sara McIntosh Wooten, *Women, Women of the American Revolution*; W. Kęder, "'Gazeta Warszawska' wobec wojny o niepodległość Stanów Zjednoczonych w latach 1778-1782, part 1, Wojna o niepodległość Stanów Zjednoczonych w Ameryce Północnej, *Rocznik Bibliologiczno-Prasoznawczy*, [vol.] 2 (2010), 45-62, part. 2, *Ibid.*, vol. 3 (2011), 89-103, Maria Rólkowska, "Amerykańska walka o niepodległość i nowo powstałe państwo na łamach polskiego piśmiennictwa okresu oświecenia", *Zeszyty Naukowe Ostrołęckiego Towarzystwa Naukowego*, [vol.] 32 (2018), 109-120; Katarzyna Stelmasiak, *Warunki naturalne Wirginii jako terenu działań wojennych podczas walk o niepodległość Stanów Zjednoczonych Ameryki Północnej*, in: *Oblicza wojny*, vol. 2, *Armia kontra natura*, edit. Tadeusz Grabarczyk i Magdalena Pogońska-Pol (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2020); Ł. Niewiński, "Jeńcy wojenni w amerykańskiej wojnie o niepodległość (1775-1783)", *Białostockie Teki Historyczne*, [vol.] 8 (2010), 59-78.

in the struggle,¹⁵ but also other Polish heroes of the “American Revolution” – soldiers of the Bar Confederation and Polish settlers – have been substantially appreciated.¹⁶

The theme of the American Revolution in Polish school textbooks of the first half of the 20th century

By the time Poland regained its independence in 1918, the education systems of the partitioning powers had been in operation in the respective territories of the Polish lands. The unification of primary and secondary education began in early 1919. History, as a school subject, was to become one of the factors helping to rebuild the state and prepare a civic society. Historical education was a pillar of the so-called national upbringing, in which the cult of Poland’s history was treated as a guarantee of love for the fatherland and good citizenship.¹⁷ By the Act of 11 March 1932, a new organizational and curricular system of Polish education was introduced. From then on, historical education became the mainstay of so-called state education, i.e. the educational ideology of the Sanation under the leadership of Josef Pilsudski.¹⁸

In Polish history textbooks published in the first half of the 20th century (until the 1950s), Eurocentrism was the dominant approach to history education. It was almost exclusively political history, always with reference to Europe.¹⁹ In this context, it is worth noting that the American Revolution, from its outbreak and happy ending for the rebels, provided a pretext for the glorification of democratic ideas. It was popularized by the majority of historians of the Second Republic, and for the next decades Polish American studies actively co-created the myth, which, among other things, presented America as a country of freedom.²⁰ However, these ideas had different political interpretations in different periods of Polish history and this trend can be seen in Polish textbooks. At the beginning of the 20th century, when Poland had been wiped off the map of Europe and then reborn within new borders and with a new system – a democratic republic – the War of Independence of the United States was seen in Polish textbooks in the context of the creation of a “new democratic republic”, affirming by action, as it were, “the free-minded theories, preached in Europe at that time”.²¹ These ideas, as it was emphasized, were to attract many volunteers, “favoring slogans of freedom”, from Poland, and from France, and soon Spain and the Netherlands followed in their footsteps.²² The United States was contrasted with the then Poland and shown as an area diverse in terms of origin, religious and political beliefs.²³ As highlighted, “they settled together, forming various religious

¹⁵ Adam Mieczysław Skalkowski, *Kościuszko w świetle nowszych badań* (Poznan: Księgarnia Uniwersytecka Fiszer i Majewski, 1924); Bogdan Grzelowski, “Polacy w wojnie o niepodległość Stanów Zjednoczonych Ameryki”, *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, [vol.] 83, 2 (1976): 347 (338-352).

¹⁶ Bogdan Grzelowski, *Polacy w wojnie o niepodległość*, 347, 349.

¹⁷ Zbigniew Osiński, *Reformowanie polskiej edukacji*, 14.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁹ Zofia Libiszowska, *Stany Zjednoczone w historiografii*, 11.

²⁰ Marian Marek Drozdowski, *Revolucja amerykańska*, 88, 99.

²¹ Wincenty Zakrzewski, *Historia powszechna na klasy wyższe szkół średnich*, [vol.] 3, *Historia nowożytna* (Kraków: nakł. aut., 1916), 164.

²² Wincenty Zakrzewski, *Historia powszechna na klasy wyższe*, 163-164, Wanda Moszczeńska, Halina Mrozowska, *Podręcznik do nauki historii na trzecią klasę gimnazjalną* (Lviv: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1935), 34-36.

²³ One of the most serious challenges for the Second Polish Republic was the problem of national minorities and, in particular, the organization of conditions in the sphere of general education. Sviatlana Sendzer,

groups, as Catholic, Protestant, Calvinist, etc., and introducing a variety of regimes, i.e. democratic communes, counties with the authority of officials”.²⁴ The pathos of democratic ideas, evident in the compendia of the time, only slightly overshadowed the fate of the ‘unfortunate negroes, imported from the sub-tropical countries of Africa’. For little was written about their position, in the context of the agricultural south, where rice, cotton and tobacco plantations had flourished.²⁵ The cause of the conflict between England and the colonies was seen in the position of the metropolis, which “left the colonies completely independent in their rule, while restraining them in their economic relations, wishing to secure for itself the greatest possible material benefits”. This, as emphasized, was the source of the conflict that ultimately resulted, as was to be obvious to the students, in a “just war of independence” that ended in victory for the colonies.²⁶

The most important piece of legislation associated with the American Revolution was undoubtedly the Constitution and, as the first decree of its kind in the world, it was heavily highlighted in Polish textbooks. Students, who in the newly reborn state were included in the general education, were supposed to know it, respect it and know that “with very minor additions it is still in place today”.²⁷ In the 1930s, more emphasis was placed on the role of the Constitution as the most important act and the great achievement of the American Revolution on an international scale. However, during the period when power in Poland was consolidated under the leadership of the Sanation, led by Piłsudski,²⁸ its context highlighted the importance of the strong power of George Washington – the organizer of the struggle against England.²⁹ After the news that Washington had been unanimously elected president, schools in Poland started to inform the students that a new state had been created in the other hemisphere, which was to occupy a prominent place in the world alongside the European states in the future.³⁰

In the textbooks of the first half of the twentieth century, George Washington appeared as a steadfast hero who stood out for his courage and foresight. It was to these “virtues of his”, as it was emphasized, “combined with great personal perseverance and selflessness, that the American cause owed most”.³¹ Washington was portrayed as a man “full of perseverance and good faith” who, despite many defeats, “never gave up working

“Obraz mniejszości narodowych w podręcznikach szkolnych jako element polityki oświatowej II RP”, *Rozprawy z Dziejów Oświaty*, [vol.] 46, (2009): 49 (49-84).

²⁴ Wanda Moszczeńska, Halina Mrozowska, *Podręcznik do nauki historii*, 34.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 35, 37. Wars were divided into “just” and “unjust” by the founder of the modern school of law, Hugo Grotius. In modern times, discussions around just war have not ceased, although the very notion of just war is not as frequently discussed anymore. Renata Jankowska, *Od wojny sprawiedliwej do wojny usprawiedliwionej – ewolucja koncepcji wojny jako czynnika destabilizującego współczesne stosunki międzynarodowe*, in: “*Wielopropblematowość – wybrane aspekty ponowoczesności*”, edit. Grzegorz Libor, Magdalena Michalska (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2014), 62-63 (59-69).

²⁷ Wincenty Zakrzewski, *Historia powszechna na klasy wyższe*, 164.

²⁸ Józef Piłsudski gradually realized his full decision making power from the moment of the 1926 military coup. The so-called “sanation policy” aimed at subordinating to the authority of Piłsudski, recognizing the dominant role of the state in creating the rules of social life, supporting the principle of strong state power (mainly by increasing the powers of the president), rejecting nationalism, and striving for Poland to play an independent role on the international stage. See more: Kamil Mroczka, “Polityka Józefa Piłsudskiego wobec parlamentu w pierwszych latach reżimu autorytarnego 1928-1930”, *Kwartalnik Naukowy OAP UW e-Politikon*, 2 (2012), 145-169.

²⁹ Wanda Moszczeńska, Halina Mrozowska, *Podręcznik do nauki historii*, 36.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 37.

³¹ Wincenty Zakrzewski, *Historia powszechna na klasy wyższe*, 162.

and fighting”.³² The Polish heroes of these events were not overlooked either - Casimir Pulaski was described as: “a brave and courageous knight who organized the American cavalry and took part in the siege of the fortress of Savannah, where he was killed leading the attack with a troop of cavalry”. Tadeusz Kosciuszko, whose “famous and his skillful fortification of fortresses resulted in strengthening the position of the liberty troops, was also recalled. It was emphasized that Kosciuszko was appreciated not only by Washington and Congress, but also by the later generation of Americans. Polish students were to be proud that the citizens of the United States remembered Kościuszko’s and Pulaski’s merits with gratitude.³³

The American Revolution in textbooks of the second half of the 20th century (up to 1989)

The post-war model of Polish education was pushed by the Soviet-dependent Polish Workers’ Party and later (from December 1948) the Polish United Workers’ Party. The school curricula aimed to promote historical thinking and infuse the educational process with elements of socialism. The concept of “people’s democracy” was commonly referred to. Democracy understood in this way was to be a counterbalance to the “bourgeois democracy” of Western European countries.³⁴

The history textbooks published in the second half of the twentieth century (up to 1989) were also dominated by Eurocentrism in historical education, however, unilaterally divided into a positive image of the so-called Eastern Bloc countries and the “imperialist West”, which also included the United States of America, although non-European, but with strong ties to the old continent. Economic and social phenomena were considered to be the fundamental factors shaping the historical process, following the Marxist methodology in force at the time, and they were significantly expanded in curricula and textbooks.³⁵ Therefore, the first theme highlighted in the Polish People’s Republic (PRL) compendia, when discussing the American Revolution, was the problem of slavery. In discussing the English colonies in North America, the diverse social structure was stressed, but in the context of social injustice. It was emphasized that “the labor force was the Negroes, treated inhumanely by their masters”. At the heart of the “just” war was, as pointed out to students, “the exploitation of the colonies by England”, which caused great indignation among the colonists and consequently the drafting of the Declaration of Independence, as an act of disobedience to the metropolis.³⁶

“A brave leader and excellent organizer”, George Washington, whose determination to train and discipline the army, and whose guerrilla warfare was successful, continued to provide students with a model of sacrifice and heroism for the national cause. It was also pointed out that “the colonists’ struggle for independence received sympathy from “progressive people in Europe”. Some of them took part in this

³² Wanda Moszczeńska, Halina Mrozowska, *Podręcznik do nauki historii*, 35.

³³ *Ibid.*, 35, 37.

³⁴ Archives: Archive of New Records in Warsaw. Ministry of Education in Warsaw 1944, 1945-1966, sig. 4212, 73; Zbigniew Osiński, *Reformowanie polskiej edukacji historycznej*, 32.

³⁵ Stanisław Mauersberg, *Reforma szkolnictwa w Polsce w latach 1944-1948* (Wrocław: Monografie z dziejów oświaty, [vol.] 16, ZNiO, 1974), 238-239.

³⁶ Stanisław Szostakowski, *Historia dla klasy 6* (Warsaw: Państwowe Zakłady Wydawnictw Szkolnych, 1965), 162.

war with arms in hand. The Constitution, although highlighted and acknowledged as a positive dimension of the events that took place in America between 1775 and 1783, was portrayed in the context of social injustice: “citizens of the United States were assured freedom of religion, freedom of speech, and personal immunity. All these rights, however, applied only to white people”.³⁷

A separate topic was devoted to the participation of Poles in the fight for the freedom of the United States of America. As previously, the attitude of volunteers “rushing to help the States in their struggle for independence” was highlighted. Casimir Pulaski and Tadeusz Kosciuszko were among those who gave special service to the American people in the fight for independence. Most attention was given to Kosciuszko. He was portrayed as a Polish patriot who “wanted above all to win the independence of his state, which is why he returned to the country in 1784”. This patriotism, at the expense of comforts, was to be seen in the message.³⁸

The secondary school textbooks of the time further emphasized the “oppression of the Indians”. It was pointed out that, moving from east to west, the colonists took the most fertile land by force or deception. They destroyed the Indians with weapons or tried to force them into slave labor, and the Indians died out or fled en masse. The slavery of the black population, who were described as “livestock”, was also exposed to an even greater extent, pointing out that “the owner was master of their life and death, they could sell, hire, cede the slave. Negroes had no political or social rights”.³⁹ The war of “American insurgents” for independence was explicitly described as “just” and it was pointed out that it reverberated throughout Europe. This was to be evidenced by the committees of solidarity with the fighting Americans being set up in various countries, especially in France. It was pointed out to the students that Poles also took part in the defense of American freedom and two well-known figures were immediately evoked: Pulaski and Kosciuszko.⁴⁰ The Constitution of the United States at the upper school level was explicitly called “bourgeois-democratic”.⁴¹ It was pointed out that “in the eighteenth century, after all, it was a major achievement in the democratization of political life and had a deep response throughout Europe, but it proclaimed ideas of democracy, freedom and equality limited to a narrow group of bourgeoisie and large landowners”.⁴²

The American Revolution. The turn of the century (20th and 21st) and contemporary times

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 167. From the mid-1950s, when relations gradually became moderate, the number of Poles travelling to the USA for a limited period of time began to increase. A significant proportion of those who received temporary visas extended their stay in the USA illegally. Representatives of all social classes were immigrating, mainly for economic reasons. Barbara Sakson, “Po drugiej stronie Oceanu. Nowi emigranci z Polski w metropolii Chicagowskiej”, *CMR Working Papers. Seria Prace Migracyjne*, [vol.] 63, 5 (2005): 5 (1-70).

³⁹ Józef Andrzej Gierowski, Józef Leszczyński, *Historia dla klasy II liceum ogólnokształcącego* (Warszaw: Wydawnictwo Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, 1976), 297-298.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 301.

⁴¹ The constitution understood in that way was intended to be a counterbalance to the constitution of “victorious socialism”, with which the Soviet constitution was identified. It was to differ fundamentally from bourgeois constitutions in that, since supporting the interests of the working masses, it introduced a socialist social order. Henryk Świątkowski, “[Józef Stalin] Twórca Konstytucji Zwycięskiego Socjalizmu”, *Nowe Drogi* [vol.] 3, 6 (1949): 176 (3-206).

⁴² Józef Andrzej Gierowski, Józef Leszczyński, *Historia dla klasy II*, 301.

The transformation of the educational system in contemporary Poland was linked to the political, social and economic changes of 1989. The first school reform in the Third Republic of Poland was introduced on 1 September 1999. The current one has been in force since 1 January 2017.⁴³ The aim of history curricula in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries in Poland is above all for the school students to “consciously and responsibly participate in the creation of a European community of values with an underlying idea of freedom that is particularly close to us Poles”.⁴⁴

The period of the Third Republic has brought a new, modified perspective on the events of 1775-1783 in the United States of America, no longer burdened by the methodological ballast of the previous era. The earlier “exploitation of the colonies by England” has been replaced by a less pejorative term: “conflict between England and its American colonies”. Students have been presented with information about the development of agriculture in the colonies to the south, and then about the exploitation of agricultural labor, employing “Negroes imported from Africa, who were often treated inhumanly by their masters”.⁴⁵ Secondary school textbooks have indicated that while in the north, in the New England colonies, relatively small-scale agricultural ownership prevailed, fostering “democratic social principles, “it was different in the south, where plantations had developed “based on the labor of Negro slaves”.⁴⁶

In the War of Independence topic, the figure of George Washington has been invariably presented as a “brave leader and excellent organizer” heading the insurgent forces. His organizational mastery for “quickly bringing order to the American ranks” as well as his military prowess when he “ordered even lead plates from roofs to be used for making bullets” have been also emphasized.⁴⁷ The secondary school textbook has also mentioned that in the effort to fight for independence, he was keen to make use of the skills of the volunteers coming to America increasingly in large numbers, often outstanding military specialists. Among these were the German (for the first time in the 20th century) Baron von Steuben,⁴⁸ the Poles Tadeusz Kosciuszko and Casimir Pulaski.⁴⁹

A separate topic has addressed the Constitution of the United States, with the emphasis being placed on the fact that “all the laws established therein, however, applied

⁴³ Magdalena Szczepanek, *Przemiany polskiego systemu edukacji podstawowej od lat 80. XX wieku, Edukacja – Technika – Informatyka*, [vol.] 26, 4 (2018): 525-526 (524-528). A reduced core curriculum is currently being consulted in Poland and is expected to apply from the 2024/2025 school year, while the new core curriculum will come into force on 1 September 2026.2027 for primary school and from 2028/2029 for secondary schools. <https://www.portaloswiatowy.pl/komunikaty-men-i-cke/zmiany-w-podstawach-programowych-rozpoczely-sie-prekonsultacje-24489.html> [Access 19.02.2024].

⁴⁴ *Podstawa programowa kształcenia ogólnego z komentarzem. Szkoła ponadpodstawowa. Historia* (2017), 10-11.

⁴⁵ Stanisław Szostakowski, *Historia 6. Polska w latach świetności i upadku (XIV-XVIII w.)* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, 1995), 159-163.

⁴⁶ Tadeusz Cegielski, Katarzyna Zielińska, *Historia. Dzieje nowożytne. Podręcznik dla szkół średnich klasy II liceum ogólnokształcącego*, ed. 1 (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, 1991), 330.

⁴⁷ Stanisław Szostakowski, *Historia 6*, 163.

⁴⁸ For more on the image of Germany in Polish historical education, see A. Młynarczyk-Tomczyk, “Wizerunek Niemiec w podręcznikach do nauczania historii od II połowy XX wieku do czasów współczesnych: Jego polityczne i historiograficzne determinanty”, *Komunikaty Mazursko-Warmińskie*, [vol.] 322, 3 (2023), 434-450.

⁴⁹ Tadeusz Cegielski, Katarzyna Zielińska, *Historia*, 336.

only to white people, and included neither Indians nor Negro slaves”. It has been stressed, however, that its basic provisions have remained in force to this day.⁵⁰ The secondary school compendia have also added information that the Constitution gave rights to gun ownership, pointing out straight away that over time the last clause “has placed a strong impact on the American way of life”.⁵¹

A separate section is devoted to the volunteers rushing to the aid of the United States, and among them, the Poles already known from earlier accounts – Casimir Pulaski and Tadeusz Kosciuszko. Both have been placed on a par with Washington in terms of military and organizational mastery. Kosciuszko, as previously, is portrayed first and foremost as a Polish patriot, who, although surrounded by universal respect in the newly formed American state, returned to his country in 1784.⁵²

The primary school pupil, following the current national curriculum, has an expanded knowledge not only of the American Revolution but also of the modern-day issue. The genesis of the struggle for independence points out to the settlers who were outraged by the unfair treatment by the British authorities, which resulted in protests in the colonies and a drive for liberation. The War of American Independence is presented as a “just” war, resulting from the fact that the American settlers no longer wanted to be subjects of the British. This was to be sanctioned by the Declaration of Independence, passed on 4 July 1776.⁵³ To explain the reasons behind the rebellion of the English colonies in America to the students of senior classes – (secondary schools and vocational schools), the textbooks go back to the Seven Years’ War and the subsequent need to maintain a large army on the territory of the colonies. As read in the textbooks, even in the early days of the struggle, the colonists’ primary goal, was not to liberate themselves from English burdens, but to win independence.⁵⁴ A “just” war, as it has been pointed out, ended with the signing of peace in 1783 and Britain’s recognition of the independence of the United States of America. The commander-in-chief of the American forces, George Washington, is still to be seen by students as a model of heroism and valor, held up as a role model because, it has been pointed out, he was not discouraged by failures. He cared about the training of soldiers and their discipline.⁵⁵ His active involvement in the conflict from its difficult beginnings to its happy ending has been highlighted.⁵⁶ As previously, the Polish touch has been exposed. For the first time, however, attention is not focused only on the leading heroes of the American Revolution. For it has been pointed out that among the many volunteers who came from Europe to fight on the side of the Americans in the War of Independence, there were about 100 Poles. Among them, the most famous were, already known from earlier accounts: Casimir Pulaski and Tadeusz Kosciuszko.

Both have been recognized as heroes, with the indication that “the memory of their deeds persists in the United States to this day”.⁵⁷ A note on Casimir Pulaski has been

⁵⁰ Stanisław Szostakowski, *Historia* 6, 164-165.

⁵¹ Tadeusz Cegielski, Katarzyna Zielińska, *Historia*, 341.

⁵² Stanisław Szostakowski, *Historia* 6, 155-156.

⁵³ Bogumiła Olszewska, Wiesława Surdyk-Fertsch, Grzegorz Wojciechowski, *Wczoraj i dziś. Podręcznik do historii dla klasy szóstej szkoły podstawowej* (Warsaw: Nowa Era, 2019), 143-144.

⁵⁴ Mirosław Ustrzycki, Janusz Ustrzycki, *Historia. Wiek XVIII i epoka napoleońska Podręcznik, dla szkół ponadpodstawowych*, part 2. Zakres podstawowy (Gdynia: Operon, 2020), 46-47.

⁵⁵ Bogumiła Olszewska, Wiesława Surdyk-Fertsch, Grzegorz Wojciechowski, *Wczoraj i dziś*, 144.

⁵⁶ Mirosław Ustrzycki, Janusz Ustrzycki, *Historia. Wiek XVIII*, 47.

⁵⁷ Bogumiła Olszewska, Wiesława Surdyk-Fertsch, Grzegorz Wojciechowski, *Wczoraj i dziś*, 146.

added to the secondary school textbook. The note says that 11 October was established as Pulaski's name day in the USA and that a parade dedicated to him is held in New York every year, on the first Sunday of October. It also includes information about the honorary citizenship of the United States granted to Pulaski in 2009. A brief note has been also made about Tadeusz Kosciuszko and his actions that contributed significantly to the American victory. As can be read, in return for his services, he was awarded the rank of brigadier general by Congress in 1783.⁵⁸

The fact of "the creation of a new state" with a common system has been emphasized. A great deal of attention has been given to the Constitution of 1787, which, as it has been stressed, introduced the system of a republic. It has been also highlighted that from then on, the state's authorities have been elected, citizens have been guaranteed freedom of speech and religion and personal inviolability, and a tripartite system of government has been adopted.⁵⁹ However, the fact that these freedoms did not apply to all citizens has been omitted. Similarly, in secondary school textbooks.⁶⁰ In primary school textbooks, as already mentioned, a section covering contemporary issues has been added, which states that today the United States of America is one of the largest and richest countries in the world. This is evidenced primarily by the fact that, in more than 200 years of its existence, it has considerably expanded its territory and the number of states.⁶¹

Conclusion

As already noted, in the scholarly literature, in the educational presentation of history, attention is primarily paid to the history of the home country. However, a certain regularity can be observed. If it is a country bordering a particular country or if it is a country that claims to be the world or continental power, then its history is given more attention than in the case of countries situated relatively far away and not playing a leading role.⁶² This is also the case with the image of the United States of America in Polish education. The history of this country, in spite of the considerable distance, has been linked to Poland and the Poles, which is why the topic of the country, and especially its beginnings, is expanded. The problem of slavery has been frequently emphasized in Polish textbooks. An elaborate theme is also the Constitution of the United States of America, as the most important piece of legislation, the achievement of the Revolution. At this point one can risk the thesis that the textbook message maintains the myth of American democracy, favored in Poland since the 1920s. It is also hard to resist the impression that students have been fondly bonded over these decades with the three heroes – George Washington, Casimir Pulaski and Tadeusz Kosciuszko. In analyzing the situation of the colonies before the revolution, depending on the period which has been discussed, textbooks have referred to ethnic, legal, and religious diversity (first half of the 20th century), the exploitation of the black population (second half of the 20th century), and the lack of unification of the individual colonies (late 20th and early 21st century). Relatively much attention has been paid to the participation of representatives of European states in the American Revolution whose activities and activism have been

⁵⁸ Mirosław Ustrzycki, Janusz Ustrzycki, *Historia. Wiek XVIII*, 51-52.

⁵⁹ Bogumiła Olszewska, Wiesława Surdyk-Fertsch, Grzegorz Wojciechowski, *Wczoraj i dziś*, 147.

⁶⁰ Mirosław Ustrzycki, Janusz Ustrzycki, *Historia. Wiek XVIII*, 53.

⁶¹ Bogumiła Olszewska, Wiesława Surdyk-Fertsch, Grzegorz Wojciechowski, *Wczoraj i dziś*, 148.

⁶² Marek Andrzejewski, "Obraz Polski w austriackich podręcznikach", 241.

referred to as “progressive” (second half of the twentieth century). Also in line with the trends in historiography, in which the traditional myths about the heroes of the American Revolution have been revised, adding to their number, their pantheon has also been updated in textbook coverage.

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