

INTRODUCTION |||

THROUGHOUT THE EIGHTEENTH AND nineteenth centuries, the Polish nation repeatedly fought first to retain and, later, to regain its independence after expansionist neighbors Prussia, Russia, and Austria had divided historically Polish territories among themselves in three successive partitions in 1772, 1793, and 1795. The two largest Polish national uprisings—the 1830 November Uprising and the 1863 January Uprising—failed under the overwhelming military might of the partitioning powers. But no oppressors could defeat the spirit of the Polish people, whose national anthem proclaimed, “Poland is not overcome yet, as long as we are still alive.” Even while continuing their armed resistance, Poles also struggled against the attempts of foreign administrations to make them forget who they were and to transform them into Germans or Russians. Poles consciously resisted the politics of denationalization and took special care to preserve and to develop Polish national culture, language, traditions, and history. Their dreams of an independent state became a reality in the Treaty of Versailles: Poland regained its independence as a new and democratic state in 1918, after 123 years of partition.

The concept of the exile’s responsibility toward the homeland has roots as deep as the 1830 November Uprising, whose failure drove thousands of political émigrés out of Poland. Most of them settled in France, Great Britain, and Belgium, where they carried out activities intended to provide political and spiritual leadership to the nation. The Great Emigration (*Wielka Emigracja*), as it came to be known, produced important Polish intellectual and artistic legacies, weaving together the nation’s Romantic tradition and profound patriotic feelings. The poets Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki,

Zygmunt Krasiński, Cyprian Kamil Norwid, historian Joachim Lelewel, and political writer Maurycy Mochnacki belong to the pantheon of Polish arts and letters.¹

Adam Mickiewicz's contribution to the astounding output of the *Wielka Emigracja* included the creation of a vision and a metaphor that described the role of Polish exiles, whom he called "Pilgrims." "The Polish Pilgrims are the soul of the Polish Nation," he wrote, and the Pilgrim's vow is "to journey to the holy land, the free country." On this journey, the Pilgrims were to be guided by "star and compass": "And the star of the Pilgrims is heavenly faith, and the compass is love of country."² Mickiewicz's vision and other political writings of the Great Emigration laid the foundation for the exile mission, an unwritten set of beliefs, goals, and responsibilities of Polish emigrants, which placed patriotic work for Poland at the center of their duties toward the homeland. For many decades thereafter, the exile mission guided and defined the experience of émigrés in different countries, including the United States. During and immediately after World War II, the exile mission again became a motivating force for the Polish political diaspora on many continents. It also rested at the heart of the relationship between postwar political refugees and later generations of Polish Americans.

In the nineteenth century, waves of Polish immigrants to the United States had adopted the nationalistic ideology of struggle for a free Poland.³ American Polonia considered itself the "fourth partition of Poland," whose duty was to speak for the subjugated nation.⁴ The process of nationalization of the peasant masses in America took place among "contentious organizational competition in Polish immigrant communities, immigrant parishes and schools, patriot priests, the immigrant press, and the intimidating encounter with the host society."⁵ The debates over the role of Polish immigrants within their own community, as well as in relationship to the Roman Catholic Church and the homeland, were reflected in disputes between American Polonia's two largest fraternals, the Polish Roman Catholic Union (PRCU, 1873) and the Polish National Alliance (PNA, 1880). An elite collection of political émigrés active in the Polish community in the United States played a particularly important role in building national consciousness among the economic immigrants. They responded to the 1879 appeal of Agaton Giller, a political exile after the January Uprising, to organize the immigrant masses for patriotic work for Poland and to persuade them to accept the

exile mission. Through the activities of those early nationalists, Polish immigrants developed a strong and meaningful relationship with the homeland. Gradually, this political culture based on the ideas of exile, displacement, and injury translated itself into New World nationalism, expressed in ethnic popular culture and literature as well as in political allegiance and relationship to the American state and its policies.⁶

Although some of the first Polish communities on American soil were established by political exiles after the failed insurrections of the nineteenth century, it was the later, more massive, and largely economic immigration that gave character to the Polish settlement in the United States.⁷ About 64.5 percent of Polish immigrants worked in agriculture prior to emigration. Once they arrived in America, almost 90 percent settled in urban industrial areas, performing unskilled labor in factories in the East and Northeast. Poles also found jobs in mining and smaller industries in New England and the Middle Atlantic states. Those who decided to work in agriculture settled mostly in Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois, and Indiana, or in smaller communities in the Connecticut River valley and upstate New York. More than 2 million immigrants left the Polish territories for America between 1871 and 1914.⁸ The Polish-American community, consisting of these immigrants and their American-born children, topped the 3 million mark by 1910.⁹

Polish immigrants brought with them a traditional peasant culture based on religion (overwhelmingly Roman Catholic), a strong family structure, and a sense of community. Despite some sociological predictions of social disorganization resulting from the transition from a preindustrial agrarian setting to modern industrial life, Polonia communities survived and flourished in America. They were usually organized on the parish basis and centered on the church, its organizations, and the parish school. This parish-based structure and clerical leadership supplied the community with internal cohesion, religious and civic leaders, and space in which to practice and preserve old-country beliefs and traditions. Parish schools perpetuated these traditions in the education and upbringing of the American-born generations. Family structure adhered to the traditional bonds of extended family. Families were units whose economic survival was the responsibility of each family member. Males were the main breadwinners in the marketplace, but women and children also substantially contributed to the family budget. Moreover, women were charged with the duty of preserving the traditional

values and customs within the family and passing them along to the next generation.

The neighborhoods within the parish structure became important self-sustaining areas, where small businesses and services catered to the immigrant clientele. They also housed local mutual aid and insurance organizations that later gave rise to the establishment of large Polish-American fraternals, uniting thousands of immigrants under their auspices and defining Polonia's ethnic identity. These fraternals fulfilled multiple and complex economic, social, and cultural roles. While their initial goal was to provide death benefit insurance and to cover funeral expenses, they also carried out fund raising for community purposes or the homeland. By offering participants a number of positions and functions, the organizations contributed to status competition within the community and gave an opportunity for the civic involvement of the immigrants. Fraternals also advanced the vigorous development of Polonia-run press and publishing houses that tied separate communities into a lively national network.¹⁰

Polish Americans, the majority of whom were employed in industry, rapidly adjusted to the demands of working-class life. Together with other blue-collar industrial workers, Poles felt the impact of economic depressions, decreasing wages, and tense labor relations. The image, held by some, of a docile Slavic worker proved unfounded. Poles participated in collective labor actions during the 1880s and the 1890s and continued their involvement in strikes during the volatile first two decades of the twentieth century.¹¹

The outbreak of World War I became a test of commitment to the ideals of a free Poland for American Polonia. In an enthusiastic show of support, Polish communities developed wide-ranging humanitarian aid programs and sponsored diplomatic and political actions, led by the famous Polish pianist and statesman Ignacy Jan Paderewski. They also raised about twenty-four thousand volunteers for the Polish Army in France, of whom nearly twenty thousand went overseas under the command of General Józef Haller to participate directly in the fight for an independent Poland. By the end of the war, approximately two hundred fifteen thousand Polish Americans had served in the U.S. armed forces.¹² Polonia's financial contribution to the cause of an independent Poland proved to be no less impressive. According to some reports, Polonia raised more than \$50 million for the cause, while purchasing \$67 million in American Liberty Bonds and earmarking another \$1.5 million specifically for

the Polish Army in France. All of these funds came, as one scholar noted, from “committed immigrants, most of whom held low-paying, unskilled jobs.”¹³

After the Polish state was reestablished in 1918, American Polonia had to redefine many of the goals that previously had been tightly tied to the struggle for Polish independence. Although some American Poles returned to Poland following the war, the vast majority remained in the United States. Those who returned often came back disappointed with the economic and social conditions of the country as well as its political instability. In the meantime, new immigration restrictions decreased the flow of immigrants into Polish-American communities to a trickle of about six thousand a year. Polonia increasingly turned toward its own internal affairs and developed a more domestic focus. Membership in fraternal organizations increased significantly, and the Polonia press flourished. As Polish immigrants participated in the post-war economic boom, their communities began developing a middle class based on ethnic businesses and professional enterprises. Social mobility and the acquisition of consumer goods facilitated a growing assimilation. The newspapers gradually introduced English into their pages. The immigrants deplored the Americanization of the second generation and showed concern for the growing gap between themselves and their children. Polish-American historian Karol Wachtl best expressed those anxieties over the need to redefine an ethnic identity: “We lost our way into the future. Before, all here knew where they were going: toward free Poland! But Poland went her way and we—in a different country, in an entirely different society, have to go along different routes. And what are these routes? Not entirely Polish and not quite American.”¹⁴ As James S. Pula put it, in the 1920s the signs of assimilation were unmistakable while the “mantel [*sic*] of leadership passed from the immigrant to the second generation.”¹⁵

Community leaders initiated a debate on the role of American Polonia in order to find its place in a changed international political situation as well as to face the challenges of assimilation. Their response became a slogan adopted in the 1920s with the broad support of the immigrant masses: *wychodźstwo dla wychodźstwa* (emigrants for themselves), which indicated a drastic shift in focus for Polish Americans.¹⁶ At the same time, the creation of cultural organizations, such as the Kosciuszko Foundation, the Polish Museum of America, and the first Polish Arts Clubs, attested to increased efforts to preserve not only Polish cultural heritage, but that of Polonia as well.¹⁷

In the 1920s Poles in Poland faced a multitude of problems stemming from the difficult task of overcoming the grim legacy of the partitions. These problems included the unification and reconstruction of the Polish economy, the building of a democratic political system, the establishment of relations with all neighboring countries, and a variety of social and educational reforms. The 1921 census showed that 25 percent of the Polish population lived in towns, and 75 percent in the countryside. Peasants constituted 64 percent of the population, and an additional 10 percent were landless agricultural laborers. Gradual industrialization resulted in a decrease of 5 percent in the rural population between 1921 and 1938. The industrial proletariat accounted for 17 percent of the population; 5 percent were professionals and intelligentsia; 2 percent were entrepreneurs; and less than 1 percent were owners of large estates.¹⁸ In 1931 ethnic Poles constituted 69 percent of the total population; Ukrainian, Jewish, Belorussian, German, Lithuanian, and Czech minorities formed the remaining part of society.¹⁹

Polish society changed dramatically during the interwar decades. Perhaps the most noticeable transformations took place in the rural population, which, despite the economic hardships, showed an increased radicalization and political involvement, particularly in the southern provinces. Land reform in 1919 and 1920, limited though it was, increased land ownership among peasants. Both rural areas and towns benefited from the reorganization of the educational system, one of the most sweeping reforms in interwar Poland. The number of schools rose considerably, and illiteracy was substantially reduced.

The Polish economy eventually revived, too, albeit after a long period of struggle to integrate the infrastructures, currencies, tax systems, and financial institutions of the three partitions. During the 1920s a series of reforms supervised by Władysław Grabski introduced the *złoty* (zloty) currency, established the Bank Polski (Bank of Poland), and initiated government investments in public works and rural improvements. In the next decade the electrification campaign, construction of the seaport in Gdynia, and establishment of the foundations for the Centralny Okręg Przemysłowy (Central Industrial Region) were among the brightest achievements of the period. Although in the late 1930s Poland was still an underdeveloped country, its economy showed strong signs of improvement.²⁰

After decades of suppression by the partitioning powers, intellectual and cultural life in Poland flourished with extraordinary intensity. The

twenty years between the two world wars were filled with scholarly and scientific achievements, as universities became vigorous centers of intellectual life. Talented intellectuals contributed to the expansion of journalism, book publishing, theater, film, and art exhibits, which in turn received strong support from the Polish public.

The Polish intelligentsia (*inteligencja*) led the way in the development of national culture. The intelligentsia represented a specific social stratum that developed in Poland and Russia in the second part of the nineteenth century. As a result of the political and economic changes in Poland at that time, “members of the ‘déclassé’ fraction of the landed nobility, seeking to maintain in an urban environment their traditional style of life, had to separate themselves from the ‘bourgeois’ middle class.”²¹ They were united in sharing a specific set of values, beliefs, moral attitudes, and political behaviors formulated by a group of intellectual leaders. Among the most significant values and goals of the intelligentsia were humanistic education and creative activity. Moreover, the members of this “charismatic stratum” saw their fundamental social role in the leadership of the nation “to its destiny.” Accepting the call to serve the nation as their credo, members of intelligentsia adopted a number of national causes, including the struggle for independence and social work for the benefit of the lower classes.²² By the end of the interwar period, the intelligentsia included urban professionals, such as doctors, lawyers, and government employees, as well as teachers, scholars, intellectuals, writers, journalists, artists, and the higher ranks of the military. They continued their traditional political and cultural leadership, replete with strong patriotic and nationalistic accents.

The changes of the interwar period influenced both those Poles who were born during the partition but then experienced twenty years of freedom, and the younger generation that was fortunate enough to grow up in an independent Poland. They witnessed the social, economic, and spiritual rebirth of the nation and participated in its growth, however uneasy and troubled it was at times. For decades afterward, émigrés were inspired by their memories of Polish modernization and its accompanying spirit of patriotism, optimism, and unrealized potential.

The war that began on the morning of September 1, 1939, ended this brief period of Polish independence. Wartime brought renewed suffering and loss. The country was again divided between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union,

and Polish citizens everywhere faced unparalleled terror. Poles suffered under the extermination policies of the German oppressor, including prisons, concentration camps, prisoner-of-war camps, slave labor, and indiscriminate killing. The Polish nation responded with a widespread resistance movement that culminated in the Warsaw uprising in 1944. In the Soviet occupation zone, Polish citizens, deprived of any legal protection, were harassed, imprisoned, and deported into brutal labor camps in Siberia. The population movements that took place in the Polish territories were unprecedented. In addition to prisoners, slave laborers, and deportees, there were civilians who crossed the Polish borders in search of safety. Polish armed forces formed in the West and later in the Middle East. All in all, about 6 million Poles remained outside Polish borders in 1945. Wherever the *polskie drogi* (Polish roads) led the refugees, they established communities and tried to repair the torn fabric of their lives. They also planned for the future, keeping Polish culture alive and taking care of the education of their children.

The war became a turning point for an entire generation. The Polish post-war diaspora had already become a reality during the war. Although emigrants did not commonly invoke the term diaspora, other Polish phrases in common use expressed a similar meaning.²³ *Emigracja wojenna*, *emigracja walcząca*, or *emigracja niezłomna* denoted wartime emigration, characterized by a fighting and indomitable spirit. The emigrants embraced notions of an organized transnational community deriving from a common historical experience and of the exile mission that guided and motivated this community.²⁴

Polish sacrifice and contribution to the Allied war effort did not secure an independent Polish state after the war. In 1945, at the international conference at Yalta, the West agreed to abandon Poland to the Soviet sphere of influence. Hundreds of thousands of Polish veterans, refugees, deportees, and prisoners faced a difficult choice: should they return to the communist-dominated homeland or embrace exile? Most did return, but many others waited in the refugee camps, displaced persons (DP) camps, or in exile communities established during the war. International efforts slowly got under way to permanently resettle a million so-called unrepatriables from various nations. About four hundred thousand Poles were resettled in four dozen nations of the world, although some displaced Poles faced hardship and despair in the DP camps for as long as nine years. During that time Poles established communities that aided everyday survival in many ways, and, more impor-

tantly, they used the DP period to install the framework of the postwar Polish diaspora and adopted the exile mission to guide them.

After the international resettlement action had dispersed the refugees into many countries on many continents, they either joined older existing Polish communities, for example, in the United States, France, Austria, and Argentina, or built their own communities nearly from scratch, as in Australia and Great Britain. Although separated by space and borders, Polish refugees still felt a strong bond to the entire postwar diaspora. They eagerly participated in debates about international events, inspired by press reports and personal letters and contacts. Veterans associations, scouting groups, and other organizations with membership in different countries cemented ties developed during and after the war. The Polish government in exile in London provided the most important political point of gravity by claiming to represent the only legal continuation of prewar authority.

Immigration and Naturalization Service statistics indicate that about fifteen thousand Polish quota immigrants were allowed into the United States during World War II (1939–45). About seventeen thousand more came within the next three years. As a result of the enactment of the 1948 Displaced Persons Act and its 1950 amendments, close to one hundred forty thousand displaced persons born in Poland, including Polish veterans from Great Britain, arrived in the United States between 1948 and 1952. All in all, between 1940 and 1953, 178,680 quota immigrants born in Poland arrived in the United States.²⁵ Most of the statistics for this period (including those of the Displaced Persons Commission, or DPC, a federal body responsible for the resettlement of DPs in the United States) classified immigrants on the basis of their place of birth or last residence. Therefore, the population of immigrants born in Poland usually included Ukrainians and Polish Jews as well as ethnic Poles. According to some estimates, nearly forty thousand of the new arrivals were Polish Jews;²⁶ it is unclear how many were Ukrainians.²⁷ The ethnic Polish Christians (predominantly Roman Catholics) who are the focus of this study joined roughly 6 million Polish Americans—first-generation immigrants and their offspring born in the United States—according to the 1940 census.²⁸

The group of Poles who immigrated to the United States between 1939 and 1945 included an exceptionally high number of intellectuals, artists, politicians, and people representing the Polish prewar professional middle class, or *inteligencja*. Most often they settled in large urban areas, especially in

New York and Chicago, forming active émigré communities for the duration of the war. Polish refugees who immigrated after 1945 were usually part of a nuclear family unit, with Polish spouses and children born (usually) outside of Poland. Polish organizations in displaced persons camps in Germany and Austria, from which most of the refugees to the United States emigrated, estimated that members of the *inteligencja* made up only 5 to 10 percent of the Polish DP population. Farmers comprised some 70 percent of the group, and the remainder was divided between skilled and unskilled workers. A sociological study conducted in 1971 described these emigrants as rather young (the average age was about twenty-four to thirty-five years) and fairly well educated, the majority having at least some high school and close to one-third having a university degree. Some 92 percent claimed Roman Catholicism as their religion, and a majority indicated political reasons for their emigration.²⁹

Polish exiles arriving in the United States during and immediately after the war joined a generation of Polish Americans who recently had gone through significant changes. In the 1930s they had come to accept a double identity, one both Polish and American. The process is best illustrated by the relationship between American Polonia and the World Union of Poles from Abroad (*Światowy Związek Polaków z Zagranicy*, or *Światpol*). *Światpol* was an international organization formed in Poland with the aim to unite and coordinate the activities of Polish communities abroad in the interest of Poland and its government. In 1934 *Światpol* organized a congress in Warsaw attended by representatives of Polonia from all over the world. To the dismay of the organizers, the American delegation to the congress, led by Francis X. Świątlik, the grand censor of the Polish National Alliance, declined membership in *Światpol*.³⁰ “Regarding ourselves as an inseparable component of the great American nation,” the statement of the American delegation announced, “we take an active and creative part in every walk of American life, thus contributing to boosting the name of Poland in our country.”³¹ After returning to the United States, Świątlik further justified his position: “Polonia in America is neither a Polish colony nor a national minority but a component part of the Great American Nation, proud, however, of its Polish extraction and careful to make the young generation love everything Polish.”³² Miecislaus Haiman, a prominent Polish-American historian, summed up the controversy provoked by American Polonia’s refusal to become a part of *Światpol*:

“In the eyes of the Poles in Poland and in other countries we are still only Poles while in fact we are already Americans of Polish extraction.”³³

The Great Depression hampered to some extent the process of assimilation by blocking social mobility and forcing the second generation back into the old ethnic neighborhoods, where Polish Americans, “cut off from the homogenizing influences of a consumption society, . . . once again clung to their cultural forms.”³⁴ First and foremost, the depression meant hard times, unemployment, and social turmoil. Second-generation Polish Americans responded to adversity by pooling community resources and relying on family economic units, but they refused to be mere victims. In 1935 Polish women in Hamtramck, Michigan, took their protest against skyrocketing meat prices to the streets. Others actively participated in strikes and union drives, which produced a number of Polish-American union leaders, such as Leo Krzycki, Stanley Nowak, Bolesław Gebert, and Stella Nowicki. The radicalizing impact of the depression was demonstrated also by the growing membership of Poles in the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). By the end of World War II, the CIO included about 6 million members, of whom approximately six hundred thousand were Polish.³⁵ Finally, the New Deal cemented Polonia’s traditional adherence to the Democratic Party, even though the participation of Polish Americans in party politics remained limited.³⁶ The assimilation process of the 1920s and 1930s affected the broad masses of working-class Polish Americans, resulting in their way of life being “‘made in America,’ just as the coal that they mined or the steel ingots that they rolled.”³⁷

The outbreak of the war revived the Polish communities in the United States. American Polonia, although internally not homogenous, contributed generously to humanitarian causes, which included support for Polish refugees and prisoners as well as (whenever possible) for the Polish population in Poland. Polish Americans also took an interest in international matters that could affect Poland, and in 1944 they formed a powerful lobby: the Polish American Congress (PAC). After the end of the war, American Polonia worked for a change in immigration laws and for the admittance of European displaced persons to the United States. Polonia’s activism worked within the American framework to a greater extent than it had during the previous world war. For young Polish-American men and women, military service meant accelerated assimilation.³⁸ After the war, taking advantage of generous veterans benefits and the booming economy, Polish Americans displayed

noticeable upward social mobility. Greater numbers of second-generation Polish-American males moved into white-collar occupations, and women, who had entered the work force during the depression and the war years, tended to stay there. Finally, many second-generation Polish Americans left ethnic communities for the suburbs, “for a slice of the promised ‘good life’ and, frankly, a chance to leave their sometimes embarrassing hyphenate ethnic past far behind.”³⁹

During the war Polish Americans were keenly aware of the plight of Polish refugees scattered around the globe and carried out successful charitable actions through a variety of organizations. They were one of the first ethnic groups that heralded the cause of European displaced persons and lobbied tirelessly for a change in the immigration laws, which would allow their admission to the United States. After the 1948 Displaced Persons Act had been passed, American Polonia mobilized itself for an unprecedented resettlement effort. Throughout the war and the early postwar years, Polish Americans revived their long tradition of activism on behalf of Poland. Decrying Poland’s loss of independence at Yalta and responding to international Cold War pressures, the majority of Polonia displayed vivid anticommunist sentiments. As U.S. citizens, they aspired to leadership in the struggle for Poland, and the DP cause became one of the important points of their mission.

The arrival of political refugees, instead of providing anticipated fresh reinforcements for Polonia, brought tension and conflict between the two groups. The refugees based their exile identity on the common experience of life in independent Poland before the war and on their wartime suffering and struggle. Neither of these experiences had been shared by American Polonia. Tensions heightened also for other reasons, some linked to the finer points of the exile mission and others connected to the social characteristics of the two populations. Lack of adequate knowledge about the history of each group, competition for political and cultural leadership, level of assimilation, class differences, social mobility, and the issue of loyalty to the Polish government in exile and to the rest of the diaspora were all factors that contributed to the friction.

Most significantly, the new arrivals did not consider themselves simply new immigrants, but rather a special category of immigrants: political refugees. This distinction had been adopted during the war and especially during the DP period of increased politicization of the refugee masses. The refugees counterposed the concept of political exile and that of the earlier economic

“emigration for bread.” Tapping the Polish Romantic tradition, they considered their political motivation a nobler and more legitimate reason for emigration. In their own eyes, it gave them a respectable identity, one easily compatible with the inspiring legacy of historical struggle for Poland’s independence. Armed with claims to European and Polish high culture—supposedly superior to the plebeian roots of American civilization—the refugees used the exile mission to ensure the survival of their Polish identity. For example, the First Convention of the New Emigration, which took place in New Bedford, Massachusetts, in September 1950, adopted a resolution explicitly stating its character: “The new emigrants regard themselves as a political emigration and strongly denounce tendencies to define them as stateless or economic emigrants.”⁴⁰ Stanisław Kwaśniewski, the author of the 1948 poem “Polscy Kombatanci,” put the matter even more succinctly. “They are coming for freedom, not dollars,” he wrote about the postwar arrivals, sharply distinguishing them from the turn-of-the-century peasant economic immigrants.⁴¹

For these political refugees the exile mission provided justification for their refusal to return to Poland and called for action on behalf of the homeland, which had been subdued by the communist oppressor. Poland’s independence was central to both political and social thinking, and one’s work for Poland defined the measure of one’s patriotism.⁴² Political action focused on lobbying Western governments and public opinion through constant reminders of the Polish nation’s historical significance and its contribution to victory in World War II. The West was to be warned against the dangers of communism and informed of the hardships of life in Poland under the communist regime, for which those who had condoned Yalta were held responsible. Émigré Poles believed that they had the right to represent Polish interests in the West and that the communists’ claim to power should be officially delegitimized. Some of their more detailed demands included the repudiation of Yalta, the return of Western recognition to the Polish government in exile, international guarantees for Poland’s border with Germany, the return of Poland’s eastern territories lost to the Soviet Union, an investigation of the Katyń massacre, and the release of political prisoners.⁴³ The responsibility of this work for Poland fell on all exiles. While the exile leaders conducted direct political lobbying, the rank-and-file refugees attempted to inform and influence Western public opinion. In order to increase the effectiveness of their political action, the exiles recognized the need to cooperate

with older immigrant waves and strove to preserve ties to the entire postwar diaspora, both through organizational and personal means.

This focus on the issues of the homeland and the diaspora had added expediency in the first decade after the war, because of the unstable political situation. Many exiles believed that their sojourn in foreign countries would be temporary and that when another war ended the communist occupation of Poland, they would return to a free homeland.⁴⁴ The myth of impending return prompted efforts to build strong exile communities, which could facilitate necessary political action as well as preserve Polish culture. The exiles formed separate organizations to fulfill those goals as well as to meet more pragmatic needs, such as securing housing, jobs, schools for children, language classes, and loans to buy furniture and other necessities, or finding churches and ethnic support groups.

The exile mission strongly emphasized both preservation and development of Polish culture in exile. The importance of this task for the spiritual survival of the nation had been clear since the partitions of Poland in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The exiles felt particularly responsible for the protection and nurture of Polish high culture: the literary language, artistic expression, as well as intellectual thought and scientific achievement. The wartime extermination of Poland's intelligentsia, the Sovietization of political and economic life, and the suppression of Polish culture gave this goal a renewed sense of urgency. The patriotic upbringing of the next generation became another significant element of the exile mission. The youth had to be prepared to return to Poland or to continue the mission in exile. Children and young people were expected to know the Polish language; to be familiar with Polish history, traditions, and customs; and to adopt patriotic attitudes toward the homeland of their parents.

A sense of history and historical memory has always been vital to the Polish experience. The memory of past glories helped the nation endure the partitions. After World War II, the exile mission recognized the momentousness of history and ranked it high on the agenda. The war effort and the refugee experience yielded themselves to placement within the larger history of the Polish nation's sacrifice and survival. Attention to history and the lessons learned from it permeated much of the exile discourse, providing examples, comparisons, and sometimes predictions for the future.

The mission's strength rested within family and community, since individuals could carry out its particular components on both the local and the

personal levels. The leaders were usually members of the intelligentsia, pre-war activists, and politicians, but the vast majority of rank-and-file refugees also interpreted their refusal to return to communist Poland as a political decision. In the context of Polish history and the Cold War, exile politicized the diaspora and particular communities within it.⁴⁵

Differences between the refugees and Polish Americans intensified in the conflict-prone environment of the resettlement program. The bipolar image of the new arrivals as victims and as sturdy immigrant material, and the specific needs of the refugees proved difficult for Polish Americans to absorb, while the resettlement program stretched thin their resources and put enormous pressure on the community. Without fully grasping the significance of the wartime experiences of the refugees and the intensity of their commitment to the exile mission, Polish Americans too often acted in dismissive and patronizing ways. The refugees, on the other hand, retaliated with accusations of political inactivity, cultural backwardness, and advanced Americanization.

While the exiles' presence both energized and challenged the community, the majority of Polish Americans represented by the Polish American Congress revitalized the main elements of the exile mission derived from their earlier Polonia tradition. For example, Polish Americans' vision of the struggle for Poland did not include the myth of return nor did it rely on close cooperation with the rest of the postwar diaspora. Polish Americans were ready to assume leadership in the struggle for Poland, but as American citizens who counted on American foreign policy and who recognized the Polish government in exile as an important symbol rather than as a sovereign political authority. In the cultural realm, working-class Polish Americans felt protective of their folk culture and confined their social and cultural activities to the traditional forms and structures of the existing Polonia organizations.

The debate between the exiles and Polish Americans, which took place in the 1940s and early 1950s, polarized Polonia but also provided a unique chance to explain and to negotiate the exile mission as well as to confront their ethnic identity. The process was not easy, and in some instances the differences would never be overcome; but by 1956, American Polonia and Polish exiles in the United States had managed to negotiate many, if not all, points of the exile mission. Changes within Poland and the stabilization of the international situation reinforced the values that both groups held in common: devotion to Poland and readiness to work together on the nation's behalf.