

## “The Polish Joke”

A Commentary

No human being wants to be a member of a group that is despised, mocked, humiliated or seen as inferior. When an individual finds himself in such a situation, he seeks to distance himself from the group or tries to hide or render ambiguous the characteristics that mark him as a member. Alternatively, if escape is impossible or the personal or social price to do so is too high or painful, the individual can join his denigrators by internalizing the negative image and even propagating it or develop some kind of compensatory explanation that explains the victimization. Both reactions are often accompanied by anger and self-doubt, overt or covert. In all such cases there is a psychic cost in self-esteem.

The group that finds itself in such a situation suffers a loss of membership or a weakened identification among those who continue as members. The prejudice it encounters hampers its ability to fully participate in civic life or marks that participation with a defensiveness and tentativeness that reduces its efficacy. It is clear that in the case of both Poles and Polish Americans the negative images are a residual manifestation of the oppression, racial bias and discrimination they have suffered. The depiction of Poles as incompetents, backward and uncultured are, for example, buried deep in nineteenth century German culture and were a weapon to justify and maintain imperial rule over Polish lands. These racist images of Poles were a key element of colonial suppression as were similar images developed by Europeans (including Germans) of Asian and African colonial subjects later in the nineteenth century. Decades before Hitler used perverted racial theories to justify genocide against Poles, textbooks in German schools characterized Poles as being “less educated, less cultured, slovenly, and deficient in habits of personal hygiene.” Furthermore, they were also portrayed as dangerous and aggressive, as beasts, thieves and criminals. Poles in popular literature were described as “Asiatic” people who lived in “dens” and were animal like in appearance and behavior.

In the United States Polish immigrants and their children were subjected to deep and persistent social and occupational discrimination that persisted in some forms until well into the last quarter of the twentieth century. It still exists in some areas in more subtle forms. For many of us subjected to the prejudice and discrimination the memories are still vivid and painful.

Thus, plays such as The Polish Joke cannot just be judged on their own. They exist in the very specific historical context I have outlined briefly above – a context of racialism, prejudice and social and occupational discrimination. In addition, the play is part of a larger body of plays, novels and films that depict Poles and Polish Americans, almost without exception, in ways that are overwhelmingly prejudicial. If there was a significant literature that depicted Poles as three dimensional and complex characters with a wide variety of flaws and virtues shaped by the rich heritage of Polish history and cultures, David Ives’ play would probably be ignored as a silly aberration. However, there is no such body of literary, cinematic or theatrical work. There is virtually no other image available to the general public but the one presented in The Polish Joke and the recent film The Breakup. We are comic, boorish, slovenly and mentally challenged. Writers know that is the image of Poles resonated deeply in American culture and it can be reliably used for comic effect especially as other such stereotypes such as Amos and Andy have become cultural taboos.

*Polish Joke commentary to page 11*

## Polish history project wins £45,000 Lottery grant

*Kresy – Sybiraki website*

**Enfield, England...** The stories of three generations of Polish immigrants who have settled in Enfield will be told thanks to a Lottery grant.

The Adam Mickiewicz Saturday School, based at Albany Secondary School, Bell Lane, has won a £45,000 Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) grant to record the memories of three generations of Polish immigrants who have settled here.

Poles who came to Enfield immediately after the Second World War, in the 1970s and 1980s to escape the Soviet regime, and after Poland joined the European Union in 2004, will all be included in the project.

Volunteers will record the memories of ten people from each of these periods and will get extra training in interviewing and oral history methods from Middlesex University.

The project will look at such issues as housing, employment and citizenship and will span the generations bringing older and younger Poles together so that experiences can be compared and contrasted.

It will also involve pupils, teachers, volunteers and trustees from the Polish Saturday School as well as members of the Polish Parish in Waltham Cross.

Schoolchildren from Turin Grove School in Edmonton will also get involved and will help the Sikorski Museum in London, and the Polish Educational Society to produce teaching aids and a DVD about Polish history, culture and traditions.

These will then be distributed to local schools and a website set up to store material related to the project.

The end result will be a community exhibition held first of all at Edmonton Green Library and then in the local schools and Forty Hall.

A Polish library and resource centre will also be created. Adam Mickiewicz’s headteacher, Grażyna Maczkowska, said: “We are delighted to receive this grant which will help to rescue memories of Polish emigrants, particularly the older generation and will bring together different generations of Poles to share their experiences and improve understanding.

“We hope that the project could help to change the stereotypical image of Poles and that the collected material and output from the project will help other communities in a better understanding of the Polish history and culture.”

Head of the HLF, Sue Bowers, also said the project aimed to enhance understanding and highlight the distinctive culture and history of Polish people. □

## Pope John Paul II Polish Center

3999 Rose Drive,  
Yorba Linda, CA 92886

### Mass Schedule:

**Saturday** 4:00 PM ENG  
**Sunday** 7:00 AM Tridentine  
9:00 AM ENG 10:30 AM POL  
**Tuesday - Friday** 8:30AM ENG.  
**First Friday of the month**  
8:30 AM Eng 7:30 PM. POL  
**First Saturday of month**  
8:30 a.m. ENG

Director: Rev. Henry Noga, SVD  
714-996-8161 office  
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## 65 Years Ago

### Anniversary...

## The Warsaw Uprising

On August 1, 1944 Polonia will join with the people of Poland to mark the 65<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the historic Warsaw Uprising.

The Uprising began on the afternoon of August 1, 1944, and lasted until October 2, 1944. During those 63 days, the people of Warsaw fought courageously in an attempt to free Poland’s capital from the Nazi German occupation. During the Uprising, over 200,000 men, women, and children were killed and the city of Warsaw was destroyed.

The Uprising was happening, while our Russian “allies” watched and did not help. □

## 70 years ago

### The Hitler - Stalin Pact

By: *Betsy Cepielik*

On August 23, 1939 the Hitler - Stalin Pact was signed.

In the pact, Poland was partitioned between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. Estonia and Latvia fell to the Soviet Union and Lithuania to Germany. However, on September 29 it was amended to increase Germany’s sphere in Poland and cede Lithuania to the USSR.

On September 1, Germany attacked Poland and on September 17 Soviet troops occupied Eastern Poland.

The Pact was secret. In October, 1987 the Polish journal “Życie Literacki” published the Secret protocol - for the first time in the Eastern bloc.

The German delegation included von Ribbentrop, von der Schulenberg, and Higler. The Soviets were represented by Stalin and Molotov. The members of the Soviet Politburo were not informed of the Pact.

*(Information from Wolfgang Leonhard’s book, “Betrayal”. Mr. Leonhard is the author of ten books on the Soviet Union and international communism. As a youth, he spent ten years in the USSR and lived in Moscow in 1939.)* □

## Our Lady of the Bright Mount Roman Catholic Church

3424 W. Adams Blvd.  
Los Angeles, CA 90018

### Schedule of Masses

**Saturday** 5:00 pm  
**Sunday** 9:00, noon & 18:30  
**Mon, Tue, Th, Sat** - 8:00 am,  
**Wed, Fri** - 7:30 pm  
(All Masses are in Polish)

Ks. Marek Ciesielski, Proboszcz  
Ks. Ryszard Bucholc, Assystent  
Ks. Antoni Bury, Rezydent

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### Economic and Trade Division

[www.wehusa.gov.pl](http://www.wehusa.gov.pl)

## Receptionist X 115

*The truth about Soviet culpability in launching the Second World War and genocide is irrepressible, even if diverse powers have tried to keep it under the carpet for 70 years. How gratifying to see that part of the story is being reported in the mainstream Western media at last.*

*Russia's Vladimir Putin has feared acknowledgement of the Soviet role in launching the Second World War, which explains why he has worked so hard to hide official documents from scrutiny by scholars, lawyers and the public.*

John Halucha  
Kresy-Siberia Group

## Resolution on Stalin riles Russia

*A statue of Joseph Stalin*

Stalin is still a hero for many Russians for his role in defeating Nazi Germany.

Russian delegates have walked out of an OSCE session in Vilnius after it voted for a remembrance day for the victims of both Nazism and Stalinism.

The pan-European security and democracy body passed a resolution equating the roles of the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany in starting World War II. Moscow’s delegation boycotted the vote after failing to have it withdrawn.

Relations between Russia and the OSCE are already strained over hurdles to election observers in Russia itself.

‘No insult’

The resolution, meant to mark the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Iron Curtain, said that Nazi Germany and Stalin’s Soviet Union brought genocide and crimes against humanity to Europe. It calls for making 23 August a day of remembrance for the victims of Stalinism and Nazism.

On that day in 1939, Germany and the Soviet Union signed a pact that carved up Eastern Europe between the two countries. Vilija Aleknaite-Abramikienė, the Lithuanian delegate who drafted the resolution, said the intention was not to insult anybody, but to remember those who perished in World War II.

Out of 385 assembly members, only eight voted against the resolution. Russia’s delegates to the OSCE session were strongly opposed to the resolution and left the hall immediately after it was passed.

Joseph Stalin continues to be a hero to many Russians, who credit him with defeating Nazi Germany.

*Kresy-Siberia Group = Research Remembrance Recognition... is “Dedicated to researching, remembering and recognising the Polish citizens deported, enslaved and killed by the Soviet Union during World War Two.”* □