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We Need You, Uncle Sam: Images of the USA Entry into World War I in Polish School History Textbooks During the First Two Decades of the Twenty-first Century

The United States of America is a federal state whose history and current activity in the arena of international politics arouse the interest of many people all over the world. This also applies to Poles, who have long recognised the impact of the American economy and politics on Polish history. The interest in the USA among Poles is intensified by the fact that the Polish diaspora in the US is by far the largest in the world, oscillating at around 10 million people. Also significant are the achievements of two monumental figures – Tadeusz Kościuszko and Kazimierz Pułaski – who have their permanent place in the history of Poland and the USA. All this, combined with many perceptions about the USA, mean that about half of Poles sympathise with Americans.¹ In Poles' perceptions, there is also a national personification of the USA, which is Uncle Sam. It was in 1917, the breakthrough year for the Great War, that the most famous depiction of Uncle Sam appeared. Its author was James Montgomery Flagg, who modelled it on a British poster from 1914, which used the figure of Lord Kitchener, well known to many Americans. The prototype for Uncle Sam was the butcher Samuel Wilson, called "Uncle Sam" by his associates. During the British-American War of 1812, Wilson supplied the American army with barrels of salted meat, marked with the initials "U.S." With time, U.S. was also interpreted as an abbreviation for the words Uncle Sam. Whatever the original inspiration, the fact is that as early as the

1 A survey conducted in January 2019 by the Centre for Social Opinion Research, entitled "Relationship to other nations", with a sample of 928 people as a representative group of adult inhabitants of Poland, showed that 51 per cent expressed sympathy for Americans, 14 per cent aversion, 30 per cent indifference, and 5 per cent had no opinion. In the popularity rankings, this gave Americans fifth place behind the Czech Republic (56 per cent), Italy (55 per cent), Slovakia (53 per cent), and Hungary (53 per cent); *Stosunek do innych narodów*, Komunikat z badań Centrum Badań Opinii Społecznej, no. 17/2019, ed. M. Omyła-Rudzka, Warszawa 2019, pp. 2, 10.

nineteenth century, thanks to drawings published in the magazine *Punch*, in which Uncle Sam also appeared with features similar to President Abraham Lincoln, this image was becoming increasingly popular as a symbol for the US. It is therefore hardly surprising that it was used during both world wars with the slogan *I Want You*. In this way, Americans' imaginations were influenced, encouraging them to enlist in the army.

The image of US entry into World War I in Polish school textbooks was and still is an important issue in the teaching of history. Firstly, it is necessary to explain to students the importance of the USA in the twentieth century as a global power. Secondly, there is the issue of American-Polish relations, including the position of the Polish diaspora. The analysis that follows may also prove helpful in comparing the changes to the Polish history curriculum over the years.

USA entry into World War I

According to many historians, the USA's entry into the Great War in 1917 was important for the final resolution of the first global conflict in human history. This view was expressed less than twenty years after the war's end by Jan Dąbrowski, the author of Poland's first extensive historiography synthesis of the Great War.² He estimated that the declaration of war on Germany by America was decisive for the course of events in the last two years of the conflict. A few decades later, Jakub Tyszkiewicz and Edward Czapiewski, authors of a synthesis of twentieth-century world history, took a very similar attitude towards this issue, emphasizing that the USA had a decisive influence on the victory of the Entente.³ According to Marek Bankowicz, co-author of a synthesis of twentieth-century history prepared by historians from the Jagiellonian University, "The participation of well-armed American troops in battles on the western front was very important for defeating the Germans".⁴ Antoni Czubiński, in *The Universal History of the Twentieth Century*, published in 2003, also had no doubt that "The USA's accession to the war generally changed the composition of the military forces."⁵ Andrzej Chwalba, the author of *Suicide of Europe*, the latest synthesis of the Great War, published in 2014, stated at the beginning of the lecture devoted to the participation of the USA in the conflict:

The accession to the war of the USA was not only a big sensation but also the most important event for both sides of the conflict. The largest economic power in the world at that time, a country with a population of one hundred million people,

2 The term "Great War", used by Dąbrowski in the title of the publication was commonly used until 1939. After World War II, the term "World War I" came into use. J. Dąbrowski, *Wielka Wojna 1914–1918*, [in:] *Wielka Historia Powszechna. Wydawnictwo zbiorowe ilustrowane*, Vol. 7, Part 3, Warszawa 1937, p. 195.

3 E. Czapiewski, J. Tyszkiewicz, *Historia powszechna. Wiek XX*, Warszawa 2010, p. 52.

4 M. Bankowicz, *Kraje Ententy w latach wojny*, [in:] *Historia polityczna świata XX wieku. 1901–1945*, ed. M. Bankowicz, Kraków 2004, p. 118.

5 A. Czubiński, *Historia powszechna XX wieku*, Poznań 2003, p. 103.

producing 30 per cent of the world's wealth, had incomparable opportunities for mobilisation and financing.⁶

The Americanist Krzysztof Michałek, on the other hand, assessed that America's participation in the war was more important from a psychological than a military perspective.⁷ In Henry Kissinger's monumental *Diplomacy*, we read that the help of the USA was indispensable in the defeat of Germany.⁸ Against the background of these statements, Alexander De Conde, an American historian from the University of California, in a five-volume *History of the United States of America* published in Poland in 1995, made no definition of the role of the USA in the conflict. It is difficult to say whether this was a deliberate act of the author or not, but it undoubtedly paid off, because no one could accuse the author of overestimating the role of the USA in the global conflict.⁹ Finally, it is worth quoting Adam Krzemiński, a columnist for the popular Polish weekly *Polityka*, in his article *One Hundred Years of Presence*, published in June 2017:

By autumn 1918, more than two million Americans had reached Europe – also on conquered German ships. Thanks to them, the Entente armies finally broke the four-year stalemate on the western front. If it weren't for the Americans, the great white people's war could have ended with the victory of the Germans, who, after imposing Bolsheviks' peace on Brest, had their hands untied in the east and the bleeding French and British probably wouldn't have survived.¹⁰

This brief review of historiographic interpretations clearly shows that the USA's entry into the war in 1917 was important, if not decisive for the course of the first global armed conflict. It is time to move on to analyzing the image of the USA's entry into the Great War in Polish school historical education during the era of the lower secondary school (gymnasium).

Methodology

A comprehensive approach to this issue requires the introduction of specific criteria. A teacher plays a key role in the process of passing on historical knowledge to young people. His passion, creativity, and the time he devotes to students often determine their school and extracurricular success.¹¹ However, even the best teacher needs

6 A. Chwalba, *Samobójstwo Europy. Wielka Wojna 1914–1918*, Kraków 2014, p. 282.

7 K. Michałek, *Na drodze ku potędze. Historia Stanów Zjednoczonych Ameryki 1861–1945*, Warszawa 1993, p. 262.

8 H. Kissinger, *Dyplomacja*, transl. S. Głąbiński, G.. Woźniak, I. Zych, Warszawa 1996, p. 235–236.

9 A. De Conde, *Woodrow Wilson i amerykańska polityka zagraniczna*, [in:] *Historia Stanów Zjednoczonych Ameryki*, Vol. 4: 1917–1945, eds. A. Bartnicki, D. T. Critchlow, Z. Kwiecień, Warszawa 1995, p. 7–18.

10 A. Krzemiński, "Sto lat obecności", *Polityka* 2017, nr 25, p. 55.

11 The literature on the subject of the role and place of the teacher in the teaching-learning process is very extensive. See more, e.g. *Nauczyciel historii. Ku nowej formacji dydaktycznej*, ed. M. Kujawska, Poznań 1996.

support. For years, the most popular and important element of this support has been the school history textbook. Textbooks have long been the most popular source materials for analyzing historical knowledge presented and discussed in schools.¹² Another advantage of textbooks as source material (research material for the present article) is that it is relatively easy to verify the information contained in them, whereas it is impossible to check exactly what content and views are presented by teachers during lessons. At this point, the role and significance of textbooks will not be discussed further. We will limit ourselves to indicating a few items from a long list of studies devoted to them, immediately moving on to the analysis of their content in the context of the image of US participation in the Great War.¹³ Within a limited scope, the issue we are interested in allows us to assess the tasks from the papers prepared for the external exam of the secondary school certificate in history.¹⁴ A third reason for focusing on textbooks is that research into the historical consciousness of students does not contribute much. It is difficult to find in Poland studies that would refer to the question of the assessment of the US participation in World War I. Therefore, our analysis will use school history textbooks, which, despite the enormous popularity of the Internet, remain one of the main sources of student knowledge about the past.

Fourteen textbooks have been analysed for the purposes of this article: seven for the third stage of education – that is, lower secondary schools (gymnasiums) – and seven for the fourth stage, upper secondary schools (lyceums and technical schools). Students have used them for sixteen years, from 2001/02 to 2016/17. We

12 Unfortunately, in Poland, a part of the academic historical community disregards school history textbooks, and even discredits them as scientific source material. This is generally because the didactics of history is treated indulgently as a historical sub-discipline. The effects of this approach can be observed in the progressive marginalisation of the importance of student internships and the systematically decreasing number of students interested in learning history in schools. It is enough to see the important place history didactics occupies in Poland's largest neighbours. The Georg-Eckert Institut für Internationale Schulbuchforschung, which has been operating in Braunschweig for over half a century and in which history textbooks from all over the world are systematically collected and thoroughly analysed, is a model example here. In the opinion of the authors of this article, another example of the disregard for the didactics of history and the subject of its research is the fact that for over thirty years, it has not been possible to obtain habilitation in didactics.

13 A. Zielecki, *Role i funkcje podręcznika historii*, Rzeszów 1984; J. Maternicki, C. Majorek, A. Suchoński, *Dydaktyka historii*, Warszawa 1994, pp. 342–353; *Podręcznik historii – perspektywy modernizacji*, ed. M. Kujawska, Poznań 1994; *Przeszłość w szkole przyszłości. Materiały Ogólnopolskiej Konferencji Naukowej „Podręcznik historii dla szkoły XXI wieku”. Częstochowa 20–22 V 1997*, eds. J. Walczak, A. Zielecki, Częstochowa 1997; A. Zielecki, *Wprowadzenie do dydaktyki historii*, Kraków 2007, pp. 298–306; E. Chorąży, D. Konieczka-Śliwińska, S. Roszak, *Edukacja historyczna w szkole. Teoria i praktyka*, Warszawa 2008, pp. 162–171; *Współczesna dydaktyka historii. Zarys encyklopedyczny dla nauczycieli i studentów*, ed. J. Maternicki, Warszawa 2004, pp. 266–273; M. Bieniek, *Dydaktyka historii. Wybrane zagadnienia*, Olsztyn 2009, pp. 72–88.

14 See more: M. Białokur, “Józefa Piłsudskiego droga do niepodległości w świadomości historycznej młodzieży. (Na przykładzie zadań w arkuszach egzaminów zewnętrznych)”, *Dzieje Najnowsze* 2017, t. 49, nr 2., p. 69.

will start our review with textbooks prepared for lower secondary school students. After a fifty-one-year break, lower secondary schools were reintroduced to the Polish education system in 1999. Until the 2011/12 school year, the history teaching program in the three-year lower secondary school covered material from ancient times to the present day. The age range for young people studying at this level was 13–16 years. By the Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 23 December 2008, the program was limited. In the school year 2011/12, students of the third grade of the lower secondary school, for the first time, finished their material in 1918. This solution was in force until June 2019, when the last year of lower secondary school students finished their education. The twenty-year period of lower secondary school functioning in the modern Polish education system then came to an end (in 2016, eight-year primary schools were restored; lower secondary schools were therefore closed). In the 2019/20 school year, the last students who studied in lower secondary schools began their further education in secondary, technical, or vocational schools. So, this is a good period to choose for analyzing the content of textbooks. It follows from the above that, both before and after the changes in the curriculum in 2008, lower secondary school students learned about the events related to World War I, and thus also about the entry of the USA in 1917.

Textbooks content analysis

Textbooks for lower secondary schools – before the 2008 program reform

In history textbooks for lower secondary schools, information about the Great War is limited to the most important events; mainly due to students' ages, but also because based on the curriculum, the realisation of more extensive content is planned only in upper secondary school. Importantly, each of the seven studies analysed contains information about the USA's entry into the war. Let us begin with the books that appeared in the first period of lower secondary schools' functioning; that is, in the years 1999–2009. At that time, there was a curriculum including a full history course in grades I–III. From this period, we selected the four studies that were most frequently used by students. First, we examined the textbook published by WSiP Publishing House (org. *Wydawnictwo Szkolne i Pedagogiczne*), which during the communist era had a monopoly over the market for school textbooks, but in free Poland was forced to compete with a wide range of competing pedagogical publishers. In this textbook, entitled *The World War I*, one of the sections is entitled *The Year 1917 – The United States Comes to War...* The text points out that 1917 was a breakthrough year for the war, which was decided by the USA's intervention on the side of the Entente. From then on, the allied states were successful.¹⁵ The WSiP manual doesn't contain any iconographic or source materials concerning the entry of the USA. The issue is

15 G. Kucharczyk, P. Milcarek, M. Robak, *Przez tysiąclecia i wieki. Cywilizacje XIX i XX wieku, kl. 3*, fifth edition, Warszawa 2008, p. 132.

presented in a slightly more extensive way in the textbook of the WIKING Educational Publisher. Students could learn from it that the victims of the unlimited submarine war declared by the German command in February 1917 included American ships, which became a pretext for the USA to enter the war on the side of the Entente.¹⁶ In this context, attention should be drawn to two debatable issues. Firstly, the use of the term *okręty* (like warships), not *statki* (like civilian ships), which might suggest that the United States Navy was involved in military operations before the USA joined the war. Secondly, it seems at least debatable to use the term “pretext” in the context of the American response to Germany’s unrestricted military action on the seas. This may suggest that the USA was only looking for an excuse to join the war. It is, however, well known that the USA – not only its president but also the majority of public opinion – expressed scepticism about engaging in a conflict caused by European countries.

Later in the textbook, the authors return to the question of USA military participation in the war. They state that at the end of the war, during military operations in France, the USA played a “significant role” in effectively supporting the armies of the Entente states.¹⁷ One of the questions in summarizing the outbreak and course of military action on the fronts of World War I concerns the determination of the effects of the USA’s intervention. The WIKING manual does not contain any iconographic material concerning the USA’s participation in World War I.

Against the background of the books mentioned above, a third textbook was prepared by Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Oświatowe Publishing House (GWO). This textbook was highly valued by teachers and students. The issues of interest to us are placed by authors Tomasz Małkowski and Jacek Rzeźniowiecki in a topic entitled *The End of the War*. In their lecture they don’t limit themselves to giving the date of the USA’s entry into the war:

Until April 1917, the USA remained neutral – and was doing well on this neutrality. Between 1914 and 1916, USA exports to Entente countries quadrupled, and the European allies took out huge loans overseas. However, in February 1917 Germany declared an unlimited submarine war. In March, the German U-Boats (the German term for submarine) sank several American merchant ships. Moreover, the Americans could not allow the defeat of the Entente – the domination of Germany in Europe and on the world’s seas would undermine the economic and political interests of the USA. In addition, both President Wilson and many USA citizens were idealistic: they believed that their state’s mission was to help bring peace and democracy to the world.¹⁸

Further on, the authors report that almost 1.2 million perfectly equipped American soldiers arrived in France in the following months, and with them, American supplies of weapons, oil and food reached the front. In this situation, a race against time began for Germany: “There was no doubt that either the central states would

16 M. Jastrzębska, J. Żurawski, *Historia 3. Podręcznik dla klasy trzeciej gimnazjum*, second edition, Wrocław 2004, p. 12.

17 Ibid., p. 14.

18 T. Małkowski, J. Rzeźniowiecki, *Historia III. Podręcznik dla klasy III gimnazjum*, seventh edition, Gdańsk 2008, p. 85.

quickly settle the war to their advantage, or they would lose it".¹⁹ The GWO textbook provides content-rich information for the lower secondary school level, along with iconographic material. On only two pages, there is space for a photograph depicting President Thomas Woodrow Wilson and a French drawing from 1917 entitled *American sun disperses German darkness*, in which the sun in the American national colours illuminates a terrified Prussian/German with the characteristic *Pikielhauba*, most likely Emperor Wilhelm II Hohenzollern. There is also a photograph taken in one of the European ports in 1917, showing American soldiers leaving the ship in which they sailed to the old continent. The manual also contains a table showing the losses (dead and wounded) during the global conflict. The students could learn from it that 115,000 American soldiers died and 206,000 were injured in the fighting.²⁰ Finally, the summary of the topic once again recalls the circumstances that led to the decision of the USA authorities to join the war. This issue is raised in a block of questions for students, in which they are asked to explain the importance of the USA's entry into the war.²¹

The issue is presented in an equally interesting and, most importantly, exhaustive way in a textbook prepared by the OPERON Pedagogical Publishing House (org. *Wydawnictwo Pedagogiczne OPERON*). The authors of the text emphasise at the outset that the USA was neutral at the beginning of the war. The situation changed when the Germans declared an unlimited submarine war. As a result, Americans also became victims of the sinking of ships by the German navy.²² An event that particularly disturbed American public opinion was the sinking of the ship *Vigilancia* by the Germans in March 1917, from which no one survived. There is also an illustration of the event of 7 May 1915 when the British ship *Lusitania* sank after being torpedoed by a German submarine. Among the 1,201 victims were more than a hundred Americans. From the textbook, students could learn of another event which, to an equally important extent as the unlimited submarine war, contributed to the decision of the US government to join the conflict. This was the handing over to the US president of the so-called *Zimmermann Telegram*, seized and deciphered by the British intelligence agency. The document contained instructions from the German Foreign Minister to the Ambassador of the Second Reich in Mexico, that if Mexico joined the war on the side of the central powers, the authorities in Berlin would support its territorial claims against the USA. Because of these events, the USA joined the war on the side of the Entente on 6 April 1917. This date is bolded in the textbook.²³ The authors of the OPERON textbook point out that the USA's entry into the war meant that the central powers practically lost the chance to win. In addition to the abovementioned illustration of the sinking ship *Lusitania*, the textbook contains a portrait photograph of American President Thomas Woodrow Wilson. In the caption under the photograph, students

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid., p. 90.

21 Ibid., p. 91.

22 J. Bednarz, M. Litwinienko, K. Zapła, *Historia 3. Podręcznik dla gimnazjum*, Gdynia 2007, p. 19.

23 Ibid., p. 20.

could read that Wilson held office between 1913 and 1921 and was initially opposed to US intervention, but the actions of Germany forced him to help the Entente.²⁴ Let us also note that, among the five orders and questions that appear at the end of the topic, one refers to explaining the reasons for the USA's entry into the war. A summary of the losses of countries participating in the war, presented in the form of a graph, tells students that the number of American soldiers killed and injured amounted to 114,000.²⁵

The analysis presented above shows a picture of great diversity in the content and teaching aids (understood as various historical sources such as texts, iconographies, and photographs, as well as processed materials such as maps and tables, in this case, used in textbooks), in the context of the background to and importance of US participation in the war.

It is even more interesting to look at the lower secondary school textbooks that were published after the 2008 program reform. Let us recall that the reform significantly reduced the amount of content, and thus of material, that students were to analyse in history lessons. It was then that the events that took place after 1918 were removed from the three-year program. In this way, the authors of the curriculum, textbooks, and teachers were given more space and time to discuss and analyse earlier historical issues, including World War I.

Textbooks for lower secondary schools – after the 2008 program reform

Three textbooks from this period were selected for analysis. Among them, the most popular was prepared by Stanisław Roszak and Anna Łaszkiwicz for the Nowa Era Publishing House; published in 2012, it is based on the general history curriculum. In the book, *Traces of the Past*, the authors point out that the USA didn't initially intend to take part in the war.²⁶ However, the anti-war mood began to change after May 1915, when a German submarine sank the steamboat *Lusitania*. Initially, under the influence of mass protests that swept through America, the German command reduced the actions of the U-Boats. However, in February 1917, they returned to such practices and went one step further by declaring an unlimited submarine war. This decision, as we read in the book, shocked international opinion, and the USA decided to declare war on 6 April 1917.²⁷ Because of this decision, the situation of the central states began to deteriorate systematically, especially when American soldiers began to reach the western front. It should be added that this part of the lecture is enriched by an illustration of the sinking steamboat *Lusitania* and a source text in which Admiral Henning von Holtzendorff praises Marshal Paul von Hindenburg for the benefits that large-scale use of submarines will bring to Germany.²⁸ The topic ends with a fragment

24 Ibid., p. 21.

25 Ibid., pp. 22–23.

26 A. Łaszkiwicz, S. Roszak, *Śladami przeszłości. Podręcznik do historii dla klasy trzeciej gimnazjum*, Warszawa 2012, p. 256.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid., p. 257.

devoted to losses and war damages. Students learn from it that the Entente took out huge US loans during the war, which they had to pay back for many years afterwards. In addition, the number of American soldiers who died in the war (48,000) is given.²⁹

A book prepared by Tomasz Małkowski and Jacek Rzeźniowiecki for the Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Oświatowe Publishing House (GWO) was only slightly less popular than the textbook published by Nowa Era. We should remark that we have had the opportunity to meet these authors (*Historia III. Podręcznik dla klasy III gimnazjum*, 2008). This textbook is particularly interesting for our analysis because it allows us to compare the content and teaching aids of two studies by the same authors, commissioned by the same publisher, but each for a fundamentally different core curriculum. The new curriculum was supposed to give the teacher more time to analyse the subject of World War I, and thus issues related to US participation. However, we are disappointed at the very beginning. In the textbook from 2011, we find almost the same lecture as in the book from 2001/2008. The authors only alter the arrangement of the content. For example, in the last study, the fragment concerning the famous message by the American president is moved from the beginning to the centre of the discussion. The only significant difference that can be described as enriching the content of the lecture in the newer study is the title of one of the paragraphs, *The End of US Neutrality*, which was not in the previous study.³⁰ The reasons behind the decision to equip the textbook with much more modest teaching aids seem completely incomprehensible. For example, in the older study, the policy pursued by the USA directly or indirectly was illustrated by four photographs/posts, while the newer one has only two.³¹ Curiously, the two successive editions of a very similar textbook give completely different figures for the number of American soldiers killed in World War I. According to the 2001 textbook, 115,000 American soldiers died and 206,000 were injured. In the 2011 study, the number of dead increases to 210,000. The number of the injured is not given, but in keeping with the adopted criterion, it would probably have to reach over 400,000.³² Thus, the differences in the manuals published by the GWO concern mostly the teaching aids of books; these, however, raise some doubts.

The third book for the new lower secondary school curriculum was prepared for *PWN School Publishing* by Jacek Chachaj and Janusz Droba. This book, like the two

²⁹ Ibid., p. 259. It is worth noting that this number significantly differs from the ones given in other studies, e.g. J. Bednarz, M. Litwinienko, K. Zapała, op. cit., p. 23; T. Małkowski, J. Rzeźniowiecki, *Historia III...*, (2008), p. 85.

³⁰ T. Małkowski, J. Rzeźniowiecki, *Historia III. Podręcznik dla klasy III gimnazjum*, Gdańsk 2011, p. 250.

³¹ For example, in the 2011 edition, which, as we remember, should have described the events in more detail, a meaningful poster, a photograph of President W. Wilson and a picture of the arrival of American soldiers on board a warship are removed. They are replaced by a photograph of the American railway guns shooting at German positions in 1918. Both textbooks contain a photo of the so-called "Big Three" taken in Paris during the Paris Peace Conference. See: T. Małkowski, J. Rzeźniowiecki, *Historia III. Podręcznik dla klasy III gimnazjum*, Gdańsk 2001, pp. 84–88; eidem, *Historia III...* (2011), pp. 251, 254.

³² Eidem, *Historia III...* (2001), p. 90; eidem, *Historia III...* (2011), p. 254.

studies discussed above, was published in 2011. In the topic entitled *The Great War (1914–1918)*, the authors include only a short note, from which students may learn that the USA's entry into the war in 1917 led to an imbalance between the sides of the conflict.³³ In the text, the USA appears as one of the five countries whose head of state was behind the most important decisions made at the Paris Peace Conference.³⁴ Unfortunately, the manual lacks any iconographic or source material referring to US participation. The same applies to the summary questions.

Summarizing the first part of our analysis, concerning the image of the USA's entry into the war in 1917, it should be stated that the textbooks prepared for lower secondary schools in their first period of functioning, presented themselves much better. It would be expected that textbooks prepared for third grades in accordance with the new curriculum of history teaching should, due to the shortening of the period to be covered during the three years of lower secondary school education, contain more content. Unfortunately, this cannot be said about topics concerning World War I, and therefore also one of its most important threads, which was the participation of the USA.

Textbooks for upper secondary schools

It is now time to analyse selected textbooks for upper secondary schools. Let's start with a book written by Jan Wróbel and published by the WSiP Publishing House (org. *Wydawnictwo Szkolne i Pedagogiczne – WSiP*) in 2003. The author attempted to prepare a two-volume textbook for the basic scope, the first volume of which covered the period from prehistory to the end of the Napoleonic era (1815). The second begins with a description of the Vienna Congress and ends with the present day. In the fourth chapter of the second volume, entitled *The End of La Belle Époque*, the author distinguishes the theme *Great War*. Wróbel's fast-paced and engaging narrative is reflected in reference to the breakthrough events of 1917. It is worth quoting the author at length, so that nothing can be missed from his interesting description:

Like many gross mistakes in history, an unlimited submarine war seemed like a good idea at first. [...] In Berlin, an angry reaction was expected from Washington, which did not hide its sympathy for the Entente. It was believed, however, that since America had been neutral for over two and a half years, it would stop at diplomatic pressure. This calculation failed. The USA's decision to join the war was made under the influence of perhaps the most spectacular intelligence and diplomatic intrigue of the twentieth century. At the end of 1916, British intelligence managed to intercept and partially decipher the Reich Foreign Minister's telegram to the German ambassador in Washington. The telegram

33 J. Chachaj, J. Drob, *Historia. Wiek XIX i wielka wojna. Podręcznik dla gimnazjum. Klasa III*, Warszawa 2011, pp. 133–134.

34 From the study, students could learn that the global cost of the war was over \$200 billion, while the total national income of the USA in 1914 was \$37 billion, greater than the combined income of the main parties of the conflict: Germany (\$12 billion), Great Britain (\$11 billion), Russia (\$7 billion) and France (\$6 billion) (*Ibid.*, pp. 135–136).

contained instructions on how to proceed in case of a possible American-German war: "We will submit to Mexico proposals for an alliance [...] and our understanding that Mexico will take back the lost territories in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona". The British gave the Americans the Zimmermann telegram at the right time. The content of the telegram disturbed American public opinion. A few recklessly written sentences about a rather fantastic plan would cost Germany dearly. On 6 April 1917, the USA declared war on Germany. The Americans needed time to build a strong intervention army. Nevertheless, thanks to the USA's entry into the war, the Entente's economic potential almost doubled and confidence in victory was seriously strengthened.³⁵

We think that the reader of this article will have no doubt why it was worth quoting a more extensive fragment of Jan Wróbel's work. More so because the next part of Wróbel's text gives information about the role of American soldiers who contributed to the defeat of the German army on the western front in 1918. The analysed textbook, in matters of interest to us, would not raise any major reservations if it had only been better edited in terms of teaching aids, in particular iconography. We should note that the study contains an American poster from 1917, which encouraged women to take up employment in industry.³⁶

The OPERON Pedagogical Publishing House conquered the market for secondary school history textbooks in the first decade of the twenty-first century. This concerned, in particular, studies in the basic scope. The team of Zielona Góra historians led by Bogumiła Burda and Bohdan Halczak could openly talk about great success. A well-thought-out publishing strategy, which was always one step ahead of the competition in offering textbooks to teachers, had a significant impact on this situation. So, what was the image of American participation in World War I in the pages of one of the most popular textbooks to be used in schools between 2002 and 2014? The textbook for the second grade includes material from the beginning of the sixteenth century to the end of World War I. It states that the USA's entry into the war in April 1917 was determined primarily by the country's strong economic ties with England and France and the German attempts to draw Mexico into the war, which was a direct threat to the territory of the USA.³⁷ This information is complemented by an illustration of the sinking of the *Lusitania* after being torpedoed by a German submarine. It comments that such incidents were the official cause of the USA's declaration of war against Germany and Austria-Hungary.³⁸ Unfortunately, the authors incorrectly describe the *Lusitania* as an American ship, when from the very beginning it sailed under the British flag. They also wrongly state that the US made a simultaneous declaration

35 J. Wróbel, *Odnaleźć przeszłość. Historia od 1815 roku do współczesności 2. Kształcenie w zakresie podstawowym. Podręcznik dla liceum ogólnokształcącego, liceum profilowanego i technikum*, Warszawa 2003, pp. 134–135.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 134.

37 B. Burda, B. Halczak, R. M. Józefiak, A. Roszak, M. Szymczak, *Historia 2. Czasy nowożytne. Podręcznik dla liceum ogólnokształcącego, liceum profilowanego i technikum. Zakres podstawowy*, second edition corrected, Gdynia 2011, p. 364.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 363.

of war against the Reich and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In fact, the declaration against the latter did not come until the end of 1917. In addition, a tabular summary of the loss of life during World War I provides information that 114,000 Americans were killed or wounded.³⁹

In the WSiP textbook, published for the first time in 2009 and covering the history of the twentieth century, the first chapter is devoted to the history of World War I. The authors of the study devote a fragment on the subject to describing the origins, course, and consequences of the conflict. As the reason for the USA's entry into the war, they indicate the German declaration of an unlimited submarine war: "In this way – as they emphasised – in the entente camp there was a state with the greatest economic potential in the world, which would soon largely determine the outcome of the conflict".⁴⁰

Having the US in their camp meant that the countries of the Entente began to receive huge supplies of food and all sorts of materials needed to conduct the war, even though the US military did not play an important role in the conflict until 1918. The textbook contains interesting facts about the sinking of the *Lusitania*, on which 128 US citizens were killed, which had an impact on the attitude of US public opinion. From that moment Americans began to stand up on the side of the Entente.⁴¹ Unfortunately, the manual does not contain any elements of teaching aids related to the USA's participation in the war.

Among the textbooks which were prepared for both the basic and advanced levels, many teachers, didactics, and methodologists of history highly rated the series *Travel in Time* by the Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Oświatowe Publishing House. In this five-volume study, the part concerning World War I was prepared by Mikołaj Gładysz. He explains that the sinking of the ship *Vigilancia* in March 1917 was a consequence of the unlimited submarine war waged by the Germans, which in turn led the USA to join the war. In this way, the Entente was to gain military support from the world's largest industrial power.⁴² The information about one million American soldiers sent to Europe and the day (6 April 1917) of the USA's declaration of war are also noted. In addition, the textbook contains a photograph of the American soldiers who arrived in Europe in 1917, along with information saying that until that time, the USA remained impartial towards the ongoing war. This, in turn, was due to its traditional policy of isolationism and reluctance to engage in armed conflict, as well as the fear of an outbreak of fighting between ethnic groups in the USA: "In fact", as Mikołaj Gładysz emphasises, "the USA provided financial support to the entente, to which they lent \$2 billion by November 1916".⁴³

39 Ibid., p. 367.

40 J. Choińska-Mika, P. Skibiński, P. Szlanta, K. Zielińska, *Historia*, Part 3: *Poznać zrozumieć. Zakres podstawowy. Liceum i technikum. Podręcznik*, Warszawa 2009, p. 11.

41 Ibid.

42 M. Gładysz, *Historia II. Podręcznik dla klasy drugiej liceum i technikum. Zakres podstawowy i rozszerzony*, Part 1: *Od oświecenia do 1918 roku*, third edition, Gdańsk 2007, p. 181.

43 Ibid., p. 182.

It should also be noted that in this textbook, which is richly supported by historical and historiographic sources, there is a place for a quotation from a classical study devoted to World War I, written by the prominent Polish historian Janusz Pajewski. In the fragment, cited as material for reflection and discussion, referring to the influence of the war on the position of Europe, the student can read that:

The USA at the end of the nineteenth century gained a position of power; European countries had to take their aspirations and interests more seriously. But these interests included the American continent, the Pacific Ocean, and the Far East, and the aspirations did not reach Europe. The USA was still owed to Europe. The war changed this situation.⁴⁴

As we can see, the textbook contains the most important information about US participation in the war. However, it is difficult to argue that the issue we are interested in is treated in a special way. Given that we are analyzing a textbook that was used at an advanced level, it is hard to rate it as providing more than a merely satisfactory level of preparation.

The same double function was performed by the textbook of Piotr Marciszuk's STENTOR Publishing House, for which a lecture about the history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was written by Maciej Przybyliński. The study presents the circumstances of the sinking in 1915 of the British passenger steamer *Lusitania* by a German submarine, on board of which 1198 people, including 128 Americans, died, which caused indignation in the neutral USA. The author further emphasises that although after this event Germany limited its submarine war, in February 1917, striving to break the British maritime blockade, they again decided to carry out such activities on a much larger scale. Initially, this had the intended effect, but after the introduction of effective methods of fighting the German U-Boats, including the organisation of highly protected convoys and the spread of mine barriers, the effectiveness of the German navy's activities significantly decreased. As Przybyliński emphasises: "The most important effect of the activities of German ships was the entry into the war of the USA in April 1917".⁴⁵

Apart from a photograph showing President Woodrow Wilson at the Paris Peace Conference, the textbook does not contain any source materials that refer even indirectly to the participation of the USA in World War I.

One of the few textbooks for upper secondary schools from the first decade of the present century, intended only for the advanced level, was published by SOP Oświatowiec Publishing House. In the textbook, which was prepared by four experienced didactics and history teachers, the lecture devoted to World War I is extensive and interesting. The American thread is first seen when the authors describe the tragedy of the passengers of the *Lusitania* transatlantic liner, emphasizing that the death of 413 crew members and 785 passengers on 7 May 1915 caused outrage around the world. The authors point out that there were further attacks by German submarines

44 Ibid., p. 187.

45 M. Przybyliński, *Poznać przeszłość, zrozumieć dziś. Historia. Dzieje najnowsze 1872–2006. Klasa 3 liceum i technikum. Poziom podstawowy i rozszerzony*, Warszawa 2007, p. 97.

on ships, although it should rather be “American civilian ships”, which caused protests by the authorities in Washington and an increase in anti-German sentiment.⁴⁶ The next section explains directly the circumstances of the USA’s declaration of war. We read that the German command sought quick solutions in the war and therefore decided to return from a very limited, because of the sinking of the *Lusitania*, to unlimited submarine war. This meant sinking without warning all the ships in the waters around the coalition states. The USA protested strongly against this decision and broke off diplomatic relations with the German Reich. The tensions between Washington and Berlin, we read in the study, soon increased with the disclosure of confidential talks between the German government and Mexico. The Americans were outraged by the proposals to give Mexico financial support and far-reaching help to recover the land it had lost to the USA in the mid-nineteenth century. In such a tense atmosphere, when a German submarine sank an American ship (again a mistake with the term “ship”), anti-German sentiment in the USA intensified and the American president decided to declare war on 6 April 1917, thus moving away from the policy of isolationism.⁴⁷ From another part of the lecture, students could learn that President Wilson had already at the beginning of 1917 presented a proposal to end the war in accordance with the principle of *peace without victory*; that is, without winners and defeated. At that time, however, both sides in the conflict decisively rejected it.⁴⁸ The last mention of the USA in the main text emphasises that World War I strengthened its position as a superpower, due to the great defeat of all of Europe.⁴⁹ The textbook contains two interesting problem tasks for students. In the first one, based on figures from a table illustrating exports from the USA to coalition and central states in 1914–1916, they have to identify trends and explain their impact on the American economy and the course of the war.⁵⁰ The second task is to explain the relationship between war expenditures and the number of mobilised soldiers in each country, including the USA, which is included in the table *War Expenditures and Army Size*.

On the basis of the conducted analysis, the textbook of SOP Oświatowiec Publishing House fully deserves the title of a study for the advanced level. Unfortunately, only a small group of students had the opportunity to use it, as only a part of the youth chose to study history at the advanced level. Also, the textbook, although well prepared from the factual and didactic side, was not given as much promotion as books published by large publishing houses. Unfortunately, we have been dealing with such a situation in Poland for years and it does not concern only the market of school textbooks.

The last of the selected textbooks was prepared by the Nowa Era Publishing House for the needs of advanced level history in the so-called new core curriculum,

46 Z. T. Kozłowska, I. Unger, P. Unger, S. Zając, *Poznajemy przeszłość od początku XVIII wieku do 1939 roku. Podręcznik dla liceum ogólnokształcącego. Zakres rozszerzony, Part 2*, Toruń 2006, p. 247.

47 Ibid., pp. 248–249.

48 Ibid., p. 252.

49 Ibid., p. 261.

50 Ibid., p. 249.

which was introduced by the 2008 regulation, and began to be implemented in the school year 2013/14. Young people who chose advanced level at history were offered a well-designed and undoubtedly ambitious core curriculum. The textbook's author, Piotr Galik, approaches the subject without complexes, skilfully combining the achievements of Polish and world historiography with the most important principles of didactics and methodology of history. The result is a textbook that allows students to deepen the knowledge gained at the second and third stages of education – that is, at primary and lower secondary schools – as well as providing good preparation for the final exam. The authors of the article rate Piotr Galik's book very highly, including for its coverage of our title issue. In the topics describing World War I, the USA appears many times. For the first time, the author, describing the international situation at the beginning of World War I, emphasises that the USA, like Germany, was a country that had effectively implemented the latest technologies and developed innovative industries, which had already given it a dominant position in the world.⁵¹ Later on, in the topic entitled *Defeat of the Central States*, the book provides the most comprehensive description of the circumstances of the entry and participation of the US in the war that we have yet encountered. As in several previous studies, we are told about the tragedy of the passengers of the *Lusitania*, including many Americans. This fragment is illustrated by a drawing of a drowning steamer.⁵² The next section shows how Germany, despite being fully aware of the threat of the USA entering the war, returned in January 1917 to unlimited underwater warfare. They were counting on the fact that they would win the war before the arrival of sufficiently large American forces on the Old Continent. These assumptions were initially intended to result in a significant increase in the number of sunken ships, although these should rather be civilian ships. However, the rapid declaration of war by the US and the application of effective methods of fighting the U-boats contributed to the thwarting of plans and the failure of strategic underwater operations.

We would describe the next section of the text as a model for the issue described in this article. Illustrated with two images and two photographs from the epoch, it contains enough information to allow a student to successfully answer a question on the subject in a university history exam, let alone at school level. What kind of information is this? It is worth quoting *in extenso* two longer fragments of the section entitled *US Accession to War*:

The most important doctrine of American politics in the nineteenth century was isolationism. After the outbreak of World War I, public opinion and power circles were divided on the question of the conflict in the Old Continent. A significant number of Americans came from European countries, which was not without influence on their views. Citizens of German and Irish origin wished for the United Kingdom to lose, while the descendants of immigrants from France, Italy, and Russia were reluctant to support the Reich. Involvement

51 P. Galik, *Zrozumieć przeszłość. Lata 1815–1939, Podręcznik do historii dla liceum ogólnokształcącego i technikum. Zakres rozszerzony*, Part 3., Warszawa 2014, p. 293.

52 *Ibid.*, p. 328.

of the government on either of the warring sides would result in loss of support among some voters. There were also economic reasons for neutrality. Trade with war-torn countries that needed more and more supplies brought substantial profits. Despite the neutrality of their country, Americans took part in the war as volunteers. American pilots fighting against Germany in the ranks of Lafayette's squadron, belonging to the French air force, gained the greatest fame at that time. Numerous volunteers (including the later famous writer Ernest Hemingway) worked in the Red Cross at the back of the fronts. With time, war events (the sinking of the *Lusitania* or German crimes against civilians) began to dominate the view that America should join the play of states allied with Great Britain and France.⁵³

In the next part, the author gives the facts already known from other textbooks, including the direct reasons for the USA joining the war: the resumption of unlimited German underwater activities and the reaction to the Zimmermann telegram. The text also provides the exact date of the declaration of war by the USA. The thread we are interested in ends as follows:

Meanwhile, over 200,000 soldiers came to Europe every month from overseas. By the end of hostilities, 2 million Americans were stationed at the front and rear. Thus, the enlistment of the large and heavily armed American army took place at the moment that was decisive for the fate of the war. President Thomas Woodrow Wilson was fully aware of this, and in January 1918 he announced a message containing 14 points on which the post-war international order was to be based. Thus, the USA rose to the rank of global power and arbiter in the world conflict.⁵⁴

The lecture is supplemented by an extensive, by textbook standards, biography of President Thomas Woodrow Wilson, in which, it is worth emphasizing, there is also a place for Polish themes related to his biography. For example: "After his death in 1924, national mourning was also announced in Poland. The monument of the President, founded by his friend Ignacy Jan Paderewski, was unveiled in 1931 in Wilson Park in Poznań".⁵⁵

The book contains a considered selection of iconographic materials as teaching aids. A photograph taken in New York during a parade, as the city's residents bid farewell to the soldiers of the American Expeditionary Forces before they leave for Europe; a recruitment poster in which Uncle Sam encourages Americans to join the army; a portrait photograph of President W. Wilson; and a painting in which his message to Congress of 8 January 1918 is perpetuated. It is a pity that the author or his helpers did not attempt to formulate problematic questions that could have been answered by students in the classroom or as homework. The situation is, however, helped by the inclusion, as a source text, of six of Wilson's fourteen points, and the formulation of

53 Ibid., p. 329.

54 Ibid., p. 331.

55 Ibid., p. 330.

two problem tasks.⁵⁶ The teaching aids, despite the noted shortcomings, are a strong point of the book published by Nowa Era. This opinion is confirmed by the fact that a large fragment of Zimmermann's telegram has been placed in the section entitled *Work with the source material*. The text, in accordance with the requirements of the didactics and methodology of teaching history, comes with a commentary: "A telegram from the German foreign minister, Arthur Zimmermann, decoded by the British, sent to the Mexican government on 16 January 1917, shocked American public opinion and contributed to the USA joining the war on the side of the Entente".⁵⁷

At the end of the chapter devoted to World War I, there is another photograph showing women working in an American ammunition factory. The caption emphasises that the men's departure to the front meant that women had to replace them in many professions that had previously been closed to them. In the same part of the summary, there is a table illustrating the war losses of the countries involved in the conflict. For the US, the table shows the number of mobilised (4,350,000), killed (126,000), wounded (234,000), prisoners of war and missing persons (4,500), total losses (364,000), and the percentage of mobilised losses (8.2 per cent).⁵⁸

The summary of the chapter includes a paragraph entitled *The Birth of the Superpower*, which states the following:

The gigantic potential of American industry and the rapidly mobilised large land forces allowed the allies to bring Germany and their allies to their knees, despite the elimination of Russia, which was engulfed in a revolutionary fire. In addition to the exceptional status of a superpower, the USA benefited economically from the war by supplying and financing the warring states. Thus, the military power of Washington was accompanied by the economic dominance of American banks as the main creditors of the Entente. From these sources came the undisputed authority of the US President as the head of the most powerful country in the world at that time.⁵⁹

Summary

The evaluation of both the quantity and the level of information concerning the participation of the USA in the Great War in the cited textbooks is not the simplest task. This results from several circumstances, among which the slogan character of the texts in the core curriculum should be particularly emphasised. While each of the analysed studies contains information about the USA's entry into the war, their descriptions of the circumstances of this decision and its involvement in the conflict differ in many ways. The teaching aids are by far the weakest element of most of the analysed studies. This is not about the number of photographs, but first of all about providing

56 Ibid., p. 331.

57 Ibid., p. 341.

58 Ibid., p. 336.

59 Ibid., p. 338.

a selection that will not only enrich knowledge but also encourage intellectual effort. We find a negligible amount of material for which related tasks have been formulated. However, in the absence of such materials, the text itself should give students a relatively complete picture of the event, naturally at the level of their perception and time possibilities. An example of this is the textbook by Andrzej Garlicki, which has been criticised by some history didactics. Its first edition was published in 1998. Its content, it is worth emphasizing, is similar to the book by Piotr Galik. Although it is difficult to find innovative didactic solutions in it because, in fact, it resembles an academic textbook, on the issue we are interested in it outlines a very extensive, for the needs of school historical education, image of the entry and participation of the USA in the Great War.⁶⁰

The authors of the school history textbooks analysed here agree that the “entry of Uncle Sam into the game” was one of the turning points of the war. President Thomas Woodrow Wilson, who was responsible for making this decision, had no doubt that it was a very difficult one. Therefore, on 2 April 1917, shortly after he had given a speech to Congress about declaring war on Germany, which had received thunderous applause, he said to his secretary Joseph Tumult: “Think of what it was they were applauding. My message today was a message of death for our young men. How strange it seems to applaud that.” He was not mistaken. It is worth remembering this also nowadays when despite many tragic experiences from history, there is still no shortage of individuals and entire social groups that see war as an effective and sustainable method of solving problems. Every war is almost a collective suicide. Aptly, Pope Benedict XV spoke in September 1914 about the attitude of “civilised Europeans” in the face of the outbreak of the Great War. Probably they were aware of this in America, delaying their involvement in the global conflict. But when the USA came in, they did so on their own terms and in the style that made the USA a global superpower.

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⁶⁰ See more: A. Garlicki, *Historia 1815–1939. Polska i świat. Podręcznik dla III klas liceów ogólnokształcących*, Warszawa 1998, pp. 235–238.

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Abstract

This paper presents an analysis of the content of Polish school textbooks for teaching history in the context of the USA's entry into World War I in 1917. School textbooks have been chosen as the dominant source of student history knowledge. Fourteen textbooks were analysed: seven for the third stage of education (lower secondary schools) and seven for the fourth stage (upper secondary schools, technical schools). These were used between 2001 and 2017. The USA's entry into the Great War undoubtedly had a decisive impact on the outcome of the global conflict. The article shows the way in which this subject was presented to students in schools. We analyse the information contained in the textbooks on the circumstances of this historical event and the conclusions and assessments formulated. Special attention is also paid to the didactic solutions applied.

Keywords: First World War, USA, school historical education, history didactics.