# Contributions of Polish Americans

- 1608: The first Poles arrived in Jamestown. As skilled craftsmen, they were critical in developing the industry of the Virginia colony.

- American Revolution:
  Gen. Casimir Pulaski: "The Father of American Cavalry," died in a heroic charge at Savannah. Gen. Thaddeus Kosciuszko was chosen by Gen. Washington to design West Point.

- In his 1798 will, Kosciuszko instructed Thomas Jefferson to devote all his sizable property (a reward for his service in the American Revolution) to free and educate slaves.

- 1870-1921: ~ 2.5 million Poles came to the US followed by waves in 1945-1952 and 1982.

- Poles built over 1,000 churches, 800 schools, and many organizations, hospitals, and orphanages, and created some of the most livable neighborhoods.

- Poles had the highest participation in America's armed forces of any ethnic group in WW I & II.

- Lt. Col. Matt Urban (Urbanowicz) was the most decorated American soldier of WW II.

- Col. Francis Gabreski: Third highest-scoring US Ace with 34.5 Kills in WW II and Korea.

- Jan Karski: Courier of the exiled Polish Gov't in London and eyewitness to the German atrocities, personally told Roosevelt and the Allies about the extermination of Jews.

- Col. Ryszard Kukliński, delivered more top-secret Soviet documents than anyone (1972-82). His bravery prevented a planned Soviet attack on Western Europe.

- Today, 9.5 million claim Polish ancestry. They exceed the U.S. national average in income, education, and home ownership.

# World War II – immense suffering



a city of 1.3 million – "Paris of the East".

Hitler's order after the 1944 uprising.:
"EVERY INHABITANT OF WARSAW MUST BE KILLED. NO PRISONERS MUST BE TAKEN. WARSAW IS TO BE RAZED TO THE GROUND."

- The population of Poland, according to censuses before and after WWII, shrank by 1/3 (11-12 million) as a result of the loss of 20 % of its territory due to a secret agreement between the US, UK, USSR and genocidal acts of the Germans and Soviets.

- Among the German-occupied countries, only Poland did not have a collaborationist regime.

- The Polish Underground State: Nowhere else in occupied Europe was there such an extensive and efficient administrative government that included judicial and educational systems, and a large clandestine army.

- 1941-49: Stalin deported 3.3 million Poles to Siberia; over 40 percent died from hard labor, disease, malnutrition, and the harsh climate.

- For several years after WWII, underground members fought the communists as Poland was oppressed by Soviet-imposed rule.

- Germany paid reparations to 12 European countries, including Sweden and Switzerland. Poland suffered the greatest human and material destruction but was never compensated.

# POLAND – THE HEART OF EUROPE



## Historical milestones

- Poland became a Christian state in 966.

- For 4 centuries, Poland was a liberal republic, that was once the largest, and one of the most powerful countries in Europe.

- Starting in 1772, fearing that the Polish Republic's freedoms would infect their countries, the absolutist rulers of Germany, Austria, and Russia began dividing Poland between them.

- 1918: Poland is reestablished. 1939: Germany and Russia invade and occupy Poland.

- 1945: At Yalta, the US and UK secretly betray Poland by moving its borders westward and allowing Stalin to impose communist rule.

- 1989: Poland ejects communist rule, joins NATO in 1999 and the EU in 2004. Today, Poland is strongly pro-American and shares our values of freedom and equality.

- With its population of 38 million, Poland is one of the world's fastest-growing economies.

- 20 million people of Polish ancestry live abroad.

## Unparalleled Liberty and Tolerance

- Poland was one of Europe's most ethnically and religiously diverse societies.

- Persecuted Jews fled to Poland. By the late 1800s, 80 percent of all Jews lived in Poland.

- At the Council of Constance (1414-18), Poland argued that nonbelievers cannot be deprived of life, property or be forced to convert.

- England's *Magna Carta* (1215) and Poland's *Privilege of Cienia* (1228) limited the King's powers. Poland's *Neminem Captivabimus* (1430) and England's *Habeus Corpus Act* (1649) prohibited unlawful arrest and imprisonment. These and other Polish acts granted freedoms that were little-known elsewhere.

- Unlike elsewhere in Europe, there were no religious wars or inquisitions. Poland's kings said: "I am not the king of your conscience."

- In pre-modern Europe, about 12 percent of Polish citizens could vote. In other countries, about 3 percent on average could vote.

- 1619: Jamestown Poles organized America's first strike because they were not allowed to vote. They were the first to fight for civil rights.

- 1505: Poland's *Nihil Novi* is Europe's earliest constitutional form. 1791: Its constitution is Europe's first and the world's second after the US.

- 1802: Napoleon sent a Polish legion to help suppress the Haitian slave rebellion. Instead, the Poles joined them in their fight. 1804: in free Haiti Poles are honored with Haitian citizenship.

- Polish women had more social liberties than in most in Europe. When Poland was re-established in 1918, they were given the right to vote before the US (1920) and France (1945).

## Defender of Europe and freedom

- For 500 years, Poland defended Europe against Tatars, Turks, and later Soviet Russia.

- 1359-1772: The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was one of the largest European countries with a multi-ethnic and multi-religious population that enjoyed peaceful coexistence under tolerant kings.

- 1410: At Grunwald, in Europe's largest medieval battle, the Polish-Lithuanian Union crushed the Germans' efforts to subjugate them.

- 1683: In the Battle of Vienna, King John III Sobieski's forces defeated the Ottoman Turks and prevented the Islamic conquest of the Holy Roman Empire.

- 1920: Two years after Poland was re-established as a nation, Polish forces defeated the Russian Bolsheviks in the Battle of Warsaw and saved Western Europe from communism.

- 1933: Three Polish mathematicians cracked Germany's Enigma encryption machine, which gave the Allies a significant military advantage in World War II. Cmdr. Patrick Beesly - "…without it, it is no exaggeration to say that Germany might have won the WWII."

- 1940: British Air Chief Marshal, Sir Hugh Dowding: "Had it not been for the participation of Polish pilots, the outcome of the Battle of Britain would have been not the same."

- Critical intelligence from the Polish Home Army enabled the Allies to destroy V-1 and V-2 rocket sites Germany used to bomb London.

- 1944: Monte Cassino, one of the heaviest battles of WW II.  For 5 months, German defenses could not be broken until Poles were called.

- 1981: It was the Solidarity movement that defeated communist rule in Poland and triggered the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe.

## World War II - exceptional heroism

- Poland was attacked simultaneously by Germany, the Soviet Union, Slovakia, and from within by ethnic Germans who were Polish citizens. Even so, it fought longer than France when Germany invaded it in 1940.

- Ten days before invading, Hitler ordered his generals to "…send to death mercilessly and without compassion, men, women, and children of Polish derivation and language."

- Despite British and French agreements of military support, none was provided, and Poland fought alone against the enemy forces.

- A secret provision in the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact divided Poland between Hitler and Stalin. In the first two years, Poles were the primary target of a coordinated extermination process.

- Warsaw uprising of Aug.-Sept.1944 was the largest battle fought by any resistance organization. It was aimed against the German occupation and politically against the Soviet Union.

- Only in Poland those who offered any help to Jews were killed, including their families. Over 80% of Jews did not speak Polish, were easy to be identified, making saving them extremely dangerous and very difficult. Hans G. Furth estimated that there may have been as many as 1,200,000 Poles involved in rescuing Jews and risking their lives.

- According to Mordecai Paldiel, "The threats faced by would-be rescuers, from the Germans and blackmailers, place Polish rescuers of Jews in a special category, for they exemplified a courage, fortitude, and lofty humanitarianism unequalled in other occupied countries."

- Polish forces were the Allies' fourth largest after the Soviets, Americans, and British. They contributed significantly to the Allied defeat of Germany in major battles fought on land, at sea, and in the air throughout Europe and in North Africa.