

Discussion Article

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**CONTROVERSIAL REPORTS ON THE SITUATION
OF JEWS IN POLAND IN THE AFTERMATH
OF WORLD WAR I**

THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE US AMBASSADOR IN WARSAW
HUGH GIBSON AND AMERICAN JEWISH LEADERS*

I. REACTIONS OF JEWISH AND POLISH COMMUNITIES
IN AMERICA TO NEWS ABOUT POGROMS IN THE POLISH
TERRITORIES DURING THE PARIS PEACE CONFERENCE

World War I was essentially over by November 1918. The victorious Allied powers and the nations that gained independence after long years of occupation faced very difficult decisions about post-war arrangements. The United States, England, and France played a special role in this process feeling fully empowered to decide not only the future of defeated Germany and Austria but also of other states, especially those which had no recent experience in self-government. Their knowledge about many of these countries – in Eastern Europe in particular – was, however, usually scant. This hindered their ability to solve such problems as setting up new boundaries or determining the status of national minorities.

Poland constituted a complicated case for the Allied leaders. The future of this country lying between Germany and Russia, was important for the stability of Europe, but at the end of 1918 the new republic – re-estab-

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lished after 123 years of Russian, Prussian and Austrian occupation – had no yet agreed upon frontiers, no integrated population, no fully established authorities, no constitution nor international recognition. “it existed, but no one could clearly define its nature or extent.”¹ Both the new Soviet state and a defeated, but not overpowered, Germany, resented Poland’s resurgence. Moreover, relations between Poles and their neighbors, as well as with the minorities living on the territory of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (including Jews, Germans, Czechs, Ukrainians, Lithuanians, and Belarusians) were not shaping up well. In particular, in 1918-20 there were military disputes in the “Eastern Territories” where Poles were fighting the Bolsheviks and local nationalist forces for control of parts of the Ukraine and Lithuania.

Poles themselves were divided about what character their re-born state should have. Some followed Józef Piłsudski, who, making reference to the historical traditions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, viewed the new Poland as a multi-national state with a federative structure. Many, however, supported Roman Dmowski and the program of his National Democrats, as well as other right-wing parties, which propagated the idea of a uni-national state where the supposedly superfluous and trouble-making minorities (especially the Jews) would either become Polonized or emigrate.²

The developments in Eastern Europe were particularly important for the Jews living there, which was the largest Jewish community in the world. At the end of the 19th century, in an era when various political movements increasingly raised the idea of the self-determination of nations, some Jews also started to demand that their group be recognized as a nationality with all the political and legal consequences such recognition implied, and not only, as in the past, as a religious group.³ This caused additional tensions with the nationalistic Poles. The old prejudices, often religiously based, were also reinforced by a growing attractiveness for Poles of the traditional Jewish occupations: commerce and retail trade.

¹N. Davies, *Heart of Europe. A Short History of Poland*, Oxford 1984.

² For a description of Polish politics at that time see, for example, A. Zamoycki, *The Polish Way. A Thousand-Year History of the Poles and Their Culture*, New York 1988, pp. 328ff.

³ For a good description of these problems see, for example, E. Mendelsohn, *Żydzi Europy Środkowo-wschodniej w okresie międzywojennym*, Warszawa 1992, pp. 57-60; English edition: *The Jews of East Central Europe Between the World Wars*, Bloomington, Indiana 1983.

The economic and social situation of many Jews, which was bad even before the war, became even worse in the war-ruined country. In times of raging nationalism, the Jews were caught in the conflict between Poles and Ukrainians, Poles and Russians, Poles and Lithuanians and Poles and Germans. Usually having no vested interests in the victory of one side or the other, sometimes supporting one side against the other, or displaying neutrality towards the events around them, they were often blamed for disloyalty by many or all sides at once. Poles often accused them of having an “antagonistic attitude towards Poland”.⁴ Moreover, the Jewish activities in trade and services often aroused hostility as supposedly being connected to financial speculation in the war zone. In effect, the anti-Semitism of the local populations led to many anti-Jewish outbreaks, especially in the Eastern territories, where the Jewish population was particularly large. This caused accusations, largely exaggerated if not totally untrue, that Poles “celebrated” the re-birth of Poland with pogroms. On the other side, they were many people convinced that “Polish hostility towards the Jews was complemented by Jewish hostility towards the Poles.”⁵

When the future of Europe begun to be discussed in the Paris Peace Conference all major Jewish bodies had sent their representatives to search for international guarantees against oppression of Jews and to protect their rights.⁶ In March 1919, they decided to consolidate their efforts and created the Committee of Jewish Delegations at the Paris Peace Conference. The Committee, dominated by moderate Zionists, had as its first two chairmen, Julius Mack, one of the leaders of the American Zionist Organization and the American Jewish Congress, and Louis Marshall from the American Jew-

⁴ A. Żbikowski, *Poles and Jews in the Kresy Wschodnie – Interethnic Relations in the Borderlands, 1918-1939*, in: *Yearbook 2002*, Leipzig 2003, p. 52; S. Liekis, L. Miliakova, A. Polonsky, *Three Documents on Anti-Jewish Violence in the Eastern Kresy during the Polish-Soviet Conflict*, “Polin” 14: 2001, pp. 116-149.

⁵ N. Davies, *God's Playground. A History of Poland*, New York 1982, vol. II, p. 258.

⁶ A few studies should be singled out for their comprehensive description of Polish-Jewish relations at that time and the proceedings of the Paris Peace Conference with special references to American-Polish-Jewish issues. See: J. Marcus, *Social and Political History of the Jews in Poland. 1919-1939*, New York 1983; P.S. Wandycz, *The United States and Poland*, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1980; K. Lundgreen-Nielsen, *The Polish Problem at the Paris Peace Conference*, Odense 1979; A. Walworth, *Wilson and His Peacemakers. American Diplomacy at the Paris Peace Conference, 1919*, New York 1986; B.W. Winid, *W cieniu Kapitolu – dyplomacja polska wobec Stanów Zjednoczonych Ameryki 1919-1939*, Warszawa 1991.

ish Committee.⁷ The Committee functioned, in practice, as an advocate for Eastern European Jews. After heated discussions, the Committee members agreed on a list of demands concerning the status of Eastern European Jews to be presented to the Conference leaders: guarantees of citizenship and other civil rights; the recognition of Jews as a national entity (with proportional representation in parliament and other state bodies); linguistic autonomy; and the right to maintain their own educational, religious and social institutions.⁸ At the same time the Committee, realizing that demanding special status just for the Jews could increase hostility toward them, pressed for the same rights for other minorities living in Europe. The Committee members tried to get support for these ideas from the US government delegates.⁹ President Wilson and most of the American representatives in Paris fully supported the idea of well-grounded guarantees for the protection of the Jews and other minorities in the newly established states, not only because of the democratic and humanistic ideals they shared but also because they believed that oppression and lawlessness encourage the spread of Communist ideology.¹⁰ Wilson was convinced that the best way to reduce the threat to peace in post-war Europe would be to control the continuing problem of Jewish and other minority relations with the dominant groups in highly nationalistic countries.¹¹ The US delegates were, however, ready only to support the rights of individuals, and were opposed to the idea of “national” rights for the Jews, which, if materialized, could create a precedent, possibly dangerous, for the United States as well.¹² They hoped that Jews in Eastern Europe would become constructive, integrated members of their respective societies, distinguished from their countrymen only by their

⁷ They were later replaced by Nahum Sokolov, the Zionist who headed the Provisional Jewish National Council of Poland.

⁸ O. Janowsky, *The Jews and Minority Rights (1898-1919)*, New York 1966.

⁹ See, for example, M. Levene, *Britain, a British Jew, and Jewish Relations with the New Poland: The Making of the Polish Minorities Treaty*, “Polin” 2: 1987, pp. 26-30.

¹⁰ A.S. Link (ed.), *Wilson Papers*, Princeton, Massachusetts, vol. 58, p. 287.

¹¹ F.W. Brecher, *Reluctant Ally. United States Foreign Policy Toward the Jews from Wilson to Roosevelt*, New York 1991, p. 30.

¹² Kay Lundgreen Nielsen in her book about Polish issues at the Paris Peace Conference wrote that “the demands of Polish Jews amounted, in effect, to the creation of a separate Jewish nation within the Polish state.” Wilson did not support this idea and “in spite of strong Jewish pressure, frequent rumors in the Western press on pogroms in Poland, demonstrations in New York, and questions in Congress, Wilson stuck to his original position” – *The Polish Problem*, pp.118-119. See also F.W. Brecher, *Reluctant Ally*, p. 30.

Jewish faith, that is assimilated like their counterparts in western countries. They did not wish to encourage in any way Jewish nationalistic or Zionist aspirations.

The Poles, led in Paris by Roman Dmowski and, in the final stages of the Conference, by Prime Minister Ignacy Paderewski, discussed “the Jewish issue” with various delegates and with the Jewish representatives. Dmowski presented his nationalistic, “one state-one nation” ideas, provoking Jewish concerns about the possibility of peaceful life in the future Poland. Paderewski only partially was able to dispel their fears by guaranteeing the Jews civil rights. At the same time he rejected demands to recognize Jews as a national minority.¹³ After long debate, influenced by the arguments of the Jewish lobby, the Allied Powers decided that rights for the minorities in Eastern European countries should be guaranteed by special treaties to be signed by the governments of these countries and supervised in future by the League of Nations.¹⁴ The idea of granting full rights to the minorities was not questioned by the Polish elite. However, the proposed procedure was perceived as humiliating for Poland.¹⁵ The Polish leaders themselves stipulated that rights for minorities, like all other rights, should be guaranteed by a country’s constitution and protected by the state authorities. They did not accept the notion that the exercise of such rights should be supervised by foreign bodies, because this would constitute a limitation of the state’s sovereignty. Finally, if forced to accept such a treaty, the Polish

¹³ In this context, it should be mentioned that Paderewski and Dmowski had very different approaches to the “Jewish issue” in Poland. Already in 1918, Paderewski “was greatly annoyed by Dmowski’s obnoxious behavior towards the Jews in America.” Paderewski, in his letter to Jan F. Smulski, President of the National Department of the First Convention of American Polonia (*Wydział Narodowy I Sejmu Wychodźstwa*), wrote in October 1918 that Dmowski’s attitude towards Jews was doing “immense harm to our cause.” Describing Dmowski’s talks with the leaders of American Jews, Marshall in particular, Paderewski criticized Dmowski for wishing to talk with the Jewish leaders themselves and telling them that there were too many Jews in Poland. See G.J. Lerski, *Dmowski, Paderewski and American Jews*, “Polin” 2: 1987, p. 113. Marshall disliked both Dmowski and Paderewski. See also E.C. Black, *Lucien Wolf and the Making of Poland: Paris 1919*, “Polin” 2: 1987, p. 28.

¹⁴ According to Woodrow Wilson’s personal advisor and press secretary in Paris, “requiring all new States to grant equal rights to their [so-called] “racial or national minorities” [...] was undoubtedly derived from the propaganda of the Jews”. R.S. Baker, *Woodrow Wilson and the World Settlement*, vol. 1, Garden City 1923, p. 227.

¹⁵ See, for example, M. Levene, *Britain ...* and E. Mendelsohn, *Żydzi...*, pp. 59-60.

leaders would have liked to see the restrictions applied equally to all countries, especially to recently defeated Germany, which also had significant minority groups. The Allied powers did not take Polish wishes into account and drafted the Treaty in their own way. Poland eventually decided to sign the Minorities Treaty but many Poles accused the Jews of being the cause of this perceived foreign interference in Poland's internal affairs.¹⁶

The discussions in Paris over protection of minorities were greatly affected by news about alleged pogroms against the Jews that reached the West toward the end of 1918 and in the spring of 1919. Especially the summary executions of 35 Jews by Polish army in Pińsk on April 5 (see below) was widely publicized by the Jewish representatives at the Peace Conference. Lucien Wolf, a representative of British Jewry, described the talks he had on the issue with Louis Marshall in May 1919 in the following way:

Both Marshall and I received further batches of horrors from Poland today, and we are bombarding our respective Delegations with them. I am afraid it is no good resisting any longer the proposed campaigns against Poland. We are in the presence of what certainly looks like a deliberate attempt to thin out the Jewish population of Poland by massacre, and we cannot stand still.... The telegrams and other narratives about the pogroms are being given out to the newspapers and Marshall and I discussed plans today for the widest possible publicity.¹⁷

Also Julius Mack involved himself in this campaign, sending cables to various Jewish organizations, especially in America, and asking them “to protest in the loudest voice against the pogroms and massacres of the Jews in Poland.”¹⁸

One of the main reasons for starting this publicity campaign was the potential threat to Jewish rights in the future country of Poland if politics

¹⁶ Most Poles attributed the highly unfavorable outcome of the Paris negotiations altogether, particularly Poland's borders, in large part to hostile Jewish influence. D. Engel, *Perceptions of Power – Poland and World Jewry*, in: *Yearbook 2002* (Simon-Dubnow-Institut Leipzig, 2003), p. 19. Interestingly enough, the US Senate never considered the Polish Treaty (after Wilson submitted it for ratification). It eventually came into force without the US participation.

¹⁷ Wolf Diary, May 22, 1919. See: Z. Szajkowski, *Jews, War and Communism*, vol. 2, New York 1974, p. 263.

¹⁸ T. Radzik, *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie w Stanach Zjednoczonych Ameryki w latach 1918-1921*, Lublin 1988, p. 47.

there were to be dominated by people like Dmowski or by the right-wing political parties. Another reason why some Jewish leaders decided to denounce these atrocities in public was their fear of the victory of the anti-Bolshevist forces in Russia which, they believed, was “almost certain to be followed by huge butcheries of Jews if we do not make an example of the Poles in good time.”¹⁹

The largest protests against the alleged pogroms occurred in the United States, home to numerous and politically active Jewish communities. In the spring of 1919, protests, previously mostly limited to critical articles in Jewish newspapers, now took the form of street demonstrations and resolutions sent to President Wilson, to Congress, and to the Department of State. In big cities, Jews organized “days of mourning.” Jewish workers went on strike to protest against the events in Poland and Jewish shop-owners covered their windows in black. Many state governors, city mayors, congressmen and other influential politicians supported the campaign. The largest demonstrations were organized on May 21. One in New York City gathered over one hundred thousand Jews.²⁰ During a meeting in Madison Square Garden, organized under the auspices of the Committee for the Protection of Jewish Rights in Poland and Eastern Europe, a leading Zionist, Nathan Strauss, said referring to Poland that “those nations which permit persecution of the Jews will themselves come to an ignominious end, and the quicker that happens the more you and I will be pleased.”²¹ In turn, Jacob Schiff from the American Jewish Committee urged that “a place in the League of Nations and in the family of free nations should be denied to Poland unless the Polish Government prevented pogroms and granted fair play to Jews.” Many American newspapers gave detailed reports from these events and published articles about anti-Jewish outbreaks in Poland. The American public was informed that Jews were being “slaughtered” that a wave of pogroms “was sweeping Poland” and that the Jewish people had never been set upon by an enemy “more merciless and brutal.”²²

¹⁹ Wolf Diary, p. 263.

²⁰ “New York Times” (May 22, 1919).

²¹ Ibid.

²² J.P. Wandycz, *The United States and Poland*, p.165. It should be noted here that already at the beginning of the war some American Jews conducted similar anti-Polish campaign which caused considerable tensions between Poles and Jews in the US. See A. Kapiszewski, *Polish-Jewish Conflicts in the United States at the Beginning of World War I*, “Polish American Studies” 1991 no. 1, pp. 63-78.

Poles in the United States denied these reports, seeing them as Jewish propaganda having little to do with reality.²³ At the same time, they perceived Jewish demands in Paris as a deliberate attempt to weaken the Polish position at the Conference, to turn the attention of the delegates from issues much more important to a newly re-born state, and to limit the country's sovereignty and its credibility. Jan Smulski, the President of the [Polish] National Department in America, challenged these accusations in a special statement saying that Poles had been subjected to "abuse and misrepresentation."²⁴ All major Polish-American organizations discussed and planned a counter campaign in order to limit the damaging impact of Jewish protests on American public attitudes toward Poland.²⁵ On May 24, 1919, Kazimierz Żychliński, the President of the Polish National Alliance, which was the biggest Polish-American fraternal organization, sent a letter on this matter to Jan Kleczka, at that time the only Polish-American representative in the US Congress. Żychliński described the tensions existing in the Polish community because of the Jewish campaign. He wrote:

This anti-Polish movement acquires all the traits of a racial conflict. Already today, it evokes such an irritation among the Polish workers that it may lead to quite undesired consequences, very destructive for the peace in this country... For instance, in the New York area, the Jews had attacked Poles to such an extent that the latter asked the PNA for protection; in Chicago, the Jewish workers of the tailors' factories, for instance of Hart, Schaffner and Marx, annoyed the Polish workers and on any day the fighting could start.²⁶

Żychliński then asked Kleczka to take the floor in the House and to request a report from the State Department about the situation of Jews in Poland. He thought that Poles should not fear such a report; on the contrary, it should help to defend them against unfounded attacks. Żychliński hoped that presenting all aspects of Polish-Jewish relations would counter balanced and

²³ A. Kapiszewski, *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie w Stanach Zjednoczonych Ameryki in: Polonia amerykańska. Przeszłość i współczesność*, T. Gromada, H. Kubiak, E. Kusielewicz, eds., Kraków 1988, pp. 609-671; T. Radzik, *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie*, pp. 22-60.

²⁴ "New York Times" (May 22, 1919).

²⁵ A. Kapiszewski, *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie*, pp. 628-32, T. Radzik, *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie*, pp. 52-60.

²⁶ "Dziennik Związkowy" (Chicago) June 24, 1919.

eventually stop the Jewish propaganda; thus, “it would serve both America and Poland.”

On May 26, the “New York Times” published a front-page article entitled “Jews Massacred, Robbed by Poles” based on reports received from Paris. Louis Marshall gave the *Times* correspondent details of pogroms in Pińsk, Vilnius and other places. On the same day, the US Senate passed a resolution introduced by Senator William Calder from New York, stating that “it is reported that innocent men, women, and children, particularly of the Jewish faith, are being outraged and massacred in Poland, Romania and Galicia” and requesting President Wilson to confer in Paris with the representatives of these countries “and to inform them that this body and the American people deeply deplore acts of violence and cruelty.”²⁷ During the following days a number of Jewish resolutions protesting specifically against pogroms in Poland were sent to the House and the Senate by different Jewish organizations.²⁸

Poles tried to neutralize the negative impact of Jewish accusations. Kleczka lobbied on Capitol Hill.²⁹ The National Defense Committee, another Polish-American umbrella organization, organized a big demonstration in New York on June 2 to protest the Jewish campaign. Knowing already about the Senate resolution, people at the rally appealed to Congress not to undertake any more steps before listening to both sides. They also requested that the President and the Secretary of State take measures to stop what they perceived as an anti-Polish actions.³⁰ Similar protest rallies took place in many other cities.

All these actions worried American policy makers as they were damaging the reputation of Poland, a country considered important to US policies in Europe. To do something about it, they needed first reliable information from Poland. The person chosen to investigate the situation there was Hugh Gibson.

²⁷ S. Res. 41, *Congressional Record*, 66th Congress, 1st Session, 1919, p. 246.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 382, 383, 433, 548.

²⁹ “Dziennik Polski” (Detroit) June 3, 1919. See also Polk to Kleczka, June 11, 1919, *Records of the U.S. Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Poland 1916-1934*, on microfilm, Decimal File 860c., roll 15 (hereafter *Records of the Department of State-Poland*).

³⁰ T. Radzik, *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie*, p. 56.

II. AMBASSADOR HUGH GIBSON REPORTS ON THE SITUATION OF JEWS IN POLAND

In April 1919, Hugh Gibson was appointed the first American Minister to the newly reborn Poland.³¹ Gibson was well prepared for such a job. He had studied at the famous *Ecole Libre des Politiques* in Paris and already had ten years of experience in the foreign service, serving in the US embassies in Belgium, Germany, England and France. He was a protégé of Herbert Hoover, a director of the American Relief activities in Eastern Europe, with whom he had traveled to many European countries.³² Both Polish and Polish-American leaders were gratified with his appointment. The American press published a number of approving articles praising Gibson's previous diplomatic service.³³

Gibson arrived in Warsaw on April 28, 1919. He was instructed to immediately report on the situation of the Jews in the country.³⁴ He conducted a preliminary inquiry and sent a brief cable back to Assistant Secretary of State William Phillips on May 17 stating that reports about pogroms circulating in America were "inaccurate."³⁵

On May 21, Frank Polk, the Acting Secretary of State, at the request of Senator Joseph France of Maryland, sent a telegram to Gibson expressing his deep concern about the issue of the alleged pogroms. He wrote that conflicting statements were being issued constantly by Poles and Jews and that it was important for the Department to know the real situation "at the earliest possible moment".³⁶

Meanwhile, Louis Marshall handed President Wilson in Paris the texts of the speeches and resolutions of the Madison Square Garden meeting and

³¹ Gibson obtained the formal ambassadorial status few months later.

³² In fact, Hoover strongly recommended him to President Wilson for a promotion: "I cannot speak too highly of his abilities.... I have known him under the most difficult of circumstances and he has never failed in a representation of the United States in the way all of us would desire, both as to ability, courage and accomplishment." Gibson to Wilson, March 25, 1919, in H. G. Papers, *Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace*, Stanford, California (hereafter Gibson Papers), box 91.

³³ See newspaper clippings in Gibson Papers, box 128.

³⁴ Phillips to Gibson, April 25, 1919, *Papers Relating to the United States, 1919*, vol. 2, Washington, 1934, (hereafter *US Papers*), p. 748.

³⁵ Gibson to Phillips, May 17, 1919, *US Papers*, p. 748.

³⁶ Polk to Gibson, May 21 and May 23, 1919, *US Papers*, p. 749.

press clippings from American newspapers on pogroms in Poland.³⁷ Polk cabled Gibson again, informing him that American newspapers were publishing long articles giving dates and places where Jews were reported to have been massacred or otherwise mistreated. Congressman Isaac Siegel had personally furnished the State Department with such a list. Polk then requested Gibson to give this investigation a priority over other matters.³⁸

Gibson, lacking staff and just beginning to organize the Legation, was not very happy about the time-consuming requests coming from Washington, which took him away from duties he considered more important at the moment. Moreover, he thought that stories about outbreaks against the Jews were exaggerated and should not receive so much attention in America. He wrote in his diary:

We are in the midst of turmoil. We are getting telegrams every day from America about alleged massacres of Jews in Poland and instructions to report.... If there were massacres it would be easier to handle for there would be something to report but it is hard to explain things that do not happen.³⁹

Gibson then described the outbreaks which took place in Pińsk on April 5. He acknowledged the fact that the Jews were killed there but at the same time stressed “that their behavior was such as to invite trouble.” According to Gibson, official reports were powerless “to quiet the propaganda artists” who were “manufacturing massacres of Jews at all sorts of places and sending cables about the need for our saving the lives of all sorts of Jews who are very much surprised when we ask about them to know that they have been considered in danger.”

Realizing the importance of full verification of the information about the pogrom which allegedly took place in Pińsk, Gibson cabled Washington a report from Lieutenant Foster of the American Peace Mission, who had gone to Pińsk to investigate the event. According to Foster, the Polish

³⁷ “New York Times” May 27, 1919. Marshall was concerned about the fate of the Jews in Poland. In the fall of 1918, he held talks with Paderewski and Dmowski in New York. The discussions with Dmowski brought him to the conclusion that Polish nationalists were a serious threat to the future of the Jews in the country. The pogrom in Lvov in November 1918 only reinforced this fear. G.J. Lerski, *Dmowski...*, pp. 95-116. See also A.S. Link (ed.) *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Princeton 1987, vol. 55, pp. 368-381.

³⁸ Polk to Gibson, May 23, 1919, *US Papers*, p. 750.

³⁹ Gibson diary, May 29, 1919, Gibson Papers, box 69. The Gibson diary was written in the form of daily letters to his mother, titled “Dearest.”

military commander of the city, which was surrounded at the time by the Soviet army, had received information from Jewish soldiers under his command that Zionists were organizing a meeting to prepare an anti-Polish, pro-Soviet uprising. Given the situation, the Polish commander arrested those attending the gathering and shot 35 of those whom he thought were Communists. Foster reported that in his opinion and the opinion of the British and French officers who accompanied him, “this shooting cannot be considered in any way as a pogrom or anti-Jewish massacre.”⁴⁰

On May 30, Gibson sent his first report to Washington on Polish-Jewish relations. He stated that he used all possible sources of information for the purpose and “received no reports of atrocities perpetrated against Jews in Poland, Galicia, Lithuania with the exception of the Pińsk and Vilna [Vilnius] affairs.”⁴¹ Then Gibson described the events of April 20 in Vilnius, where, during a Polish-Soviet military dispute, a number of people were killed. Several foreign representatives investigated the incident and they were “unanimous in reporting that there was no Jewish massacre in that city; this was confirmed by the statements in the Jewish press in Warsaw.”⁴² Explaining the situation Gibson wrote:

There is a bitter feeling against classes of Jews which arises largely from economic causes and not from religious intolerance. This gives rise to a considerable amount of petty persecution which cannot be prevented or readily controlled by Governmental action. Certain elements of the Jews support the [Polish] Government and are respected as an integral part of Polish nation. [But] large elements of the Jews are outspokenly and avowedly hostile to the Government and this attitude has served to intensify bad feeling.⁴³

According to Gibson, the reports about pogroms propagated in America were “exclusively of foreign manufacture for anti-Polish purposes.”⁴⁴ Gibson was convinced that Germans and Russians were using the information about anti-Jewish incidents in a propaganda war against the Poles. For example, he learned about “a big propaganda bureau” at Kowno, which at that time was under German occupation, whose main function was to send

⁴⁰ Gibson to Polk, May 31, 1919, *US Papers*, p. 754. For discussion on the Pińsk event see J. Tomaszewski, *Pińsk, Saturday 5 April 1919*, “*Polin*” 8: 1994, pp. 227-242.

⁴¹ Gibson to Polk, May 30, 1919, *US Papers*, p. 750.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 751.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 750.

⁴⁴ Gibson diary, May 30, 1919, Gibson Papers, box 70.

out long reports of the killing of Jews in Poland, regardless of the truth. "The Berlin papers carry these yarns and they get into the neutral papers and gradually into our own. Of course it is to the advantage of the Germans to stir up as much dissension in Poland as possible so as to keep the country weakened."⁴⁵ In turn, the American Embassy in Stockholm reported that the Soviet Government was also involved in such actions and "through the Bolshevik Telegram Bureau Rosta" was sending out unverified stories of alleged Jewish pogroms, "to win the support and sympathy of the world's Jewish population."⁴⁶

Gibson next cabled the State Department a report written by Frederic Dolbeare, a Secretary of the American Legation in Warsaw, who was sent to investigate the events in Częstochowa, described in the American press as another pogrom. Dolbeare reported that on May 27 shots were fired at a Polish soldier. As the Poles accused the Jews of this attack, a mob went to the Jewish quarter in the city, instigating outbreaks of violence in which several people were killed and many injured. Eventually the Polish army restored order and the man who led the mob was convicted.⁴⁷ Gibson telegraphed that he had learned from foreign relief agencies personnel that Częstochowa was famous for the smuggling of food supplies into Germany, that the Jews were very active in this work and a number of them were caught bearing regular licenses from the Germans for smuggling. As food was scarce and prices were high, the Polish population was aroused. Nevertheless, the local authorities handled the situation well, regarded the affair as incidental and did not look for further trouble. On June 12 Gibson sent to Washington a joint report made by representatives of the American, British and French Legations in Warsaw about the outbreaks in Częstochowa who reached the conclusion that "all ideas of a premeditated organized pogrom must be dismissed."⁴⁸

Gibson discussed the outbreaks in Częstochowa on May 27 also with Józef Piłsudski, the Polish Chief of State. Gibson noted that Piłsudski was evidently alarmed and indignant by that incident and told him "that to persecute the Jews brought shame upon the name of Poland and could not but harm the country."⁴⁹ Gibson wrote that Piłsudski had given positive instruc-

⁴⁵ Ibid., box 69.

⁴⁶ Wheeler to the Secretary of State, July 8, 1919, *Department of State-Poland*.

⁴⁷ Gibson to Polk, June 1, 1919, *US Papers*, p. 755.

⁴⁸ Gibson to Polk, June 12, 1919, *Department of State-Poland*.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

tions to the Polish Army that he would not tolerate anti-Jewish acts, that punishment would be severe and that the officers were to be held responsible for the behavior of their men. Gibson reported also that Piłsudski told him that the troops newly arrived from France, that is General Haller's army, composed to large extent of volunteer Polish-Americans, "had shown a disposition to make life miserable for the Jews, chasing them through the streets, cutting off their beards et cetera."

Following this meeting, Gibson informed Washington about events in Warsaw on June 26, in which some soldiers from Haller's army beat a number of Jews.⁵⁰ Gibson reported that the Polish Minister of War issued a special order condemning the incident, warning the soldiers that "any violation of civil rights is a crime to be punished with full severity of law," and that they were "obliged while off duty or on duty to aid the oppressed." Nevertheless, the Minister believed that inter-group tensions were caused "by the enemy agents paid to provoke them".

On June 2, Gibson sent the State Department a long report describing the situation of the Jews in Poland.⁵¹ First, he characterized different groups of Jews: the pro-Polish "assimilators" who "have no grievances against Polish state"; the orthodox, usually indifferent to the country; the so called Litwaks, deported from Russia in the past and "avowedly hostile to the Polish Government" and the criminals, "not unlike the gun men in New York" who "give constant trouble to the police." Next, Gibson expressed his opinion on the major causes of Polish-Jewish tension. According to him, many Polish Jews looked upon themselves not as a religious group but as a nationality and their attitude toward the Poles was often "hostile and provocative." Publications in the Jewish press and behavior of Jewish members of the Polish Parliament only intensified this feeling as they supposedly tried "to coerce Poland through the influence of foreign Jews upon their [foreign] governments". The Polish newspapers also did not help the situation, as many of them kept "feeling stirred up on constant discussions of Polish grievances against the Jews". Gibson also reported that many Jews were continually working as spies for the Bolsheviks, the Ukrainians and

⁵⁰ Gibson to the Department of State, July 4, 1919, *Department of State-Poland*. This was the Polish army originally formed in France under the command of General Józef Haller which at that time was engaged on the Eastern front. Many Polish-American volunteers joined that army.

⁵¹ Gibson to Polk, June 3, 1919, *US Papers*, pp. 757-760.

Germans and acted against the Polish army. He wrote that Poland's economy was monopolized by Jews, who supposedly carried on business by unethical methods "that would not be tolerated in the United States." In particular, Gibson reported that Jews used to hide food to keep prices up and smuggled food out of starving Poland for profit. According to the American Minister, all these factors led to conflicts. At the same time they were usually wrongly depicted in the West. According to Gibson when a Jew was injured it was always called a pogrom but "when a Christian was mobbed it was called a food riot."

In the same report Gibson suggested a number of actions which could improve the situation: to influence the Polish and Jewish press to moderate its tone; to call assimilated Jews to assist the Polish government more; to invite Polish representatives to visit America to change the incorrect perception of many Poles that the United States was an advocate of the Jews and acted against Poland; to have the State Department discourage violent Jewish anti-Polish agitation based upon "exaggerated or unfounded reports", to send to Poland some American Jews "who could face facts honestly", and to refuse passports "to agitators of any sorts." Admitting that the problem required patience and good will on both sides, Gibson praised the Polish government, which had been "well intentioned" and "amenable to suggestions" although it lacked power and experience in authority.

Nevertheless, Gibson predicted new outbreaks of violence in Poland in the near future, due to "the nervousness of the population" caused by shortages of food, uncertainty over the determination of frontiers, fear of German hostilities, and significant unemployment.⁵²

These disorders may as a rule be expected to take an anti-Jewish character for the following reasons:

1. Food hoarding and profiteering by certain elements of the Jews.
2. Rumored hostile Jewish influence against Poland in England, France and America and anti-Polish agitation in these countries over Jewish matters.
3. Proposed special treaty for the protection of the rights of minorities which is resented as needlessly imposing on the Polish state conditions most of which would have been adopted without pressure.
4. Relations of Polish Jews with the Germans.
5. Inclination of mobs to pillage food shops which are largely in the hands of the Jews.

⁵² Gibson to Polk, June 8, 1919, *US Papers*, pp. 760-61.

At that time congressional representatives from New York City – Isaac Siegel, Fiorello La Guardia and Henry Goldfogle – separately introduced in the House drafts of three resolutions bitterly assailing Poland for massacres of Jews.⁵³ The House Committee on Foreign Affairs opened hearings on the issue. Representative Stephen Porter, Chairman of the Committee, decided, however, to put off the deliberations until Gibson sent a full report about alleged outrages in Poland. Porter told Polish and Jewish leaders who came to Washington to testify that he hoped that after Gibson’s investigation any further action by the House would be unnecessary, because much of the news about pogroms was probably only German propaganda to discredit the Poles.⁵⁴ He also asked representatives of both communities not to mount any public protests around the country until Gibson’s report was available. Assistant Secretary of State Phillips described this meeting in a letter to Gibson, pointing out that it was appalling to him to see “the amount of antagonism against the Poles which had been deliberately created during the last month by the Jews in this country.”⁵⁵ Phillips praised Gibson’s reports which, as he believed, “helped to stop the public meetings which might have been the centers of serious local riots.”⁵⁶

Nevertheless the tensions continued. On June 10 the “New York Times” reported that Louis Marshall received in Paris a new “detailed circumstantial account” of the atrocities committed by Poles against Jews in the city of Vilnius.⁵⁷ Marshall planned to hand this report to President Wilson. Acting Secretary of State Frank Polk immediately cabled Gibson:

Report tells first of disappearance of 400 Jews driven from their homes without leaving traces of their whereabouts.... Report states that the number of killed already totals 60. States further that L. Jaffe, President of the Lithuanian Zionist Association, member of Executive Committee of Jewish Community of Vilna [Vilnius], suffered special mishandling. According to report

⁵³ See newspaper clippings, Gibson Papers, box.128.

⁵⁴ “New York Times” (June 11, 1919).

⁵⁵ Phillips to Gibson, June 6, 1919, Gibson Papers, box 92.

⁵⁶ Phillips to Gibson, July 29, 1919, *ibid.*

⁵⁷ It is interesting to note that the “New York Times” report about outbreaks in Vilnius was presented at length in two columns as a main story while information about four pogroms in Russia at the same time in which 29,350 Jews were killed was presented only in a few lines at the bottom of a page. Such disproportionate attention sometimes paid to events in Poland in contrast to similar events in other places caused additional tensions within the Polish community.

Israel Benski was shot in his home and his wife and child shot over his dead body, and that Reisa Stein was killed because she protested against arrest of her husband. It is said that under threat of shooting, about 200 Jews were kept in the Theater Platz all day during the 22nd of April and were beaten with the bats of guns, that Chaio Warnian was robbed and tied to the horse of a legionary driven at gallop through the city, that three old men, Aronozicz, Katz and Rabbi Chodes were robbed of everything they had, that about 20 legionaries kept a man named Lichtenstein before a firing squad and demanded 10,000 rubles and that under pretense of a search legionaries and militia plundered shops, warehouses, charitable institutions and synagogues. Report is represented as a flat contradiction of statement of Premier Paderewski that there was no persecution of Jews by Poles.⁵⁸

Understanding the importance and sensitivity of the issue, Gibson asked Washington to approve his personal undertaking of the investigation on the spot in those places where outbreaks occurred and requested to be accompanied by some American non-governmental observers: Boris Bogen, director of the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee for Poland, and Lieutenant Colonel Walter Bailey of the Red Cross.⁵⁹ The State Department accepted these requests, and Gibson went to Vilnius with the others. After investigating the situation Gibson responded to Polk's cable, denying most of the information about alleged persecution of Jews.⁶⁰ He nevertheless stated that he doubted whether the exact truth about all events could ever be ascertained. The outbreak took place during the fighting between Polish and Soviet troops, before the Polish authorities had obtained control of the city. Gibson reported that at that time there was a widespread feeling of hostility among the local Polish population and the Polish soldiers against Jews who were "believed to be allies of the Bolsheviki, war profiteers and enemies to Poland." On entering Vilnius, Polish troops were fired on from houses occupied by Jews. Searches disclosed machine guns and other weapons. The Polish military therefore made wholesale arrests and executed a number of persons. Eventually Polish authorities took effective control and issued orders against looting. No cases of serious violence were reported after that. Gibson wrote in his cable:

⁵⁸ Polk to Gibson, June 10, 1919, *US Papers*, p. 761.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 751-752.

⁶⁰ Gibson to Polk, June 15, 1919, *US Papers*, pp. 763-64.

The representatives of the Jewish community made no mention of any number of Jews who had been driven away without giving any trace of their whereabouts. A large number of people were arrested at time of the occupation of the town and sent to Lida and Bialystok so that for some days their whereabouts may have been unknown. These people however have been returned to Vilna and so far as I was able to learn there are none unaccounted for. Jaffe... suffered no mistreatment according to his own statement... Rab-bis Rubenstein and Schabe were not beaten or otherwise mishandled... I talked with both of them alone and at length. As a whole the report in the *Times* appears to be exaggerated.

Still in an extended report on the Vilnius outbreaks, written by Gibson together with Bogen and Bailey, the deaths of 64 Jews were confirmed.⁶¹

Meanwhile, Lieutenant Foster went to Krakow to investigate the events which took place there on June 6.⁶² In his report Foster stated that in Krakow “one Christian woman and one Jewish boy were killed... about 100 injured, including police, Christians and Jews several Christian shops as well as Jewish [were] pillaged.” According to Gibson, the reasons for Polish-Jewish clashes there were again “Bolshevik and German agitators... high prices and general unemployment.”

To support his position on Jewish behavior in Poland, Gibson sent Washington a protest from Jewish representatives from the towns of Borysław, Tustanowice and Wolanka “against exaggerated charges on the subject of pogroms spread by elements hostile to the Polish army.”⁶³ He transmitted also a *note verbale*, received from the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, calling attention to the fact that Polish-Jewish conflicts “were generally results of the work of certain provocateurs.”⁶⁴

In July, Gibson sent to Washington another long report on the general situation of the Jews in Poland and on Polish-Jewish relations.⁶⁵ Gibson wrote in it that the Jewish question was one of the most complicated and delicate issues in Europe. It did not begin in the Polish territories with the signing of the armistice but had been introduced there much earlier by the

⁶¹ Gibson to Polk, June 17, 1919, *US Papers*, pp. 765-768.

⁶² Gibson to Polk, June 12, 1919, *US Papers*, p. 762.

⁶³ These protests were submitted to the American Legation by the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Gibson to the Secretary of State, June 18, 1919, *Department of State-Poland*.

⁶⁴ Gibson to the Department of State, July 9, 1919, *Department of State-Poland*.

⁶⁵ Gibson to Phillips, July 6, 1919, Gibson Papers, box 92.

partitioning powers: "Jews with other minorities were subjected to hateful discriminations; public feeling was carefully aroused and maintained against the Jews as part of the system of dominating through internal dissension.... The Russian system was perhaps the worst." Gibson explained that he did not realize how this system worked until he came to Poland: "It was as cold-blooded and fiendish as anything you can imagine and has reduced large classes of the Jews to a state approaching that of an animal." In a newly re-born Poland legalized discrimination was gone, but the prejudices and hatred had survived; due to the absence of strong authorities, physical violence against the Jews spread all over the country "to a degree that did not exist before." Several hundred Jews did lose their lives as a result. Nevertheless, "when one remembers that there are four millions of them in Poland, and when one bears in mind the upheavals through which the country has passed, and all the forces tending to create hatred of the Jews, this resolves itself into a mere symptom in the sickness of this part of the world."

Continuing his comments, Gibson stressed that the term "pogrom" should not be used to describe the outbreaks against the Jews in Poland, as the authorities did not support them and did their best to preserve order. Then he analyzed the events in Lida, Vilnius, Pińsk, Lviv, Częstochowa, and Krakow, which in America were called massacres. Gibson wrote that he hesitated to describe them in that way. "The loss of life occurred in each instance either during actual fighting while the town was being captured by the Polish armies or immediately thereafter, before the Polish Government had been able to establish itself firmly in control Some of the people were admittedly killed in the course of street fighting by stray bullets the rest were shot by military orders and in some instances by casual soldiers who afterwards justified their action by stating that the Jews in question were firing from windows or had committed some hostile act." Gibson did not absolve the Poles of responsibility for killing Jews but, at the same time, criticized "the questionable" attitudes and behavior of some Jews, which were perceived by the local population to be anti-Polish. The Polish authorities always claimed that the Jews "acted as spies for the enemy, that they had arms concealed in their houses and that they fired on the Polish troops" while Jewish representatives usually denied these accusations. "I have no doubt – Gibson wrote – that innocent Jews were killed in the course of events at these various places but it must be remembered that innocent Poles were also shot and that Polish troops suffered considerable casualties." For Gibson, "the outstanding fact" was that Jews were not discriminated against

on religious grounds. According to him economic and social problems were the main cause of conflicts. At the same time, he accused many foreign Jews of anti-Polish agitation which could have tragic consequences for the Jews themselves.

One great difficulty is that some of the noisiest Jews in Poland and a good many outside have devoted themselves chiefly to destructive work against the Polish State. This is foolish.... The thing for them to do is to help lift up Poland and lift their own people along with the country. I feel that we can render good service in helping to bring Poles and Jews together for discussion and constructive work. But such service on our part is delayed and hampered by the attempt of American Jews to hurt Poland in the eyes of the world. I feel very strongly that propaganda is fraught with grave danger for the Jews. If carried on in its present scale with its present violent character it is quite conceivable that it will succeed in prejudicing public opinion to such a point as to damage Poland in some specific way. She may be refused a foreign loan as a protest against her treatment of the Jews; she may be refused some given frontier on the ground that she is not fit to rule over minorities.... And if the people in their resentment do rise up and massacre Jews on a scale never before known, the blood guilt will be of the foreign Jews who with wicked disregard of the facts or the danger to human lives have played with this tremendously delicate situation.

Part of the problem was that to editors of some Polish newspapers "every Jew is an enemy.... every ungrateful influence or event is attributed to Jewish intrigue." Gibson suggested here that the American press should concentrate their attention on such newspapers, on "real offenders instead of on Poland and Poles."

Gibson also pointed out that to a large extent the American volunteers who joined the Haller's Army were to be blamed for anti-Jewish excesses.

While we are criticizing the Poles for their behavior toward the Jews I feel that they have shown a good deal of self-restraint in not showing up in the foreign press the fact that American boys in Haller's army have been among the worst offenders and that they have been a constant source of trouble.... General Haller told me that he was greatly annoyed with his troops because they were violently anti-Semitic and that although he had given the strictest orders to keep them in line they were hounding Jews at every opportunity. He said they have never before seen the Orthodox Jew with his long beard and cloak, his greasy ringlets and none too cleanly appearance. When they heard the tales that the Polish peasants and townspeople had to tell about the

profiteering and other offenses of the Jews their sense of justice was aroused and they set out to show "how the matter would be handled in America."

Accenting his own influence on the Polish Government, Gibson stressed its good will and desire to stop the anti-Jewish outbreaks. According to him, the Government realized the gravity of the problem and wanted to find some solution to it. Unfortunately, the newly established authorities were not yet efficient enough to enforce their own orders. Moreover, the anti-Semitic National Democrats, headed by Roman Dmowski, were very influential in Polish politics and public opinion and often disregarded the efforts of the government. Nevertheless, Gibson believed that through education and patience the tensions between Poles and Jews might be overcome.

Gibson had serious doubts about the extent to which the American Legation should be involved in Jewish affairs in Poland; if such involvement had to take place, he wanted to have some Jews attached to it.⁶⁶ Moreover, because the situation of Jews in Poland was the internal affair of a friendly state, Gibson thought the U.S. should investigate it only if she could come with concrete help to the people there. Gibson wrote:

I am convinced there is a great deal we can do, but it will not be by making any reports on pogroms. It will be by much patient work and thought, endless forbearance with unreasonableness of all sorts. If we are prepared to tackle the question in this way we can go farther toward solving the pending problems than any other people I know of, and if we can accomplish anything substantial we shall have done a very big job and we can be proud of it. I don't look upon it as any picnic, and from some of the experiences I have had with this people we are trying to help, both in Poland and America, it has been made clear to me that it is not only a thankless job but one that is loaded with poison. However, I suppose in due time I shall get so I like poison and shall go ahead and do the best I can.

⁶⁶ Gibson wrote to his friend Walter Lippman, an advisor to Colonel House, about this matter:

It seems to me to be far outside the boundaries of a diplomatic job. It is highly charged with bitterness and internal politics and no matter how well I handled it there would be serious danger of damaging the usefulness of the Legation. It had to be a Mission of some sort, and if its work is to be productive of much good I feel that there must be some Jewish representation on it.

Gibson to Lippmann, August 9, 1919, Gibson Papers, box 51. Walter Lippman, a well known author, was at that time a staff member of the American delegation to the Paris Peace Conference.

III. CONTROVERSIES CREATED BY GIBSON'S REPORTS

In June 1919, the content of Gibson's reports became known to American Jewish leaders and aroused strong criticism from them. In particular, they were offended by Gibson's classification of some Jews as the "criminal class."⁶⁷ On June 14 Louis Marshall issued in Paris a special statement accusing Gibson of ignorance, of disregarding well known facts and minimizing the extent of Jewish sufferings.⁶⁸

His report [on Vilnius] is necessarily based on the merest hearsay, parrot-like repetition of what has been told him in court circles within whose sacred precincts Jews are not permitted to enter. There, in the face of continuous and unparalleled atrocities that have shocked the civilized world, all the charges met with the stereotyped remark: "There have never been any pogroms in Poland." This is usually followed by a pronouncement, the inconsistency and falsehood of which does not abash its authors, that, after all, the victims are Bolsheviki or capitalistic exploiters.... He forgets that during the last seven years, at the instance of a political cabal, a pernicious boycott has been waged against Jews, which threatens their destruction industrially and economically.

Next, Marshall criticized Gibson's reports about outbreaks in various Polish cities:

He coolly ignores the awful story of Pińsk, where thirty-seven defenseless men were without resistance taken into custody, while engaged in work of philanthropy, by the military authorities, and without the semblance of a trial or hearing were deliberately murdered at the command of a Polish officer, who thus far has not even received a reprimand. He does not seem to know that Paderewski has even expressed qualified regret that some innocent blood was shed on that occasion. He does not appear to have read the official report of Lieutenant Foster of the American Peace Mission, whose findings of

⁶⁷ Cyrus Adler, of the American Jewish Committee, wrote to the representative of the Joint Distribution Committee in Poland: "Such a characterization is, of course, in itself an indication of... hostility since no one would ever think of marking any section of a people as a criminal section." Quote in Z. Szajkowski, *Western Jewish Aid and Intercession for Polish Jewry 1919-1939*, in: *Studies on Polish Jewry 1919-1939*, J. A. Fishman, ed., New York 1974, p. 152.

⁶⁸ "New York Times" June 17, 1919.

fact corroborate the charge of murder. He takes no account of the brutal castigations inflicted on men and women who were imprisoned after witnessing the execution of those near and dear to them and were later discharged as innocent of all wrong. He probably has never heard of the report of Brailsford, the distinguished English publicist, which is in the official files here, who shows that several weeks before the Pińsk murders the very officer who directed the butchery expressed to him his hatred of Jews and declared that one Jew in every ten should be killed. He makes no note of the arbitrary fine of 100,000 marks inflicted after this massacre upon the Jewish population of Pińsk, followed by similar fines in other towns. He regards as unimportant the confiscation by Polish authorities at Pińsk of 1,000,000 marks sent there by the American Jewish relief committees to relieve their brethren dying from famine and typhus, which then have as yet been unable to wrest from the hands of the despoiler.

He is silent respecting the horrors of Vilna [Vilnius], the details of which have been officially reported, with the names of sixty Jews done to death, particulars of property valued at 1,000,000 rubles pillaged and destroyed, a minute narrative of flogging and other indignities inflicted and of wholesale deportations of hundreds of reputable citizens, who are still undergoing incarceration far from their homes. He seems to know nothing of the occurrences at Lida and many other towns. Nor does he appear to realize what happened at Szenstockau [Częstochowa], although leading Polish journals, avowedly anti-Semitic, have confessed the happening there of a pogrom where at least five Jews were killed and upward of forty seriously wounded. He has failed, so far as the public knows, to report what has just been learned of the attack made upon Jews at Cracow, in which Polish General Staff concedes that soldiers participated, which resulted in the serious wounding of sixty-six Jews and in the infliction of slighter injuries on more than a hundred. He seems to have closed his eyes to the indiscriminate beating and flogging of Jews and to the systematic and diabolical tortures now inflicted upon them. A new kind of sport consists in tearing out by the roots of beards with the adherent flesh, of Jews in streets, public places, railroad stations, and railway trains, or, by way of variety, severing them with knives and bayonets and setting fire to them.

According to Marshall, Gibson, "more royalist than the king," always tried to deny these incidents and "hide the sea of blood that has been and continues to be shed."

Marshall's statement became widely known because the "New York Times" printed it on June 17, and it was picked up by many other newspapers. In response, the Polish-American press published many accounts of

people returning from Poland and denying such occurrences as well as accusing Jews of anti-Polonism.⁶⁹

In such a situation, the State Department decided to show Gibson's dispatches to Abram Elkus, former American Ambassador to Turkey, in order to obtain his opinion on the issue; he was a respected diplomat and a well known Jew. Elkus in turn showed these reports to other influential Jewish politicians: Schiff, Judge Magrader, Rosen, Walcott, Mossburg, Strauss and Stephenwise. All of them were apparently "entirely satisfied with rulings of the Department and had a feeling of the utmost confidence in Gibson himself."⁷⁰ Elkus told the State Department that criticism of Gibson was caused because of the publication in the press of a confidential report by the Military Attaché at Paris to the effect that no pogroms had taken place in Poland, which was wrongly attributed to Gibson. Elkus and his associates explained the situation to Marshall, affirming their own confidence in Gibson. Elkus thus suggested that Marshall might be permitted to see the Gibson cable reports which should satisfy him as to the US Legation's just and fair attitude in the whole matter.

In June, Gibson had been summoned to Paris to assist with the final deliberations of the Peace Conference. It was at that point that he fully realized the problem his reports had created.

The Jewish situation I found is even more of ferment than I had anticipated. It seems that the Department gave to the Committee on Foreign Affairs extracts from some of our telegrams. The Committee in turn gave some extracts of these extracts out and the newspapers printed some extracts of these extracts of these extracts. By that time father could hardly recognize the child. Incidentally our friend, Colonel Godson, seems to have come in with a boob telegram denying that there had been any excesses in Poland. Somebody, either here in the Mission or in Washington, gave that out as coming from me. Upon reading this Mr. Louis Marshall went up in a balloon where he has since remained showering upon me all sorts of invective which is being ca-

⁶⁹ T. Radzik, *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie*, pp. 51-3. Polish-Americans and their organizations, trying to reach the English-speaking public, published several books, articles, and leaflets defending Poles. The broadest audience was reached by "an open letter" to Nathan Strauss published by Jakub Vorzimer, a Polish-American editor in New York, which was accompanied by fragments of Gibson's reports.

⁷⁰ Polk to Phillips, June 23, 1919, Gibson Papers, box 92. See also Phillips to Gibson, July 29, 1919, Gibson Papers, box 56.

bled to New York to keep the situation stirred up.... All the leading Jews in America went to bat on that subject and have stirred up a lot of feeling.⁷¹

In Paris, Gibson met with some Jewish representatives. The talks, however, did not diminish the differences in opinions. Gibson wrote about one such meeting in a letter he sent to Dolbeare in Warsaw:

The evening of my arrival [in Paris] I went up to see Colonel [Edward] House [President Wilson's advisor] and found Justice Brandeis and Felix Frankfurter, the hot dog of war, there. The Colonel nimbly slipped out of the room and left me to defend myself. These two opened the prosecution by saying that I had done more mischief to the Jewish race than anyone who had lived in the last century. I inquired to know just how that happened. They said that I was known in the United States as a fair-minded and humanitarian citizen and when I put my name to a document it carried weight, that my reports on the Jewish question had gone round the world and had undone their work for months. I still persisted in asking what they objected to and they finally said that I had stated that the stories of excesses against the Jews were exaggerated to which I replied that they certainly were and I should think any Jew would be glad to know it. They further said that I had «branded the whole Jewish race as gunmen» and that phrase had stuck in the public mind. I gently pointed out that what I had done was to say that there was a small class of renegade Jews like the gunmen of New York whose crimes should not be charged up to the Jewish people. They said that was so but none the less I was to blame for using the expression. Finally just to show how completely fair-minded they were Felix handed me a scarcely veiled threat that the Jews would try to prevent my confirmation by the Senate.⁷²

⁷¹ Gibson to Dolbeare, June 26, 1919, Gibson Papers, box 92. See also Gibson to Lippman, August 9, 1919, Gibson Papers, box 43. In one of his daily letters to his mother, Gibson wrote in an even more direct way:

As you may have seen by the papers some damfool gave out a statement made by somebody else as coming from me to the effect that there had been nothing of the nature of pogroms in Poland. All the Jews rose up and smote me hip and thigh and one of the most virulent of them was Louis Marshall who shot off a column to the *New York Times* which sounded like Cicero's denunciation of Cataline.

Gibson diary, June 24, 1919, Gibson Papers, box 70.

⁷² Gibson to Dolbeare, June 26, 1919, Gibson Papers, box 92. See also House diaries, June 24, 1919, Sterling Library, Yale University, vol.15, p. 250 and Schiff to Marshall, 419/18 [June 1919], Blaustein Library, New York, American Jewish Committee, file: Peace Conference – Joint Distribution Committee (Poland). The Senate, however, approved Gibson nomination as the US Ambassador to Poland without reservations on June 26.

In turn, in his diary, Gibson described his discussion with Marshall (when Gibson talked to him, Marshall had already received the telegram from Elkus explaining confusion about the authorship of some reports, but he continued to manifest hostility toward Gibson):

M[arshall] clearly considered that it was his duty to conduct the case for the prosecution rather than endeavor to discover the facts and I had to do some pretty plain talking before we got down to brass tacks. I drew his statement to the papers on him and showed him clearly that each and every one of the twenty one statements he had made about me was the opposite of the truth. He wriggled and squirmed and reluctantly admitted that he had been wrong in each instance but did not give the slightest expression of regret or signify any intention of making amends for what I told him was a cowardly assault upon my character.⁷³

Gibson also had a meeting with Lewis Strauss, one of the influential representatives of the American Jewish Committee. Gibson believed that he was able to convince at least him that he was not “a Jew baiter” and that he really wanted to help the Jews, but not in a way of “accusing the Polish Government for everything to be found in any report, no matter what its source, its foundation or its inspiration.”⁷⁴

The meeting with Strauss apparently improved the atmosphere. The representatives of the American Jewish Committee went to the American Peace Mission in Paris and stated that the talks with Gibson “were very satisfactory and that the atmosphere had been cleared.”⁷⁵ Gibson felt confident in his position, since President Wilson and the State Department apparently stood behind him. He wrote in his diary that they gave him “splendid support.”⁷⁶

Gibson, summarized his discussions with the American Jewish representatives in Paris, stressing that they “seemed to be interested in the agitation for its own sake rather than learning of the situation.”⁷⁷

I find that most of these people are over wrought and have reached that stage where they unconsciously want to believe every exaggerated yarn about ex-

⁷³ Gibson diary, June 29, 1919, Gibson Papers, box 70.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Gibson to Phillips, July 6, 1919, Gibson Papers, box 92.

cesses against the Jews. They take it as prejudice if you question any story no matter whether they know where it comes from or not, so long as it makes out a case against the Poles and shows that the Jews are suffering.... I can see that there will be a tremendous amount of patient talking to be done among the American Jews before they will be willing to abandon the idea of curing all the ills of their people by one blast at the Polish Government. They have got to make up their minds to work untiringly with the Government and not against it.⁷⁸

According to Gibson, the purpose of the propaganda campaign conducted by American Jews was not the welfare of the Jews in Poland but “a conscienceless and cold-blooded plan to make the condition of the Jews in Poland so bad that they must turn to Zionism for relief.” Its aim was also “to weaken Poland in the interest of Germany which does not desire a formidable economic or political rival in the East.”⁷⁹

In turn, Louis Marshall summed up his opinion on Gibson in a long letter he wrote to Abram Elkus.⁸⁰ Marshall stated that most of Gibson’s reports were “inaccurate and ill-digested” that Gibson gave the subject “merely superficial attention” and accepted the point of view “which makes the Jew the convenient scapegoat for all sins that have been inherited from the past and for all the misdeeds and incompetence of those in power.” Marshall rejected most of Gibson’s findings. He said that Gibson was simply wrong in reporting that killings of Jews occurred only during fighting against the Bolsheviks, when there were no Polish authorities yet established, or that they happened during spontaneous street fights or disputes about food prices. Marshall argued that all these events were “deliberate, continuous and unrelenting pogroms, atrocities and massacres.” He accused Gibson of abusing the term “justice,” describing murders as “summary justice,” terming humiliation of Jews by Haller’s soldiers as only “minor persecution” or blaming the Jews for doing unfair business at the expense of starving Poland. He wrote that Poles, not Jews controlled the food distribution in the country. Moreover, the economic boycott of Jews proclaimed by Dmowski was not stopped and much of the existed discrimination was the result of governmental action. Marshall especially criticized Gibson for his remarks about American Jewish propaganda, which supposedly hampered efforts to help Polish Jews and only hurts Poland in the eyes of the

⁷⁸ Gibson diary, June 27, 1919, Gibson Papers, box 70.

⁷⁹ Gibson to Phillips, July 6, 1919, Gibson Papers, box 92.

world as well as for threatening American Jews “with responsibility for murders to be committed by the Poles.” He said that the Jews in America, knowing what was happening in Poland, would always protest, “giving publicity to these awful occurrences and would ask for the intervention of the civilized Governments of the world to put an end to these monstrous brutalities” and that he “would personally rather die ten thousand deaths than to have been guilty of the crime of being silent.” At the same time he questioned the objectivity of reports coming from well assimilated Polish Jews, and often quoted by Gibson. He wrote that such Jews “are few in number and are either apostates or renegades” interested only in their private businesses not in the situation of their fellow co-religionists, but often employed by the Polish government “as spokesmen of Jews who were entirely satisfied with prevailing conditions.” At the end of his letter, Marshall stressed that Jews in America and England “appreciated fully the desirability of coming to an understanding with the Poles and of cultivating friendly relations with them” hoping that after ratification of the Minorities Treaty by the Polish Parliament, the persecution of Jews would cease.

Marshall’s criticism of Gibson was widely reported by the Jewish press in America and in Poland which demanded recalling him from his post.⁸¹ The Polish press, for its part, strongly defended Gibson. Gibson, however, asked the Polish Government to abandon its campaign in his defense “which only served to keep feeling stirred up.”⁸²

As Marshall continued his attacks on Gibson, Lansing cabled from Paris to the Department of State suggesting that it should issue a public statement about Gibson’s investigations, emphasizing the fact that “agitation based on exaggerated reports can only aggravate the situation of the Jews.”⁸³ Secretary of State Robert Lansing recommended that it should be stressed that the Gibson reports “have been characterized by fairness and desire to help the Jews” and that he conducted his investigations accompanied by representatives of the American Jews. In particular, Bogen’s name

⁸⁰ Marshall to Elkus, August 19, 1919, in *Louis Marshall*, vol.2, pp. 1-11.

⁸¹ See newspaper clippings, Gibson Papers, box 128. For example, Herman Bernstein after spending several weeks in Poland wrote that outbreaks against the Jews there were worse than Russian pogroms and that Gibson’s reports were based on “superficial, hasty investigation”. “New York Herald” (August 3, 1919).

⁸² Gibson to the Secretary of State, July 12, 1919, *Department of State-Poland*.

⁸³ Lansing to the Department of State, July 13, 1919, *Department of State-Poland*.

was mentioned in Lansing's cable. Bogen at that time came under attack from some Jewish newspapers in Poland and America, as they learned that it was he who had co-signed the report about the Vilnius affair (which denied that there had been a pogrom of Jews there). Bogen, was accused of being "a Jewish traitor", and had to abandon his relief mission in Poland.⁸⁴

Only later did Marshall apparently decide to change his policy of criticizing Gibson. In the summer of 1920 he requested him to address a large Jewish gathering in New York City.⁸⁵ Gibson, being at that time on a home leave in America, accepted the invitation and was much surprised to hear Marshall praising him for his relief efforts. He described the event in a letter to his mother:

It would have amused you to hear the praises of your son from the same men who were trying with all their strength to skin him alive last year. The same Louis Marshall who was denouncing me in the New York papers made a speech which was fit to be engraved upon my tombstone – that is if I had a few acres of tombstone. The others followed in the same strain and before I got through I had a high opinion of myself. Anyway it got them on record.⁸⁶

IV. THE MORGENTHAU COMMISSION AND ITS FINDINGS

In June 1919, during the discussions in Paris about the protection of Jews in Eastern Europe, and after a series of Jewish protests in American cities, Herbert Hoover suggested the American President sending a special mission to Poland to further investigate Polish-Jewish relations.⁸⁷ Hoover wrote in his letter to Wilson:

As you are perhaps aware, there is a great agitation in the United States over the mistreatment of Jews in Poland. This agitation has been founded to some extent on misinformation. A good deal of news that comes to the United

⁸⁴ Gibson diary, July 17, 1919, Gibson Papers, box 70. See also newspaper clippings, Gibson Papers, box 128. The Jewish commentaries concerning Bogen were also widely reported in Polish-American newspapers.

⁸⁵ Gibson Papers, box 37.

⁸⁶ Gibson to Mary Gibson, June 18, 1920, Gibson Papers, box 37.

⁸⁷ *Two Peacemakers in Paris: The Hoover-Wilson Post-Armistice Letters 1918-1920*, edited and with commentaries by F.W.O. Brien (College Station and London), pp.166-167.

States from Poland filters through German and Bolshevik sources. On the other hand, there has been wrong-doing and a proper illumination of it will not only act as a deterrent but will give the Polish Government an opportunity to prove its good faith.... A section of Jews in Poland have shown no support whatever to the Polish Government, and, if such a commission was wisely selected, it might not only act as a deterrent to outrages on Jews but it might also act in an advisory capacity to the Jewish community in Poland, that they should support this growing democracy as being their ultimate salvation from the tyrannies they have endured. The Polish Government is generally meeting a great deal of difficulty from the Jews in the fact that they are peculiarly subject to Bolshevik influence because of the total misery in which they have been left by the last two hundreds years of mistreatments and they have also been stimulated to make trouble by the Germans, because during the war the Germans played strongly upon the past sufferings of the Jewish population as against the Poles, and many of them are rather pro-German.

The Polish Prime Minister, Ignacy Paderewski, who had strongly protested in Paris against the exaggerated reports of anti-Jewish excesses in Poland, agreed to the idea of sending the proposed mission. He believed that it could make an objective report on the situation and thus help to improve Polish-Jewish relations. Gibson, for similar reasons, also supported the concept.⁸⁸

At the beginning of July, President Wilson appointed the members of the mission. They included Henry Morgenthau, former US Ambassador to Turkey, an anti-Zionist and member of many Jewish philanthropic organizations, General Edgar Jadwin from the U.S. Corps of Engineers, and Homer H. Johnson, professor of law at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland. For the President, it was especially important to include in the commission a trustworthy Jew who could lend credibility to the investigation and eventually present this sensitive issue in impartial and responsible way.

In turn, American Jewish leaders did not welcome the idea of sending a fact-finding mission and questioned its composition. In particular, they did not want to have a Jew in the group, worrying that he would provide legitimacy to a pre-determined acquittal of Poland. Zionists were unhappy

⁸⁸ Black suggested that it was Gibson's incompetence which served as the justification for the Morgenthau mission to investigate the Polish-Jewish affairs. E.C. Black, *Lucien Wolf...*, p. 34.

with Morgenthau being in the group as he did not sympathize with their views.⁸⁹ Walter Lippman, a well known member of the American delegation to the Paris Peace Conference, also shared this view. He wrote on this issue to Gibson:

I have no confidence whatever in Morgenthau. I don't think a Jew should have been on the commission, and I don't think there should have been any commission. I think the investigation should have been done by you and whatever help you needed attached to the Legation. I am sick to death of these traveling ignoramuses who stick their noses into a problem they don't understand and haven't time to investigate and who bring home the last bit of gossip someone stuffed into their ear.⁹⁰

According to Morgenthau himself, some Jewish leaders opposed him because they were "afraid of the truth" and only wanted to establish a case, not to determine the facts.⁹¹ Bowing to Jewish criticism, Morgenthau asked Wilson to be excused. The President met him on June 26 and won him over, appealing to his sense of duty and personal loyalty.

Phillips described the situation in a letter to Gibson:

Elkus assured me that he, Schiff, and others are heartily in accord with you and your work and are diametrically opposed to the attitude of Louis Marshall

⁸⁹ In similar circumstances, the American Zionists in June 1917 were able to stop Morgenthau's Mission to the Near East. Morgenthau was sent there by President Wilson to see if it was possible to secure a peace with Turkey, which was against Zionist interests because the establishment of an independent Jewish Palestine required the dismemberment of the Turkish empire, of which Palestine was then a province. See J.P. O'Grady, ed., *The Immigrants' Influence on Wilson's Peace Policies* (University of Kentucky Press, 1967), p. 299. On Morgenthau's attitude toward Zionism, see his memoirs (written in collaboration with French Strother), *All in a Life-Time* (Garden City, N.Y. 1922), pp. 348-351. Morgenthau was a representative to the Jewish congress held in Philadelphia in 1918 which elected representatives to be sent to the Paris Peace Conference to secure assurances in the Peace Treaties of Jewish rights in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. As the congress became dominated by Zionists, Morgenthau decided not to attend it, and signed, along with several other Jewish leaders, a statement against Zionist agitation. These actions brought him into conflict with the Zionist-dominated delegation of American Jews in Paris. Szajkowski suggested, that Wilson chose Morgenthau deliberately "to bring back a report directed against Jewish nationalists" *Western Jewish Aid*, p. 152. See also F.W. Brecher, *Reluctant Ally*, pp. 37-38.

⁹⁰ Lippmann to Gibson, July 14, 1919, Gibson Papers, box 51.

⁹¹ Gibson to Dolbeare, June 26, 1919, Gibson Papers, box 43. See also Morgenthau diary, June 8, 11 and 12, 1919, Library of Congress and Morgenthau: *All in a Life-Time*, pp. 354-56.

as represented in his recent attacks upon the Legation. From the start I have taken Elkus into my confidence and have allowed him to read and to show other leading Jews here all of your dispatches on "pogroms." I think this course has pleased them very much and that they were perfectly satisfied to have you handle the whole situation, as much so that they cabled to the President to delay the appointment of any other Commission of Inquiry. For your own information, they were strongly opposed to the appointment of Morgenthau on the Commission.... Realizing as I did the confidence which the [Foreign Relations] Committee had in you I was a little sorry myself to have the investigation taken out of your hands and placed in a Morgenthau Committee. On the other hand I appreciate that Morgenthau, being a Jew, might be in a position to get in touch with the Jews in Poland and talk to them like a "Dutch Uncle."⁹²

The American Jewish leaders in Paris, having failed on their attempt to convince President Wilson not to appoint the commission, decided to send to Poland their own representatives, to carry on a separate investigation.⁹³ They chose Felix Frankfurter and Harold Gans to do so. Gibson tried to stop their mission. He was especially critical of Frankfurter's coming to Poland. He wrote to Leland Harrison of the American Commission to Negotiate Peace that "after seeing something of Frankfurter's general attitude on this question I feel that this would be deplorable and that he should not be given a passport... There is no earthly excuse for a private citizen to come in on the same errand, particularly as he has been outspokenly hostile to the President's commission and will come, if permitted, for a purpose of gathering material with which to combat the commission's findings."⁹⁴ Gibson stressed that there were various problems already with American Jews coming to Poland and that many of them should not be allowed to go there:

We are constantly refusing passports to non-Jewish Americans and seem to have no hesitancy in doing so.... I don't see any reason for a different policy toward American Jews who are out to make trouble and involve us in em-

⁹² Phillips to Gibson, July 29, 1919, Gibson Papers, box 56.

⁹³ Frankfurter wrote in his memoirs: "It was felt that it was important for him [i.e. Morgenthau] to know that he was being watched, so it was arranged that I should go to Poland". F. Frankfurter: *Reminiscences*, recorded in talks with H.B. Phillips, New York 1960, p. 160.

⁹⁴ Gibson to Harrison, July 8, 1919, Gibson Papers, box 43. See also Harrison to Gibson, July 24, 1919, and Gibson to Harrison, August 1, 1919, Gibson Papers, box 43.

barrassment with foreign Governments. I shall be glad to have some well balanced American Jews come in here on relief work of various sorts if they could keep out of propoganda and trouble making. But unfortunately nearly all those who have come have brought discredit on us by their performances here and after leaving the country.... It would be very helpful if you would have somebody go over the applicants for passports and cull out the names of pronounced Zionist and other trouble makers. I feel very strongly that they should be kept out of this country at least until the commission has had an opportunity to do its work.

According to Gibson many American Jews visiting Poland “abused the privileges accorded them to do anti-Polish propoganda in the country and gather material for scandalously untruthful articles which have been printed in the American press in connection with the present agitation.”⁹⁵ “As a rule, these people seem to devote their efforts to knifing Poland.”

The Department of State, however, after consultation with Homer Johnson and Herbert Hoover, came to the conclusion that it would not be advisable or expedient to prevent Frankfurter and Gans from proceeding to Poland.⁹⁶

Gibson continued to criticize Frankfurter’s mission after its arrival in Warsaw. He wrote to Harrison, that “Frankfurter came here specifically for the purpose of making trouble” and probably would “distort and misrepresent” everything he would find.⁹⁷ According to Gibson, Frankfurter was “avowedly hostile” to Morgenthau and tried “to get him.” Gibson wrote in a letter to Joseph C. Grew, a Secretary of the American Commission to Negotiate Peace in Paris:

Frankfurter takes the ground that Mr. Morgenthau is totally unfitted for a position of this sort, which he elaborates in considerable and not very flattering detail... I am inclined to think that if the President of the United States has sufficient confidence in Mr. Morgenthau to entrust this question to him I can safely assume that he has enough sense to handle it without interference from me and that my job is to back him up to the hilt and help him in any way he thinks useful and that aside from this the matter is none of my business until Mr. Morgenthau and his Mission leave Poland.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Gibson to Harrison, July 7, 1919, Gibson Papers, box 43.

⁹⁶ Grew to Morgenthau, July 17, 1919, Gibson Papers, box 43.

⁹⁷ Gibson to Harrison, August 1, 1919, Gibson Papers, box 43.

⁹⁸ Gibson to Grew, July 31, 1919, Gibson Papers, box 43. See also comments in Gibson’s diary, July 21, 1919, Gibson Papers, box 70.

Gans, on the other hand, wrote:

Even, if the tale.... had been true, and Frankfurter and I had to come here not only uninvited but in opposition to Mr. Morgenthau's wishes and for the purpose of checking up his activities with a view to subsequent criticism, we would have been within our clear and indubitable rights and any official who had expressed opposition to our coming or had sought to interfere with our attempt to secure such information as was open to the public, would have been guilty of a ridiculous exhibition of bureaucratic arrogance.⁹⁹

Despite his attitudes to Frankfurter and Gans, Gibson extended to them the facilities of the Legation but decided not to brief them about the situation in Poland or to present them to the Polish authorities.

The Morgenthau Commission arrived in Poland on July 13, 1919, and immediately went to work.¹⁰⁰ Its members visited all the places where anti-Jewish excesses had taken place and talked with both Jewish and Polish representatives of different organizations, the local populace, witnesses to the outbreaks, and their victims.¹⁰¹ The Commission was generally greeted warmly by the Jews in Poland. Only few Jews expressed their worries that Morgenthau might accept himself what many Poles believed to be the explanation for anti-Jewish violence, namely that there was a danger of "Jewish communists."¹⁰² In this context, they questioned Morgenthau's appeals to the Jews in Poland's Eastern territories "to in no case assist the Bolshevik authorities" and "not to offer armed resistance against Polish troops" which would help "to avoid excesses and pogroms".¹⁰³

The Polish authorities gave the Morgenthau Commission a free hand and made no efforts to restrict its access to Jewish representatives and witnesses. Nevertheless, some Poles felt offended by the fact that a foreign

⁹⁹ Gans to Mackenzie, July 27, 1919, a copy in Gibson Papers, box 43. See also F. Frankfurter, *Reminiscences*, pp. 156-57.

¹⁰⁰ Lansing, in his letter to Morgenthau, instructed the commission "to make careful inquiry into all matters affecting the relations between the Jewish and non-Jewish element in Poland" for the purpose "of seeking to discover the reason lying behind [anti-Jewish] excesses and discriminations with a view to finding a possible remedy, as the American Government would like to render service to all elements in the new Poland: Christians and Jews alike", Lansing to Morgenthau, June 30, 1919, *Department of State-Poland*.

¹⁰¹ For a detailed description of the mission's activities see notes by a counsel to it: A.L. Goodhart, *Poland and the Minority Races*, New York 1920).

¹⁰² Z. Szajkowski, *Jews, War and Communism*, p. 262.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

mission investigated what they perceived as Polish internal affairs, instead of relying on the results of official inquiries and government statements. It is worth quoting here the comments made by Józef Piłsudski about the mission, though made in the form of a joke. Piłsudski told Gibson that: “he saw we had had a pogrom in New York and thought it might be necessary for him to send over a Mission to make an inquiry so as to quiet Polish public opinion as the darkies had been cutting loose in Washington and the whites retaliating, it might be that the negro colony of two or three in Warsaw would demand that something be done to bring our barbarous people to a sense of its responsibilities.”¹⁰⁴

Morgenthau’s stay in Poland was not free of controversy. For example, on July 28 the Polish Telegraphic Agency cabled to the United States the text of an interview with him, in which he was quoted as saying that earlier information about pogroms was greatly exaggerated and that Polish Jews should lend greater support to the new Polish state.¹⁰⁵ The interview provoked a tempest in the Jewish community in America. The Jewish press accused Morgenthau of being a traitor to the Jewish cause. When he learned about this reaction, he denied having granted any such interview.¹⁰⁶ The Polish Telegraphic Agency, which realized that it was not in Poland’s interest to put Morgenthau in a difficult position, apologized for “a mistake” by one of its employees. The incident made Morgenthau realize once more how sensitive was the job the mission had undertaken and how closely American Jews were observing its work.

Assessing the Commission’s work, Gibson felt that Morgenthau’s judgment “on the Jewish issue” was “right” and that he “played the game well.”¹⁰⁷ He was, however, aware of the fact that Morgenthau “ruffled the feathers” of many people and wondered if he would be able to get away “without a real upheaval.”¹⁰⁸

Morgenthau shared his views on Polish-Jewish relations with Herbert Hoover, who was visiting Poland at that time.¹⁰⁹ Morgenthau was convinced that in this country “a strong prejudice against the Jews prevailed”, but animosity of the Poles towards the Jews was greatly aggravated by the suc-

¹⁰⁴ Gibson diary, July 27, 1919, Gibson Papers box 70.

¹⁰⁵ T. Radzik, *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie*, p. 65.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Gibson diary, July 20, 1920, Gibson Papers box 70.

¹⁰⁸ Gibson to Phillips, August 29, 1919, Gibson Papers, box 56.

¹⁰⁹ Morgenthau to Hoover, August 12, 1919, Gibson Papers, box 91.

cess of Jewish representatives in Paris in compelling the Poles to grant to the Jews the rights conceded under the Minorities Treaty which deeply wounded Polish national pride. At the same time, describing the situation in Poland, he wrote to Hoover that the Poles were “almost in a state of despair... as they are without food, fuel, raw material, transportation, trained government officials, a constitution, and practically every other necessary thing to bring to their people any direct benefits from this great freedom which circumstances, as much as their own efforts, have thrust upon them.” He also commented on difficulties in presenting a report on Polish-Jewish relations:

A white-washing report, or even a softened statement of the mishaps, will not satisfy the aroused American and English opinion. Any report that comes short of the truth will be completely shattered by the publication of the detailed facts which are in the possession of the Jewish leaders of America and England. It requires absolute honesty, and a grim determination to face the truth and remedy it, and not shifting of responsibility or blame, or a mere dodging of the issues. And unless this is done, Poland will start her new life with more toxin in her system than she can possibly absorb.

Morgenthau then went so far as to propose that Hoover appoint another commission of experts in various fields, to “work out the solution for the entire Jewish question.” He was even ready to donate the then large sum of \$ 25,000 to cover the expenses of such a mission.¹¹⁰

After spending two months in Poland, the Commission returned to Paris and its members started to work on the final report. Gibson was visiting Paris at the same time and he met members of the Commission there. Morgenthau and, separately, Jadwin and Johnson wanted Gibson to examine their description of events. Gibson then asked the State Department for opinion and was advised not to do so, “to be able to prove an alibi in the future.”¹¹¹ He shared this view; in Poland he deliberately stayed away from Mission’s meetings and did not want to change this approach.¹¹²

The members of the Mission could not reach a compromise over what should be in the final report. Morgenthau wrote, that they “had no end of arguments in trying to agree in a joint report.”¹¹³ Finally, two separate re-

¹¹⁰ Hoover’s response to Morgenthau’s letter is not known.

¹¹¹ Grew to Gibson, October 29, 1919, Gibson Papers, box 43.

¹¹² Gibson diary, September 16, 1919, Gibson Papers box 70.

¹¹³ Morgenthau to Gibson, January 14, 1920, Gibson Papers, box 54.

ports were prepared and submitted to President Wilson: one by Morgenthau himself, and a second by Jadwin and Johnson. They both described in detail the situation in Poland and Polish-Jewish relations, and in fact differed mainly in “emphasis and shading”, rather than in assessment of the very facts. Morgenthau stressed that out of eight major excesses which occurred in 1919 (neither report used the term “pogroms” because of the conviction that it was inadequate to describe in such a way the character of the events), only two took place in the ethnically Polish territories, four involved poorly disciplined soldiers in combat zones, and one was the result of a junior officer’s orders. The outbreaks were investigated by authorities, and those found guilty were sentenced. Morgenthau concluded in his report that:

Just as the Jews would resent being condemned as a race for the action of a few of their undesirable co-religionists, so it would be correspondingly unfair to condemn the Polish nation as a whole for the violence committed by uncontrolled troops or local mobs. These excesses were apparently not premeditated, for if they had been part of a preconceived plan, the number of victims would have run into the thousands instead of amounting to about 280. [Nevertheless], it is believed that these excesses were the result of a widespread anti-Semitic prejudice aggravated by the belief that the Jewish inhabitants were politically hostile to the Polish State.¹¹⁴

Morgenthau, commenting on the situation, wrote in his diary that there was “no question that some of the Jewish leaders exaggerated these evils.”¹¹⁵ He also criticized “malevolent, self-seeking mischief-makers both in the Jewish and Polish press and among the politicians of every stripe” and the Zionists in general.¹¹⁶

The joint Jadwin and Johnson report was much more comprehensive; it presented the complex causes of the outbreaks and suggested a variety of concrete steps to the Polish authorities and the outside world on how to improve the situation.¹¹⁷ The authors stressed both German and Russian efforts to incite the Poles against the Jews and the foreign anti-Polish propaganda from which the country seriously suffered. They directed their readers’ attention to the fact that, while Poland “has always shown complete

¹¹⁴ U.S. Congress. Senate. S. 177, *Mission of the United States to Poland*, 66th Congress, 2nd Session, 1920, p. 9.

¹¹⁵ H. Morgenthau, *All in a Life-Time*, p. 382.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 383-384.

¹¹⁷ *Mission of the United States to Poland*, pp. 13-24.

religious tolerance, and equal rights for all citizens has always been the permanent postulate of all the parties.... some representatives of the Jewish national movement.... refused to subordinate the Jewish question to the general needs of the Polish State.” They believed that none of the reported excesses “were instigated or approved by any governmental authority, civil or military” while anti-Semitic attitudes of the public had their roots “in the history and the attitude of the Jews, complicated by abnormal conditions produced by the war.” Jadwin and Johnson wrote that they “were assured by many representative Jewish delegations that while they were disturbed by the anti-Jewish feelings.... they did not fear for their lives or liberty.” They believed that, since Poland accepted the Minorities Treaty, Polish-Jewish relations would gradually improve.

On January 15, 1920, the Morgenthau and the Jadwin-Johnson reports were sent by President Wilson to the Senate and were published in the Congressional Records.¹¹⁸ As the reports basically did not confirm the information about pogroms in Poland, the House Committee on Foreign Affairs stopped further investigation of the issue. Hoover wrote in his memoirs, that “these gentlemen did fine service by exposing falsity and creating a generally more wholesome atmosphere.”¹¹⁹

The Jewish press ignored the reports findings almost completely.¹²⁰ Only some Zionists criticized Morgenthau for his allegedly pro-Polish attitudes visible in the report. In turn, the Polish American community greeted the reports rather favorably, especially the one written by Johnson and Jadwin, which did not criticize the Poles very much. The “New York Times” on January 21, 1920 wrote that “temperate and.... impartial” Morgenthau inquiry demonstrated that the uproar against Poland “had been much ado about little”. Nevertheless, Poles accused Morgenthau of taking a biased stand toward Poland in his speeches delivered to Jewish audiences.¹²¹ Gibson said that he was sorry “that his courage did not carry him far enough to say in public what he was ready enough to say in private.”¹²²

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover. Years of Adventure, 1874-1920*, New York 1951, p. 358.

¹²⁰ See also *Why the Jews Dislike the Morgenthau's Report*, „The Dearborn Independent” October 30, 1920.

¹²¹ See the report by Polish Minister in Washington to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, February 5, 1920, collection of the Polish Embassy in Washington, Hoover Archives, box 66.

¹²² Gibson to Phillips, December 29, 1919, Gibson Papers, box 56.

V. GIBSON'S CONTINUED CRITICISM OF JEWISH ANTI-POLISH CAMPAIGNS

The Morgenthau Commission's reports did not end the controversy over the situation of the Jews in Poland and Polish attitudes toward them. Representatives of various American Jewish organizations continued to arrive in Poland to investigate the matter. Gibson believed that many of them abused their status in the country and embarked upon a prejudiced campaign against Poles and the Polish government. On October 15, 1919 he sent a confidential letter to Harrison about this issue again.¹²³ After citing examples of such Jews, Gibson wrote:

The record of American Jews abusing their passports and the privileges accorded them here is both shameful and embarrassing to us, and I think the time has come when positive action should be taken by our Government. It is certainly preferable to stop this sort of thing of our own motion before the patience of the Polish Government is exhausted and they point out to us the unfriendliness of our action in permitting our people with official support to carry on a concerted effort to undermine this country and its Government. We in the United States would not for a moment tolerate intrigue against the Federal Government or the people of the United States by any series of Poles who might come over to exploit the treatment of the Negroes or the Japanese. We would give them short shrift and it is only the unbelievable patience of the Polish Government that has saved us from having several very unpleasant incidents here. I don't know what the present status of the passport restrictions is, but if we still have any say about who can and who cannot come to Poland we ought, from motives of decency and self-protection, to look these people over very carefully before they are allowed to have a visa for Poland.... I should like to have some definite steps taken by us before we have a public scandal.

Harrison answered Gibson that the Department of State could not do much about it:

As you know it is very difficult, if not impossible, for the Department really to control the movements of such persons or to refuse them passports or visas when they have backing in certain quarters. My own feeling is that from now on it is entirely up to the Poles to keep undesirable foreigners out of

¹²³ Gibson to Harrison, February 14, 1920, Gibson Papers, box 43.

Poland. But please don't think me unsympathetic, and be sure that I will do everything I can to help you out.¹²⁴

In the fall of 1919 and in the spring and summer of 1920, during the Polish-Soviet war, the Jewish press in America blamed the Poles again for organizing pogroms and persecuting the Jews.¹²⁵ Some newspapers expressed doubts about the rectitude of granting "immature Poles" independence (presenting it as Wilson's mistake) and supported the Soviet offensive, believing that the situation of the Jews would improve under the Russian government.¹²⁶ On February 14, 1920, Gibson wrote to the Secretary of State a new report on "the Jewish issue."¹²⁷ According to him, the campaign about massacres of the Jews in Ukraine was again "characterized by gross exaggeration.... with a consistent endeavor to confuse that country and Poland so far as possible in the public mind." Although Gibson believed that the people who carried on the anti-Polish propaganda were not representative of all American Jews, he was worried that the majority of Jews might be misled by them. Gibson stressed also that the Jews in Poland never took any significant part in anti-Polish campaigns and themselves criticized the approach taken by American Jewish leaders, who had not consulted Polish Jews and were inspired "chiefly by selfish motives of promoting their own ends."

Gibson argued that foreign campaigning created much resentment among the Poles and that many Jews were afraid of its negative consequences in the future. After talking to many American Jews who had come to Poland, he said he was unable "to discover anything beyond a desire either for agitation for its own sake, to punish Poland as a whole for what has happened to the Jews, or.... to make her economic and political situation as difficult as possible.... as if Poland were to be sufficiently intimidated through propaganda, she would submit to any conditions imposed upon her in the interest of the Jews." Describing the situation in Poland, he expressed his opinion that the so-called "Jewish question" was entirely social and economic, not religious, and that the economic discrimination against the Jews in Poland was made easier by their separateness and distinctiveness. He believed that the only way to make the life of Jews "less intolerable"

¹²⁴ Harrison to Gibson, November 24, 1919, Gibson Papers, box 43.

¹²⁵ See, for example, N. Davies, *White Eagle, Red Star: The Polish-Soviet War, 1919-1920*, London 1972, p. 328; or A. Kapiszewski, *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie*, pp. 626-627.

¹²⁶ See T. Radzik, *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie*, p. 75.

¹²⁷ Gibson to Lansing, February 14, 1920, Gibson Papers, box 50.

was to improve the general economic condition of the country. Thus, anti-Polish campaigns, which had weakened Poland politically and economically, would then have only a disastrous effect on its Jews. This was why Gibson believed that American Jews themselves should “silence the people who were inspired only by blind hatred and a desire to intrigue” and should “suppress improper activity and work constructively.” In this context Gibson suggested a radical change in the personnel of the Jewish relief organizations in Poland, leaving only native American citizens “who are American first, last and all the time” because those who were born in Poland or in Russia maintained the prejudices and hatreds of their native countries and thereby were “unfitted for the duties of a friendly neutral relief worker.” At the end of his report, Gibson expressed his worry that if this did not happen “we must be prepared for conflicts, intrigues, and agitation which would be harmful to our country and to Poland and which would react unfavorably on the situation of the Jews here.”

On their side, the leadership of American Jews decided to present their official standpoint toward Poland to the Polish Minister in Washington, Prince Kazimierz Lubomirski. On November 10, 1920, Louis Marshall, in the name of the American Jewish Committee, and Stephen Wise, in the name of the American Jewish Congress, signed a resolution that stated as follows:

So far as Poland is concerned we desire to place upon record that the Jews of the United States are not now and never been hostile to that land. On the contrary, they have at all times sympathized with the aspiration of the Polish people for the restoration of their freedom. Because of that fact and because of our anxiety to promote the welfare of the millions of our brethren who now live and will continue to live in Poland, whose ancestors have for centuries lived there and regarded it as their home, we are deeply interested in the perpetuation of the present free and independent Republic of Poland.... In giving utterance to these sentiments we would, however, be lacking in candor if we failed to voice our grave concern at the treatment to which our brethren have been subjected in Poland for some time past.... While the Jews of America stand ready and willing to aid in the creation of a prosperous Poland, they feel justified in entertaining the expectation that Poland shall remove all obstacles that stand in the way of cooperation by the Jews of Poland in the attainment of what should be the united purpose of all the inhabitants of Poland – its social, economic, civic and political development.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Copy at the collection of the Polish Embassy in Washington, Hoover Archives, box 66.

In March, 1921, a constitution was adopted by the Polish Parliament which guaranteed rights for Jews and all national minorities. Marshal Józef Piłsudski was still in power and tensions between Poles and Jews seemed to calm down for a while.

Gibson did not report on Polish-Jewish affairs for quite some time. It was only in January, 1922, that he wrote on this subject again, discussing the situation in Vilnius during the Polish-Lithuanian military dispute over that city and its surroundings.¹²⁹ He described a plan for a government in Vilnius, proposed by Rabbi Rubenstein, one of the Jewish leaders there. According to the plan, each national group – Jews in particular – should have separate schools and its own courts, should be represented in the government by a minister empowered to protect its rights, etc. Such proposals were strongly criticized by the Poles, who believed that this was an attempt to create “a state within a state.” Gibson shared the Polish view.

In November, 1922, Gibson once again wrote to Washington about the continued anti-Polish campaign carried on by some American Jews.¹³⁰ In a strictly confidential dispatch, Gibson described how he had been approached by a number of Jews “with alarming stories of what has happened and what is going to happen.” They complained to him about what they called “pogroms” which were, according to Gibson, “food disorders” during which both Jewish and Christian merchants were injured. As in the past, Gibson questioned Jewish motivation behind publishing all possible reports that referred to the mistreatment of Jews. According to him, many Jewish leaders, and the leadership of the American Jewish Committee in particular, accepted any allegations made by a Jew against the Poles or any newspaper report or anonymous statement, so long as it indicated that a Jew had been unfairly treated.

Gibson then recalled Marshall’s “scurrilous attack” on him back in 1919 and his “completely false statements” as to what Gibson had said in confidential reports “which he had not seen and which he did not even ask to see before assuming the responsibility for making a newspaper attack.” Gibson wrote that, for Marshall, such behavior was completely justified simply by the fact that his reports “were causing great harm to Jewish propaganda.” while the issue itself was not important. Gibson also suggested that although Marshall “was obliged to admit the falsity of his statements in the

¹²⁹ Gibson to the Secretary of State, January 12, 1922, Gibson Papers, box 101.

¹³⁰ Gibson to the Secretary of State, November 10, 1922, Gibson Papers, box 100.

presence of several witnesses, he did not consider it necessary to make any amends, and has allowed his misstatements to stand to this day.”

Next, Gibson criticized the politics of American Jewish leaders with regard to the problems of the Jews in Poland and in particular their demands for American government action in this matter. He brought to the attention of the State Department that now also some Jewish leaders in Poland used the threat of American intervention as a political weapon to support their demands during the parliamentary debates. Gibson was convinced, however, that any American intervention on behalf of the Polish Jews could do them “nothing but harm” while, at the same time, it could damage the United States’ interests. He perceived organized Polish Jewry as “deliberately and openly anti-Polish,” since the Jewish press constantly “hurls abuse at the Polish Government and people and calls down upon them every imaginable curse” and that “the daily run of Jewish callers at the Legation and Consulate General are loud in their denunciations of Poland, its Government and people, and frequently express annoyance if their sentiments do not elicit approval from American representatives.”

Gibson compared the situation of Jews in Poland to that of blacks in the United States. He stressed that it was established by Morgenthau’s Commission that the number of Jews killed in Poland in 1919 “was less than the number of Negroes killed in the United States during the same period.” Moreover, all of the alleged pogroms in the Eastern territories happened in war-time conditions, while American blacks were killed during times of peace. Gibson then expressed his doubts as to what extent the treatment of Jews in Poland was a matter of legitimate interest to the United States.

I am confident that there would have been an outcry from one end of our country to the other if European Governments had suggested sending a commission to investigate the killings of Negroes, setting up tribunals to hear their grievances, questioning American officials as to whether they had or had not done their best to prevent disorders, and publishing official reports passing judgment on the conduct of the Government.

Gibson also believed that even a mild American intervention into Jewish matters in Poland would establish a precedent which would enable Jewish leaders bringing similar kind of pressure upon the American Government and the Congress to undertake parallel actions in Soviet Russia, “which might well jeopardize our national interests without any compensating advantage to the Jews” and in fact bring “a massacre of Jews on a scale unprecedented in modern times.”

According to Gibson, Jews in Poland demanded not equal but exceptional treatment: exemption from military service and from certain taxes, separate courts with Jewish laws, separate Jewish schools at the government's expense, etc. Gibson complained that "in order to obtain these demands they resort to any tactics which will place the Poles in an unfavorable position." "There is not only no cooperation on their part to build up a Polish State but they endeavor to frustrate the settlement of Polish problems by interference, threats and non-participation." Gibson believed that when the Jews pressed their demands for the intervention of the United States, they did it "not to prevent cruelties and injustices to an oppressed minority but to secure the aid of a large power for their selfish ends in a matter which is a purely internal problem of a friendly state."

Washington did not react to Gibson's note. The Department of State did not want to be involved in Polish-Jewish relations again. In the following years the entirety of American foreign policy became more isolationists again, and Polish affairs were not high on its agenda. Even when American Jewish leaders directly demanded that the American Government take some action against what they perceived as further persecution of the Jews in Poland, the Department of State answered that no intervention was formally possible or necessary since it concerned matters which did not "directly affect American citizens or interests."¹³¹

* * *

How should Hugh Gibson's views of the Jewish issue in Poland and of Polish-Jewish relations be evaluated? It is not possible to answer this question without looking at it in the broader context of his performance in Poland and of Jewish politics at the time. Being stationed at Warsaw, Gibson became quite involved in Polish affairs. He would have liked Poland to play the role of a balance between Germany and Russia, of a solid buffer protecting the West from Communism, and country economically prosperous. But Poland was ruined after years of occupation and war, and it badly needed unification of its distinct parts, establishment of authority and security of its borders, and relief from famine and typhus. It also needed

¹³¹ Quoted in *Polish Jews*, 1938, 154. Black also wrote on the situation:

The United States, in spite of lip-service to advanced principles, could not tolerate the suggestion of general League of Nations intervention on behalf of abused minorities. That might mean outside intervention on behalf of abused Japanese in California or, even worse, of Blacks in the American South.

E.C. Black, *Lucien Wolf*, p.13.

a solution to its conflicts with neighboring nations and with its own minorities. In the endless list of priorities for this newly re-born state, Gibson, like the Poles, did not place the improvement of the situation of the Jews at the top. He was quite involved in relief efforts for the whole population, not for the Jews separately. He did not fear for the future of Polish-Jewish relations, as he believed that the antagonism between the two communities was a legacy of the politics of the partitioning powers, Russia and Germany, which would diminish once Poland achieved normalization. He trusted that the new Polish Government would fully respect the rights of Jews and other minorities. In this context, he perceived the campaigns of protest organized by some Jewish groups abroad as unnecessary, lacking any understanding of the situation in Poland or the support of the most interested party -- the Polish Jews. Gibson believed that such actions were turning the attention of world leaders and the public away from the more important tasks of the moment and were weakening the position of Poland in the international arena.

Working in difficult conditions in the newly established Legation in Warsaw in the dramatic times of post World War I Poland, Gibson tried to present the full picture of the Polish situation to Washington. His reports on Jewish issues were, however, not always accurate. When he described the supposedly always-negative attitude of the majority of Western Jews toward Poland, Gibson probably lacked an understanding of the scale of the anti-Semitism existing in these territories and of its possible consequences. Thus, during the Paris Peace Conference, Gibson clashed with some American Jewish leaders for whom his way of presenting the situation in Poland became an obstacle to the achievement of international guarantees protecting the Jews in Eastern Europe from mistreatment.

Nevertheless, some of the reports coming from Jews who visited Poland were indeed one-sided, and less-than-objective in presenting Poland's problems. In particular, they exaggerated the extent of anti-Jewish outbreaks. Also some of the Jewish campaigns, officially aimed at helping Jews in Poland, did bear the characteristics of anti-Polish campaigns and were organized more for political or personal reasons, without taking into account the complexity of the situation in the Polish territories.

Opinions about Gibson's reports in the academic literature have been much divided, although usually critical. Eugene Black, for example, wrote that Gibson was "ill-informed" and his reports "repeated every libel Dmowski had used through the years, all the legends of Jewish pro-Germanism, treachery, espionage, profiteering and bolshevism" and

described “the whole Jewish proletariat – indeed all the Jews who were not Assimilants or Chassidim – as “criminals”.¹³² According to Black “Gibson’s later denials and feeble argument that his reports were garbled in transmission made Gibson doubly foolish and cast doubts on American diplomatic intelligence.” In turn, Ronald Swerczek wrote that “while Gibson did not in theory approve of pogroms or even of harassment of Jews, he did have certain anti-Semitic prejudices which made it difficult for him to understand the apprehensions of Jewish leaders seriously concerned about the welfare of their co-religionists in Poland.”¹³³ He added that Gibson held “a common stereotyped opinion of Jews – that they were frequently sly and conniving, rather than straightforward” and that he, like many other white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant Americans, “aired certain prejudices of which he was not even fully aware, so much were they a part of him.” Frank W. Brecher characterized the problem by saying that “there was a major gap between the level of violence that Gibson was confirming and the actual extent of such violence” and that his reports were “internally inconsistent”.¹³⁴

On the other hand, Piotr Wandycz believed that Gibson’s reports were “fairly objective.”¹³⁵ Kay Lundgreen-Nielsen, in turn, stated that although Gibson’s reports “were pro-Polish,” they “carefully explained the reasons for some of the episodes;” as they were minimizing the importance of them, they “did not take the direction which the Jewish-led section of American public opinion wished.”¹³⁶ There were also some Jewish leaders who after observing Gibson work in Poland expressed confidence in his fairness and conscientiousness.¹³⁷ Neal Pease wrote that “the degree to which Gibson’s prejudice against Jews colored his conclusions is difficult to ascertain ... he seems to have been able to separate his private crotchets from his professional judgments to some extent.”¹³⁸

¹³² Ibid., p. 25.

¹³³ R. E. Swerczek, *The Diplomatic Career of Hugh Gibson 1908-1938* (Ph.D. diss., University of Iowa 1972), pp.133-4.

¹³⁴ F.W. Brecher, *Reluctant Ally*, p. 36.

¹³⁵ J.P. Wandycz, *The United States and Poland*, p. 165.

¹³⁶ K. Lundgreen-Nielsen, *The Polish Problem at the Paris Peace Conference*, p. 375.

¹³⁷ B. D. Bogen, *Born a Jew*, New York 1930, pp. 194-201; C. Adler and A.M. Margolich, *With Firmness in the Right: American Diplomatic Action Affecting Jews, 1840-1945*, New York 1946, p. 153.

¹³⁸ N. Pease, “This Troubled Question”: The United States and the “Polish Pogroms” of 1918-1919’, unpublished manuscript, p. 27.

What was the truth?

According to British historian Norman Davies:

Press reports in the West of “Pogroms in Poland” though accepted by Jewish commentators, were repeatedly discredited by the investigations of independent British and American observers. The so-called pogrom in Lwów, in November 1918, turned out to be a military massacre where three times more Christians died than Jews. The so-called pogroms in Pińsk in March 1919 turned out to be work of a panicky lieutenant, whose order to execute thirty-five suspected Bolshevik infiltrators was described by a US investigator as “fully justified by the circumstances” the pogroms in Wilno in April 1919 and again in October 1920 were occasioned by the Red Army’s hasty retreats, and by military reprisals against suspected collaborators.¹³⁹

In turn, Polish émigré historian Adam Zamoyski, presenting typically Polish evaluation of the situation, wrote:

The collapse of law and order in November 1918 produced a rash of anti-Jewish outrages in country areas and in towns such as Lwów and Pińsk. Further violence and some shootings took place in the wake of military operations between the Poles and the Bolsheviks, since some leaders of the [Jewish] Bund had called on all Jews to further international revolution by supporting the Red Army. Hostility towards the Jews was inadvertently heightened by American and British Jewish pressure groups at Paris Peace talks of 1918. It was at their insistence that such states such as Poland were made to sign “Minorities Treaties”, which subjected their treatment of their Jewish citizens to international scrutiny. As well as encroaching on their sovereignty, it was an insult to the Poles with their long tradition of toleration... In the first two years of Polish independence, powerful groups of American and British Jewry were seen to be advocating the curtailment of Polish sovereignty apparently in unison with German interests, while Jews were in the forefront of the Bolshevik invasion of 1920. The average Pole felt the Jews were not on the same side as him.¹⁴⁰

What one can probably easily agree on is that Gibson’s outlook on the Jewish question was consistent with views of the US government. American historian Frank W. Brecher characterized the main features of these views in the following way:

¹³⁹ N. Davies, *God’s Playground*, vol. II, pp. 262-3.

¹⁴⁰ A. Zamoyski, *The Polish Way. A Thousand Year History of the Poles and their Culture*, New York 1988, p. 345.

- The East European Jew was closely associated with, if not the actual leader, of the Communist world movement, which represented the major extant threat to Western interests in Europe and elsewhere
- If the Jew was the victim of popular violence, it was largely his own fault, due to his revolutionary activity, rapacious economic behavior using business methods “that would not be tolerated in the United States,” cultural separatism, and political disloyalty to his particular country of residence
- Religious bigotry hardly played a role in anti-Jewish persecution¹⁴¹.

According to Brecher, Washington politicians, and Gibson himself, believed that to solve existing problems, Jews should reform themselves, become “team players”, and blend in with their country’s citizens, just as the assimilated Jews had done in the West. For most of the Jews, these were wrong, prejudiced perceptions and unacceptable proposals.

Whatever the exact truth about the situation in the Polish territories was, the controversies that were caused by different views on the treatment of Jews and over Polish-Jewish relations in the aftermath of World War I had an impact on the minds of the people involved and on the relations between Jewish and Polish communities in America.¹⁴² Each side took from the press what it wanted to see. For many American Jews the reports and subsequent press articles re-enforced their convictions about the anti-Semitism of Poles and the mistreatment their co-religionists faced in Poland. In turn, many Polish-Americans, like many Poles in Poland became convinced that Jewish leaders organized anti-Polish campaigns aimed at weakening their new-born state. The involvement of the U.S. government and its officials in the “Jewish issue” in Poland did not help to improve relations between members of the two groups. Tensions, which had existed between both communities for some time, were significantly strengthened in the aftermath of World War I and, unfortunately, have continued since then.

¹⁴¹ F.W. Brecher, *Reluctant Ally*, p. 37.

¹⁴² On May 22, 1919, Felix Frankfurter wrote to Wilson: “The Polish Government must be bullied and brow-beaten into quitting its policy of extermination and persecution” (*Wilson Papers*, vol. 55, pp. 369 ff.; vol. 59, pp. 411 ff). Frank W. Becher pointed out, that “amazingly, when the true “extermination” actually came with Nazi Germany, now-Supreme Court Justice Frankfurter, according to historians of America’s response to the Holocaust, declined to do even the minimum to try to influence President Roosevelt to undertake immediate rescue action in favor of European Jews. Presumably, there was some cost to Jewish credibility during the Holocaust as a result of the hyperbole of 1919; note that several key personalities in the United States government during the Holocaust were active participants at Paris or senior officials in Washington.”: *Reluctant Ally*, pp. 35 and 129.