

THE POLES

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The Poles represent the northwestern branch of the Slavonic race. They speak Polish, a member of the Western Slavic branch of the Indo-European language family. It is most closely related to Belorussian, Czech, Slovak, and Ukrainian. From the very earliest times the Poles have resided on the territory between the Carpathians, Oder River, and North Sea. Boleslaw I "Chrobny" or the Brave (967-1025) united all the Slavonic tribes in this region into a Polish kingdom, which reached its zenith at the close of the Middle Ages and slowly declined in the mid to late eighteenth century. Hostility to Polish nationalism formed a common bond between the Russian, Prussian, and Austrian governments. Thus, Poland was partitioned four times. The first partition (August 1772) divided one third of Poland between the three above-named countries. The second partition (January 1793) mostly advantaged Russia; Austria did not acquire land. In the third partition (October 1795), the rest of Poland was divided up between the three autocracies. After the defeat of Napoleon and collapse of his puppet state the Grand Duchy of Warsaw (1807-1814), a fourth partition occurred (1815), by which the Russians pushed westward and incorporated Warsaw. Until then Warsaw had been situated in Prussian Poland from 1795 to 1807. Potent anti-Russian sentiment has long prevailed among the Poles who are predominantly Catholic, especially in the

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as evidenced by four popular uprisings against the Slavic colossus to the east: 1768, 1794, 1830-1, and 1863. According to the 1990 census about 8,400,000 Poles resided in the Russian Empire.

Finally in 1918, an independent Poland was reconstituted. Later in August 1939 a pact was signed between Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union, which contained a secret protocol authorizing yet a fifth partition of Poland. "In the event of a territorial and political rearrangement of the areas belonging to the Polish state the spheres of influence of Germany and the U.S.S.R. shall be bounded approximately by the line of the rivers Narew, Vistula, and San." The next month Hitler's Germany invaded Poland; the Red Army did not interfere.

After more than four decades of the Cold War, during which Poland was a Soviet "satellite" and belonged to the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact, partially free elections were held in 1989. The Solidarity movement won sweeping victories; Lech Wałęsa became Poland's first popularly elected postcommunist president in December 1990. In 1999 Poland joined NATO, along with Hungary and the Czech Republic.

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