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Poland in the 'Paris system': self-determination, stereotypes, and decisions in 1919

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One of the most important questions at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference was what to do about the newly re-created state of Poland. The Paris peacemakers realised the importance of the settlement, thanks in part to dire warnings about Poland's future, and the leaders spent much time discussing the territorial settlement. Yet discussions of this important question regularly strayed from debates about policy to incorporate understandings of Polish national character. In particular, the leaders of the so-called Big Three, Britain, France, and the United States, connected expert opinion and the broader political landscape to stereotyped understandings of national character, among other factors. With reference to scholarship on stereotyping, this article analyses how developing attitudes on Polish national character became integrated into the complex settlement of Poland's borders. The peacemakers' decisions, which were a compromise between different points of view, reflected interconnected understandings of the Polish settlement.