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## Immigration Laws and the Foreign Visitor

United States laws passed since 1950 have seriously restricted the freedom of foreign citizens to visit our country. It is reasonable to examine again the effects of these laws upon the development of knowledge in the arts and sciences, upon security, and upon the image they create of the United States abroad.

Any restriction of communication has a deleterious effect upon the growth of knowledge. Formal and informal meetings of scholars are one of the most effective modes of communication. The current restriction on the visits of individual foreign scholars and scientists to the United States unquestionably limits the opportunity for the interchange of ideas here. Moreover, international conferences of learned societies are held less frequently in the United States than they might be because of the hazards and frictions that are created for some people; yet these same people might in the end get visas. Thus the restrictions on visits affect a much larger group of learned men than those whose visas are actually denied or delayed. Only a small fraction of United States citizens can afford to attend international meetings in foreign countries, while many could attend such meetings here. Yet it is obvious from history that the arts and sciences develop in an international field. Any people who build fences that limit this cross-fertilization may well make their own section of the field less productive than it would otherwise be.

Such restrictions can be justified only on the ground that they are essential to security. But our measures are gaining for the United States little or no security. The foreign scholars who are being excluded could do little or no harm under the conditions of their visits, even if they wanted to. They are not invited to visit classified projects; they are invited only to contribute to, and stimulate, the development of our knowledge in open meetings. Any patriot should be in full sympathy with all useful programs in behalf of security, but it is well to recall the classic illustration: the scientific knowledge that made possible the production of atomic energy was brought to this country voluntarily by certain of our foreign colleagues from countries with which we were at war. This supports the view that an open and free country stands to gain more than it stands to lose by virtue of its unrestricted policies.

A restrictive policy toward foreign visitors works against our general welfare in still another way. Our seemingly arbitrary restrictions on the visits of our foreign colleagues have inevitably contributed to the impression that we mistrust them. An antipathy to the United States seems to be developing abroad, an antipathy that did not previously exist, along with a tendency to disdain us as we have disdained those other nations that have restricted freedom. The United States is damaged by the loss of the prestige and affection it once enjoyed as the land of the free.

It seems clear that our country should do everything it safely can to keep the doors open and to welcome guests who can give us much. Indeed the greater safety lies in such a course. It is to be hoped that the Congress will liberalize the statutes governing the entry of visitors and phrase the new laws so that they cannot easily be interpreted illiberally.

—JOHN E. BURCHARD

*This editorial is based on statements made by Dean Burchard as president of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences before the United States Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship Laws, 1 Dec. 1955.*