

# Notices

of the American Mathematical Society

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## Mathematical Vitality versus Constraint of Foreigners

At the 1997 meeting in San Diego, the AMS Council passed a resolution deploring the intent of "The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996" to restrict visits by foreign nationals. In particular, the Council is concerned about the potentially adverse effects of Section 641 of this act on international mathematical contacts. This section instructs universities to set up surveillance operations on foreign students and visitors with F, J, and M visas. While the Act (and particularly Section 641) is of considerable concern to all academic disciplines, it is especially disturbing to the American mathematical community, which since its inception has benefited enormously from foreign contacts.

In her recent illuminating article "Historical contours of the American mathematical research community", Karen Parshall details the crucial contribution of foreigners to U.S. mathematics. The emergence of the American mathematical community in the second half of the nineteenth century might be said to date from the founding of Johns Hopkins University and the hiring of the British algebraist J. J. Sylvester in 1876. In subsequent decades, students from the dominant mathematical centers in Europe (e.g., Klein in Göttingen) spread over the U.S. and formed a foundation on which mathematical research in the U.S. was built. In the 1930s American mathematics received a tremendous boost from the migration of mathematicians fleeing tyranny in Europe: for example, Artin, Brauer, Noether, Siegel, Courant, von Karman, von Mises, Neyman, von Neumann, Friedrichs, and Weyl came at this time. More recently, waves of research mathematicians from the former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and China continue to stimulate and enrich U.S. mathematics. Nowadays visits by foreign mathematicians inform the American mathematical community of much new mathematics and create many opportunities for collaborative research. Moreover, in many mathematics departments, my own included, a substantial percentage of the faculty is foreign-born. It should be noted that this influx of foreigners, although beneficial in many ways, has also contributed to an undesirably tight job market.

Short-term visits and long-term stays of foreign mathematicians are undeniably of enormous importance to the continued vitality of American mathematics. For this reason the AMS should do all within its power to change and challenge the adverse provisions of the recent immigration act as they affect mathematicians.

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