LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Presidential Nomination by Petition?

I recently received the September 2017 AMS *Notices*, which contains the information on the presidential candidates. Professors Pipher and Williams are eminently qualified, and whichever one is elected will no doubt be an excellent president.

Nevertheless I wonder if it would be appropriate to allow nomination by petition for AMS president (as it is now for other officers and the Council). This is the practice for many academic and professional organizations. I feel it would increase participation by the membership and allow for greater diversity. One could require a substantial number of supporting signatures to preclude frivolous nominations.

I urge the officers of the AMS as well as the president elect to set in motion a procedure for nomination by petition for president.

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EDITOR'S NOTE. Voting in the current election closes November 3, 2017. See www.ams.org/about-us/governance/elections/election-info.

Travel Ban, Lincoln, and Beethoven

Thank you for the story about mathematicians affected by the travel ban in the August 2017 *Notices*. I recently went to an LA Philharmonic concert where the program was Copland's *Lincoln Portrait* and Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*. *Lincoln Portrait* features excerpts of Lincoln's speeches and writing, the first of which, from his 1862 message to Congress, is:

> Fellow citizens, we cannot escape history. We of this congress and this administration will be remembered in spite of ourselves. No personal significance or insignificance can spare one or another of us. The fiery trial through which we pass will light us down in honor or dishonor to the latest generation. We, even we here, hold the power and bear the responsibility.

It was impossible not to think of the current administration. Following that, the "Ode to Joy" in Beethoven's Symphony became a prayer for peace and reconciliation for all mankind. I hadn't expected it, but the program seemed to be the orchestra's response to the question, "How do we, as musicians, respond to the catastrophic situation that confronts us?" That got me thinking: how do we respond, as mathematicians? I don't think this story about the travel ban was the full answer, but it is something. Thank you for that.

—*Lyla Fadali*
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More to Internationalism than Migration

Moon Duchin's timely commentary in the August 2017 *Notices*, paired with an article on the Travel Ban and another on a new Global Math Project, drew important attention to the importance of migration and international outreach in the history and current situation of American mathematical leadership. All three pieces, in their own ways, focus on the wealth of talent from foreign shores that Americans would stand to lose, whether through policies of exclusion or simply a failure to connect and encourage. They ask us to appreciate the great contributions from migrant mathematicians in the past and to imagine what future migrants may bring to our mathematical institutions.

My own research on the history of American mathematical internationalism suggests two corollary points to keep in mind that take our focus away from migrants and migration themselves.[1] One is about the structural importance of an international outlook, regardless of whom it brings in from abroad. The other is a cautionary point about the politics of internationalism, and the need to keep a critical perspective on the rhetoric of openness.

While the stories of high-profile migrant mathematicians may be more visible, detailed recent research by historians (including myself) has shown that American internationalism required structural changes to the nation's mathematical institutions that may have been even more significant than migration itself for the mathematics profession, both domestically and internationally. Americans developed an internationally-oriented mathematical community led primarily by American-born mathematicians well before the famous influx of World War II refugees. (Indeed, L. E. Dickson, the subject of another piece in the

[1]: *See especially Michael J. Barany, Distributions in Postwar Mathematics, PhD dissertation, Princeton University, 2016, available at* mbarany.com/publications.html.

August *Notices*, was among the architects of this posture.) Convinced that the key to mattering in the discipline was to maintain strong ties to Europe, Americans approached everything from travel to publishing to the organization of research and teaching with Europe in mind. Toward the mid-twentieth century, American funding bodies and academic institutions prioritized international travel, international fellowships, and international publishing, including to sites beyond Europe. This redounded to mathematicians in the United States regardless of their countries of origin by helping forge vital connections and exchanges. The infrastructure required to look to the world made domestic mathematics stronger, beyond just what it enabled those from afar to contribute. When assessing the value of internationalism, it is therefore important to consider its homegrown beneficial effects, not just what it welcomes from abroad.

But we must be cautious about the values and priorities that get set aside in the name of internationalism. Tellingly, American apologists for Nazi Germany used the rhetoric of international understanding to excuse the latter regime's treatment of Jewish scholars. Just months before the German invasion of Poland, German mathematician Helmut Hasse confidently urged an American colleague to be "truly impartial and hence genuinely international" during an American debate over how to respond to Jewish mathematicians' dismissal from the Zentralblatt für Mathematik—a debate that led to the creation of the AMS's Mathematical Reviews. The American organizers of the 1950 International Congress of Mathematicians turned time and again to the language and ideals of internationalism and its associated impartiality, which helped them ignore their manifold shortcomings in including mathematicians of any political views from across the Iron Curtain and those with leftist views from the West. It also helped them dismiss the suggestion of awarding an invited address to Howard University's David Blackwell as a leading Black mathematician at an American HBCU, and their focus on mathematical fields and institutions meant they did not raise an eyebrow at the lack of women nominees for invited addresses. Throughout this history, American elites used a rhetoric of internationalism to claim the organizational forefront of the discipline while downplaying non-nation-based forms of discrimination and prejudice in mathematics.

Mathematicians should stand up for international values of inclusion, access, and exchange, which strengthen the discipline in many ways, both overt and subtle. At the same time, powerful members of the mathematical community must be responsible for recognizing that inclusion and exclusion come in many forms, and that internationalism should not be an end in itself.[2]

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Barany[2]: *Hat tip to the excellent new AMS* inclusion/exclusion *blog.*

Make March 20th Hypatia Day

The death of Maryam Mizrakhani in July of this year again raised the question of the proper recognition of women in science.

Let me bring your attention to an online petition I initiated in March 2016 after publishing a paper that solves a 1,600-year old history puzzle.[1]

A famous female mathematician and astronomer, Hypatia, a daughter of Theon, lived in the fourth and fifth centuries CE in Alexandria. Her death (actually barbaric murder at the hands of a clique of Christian zealots) symbolized the transition from Antiquity to the Dark Middle Ages. The astronomical/calendrical background, related to the determination of Easter, is explained in my article in *Vigiliae Christianae.*[2]

Since, according to my reconstruction, Hypatia's last days were dedicated to finding the exact time for the vernal (spring) equinox, I propose remembering Hypatia annually on the day of the vernal equinox. By local time in Alexandria, the vernal equinox in the years 2016–2050 falls on the same date, March 20th, as that in 415 CE, the year of her murder. Therefore March 20th is an ideal date in our era to commemorate the first female astronomer and to celebrate women in science more generally. Let us make March 20th Hypatia Day!

—Ari Belenkiy
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We Don't Need "so-called"

To all editors, referees, and authors:

I have noticed an increase in use of "so-called" in many math papers. It can have a pejorative or at least disparaging sense, cf. the secondary dictionary meaning: "used to express one's view that a name or term is inappropriate." Examples include "so-called Islamic State," "so-called Caliphate,"' and "so-called leaders."

There is no need to use *so-called* in math papers. Authors can use italics, for example, *operad.* IFF the author really thinks something needs to be said, use "what is called" or "what is known as."

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Belenkiy1: *At the time of this writing, the petition has more than 900 signatures from 53 countries, representing all five continents. The petition is at* `https://www.change.org/p/canada-s-parliament-commemorating-the-first-female-astronomer-hypatia-of-alexandria`.

Belenkiy2: `booksandjournals.brillonline.com/content/journals/10.1163/15700720-12341264`.