

# A Free Trade in Ideas

By ROBERT F. KENNEDY, *Attorney General of the United States.* This article is adapted from a recent talk before the National Workshop of the Council on Student Travel.

WHILE I was in Indonesia last year, during a question period a young student asked me about the United States, describing its economy as "monopolistic capitalism."

When he made that statement, about half the student body applauded and accepted that description of the United States. So I said to him, "What do you understand by that? What do you understand is going on in the United States that fits that description? You are a student and have had the advantage of an education. What is in the United States that fits that description?"

He simply sat down.

"Anybody who laughed, anybody who applauded," I said, "anybody who agreed with that description, come forward and tell me what in the United States meets that description."

No one came forward.

There was a great lesson in this silence. We had not been getting the truth about America to the world—particularly to the young intellectuals, the future leaders of foreign nations. Meanwhile, Communism—armed not with truth but with intensive, attractive propaganda—has been turning them against us.

Forty years ago Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes said, "The ultimate good desired is better reached by free trade in ideas. The best of truth is the power of the thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market."

There is a powerful competition of ideas in the world today and its significance is both clear and cosmic. We compete with a system whose goal is political domination of the world, and which seeks that goal militarily and economically as well as ideologically.

Our goal is that the world be dominated in a different way—by full freedom, individual dignity, and personal prosperity. I am confident that we will win this competition and achieve our goal. Our system provides 180,000,000 examples of the fact that freedom can be the foundation of a successful social system. We have the truth on our side.

It would be comforting to think that

this is enough. However, as I learned coldly and clearly on my trip around the world last year, it is not enough. For the truth to be effective, it must be told. And the truth about America, the truth about a free and prosperous democracy, is not well enough known abroad. It can only become well enough known if enough Americans travel abroad, talk with the people, and let them know the truth about themselves and the country they live in. And few people are better able to perform this urgent task than students.

Just before leaving Indonesia, I met with another group of students. There were thirty in the group, including about five Communists. They, too, criticized the United States for being imperialistic and colonialistic. Yet when I asked them about Hungary and the Berlin wall, the only response I could get from the Communist spokesman was: "We don't want to discuss details."

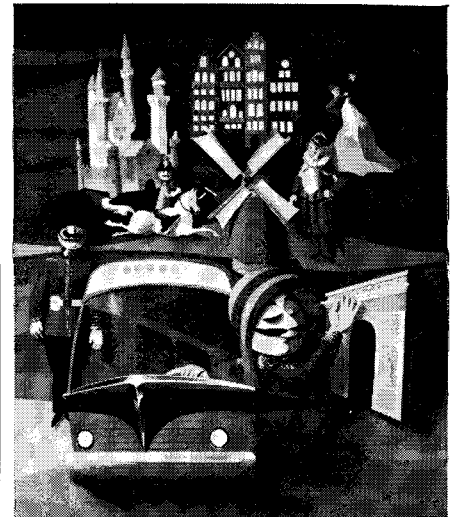
Even more significant was what happened a half-hour later. Five of the students came up to me. They were very friendly and interested in the United States and they talked about the meeting. I had made some good points, they said. "Those points regarding Communism should be made more frequently. You are absolutely right about Berlin and the wall."

One of the American reporters with us asked them, "Why didn't you say something at the time? Why didn't you speak out?"

The response was deeply disturbing: "We just don't do that in our circles when we are among students."

In other words, they had been intimidated for such a long time that they were afraid to speak out, even at a rare time when they knew they were listening to the truth.

HOW can we respond to such propaganda success, to such intimidation, and to such misconceptions about the nature and the motives of the United States? Certainly the efforts of the United States Information Agency and other government and private agencies are having some effect. But I think, in the final analysis, the truth can only be told in person. And it can, perhaps, best be told not by officials of one country talking to students of another, but by those with the common bonds of youth and curiosity, exploring each other's countries and each other's minds—in Justice Holmes's phrase again—"by



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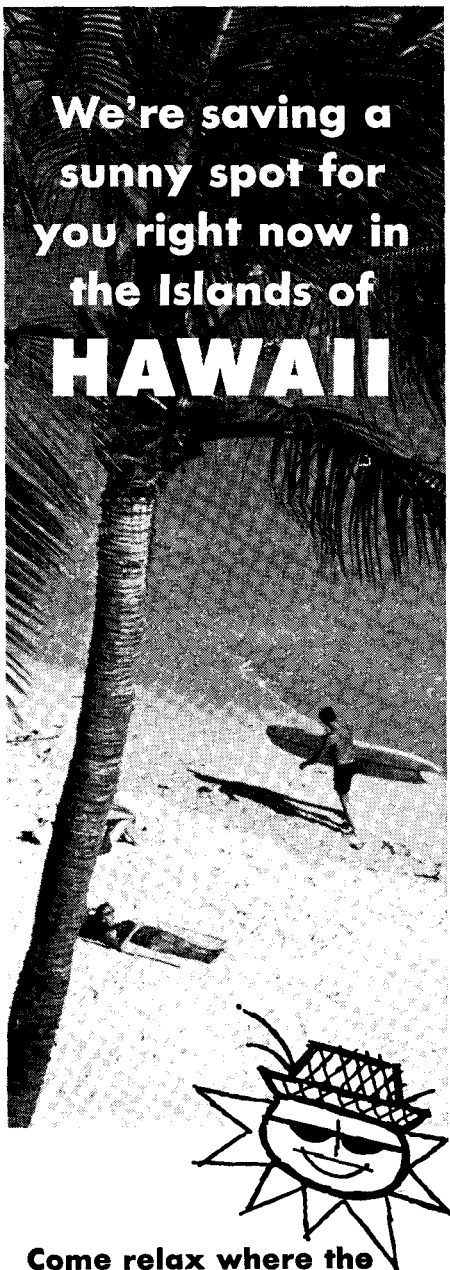
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free trade in ideas." Student travel indicates how successful such exchanges can be in promoting personal and national understanding.

Recently a newspaper editor from the South returned from an eight-week trip through the Caribbean and South America and made a number of recommendations on what we should do to counter the lack of accurate information about the United States. Among other things, he recommended sending American students, well briefed and able to speak Spanish, either to visit these countries or to enroll in their universities as students.

There are vivid and enormously heartening examples of the success of such efforts, such as that of two young Americans, William Crofut of Cleveland, Ohio, and Stephen Addiss of New York City, who toured Africa not long ago under the auspices of the State Department, with a banjo and guitar.

They were given none of the buildup that well-known performers might have received, and yet they made an enormously favorable impression for their country and its way of life. They disregarded all kinds of physical hardships and sang in village markets, homes, and schools, in many cases to audiences that had never before seen an American. Their rendition of native songs provoked great excitement in Kenya and elsewhere. One folk song authority said after a concert that "this is the first time a white man has learned an African song to perform before an audience [in Kenya]." After a concert in Kenya, the student audience followed them out of the hall, singing a traditional good-bye song—an honor never before accorded any visitor.

**A**NOTHER remarkable example of the efforts of young Americans abroad is that of Miss Ann Brownell, the daughter of a distinguished predecessor of mine, Herbert Brownell. She spent eight months in Caracas, Venezuela, where she was able to know many students. One was an important student leader, a young man who was vehemently anti-American and just as vehemently pro-Castro and pro-Communist. He had been to Los Angeles, where he saw slums, saw prejudice against Mexicans. He also had been to Cuba and was convinced the only hope for his country lay in Communism. Miss Brownell wrote, after her return, that "he wanted to know how I could possibly be a member of a capitalist society. His knowledge of the United States was nineteenth-century—Wall Street, the trusts, monopolies." She talked to this student leader at great length about things like the antitrust laws and our climate of economic, political, and social progress.

"It was obviously the first time he had thought of some of the things he was saying," she wrote. He still continued to criticize America in his public speeches—in order to maintain student political favor—but in private conversation he never brought these things up again. "I think he was reconsidering his attitude," wrote Miss Brownell.

There is, however, another need that parallels sending young people abroad. That is that they be informed.

Every American knows in his heart the truth of the democratic way of life. But a nice warm feeling in the heart doesn't take the place of knowing what you are talking about. There is no shortage abroad of questions—often belligerent—about American life. Americans who go abroad should do so with a sense of responsibility for providing full and factual answers.

**I**T is not enough simply to send thousands of students abroad and believe, that, because they are nice young boys and girls who "mix," this will be sufficient. If they go to Germany and don't know anything about the Berlin wall; if they go to Indonesia and don't know about the West New Guinea problem; if they go to African countries and don't know what we are trying to accomplish at home in the field of racial discrimination; if they are good-looking, pleasant, eager—and uninformed—we are just not going to get the job done. It would be better for them to stay home.

If our young people are to accomplish good abroad they must know something about the United States—a little bit more than that George Washington was the founder of our country and its first President. They must know our literature and our culture and be able to talk about what we believe.

There is no point in trying to make the United States out to be a country without faults, where everything is fine between labor and management, where there are no civil rights difficulties, and where we have no unemployment problems. This kind of approach simply will not be accepted. Students abroad must discuss our problems intelligently, admit our problems, and must say what we are trying to do about them. This is, after all, one of our country's great strengths—we admit our problems but we try to take action to solve them and face up to our responsibilities.

The need is to be candid about our problems and to be informed on what we're doing about them. Unlike the highly trained Communist infiltrators and propagandists, we have no "party line" in this country. Nor is there need of one. The facts—as opposed to the stereotypes exploited by our adversaries—will speak for themselves.



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# SHOULD EVERY STUDENT TRAVEL ABROAD?

By JAMES F. FIXX

**A**N AMERICAN co-ed, one of the top students in her class, recently went to study for part of the summer at a well-known European university. Anxious to improve her use of the language, and assured by a travel agent that the best way to do so was to stay at a native *pension*, she rented a room in a lodginghouse just off the campus. Everything went well until her fellow lodgers, mostly European students, discovered that she was an American. Immediately, egged on by a gleeful landlord and landlady delighted at the windfall of a free language lesson in their midst, the students insisted on speaking nothing but English. Outnumbered, the American found herself having to speak kindergarten English instead of learning the language she had come to Europe for. She and her parents, who were paying the bills for the European trip, had to write off a good part of the \$1,500 total as a lesson in the perilous ways of the world of travel.

This student's experience suggests the kind of pitfall that can sour the enthusiasm of even the most earnest and intrepid college-age traveler. At its best, the burgeoning American enterprise known loosely as educational travel can be, as its promoters say, a uniquely valuable lesson in international understanding; but too often it turns out to be an experience that yields only disillusionment, frustration, and a justifiable sense of having been cheated in the pursuit of an honest and worthwhile goal. This danger was underlined by a committee of representatives from the Association of American Colleges who met in 1960 under a Ford Foundation grant to explore the assets and liabilities of educational travel. In its report the conference observed that "many programs are set in motion with only the vaguest goals and objectives. . . . In order to achieve positive values, programs must be based on clear and valid educational aims."

American educators, while largely enthusiastic about the benefits of educational travel, are becoming increasingly concerned about its abuses and disappointments as the numbers of wandering scholars rise each year. Less

than a decade ago, in 1954, fewer than 24,000 American students traveled abroad; in 1962, according to the U.S. Department of State's Passport Office, the figure was 103,510, and it is expected to increase even more this year. Of these students, a large number will go overseas independently or on conducted tours that have no specific academic purpose; they simply want to see foreign countries and learn what they can in a relatively superficial way. Roughly half, on the other hand, will go abroad with a serious academic goal and will participate, whether for college credit or not, in seminars, sessions at European universities, study tours, and the myriad other educational programs from Paris to Tokyo, from Sydney to Warsaw, that are available to Americans. But whatever program they choose, most of them will be spurred to their travels by some sort of educational goal, however vague. And the result of those travels will determine, to one degree or another, the quality of their entire college education, particularly where their view of the world beyond the home campus is concerned.

Clearly, as 1963's record June exodus approaches, it is worth wondering just what the students and their colleges expect—and what they are in fact likely to get. Will they, in Philip Wylie's phrase, "bask in brassy ignorance and bristle with prejudices"? Or will they have been prepared in advance to view a foreign culture with the sympathy, respect, and open-mindedness needed to learn anything of significance from it? And, just as important, will the overseas programs in which they participate afford them the opportunity to discover something more about a foreign country than simply their own private reaction to it? For this seems to be a peculiarly American danger. As University of Chicago historian Daniel J. Boorstin writes in "The Image—Or What Happened to the American Dream," "As a nation we are probably the most traveled people of our time, or of any time. What is remarkable, on reflection, is not that our foreign travel has increased so much. But rather that all this travel has made so little difference in our thinking and feeling." It is still possible, of course, for travel to be the mind-stretching experience it was for

