Correspondence

US visa changes leave postdocs in limbo

Six of us are postdocs from abroad who work in the United States. We are therefore deeply concerned about the latest uncertainties over US visas, announced last month (see *Nature* http://doi.org/d2h4; 2020). Coming on top of the havoc wreaked by the COVID-19 pandemic (see, for example, *Nature* **582**, 449–450; 2020), the changes mean that researchers' careers are now under grave threat.

Things were already difficult under the preceding visa regime. Those of us in this position were wary of visiting our home countries, in case our return to the United States was blocked. The US government's imposition of travel restrictions has made matters worse, thwarting even urgent trips back to our families.

Renewing a non-immigrant visa is next to impossible at the moment, and legal advice is hard to obtain because of the fluidity and confusion of the situation. Applying for a new visa is not an option, so long as embassies and consulates are closed and travel restrictions apply. Meanwhile, our projects and job applications are on hold.

We value the opportunity to work in world-class laboratories. In return, we contribute a highly motivated and affordable talent pool to our host institutions. We urge the United States to safeguard international postdocs to reinforce these mutual benefits.

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*On behalf of 7 correspondents, see go.nature.com/3f2pnyl

Landmark 100 years of climate modelling

This year marks the centenary of the seminal work on climate modelling by the Serbian mathematician and geophysicist Milutin Milanković.

In 1920, Milanković published his book *Mathematical Theory of Thermal Phenomena Caused by Solar Radiation*. This linked long-term climatic changes to astronomical factors that affect the amount of energy Earth's surface receives from the Sun. In collaboration with geophysicist Alfred Wegener and meteorologist Wladimir Köppen, Milanković used this model to determine Earth's past climatic cycles over thousands of years, culminating in the monumental and influential 1941 work *Canon of Insolation and the Ice-Age Problem*. This led to the recognition of regular changes in key astronomical parameters: the eccentricity of Earth's orbit around the Sun, and the obliquity and precession of Earth's rotational axis.

As a result, science could at last explain the distribution of ancient large-scale glacial deposits in areas that now have a temperate or warm climate. These periodic climatic oscillations, known as Milanković cycles, also explained the repetitive glaciations that occurred during Earth's history. Crucially, these cycles enabled prediction of future climate changes.

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Deconstruct racism in medicine

COVID-19 is four times more likely to severely affect African Americans than their white counterparts (see go.nature.com/37fffny). Structural racism in our society undoubtedly contributes to this stark difference. As physician-scientists, we have a duty to break this cycle of disadvantage through our clinical work, scientific inquiry and education efforts.

Health inequity is perpetuated by social, economic and environmental disparities in the African American community. Researchers focusing on patient-oriented studies should ensure that cohorts are representative of racial demographics. Too few people of colour currently enrol in clinical trials. This stems, in part, from mistrust, after the US Public Health Service's scandalous 1932–72 Tuskegee study of untreated syphilis in Black males (see S. M. Reverby *Nature* **567**, 462; 2019). Clinical researchers now have an obligation to patients and their families to advocate and educate on the risks and benefits of participation in clinical trials.

As educators, we must also remove the unconscious bias that affects student selection and commit to mentoring students of colour. This will expand the pipeline of under-represented scientists and better equip us to tackle racial disparities in a clinical setting.

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Dreadlocks and discrimination

As an Afro-Colombian soil ecologist with dreadlocks, I have encountered prejudice and scepticism about my profession countless times — from airport and immigration authorities, the public at outreach events and even colleagues at conferences.

Such experiences reinforce my conviction that, as scientists, it is our professional, civic and moral duty to strongly denounce and combat systemic and structural racism and its intersectionality with other forms of oppression and discrimination. We must study its causes (see E. Culotta *Science* **336**, 825–827; 2012), as well as its tragic consequences (see, for example, A. Mesic *et al. J. Natl Med. Assoc.* **110**, 106–116; 2018).

There is also plenty of work to do to eliminate racial under-representation in science. For example, a study published earlier this year shows that PhD students from under-represented groups in the United States innovate at higher rates than do those in the majority, but that their contributions are less likely to lead to academic positions (B. Hofstra *et al. Proc. Natl Acad. Sci. USA* **117**, 9284–9291; 2020).

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