

American Historical Association

October 5, 2004

The Honorable Colin L. Powell
Secretary of State
Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Powell,

We are writing as concerned historians to express our dismay over the United States' wholesale rejection last week of sixty-one visa applications from Cuban scholars and intellectuals. These Cubans had been invited to attend the national meeting of the Latin American Studies Association to be held in Las Vegas from October 7th–9th. As far as we can gather, no cogent explanation for this blanket rejection has been given by the Department of State.

Surely free enquiry and open exchange of ideas with scholars of all nations—including scholars from nations with ideologies considered antithetical to American values—are essential to the health of our democratic society. Such exchanges of ideas are also one of the ways by which we can endeavor to reduce tensions with those who have once been, or still consider themselves to be, hostile in various ways to our own values.

We are both especially conscious of this, since one of us (Jonathan Spence) has devoted his career to the study of modern China, and the other (James Sheehan) to the study of modern Germany. Both those countries, with which within living memory the United States was engaged in bitter and protracted warfare, are now considered important partners in our shared quest for a more secure world.

It is not too late to rescind the order denying visas to this particular group of scholars from Cuba. Furthermore, we believe that you can be a powerful spokesman for the values of flexibility and good judgment in the future, when similar types of decisions have to be made to allow foreigners to enter this country for purposes of scholarly exchange.

Yours sincerely,



Jonathan Spence, *Yale University*
President, American Historical Association

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "James J. Sheehan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "J".

James J. Sheehan, *Stanford University*
President-elect, American Historical Association

CC: Mr. Roger Noriega, Assistant Secretary for Latin America, *U.S. Department of State*
Professor Marysa Navarro, President, Latin American Studies Association, *Dartmouth College*
Professor Kristin Ruggiero, Director, Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies, *University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee*