

USIA Revisited

I am writing because I am a historian, a member of the OAH, a career officer in USIA, and the present Cultural Affairs Officer in Australia. Richard Curry's article in the November Newsletter about his experience here gives the impression that relations between USIA's Australian post and the academic community, including the Fulbright Commission, are characterized principally by hostility and contempt. I am concerned that publication in November 1983 of statements relating to those events of July and August 1981 might give the impression that they describe the present situation. They do not. I believe that relations between myself, my staff, and the academic community in Australia are excellent.

Last year, this post brought a record number of American speakers to Australia, the majority being academics and speaking at academic venues, the result of arrangements made in close consultation with scholars and university officials here. Some speakers presented strictly Administration viewpoints, but others criticized various aspects of current policies. One has had a long association with Democratic administrations; another was a former Democratic member of Congress.

Regarding relations with the Fulbright program, I am a member of its Board here and am completely, and harmoniously, involved in all of its principal activities. To give just one example of the cooperation between its office and mine, I recently arranged a complete Asian itinerary for an American Fulbrighter here who wanted to speak in other countries under USIA sponsorship.

My office works closely with the Australian and New Zealand American Studies Association (which once expressed its concern in these pages about the Curry affair). For instance, in consultation with that Association, we plan to bring three distinguished American scholars to its conference next August. Meanwhile, the Fulbright Commission will provide two others, for which USIA and I are, of course, in part responsible, one of whom, incidentally, is an officer of the OAH.

I do not say all of this in a spirit of self-congratulation, but simply to make it as clear as possible that relations today between USIA, the Fulbright program, and the academic community in Australia bear no resemblance to the trench warfare described in Dr. Curry's article in the November issue.

Harry B. Ryan, Cultural Affairs Officer, Canberra