

John Mc & Wilfred - New York Times

Oct 11 1983

McClintock mythology.

Dear John:

Barbara McClintock has been an inspiration to me for over 40 years; and I would not reduce by one iota the merit of her Nobel prize. In fact she had already earned it in the 1930's with her historic work on crossing-over in maize.

Your successor, however, "reminiscent of a myth -- e.g. 'stony silence' in 1951 -- that does not accord with my recollections nor the evidence, some of which I attach.

Add: she was elected to the National Academy of Sciences in 1944.

Add: from the 50's through to the present R.A. Brink at the Univ. of Wisconsin has systematically followed up on the gene instability in corn that Dr. Mc. reported in 1951.

CC HAZ

What is true is an egregious lack of public recognition for her work that makes the present-day acclaim all the more just. We don't have to resect history to that end.

Sincerely,

John.

p.s. - Barbara McClintock would not have been invited to the 1951 symposium unless the organizers had some glimmer of the importance of her work.

Between "stony silence" and "instant appreciation" is the reality of how to integrate the startling evidence she presented into a coherent scheme. That was hardly possible before, as Watson says, the science [of molecular biology] caught up with her. Perhaps some of the biochemists in the 50's were not well versed in maize genetics and it is their voices you hear

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cc: G/S
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