

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20554

June 25, 1969

IN REPLY REFER TO:

Professor Joshua Lederberg
Department of Genetics
Stanford University Medical Center
Stanford, California 94305

Dear Professor Lederberg:

I found several communications from you in different piles of correspondence here in my office and I did want to reply to your letter of June 9. I very much appreciate having a copy of Dr. Siegel's paper.

I was very pleased that we had the opportunity for even a brief conversation, and was very impressed with your article in the Post last Sunday. Let me try to answer some of your questions.

I believe that most of the motivation for our present television programming is to respond to the lowest common denominator of the largest possible audience. In an essentially three supplier market, this leads to the kind of programming we have. I do think that Madison Avenue is not well informed about public taste, and that television programmers are not particularly innovated in searching out or developing latent public desires for quality programming. I would point to some of the ratings that "quality" programs have received--some of the CBS playhouse productions were the highest rated in their market, and the hour-long special on Justice Black did very well. The ~~Resistor~~ piece on Japan was also very highly rated. I also think that controversial or unpleasant programming--where all difficult situations are not resolved in a space of a half hour, tend to upset people who see them and therefore, advertisers do not want to associate their products with such programming. I think this has adverse, direct and indirect, effects through this advertiser concern.

JOHN SMITH, Nielsen

Professor Joshua Lederberg

June 24, 1969

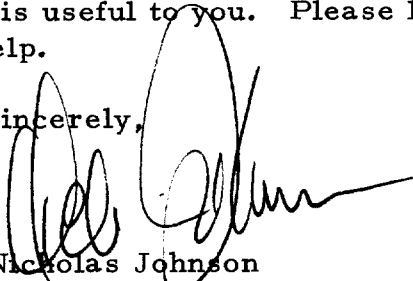
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Finally, I think that many of the people who are responsible for programming decisions are somewhat out of touch with the intellectual and youth interests in our Nation. The people who run the mass media tend to be the people who attend the rotary clubs and go mainly to corporation board meetings. I would appreciate knowing your reaction to these suggested factors.

You have asked about the current status of some other matters. The Commission is presently reviewing CATV policy--our most recent proposals in this area are enclosed. Several new Common Carriers have proposed competing systems with Bell network--the only case to come before us for decision is now pending before the Commission and has been pending for some time. As for the shared use of private lines, a recent recommended decision by the Chief of the Common Carrier Bureau has suggested that present Bell tariffs are unlawfully discriminatory. That question is now pending before the full Commission. And Bell, itself, has proposed some relaxation in its sharing provisions for private lines. Finally, the domestic satellite matter is now also pending before the Commission.

I hope this information is useful to you. Please let me know if I can be of further help.

Sincerely,



Nicholas Johnson
Commissioner

Enclosure

As it turned out, I discovered after our conversation you had sent me the material on your latest column which I did not then have before me.