



THE ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY

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NEW YORK, NY 10021

February 14, 1979

JOSHUA LEDERBERG

PRESIDENT

Dr. Baruj Benacerraf
Chairman
Department of Pathology
Harvard Medical School
25 Shattuck Street
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Dear Dr. Benacerraf:

I was delighted to hear, according to your letter of February 8th, that you will be creating a Department of Genetics at Harvard Medical School. The only question that can be raised about such a step is why it took so long!

I am not sure that I can add much to the wisdom already inherent in the excellent group on your ad hoc committee. However, it seems to me that the interface between clinical genetics and the powerful tools that have been developed recently in the technology of molecular genetics offers the most exciting of opportunities. I certainly do not mean the engineering of the human genotype which is fraught with scientific, technical as well as moral and political perils! I do mean that it has become possible to probe variations in the human genome directly at the molecular level and this will almost certainly be the seat of major new insights into the genetic determination of complex but important diseases: schizophrenia, atherosclerosis, diabetes, ...namely the whole panoply of ills in which genetic factors play a distinctive if now vaguely understood role. Within the very near future it should be possible to determine fairly directly and economically which grandparent is the source of a given chromosome that has segregated in the F2 and this in turn will give us, for the first time, a reliable handle on the genetics of complexly determined traits. The nosological classification that can result from this exercise will result in turn in a far deeper insight into the developmental and biochemical aspects of human variation and disease that is most likely to open up avenues for prevention, preemption, and treatment.

Dr. Baruj Benacerraf
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It is a bit more difficult to point to the individuals most likely to bring about these revolutions. However, you can hardly ignore Professor Wuet Wai Kan, now Professor of Medicine at the University of California/San Francisco who has already made an outstanding contribution in precisely this direction. I suggest you also give serious consideration to Dr. Mark Skolnick (about to be named as Associate Professor) at the University of Utah Medical School who is one of the most promising graduates of Stanford's Department of Genetics in recent years.

I am a little less certain about the Chair but you probably should try to go after Stanley Cohen who succeeded me at Stanford in a comparable role. Among the seasoned women in the field, you should certainly consider Dr. Margery Shaw at the University of Texas Medical Center, Houston. Of course you have plenty of talent in your own institution.

I am sure that some other names will come to my mind and I will think about forwarding them to you in due course.

Congratulations and the best of good wishes on this new venture.

Yours sincerely,


Joshua Lederberg

Encl.