June 4, 1973

Dr. R. D. Owen
Biology Department
California Institute of Technology
Pasadena, California

Dear Ray,

If you do not already have it, you may be interested in adding to your files the enclosed remarkable letter you wrote me in long hand under date of August 13, 1947 about Josh Lederberg's suitability for an appointment in Genetics at Wisconsin. There is a second reason for supplying you at this time with a copy of this document: Josh has recently requested in a letter to Jim Crow information concerning the circumstances of his recruitment here. This letter embodying your judgement of Lederberg's potentialities and those of your colleagues at Cal Tech, had a major influence on our decision, and so is directly relevant to Josh's inquiry. Would you be agreeable to supplying Lederberg with a copy of either (1) the complete letter or (2) a partially excised version. If you prefer the latter, then what parts should be stricken?

Your August 13, 1947 letter has been retrieved from the University Archives where it was transferred, with much other correspondence when the Genetics Department moved to its present quarters some 10 years ago. I searched it out in connection with a request from a special Archives Committee set up a few years ago by the Administration to obtain from each retired professor a summary of his activities deemed of special significance for the welfare of the University. Josh Lederberg's recruitment to the Genetics staff, of course, was a major event during my term as departmental chairman. A copy of your letter, about Josh will be included in my report to the special Archives Committee.

As you will recall, opinion was strongly divided within our departmental group concerning the desirability of adding Lederberg to our staff. Your thoughtful and incisive letter and an appraisal of Josh from E. W. Sinnott, then Dean of the Graduate School at Yale, and formerly on the agricultural staff at Storrs, Conn., tipped the balance among my associates in favor of voting to invite Josh to come to Wisconsin. Particularly significant under the circumstances was the group's acquaintance with you as a recent colleague and confidence all round in your judgement in a critical matter of this kind.

Josh's appointment was in inflection point in the development of an experimental biology at Wisconsin. Your letter was decisive at the time and it is an important historical document now. Should it be transmitted to Josh, and in what form?

(continued...)

This spring has been excessively wet here, so that we finished corn planting only a few days ago. Hope this year to learn whether passing a transposable element through a maize locus sometimes has a stable residual effect at the locus. Another question in which I am interested is whether Ds (one of McClintock's controlling elements) can be used to generate a spectrum of mutations at the opaque-7 locus on chromosome 10 of possible economic value. The single opaque-7 mutant now available conditions high lysine content of the endosperm proteins, a valuable characteristic which, however, is offset in part by undesirable changes in endosperm texture expressed as slow drying of the kernels at maturity and susceptibility to molds. To what extent can lysine content and seed texture be genetically varied independently of each other? I shall probably have to be reincarnated to get the answer to this question, because (to get the experiment in gear) I have first to obtain the transposition of Ds to O_7 from R locus about 25 crossover units distant. This form of mutagenesis however, has major possibilities in this instance so I am going to try for the transposition, even though the probability of success is low.

Let me say again how much Joyce, her mother, and I enjoyed our visit with you and June last winter. It was a delightful visit for all of us.

Our best wishes to both of you,

Cordially yours,

R. A. Brink
Emeritus Professor of Genetics

Encl.

ks