

SEP 10 1973

University of Wisconsin—Madison



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6 September 1973

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

Dear Josh:

Last year Jim Crow informed me of your interest in learning more about the conditions of your appointment to the Genetics staff here some 26 years ago. Just before Jim spoke to me about this I, as a retired person, had received a request from the Archives Office for an account of my past academic services that I deemed of special significance for the University. I stated to Jim then that my most useful single accomplishment was in helping to recruit you to the staff and that the relevant documents should be among those to be worked over in response to the broader request from the Archives Office. Jim was told that I would write you about the matter in due course.

There was a long and unexpected delay in locating the correspondence concerning your appointment. Eventually the "recruitment" file during my term as departmental chairman was found in the University Archives to which it had been consigned in 1962 when the Department moved to its present quarters. Either I had been unaware of this transfer or had forgotten about it. Enclosed are xerox copies of the documents in question that are available. The correspondence is complete, or nearly so, except for one important letter. This letter was from a distinguished geneticist at another institution who recommended you strongly for the Wisconsin position. His departmental colleagues, with whom he had consulted and who were named individually in the letter, however, had not been unanimous in this opinion. Since the views of the dissenters had been given in confidence, and certain of them are still living, the writer of the letter has asked me not to make the document available to you now. I had not expected this reply when I sought clearance of the letter, but I have informed the writer of it that his desires in the matter would be respected. The Archives policy in such a case is that an outsider will not be given access to the letter during the lifetime of the recipient, except with the latter's approval.

The favorable judgment of your achievements and potentialities presented in the letter being withheld was a decisive factor in persuading certain of my departmental colleagues, who were previously opposed, that we should invite you to join our staff. The views of Sinnott whose experience included several years on the staff at the Connecticut Agricultural College, in an academic environment resembling ours, also carried special weight with the group.

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Initially there was outspoken and determined opposition to inviting you here on the part of some members of the departmental staff. These individuals argued that even though we were agreed that promise in basic research should be the primary factor in making the selection it was important also that the appointee be agriculturally oriented. The view was expressed that because of your metropolitan background it was little short of folly to expect that you would adapt to a College of Agriculture environment. For several weeks it appeared that the outspoken critics, and others who were less vocal but seemingly were opposed, were in the majority. Bob Irwin and I, however, kept the deliberations open, with unwavering support for your candidacy from Ira Baldwin, then Dean of the College of Agriculture.

Opposition to inviting you to join us later softened. The letter from outside that I cannot supply you had much to do, in my opinion, with switching the position of the less determined opponents. Eventually a vote was taken, and a majority favored inviting you to join the staff.

A year or so after you arrived on the campus one of my colleagues who had been adamant in his opposition to your appointment remarked to me casually that "Lederberg seems to be doing exceptionally well. His performance, in fact, almost justifies the manner in which he was brought here." The dubious procedure implied was in deferring a departmental vote until the desired majority was assured. If this was a sin, it has indeed rested lightly on my conscience, thanks in particular to the exceptionally distinguished and lasting service you have rendered the University of Wisconsin.

With personal regards,

Sincerely yours,



R.A. Brink
Emeritus Professor
of Genetics

RAB:tm
cc: J.F. Crow