

CARNEGIE INSTITUTION OF WASHINGTON

DEPARTMENT OF GENETICS

COLD SPRING HARBOR, LONG ISLAND, N. Y.

20 February, 1950

Dr. Joshua Lederberg  
Department of Genetics  
University of Wisconsin  
Madison, Wisconsin

Dear Joshua:

I have been in quite a stew over Kennedy's application for an assistantship. He has been my assistant since he came here, and I know his capacities well. Dr. Demerec, who hardly knows him, gave him the application blank out of kindness, knowing that he was looking around for something for next year. I strongly advised him not to apply, but he didn't take my advice, and went ahead with it. He asked me to write a supporting letter, which I did, after much cogitation. I have adopted a policy of never refusing to write such letters, and of telling the truth, but not always the whole truth, on the assumption that perceptive examiners will take note of any significant omissions. If you have seen my letter, you will know what I mean. It is probably as damning as an outright testimonial of mediocrity, but somehow keeps me from feeling responsible for quashing someone's chances. Since you have asked me directly, I have no alternative but to tell you frankly what I think of Kennedy, and let my conscience take the consequences.

Kennedy is a nice guy, and has been a cooperative and quite satisfactory assistant. He works hard, follows directions, is conscientious and thorough, and usually understands the rationale of our experiments. He's pleasant, has a good sense of humor, and is very bright in some ways. However, he doesn't have the quality of intelligence required for advanced scholarship or first-rate independent thinking, or, at least, such is my opinion. I was not surprised to learn that his academic record is so poor, although he has facets of brightness that would not show up in that way. My overall judgment would be that he is only a fair bet for admission to graduate school, and a very poor one for the assistantship. I don't think you could expect him to do any better in graduate course work than he did as an undergraduate, although he has developed a feel for research that might carry him along. He really ought to be encouraged to go in the direction of industrial bacteriology, or some such area, where his particular abilities would be more likely to lead to success.

Thanks for your MGB note -- a good idea, which we intend to put into use here. We've used aluminum caps for everything but aeration tubes, but we never had that nice little brainstorm.

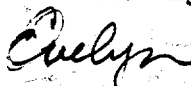
Formaldehyde is down on Demerec's list as nonmutagenic, though I seem to remember Beale getting dubious results with it, and not being able to make up his mind about it. I've never worked with it myself. Would like to know more about what

you are doing with germicides -- why only tantalizing tidbits?

I'm having a good time with lactose sectors. So far, results indicate correlations between frequency of certain sector types and the number of Robinow bodies per cell at the time of UV irradiation. Like any correlational attack, it doesn't establish a direct cause-effect connection, but nonetheless it's encouraging.

Aside from this, I am busy raising my small son, who is almost a year old and has already broken his first test tube. Greetings to Esther.

Sincerely,



Evelyn Witkin