

CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
PASADENA, CALIFORNIA

DIVISION OF BIOLOGY

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Prof. J. Lederberg
Genetics Department
Stanford University Medical Center
Palo Alto

Dear Josh,

I want to try a new idea out on you. It merely entails a reassessment of the goals of space biology. I would like to drop it in the pot in connection with the coming SSB discussions toward an explicit space program. These dissident thoughts were generated by my pondering the back-contamination problem. In my view, our concern with the dangers of back-contamination has obscured what should be the prime objective of the exobiological program: to bring back samples of the planets (uncontaminated by earth organisms) for examination at home. I think that this goal should be explicitly stated and that all other aspects of the program should be subordinated to it. I am convinced that the embargo policy is wrong. As Sturtevant said when I discussed the problem with him yesterday, it would be more logical to declare an embargo on all materials from the Antarctic.

A more formal statement is enclosed. This was originally intended to be a suggestion for rewriting the second half of the paragraph on p. 28 of your revised Exobiology draft--starting with "However, even the remotest risk" At first I tried to arrive at a compromise between our opposite views, but I found this to be impossible. I would, of course, like to get your reaction to this, as well as those of the other Westexers. I leave it to you to suggest whether this be by mail or by meeting. In either case, I would prepare a more detailed statement for circulation among the members.

Yours,



Norm Horowitz

P.S. As regards a director of the NASA Space Biology Program, I asked Beets, and, as I expected, he is not interested. He is now Acting Dean of the Faculty and will, in all probability, resign the chairmanship of Biology and become permanent Dean. He is also now on the President's Scientific Advisory Committee. In ~~other words~~ other words, he is busy. Sturt suggested Demerec for the job, thinks he still has plenty of energy. My own candidate is yourself.