



STANFORD UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTER

STANFORD, CALIFORNIA 94305

August 19, 1974

STANFORD UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
Department of Genetics
(415) 497-5052

President W. Ferguson
University of Connecticut
Storrs, Connecticut 06268

Dear Dr. Ferguson,

I am informed that Professors Ginsburg and Laughlin are being attacked as racists and that you are being pressed to dismiss them!

Indeed, if contrary to the fact these investigators were manifest racists, using their academic positions to legitimize repressive policies rather than the pursuit of new knowledge, you would face an agonizing dilemma of the bounds of free speech and free inquiry. That is not the problem here. To confuse reputable scientists like Ginsburg and Laughlin with a polemicist like Shockley is to encourage an attack on all truth-oriented research in the social and human sciences. The matter is even more curious, since by their reputation and the public statements known to me, Ginsburg and Laughlin can hardly be described as racists; on the contrary, they have worked hard to controvert pseudoscientific justifications of racism.

If they are successfully victimized, it will mean that the only acceptable answer to the Shockley's of this world is an equally emotional rhetoric and defamation, and a similar appeal to prejudgment in place of dispassionate scientific inquiry.

This illuminates why such unlikely targets, eminent scientists like Ginsburg and William Laughlin, are chosen for attack. There is ample precedent for the revolutionary doctrine of destroying the liberal center with its dedication to open discourse. Its success will be measured by the disruption of free inquiry, and by the transformation of every item of research and of education into class-struggle politics!

It can be argued that the appeal to objectivity in science is itself a political claim. I understand the merit of that allegation, but also the enormous costs of accepting it. If that is the issue in the current controversy, let it be identified and decided upon for what it is.

Others have expressed fears about the further pursuit of any research on human differences. For reasons that stem in an obvious way from the historical tragedy of our national past, race difference in the U.S. strikes me as among the least amenable areas of biological research - genetical, environmental and social factors are too complexly interwoven, not to mention too contentious, to be unravelled with the feeble methods available for such research today. The problematics of this situation

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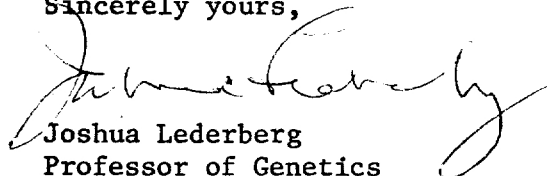
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must be clarified precisely so as to answer the racists, as well as to approach how to most efficiently invest resources to achieve social equality. But the only one who needs to fear such research is the racist-in-his-heart who believes that objective science might validate prejudice - an outcome that I for one vehemently reject. From this perspective some of the attackers may be the most tainted with racist ideology.

But this is not all really to the point, since Ginsburg and Laughlin have had only the most peripheral involvement with specific studies connected with race in the U.S. If they are under attack, it must be a tragic combination of misinformation about their actual scientific program, and a cynical campaign to convert academic inquiry into political polarization; a campaign that if successful here will find hundreds of more vulnerable targets in every field of "uncommitted" scholarship.

I have not read every word they have written that might be used against them, nor do I always agree with what I have read. Likewise, only a regime of thought-control would imply that I agree with every conclusion of others who support these men; just as I conceivably might share common ground with some of their critics. My own research programs have little to do with theirs. But I am shocked that they should be subject to a harassment that would soon destroy the academic tradition of quiet investigation and discussion of controversial issues.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Joshua Lederberg".

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics

JL/rr