

November 17, 1972

Dr. Evelyn Witkin
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Dear Evelyn,

It was a treat to see you and Hy again and to discuss some of the "old times" at Columbia.

If you have the inclination and the time some rainy afternoon I wonder if you could be persuaded to dictate an informal account of the intellectual atmosphere that characterized the turning points in genetics in the early 40's. Such documents are very hard to come by and will be invaluable in future years in constructing the history of a revolutionary stage in science.

I do not know if you have seen Martin Pollack's account of Griffith in the Journal of General Microbiology a couple of years ago. If you read this closely to try to examine what we really know you can see what a cloud there is over the history of that stage in bacteriology.

Our chat reminded me what an important part the anxiety about the Lysenkoist issue had in shaping the conservatism of some geneticists about the interpretation of new findings from bacteria. It helped explain why Dobzhansky was so preoccupied with "directed mutation" that this was the only way he could see how to label the pneumococcus transformation, in spite of the fact that looking on this as a genetic transfer would have given a much more parsimonious interpretation. I rather think that unfortunate phrase befuddled a great many people.

But I certainly do not want to bias the structure of any account that you would put down to paper.

I would even ~~ask~~ you to do this if you were the least bit reticent about letting me see it, although I would appreciate the opportunity as helpful background for some of my own writing. I will not attribute anything to you without your particular permission.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics

JL/rr