

October 13, 1965

Mr. P. S. Barrows
385 Bellaire Road
Del Mar, California 92014

Dear Mr. Barrows:

The officers of the Stanford Fund have asked me to comment on your correspondence of September 10.

As a geneticist, if I could ignore every other responsibility I might accept the trend of your assessment, even though there are many points on which I would have self-doubts as to their scientific certainty. These doubts would not deter me from a program for selective breeding of hunting dogs. But our responsibilities to human life are not that simple. Implementing reproductive policy for man would be very hard to accomplish in a way both effective and consistent with the personal freedoms and initiative we cherish most. In my own view, we simply do not have enough reliable knowledge of (1) what is actually happening, in historical perspective (we may be passing through a momentary transition) with respect to dysgenic differences in reproductive rate, and (2) the actual consequences to human performance in the next generation. Consider just the change in the technical environment over the last century: the innate skills needed to design a computer in a teamwork collaboration are not quite the same as to pioneer on the western frontier; we must be careful not to commit the species to overspecialized adaptations to a milieu that may soon be replaced by another one.

What then can we do? Certainly we have to dissolve irrational obstacles to family planning, which is least available where it is needed the most. Apart from anti-social legislation in some states, educational opportunity would seem to be the most important ingredient. Certainly it would be as irresponsible as it would be futile to advocate any kind of compulsion in this sphere before we had exhausted approaches based on enlightenment.

On the other hand much more research on human genetics and population biology is absolutely essential for any program that can hope to rest on science rather than bigotry. Our department is in fact involved in such research at several levels. The most pertinent is an exhaustive computer-based study of the raw data of the 1960 Population Census precisely on such questions as differential fertility. Even such obvious materials have never, in our view, been properly analyzed despite the many books that have been written on them. This work is already amply supported by research grants, as far as its present plans go.

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However, our department has its central interests in experimental work, and this study deserves more concentrated attention than we now give it. To be perfectly frank, I am advocating that the medical school establish a new chair of population studies. I can think of two or three outstanding possibilities for such a professorship but we are somewhat strapped for funds needed to pursue the matter aggressively.

I am sure you will understand that we could not associate such a development at the university with any preformed judgment of social or political objectives, whether yours, mine, or anyone else's. Its purpose is scientific inquiry and education, and we must take every precaution to protect its objectivity. Indeed, as the ultimate needs for endowing a program are several times \$100,000, we may receive contributions from donors of widely differing social outlook who agree on just one theme -- the importance of deeper scientific understanding of "man as an organism" (which happens to be the title of a course I teach here).

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics

JL:eif

cc: Peter E. Pratt
Director of Development, School of Medicine

P. S. You may be interested in a current issue of LIFE Magazine (10/1/65) which discusses "Will man direct his own evolution". To be perfectly frank, I personally do not put eugenics at the top of the agenda. Not that I decry its importance, But it has a time scale of many generations, and many more revolutionary developments in biology are changing all the ground rules at a much faster pace. That is, my view is that eugenics is only part of a more complex concern -bout man's control of his own nature, a responsibility we are woefully unprepared to exercise.