



University of Delaware



DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
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July 9, 1986

Dr. Joshua Lederberg
President
Rockefeller University
New York, NY 10021

Dear Dr. Lederberg:

I write to ask for your help in recounting an episode concerning you, the Du Pont Company, and uracil herbicides. Following the publication about Du Pont's discovery of uracil herbicides in the August 17, 1962, issue of Science, you wrote to Du Pont's president, Crawford H. Greenewalt, expressing alarm about the possible mutagenic effects of the uracils because of their relationship to 5-bromouracil (a known mutagen). Later, on October 9, 1962, you spoke at a Du Pont symposium ("Patterns of Change") and, from records I've seen, reiterated to "management" your concerns about commercializing the uracil herbicides.

Because of Du Pont's records retention policy, your letter to Greenewalt does not survive in the company. Would you still have a copy of it? Also, from the published proceedings of the symposium, I gather you raised the uracil issue in response to the question on genetic effects of drugs (pp. 89-90 of enclosed copy). Obviously, Du Pont did not publish these statements, but I wonder if you could add to what I already know. For example, how did Du Pont respond to your concerns? Did Conrad Edmund Hoffmann's work published in Nature (which was clearly sparked by your concerns) ease or eliminate them? Or do you still hold your original views about the uracil herbicides as possible mutagens?

I am currently writing a chapter on Du Pont's biochemical research in the post-World War Two era, which will be one of twenty chapters of a book, Science and Corporate Strategy: Du Pont R&D, 1902-1980 (to be published next year by Cambridge University Press). Du Pont's recently retired chairman, Edward G. Jefferson, commissioned me to do this study and granted me complete access to the corporation's records and the academic freedom to publish what I find.

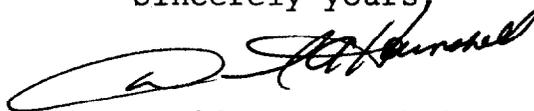
Dr. Joshua Lederberg

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The fact that Du Pont asked you to give one of the main addresses at the dedication of the Greenewalt Laboratory in 1984 obviously shows the great respect they have for you, and I would certainly like to benefit from your side of the story. If you believe it helpful, I will be happy to come to New York to meet directly with you.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. A. Hounshell", written over a horizontal line.

David A. Hounshell
Associate Professor

DAH:mem