

Phillips

UNITED STATES ARMY
CHEMICAL CORPS BIOLOGICAL LABORATORIES
FORT DETRICK, MARYLAND

CMIRD-BL-10-PD

6 December 1960

Dr. Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics
Stanford University
Palo Alto, California

Dear Joshua:

Your last letter arrived just as I was about to take off on a business trip which I combined with a Thanksgiving vacation and I am just now getting around to answering some of your specific questions.

I passed along your comments on the polyvinyl alcohol tape you were using to our people working on the partichrome and received back ~~from~~ ^{some} them ^{vw. 123} comments on our reasons for selecting cronar tape and ethyl stain which I am appending just as they were written. One point which Mr. Nelson did not make clear is that cronar tape has an extremely flat surface, it is really a selected tape for optical purposes, and hence can be counted upon to remain in focus as it passes over thru microscope field.

The references which Sol Nelson made to the early work with ultra violet and ultra violet stains refer back to the work Mittler did for us on the Polaroid contract, which I discussed in my last letter.

After two reminders, the NASA people finally sent me a copy of Ableson's letter on his thoughts concerning the necessity for sterilization. I could not see anything in it which should get them extremely excited. As long as he concurs in the necessity of sterilization of vehicles headed towards Mars, we might as well practice on those headed towards the Moon. My own feeling is that since there are so many divergent views as to what type of exobiology we might find, if any, on these extraterrestrial bodies that we should certainly proceed with caution until such time as somebody has been able to get up there and find out what the true situation is.

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(Dr. Joshua Lederberg)

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Incidentally, one effect of the letter seems to have resulted in a postponement of getting a policy statement out of NASA on their position concerning sterilization. The casual statement which appeared in our article in Science that they were "actively investigating means of preventing contamination" is the only thing yet which comes close to a public statement on their part. This article was reviewed and approved by them before publication and represents the strongest statement I could get from them. The original manuscript which contained a statement "It is the policy of NASA" was censored by them as I think I told you earlier. At the sterilization meeting, which we held in their headquarters last June, it was strongly urged that a new statement be issued, if not publicly at least to their own personnel and contractors, since the earlier statements had left questions in many peoples minds as to whether or not NASA would hold them to a sterilization requirement should difficulties arise. They are still, apparently, trying to write up a statement which the administrator will sign. The latest result of this indecision on their part is to postpone indefinitely the film they were planning to make on sterilization which was to be a companion piece, I understand, to the ones you, Calvin and Fox are making on extraterrestrial biology.

I have recently been approached by Dr. Essie White Cohn of Denver, Colorado, concerning my acting as chairman for a session on exobiology at the 1961 AAAS meetings. I am curious as to how many other people may have been approached earlier by her and declined. I talked this over with the NASA people and have decided to accept. I hope I will be able to get some help from you when I start trying to make some definite plans concerning this early next year.

Sincerely,

Charlie

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CHARLES R. PHILLIPS
Chief, Physical Defense Division