

January 13, 1965

Mr. Sargent Shriver
The Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. Foundation
1411 K Street, N.W., Suite 402
Washington 5, D. C.

Dear Sarge:

Thank you for your note of January 9 concerning Dr. Shockley's talk at Gustavus Adolphus University. You suggest trying to contact Dr. Shockley, but I am afraid it is a waste of time, since I had already talked to him when he was preparing his notes for this occasion, and found I really would not be able to get anywhere with him. I think you are quite right that he is very poorly informed indeed about some elementary principles of human genetics, not to mention the complexities of the problem that he chose to address himself to. You mention your concern about the destructive impact that this kind of discussion may have on the movement for enlightenment in the prevention and amelioration of mental retardation, and I would share your sentiments on this point. I do not know whether you would also agree that remarks like his are bound to be quite destructive to any sensible approach to trying to mitigate the population problem in general - we are certainly not going to get anywhere if we are identified with the view that large families should be a privilege only of the "upper classes". I hope the net effect of such nonsense is simply to remove the cloak of infallibility that the public mind may have attached to Nobel prize winners. Certainly in every other respect Shockley has every right to hold even the most obviously wrong position. I doubt that the best strategy is to get into a public embroil with Shockley, which would only help to further advertise and dignify a position that most sensible people have seen through long ago. I can certainly understand how irritating such a display might be, but unless you see strong pointers for a contrary move, my own inclination would be to forget it and pass on to more worthwhile occupations. If we stopped to correct every bit of nonsense we would hardly have time for anything else.

With best regards,

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics

Kennedy / Shriver