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THE ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY

pro bono humani generis

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Joshua Lederberg
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Dear Bill: Gibson

Thank you for your recent vignettes, in particular Barbara McClintock.

It's a vivid account; but I caution you about propagating the mythologies, esp. the reception of her paper at the 1951 Cold Spring Harbor Symposium. I was there!

Spradling's book review (enclosed) is an accurate account.

I also enclose a list of citations promptly after 1951 (till 1954), including my own, and Ernst Caspari's contemporary remark.

Cheers,

Yours sincerely,

Joshua Lederberg

(* Science 114:3a 1951)

Returning to Cold Spring Harbor she found her "plantation" of corn awaiting her scrutiny and bit by bit she devoted the next six years to a methodical interpretation of the changes seen in her plots of corn. Her annual reports to the Carnegie Institution in Washington, D.C., were treasure-houses of information that few understood, except the author, who just kept pressing on to a full understanding of corn genetics. Economic security only began when a lifetime MacArthur Foundation award was ~~given~~ made to her.

Six years later - after step-by-step analysis of what she was seeing in her "cornpatch" - leaf after leaf - with unusual patterns, she noted the "genetic crosses." Her 1951 paper summarizing her then massive data was not even discussed, nor reprints requested. By 1956, the doubts of her listeners had increased.

However, as her devoted biographer Evelyn Fox Keller puts it: "As she watched the corn plants grow, examined the patterns on the leaves and kernels, looked down the microscope at their chromosomal structure, she saw directly into that ordered world."

Only gradually did scientific leaders come to recognize the unique value of McClintock's basic work. "Things are much more marvellous than the scientific method allows us to conceive."

Dr. McClintock had many great personal qualities. She was an environmentalist lifelong. She hoped that students would find time to think! She certainly took the time, despite many frustrations. In 1983, the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine was awarded to her at age 81. She was the single recipient in that year - a rare honour for one individual. She died in 1992 at the age of 90.

Science Citation Index

1945 - 1954

JONES EP J GB GYN OR

MCCLINTOCK B

51 COLD SPRING HARB SYM 16					
BONNER DM	COLD S HARB		16	143	51
51 COLD SPRING HARB SYM 16 13					
BARCLAY PC	P NAS US		40	1118	54
BARRATT RW	ADV GENETIC	R	6	1	54
BRAUN W	AM NATURAL		86	355	52
BRINK RA	GENETICS		39	724	54
KAPLAN WD	"		38	630	53
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MCCLINTO.B	GENETICS		38	579	53
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MICHAELI.P	"		85	282	53
NEWCOMBE HB	GENETICS		39	619	54
"	J GEN MICRO		9	30	53
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STEBBINS GL	GENETICS		39	378	54
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