

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

JOSHUA LEDERBERG

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by

James J. Bohning

at

Rockefeller University

on

25 June, 7 July, and 9 December 1992

(With Subsequent Corrections and Additions)

LEDERBERG

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION
Oral History Program
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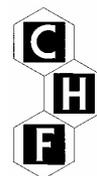
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JOSHUA LEDERBERG

1925 Born in Montclair, New Jersey on 23 May

Education

1944 B.A., biology, Columbia University
1947 Ph.D., microbiology, Yale University

Professional Experience

1945-1946 Columbia University
Research Assistant, zoology

1946-1947 Yale University
Research Fellow, Jane Coffin Childs Fund for Medical Research

1947-1950 University of Wisconsin
Assistant Professor of Genetics
1950-1954 Associate Professor of Genetics
1954-1959 Professor of Genetics
1957-1959 Chair, Department of Medical Genetics

1950 University of California, Berkeley
Visiting Professor of Bacteriology

1957 University of Melbourne
Visiting Professor of Bacteriology

1959-1978 Stanford University School of Medicine
Professor of Genetics (also Biology, Computer Science)
1959-1978 Chairman, Department of Genetics

1978-1990 The Rockefeller University
President
1990- University Professor

Honors

- 1957 National Academy of Sciences
- 1958 Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine
- 1960 Sc.D. (honorary), Yale University
- 1967 Sc.D. (honorary), University of Wisconsin
- 1967 Sc.D. (honorary), Columbia University
- 1969 M.D. (honorary), University of Turin
- 1970 Sc.D. (honorary), Yeshiva University
- 1979 Litt.D (honorary) Jewish Theological Seminary
- 1979 Foreign Member, Royal Academy of Sciences
- 1979 LL.D. (honorary), University of Pennsylvania
- 1980 Honorary Life Member, New York Academy of Sciences
- 1981 Sc.D. (honorary), Rutgers University
- 1981 Honorary Fellow, New York Academy of Medicine
- 1982 Fellow, American Association for the Advancement of Science
- 1982 Fellow, American Philosophical Society
- 1982 Fellow, American Academy of Arts and Sciences
- 1984 Sc.D. (honorary), New York University
- 1985 M.D. (honorary), Tufts University
- 1989 National Medal of Science

ABSTRACT

Joshua Lederberg begins the three-part interview with a description of his parents, family background and early years in New York. Lederberg knew from the second grade that he wanted to be a scientist, and experimented at home with his own chemistry lab. Lederberg cites Albert Einstein as being a positive role model in his formative years. After completing grade school in 1936, he attended the Palestine Conference with his father in Washington, DC. He graduated from Stuyvesant High School at age fifteen. Due to age restrictions, he had to wait until he turned sixteen before entering Columbia University. Lederberg spent the semester between high school and college at the American Institute of Science Laboratory. He received his B.A. in biology from Columbia in 1944. While in college, Lederberg did original research with colchicine, and worked with Francis Ryan on *Neurospora* and *E. coli*. At age seventeen, he enlisted with the U.S. Navy and was placed in the V-12 program, serving as a naval hospital corpsman. While working towards his Ph.D., Lederberg continued his research on bacteria and *E. coli*. After receiving his Ph.D. in microbiology from Yale University in 1947, he joined the University of Wisconsin as assistant professor of genetics, and expanded the University's bacteriology research. There, Lederberg first worked in salmonella strains with his graduate students. While with the University of Wisconsin, Lederberg won the Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine in 1958. Lederberg concludes the interview with a discussion of the University environment during the McCarthy era, reflections on his career decisions, and thoughts on chemical information science.

INTERVIEWER

James J. Bohning is currently a professor at Lehigh University. He has served as Professor of Chemistry Emeritus at Wilkes University, where he was a faculty member from 1959 to 1990. He served there as chemistry department chair from 1970 to 1986 and environmental science department chair from 1987 to 1990. He was chair of the American Chemical Society's Division of the History of Chemistry in 1986, received the Division's outstanding paper award in 1989, and presented more than twenty-five papers before the Division at national meetings of the Society. He has written for the American Chemical Society News Service, and He has been on the advisory committee of the Society's National Historic Chemical Landmarks committee since its inception in 1992. He developed the oral history program of the Chemical Heritage Foundation beginning in 1985, and was the Foundation's Director of Oral History from 1990 to 1995.

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