

Nirenberg

January 14, 1965

RAdm. D. S. Fahrney, USN (Ret.)
Committee on Science and the Arts
The Franklin Institute
Philadelphia 3, Pennsylvania

Dear Admiral:

You are kind to ask me for advice on the candidacy of Marshall Nirenberg for an award recognizing his contributions to genetics. There is no question that his demonstration that simple accessible polynucleotides can be used as models and substitutes for genetic messengers is a major contribution. More recently, his continued investigations of his initial findings have been done with better precision and continue to be highly significant in our understanding of how information is encoded in genes and transcribed for protein synthesis.

It would be unfair to say, however, that this contribution is of such elegance and depth in biochemistry or in genetics as disciplines to give him considerable stature in either field. While it may be beyond the scope of your quest for information about Nirenberg, I cannot refrain from giving you my comparative evaluation of Charles Yanofsky, Professor of Biology here at Stanford. His contributions to genetics are to my mind of considerably greater depth and importance than those of any investigator during the past ten years, including Nirenberg's. It is Yanofsky who has demonstrated with a thoroughness and elegance that is unmatched the colinearity of the genetic code and the primary structure of the protein molecule. From my intimate association with many colleagues who work in this field, Yanofsky is clearly their choice for the scientist's scientist. I appreciate that the newspaper coverage and the popular response to Yanofsky's work does not approach that of Nirenberg's. This, I would suggest, is all the more reason that responsible juries making awards consider the relative merit of Yanofsky's contributions.

Sincerely yours,

Arthur Kornberg

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