Exclusive
Howard University Sought Center To Research Biology and Violence

A black Howard University political scientist, Ronald Walters, Ph.D., has led efforts in the last year to stop federal funding for studies on possible genetic and other biological links to violence and crime. He charges this research is racist.

PROBE has now learned, however, that Howard, a black university in Washington, D.C., last year tried to set up a research center to study biological aspects of violence at its medical school. Howard officials obtained help from Senator Claiborne Pell (D-R.I.), who arranged for provisions that appear in last year's NIH reauthorization bill "to encourage biomedical and behavioral research" in "the study of violence." The new language, approved by Congress, also identifies "historically black colleges and universities" as "research centers of excellence" to facilitate future funding of the Howard violence initiative.

Cordial discussions between Howard's senior vice president for health affairs, internist Russell L. Miller, M.D., Sen. Pell, Chairman of the Labor and Human Resources Committee, District of Columbia correctional psychiatrist Bill Davidson, M.D., and other administrators and researchers who were planning the Howard research center still were on track as late as last April. In an April 14 letter, on Howard letterhead, Miller tells two project planners, "I am writing to bring you up-to-date on some of the most recent developments related to our proposed research activities involving the study of violence."

Letter Updates Progress

He describes a meeting with Dr. Davidson and other Washington area planners, and a subsequent visit to NIH to discuss the project with officials there. He also tells of an exchange of letters with Sen. Pell's office, and says that congressional staffs had accepted some of the changes he had suggested to accommodate the proposed center at Howard.

"As you will note, not all of the recommendations were accepted, but a significant number were," Miller wrote. "I feel very good about his [Pell's] commitment to helping us."

Both Pell and Howard president Franklyn Jenifer attended a dinner at an elegant Washington restaurant to celebrate the project's progress, according to forensic psychiatrist Laurence R. Tancredi, M.D., of New York, who was one of the planners.

"It was sort of an inaugural dinner — this thing was going to get underway!" Tancredi said last month by phone.

Forward Motion Stops

But shortly thereafter, and apparently without direct mention of the biology-and-violence center planned for his own

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The spurious case against Nobelist David Baltimore, Ph.D., and his co-investigator Thereza Imanishi-Kari, Ph.D., who is an immunologist, continues to unravel. Here are recent developments:

Imanishi-Kari and several co-authors published two research papers in April in the mainstream Journal of Immunology that appear to confirm and extend the findings in a 1986 paper in the journal Cell. This is the paper for which she and Baltimore have been accused, by Rep. John D. Dingell (D-Mich.), of fraud. Publication of the new papers — which both cite the 1986 Cell paper in the references — all but eliminates the possibility that the earlier work was fraudulent, since it can be assumed that the immunology journal’s editors scrutinized the new reports with exquisite care.

“This will have been reviewed up the gills, no doubt about it!” exclaimed immunologist Darcy Wilson, Ph.D., of the San Diego Regional Cancer Center, in La Jolla, by phone. Wilson is a friend and supporter of Imanishi-Kari.

Meanwhile, two architects of the case against Baltimore and Imanishi-Kari have been sharply put down by the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The reason is that they were using government time, resources, and office space to try to hang a “plagiarism” rap on an academic researcher; he is an historian who is wholly outside the biomedical nexus and receives no federal funding.

While NIH’s determination that the NIH gunshoes, as they have been dubbed, “was beyond [the agency’s] mission,” this does not prove they were out of line on the Cell paper. But it does identify them as irresponsible.

FRAUD WAS ALLEGED

In the Cell “case” — which has been tried in Dingell’s hearing room and in the press, but never in court — Baltimore and Imanishi-Kari were accused of malfeasance and fraud by a disgruntled post-doctoral researcher in her lab, Margot O’Toole, Ph.D. A federal attorney declined to bring charges. But administrative sanctions against Imanishi-Kari continue at NIH, depriving her of funding. Baltimore lost a prestigious job, as president of Rockefeller University.

Their alleged malfeasance, what is more, has been seized upon by Dingell, and by reporters, including Philip J. Hilts, Jr., of the New York Times, as evidence that American biomedical science has become corrupt — and needs to be controlled. But the case’s shortcomings have not been nearly as well reported in the press as the accusations against Baltimore and Imanishi-Kari (PROBE, Nov., Dec. ’91, May, Aug., ’92).

The editor of the Journal of Immunology, immunologist Peter E. Lipsky, M.D., of the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, in Dallas, said that the relationship between the Cell paper and Imanishi-Kari’s new ones is “obvious” from reading them. He declined, through an associate, to comment specifically on the question of whether the new papers support or discount the earlier one’s scientific integrity.

The case against Baltimore and Imanishi-Kari was drawn up by chemist Walter Stewart, Ph.D., and cell biologist Ned Feder, M.D., of NIH, based on interviews and documents. Their findings led NIH to suspend Imanishi-Kari’s grants, and provided the basis for the grilling she and Baltimore were subjected to by Dingell.

PLAGIARISM CHARGED

In their most recent excursion, which may prove to be their undoing, Stewart and Feder created a computer program that they say detects plagiarism. They used it, on NIH time, to analyze books written by University of Massachusetts historian and Lincoln biographer, Stephen B. Oates, who had been accused of plagiarizing material from earlier Lincoln biographies. This charge, by one of Oates’ colleagues, had been rejected by the American Historical Association, and by his university.

Using NIH overnight envelopes, Stewart and Feder disseminated widely their findings that Oates had lifted several hundred phrases and clauses — but apparently no whole sentences — from earlier writers.

The NIH acted with alacrity: Stewart and Feder’s office was closed — over Dingell’s objections — and they were reassigned to other duties.

“Those who聲 the public and stewards of science have become corrupt — and needs to be controlled,” Stewart and Feder charged in their downfall, filed April 16.

“It’s about time, too, that NIH and Dingell, the press acknowledge that Stewart and Feder generated unfounded charges against Baltimore and Imanishi-Kari, and take the steps needed to clear their reputations.

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New Data Erode Old Wisdom On Cholesterol

We foresee a major shift — perhaps already in progress — with regard to scientific findings on cholesterol and heart disease, and their translation into medical and dietary practices.

As often happens in a change of this kind, those who wrote the current interpretations and policies are hanging back. This old guard includes researchers, policy-makers and health educators at the American Heart Association (AHA), in Dallas, and the National Cholesterol Education Program (NCEP), at NIH, which draws support from a coalition of health organizations.

The change involves what to do about high cholesterol. Few experts would oppose the notion that, by and large, high cholesterol levels are dangerous, low ones much safer. The problem is, Who needs to lower his or her cholesterol? When? And How?

The current AHA/NCEP view is that everyone should find out his or her cholesterol, from blood tests, and then strive throughout life to keep it low — mainly through diet. The emerging view is that, extreme cases aside, cholesterol is not of great concern until, say, age 35 or 40 in men, and perhaps later in women. So while it undoubtedly would be wise, for a variety of reasons, for Americans to consume less cholesterol and less of the cholesterol-making saturated fatty acids in meat and dairy products, this may not be a very efficient health measure.

Findings Described

Recent studies have clarified these matters, showing that:

• Diet is not an effective way for healthy people, who have not been frightened into compliance by a heart attack or other heart disease, to lower their cholesterol levels. Reductions of 3 to 5% are the norm, albeit greater reductions can be achieved by vegetarians and other avid dieters.

• New drugs, and particularly those of the class called co-enzyme A reductase inhibitors, are very effective, and also apparently very safe in lowering cholesterol. Reductions of 25 to 30% are standard.

New data that strongly bolster these findings were published in the April 29 New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM) by internist Donald B. Hunninghake, M.D., of the Minneapolis Heart Disease Prevention Clinic, and two dozen co-investigators. The work was supported by Merck, the maker of one of these drugs, lovastatin (Mevacor), which was used in the study.

The researchers switched 97 patients with mildly elevated cholesterol levels between four regimens: a normally high-fat diet + dummy medication; a low-fat diet + dummy medication; a high-fat diet + lovastatin; and a low-fat diet + lovastatin. Each person was on each regimen for 9 weeks.

When diet was the only effective therapy, because the patients were taking dummy medication, their levels of LDL (low-density lipoprotein) or "bad" cholesterol fell 5% on average. But lovastatin cut LDL cholesterol by an average of 27% during both high-fat and low-fat diet periods.

When patients taking the drug also were on the low-fat diet, their LDL cholesterol levels were a third (32%) lower than when they were on the high-fat diet and not taking the drug.

These findings show, as spokesmen for AHA and NCEP stressed in recent telephone interviews, that diet and drugs have additive benefit: Both are helpful when used together. But these results also show that the low dose of the drug (20 mg/day) used in this study is five times more effective than the rigorous NCEP Step 2 diet with which it was compared.

When was worse, from the dietary point of view, is that the NCEP diet lowered patients' levels of HDL (high-density lipoprotein) cholesterol, which is the "good" cholesterol that appears to protect against heart disease. The drug, however, raised HDL levels. This led Dr. Hunninghake and his colleagues to conclude:

"The reduction in LDL cholesterol produced by the diet was small, and its benefit was possibly offset by the accompanying reduction in the level of HDL cholesterol."

Results Raise Doubts

Why the diet adversely affected HDL is not known. But this finding is a devastating blow to the dietary approach, since it suggests — but does not prove — that a cholesterol-lowering diet, for all the denial of food pleasure it entails, may be worthless.

This study, and others like it, indicate that the main preventive method for people who have heart disease, or are at high risk of it, should be — and probably already is — drug therapy.

The public health problem is what to do for the many young to middle-aged Americans who have moderately elevated cholesterol.

Doctors, rightly, are afraid to put millions of essentially healthy people on a powerful — and costly — cholesterol-lowering drug; they fear that the side effects may outweigh the benefits. On the other hand, if a rigorous diet is only of questionable value, then the less rigorous Step 1 NCEP starter diet may be, at best, a waste of time.

The shift we see coming — and it is foreshadowed in an editorial in the same NEJM issue — is that doctors will treat people with high cholesterol or other risk factors with both diet and drugs. But they will reject the current AHA/NCEP notion that cholesterol counting and control should be a life-long concern for all Americans, starting when they are children.

Counterpoint

"The AHA and the NCEP recommend that patients follow a Step 1 or Step 2 [fat- and cholesterol-lowering] diet for six months to achieve the maximum benefit before taking cholesterol-lowering drugs. This study had patients diet for only 9 weeks. This may not have been enough.

"Dietary lowering of HDL cholesterol as observed in this study is a concern ... [but may] be temporary. . . .

"A low-fat, low-cholesterol diet as recommended for the past 30 years by the AHA has been shown to have long-term health benefits and is inexpensive, risk-free and without side effects." — American Heart Association

Statement on Hunninghake study

But: Is this diet any fun?
Critics Collide in Provocative New On Clash Of Fundamentalism and

Two newly published books strike at the heart of the fierce current debate between inquiry and authority, between science and fundamentalism. This conflict—which both authors correctly identify as the central issue of our times—also animates PROBE's exploration of news events and ideas. So we welcome this debate, in which we are quite partisan.

One book, already a best-seller in England, is by London journalist Bryan Appleyard; it is called Understanding the Present (Doubleday), with the subtitle "science and the soul of modern man." It is an angry and despairing attack on science and on science-based beliefs, or scientism, which Appleyard holds responsible for most contemporary social and moral ills. Particularly, he says science has denigrated, and all but destroyed, revealed religion, simple faith — and peace of mind.

The second, contrary, but oddly complementary, book is by an American journalist, Jonathan Rauch; it is entitled Kindly Inquisitors (University of Chicago), with the subtitle "the new attacks on free thought." It is a passionate defense of what Rauch calls "liberal science," exemplified by the critical public skepticism that characterizes scientific, historical, and journalistic inquiry.

Agreement Found

Rauch's fear, the opposite of Appleyard's, is religious and secular fundamentalism. He is particularly worried about the new authoritarianism — political rectitude — that is justified in the U.S. on humanitarian and egalitarian grounds. He says it dangerously threatens our democratic freedoms. The self-selected politically correct guardians of virtue, Rauch charges, are the "new inquisitors" — whom we should fear and resist.

The two contradictory authors are in clear agreement on this critical point: Historically and intellectually, scientific inquiry, political democracy, and capitalism are interdependent. They express the relentlessly questioning spirit of the Modern Age — which Appleyard hates and Rauch loves.

For Appleyard, science is major research findings and theories about nature, and also scientists' pronouncements about the meaning of these discoveries. For Rauch, on the other hand, science is an open-ended process of discovery: It provides useful information about the world and ourselves, but yields no abiding truths.

Science "works," Appleyard laments. Its findings — that the solar system is heliocentric rather than anthropocentric, as the medieval church taught — cannot be denied. So Understanding..., reminiscent of T.S. Eliot, is an impassioned — and in places brilliant — effort to defame, debunk, or at the least escape science and the social and political uncertainties through which it thrives. Christian mysticism is one of the not wholly satisfactory refuges that Appleyard finds.

Attacks Anticipated

Rauch cedes the private realm to Appleyard, and to each and every other belief and believer. The liberal science he upholds as modern man's continuing genius — and the key to accommodating diversity in a heterogenous society — is a public process, he says. Information and ideas generated by scientists, journalists, or anyone else, are published, and are routinely critiqued and attacked by others. Those which survive this rigorous scrutiny do so because they either reflect an accurate description of nature (the sun is at the center of the universe) or a verifiable human insight. They are retained until superseded by new and more critically defensible propositions. Meanwhile, indefensible ideas (the earth is the center of the universe), are laughed off, marginalized, Rauch says, along with the spiritual and metaphysical comforts (man is on earth; God is in the heavens) — they may have provided.

Truth Sought

For Rauch, this process, which denies Truth, with a capital T, is intellectually invigorating, the secret of Western civilization's success. He takes great pains to defend it, not only against old-fashioned fundamentalists like Salman Rushdie's tormentor, the late Ayatollah Khomeini. As dangerous, he writes, are our home-grown "kindly inquisitors," who would suppress free inquiry and free expression because it is deemed offensive to blacks, Jews, women, homosexuals, or anyone else.

Not that he may not share some of these inquisitors' feelings; Rauch identifies himself as a Jewish homosexual. But, he warns, every effort to squelch free speech or thought because it offends somebody requires a judge to decide what is to be suppressed. That judge, says Rauch, is an inquisitor or an inquisition — and anathema to critical thinking and freedom.

Appleyard's quite contrary belief is that science, in its relentless analysis of human understanding and of nature, has wholly alienated all of us from the world and from ourselves. Decrying Descartes, whom he sees as the instigator — continued on next page

Criticism Endangered

"[N]o social principle in the world is more foolish and dangerous than the rapidly rising notion that hurtful words and ideas are a form of violence or torture (e.g., 'harrassment') and that their perpetrators should be treated accordingly. That notion leads to the criminalization of criticism and the empowerment of authorities to regulate it. The new sensitivity is the old authoritarianism in disguise, and it is just as noxious."

— J. Rauch, in Kindly Inquisitors (p. 28-29)
Volumes of Science

or, he says:

"Science trapped us all in our private reasons. It divided us from our world, locked us in the amorous turrets of our consciousness. Outside was an alien landscape which was either illusory or meaningless, inside was the only possession of which we could be sure — the continual, anxious chattering of our self-awareness. Our souls were removed from our bodies (p. 56-57)."

Few Choices Available

This cri du coeur is widely shared — and it accounts in large part for the rampant irrationality and anti-science attacks of the New Age movement. But Appleyard’s personal solution to the problem, since he won’t forego antibiotics or airplane rides — and so must acknowledge the scientific findings upon which they are based — is to a personal religious privatism that simply disregards science’s assault on religion’s sustaining beliefs.

Emerson Cited

"For ourselves," he writes, "we can begin to define our lives in the terms in which we do anyway when left to our own devices. We can have irreducible affections, values and convictions. . . . Such an avowal means the end of the rule of science because it denies the infinite open-endedness and willingness to change that science needs for its continued invasion of our souls" (p. 234-35).

This sad and fearful resolution, we think, was engendered by Appleyard’s apparent earlier religious enchantment with science, as a fount of certitude and serene belief. Rauch, more courageously, cites Emerson’s remark that "God offers to every mind its choice between truth and repose. Take which you please, — you can never have both." In the present context, Emerson’s "truth" is the provisional, but vibrant, give and take of discoveries and ideas that Appleyard finds so dismaying.

Our vote, obviously, is with Rauch. We are delighted by his exuberant defense of scientific freedom and political democracy, with which it is inexorably linked.

We think PROBE readers should read the Appleyard book, for a brilliant portrayal of the loss of heart that has created New Age thinking. We think Nature, the preeminent science journal, was correct in calling his book "dangerous," because of the anti-rational political and ideological views it upholds.

We urge PROBE readers to read the slender Rauch volume for its uncom­promising exaltation of intellectual freedom.

Vitamins Supplements Fail To Extend Life

Americans spend over $3 billion annually on vitamins and other nutritional supplements. So there is reason to ask whether those who use them live longer.

Experts in health promotion and disease prevention on National Centers for Disease Control (CDC), in Atlanta, set out to answer this question. They used existing data from 14,000 American adults whose health has been followed by statisticians since 1971. The CDC analysts re-interviewed 9,000 of the survivors in this group who followed ordinary diets. They describe their findings in the April American Journal of Public Health:

"We found no evidence that supplement use was associated with decreased mortality," public health specialist Insun Kim, Dr.PH, and co-workers report. They add: "The risk of cancer mortality for regular users of supplements was not significantly different from that of nonusers."

In one subgroup of participants, men who did not drink alcohol, the analysts found a "slightly" reduced risk of deaths among those who used vitamins regularly, compared to those who didn’t use them at all. But underweight women who used vitamins and other supplements regularly had almost twice the risk of dying as those who did not use supplements.

The CDC investigators add: "Our findings therefore support the current scientific consensus that healthy people do not require nutritional supplementation."
In a luncheon talk before graduation exercises for the New York University School of Medicine, Donna E. Shalala, the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS), provided doctors and guests a glimpse of her sense of mission:

She noted that she came to her new federal post from the University of Wisconsin, where she was president. She recalled that social planner Wilbur Cohen also traveled from Madison to Washington, during the New Deal, to write much of the key social legislation of that era, including the Social Security Act.

Her own mission, and the Administration’s, Shalala made it clear, is to write and enact equally revolutionary legislation that will free all Americans from the fear of illness for which they cannot afford care.

It is hard not to applaud this vision.

But we, like many Americans, have lost confidence in the government’s ability to perform any service effectively, efficiently, and without corruption. Social Security, with its dire fiscal problems, high cost, and weak performance, is just one example.

Beyond the staggering complexity of health care reform, the Administration has a major job, which it has not addressed very well as yet: restoring the American people’s confidence that government can work — for them!

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HHS Chief Shalala and the Clinton Administration already have compromised on one of their goals: “universal purchase” of all vaccines needed by American children. Under the draft Comprehensive Child Immunization Act of 1993, only poor children and those whose parents claim they are poor would get free shots. This plan is called “universal access,” and is cheaper for the government — and for taxpayers.

The drug industry argues, convincingly, that the problem of low immunization rates — 42% among Los Angeles county toddlers, for example — reflects the loss of public health infrastructure and medical and governmental commitment to sell parents the notion, and then compel them to have their children immunized.

A model exists, close at hand, of what needs to be done:

All states have now passed laws that require proof of immunization before a child can enter kindergarten at age 5. These laws are very effective.

The problem now is toddlers between ages 1 and 5; legal and illegal immigrants; and religious groups that object to immunization. There is also a growing — and shocking — New Age effort, which is led by chiropractors, to persuade parents to have their children’s spines adjusted rather than be immunized.

The way to solve the problem, and get the toddlers immunized, we think, is to find or create another, earlier compulsory health opportunity for children at age 18 months to 2 years. Parents should be urged — and ultimately coerced — to bring all children to pediatricians or general practitioners at this age for proof of immunization, and to make up for missed vaccinatons. These visits also would provide for physical checkups, including hearing, seeing, and other problems that can impair a child’s growth and development.

Private pediatricians provide this kind of care anyway. Compliance should not be a problem. For families who use public health services, there may be ways to insure these developmentally important health interventions that serve the commonweal as well as their particular children; high rates of “herd immunity” protect everyone.

People want social entitlements, like welfare. We see nothing wrong with society insisting that they take care of their children’s health before they get their food stamps.

Howard...

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university, Walters launched a wide-ranging attack on all studies of genetic and biological correlates of violence. Since then, Drs. Tancredi and Davidson said by phone they have heard no further from Miller or the university on the project.

“We haven’t heard any more,” Davidson said.

A call to Dr. Miller, at Howard, for comment, was not returned.

Brain Studies Foreseen

One focus of the Howard study would have been the use of positron emission tomography (PET), an imaging method, to study the brains of violent persons. Dr. Tancredi and psychiatrist Nora D. Volkow, M.D., a PET expert at Brookhaven National Laboratory, in Upton, N.Y., visited Howard’s medical campus to look at possible PET sites, according to Tancredi.

He and Volkow have collaborated for several years on PET studies of violent people. They have published, among other things, a report on four incarcerated psychiatric patients with a history of “purposeless violent behavior.” All four "showed evidence of blood flow and metabolic disorders in the left temporal lobe," they reported in the British Journal of Psychiatry (vol. 151, pp. 668-73, 1987). These studies would have been widened and extended at the Howard center, had it been initiated as planned last year.

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The fact that Howard was trying — successfully — to obtain federal funding for a center to investigate behavioral and biomedical aspects of violence should lay to rest black activists’ charge that such studies are a white, racist effort to subjugate blacks.

Howard’s subsequent cave-in to extremists is, in psychiatrist Davidson’s word, a “tragedy,” because it blocks one possible — possible — route to relieving the epidemic violence that is destroying many black communities.

The disagreement between Howard doctors who wanted to study the problem there, and those at Howard who oppose all such studies, also illuminates the difficulties black academics and scientists face when they try to pursue politically incorrect research.
Contrasting NIH Views On Crime Conference

"[A] superb job of assessing the underlying scientific, legal, ethical and public policy issues."
— NIH award letter for U. of Maryland conference grant

"[A]n excellent grant application for a conference on a timely and important topic. It will likely be considered a landmark in the field."
— NIH study section referee's report on grant application

"[An] inappropriately ill-conceived, dangerously inflammatory conference in the way it was promoted... It would have been socially irresponsible for it to go forward."
— NIH chief Healy, to AP

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meeting is being held June 1-4, in Bethesda; we will report on it. After objections were raised to the University of Maryland conference last summer, NIH froze the funding, stopping the October event. Diggs wrote to the university's provost, Jacob K. Goldhaber, on September 4, calling his attention to a paragraph in the promotional brochure (See Box, below).

"These statements not only inflamed public opinion but also represent a radical divergence from the topics for which the grant was awarded," Diggs charged. He went on to say that the university's conference organizer, attorney David Wasserman, "grotesquely distorted the nature and scope of the meeting that was originally approved through the peer review process."

In fact, however, the paragraph that Diggs — and presumably Healy — objected to is taken verbatim from the grant application, a copy of which was supplied to PROBE by the University (See Box, above). So was the rest of it.

"Despite some concerns," the NIH referee's report, dated July 1, 1992, states, "this is considered over all to be an excellent grant application for a conference on a timely and important topic. It will likely be considered a landmark... ."

In its subsequent grant awards letter, according to the University, NIH said that the conference organizer did "a superb job of assessing the underlying scientific, legal, ethical, and public policy issues" of biological research on violence and crime.

In the months that followed the freezing of the funds, little progress was made in resolving the dispute. In March, Goldhaber wrote to Diggs, saying:

"Although it was our understanding that review and approval of the brochure's content by the NIH was the single precondition to the release of funds for the conference, the remedial action taken by the University has resulted in neither restoration of funding nor official termination."

The University could not invoke NIH's appeals process unless the grant was terminated. Goldhaber asked for a yes or no.

On April 22, Diggs wrote back, terminating the grant "for cause." He said:

"Specifically, the University prepared and distributed a brochure whose language appeared to discount the environmental factors in crime and gave the distinct impression that there is a genetic basis for criminal behavior, a theory that has never been scientifically validated."

He went on to charge that the University "violated" the terms of the grant "by creating an environment that has made it impossible for the proposed conference to proceed in a scientifically objective manner, and by removing any likelihood that it would produce meaningful results, as contemplated by both the University and the NIH at the time of the award."

Objections Voiced

Diggs' boss, Healy, meanwhile told the AP that, "We as scientists and physicians believe it was an inappropriately ill-conceived, dangerously inflammatory conference in the way it was promoted." She added that "it would have been socially irresponsible for it to go forward."

The University has filed an appeal of the grant termination. We phoned NIH, noting that the language in the original brochure came directly from the grant application that had been approved and highly praised at NIH. We asked for comment by Diggs and Healy. Diggs called back. Healy didn't.

We asked Diggs if NIH only approved grants for conferences on "scientifically validated" subjects, as his legal letter to the University implied.

"Not at all," Diggs replied — raising for our mind the question of why he had written the phrase into his legal letter. Rather, Diggs said: "I think the application went to great..."

Bone of Contention

This is the paragraph in the University of Maryland's promotional brochure that NIH took exception to. It is identical to a high up paragraph in the University's grant application, with citations from the literature deleted:

Researchers have already begun to study the genetic regulation of violent and impulsive behavior and to search for genetic markers associated with criminal conduct. Their work is motivated in part by the early successes of research on the genetics of behavioral and psychiatric conditions like alcoholism and schizophrenia. But genetic research also gains impetus from the apparent failure of environmental approaches to crime — deterrence, diversion, and rehabilitation — to affect the dramatic increase in crime, especially violent crime, that this country has experienced over the past 30 years. Genetic research holds out the prospect of identifying individuals who may be predisposed to certain kinds of criminal conduct, of isolating environmental features which trigger these predispositions, and of treating some predispositions with drugs and unintrusive therapies.
Leaders ... continued from preceding page

length to put together a conference in which scholars would debate both sides of the question, the two sides being biological causes of crime vis-à-vis "environmental," or socioeconomic, factors.

"The basis of the approval was that both sides would be brought in, and there would be a balanced discussion."

Our reading of the grant proposal, however, shows that it focuses exclusively on the prospects and the problems of the biological approach to research on crime. Neither explicitly nor implicitly was the conference said to be about environmental factors in violence and crime. Also, contrary to Diggs' assertion, the approved grant proposal makes no effort to present or balance the two approaches.

We pointed out to Diggs that the paragraph in the brochure that distressed NIH was quoted verbatim from the grant application, with only the deletion of bibliography citations. He replied, contrary to what he stated in his two letters to the University, that it was not the language in the paragraph that was objectionable, but rather that the brochure was "out of context," since it failed to provide equal weight to environmental factors in crime, as the grant proposal did.

But it didn't.

Diggs, in short, defended the University's grant application, which NIH had approved, but blamed the problem on the brochure. But Healy (See above), confusingly but perhaps more forthrightly, branded the conference — which could only mean the proposal, and not the follow-up brochure — as "ill-conceived."

Diggs and Healy can't both be right, since they disagree on the source of the problem. Healy is responsible for Diggs' statements — which do not jibe with the facts.

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