CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

FRANK A. LASKI

The Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by

Steven J. Novak

at

University of California, Los Angeles
Los Angeles, California

on

13 May 1993 and 19, 26 May 1994

From the Original Collection of the University of California, Los Angeles

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This oral history is part of a series supported by a grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts based on the Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences. This collection is an important resource for the history of biomedicine, recording the life and careers of young, distinguished biomedical scientists and of the Pew Scholars Program in the Biomedical Sciences Advisory Committee members.

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The following oral history, originally processed at the UCLA Center for Oral History Research, has been reformatted by the Chemical Heritage Foundation. The process involved reformatting the front matter, adding a new abstract, replacing the table of contents, and replacing the index. The paragraph spacing and font of the body of the transcript were altered to conform to the standards of the Oral History Program at the Chemical Heritage Foundation. The text of the oral history remains unaltered; any inadvertent spelling or factual errors in the original manuscript have not been modified. The reformatted version and digital copies of the interview recordings are housed at the Othmer Library, Chemical Heritage Foundation. The original version and research materials remain at the Darling Library, University of California, Los Angeles and at the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

REFORMATTING:

Marnie Berkowitz, Consultant to the Chemical Heritage Foundation. B.A., Classical Languages and Literatures, University of Minnesota; Ford Foundation Fellowship, Classical Languages and Literatures, University of Chicago.

David J. Caruso, Program Manager, Oral History, Chemical Heritage Foundation. B.A., History of Science, Medicine, and Technology, Johns Hopkins University; PhD., Science and Technology Studies, Cornell University.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES

Oral History Interview Agreement No. R940525

This Interview Agreement is made and entered into this 20th day of May, 1994, by and between THE REGENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, a California corporation, on behalf of the Oral History Program at the UCLA campus, hereinafter called "University," and FRANK A. LASKI having an address at University of California, Los Angeles, Department of Biology, 405 S. Hilgard Avenue, Los Angeles, California, 90024-1570, hereinafter called "Interviewee."

Interviewee agrees to participate in a series of University-conducted tape-recorded interviews, commencing on or about May 13, 1994, and tentatively entitled "Interview with Frank A. Laski". This Agreement relates to any and all materials originating from the interviews, namely the tape recordings of the interviews and a written manuscript prepared from the tapes, hereinafter collectively called "the Work."

In consideration of the mutual covenants, conditions, and terms set forth below, the parties hereto hereby agree as follows:

1. Interviewee irrevocably assigns to University all his copyright, title and interest in and to the Work. This assignment applies to University, its successors, and assigns, for and during the existence of the copyright and all renewals and extensions thereof.

2. By virtue of this assignment, University will have the right to use the Work for any research, educational, or other purpose that University may deem appropriate.

3. Interviewee acknowledges that he will receive no remuneration or compensation for his participation in the interviews or for the rights assigned hereunder.

4. Interviewee will receive from University, free of charge, one bound copy of the typewritten manuscript of the interviews.

5. To insure against substantive error or misquotation, Interviewee will have the right to review the manuscript before it is put into final form. University therefore will send Interviewee a copy of the edited transcript for review and comment. Interviewee will return transcript and comments to University within 30 days of receipt of the transcript. In the event that Interviewee does not respond within 30 days, University will assume that Interviewee has given full approval of the transcript.

6. All notices and other official correspondence concerning this Agreement will be sent to the following:

If to University: Office of Intellectual Property Administration
University of California, Los Angeles
405 Hilgard Avenue
Los Angeles, California 90024-1406

Attention: Ms. Carli V. Rogers
Copyright Officer

If to Interviewee: Frank A. Laski
Department of Biology
405 So. Hilgard Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90024-1570

University and Interviewee have executed this Agreement on the date first written above.

INTERVIEWEE

(Signature)

Frank A. Laski
(Typed Name)

University of California,
Los Angeles

Department of Biology

405 So. Hilgard Avenue
(Address)

Los Angeles, CA 90024-1570

Date 5/13/94

THE REGENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

(Signature)

Carli V. Rogers
(Typed Name)

Copyright Officer
(Title)

Date May 30, 1994

Chemical Heritage Foundation
Oral History Program
315 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106

FRANK A. LASKI

1956 Born in Detroit, Michigan on 13 June

Education

1977 B.G.S., University of Michigan
1983 Ph.D., Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Professional Experience

University of California, Berkeley
1984-1988 Postdoctoral Fellow

University of California, Los Angeles, Department of Biology and Molecular Biology Institute
1988-present Assistant Professor

Honors

1984 Postdoctoral Fellowship, National Institutes of Health
1984-1987 Exxon Education Foundation Fellow of the Life Sciences Research Foundation
1988-1993 National Institutes of Health Grant
1989 Career Development Award, Jonsson Comprehensive Cancer Center, University of California, Los Angeles
1993-1997 National Institutes of Health Grant
1990-1992 Basil O'Connor Starter Scholar Research Award Fellow of the March of Dimes
1990-1994 Pew Scholar in the Biomedical Sciences

Selected Publications

Laski, F. and E.N. Jackson, 1982. Maturation cleavage of bacteriophage P22 DNA in the absence of DNA packing. *Journal of Molecular Biology,* 154:565-79.

Laski, F.A. et al., 1982. Expression of a X. laevis tRNA (Tyr) gene in mammalian cells. *Nucleic Acids Research*, 10:4609-26.

Laski, F.A. et al., 1982. An amber suppressor tRNA gene derived by site specific mutagenesis: Cloning and function in mammalian cells. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*

USA, 79:5813-17.
Laski, F.A. et al., 1983. In vitro transcription and splicing of a tRNA (Tyr) gene in a Hela cell lysate. *Journal of Biological Chemistry,* 258:11974-80.
Laski, F.A. et al., 1984. Synthesis of an ochre suppressor tRNA gene and expression in mammalian cells. *The EMBO Journal*, 3:2445-52.
Laski, F.A. et al., 1986. Tissue specificity of *Drosophila* P element transposition is regulated at the level of mRNA splicing. *Cell*, 44:7-19.
Laski, F.A. and G.M. Rubin, 1989. Analysis of the *cis*-acting requirements for germline-specific splicing of the P element ORF2-ORF3 intron. *Genes and Development,* 3:720-28.
Laski, F.A. et al., 1989. Construction, function and stable transformation of a tRNA nonsense suppressing gene in *Drosophila melanogaster*. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences USA,* 86:6696-98.

ABSTRACT

Frank A. Laski was born in Detroit, Michigan; he grew up in Oak Park, a suburb of Detroit until about high-school age, when his family moved to Southfield, another suburb. His father's parents and sisters perished in a concentration camp in WWII; his mother's family in Berlin obtained false papers to survive the war. Laski's father and uncle survived the concentration camp and were sent to Louisville, where Laski's father met and married Eva Marx, who also had moved to Louisville after the war. Laski's parents and his uncle moved to Detroit, where they established a prosperous heating business. Laski has one older brother and a younger sister. He had a happy childhood and liked school. He attended a summer camp each year from an early age and eventually worked at the camp. He discovered in high school that he liked science. He attended the University of Michigan, where he obtained a BS in general studies, a major that allowed him to concentrate on science; he worked in Ethel Noland Jackson's lab as an undergraduate. He became very excited about recombinant DNA and knew that his future lay with genetics. Laski entered Massachusetts Institute of Technology for his Ph.D. He worked there in Phillip A. Sharp's lab, where he learned to clone adenovirus; spliced introns; and eventually passed his oral exams. After receiving his Ph.D. he took a postdoc in Gerald M. Rubin's lab at the University of California at Berkeley, working on the relationship between P elements and germline tissue. He then accepted an assistant professorship at the Department of Biology and at the Molecular Biology Institute at the University of California at Los Angeles, where he remains today. His work encompasses bacteriophage packaging; transfer RNA; *Drosophila* ovaries; P elements; oogenesis; and genetic mutations in *Drosophila*. He has won many awards and has published many articles

UCLA INTERVIEW HISTORY

INTERVIEWER:

Steven J. Novak, Senior Editor, UCLA Oral History Program. B.A., History, University of Colorado; Ph.D., History, University of California, Berkeley; M.B.A., UCLA Graduate School of Management.

TIME AND SETTING OF INTERVIEW:

Place: Laski's office, UCLA.

Dates, length of sessions: May 13, 1993 (109 minutes); May 19, 1994 (111); May 26, 1994 (130).

Total number of recorded hours: 5.8

Persons present during interview: Laski and Novak.

CONDUCT OF INTERVIEW:

This interview is one in a series with Pew scholars in the biomedical sciences conducted by the UCLA Oral History Program in conjunction with the Pew Charitable Trusts's Pew Scholars in the Biomedical Sciences Oral History and Archives Project. The Project has been designed to document the backgrounds, education, and research of biomedical scientists awarded four-year Pew scholarships since 1988. To provide an overall framework for Project interviews, the director of the UCLA History Program and three UCLA faculty consultants developed a topic outline. In preparing for this interview, Novak held a preinterview conversation with Laski to obtain written background information (curriculum vitae, copies of published articles, etc.) and to agree on an interviewing schedule. He also reviewed prior Pew scholars' interviews and the documentation in Laski's file at the Pew Scholars Program office in San Francisco, including his proposal application, letters of recommendation, and reviews by Pew Scholars Program national advisory committee members. For technical background, Novak consulted J.D. Watson et al., *Molecular Biology of the Gene.* 4th ed. Menlo Park, CA: Benjamin/Cummings, 1987 and Bruce Alberts et al., *Molecular Biology of the Cell.* 3d ed. New York: Garland, 1994. The interview is organized chronologically, beginning with Laski's childhood in Oak Park, Michigan, and continuing with his education at the University of Michigan, his graduate work at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, his postdoc at the University of California, Berkeley, and the setup of his own lab at UCLA. Major topics discussed include bacteriophage packaging, transfer RNA, *Drosophila* P elements, oogenesis and genetic mutations in *Drosophila,* and the training and funding of scientists.

ORIGINAL EDITING:

Betsy Ryan, editor, edited the interview. She checked the verbatim transcript of the

interview against the original tape recordings, edited for punctuation, paragraphing, and spelling, and verified proper names. Words and phrases inserted by the editor have been bracketed.

Laski reviewed the transcript. He verified proper names and made minor corrections.

Novak prepared the table of contents and index. Ryan compiled the biographical summary.

Kristian London, editorial assistant, assembled the interview history.

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