Vignettes: Genetic Vistas

I think it is worthwhile taking seriously the impact of the entertainment industry on what people believe about DNA technology. After all it is not from conferences . . . that most of the people in this country learn about molecular genetics; rather it is from movies and books such as *Jurassic Park*, *The Boys from Brazil*, *The Andromeda Strain*, and *The Creature from 20,000 Fathoms*. It is worth paying attention to what is being said in popular literature and movies about genetic engineering, because implicit, if not explicit, in the premises of much of this material is a fundamentally incorrect view of what genetic manipulation can now or will in the foreseeable future be able to accomplish. But it is this world view that is influencing many beliefs in our society about the potential for genetic engineering.

—*David A. Jackson*

We are increasingly going to be accused of unwisely "playing God" when we use genetics to improve the quality of either current or future human life. Partly these accusations reflect the objections of individuals who don't think we have the right to do "God's" work. But I also sense that sometimes the uneasiness comes from the fear that we might someday use genetic procedures in Hitler-like ways, using our scientific powers to further discriminate against unpopular political and racial groups.

But diabolical as Hitler was, . . . we should not be held in hostage to his awful past. For the genetic dice will continue to inflict cruel fates on all too many individuals and their families who do not deserve this damnation. Decency demands that someone must rescue them from genetic hells. If we don't play God, who will?

—*James D. Watson*

From *DNA: The Double Helix, Perspective and Prospective at Forty Years* (Donald A. Chambers, Ed.; New York Academy of Sciences)

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