

The New York Times
Times Square

May 30, 1939.

Dr. James Bryant Conant
President
Harvard University
Cambridge, Mass.

My dear Dr. Conant:

It is a hot day, and I have had to work on a holiday. And, so, it seems to me an excusable occasion to get off my mind something that has been resting there for some time.

You may recall that a couple of years ago when you did us the honor to have lunch with us here at The New York Times you discussed with us at that time the question of the Nieman Fellowships. You did me the favor of asking my opinion as to one or two classes of reporters which were had to get in the ordinary run of things, with the idea, you said, that the training of men to do such work would be both a favor to the newspaper and to the Nieman undertaking. I recall quite well that at the time I told you the two classes of reporters hardest to get were those who were able to interpret accurately a complicated legal decision, and those who were able efficiently to report science news.

Subsequent to that, if my memory fails me not, Mr. Ellery Sedgwick and Mr. John Stewart Brown, two of the three directors of the Nieman Fellowships, discussed the matter with me at some length.

Then came the time for nominations. I stopped everyone here in the building who wanted to nominate someone, and centered the efforts of The New York Times on one young man - a graduate of a very good college, the son of a doctor and a man I regarded as eminently qualified to become an expert reporter of science news. He didn't get to first base. I was somewhat miffed.

This year I had made up my mind that I had

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been turned down too hard to run the risk of committing that one human sin that should never be condoned; namely, making the same mistake twice. But, I was influenced by a personal friend of one of the directors who told me it would be a cinch. And, so, I prevailed upon the young man who was turned down last year, and who by this year had become an even better prospect, that he put in his application again with my recommendation. And, again we were turned down.

I have just looked over the list of those who were successful, and, in the cases of at least six, it has got me beat.

Now, having bothered you thus far, I will promise you not to bother you again. However, if I am ever responsible for anybody getting a Nieman Fellowship, it has got to be handed to me signed, sealed and delivered before I touch it again.

I know you do not have anything to do with selecting the men, but the reason I am imposing this letter on you is that you were the first man who ever mentioned the matter to me.

I hope you will not be offended at this letter, because it is an honest letter. I just feel that way, and now I have got it off my chest.

With best wishes for a happy vacation, I remain

Faithfully yours,


Edwin L. James
Managing Editor

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June 1, 1939

Mr. Edwin L. James
The New York Times
Times Square
New York, New York

Dear Mr. James:

I appreciate very much your frank note. No one can try to make a scheme work, unless one hears from people like yourself who find some aspect unsatisfactory. I am very sympathetic with your point of view and you have brought to my attention one of the most difficult problems that we have to lick in this undertaking. On the one hand, we want to encourage able applicants and on the other, we have to choose from a great number of excellent candidates. At this moment, I see no way of solving the puzzle, but your letter has stimulated me to further study of this aspect of the problem and undoubtedly your experience has been shared by others.

I am taking the liberty of showing your letter to the members of this year's selection committee and I hope that Mr. Jerome Greene will write you a letter explaining some of the details of the selection procedure.

With deep appreciation of your writing me,

Sincerely yours,

James M. ...