

A number of academic researchers studying the relationship between race and intelligence have accepted support from the Pioneer Fund. The Pioneer Fund was established in 1937 by Wickliffe Draper, a textile magnate who was sympathetic to Nazi Germany and later advocated repatriating American Blacks back to Africa. The first President of the Fund, Harry Laughlin, was the leader of a movement to bar "genetically inferior" immigrants and an early admirer of the eugenics policies of Nazi Germany. The Fund's current President denies any Nazi or white supremacist connections, but the fund has never changed its 1937 charter which calls for "race betterment." The researcher who accept support from the Pioneer Fund say that because of the controversial character of their research government agencies and major philanthropic foundations will not support them.

Should a scientific researcher accept funding from the Pioneer Fund. If so, why? If not, why not?

MODERATOR'S ANSWER: University based scientific researchers should not accept funding from the Pioneer Fund. Scientific researchers have a responsibility to advance knowledge to the best of their abilities. This means avoiding conflicts of interest that could impair their best scientific judgment. Apart from the issue of whether the Pioneer Fund is devoted to inherently immoral racist objectives, the Fund clearly wants to support research tending to confirm the specific ideas it favors. This puts researchers who apply for and/or accept support from the Pioneer Fund in a potential conflict of interest situation. That a researcher has trouble gaining support for his research from major private foundations and government agencies cannot justify entering into arrangements for support that he or she has a professional duty to avoid.

In regard to the previous question topic, should a university forbid its faculty from accepting support from the Pioneer Fund? If so, why? If not, why not?

MODERATOR'S ANSWER: The university must not forbid researcher from accepting support from the Pioneer Fund. A research university has a responsibility to maintain an environment in which scientific research can flourish. This requires that a university respect the professionalism of researchers on its faculty by allowing them a wide scope of independence in regard to decisions concerning the conduct of research, including decisions about the sources from which to seek financial support. As a separate point, it would be understandable if many within a university community concluded, based upon the Pioneer Fund's history, that the Fund is set up to further the spread of a morally objectionable racist ideology. To tell researchers that they may not accept support from the Fund for this reason, however, goes against principles of free thought and opinion that are critical to a research university.

Case from the 1995 Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl. Copyright Robert Ladenson, Center for the Study of Ethics in the Professions, Illinois Institute of Technology, 1995.