

Education

Happy Fellows, Family Feud

The MacArthur Foundation's largesse and legal problems

Harvard Biologist Matthew Meselson, 53, has been embroiled in bitter controversy ever since he suggested last spring that the "yellow rain" in Southeast Asia, which the State Department claims is biochemical weaponry used by the Soviet Union, is actually bee droppings. Last week, as the beleaguered Meselson sat dictating letters requesting \$700 from the Harvard administration to help fund his work, the phone rang. An official of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation in Chicago informed him that he had been chosen to receive a five-year, no-strings \$256,000 award. Meselson covered the mouthpiece and gleefully exclaimed to his secretary: "Money!"

Money, indeed. The award was one of 22 announced last week, ranging from \$128,000 to \$300,000. Since 1981 the MacArthur Foundation—a \$1 billion fund established by an insurance tycoon—has bestowed such largesse on scholars and artists to give them creative freedom. The current list of winners indicates that the foundation has responded to criticisms of its past selections: that they have been too male, too white and too academic. The new fellows include four women (one of them black) and seven non-academics, among them two visual artists, a Hispanic community organizer, an ornithologist and a Catholic priest.

They also include the youngest MacArthur winner ever: David Stuart, 18, a junior fellow at the Dumbarton Oaks library and museum in Washington, D.C., and an expert in Mayan hieroglyphics. Stuart became fascinated by the "weird carvings" when at the age of nine he accompanied his archaeologist father on a dig in Mexico. Even before graduating last year from Bethesda Chevy-Chase High School in Maryland, he had published scholarly papers on the subject. The oldest winner is Paul Kristeller, 78, a professor emeritus of philosophy at Columbia University. Ever since he ran out of funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities, in 1980, Kristeller has been working without assistance on a six-volume listing of Renaissance manuscripts. MacArthur's \$300,000 grant, he says, will "improve my chance of continuing and possibly com-



Kristeller



Stuart with pre-Columbian hieroglyphics
Five years of creative freedom.

pleting this project before it is too late." "I am very happy with the selections," commented Roderick MacArthur, 63, a board member and son of the founder. He was not so happy, however, with his foundation colleagues. The same day the awards were announced, MacArthur filed suit against the president and seven directors, accusing them of mismanagement of assets, conflicts of interest and excessive fee taking (all unrelated to the foundation awards). In a counter-motion, the foundation charged that John D. MacArthur had held Roderick in low regard, and produced a 1975 letter from father to son that said, "Most of your life has been wasted. You were born with a good intellect but never learned the meaning of teamwork." Despite the legal wrangling, Foundation President John Corbally remained cheerful, remarking last week: "We specialize in philanthropy and litigation." ■