



PEOPLE FOR  
THE ETHICAL  
TREATMENT  
OF ANIMALS

January 22, 2024

The Honorable Barack Hussein Obama II, J.D.  
2446 Belmont Rd. NW  
Washington, DC 2008

Dear President Obama,

I hope this correspondence finds you well. I am writing as a neuroscientist and on behalf of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) to respectfully request your assistance in ending a series of maternal and sensory deprivation experiments being conducted on infant rhesus macaques at your alma mater, Harvard University. These experiments, led by Harvard Medical School Professor Margaret Livingstone, remove newborn baby monkeys from their mothers at birth—permanently—to subject them to various forms of sensory deprivation. In some of these experiments, infants' eyes are sewn shut for their first year of life. In others, infants are forced to wear goggles that distort their vision or create a strobe-like effect. The stroboscopic rearing experiments last for 18 months, so these infants spend the first year and a half of their lives alone in a cage with the lights flashing on and off at a rapid rate. Experimenters then use surgically implanted electrodes to test the monkeys' altered neurological responses to different types of visual input. In short, these young monkeys are being subjected to procedures that would be defined as torture if they were performed on human beings.

We recently learned that a portion of these experiments are being funded by the BRAIN (Brain Research through Advancing Innovative Neurotechnologies) Initiative. It is hard to believe that an initiative designed to advance our understanding of the human brain using the most pioneering technology available is funding a project that is not only unspeakably cruel, but also relies on outdated techniques that were developed half of a century ago. Repeating archaic and harmful procedures that take infant monkeys away from their mothers and depriving them of normal visual experiences will not provide new information about the human brain or human disease. The \$2,039,107 the BRAIN Initiative has already provided Harvard to produce visually impaired monkeys would certainly be better invested in research aligned with the BRAIN Initiative's original goal: to revolutionize our understanding of the human brain.

Hundreds of scientists, bioethicists, and primatologists, including Dr. Jane Goodall, have asked Harvard to discontinue Livingstone's experiments because of their outdated methodology, their lack of scientific utility, and the extreme harm they cause the monkeys. I hope that you will join them and reach out to BRAIN Initiative Director Ngai as well as Harvard President Gay and request they end their support of these cruel and unnecessary experiments immediately. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Chief Scientist  
Laboratory Investigations Department

Washington  
1536 16th St. N.W.  
Washington, DC 20036  
202-483-PETA

Los Angeles  
2154 W. Sunset Blvd.  
Los Angeles, CA 90026  
323-644-PETA

Norfolk  
501 Front St.  
Norfolk, VA 23510  
757-622-PETA

Info@peta.org  
PETA.org

Entities:

- PETA Asia
- PETA India
- PETA France
- PETA Australia
- PETA Germany
- PETA Switzerland
- PETA Netherlands
- PETA Foundation (U.K.)