



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on February 23, 2025

NIH Used Private Emails to Plot Deceptive Response to Protests of Cruel Experiments on Baby Monkeys

When the National Institutes of Health's (NIH) psychological torture of baby monkeys threatened to become a scandal a decade ago, then-NIH Director Francis Collins and his subordinates deceived the public while strategizing their approach to the matter via private emails they hoped would never be discovered.

However, thanks to People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), which obtained the emails in 2020 through a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) lawsuit, and the Daily Caller, which [reported](#) on the emails Friday, the mendacity of Collins and company has now been exposed.



AP Images

Monkey Business at NIH

For more than 30 years, Stephen Suomi conducted experiments on baby rhesus macaques in a Maryland NIH laboratory. These experiments included intentionally breeding monkeys to be predisposed to mental illness, separating newborn monkeys from their mothers, frightening them with loud noises, and placing them in cages with their incapacitated mothers.

Suomi's experiments were allegedly designed to mimic abuse of human children so scientists could better understand how it affects them.

PETA began putting pressure on NIH in 2014 after obtaining [video footage](#) of the experiments, some of which includes researchers' laughter at the monkeys' distress. Eventually, the group recruited primatologist Jane Goodall to appeal to Collins to end the experiments.

[The emails PETA obtained](#), which cover April to July 2014, demonstrate NIH's determination to do the minimum necessary to put the scandal behind it while shielding Collins from all blame. The emails were sent through private email accounts, a tactic former National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) Director Anthony Fauci and his subordinates [also employed](#) in an effort to avoid FOIA discovery.

On May 1, 2014, Goodall notified Collins that PETA planned to post the monkey videos online and ask viewers to pressure NIH to stop them. The email chain she forwarded included a link to the videos.

After viewing the videos, Collins emailed a scientist familiar with non-human primate research. Collins told the scientist, whose name is redacted in the released emails, that he "was pretty troubled by the video." Although he had heard that Suomi was "well respected by his peers," he confessed:

As I wrestle with what to do here, your own observations ... about the pointlessness of much of the research being conducted on non-human primates is [sic] ringing in my ears.



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The scientist replied that, in his opinion, Suomi's "studies do not have a truly significant practical impact on human life."

Covering Collins' Caboose

Similarly, then-National Institute of Mental Health Director Tom Insel told Collins' top aide, then-Deputy Director for Science, Outreach and Policy Kathy Hudson, "that he has always been annoyed that Suomi's work is basically doing in macaques what has already been shown in humans," Hudson emailed Collins. "He called it third rate and said it is time for Suomi to retire."

Nevertheless, as a fellow agency head, Insel knew what took top priority. "Suspect we will hear from PETA when they make this public," he told Hudson. "So would plot our response now."

The plotting soon commenced.

Hudson's advice to Collins was "to stay at a distance" from the matter and pretend he had never seen the video.

"The story line is that I got this video. You are not connected," she wrote on May 24, 2014.

In late June 2014, Hudson told Collins she had decided to meet with PETA representatives "to show that while I am willing to listen, NIH is not debating the scientific merits of this research with this organization." On July 1, 2014, after the meeting concluded, she advised Collins not to participate in any emails on the subject with either Goodall or PETA.

Two days later, Hudson determined to put an end to the discussions with PETA once and for all, telling Collins she would thank the group for meeting with her, and "then we go dark."

Collins agreed with her approach and added that he would "remain silent."

PETA Post Prompts Protests

PETA, however, was not satisfied with Hudson's response, so it [posted the videos online](#) in September 2014 and began a monthslong protest of the experiments.

By January, with Congress having been [briefed by PETA](#) on the subject, NIH issued a [statement](#) defending the experiments in which it contradicted the advice scientists privately gave Collins.

"These studies," the agency declared, "cannot be carried out in humans and require the use of animal studies to carefully separate experience, genetic and environmental factors."

Finally, in December 2015, "NIH directed Suomi to phase out the experiments but continued to provide funding for the analysis of existing data," reported the Daily Caller. "NIH [insisted the move](#) was a budgetary decision and unrelated to PETA's campaign."

Regardless of one's opinion of PETA or Suomi's experiments, these emails further cement Collins' reputation as a bureaucrat more interested in protecting his and his agency's standing than in following genuine science. Collins, who in 2017 resumed gain-of-function experiments that likely produced Covid-19, was already known to have exchanged private emails with Fauci in which the two men conspired to [smear](#) prominent scientists who opposed lockdowns. Fauci, who had used private email to keep NIAID's funding of gain-of-function research a secret, also bankrolled experiments torturing baby animals, namely [puppies](#).

Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. has his work cut out for him when it



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comes to cleaning out the rot at NIH and NIAID. Congress should simplify matters and shutter both unconstitutional agencies.



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