

ministic, they do not provide useful information on deciding whether or not to pursue various programs to enhance the capabilities of different members of society. Those decisions are moral, social, and political ones.

Lori B. Andrews
Dorothy Nelkin

*National Institutes of Health—Department of
Energy Joint Working Group on the Ethical,
Legal, and Social Implications of Human
Genome Research (ELSI Working Group),
31 Center Drive,
Bethesda, MD 20892-2152, USA*

References and Notes

1. R. J. Herrnstein and C. Murray, *The Bell Curve: The Reshaping of American Life by Differences in Intelligence* (Free Press, New York, 1994).
2. A longer version of this statement was endorsed by the National Society of Genetic Counselors.



Genetic Patents

I would like to comment on the article "Scientists attacked for 'patenting' Pacific tribe" by Gary Taubes (News & Comment, 17 Nov., p. 1112). The Rural Advancement Foundation International (RAFI) is not questioning molecular biology but rather the ethics of patenting human genetic ma-

terial. The basis of RAFI's concerns about patenting genetic material from the Hagahai tribe in Papua New Guinea have been clearly laid out in the "Blue Mountain Declaration," which states

The humans, animals, microorganisms and plants comprising life on earth are part of the natural world into which we were all born. The conversion of these life forms, their molecules or parts into corporate property through patent monopolies is counter to the interests of the peoples of the world.

No individual, institution, or corporation should be able to claim ownership over species or varieties of living organisms. Nor should they be able to hold patents on organs, cells, genes or proteins, whether naturally occurring, genetically altered or otherwise modified.

Substantial numbers of people around the world are developing a consciousness that there is something ethically wrong with the patenting of life forms, particularly human genetic material. For example, the Parliament of the European Union voted last 1 March against the issuance of such patents. Those of us who discuss these matters at churches, union halls, and community assemblies find that ordinary Americans are appalled when they find out about the patent applications that have been filed.

The members of RAFI are not "anti-

science." They have not attacked the Institute of Medical Research in New Guinea. They have asked how and in what fashion the Hagahai gave their approval to the patenting of their genetic material. They have asked how and in what fashion the individual whose cell line has been immortalized gave "informed consent" to this procedure. They have asked how having a "clear understanding of the concept of ownership" can be construed as approving the ethics of patenting a human cell line, as many people in Europe and North America who understand ownership also oppose such patents.

To raise such questions is essential to the necessary public discourse that must be conducted about these scientific and institutional developments.

Philip L. Bereano

*Department of Technical Communication,
University of Washington,
Seattle, WA 98195, USA*



Explaining "Linguistic Features" of Noncoding DNA

In the article "Hints of a language in junk DNA" (Research News, 25 Nov. 1994, p. 1320), Faye Flam described the statistical

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