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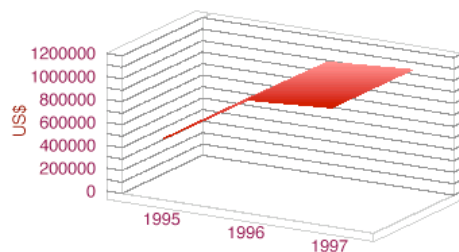
US Funding of Human Biodiversity Collections Carries on Despite Contrary Scientific Advice

NSF Sidesteps Own Report to Fund Controversial Project to Collect the Blood of Indigenous Peoples Around the World. International Controls Needed.

The US National Science Foundation continued to fund the Human Genome Diversity Project (HGDP) even as the NSF awaited a report it itself commissioned in order to determine if the HGDP met peer-approved scientific and ethical standards. Following an exhaustive 30-month investigation, the report, tabled by a blue-ribbon committee of the National Research Council, advised against the HGDP proposal citing both ethical and scientific shortcomings.

Total support from the NSF's Physical Anthropology Program for human biodiversity activities nearly doubled between 1995 and 1997. Between the time the NSF commissioned the HGDP evaluation in mid-1995 and the time the NRC committee tendered its report rejecting the HGDP as a viable project, on October 21st this year, the NSF disbursed \$2,197,832 in 21 grants related to human genetic diversity research and/or collection. Of that, \$1,143,748 (or 52%) went to 10 HGDP activities. The most recent HGDP allocations were made only a few weeks before the NRC's negative findings were made public. Some grants went to the HGDP to address questions which had already been assigned to the evaluation committee.

Human Genetic Diversity Funding
US NSF Grants - 1995=97



While the grants made explicitly to the HGDP were for studies clearly intended to pave the way for the Project's proposed international blood collection work, many of the other grants were to HGDP-associated researchers for the investigation of specific indigenous populations.

Among the grants approved were: work in Tibet on a gene found among peoples living above 4000 metres that facilitates oxygen absorption in the bloodstream and also appears to improve their "reproductive fitness"; an investigation of the genetic diversity of insular Southeast Asians with the peoples of New Guinea and Polynesia; susceptibility to diabetes and resistance to cancer among Plains Apache in Oklahoma (USA); a study of the genetic evolution of four South India caste

populations as well as two "tribal" populations; measurement of the basal metabolic rate and cold-tolerance of Mongolia's pastoral nomads; research based on 800 individuals sampled from New Guinea to the furthest reaches of Melanesia; sampling and stress study of 70 individuals from two locations in Botswana; study of rural Quechua in Norte de Potosi, Bolivia; genetic investigation of eight groups in La Paz and Santa Cruz, Bolivia; analysis of aboriginal populations of Australia and New Guinea; comparison of exhumed remains of 47 ancient Native Americans from Stillwater Marsh and Pyramid Lake, Nevada with indigenous peoples in the Western US today; and, blood sampling of youth among six villages in Western Samoa.

At least one population-sampling activity - that being conducted by the University of Utah in conjunction with Indian scientists to investigate caste and tribal groups in southern India - is closely associated with another NSF grant to the HGDP for field lab testing, also in Southern India, also involving the same Utah team.

The NRC committee that evaluated the HGDP proposal concluded that the international collection of human DNA should only take place under the authority of an intergovernmental governance structure. No such mechanism currently exists. The committee also determined that it would be unethical for scientists to use blood collected from indigenous peoples for any purpose other than that originally agreed to by the research subjects. Many of the NSF grants, such as the one among youth in Western Samoa, appear to involve blood samples collected for other purposes. The committee also concluded that the HGDP's model ethical code for collecting was inadequate. Yet the NSF asked the HGDP - in the midst of the evaluation, to undertake case studies of key ethical and legal issues while

Great Plains populations were being investigated. Finally, the NRC committee stated that the HGDP did not have a clearly-defined goal for its proposed work. Yet the work continues.

The committee did however, agree that a global survey of human genetic diversity could be beneficial and that, under the proper circumstances and with the full approval and participation of target populations, there should be financial support for this work.

Indigenous Peoples and Civil Society Organizations have called for a moratorium on all human biodiversity collecting, unless and until these conditions are met by the international community. In light of this new information, the scientific integrity of the U.S. National Science Foundation is brought into question.

The NSF should immediately suspend financial support to all human biodiversity collection and HGDP activities and request its grantees to suspend their work. A full investigation of U.S. Government financial support for the research into - and collection of - human genetic diversity will be necessary before the confidence of the international community can be restored. Other governments whose peoples have been targeted by NSF grants should consider their own investigations.

Governments attending the UN Convention on Biological Diversity's Madrid meeting (November 24-28) should acknowledge that - though inadvertently - the Convention has been ceded a role in addressing issues concerning human biodiversity and should act to bring the issue of the collection of human genetic material before the UN Human Rights Commissioner and the International Court of Justice.

Indigenous people from South and Central America meeting today in Kuna Yala, Panama will be carrying a letter to the Madrid meeting calling for an immediate end to US government funding for the HGDP and a suspension of the projects in question. Indigenous peoples' organizations, RAFI, and other NGOs will work together in Madrid over the next two weeks to coordinate and advance their efforts to stop the HGDP.

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**US National Science Foundation Physical Anthropology Program 1995-97
Grants for Human Genetic Diversity Research & Collection**

NSF No.	Start Date	US\$	Location/ Purpose	University/Institution
1995				
(9423118)	950501	\$210,008	SE Asia/Pacific	U. Pennsylvania)
(9523248)	950615	\$160,000	Research/Evaluation	Inter-Agency w/ NIH (HGDP))
9507320	950901	\$156,313	Bolivia (Quechua)	Northwestern U. /UC Riverside
9523494	950915	\$12,000	Bolivia	Cornell U.
1996				
9514733	960301	\$294,789	India	U. Utah (HGDP)
9610342	960415	\$98,000	Research	Washington U. (HGDP)
9630926	960801	\$9,575	US - Indigenous Pop.	U. California-Davis
9600910	960815	\$233,097	SE Asia	U. Pittsburgh
9632509	960915	\$252,000	Global	Yale U. (HGDP)
9601020	960915	\$100,000	SE Asia/Pacific	U. Pittsburgh/ U. Michigan
1997				
9617272	970215	\$9,800	Pacific/Australia	U. Pennsylvania
9615749	970301	\$12,000	Mongolia	Case Western Reserve U.
9610336	970415	\$100,000	N.America - Apache	U. Oklahoma (HGDP)
9610371	970415	\$36,000	Research	Stanford (HGDP)
9610505	970501	\$114,000	Research	U. California-Berkeley (HGDP)
9796180	970501	\$79,998	Research	U. Pittsburgh/Allegheny U. (HGDP)
9705161	970501	\$11,995	Western Samoa	Emory U.
9710603	970801	\$231,424	Research	Stanford U.
9706980	970801	\$266,786	Tibet	Case Western Reserve U.
9711691	970901	\$11,094	Botswana	Emory U.
9711287	970901	\$20,961	Research/Meeting	AAAS (HGDP)
9610147	970901	\$50,000	Research	Louisiana State U. (HGDP)

9700729	970915	\$98,000	India	U. Utah (HGDP)
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Note: The total indicated in this table includes the sum of all human biodiversity projects supported by the NSF from 1995 through October, 1997. Two projects approved in 1995, prior to and including the NSF's financial disbursement to the NRC for the HGDP evaluation, are included here in order to provide a picture of the funding pattern for each of the three years.