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Letters

A useful resource

You recently reported ("Banking on genetic information" SN: 10/9/82, p. 238) on the DNA/RNA sequence library being established at the Los Alamos National Laboratory. It seems prudent to compile and freeze actual extracted DNA from many of the near-extinct animal, plant and microbe species. This "germ plasm" resource could have many uses for future recombinant DNA technology.

James W. Larrick, M.D., Ph.D.
Palo Alto, Calif.

A mistaken impression

I would like to correct a mistaken impression that was expressed by Adrienne L. Zihlman (SN: 10/9/82, p. 228). In discussing the antiquity of man, defined as a species of the genus *Homo*, from Ubeidiya, Israel, I did not imply that man's ancestors, assigned to other hominid primate genera, were not largely African; they are, as Dr. Zihlman points out. What present evidence seems to indicate is that some of the non-*Homo*

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ancestors of man dispersed from Africa to Eurasia and there evolved into what is recognized as the genus *Homo*.

The subsequent return of this emigrant lineage, as *Homo erectus*, to Africa, as immigrating "man," is strongly supported by the East African archaeological records, in which *Homo erectus* and early Acheulian artifacts first appear abruptly with no gradation out of older fossils or artifactual styles as emphasized by M.D. Leakey in the 1971 publication *Olduvai Gorge, Volume III, Excavations in Beds I and II, 1960-1963* [Cambridge Univ. Pr.]. In addition, Benveniste and Todaro (NATURE: Vol 261, pp. 101-108) have documented the differences in viral gene sequences between African and Asian apes and show clear evidence that the lineage leading to man has been removed from the African region for a considerable period of time. They suggest that many may have invaded Africa only 2 to 3 million years ago because he now does not yet show detectable genetic adjustment to the African virus studied; he retains the characteristics of Asiatic apes. Finally, the relatively brief period of cohabitation of Africa by both immigrant *Homo erectus* and indigen-

ous non-*Homo* hominid primates also suggests invasion. But none of these even slightly cast doubt on the African origin of hominid primates, which, as stated by Dr. Zihlman, is overwhelming. It is *Homo*, not all hominids, that appears to have evolved outside of Africa.

Charles A. Repenning
Menlo Park, Calif.

A limited definition

Regarding the article "Learning Disability: Sexual Parity" (SN: 9/4/82, p. 154): please be aware of the limitation of the authors' definition of learning disability as "a deficit in spatial orientation that predicts poor reading skills." Learning disabilities also include deficits in many other mental "processes." Auditory sequentialization difficulties, specific memory dysfunctions and disorders of planning and organizing functions are frequently observed in the learning-disabled individual. One of the most common manifestations of these dysfunctions in cognitive processing is language disorder, which also "predicts poor reading skills."

Nancy A. Hurd
Atlanta, Ga.



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