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Cover: Although the Hubble Space Telescope was upgraded just 2 months ago, astronomers are already hard at work on its successor. Dubbed the Next Generation Space Telescope, this device would feature a primary mirror two to three times the diameter of Hubble's and might record some of the earliest flickers of starlight in the cosmos. A large sun shield would keep the telescope cold enough to make observations in the infrared. (Illustration: Ball Aerospace)



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## Letters

### Eurafrican gene mix and cancer risk

I concur with Mark H. Schiffman's "inevitable middle position, with genes and environment interacting to a greater or lesser extent for each malignancy, but always interacting" (Letters, SN: 2/1/97, p. 67). Though a generally unassailable rationale for the etiology of many malignancies, this conclusion is not truly linked to his chain of argument.

There is an inherent fallacy in taking at face value the "juxtaposition" of the two facts listed in the letter: "that prostate cancer remains rare in Africa and that black U.S. men have one of the highest incidences in the world, higher than that of white U.S. men." While the various indigenous populations of sub-Saharan Africa (to which I believe the letter refers) are of course "black," they are genetically different from "black U.S. men."

The slave trade, which was the origin of the black populations in the Americas, drew disproportionately from black ethnic groups

in the West African coastal areas. Moreover, these black populations received substantial genetic infusions from white plantation and factory owners, as well as overseers. Since the genes accounting for negroid body features are dominant, they may mask the close genetic relatedness of "black" and "white" U.S. populations.

It could be argued that the reproductive mingling of sub-Saharan black populations and European white populations in North America may have produced a genetic crossing (the present U.S. black population) that has an inherent predisposition to prostate cancer. However, males in other black or dark-skinned populations in the Americas, such as the Caribbean countries and Brazil, are not known to display an unusually high incidence of prostate cancer.

It is also possible—and perhaps more likely—that socioeconomic and culturally transmitted lifestyle factors may account for, or are significant contributors to, the very high incidence of prostate cancer in U.S. black males.

For example, the predominant dietary pattern of U.S. black populations is very high in fatty foods, a parameter that has been implicated in elevated prostate cancer incidence. This is possibly exacerbated by the largely urban lifestyles of the U.S. black populations—now sedentary, but consuming a diet originally adapted to heavy physical labor.

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*Clinical Professor Emeritus*  
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### Best wishes

I just received the 75th anniversary issue (3/1/97) and thought you might be interested in knowing that SCIENCE NEWS has been in my family for 75 years.

My father, Earl Berger, started subscribing to SCIENCE NEWS LETTER when it was first published. I was born in 1926, and my earliest memories are of my father reading it to us. He

*Letters continued on p. 260*