

DNA advances fuel racism fears

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New developments in genetics are advancing medicine, but some scientists and advocates fear they could be misinterpreted as support for racist theories.

Though about 99 percent of DNA is identical, the remaining 1 percent is not, The New York Times reported Sunday. Study of those genetic differences has led to new treatments like BiDil, a heart-disease drug targeted toward African-Americans, and genetic tests for some hereditary conditions.

But in the blogosphere and elsewhere, research has been misinterpreted to support theories about the difference between races that were subscribed to by Nazis, oppressive colonial regimes and others, the Times reported.

In particular, those theories attribute non-physical differences between races, such as temperament, intelligence and social status, to genetics.

Some researchers and armchair scientists, for example, have argued that Africans -- and by extension African-Americans -- have a lower average IQ.

But most mainstream scientists caution that human genetics is highly complicated and difficult to definitively connect with any trait, the newspaper said. Whereas some genes linked with intelligence are less prevalent in Africans, others are actually more common. And in many instances, socio-economic factors also clearly play a large role.

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