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DIANE LUDIN

# Harvesting the Net:: Memory Flesh

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## Diversity.com/Population.gov

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### A Tsunami of Data

When, in the early 1990s, the U.S. government-funded Human Ger Project (HGDP) drafted plans for a genetic database of some 4,000 distinct ethnic populations, it was met with a great deal of controve criticism. The stakes were raised even more when it was discovere HGDP had proposals for the patenting of the cell lines from several indigenous populations, all without those members' or communitie consent. Due to the interventions by such groups as the Rural Adva Foundation International (RAFI), the HGDP was forced to drop thre patents. In 1996 it provided a testimony to the U.S. National Resea and has since drafted a document of "Model Ethical Protocols" for r emphasizes informed consent and cultural-ethical negotiation. Sinc however, the HGDP has been conspicuously silent (it is now based University, as the Morris Institute for Population Studies), and, des of news items and press releases relating to the various genome m endeavors around the world--both government and corporate spon has been relatively no news or updates on the progress of the HGD plans.

Much of this curious disappearing act has to do, certainly, with the conundrums in which the HGDP has been involved, as well as with combination of vocal critics such as RAFI, and the HGDP's having b the media and dubbed by its critics as "the vampire project." Howe HGDP as an organization may have slipped from science headlines, and problems associated with it have not. Another, parallel develop biotech and genetics has emerged, which has more or less taken u problem" that the HGDP had dealt with in the 1990s: bioinformatic Bioinformatics involves the use of computer and networking techno organization of updated, networked, and interactive genomic datab used by research institutions, the biotech industry, medical genetic pharmaceutical industry. Bioinformatics signals an important devel increasing computerization of "wet" biotech research, creating an a where bioinformatics can form relationships between bioscientific a diversity and the fluctuations of the biotech economy. A driving ec finance capital, bolstered from within by a wide range of "future pr biotech research (software-based gene discovery, data mining, gen and so on). The emphasis we are witnessing now in "digital capitali