

A new take on race proposed: white identity

But one academic movement says a positive white identity is impossible.

ROSELLE, N.J. (AP) — Jeff Hitchcock thought he was pretty knowledgeable about living in a multicultural society.

After all, the 45-year-old psychologist dealt with race issues both in his career as a diversity consultant, conducting cultural sensitivity workshops for companies, and in his interracial marriage to a black woman.

But Hitchcock was unprepared when an interview subject, discussing what people of various cultures need to do to get along in a multicultural world, said that white people needed to be more aware of their whiteness.

"I had been half-listening, but when he said that, it just struck me," Hitchcock says. "I thought, 'What is he talking about?' because I never really thought of myself as having a racial identity as a white person."

"Then I realized that if I was going to do this kind of work, I really needed to think about it."

In April 1995, Hitchcock started the Center for the Study of White American Culture to carry out that task.

Operating out of a small office in his Roselle home, the center has an Internet site and a newsletter. Last year

it sponsored a conference that brought together about 50 people from around the country to discuss the issue.

Non-racist models

"The only models we have for discussing whiteness are coming out of the Ku Klux Klan and the Aryan Nation, and that's not right," Hitchcock says. "We have to examine what it means to be white, but in a non-racist, non-supremacist way."

The organization's goal is to get white people to talk about and recognize themselves as a distinct cultural and racial group and to examine what role that group plays in the larger American society.

Hitchcock says many whites find it difficult to talk about themselves in terms of race, but sees it as vital if race relations are to improve.

"Whites think of themselves as the norm in America and race as something people of color have. We see ourselves as plain Americans, and we claim center stage for ourselves," Hitchcock says.

Hitchcock is not alone. There's a growing interest at colleges and universities in taking a critical look at white culture.

While minority scholars have examined the issue for years, mainstream academic interest is relatively new, says David Roediger, chairman of the American studies department at the University of Minnesota.

"It was always easy to dismiss stud-

ies of whiteness from writers of color," Roediger says. "But with the increased diversity in this society, white privilege is coming under attack. White normalcy is being challenged."

Removing racial myths

Benjamin Bowser, a sociologist at the California State University at Hayward, says it's a myth that all European immigrants eagerly assimilated into the American ideal of rugged individualism. Believing that myth, most whites cannot relate to immigrants of color who seem more reluctant to assimilate and let go of where they came from, he says.

"When whites study their history, they see their roots are different from what they are led to believe," Bowser says.

"They understand that they were forced to give up their cultures, their languages, their traditions to fit into what a dominant English minority considered American culture," he says. "Studying it opens emotional traumas, but whites who do it become aware of their similarities to other communities."

Hitchcock hopes studying the issues will help whites gain a positive self-identity.

"Many whites feel they have no culture, or they feel ashamed to be white because they think it's only about oppression," he says. "That shouldn't be the case."

"People should feel both pride and

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JEFF HITCHCOCK
psychologist

shame because all cultures have good and bad points. We're not interested in building up the white culture, but we're not going to tear it down either."

Positive white identity?

Another school of thought among some academics, known as the New Abolitionist movement, takes a more negative view.

"There is no possibility of a positive white identity," says Noel Ignatiev, a lecturer at Harvard and an editor for *Race Traitor*, the journal of the New Abolitionists.

"There may be positives to various European ethnic identities, but whiteness is purely about the maintenance of privilege."

"Working-class people accept the benefits of being white over the benefits of a better work situation. Instead of working with others in the same position, they say, 'However bad we've got it, at least we're white.'"

Others see no value to studying whiteness. They see it as part of an unhealthy obsession with difference that ignores the shared culture of America.

"Under the multiculturalism push, we are putting ourselves into little boxes. We are driving lines into our culture," says David Murray, a researcher at a statistical research foundation in Washington, D.C.

"There are no real biological racial differences. Social class has more consequences than race per se. I'm sick of what we in the counterculture have done to this country by emphasizing differences."

Those who are studying whiteness call that viewpoint naive.

"Race is the most controversial issue in this society, and we need to address it," Bowser says. "Until we can bring all players to the table, we won't be able to resolve it."

Monkeys reproduced from cloned embryos

Scientists say there are now fewer barriers to cloning humans.

born in August were cloned from cells taken from embryos, not an adult monkey — a crucial difference between them and Dolly, the sheep cloned by Scottish researchers from an adult sheep.

WASHINGTON (AP)—Scientists in Oregon have produced monkeys from cloned embryos, marking the first time a species closely related to humans has been cloned.

The cloned monkeys thus are not genetically identical to any adult monkey.

The scientists used a technique similar to the one used by Scottish researchers last week to clone a sheep, *The Washington Post* reported in Sunday editions.

The *Post* said lead researcher Don Wolf, a senior scientist at the Oregon Regional Primate Research Center in Beaverton and director of the human in vitro fertilization laboratory at Oregon Health Sciences University in Portland, said researchers do not plan to produce clones from adult monkeys.

The Oregon success adds to a growing body of evidence that there are no insurmountable biological barriers to creating multiple copies of a human being, the *Post* reported.

"This is really an effort to see if we can create genetically identical monkeys for research," he said. He explained that fewer carbon-copy research animals would be needed in drug experiments, for example, because their sameness would eliminate much of the genetic differences that confound such experiments.

"It demands that we take seriously the issue of human cloning," Arthur Caplan, a bioethicist at the University of Pennsylvania, told the *Post*.

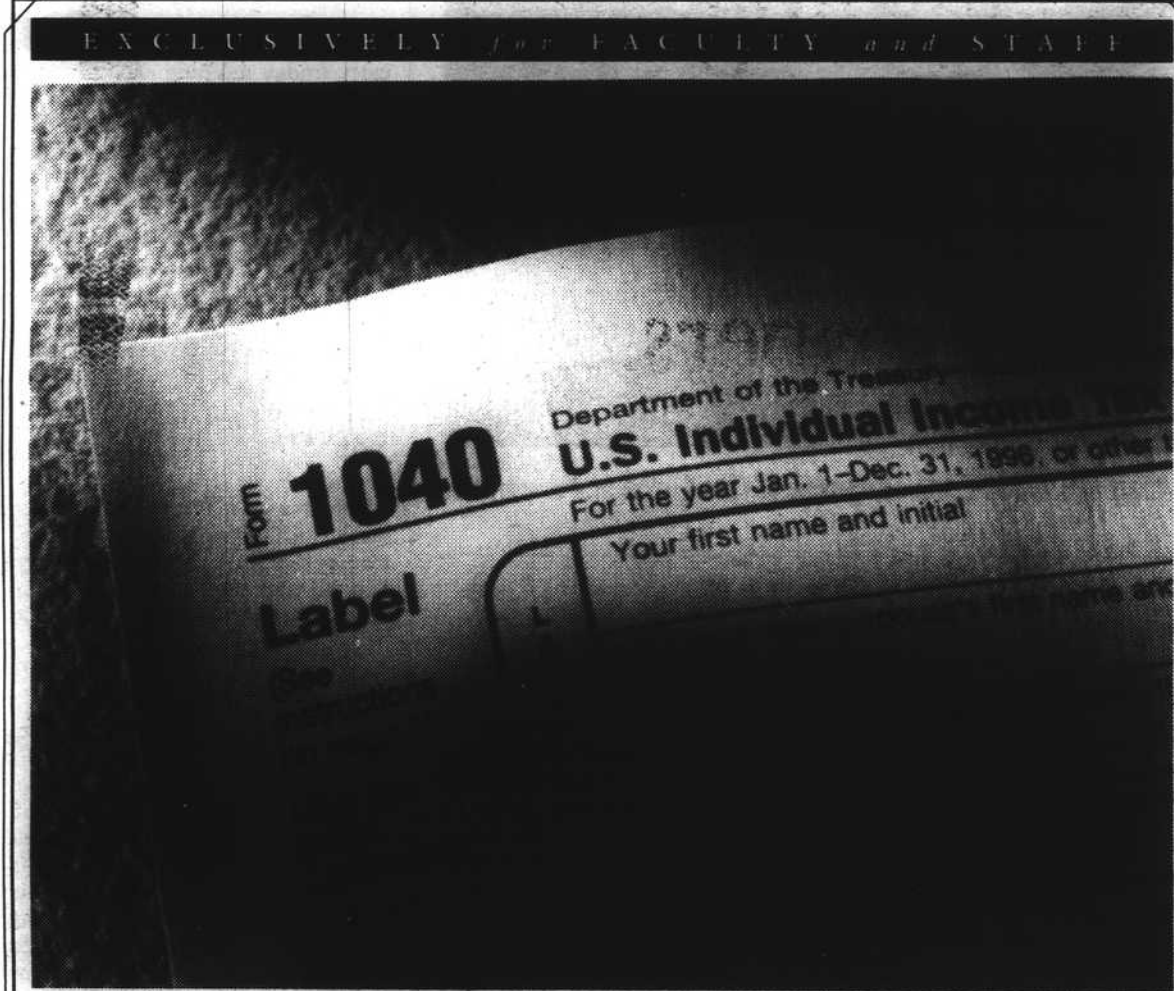
The two monkeys cloned in Oregon are not identical to each other because they were taken from different embryos.

But he said cloning is still far too expensive and results in too many abnormal embryos to be practical for humans, notwithstanding the public outcry over prospects of human cloning.

But researchers told the *Post* the technique could be used to create eight or more identical monkeys from a single embryo, and that further advances could lead to the ability to make clones of adults as well.

"You're probably heading down the path to criminal arrest, not the Nobel Prize, if you try this in people," Caplan said.

The *Post* said two Oregon monkeys



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The Daily Nebraskan (USPS 144-080) is published by the UNL Publications Board, Nebraska Union 34, 1400 R St., Lincoln, NE 68588-0448, Monday through Friday during the academic year; weekly during summer sessions.

Readers are encouraged to submit story ideas and comments to the Daily Nebraskan by calling 472-2588. The public has access to the Publications Board.

Subscription price is \$55 for one year.

Postmaster: Send address changes to the Daily Nebraskan, Nebraska Union 34, 1400 R St., Lincoln, NE 68588-0448. Second-class postage paid at Lincoln, Neb.

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