Race Certainly Has a Biological Reality

To the Editor:

Ira Glasser of the American Civil Liberties Union (letter, Oct. 28) criticizes Shelby Steele (Op-Ed, Oct. 24) for pretending that racism does not exist. Mr. Glasser further asserts that race is not a biological fact but rather a “social and political construct” based purely on skin color.

Using this reasoning, an African and a native of India are of the same race if their skin color is identical. Yet few would consider this pair to be of the same race, no matter which of the many racial classifications is used.

Dividing the world’s population into a few major racial groups necessarily involves arbitrary lines and obscures much underlying texture. It does not mean there is no underlying biological reality.

Contrary to Mr. Glasser, acceptance of race as a biological construct does not imply that racial groups necessarily vary in “intelligence, responsibility and moral capacity.” It means they differ in genetic material as a consequence of historical separation. If race were purely a social construct, the proposal that the Human Genome Diversity Project inventory the genes of African-Americans separately from American whites would be as frivolous as having a separate inventory for Republicans.

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