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Kimberly's Genealogy Blog

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What Exactly Can DNA Testing Tell You About Your Ancestry?

Thursday November 13, 2008

Public interest in [genetic ancestry analysis](#) as a means of supplementing traditional genealogical research methods has grown dramatically in recent years. **The American Society of Human Genetics (ASHG) estimates that a half-million Americans will purchase a genetic ancestry test this year. But what exactly can this ancestry testing tell us about our race, ethnicity, ancestry and inherited traits? Answering these questions is the focus of the ASHG Ancestry Testing Task Force Committee, which will unveil it's recommendations for ancestry testing in a [live Webcast](#) on Thursday, November 13, 2008 from 1:15 - 2:15 p.m. from the annual ASHG Meeting in Philadelphia.**

Recommendations for Ancestry Testing by the [American Society of Human Genetics](#): "

1. *Because the science of ancestry determination has limitations, greater efforts are needed on the part of both industry and academia to make the limitations of ancestry estimation clearer to consumers, the scientific community, and the public at large. In turn, the public has the responsibility to avail themselves of information regarding ancestry testing and strive to better understand the implications and limitations of these assessments.*
2. *Additional research is required to further understand the extent to which the accuracy of genetic ancestry estimation is influenced by whom we have sampled in existing databases, geographical patterns of human diversity, marker selection and statistical methods.*
3. *The complex consequences of ancestry estimation for people, families, and populations need to be assessed and guidelines should be developed to facilitate explanation and/or counseling about ancestry estimation in research, DTC and health care settings.*
4. *Scientists inferring genetic ancestry should consult or collaborate with scholars who have expertise in the historical, sociopolitical and cultural contexts needed to inform the processes and outcomes of their research and commercial efforts.*
5. *Mechanisms for greater accountability of the DTC ancestry testing industry should be explored.*

Implementation of these recommendations is likely to have many benefits, including an improved understanding of human evolution and demographic history (an important story applicable to all humans), more accurate ancestry testing with quantifiable limits, better informed users of ancestry information, and the establishment of a framework for interpreting ancestry information in a culturally appropriate and socially sensitive manner." --See the complete ASHG [Ancestry Testing Statement](#)

How do you feel about the various ancestry tests offered by genetic testing companies these days? Have you ever had yourself tested? Did you learn anything useful? Surprising? Personally, as genealogists I feel that most of us use DNA tests as yet another source of evidence to supplement our family history research. But maybe some people do expect a bit too much...