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## Ancestral genes are not black or white

25 November 2008  
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A DESIRE to know our roots seems central to human identity. It could also explain why this year alone, half a million people in the US have tried to trace their ancestry by undergoing genetic testing. But the results can be misleading, warns the American Society of Human Genetics in a new report.

About 30 companies in the US offer to compare an individual's DNA markers with those in genetics databases worldwide. The results, however, may be more interesting than illuminating.

In theory, the more markers that match a population, the higher the likelihood that a person had ancestors there. In practice, though, migration can spread genes among populations. This could lead to the markers wrongly identifying an individual's ancestral line. And since the databases do not equally cover all the populations, they may miss some lineages altogether.

Charmaine Royal from the Duke Institute for Genome Sciences and Policies in Durham, North Carolina, an author on the report, thinks the tests could fuel racism. "By viewing populations as discrete biological entities, with no overlap, we will never get rid of the desire to discriminate."

By viewing populations as discrete entities we'll never get rid of discrimination

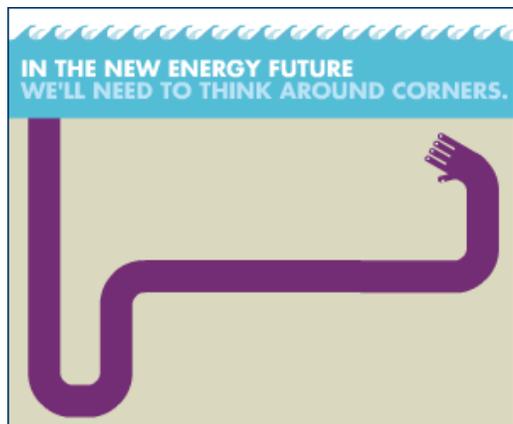
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