

Genetics & Society: On Origins and Identity—The Science and Ethics of Ancestry DNA Testing | The 2025 Walter and Susan Schenker Seminar in the Humanities

Faculty: Michell Chresfield, Assistant Professor, Africana Studies & Research Center

Week Two: July 13 - 19, 2025

Schedule: Monday - Friday, 9-12 and 1:30-3:30, except Wednesday afternoon.

Location: On campus, classroom KEND 101 (Cap 26)

On Origins and Identity: The Science and Ethics of Ancestry DNA Testing

Class Schedule and Resources

- Monday, 9 – 12: Roots and Records: Understanding Institutional Ties"
 - Sarah Zhang, “What Can You Do With the World’s Largest Family Tree?” *The Atlantic*, Feb 7, 2017.
 - Maya Jasanoff, “Our Obsession with Ancestry Has Some Twisted Roots,” *The New Yorker*, May 2, 2022.
<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2022/05/09/our-obsession-with-ancestry-has-some-twisted-roots-maud-newton-ancestor-trouble>
 - “Know Your Genes: DNA & Personal Identity,” *In Those Genes Podcast*, May 6, 2020.
<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/intronic-season-ep-1-know-your-genes-from-american/id1489257965?i=1000475995830>
- Monday, 1:30 – 3:30: Mapping Your Own Story
 - Genealogy: Getting Started at the NY Public Library: First Steps
<https://libguides.nypl.org/genealogy/gettingstarted/firststeps>
 - Activity:** Create a personal family chart (materials provided; digital or paper).
 - Prompt:** Reflect on what stories are known, unknown, or contested.
- Tuesday, 9 – 12: From Curiosity to Commerce: The Rise of Genetic Ancestry Testing"
- In Class: PBS NOVA- “Secrets in Our DNA” P
- Tuesday, 1:30 – 3:30: The Lemba and the Search for Jewish Ancestors
 - Noah Tamarkin, “South Africa’s Lemba People: How They View Their Jewishness Challenges Zionist Ideas That Identity Is Linked to Homeland,” *The Conversation*, April 30, 2024.
<https://theconversation.com/south-africas-lemba-people-how-they-view-their-jewishness-challenges-zionist-ideas-that-identity-is-linked-to-one-homeland-228632>
- Wednesday, 9 – 12: Identity, Belonging and Recognition: The Case for Native Americans
 - All My Relations Podcast- Can DNA Define Who You Are?
 - Tom Fennario, “Abenaki in Quebec Allege Tribes Recognized in Vermont are Committing Cultural Identity Theft,” October 20, 2023.

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<https://www.aptnnews.ca/investigates/aptn-investigates-people-of-the-dawn-abenaki-quebec-vermont-cultural-identity-theft/>

- Shaun Robinson, "Dispute Over Abenaki Identity in Vermont Grows More Entrenched," May 3, 2024.

<https://vtdigger.org/2024/05/03/dispute-over-abenaki-identity-in-vermont-grows-more-entrenched/>

Wednesday, 1:30-3:30: Mock Tribunal-Proving Indigeneity: The Abenaki Case

Thursday, 9-12: "From Kin to Killer: Forensic DNA and the Golden State Case"

- Sarah Zhang, "*How a Genealogy Website Led to the Alleged Golden State Killer*" (The Atlantic)
- Excerpt from Libby Copeland, *The Lost Family* (on forensic genealogy)
- Thursday, 1:30 – 3:30: Surveillance: Should You Opt In?
 - § Blog Post: "Protecting People in People Powered Research" 23andMe, July 30, 2014.
<https://blog.23andme.com/articles/protecting-people-in-people-powered-research>
 - Joe Hernandez, "23andMe is Filing for Bankruptcy: Here's What It Means for Your Genetic Data", NPR, March 24, 2025.
<https://www.npr.org/2025/03/24/nx-s1-5338622/23andme-bankruptcy-genetic-data-privacy>

In class: 23 and Me CEO on genetic testing relaunch, protecting privacy

Prompt: Should publicly shared genetic data be used to solve crimes? What types of limits should exist?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=peIUNFVmTWg>

What would you want a user policy to indicate for a genetic database?

- Friday, 9 – 12: Unexpected Ancestries: Stories, Shocks, and Selfhood"
- Dani Shapiro, "How A DNA Testing Kit Revealed A Family Secret Hidden 54 Years," *Time*, January 3, 2019.
<https://time.com/5492642/dna-test-results-family-secret-biological-father/>
- Anna E. Machado, "A Lineage of Nonconsent," *Guernica*, June 13, 2022.
- Friday, 1:30 – 3:30: "DNA Doesn't Know Your Name"

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