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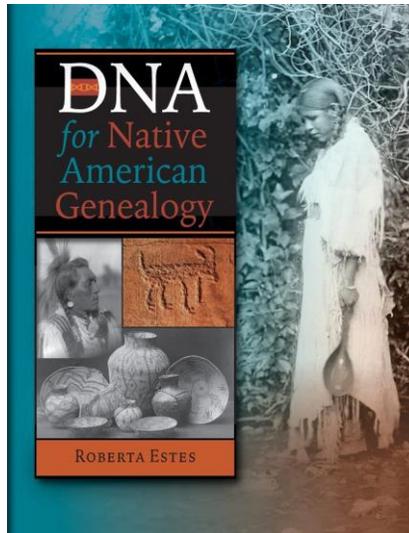
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BOOK REVIEW: DNA FOR NATIVE AMERICAN GENEALOGY, BY ROBERTA ESTES

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Review by J. David Vance



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Perhaps it's not that surprising that since genetic genealogy was made possible by new advances in genetic testing, that therefore many books and guides about genetic genealogy have focused on explaining the underlying science and biology that makes deep genetic testing of our DNA useful for genealogy. For me though a book needs to focus mostly on solving genealogical questions to keep my interest; deep dives into genetics tend to put me to sleep. If that's the case for you as well and you have an interest in indigenous American ancestry then *DNA for Native American Genealogy* is exactly what you need.

Don't get me wrong, the science is still there; but those familiar with Roberta Estes' blog (www.dna-explained.com) will find the same well-written, well-organized and easy to follow walks through complex subjects in just enough detail to clarify them for new readers without getting lost in the science. Readers already familiar with the genetic underpinnings of DNA testing for genealogy will appreciate her focus on the applications of DNA test results to solving the genealogical challenges of indigenous Americans, while those new to DNA testing will get just enough of an introduction to understand how the DNA test results are useful. The author is also thorough in her treatment of the different types of DNA testing (autosomal, Y, and mitochondrial DNA testing), the results you get from each type of test and the companies which provide them. But that's all just the starter course; the main course here is about using it all to explore your indigenous American ancestry.

Those new to genetic genealogy often hope that DNA testing will "reveal their tribe", and the author does a good job of dispelling this myth while explaining what DNA really can tell you about your indigenous American ancestry and providing practical suggestions covering the various scenarios that you might encounter; these are

sprinkled throughout the book and also consolidated into a useful roadmap as an appendix which even includes the use of tools like DNAPainter and Genetic Affairs. The use of GEDmatch is not explicitly covered but readers who follow the roadmap would naturally come across this and other extensions on their own. The cross-references of major tribes to major Y-DNA and mtDNA haplogroups are invaluable (DNA cannot prove a connection to a specific tribe, but the varying frequencies of individual haplogroups occurring among different tribes may offer clues).

While a few reference sections are specific to North American indigenous ancestry (requirements for joining tribes, as an example) the majority of the book is applicable to those exploring either North, Central, or South American indigenous ancestry. What you can learn about the specific people in your ancestry of course depends on available records which will vary significantly across locations and time periods, but the recommended step-by-step approaches for exploring these ancestries with DNA are still broadly the same.

Personally I have no indigenous American ancestry that I'm aware of (or that DNA has revealed) and I still found this book useful to challenge my usual approaches to my own ancestry research. While obviously the resources and details in the book are specific to indigenous American genealogy research, I found parallels with researching other backgrounds. There is obviously no single best roadmap for researching different ethnicities, but in a field dominated by advice mostly about researching Western European genetic ancestry a book devoted to a wholly different genetic ancestry is a welcome example of how and where our genetic genealogy methods may need to adapt to different scenarios.

My daughter however is adopted from Central America and comes up as 44-45% indigenous American (Mayan, for that region) on both Ancestry.com and 23andMe's ethnicity reports. Her mtDNA haplogroup and known heritage are consistent with the cross-references in the book and she and I have taken some but not all of the recommended steps; so we now have a roadmap for further exploration.

So whether you have a family story of an "Indian princess" ancestor or already know your ancestry back to one or more specific tribes, *DNA for Native American Genealogy* is a valuable resource for organizing and exploring the DNA clues to your ancestry!

Note: A copy of Roberta's book was provided to the Journal of Genetic Genealogy for this review.