

Genes show Latin America's past

Results from a genetic study of Latin America suggest most Latin Americans are descended from European men and Native American or African women.

Scientists say the study, said to be the largest of its kind, backs up historical theories about the Spanish Conquistadors of the 16th Century.

The research involved genetic analysis of over 300 individuals from across seven countries from Mexico to Chile.

Details of the study are published in the online journal PLoS Genetics.

The genetic research was conducted by universities across Latin America, the US and Europe.

'Genetic continuity'

Close genetic analysis of blood samples from across the region show, the researchers claim, that the majority of Latin Americans can trace their origins some 13 generations back to the time of the Conquistadors.

What is more, they say, the genes suggest most are a product of a match between a European male settler and a Native American or African woman.

This supports the historical argument that European colonisers killed off many of the native men and had sex with native women or with African slaves.

Professor Andres Ruiz-Linares of University College London, who led the study, says that it goes some way to rescuing the past of Latin America and what he calls the "living presence" of Native Americans throughout the region.

He says despite many past attempts to erase Native Americans from the history of the Latin America, the new research shows there is substantial genetic continuity between the pre- and post-Columbian populations.

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