



***Linguistics & Population Genetics:***  
**Reconstructing the origins**  
**of Latin America's**  
**Black populations**



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***Abstract***

Less than a quarter century ago, reconstructing the *precise* sub-Saharan origins of descendants of African slaves in the Americas seemed like an impossible task. This was so for at least two reasons: (1) historical records of the transatlantic slave trade were haphazard, and (2) slaves had originated from so many parts of West Africa that specific speech communities in the New World were a priori thought to be the result of heavy ethno-linguistic mixing.

This talk explains how the past 30 years of research have dramatically reversed this former situation, so much so that today some Black speech communities (e.g., El Palenque, Colombia) can be traced to highly specific locations in Africa.

Key to this discovery of “Africa roots” has been a multidisciplinary approach that combines historical linguistics with population genetic (DNA) research. A main goal of this talk is to demonstrate how this multi-pronged approach to the origins question has led to the discovery of highly specific African roots.

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