

Electronic paternity tests and other bad ideas before the dawn of the DNA era

In the first decades of the 20th century, scientists around the world proposed a fantastic array of new methods to determine a child's biological parentage. ... And in San Francisco, physician Albert Abrams introduced the oscillophore, a miraculous machine that established parentage by measuring the electronic vibrations of the blood.

...In the era of DNA, it's tempting to lampoon this prehistory of genetics. An electronic paternity test? Who were these "scientists" who made such ludicrous claims?

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The quest for a scientific method to determine a child's paternity harnessed ideas about heredity to solve a practical problem: how could you tell if two individuals were related? It was a question that cropped up in a wide variety of contexts, and courts, for one, were eager for the answers provided by science.

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In the present as in the past, genetic science is called on to answer a remarkable array of questions. It promises to defend morality, ensure justice, secure the nation, reknit ties and reveal the elusive truth of identity. The science may be radically different, but in the era of DNA, as in the era of electronic paternity tests, perhaps the most powerful and enduring truths genetic testing reveals are not about biology but about society.

Read full, original post: [The Electronic Paternity Test and Other Follies](#)