

Good essay on the immortal life of henrietta lacks

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When gender and race are combined in the life of a black woman, they result to racism, objectification, and sexism from medical professionals. A combination of these factors seems negatively to affect black women. In a critical response to Rebecca Skloot's book "The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks" this essay presents the case for women and gender for black women.

Science is used to construct both gender, sex and race

The case of Henrietta is introduced when she dies of cervical cancer in hospital. At 31, Henrietta was poor and could not afford to undergo the required procedure to heal her. However, the irony of her story is that her cells were removed and they revolutionized medicine. Although the doctors performed this procedure after her death without the consent of her family, the procedure brought a significant change in medicine. By mixing the cells from her body with special plasma in the laboratory, the medical technicians managed to grow tumor cells (Skloot 44). For the first time within medical practice, human cells had survived outside the body. Science constructed sex and race because science involves the combination of sex and racial cells to provide the accurate mix as intended by the medical practitioners. Science has little regard for gender, sex, and race as evident in the book. The book does not provide another example of the pattern. The scenario is a unique one, which indicates how science disregards ethics, race and gender. In this regard, the scientific discovery coupled with the faith of healing take center stage with the procedures taking place while the body lay in the autopsy center. It also presents the story of a daughter who is consumed with questions regarding a mother she did not know. The unique case, coupled with scenarios from other books present the dark history of medical

experimentation on African Americans. The birth of bioethics may have emerged from such scenarios where individuals fight with the control of the stuff that the body is composed of. The pattern does not have another example because the first case proved a success. Additionally, the Henrietta cells have been sold and bought by the millions yet very little is known about her (Skloot 55; Kessler 33). Additionally, the expensive cells used for medical procedures belong to an individual whose family could not afford health insurance. However, the woman that scientists have described as HeLa has become one of the most vital tools for developing vaccines for polio. The medical intervention is also responsible for gene mapping, cloning, and vitro fertilization. However, Skloot does not have other examples to present the case of Henrietta.

Researchers, medical scientists and general practitioners in medical ethics have a role to play in Lack's story. General practitioners ought not to segregate patients in wards according to their race. For example, Henrietta was admitted in the "colored ward" in the hospital where they attended to the black patients. Race here appears as a major factor in science and medicine. Additionally, she went through scarring radiation treatment, some of which she did not understand. In medicine, HeLa would be termed as the godmother of virology as well as biotechnology (Skloot 55; Kessler 33). The intervention in her case has benefited most of the world. Although scientists and researchers have transformed the scene in medicine, the issue of bioethics was not adhered to. Additionally, HeLa has been helpful in building thousands of careers in medicine and led to more scientific studies. These studies continue to be published. In this regard, medical practitioners have

used the cells to research about aging, cancer, and mosquito mating. Other studies include the consequences of working in sewers. Undeniably, the HeLa cells and other studies involving black subjects have led to breakthroughs in medicine.

The story is less tragic than that of Sarah Baartman and Joice Heth because it presents a good side. Although the cells and body of Henrietta were used without the consent of her family, it is evident that the studies have revealed much more than was expected in the field of medicine. Although the medical practitioners in all cases did not do their best in terms of respecting the body of the deceased, they have used each opportunity to evolve in medicine. In this regard, the wrong committed to Henrietta has helped in making life and health for many other people right. In this perspective, medical research has some compromises as such; HeLa cells emerged as a compromise for dignity and consent. The HeLa cells present a strong nature over other cells. In the last months as Henrietta was dying of cervical cancer, the HeLa cells were rapidly being formed. In the other cases, the patients had not succumbed to the disease before the medical practitioners engaged in the studies while the patients were laying on the hospital beds (Welter 33; Zschoche 554).

Additionally, Henrietta's children were informed of the existence of their mothers cells, which means that although they did not consent, they were aware. The case appears different for Sarah Baartman and Joice Heth.

The text informs my understanding for the intersection of gender, sexuality, race and medical science by highlighting the mistreatment upon the body of Henrietta. As the lab assistant at the hospital painted Henrietta's toes, she thought; " Oh jeez, she is a real person". Whether dead or alive, the body of

an individual should be respected. However, very little respect is shown for black women in medical research. Additionally, at some point in the study, the cells did not appear to the lab as those belonging to a live person. She asserts “and it hit me they came from a live woman never thought of them in that way (Skloot 25)”. Clearly, medical practitioners and biotechnologists have in the past shown little or no regard for black women. The combination of gender and race appear to have negative effects on the life of black women in other fields such as education and engineering.

The other texts in this study and response indicate little or no regard for women in different levels of practice. In engineering, their recognition took a long time from being termed as Engineeresses to good engineers (Amy Sue 28; Fausto-Sterling 122). However, the suffering of black women does not compare to that of other women. The combination of race and gender seems to have negative reactions (Lorber 33). Although the triumphs of women who are challenged by gender and race appear to benefit much more people as the case of Henrietta, their case also appeals to an individual of their social standing. Only a person placed low in the social ladder can go through the issues witnessed in this case.

As informed in earlier readings from this course, the intersection of gender, race and sex is never a good combination. Readings in women and gender indicate that black women have suffered under different circumstances not only based on their social class but also their gender and race. In circumstances where, white women would go through similar situations with black women, the black women appear to continue to undergo victimization. In specific cases such as this one dealing with Henrietta, it is evident that the

field of medicine is not any different from that of engineering and other aspects of social life. Evidently, the black women is significant situations undergo profound objectification and sexism and racism thus causing them to suffer more than other women. These are just the few documented real cases, there may exist other cases where women go through these treatments but fail to record them or speak about them to other individuals due to shame or lack of trust.

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