

The Unveiling **Our Little known History**



Black People and Vaccine Hesitancy. It's rooted in history...

Many of us have been puzzled by some groups' avoidance of the covid-19 vaccine, especially Black people who often already have health issues and limited access to quality health care. Some find it hard to understand why Blacks wouldn't hurry to get free protection from this deadly virus. The answer, like so many others we're learning, is rooted in our dark history. The relationship between Blacks and the U.S.

medical community is marked by a long series of betrayals.

“The Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Negro Male” is the most famous example. *The New York Times* explains: “The study was performed by the US Public Health Service on 600 Black men — 399 with syphilis and 201 without the disease. The men were told they would be treated for so-called ‘bad blood’ in exchange for free medical exams, meals and burial insurance. In reality, treatment was withheld. Even after penicillin was discovered as an effective treatment, most did not receive the antibiotic. The experiment began in 1932 and did not stop until 1972, and only after it was exposed in a news article. The surviving men and the heirs of those who had died were later awarded a settlement totaling about \$10 million.”

Hundreds of Black men were lied to and allowed to suffer and die (with treatment available!); some of their wives contracted it, and some passed it on to their children--so the US Public Health Service could “study the arc of the disease.”

This short video explains further:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B0Vb7O121_8

Henrietta Lacks was a Black woman who died of cervical cancer in 1951 at age 31. *Nature Magazine* describes how she was *studied*: “Doctors at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore took samples of her cancerous cells while diagnosing and treating her. Without her knowledge or consent, they gave some of that tissue to a researcher. In the laboratory, her cells turned out to have an extraordinary capacity to survive and reproduce; they were, in essence, immortal. The researcher shared them widely with other scientists, and they became a workhorse of biological research. Today, work done with “HeLa” cells underpins much of modern medicine; they have been involved in many key discoveries for cancer, immunology and infectious disease. In vitro fertilization was also developed from HeLa cells. None of the biotechnology or companies that profited from her cells passed any money back to her family. And, for decades after her death, doctors and scientists repeatedly failed to ask her family for consent as they revealed Lacks’s name publicly, gave her medical records to the media, and even published her cells’ genome online.”

Fannie Lou Hamer and countless other Black women. In 1961, famed Civil Rights leader Fannie Lou Hamer went to a hospital to have a tumor removed from her uterus. The doctor gave her a hysterectomy without her knowledge or consent. "I would say about 6 out of the 10 Negro women that go to the hospital are sterilized," Hamer said in

1964 on a civil rights panel. The practice of sterilizing poor, Black women was customary not only in Mississippi but throughout the South. It went largely unchallenged until the 1970s when a Black mother realized that her two teenage daughters, for whom she’d requested birth control shots, had been sterilized instead.

Untold numbers of egregious negligence and maltreatment such as white doctors in the Jim Crow south turning away sick and injured African Americans due to their race, antebellum doctors performing cesarean sections without anaesthesia on enslaved women, again to “study” the procedure; going all the way back to the practice of withholding treatment for sick Africans on slave ships and instead, throwing their bodies overboard to collect the insurance.

So--the question is not why would Black people resist or suspect the US medical community of lying? The real question is where do some Black people find the courage to risk a controversial new vaccine?

In a recent talk, Sadiqa Reynolds, President and CEO of the Louisville Urban League, described being asked to get the shot publicly, on film, to encourage the Black community to get vaccinated. “I was scared,” she said. “But I knew I had to do it.” We should recognize her heroism, along with other Black leaders such as Tim Findley, Jr. and Raymond Burse who have

led the way for a community deeply scarred
by the medical profession in this country.