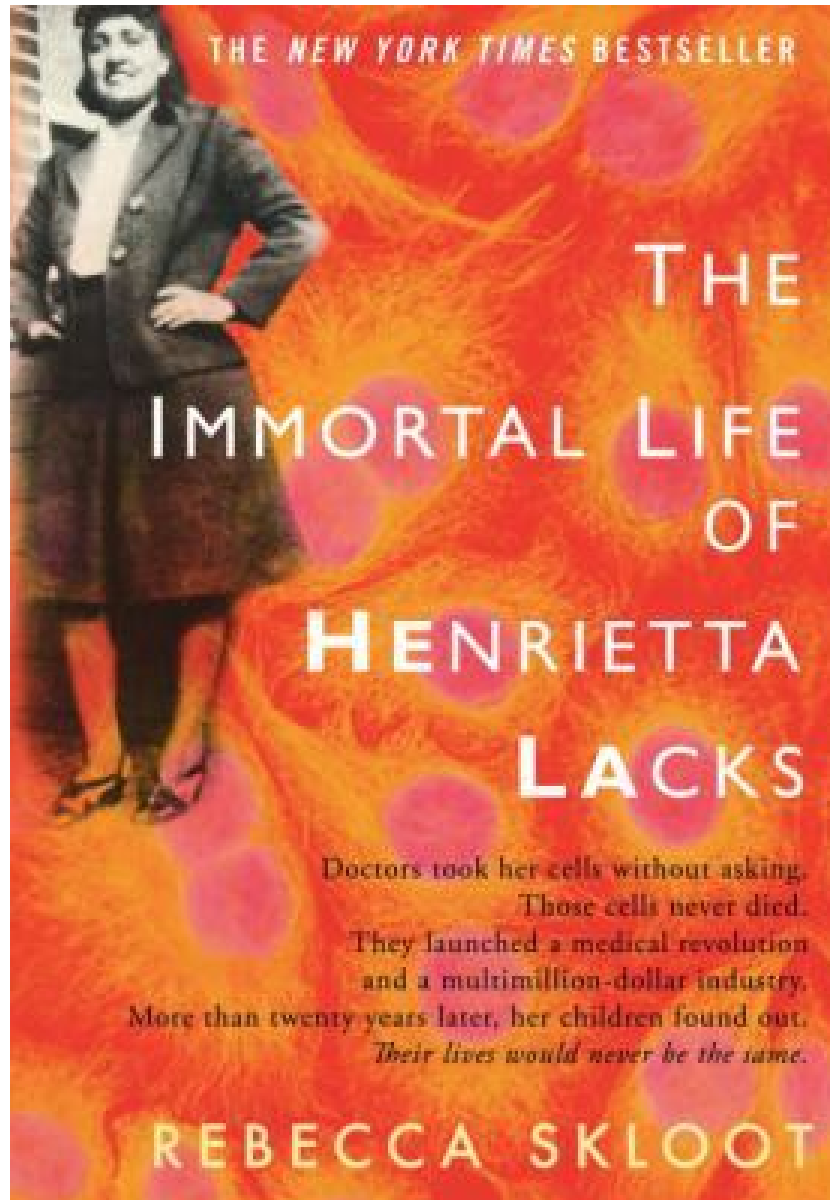


# The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks Book PDF Download



**By:  
Rebecca Skloot**

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## What people Say:

### Kemper

The doorbell rang the other day and when I answered it, there was a very slick guy in a nice suit standing there and a limousine parked at the curb. He started shaking my hand and wormed his way into the house.

“Mr. Kemper, I’m John Doe with Dee-Bag Industries Incorporated. I need you to sign some paperwork and take a ride with me. Don’t worry, I’ll have you home in a day or two,” he said. Then he pulled a document out of his briefcase, set it on the coffee table and pushed a pen in my hand.

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“Wait a second. What the hell is this all about?” I said as I tried to pick up the paper to read it, but Doe kept trying to force my hand with the pen down on it so I couldn’t see what it said.

“Oh, that’s just legal mumbo-jumbo. You’d rather try and read your mortgage agreement than this old thing. Just put your name down and let’s be on our way, shall we?” he said.

There was a brief scuffle, but I managed to distract him by messing up his carefully gelled hair. As he shrieked and ran around looking for a mirror, I finally got to read the document.

“This is a medical consent form. What’s going on?” I demanded as I shook the paper at him. Once he had combed and smoothed his hair back into perfection, Doe sighed.

“Very well, Mr. Kemper. I guess I’ll have to come clean. Do you remember when you had your appendix out when you were in grade school?”

### Petra-X

This is an all-gold five star read.

It's actually two stories, the story of the HeLa cells and the story of the Lacks family told by a journalist who writes the first story objectively and the second, in which she is involved, subjectively. The contrast between the poor Lacks family who cannot afford their medical bills and the research establishment who have made millions, maybe billions from these cells is ironic and tragic. It has been established by other law cases that if the family had gone

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I have seen some bad reviews about this book. People who think that the story of the Lacks - poor rural African-Americans who never made it 'up' from slavery and whose lifestyle of decent working class folk that also involves incest, adultery, disease and crime, they just dismiss with 'heard it all before' and 'my family despite all obstacles succeeded so what is wrong with the Lacks?' I wonder if these people who not only totally can't see the wonderful writing that brings these people to life and who so lack in compassion themselves are the sort of people who oppose health care for the masses? As an extremely wealthy American tourist once put it to me, he had earned good health care by his hard work and success in life, it was one of the perks, why waste good money on, say, a triple-bypass on someone who hasn't even succeeded enough to afford health insurance? That they were a drain on society, non-contributors and not the way America needed to go to move forward.

I don't think you can rate people by what they have achieved materially. Success depends a great deal on opportunity and many don't have that. Henrietta Lacks didn't have it and her children didn't have it, not even her grandchildren made much of a way for themselves, but the next generation, the great grandchildren - ah now they are going in for Masters degrees and maybe their children will be major contributors. The author intends to recompense the family by setting up a scholarship for at least one of them. All of us came originally from poverty and to put down those that are still mired in the quicksand of never having enough spare cash to finance an education is cruel, uncompassionate and hardly looking to the future.

HeLa cells have given us our future. They are the most researched and tested human cells in existence. All of us have benefited from the medical advances made using them and the book is recognition of what a great contribution Henrietta Lacks and her family with all their donations of tissue and blood, mostly stolen from them under false pretences, have made. Indeed one of the researchers who looks like having told a lot of lies (and then lied about that) in order to get the family

to donate blood to further her research is still trying to get them to donate more. She's a hard-nosed scientist, with an excellent job and income and to her the Lacks are no more than providers of raw material.

Sometimes you can't make hard and fast rulings. No I don't think we should have to give informed consent for experiments to be done on tissue or blood donated during a procedure or childbirth - that would slow medical research unbearably. I don't think cells should be identifiable with the donor either, it should be quite anonymous (as it now is). However, there is only ever one 'first' in any sphere and that one does deserve recognition and now with the book, some 50 years after her life ended, Henrietta Lacks has it. Good on yer, Rebecca Skloot, you've done a good thing here.

## Emily May

I've moved this book on and off my TBR for years. The truth is that, with few exceptions, I'm generally turned off by the thought of non-fiction. I'm a fan of fictional stories, and I think I've always felt that non-fiction will be dry, boring and difficult to get through. Especially a book about science, cells and medicine when I'm more

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But this book...

. It's written in a very easy, journalistic style and places the author into the story (some people didn't like this, but I thought it felt like you were going along for the journey). It's all the interesting bits of science, full of eye-opening and shocking discoveries, but it's also about history, sociology and race.

I started reading

while sat next to my boyfriend. Every so often I would unknowingly gasp or mutter "oh my god" and he was like "what? what?" and I hadn't even realized I'd done it out loud. It's just full of surprises - and every one is true! It

. And it just shows that sometimes real life can be nastier, more shocking, and more wondrous than

anything you could imagine.

Maybe you've heard of HeLa in passing, maybe you don't know anything about these cells that helped in cancer research, in finding a polio vaccine, in cloning, in gene mapping and discovering the effects of an atom bomb; either way, this tells an incredible and awful story of a poor, black woman in the American South who was diagnosed with cervical cancer. She is given back her humanity, becoming more than a cluster of cells and being shown for the tough, spirited woman she was. From her own family life to the frankly nauseating treatment of black patients in the 1950s, her story emerges.

Not only that, but this book is about the injustices committed by the pharmaceutical industry - both in this individual case (how is it that Henrietta's family are dirt poor when she has revolutionized medicine?) and on a larger scale (during the 1950s, many prisoners were injected with cancer as part of medical experiments!). It's hard to believe what so-called "professionals" have gotten away with throughout history - things that we generally associate with Nazi death camps.

. Maybe because it's not just about science and cells, but is mainly about all of the humanity and social history behind scientific discoveries. Maybe because Skloot is so damn passionate about her subject and that passion is transferred to the reader. Whatever the reason, I highly recommend it.

## Always Pouting

This was a really good book that leaves one with more questions than it answers, especially at this moment with the explosion in investment and growth in health/biotech. A lot of those questions are ones I wouldn't know how to answer myself either. I think it's really important though that we all start grappling with and instituting better processes around things like informed consent. Also really horrible to think about this in larger societal terms, in the context of institutional racism, and

This was a really good book that leaves one with more questions than it answers, especially at this moment with the explosion in investment and growth in health/biotech. A lot of those questions are ones I wouldn't know how to answer myself either. I think it's really important though that we all start grappling with and instituting better processes around things like informed consent. Also really horrible to think about this in larger societal terms, in the context of institutional racism, and the ways in which the Lacks family still is so socioeconomically disadvantaged while private biotechnology companies sell their mother's cells for so much money. I just feel so extremely uncomfortable with that. I think I wouldn't care so much if the cells were just part of the commons, available for free, or extremely cheaply, but to know people are profiting off of it, it really is quite disgusting. I try not to bring my politics to bear here quite too often but this really really makes me feel strongly that

commercialization of things in biological research, especially people's biological matter and tissue shouldn't be happening. This whole situation just feels quite perverse honestly and the book left me feeling disheartened. The dual dehumanization of the Lacks family through science and commercialization is horrifying. And I think if we want things to be better moving forward both need to be addressed, not just one.

## Will Byrnes

On October 4, 1951, Henrietta Lacks, a thirty-one-year old black woman, died after a gruesome battle with a rapidly metastasizing cancer. During her treatment, the doctors at Johns Hopkins took some cells from her failing body and used them for research. This was not an unusual thing to have done in 1951. But the cells that came from Ms. Lacks's body were unusual. They had qualities that made them uniquely valuable as research tools. Labeled "HeLa", Henrietta's cells were reproduced by the billion

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- from Powell's

Rebecca Skloot, a science writer with articles published in many major outlets, spent years looking into the genesis of these cells.

tells four stories. First is the tale of HeLa cells, and the value they have been to science; second is the life of, arguably, the most important cell donor in history, and of her family; third is a look at the ethics of cell donation and the commercial and legal significance of rights involved; and fourth is the Visible Woman look at Skloot's pursuit of the tales. Each story is significant.

The contribution of HeLa cells has been huge and it is important to know how these cells came to be so widely used, and what are the characteristics that make them so valuable. Skloot goes into a reasonable level of detail for those of us who do not make our living in a lab coat. She adds information on how cell cultures can become contaminated, and how that impacts completed research. She also offers a description of telomeres, strings of DNA at the end of chromosomes critical to longevity, and key to the immortality of HeLa cells. Fascinating stuff.

- From Science And Film

Skloot constructs a biography of Henrietta, and patches together a portrait of the life of her family, from her ancestors to her children, siblings and other relations. It is with a source of pride, among other emotions, that her family regards Henrietta's impact on the world. Skloot delves into these feelings, and the experiences the Lacks family members have had over the decades with people trying to write about Henrietta, and people trying to exploit their interest in Henrietta for dark purposes.

The author had to overcome considerable family resistance before she was able to get them to meet with and ultimately open up to her. She takes us through her process, showing who she talked with, when, and the result of those conversations, what institutions she contacted re locating and gaining access to information about Henrietta and some other family members. Most interesting, and at times frustrating, is her story of how she gained the trust of some, if not all, of the Lacks family. This is like presenting a how-to of her research process, a blow-by-blow description of the way research is done in the real world, and it is very enlightening.

has received considerable acclaim. It is all well-deserved. The book is an eye-opening window into a piece of our history that is mostly unknown. It presents science in a very manageable way and gives us plenty to think about the next time we have a blood test or any other medical procedure. This book may not be as immortal as Henrietta's cells, but it will stay with you for a very long time.