Name of Student

Name of Professor

Name of Class

Day Month Year

The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks

Social evil of racism has been haunting this world for years. The world knows very less about feats, struggles and ventures of Black as they are not as much emphasized as whites. This paper is the short essay of Rebecca Skloot’s The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks. This book is about the story of a poor African American woman named Henrietta Lacks, who died in 1951 because of cervical cancer (Skloot). But her tumor cells were used to create HeLa, the first immortal cell line of a human. Henrietta was the main person in this book. She was a middle-aged woman living with the family of a husband and 5 children.

In this book, Rebecca Skloot narrates the learning about the life, death, illness, and suffering of Henrietta Lacks. The author discusses how discovery HeLa opened a new doorway for the scientific world. Henrietta's famous cell line became a cure to innumerable problems in science. While the whole world celebrated, no one even knew about the person behind all of this. Being black Henrietta’s disease was not focused on by doctors as much as they were concerned with her cancerous cells. Several medical companies and many individuals earned a profit of millions from Henrietta’s genes while her family went through horrible sufferings and hardly made both ends meet even in their best of times.

Skloot was very much obsessed with the life of this important woman in scientific history. There was a number of articles, journals, and books written for HeLa but none discussed anything about Henrietta. Skloot did what any other author could not have done, she discussed the person who was the reason this world was having countless benefits from HeLa. She visited Henrietta’s birthplace Roanoke, Virginia, her family and the people who knew about her to find out what actually happened to her and her family after Henrietta’s death and discovery of HeLa. It was not easy for her to do that because when she met Henrietta’s family, their attitude was angry and aggressive towards her. Skloot later detected that this family was bitterly treated by media and science organizations and it won't be easy for her to interact with them. She first earned their trust that she was not like any other journalist and she wants to help them, then she found out about what she came for (Zielinski, Sarah).

Furthermore, from all the research, interviews, and data collection, Skloot raised powerful ethical questions against John Hopkins hospital (where Henrietta was admitted for the treatment) and medical companies who used Henrietta’s tissue samples without her and her family consent. Unlike others, the author raised voice for the rights of Henrietta and her family in her this book (Nisbet, Matthew, Fahy).

Author has reflected all the suffering of Henrietta’s family in her book. Her tone is convincing and yet painful. She has discussed with grief about how doctors treated Henrietta because she was black and poor, how they took what was hers and no one knew about it until years. Skloot lefts her readers feeling pain about Henrietta and her family. Moreover, readers are left with wanting more to know about Henrietta's life, death, disease, and HeLa.

This book has addressed the issues of racial discrimination and its poisonous consequences that were faced by Henrietta, her family. No one even cared about their rights and life while celebrating the success of what was taken from them. Moreover, Henrietta was not the only one who experienced racial discrimination, there were a lot of African Americans who were facing the evil of racial discrimination in every field. Skloot states, *"Black scientists and technicians, many of them women, used cells from a black woman to help save the lives of millions of Americans, most of them white. And they did so on the same campus—and at the very same time—that state officials were conducting the infamous Tuskegee syphilis studies. “(*97). Skloot has pointed out the irony of the first factory of HeLa that was found at Tuskegee Institute, here black men were exploited and as a research subject, they were allowed to die. In addition, Skloot added that where HeLa was curing the world, Henrietta’s family and relatives did not even have money to afford products of HeLa’s cell line and many of their relatives died because of it.

Works Cited

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Nisbet, Matthew C., and Declan Fahy. "Bioethics in popular science: evaluating the media impact of The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks on the biobank debate." BMC medical ethics14.1 (2013)

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