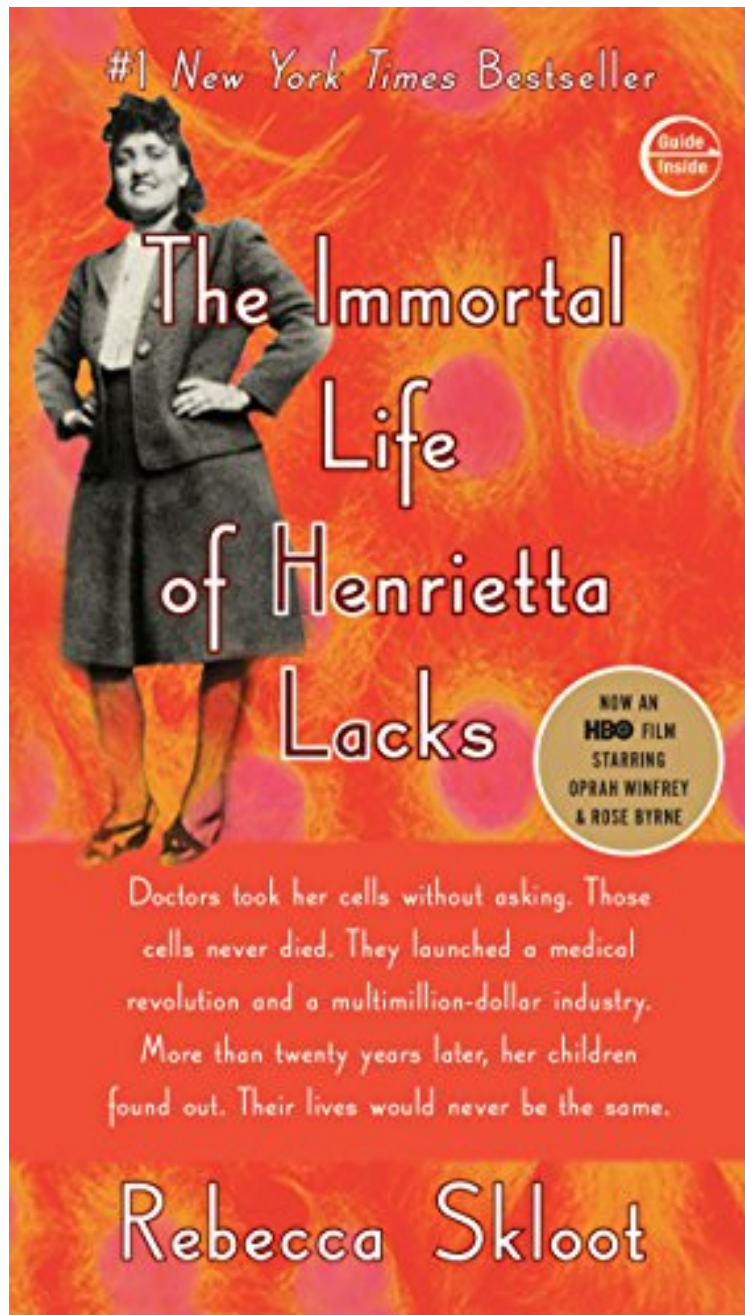


(Download pdf) The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks

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Rebecca Skloot

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Rebecca Skloot : The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks:

95 of 98 people found the following review helpful. Educational, entertaining, and an overall great read. By BccalyI ordered this book to read for one of my Ethics classes. I was worried about so much assigned reading to complete in one week, but it turned out to be a book that you just can't put down. It still amazes me that this is a woman's real life story, the story of her family, and how they have impacted science and anyone who works or benefits from the use of cellular research. That means just about every single person is connected to Henrietta in one way or another. This was a great book that I'm so glad I read. I learned a lot and it kept me entertained and fascinated for days. It will really change your perspective and make you appreciate this woman's contribution to our scientific and health fields.

102 of 108 people found the following review helpful. The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks is an instant classic – this is one of those stories that genuinely needed to be told. By S.A.N MONSANTO MONSANTO From the very beginning there was something uncanny about the cancer cells on Henrietta Lacks's cervix. Even before killing Lacks herself in 1951, they took on a life of their own. Removed during a biopsy and cultured without her permission, the HeLa cells (named from the first two letters of her first and last names) reproduced boisterously in a lab at Johns Hopkins — the first human cells ever to do so. HeLa became an instant biological celebrity, traveling to research labs all over the world. Meanwhile Lacks, a vivacious 31-year-old African-American who had once been a tobacco farmer, tended her five children and endured scarring radiation treatments in the hospital's "colored" ward. In "The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks," Rebecca Skloot introduces us to the "real live woman," the children who survived her, and the interplay of race, poverty, science and one of the most important medical discoveries of the last 100 years. Skloot narrates the science lucidly, tracks the racial politics of medicine thoughtfully and tells the Lacks family's often painful history with grace. She also confronts the spookiness of the cells themselves, intrepidly crossing into the spiritual plane on which the family has come to understand their mother's continued presence in the world. Science writing is often just about "the facts." -Skloot's book, her first, is far deeper, braver and more wonderful. This work has the most human of stories at its core, and never deviates from that important, and often heartbreaking, humanity. When science appears, it does so effortlessly, with explanations of cell anatomy or techniques like "fluorescence in situ hybridization" seamlessly worked into descriptions of the coloured wards of Johns Hopkins hospital to Lacks's hometown of Clover, Virginia. But The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks is not a comfortable read. I visibly winced at descriptions of Henrietta's blackened, burned skin after multiple rounds of devastating radiation treatments. I put the book down with a heavy sigh after reading about the experiments that black Americans have been unwittingly subjected to over the years. I cried twice, at events that I can't talk about without seriously spoiling the book. But it is uplifting too, particularly in a stand-out chapter where Henrietta's children, Deborah and Zakariyya, visit a cancer researcher to see their mother's cells under a microscope. All of this is to be expected of a book that refuses to shy away from tackling important themes – the interplay between science and ethics, the question of who owns our bodies, and the history of racism in the US. And yet for all its grand scope, skilful writing and touching compassion, there is one simple element that makes As a final thought, I was struck by the parallels between Henrietta's cells and her story. Henrietta's entire family history was eventually condensed into a small sliver of cells that you could carry in a glass vial. They have achieved immortality, used by scientists throughout the world. Similarly, her entire life has been condensed into a moving tale and an exceptional book that you could read in a comfortable day. By right, it will achieve the same immortal status.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A Really Interesting Read - Definitely Worth It. By Postscript The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks is a really strange, but intriguing story. Henrietta Lacks was a black woman who died of a particularly virulent case of cervical cancer in 1951. Without her knowledge or consent, the doctors treating her took a sample of her cancer cells. Those cells became "immortal" - meaning they are capable of growing in labs forever, assuming they receive the proper care. The cells are named "HeLa" (HENrietta LACKS) and have played a vital role in curing polio, conducting genetic mapping, experimenting with cloning, and so much more. The strangest part? It's all true. Skloot weaves together a number of stories in her book: - Henrietta's life and death - The development and impact of the HeLa cells - The Lacks family's struggle to understand their mother and her role in medical history - Skloot's relationship with the Lacks' family, especially Henrietta's daughter Deborah. Ultimately, although the book is centered around Henrietta and her cells, it's really about Deborah and her deep need to understand her who her mother was - both as a person and as a scientific contributor. What started out as Skloot doing due diligence as a researcher, led to a real relationship with Deborah and Deborah eventually takes over the story from her mother. This may have been because Henrietta's life story is actually pretty short, despite the HeLa cells' immortality. But I also think it's because Deborah had a real philosophical and moral dilemma on her hands - what is her family owed because of Henrietta's unknowing contribution to science? Or are they owed anything at all? The story does end a little abruptly, but I chalk this up to the fact that Henrietta's story isn't really finished. HeLa cells are still being used around the world for research and they'll probably continue to be used for a long time. And all of the ethical questions raised by the very existence of the HeLa cells will not be resolved any time soon. This book is designed to make you think more than to present you with a complete story. This book got a ton of hype over the last year or so and after finishing it, it's easy to see why. The story is pretty incredible, plus the writing is strong. Despite including a lot of medical and technical terms, history, and theory, it's easy to follow and understand. The story pulls together a number of sticky and complicated aspects of American society that we're still trying to work out - the power of the medical and

scientific communities, the common assumption that doctors know best, the blurriness of medical ethics, racism and classism. Deborah's quest to better understand her mother brings a really important human element to the book, which grounds all the medical talk and reminds you that the research done on HeLa impacts real people. In a nutshell: An intriguing story that will make you scratch your head and say "This really happened?" Turns out it did and it's worth reading about. Three and a half stars.

Now an HBO® Film starring Oprah Winfrey and Rose Byrne #1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER Her name was Henrietta Lacks, but scientists know her as HeLa. She was a poor black tobacco farmer whose cells—taken without her knowledge in 1951—became one of the most important tools in medicine, vital for developing the polio vaccine, cloning, gene mapping, and more. Henrietta's cells have been bought and sold by the billions, yet she remains virtually unknown, and her family can't afford health insurance. This phenomenal New York Times bestseller tells a riveting story of the collision between ethics, race, and medicine; of scientific discovery and faith healing; and of a daughter consumed with questions about the mother she never knew.

.com Best Books of the Month, February 2010: From a single, abbreviated life grew a seemingly immortal line of cells that made some of the most crucial innovations in modern science possible. And from that same life, and those cells, Rebecca Skloot has fashioned in *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* a fascinating and moving story of medicine and family, of how life is sustained in laboratories and in memory. Henrietta Lacks was a mother of five in Baltimore, a poor African American migrant from the tobacco farms of Virginia, who died from a cruelly aggressive cancer at the age of 30 in 1951. A sample of her cancerous tissue, taken without her knowledge or consent, as was the custom then, turned out to provide one of the holy grails of mid-century biology: human cells that could survive—even thrive—in the lab. Known as HeLa cells, their stunning potency gave scientists a building block for countless breakthroughs, beginning with the cure for polio. Meanwhile, Henrietta's family continued to live in poverty and frequently poor health, and their discovery decades later of her unknowing contribution—and her cells' strange survival—left them full of pride, anger, and suspicion. For a decade, Skloot doggedly but compassionately gathered the threads of these stories, slowly gaining the trust of the family while helping them learn the truth about Henrietta, and with their aid she tells a rich and haunting story that asks the questions, Who owns our bodies? And who carries our memories? --Tom Nissley Exclusive: Jad Abumrad's *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* Jad Abumrad is host and creator of the public radio hit *Radiolab*, now in its seventh season and reaching over a million people monthly. *Radiolab* combines cutting-edge production with a philosophical approach to big ideas in science and beyond, and an inventive method of storytelling. Abumrad has won numerous awards, including a National Headliner Award in Radio and an American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) Science Journalism Award. Read his exclusive guest review of *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*: Honestly, I can't imagine a better tale. A detective story that's at once mythically large and painfully intimate. Just the simple facts are hard to believe: that in 1951, a poor black woman named Henrietta Lacks dies of cervical cancer, but pieces of the tumor that killed her—taken without her knowledge or consent—live on, first in one lab, then in hundreds, then thousands, then in giant factories churning out polio vaccines, then aboard rocket ships launched into space. The cells from this one tumor would spawn a multi-billion dollar industry and become a foundation of modern science—leading to breakthroughs in gene mapping, cloning and fertility and helping to discover how viruses work and how cancer develops (among a million other things). All of which is to say: the science end of this story is enough to blow one's mind right out of one's face. But what's truly remarkable about Rebecca Skloot's book is that we also get the rest of the story, the part that could have easily remained hidden had she not spent ten years unearthing it: Who was Henrietta Lacks? How did she live? How she did die? Did her family know that she'd become, in some sense, immortal, and how did that affect them? These are crucial questions, because science should never forget the people who gave it life. And so, what unfolds is not only a reporting tour de force but also a very entertaining account of Henrietta, her ancestors, her cells and the scientists who grew them. The book ultimately channels its journey of discovery through Henrietta's youngest daughter, Deborah, who never knew her mother, and who dreamt of one day being a scientist. As Deborah Lacks and Skloot search for answers, we're bounced effortlessly from the tiny tobacco-farming Virginia hamlet of Henrietta's childhood to modern-day Baltimore, where Henrietta's family remains. Along the way, a series of unforgettable juxtapositions: cell culturing bumps into faith healings, cutting edge medicine collides with the dark truth that Henrietta's family can't afford the health insurance to care for diseases their mother's cells have helped to cure. Rebecca Skloot tells the story with great sensitivity, urgency and, in the end, damn fine writing. I highly recommend this book. --Jad Abumrad Look Inside *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* Click on thumbnails for larger images Henrietta and David Lacks, circa 1945. Elsie Lacks, Henrietta's older daughter, about five years before she was committed to Crownsville State Hospital, with a diagnosis of "idiocy." Deborah Lacks at about age four. The home-house where Henrietta was raised, a four-room log cabin in Clover, Virginia, that once served as slave quarters. (1999) Main Street in downtown Clover, Virginia, where Henrietta was raised, circa 1930s. Margaret Gey and Minnie, a lab technician, in the Gey lab at Hopkins, circa 1951. Deborah with her children, LaTonya and Alfred, and her second husband, James Pullum, in the mid-1980s. In 2001, Deborah

developed a severe case of hives after learning upsetting new information about her mother and sister. Deborah and her cousin Gary Lacks standing in front of drying tobacco, 2001. The Lacks family in 2009. From Publishers Weekly Starred . Science journalist Skloot makes a remarkable debut with this multilayered story about faith, science, journalism, and grace. It is also a tale of medical wonders and medical arrogance, racism, poverty and the bond that grows, sometimes painfully, between two very different women—Skloot and Deborah Lacks—sharing an obsession to learn about Deborah's mother, Henrietta, and her magical, immortal cells. Henrietta Lacks was a 31-year-old black mother of five in Baltimore when she died of cervical cancer in 1951. Without her knowledge, doctors treating her at Johns Hopkins took tissue samples from her cervix for research. They spawned the first viable, indeed miraculously productive, cell line—known as HeLa. These cells have aided in medical discoveries from the polio vaccine to AIDS treatments. What Skloot so poignantly portrays is the devastating impact Henrietta's death and the eventual importance of her cells had on her husband and children. Skloot's portraits of Deborah, her father and brothers are so vibrant and immediate they recall Adrian Nicole LeBlanc's *Random Family*. Writing in plain, clear prose, Skloot avoids melodrama and makes no judgments. Letting people and events speak for themselves, Skloot tells a rich, resonant tale of modern science, the wonders it can perform and how easily it can exploit society's most vulnerable people. (Feb.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From *Bookmarks Magazine* In simple, straightforward prose, Skloot brings to life the woman unknowingly behind some of the 20th century's greatest medical advancements. In the process, she exposes the minefield of scientific, legal, and philosophical questions raised by Lacks's unwitting legacy. Skloot, who deftly weaves together the disparate threads of biography, science, and social history, provides a remarkably evenhanded assessment of the shadier dealings of the biomedical industry despite her obvious affection and sympathy for the Lacks family. Scientifically challenged readers will rejoice in Skloot's ability to explain complex technical processes in layperson's terms. Hailed by the *New York Times* as "the book Ms. Skloot was born to write," *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* "is an important book, one that will linger--like Henrietta's cells--long after you've turned the last page" (*Chicago Sun-Times*).