

RACIAL DISPARITIES IN HEALTHCARE FROM 1619-PRESENT DAY

1619-1730: Africans were enslaved and transported to the American colonies to be treated as property, receiving little to no medical treatment.

Mid-1800s: [Surgeon James Marion Sims](#) became known as the “father of modern gynecology” for developing surgical techniques that help women through a difficult childbirth. Sims created his techniques by operating on enslaved black women without using anesthesia.

1860s: [It is estimated](#) that one quarter of emancipated slaves died or suffered from illnesses, including significant outbreaks of cholera and smallpox.

1861-1865: During the Civil War, there were separate wards for wounded black soldiers in the Union Army; they were poorly staffed. [Black soldiers would die from wounds](#) that white soldiers would recover from due to a lack of supplies and treatment. Blacks continued to be used in medical experiments without consent, dead or alive.

1883: Dr. Rebecca Lee Crumpler became the first African American to become a physician in the U.S. She experienced intense racism and sexism through her career.

1913: Sterilization laws were centered towards people with mental illnesses in its beginning stages, but expanded to a list of different medical conditions and extreme circumstances that gave doctors leeway in choosing who to sterilize. These laws drastically affected African Americans. They were [four times more likely to be sterilized than their white counterparts](#).

1863: The [Emancipation Proclamation](#) declared that all slaves living in southern states were freed.

1899: [In the book "The Philadelphia Negro," sociologist and activist W.E.B. Du Bois](#) argued that the differences in health outcomes for blacks and whites had more to do with living conditions, than genetics.

1932: The U.S. Public Health Service started a 40-year experiment looking at the “natural history” of untreated syphilis. Some 600 poor, black sharecroppers enrolled in [The Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Negro Male](#). Participants include 399 men with latent syphilis and 201 who don’t have the disease. Participants were told they were getting free medical care from the federal government. They were unaware that they had syphilis, which ensured that government doctors could study the disease and the effects it had on the participants. Even when a treatment for syphilis became available, the men were not treated.

April 10, 1945: [Ebb Cade, an African American male, was the first test subject in the Human Radiation experiment \(i.e. Manhattan Project\) in Oak Ridge, Tennessee](#). He was in a car accident on March 24, 1945, and fractured bones in his arms and legs. While waiting for treatment on April 10, he received injections of 5 mg of plutonium without his consent. Cade did not receive any treatment for his bone fractures until April 15. Fifteen of his teeth were extracted to see the results of the radiation. Cade died 8 years later from heart failure.

Oct. 4, 1951: [Henrietta Lacks](#), a 31-year-old African American mother of five from Virginia, died of cervical cancer. Medical researchers use her cancer cells, known as the HeLa cell line. Lacks’ cells are one of the most vital cell lines in medical research. It has been used to study the effects of toxins, drugs, hormones, and viruses on the growth of cancer cells without experimenting on humans. The HeLa cells were used to develop the polio vaccine and in cancer and AIDS research. Doctors never obtained Lacks’ or her family’s permission to culture her cells.

May 16, 1997: After a \$10 million out-of-court settlement was reached in 1974 for the participants of the [Tuskegee Syphilis](#) experiment, President Bill Clinton formally apologizes to victims on behalf of the United States government. The victims are all African American and include numerous men who died of syphilis, 40 wives who contracted the disease and 19 children born with congenital syphilis

1960s: The Civil Rights movement helped pioneer legislation such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, hospital desegregation, the Voting Rights Bill, and passages of Medicare and Medicaid. [The African American community saw an increase in overall health for the next decade due to these changes.](#)

1997: [The W.K. Kellogg Foundation gives funding to the University of Michigan Historical Center for Health Sciences to research the healthcare experiences of African Americans](#) who lived in southeastern Michigan during the 1940s through the 1960s. They collected 42 accounts of these experiences and held projects presenting this research until 2000.

2005: [African Americans are 10 times](#) more likely than whites and nearly three times more likely than Latinos to have AIDS. This comes after surveys show from *the New York Times* that ten percent of African Americans believe AIDS was created specifically to target the African Americans.

July 30, 2008: [The American Medical Association apologizes to the National Medical Association, a society of African American physicians.](#) For more than a century, the AMA reinforced or passively accepted racial inequalities and excluded black doctors from AMA as well as state and local medical societies.

2010: [“The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks,” a book by Rebecca Skloot](#) is published. (A film by the same name was produced by Oprah Winfrey and released in 2017.) Skloot created the Henrietta Lack Foundation in 2010 to help families that underwent medical experiments without consent.

2010: The Affordable Care Act was enacted and by expanding access to care, narrowed longstanding racial disparities in health care coverage. [The gap between black and white adult uninsured rates dropped by 4.1 percentage points.](#)

April 25, 2014: [As a cost-saving measure, Flint, Mich., switches its water supply to the Flint River introducing lead-poisoned water](#) into homes and creating a massive public-health crisis. Lead is toxic to humans. More than half of Flint residents are black.

April 4, 2016: [Half of 222 white medical students and residents surveyed at the University of Virginia believe blacks and whites are biologically different,](#) according to a paper published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. They also believe blacks felt less pain than whites and thus were more likely to suggest inappropriate medical treatment for black patients. This is believed to be the first study linking racial bias to biology, racial perception of pain, and the accuracy of medical advice.

2020: The coronavirus pandemic affects racial minorities at a disproportionate rate. [The CDC reports](#) that factors that contribute to the increased risk include discrimination, access to care, occupation, education, income and wealth gaps, as well as housing. Lower vaccination rates among Black Americans (due to mistrust and access) contribute to concerns of more disproportional mortality rates among Black Americans.

January 2, 2015: [Flint residents were notified by city officials that their water supply violated the Safe Drinking Water Act.](#) The water was verified to have high levels of TTHM, total trihalomethanes, which can cause multiple medical complications if consumed in large amounts.

Jan. 16, 2020: The National Center for Health Statistics releases [2018 data](#) on pregnancy-related deaths showing black women die 2½ times more often than white women. Hispanic women have the lowest rate of maternal mortality. Researchers do not have a clear reason for the high mortality rate for black women, but suspect institutional racism and susceptibility to certain conditions such as obesity and hypertension as well as lack of access to quality prenatal care.

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