

# TUSKEGEE STUDY OF UNTREATED SYPHILIS

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# OUTLINE

- BACKGROUND
- WHAT IS SYPHILIS?
- CASE
- TREATMENT
- TIMELINE
- RESULTS
- ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS
- OUTCOME
- QUESTIONS?

## The New York Times

### *Syphilis Victims in U.S. Study Went Untreated for 40 Years*

By JEAN HELLER  
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON, July 25—For 40 years the United States Public Health Service has conducted a study in which human beings with syphilis, who were induced to serve as guinea pigs, have gone without medical treatment for the disease and a few have died of its late effects, even though an effective therapy was eventually discovered.

The study was conducted to determine from autopsies what the disease does to the human body.

Officials of the health service who initiated the experiment have long since retired. Current officials, who say they

have serious doubts about the morality of the study, also say that it is too late to treat the syphilis in any surviving participants.

Doctors in the service say they are now rendering whatever other medical services they can give to the survivors while the study of the disease's effects continues.

Dr. Merlin K. DuVal, Assistant Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare for Health and Scientific Affairs, expressed shock on learning of the study. He said that he was making an immediate investigation.

The experiment, called the Tuskegee Study, began in 1932 with about 600 black men,

July 26, 1972



# BACKGROUND

- SYPHILIS WIDESPREAD BUT POORLY UNDERSTOOD

- 36% OF AFRICAN AMERICANS HAD SYPHILIS (1930s MACON COUNTY)
- OFTEN INCORRECTLY DIAGNOSED
- TREATMENTS OF 1930s
  - 3% SUCCESSFUL
  - DANGEROUS

ADMINISTRATION OF TREATMENT

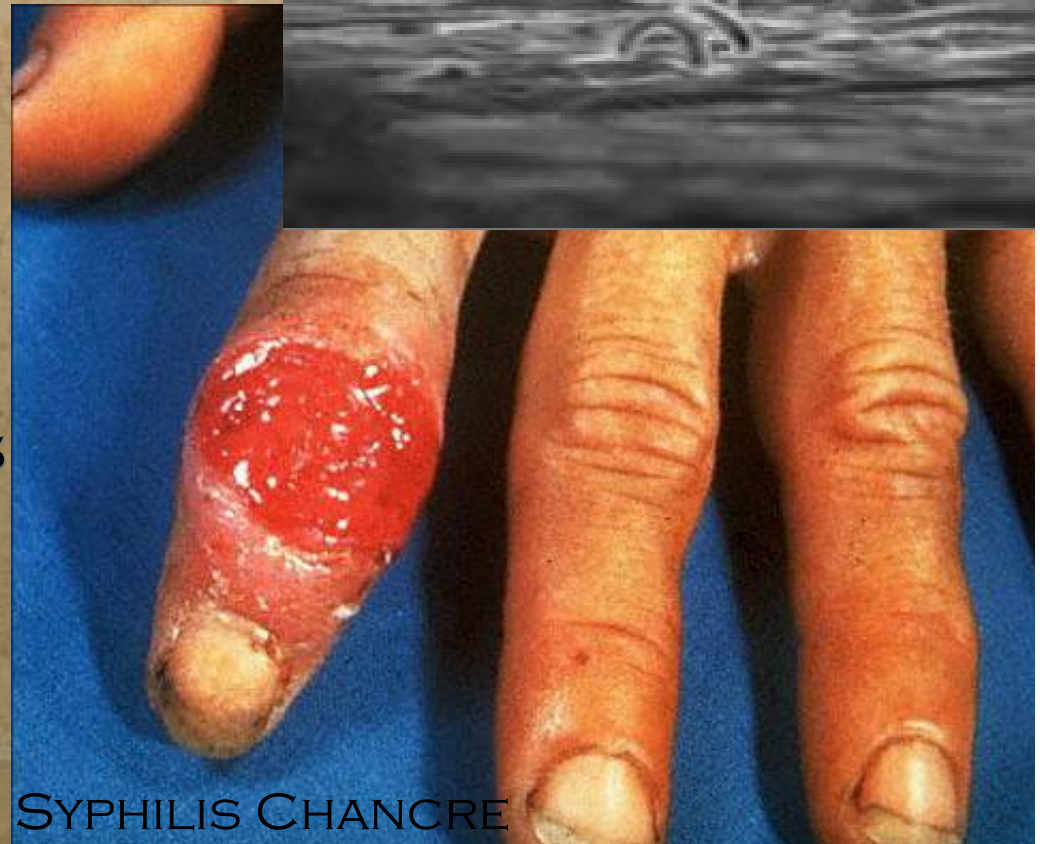


[HTTP://WWW.CYNICAL-C.COM](http://www.cynical-c.com)



# WHAT IS SYPHILIS?

- SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASE
  - PASSED THROUGH DIRECT CONTACT WITH CHANCRE
  - BACTERIUM: *TREPONEMA PALLIDUM*
- SYMPTOMS
  - SORES, RASH, SCALES, WARTS
- PROGRESSION
  - BLINDNESS, DEAFNESS PARALYSIS, INSANITY
  - WOUNDS THAT DESTROY TISSUE
  - DEATH



# CASE

- 1932 -1972 US. PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE
  - ORIGINAL PURPOSE
    - STANDARD TREATMENTS: MERCURY, ARSENIC, BISMUTH
      - TOXIC AND DANGEROUS
      - TREATMENT MORE/LESS DANGEROUS?
  - SUBJECTS
    - 399 BLACK MALES
    - POOREST COUNTY IN ALABAMA
    - VERY LITTLE MEDICAL CARE AVAILABLE





# CASE (CONT.)

## ■ EXPERIMENT

- CONTROL GROUP: 201 HEALTHY BLACK MALES
- EXPERIMENTAL GROUP: 399 SICK BLACK MALES
- GAVE “TREATMENT” TO BOTH GROUPS
  - GAVE NO CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN STUDY
  - WERE NOT INFORMED OF ILLNESS (TOLD THEY HAD “BAD BLOOD”)

SOME OF THE TUSKEGEE STUDY GROUP CLINICIANS.



[HTTP://EN.WIKIPEDIA.ORG](http://en.wikipedia.org)

# “TREATMENT”

ADMINISTRATION OF  
SPINAL TAP

- GIVEN TREATMENTS OF THAT TIME
- THEN ADMINISTERED ASPIRIN (PLACEBO) IN PLACE OF TREATMENT
- PENICILLIN (1943)
  - CURRENT TREATMENT
  - DISCOVERED 10 YEARS INTO STUDY
  - WITHHELD FROM PATIENTS
  - SINGLE INJECTION CURES SYPHILIS AND PREVENTS CONGENITAL SYPHILIS
- DECEIVED PATIENTS WITH LETTER
  - TO COME IN FOR SPINAL TAP (CHECK ON PROGRESSION)



[WWW.BLACKPAST.ORG](http://WWW.BLACKPAST.ORG)



## Macon County Health Department

ALABAMA STATE BOARD OF HEALTH AND U. S. PUBLIC HEALTH  
SERVICE COOPERATING WITH TUSKEGEE INSTITUTE

Dear Sir:

Some time ago you were given a thorough examination and since that time we hope you have gotten a great deal of treatment for **bad blood**. You will now be given your last chance to get a second examination. This examination is a very special one and after it is finished you will be given a **special treatment** if it is believed you are in a condition to stand it.

If you want this special examination and treatment you must meet the nurse at \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_

at \_\_\_\_\_ M. She will bring you to the Tuskegee Institute Hospital for this free treatment. We will be very busy when these examinations and treatments are being given, and will have lots of people to wait on. You will remember that you had to wait for some time when you had your last good examination, and we wish to let you know that because we expect to be so busy it may be necessary for you to remain in the hospital over one night. If this is necessary you will be furnished your meals and a bed, as well as the examination and treatment without cost.

REMEMBER THIS IS YOUR **LAST CHANCE** FOR SPECIAL FREE TREATMENT. BE SURE TO MEET THE NURSE.

Macon County Health Department

TUSKEGEE  
STUDY  
GROUP  
LETTER:

LAST CHANCE  
TO RECEIVE  
"SPECIAL  
TREATMENT"  
FOR "BAD  
BLOOD."



# TIMELINE

- 1932 EXPERIMENT STARTED
- 1932 GIVEN STANDARD TREATMENTS
- ???? GIVEN ASPIRIN AS A PLACEBO
- 1943 PENICILLIN TREATMENT FOR SYPHILIS
- 1947 WIDELY AVAILABLE



# RESULTS

- 28 DEATHS DIRECTLY RELATED TO SYPHILIS
- 100 DEATHS FROM RELATED COMPLICATIONS
- 40 WIVES INFECTED
- 19 CHILDREN BORN WITH CONGENITAL SYPHILIS
- NO SCIENTIFIC CONCLUSIONS DRAWN





# ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS

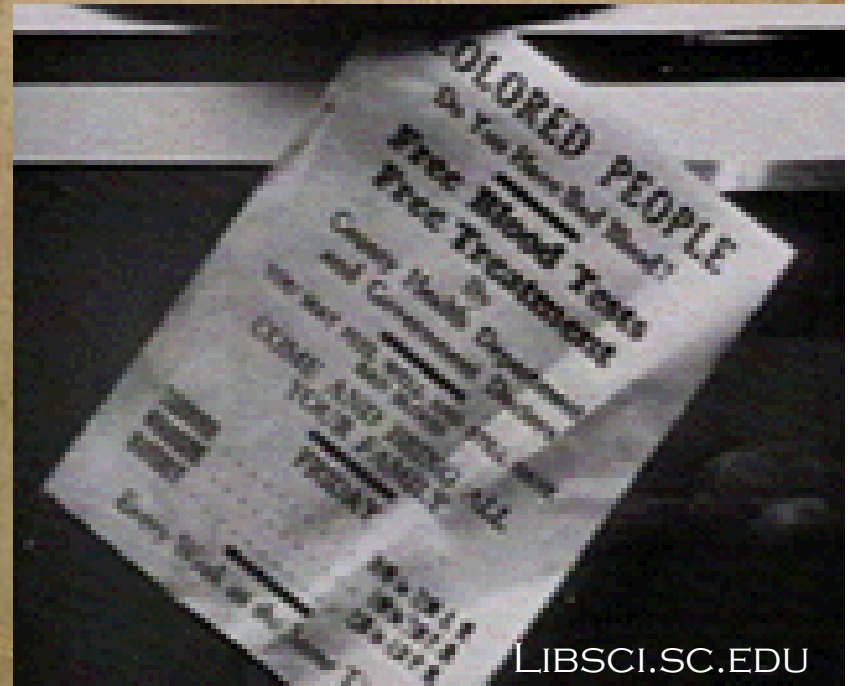
## NUREMBERG CODE (1947)

BLUE - VIOLATION

1. VOLUNTARY CONSENT
2. RESULTS FOR GOOD OF SOCIETY (??)
3. PRIOR ANIMAL EXPERIMENTATION
4. AVOID ALL UNNECESSARY SUFFERING
5. DEATH SHOULD NOT BE EXPECTED RESULT
6. IMPORTANCE OUTWEIGH RISK
7. PROPER FACILITIES (UNKNOWN)
8. QUALIFIED SCIENTISTS (??)
9. SUBJECT AT LIBERTY TO END PARTICIPATION (??)
10. SCIENTIST PREPARED TO TERMINATE STUDY

# ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS (CONT.)

- DID NOT INFORM PATIENTS OF INVOLVEMENT IN STUDY
- DID NOT INFORM OF DISEASE
- LIED ABOUT “TREATMENT”
  - SPINAL TAP
  - ASPIRIN
- WITHHELD PENICILLIN





# OUTCOME

- GOVERNMENT REEVALUATED RESEARCH PRACTICES
  - NATIONAL RESEARCH ACT
    - SIGNED INTO LAW JULY 12, 1974
    - ALL STUDIES USING HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEWED BY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
- COMPENSATION
  - \$37,500 PER SURVIVOR
  - \$15,000 PER HEIR
- APOLOGY
  - PRESIDENT CLINTON 1997

PRESIDENT CLINTON AND  
STUDY SURVIVOR



“THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT  
DID SOMETHING THAT WAS WRONG,  
DEEPLY, PROFOUNDLY, MORALLY  
WRONG.”

– PRESIDENT CLINTON

**QUESTIONS?**