

PHOTO STUDY and QUESTIONS

Rebecca Skloot, "Prologue: The Woman In the Photograph" from *The Immortal Life Of Henrietta Lacks*

1. Using the book portrait of Rebecca Skloot, free-write on "The Woman On the Book Jacket." Call attention to any details or assumptions you might make about this portrait of the author to help you articulate your response and your interest in the subject matter of Skloot's Prologue.



2. The Lacks family continued to live in relative poverty, and without access to healthcare, for decades after Henrietta Lacks perished from her cervical cancer. They were unaware of the fact that her cells were still alive and benefiting medical science to such an amazing extent. What are the ethical issues in this? Is the Lacks family owed compensation out of a *moral* or *ethical* obligation? Why, or why not?

3. The Prologue of Rebecca Skloot's book, *The Immortal Life Of Henrietta Lacks*, is called "The Woman In the Photograph." Although Skloot means at first a photo of Henrietta Lacks, she later goes on to describe a photograph of her daughter, Deborah Lacks, and to compare herself with Deborah.



Widower David Lacks Sr. and his daughter Deborah (L) are shown with son's wife Bobbette and her daughter La Donna.

Locate this paragraph in "The Prologue" and, using its examples, classify the types of women Deborah Lacks and Rebecca Skloot are? Discuss how these two profiles might typify two sides of a medical ethics debate.

4. Though her informed consent was questionable in this matter, Henrietta Lacks signed paperwork at Johns Hopkins Hospital that gave her doctors broad discretionary powers to use her treatment to further their own cancer research. Given what you know about her background and her socio-economic circumstances, how similar or different is this to the signing of an organ donor card that permits one's organs to be harvested in the event of one's sudden death?



5. In her Prologue, the author describes herself as "fixated on the idea of someday telling Henrietta's story," and her journey of discovery goes to great lengths to uncover its truth and raise the public's consciousness about it. However, is the author guilty of exploiting the dying "woman in the photograph" in the same ways that photojournalist Kevin Carter was accused of exploiting the dying Sudanese girl in his 1993 Pulitzer Prize-winning photo? Why, or why not? At what point does documenting a personal tragedy or controversy in a public way become an exploitation of it? Choose several criteria on which to base such a determination.

