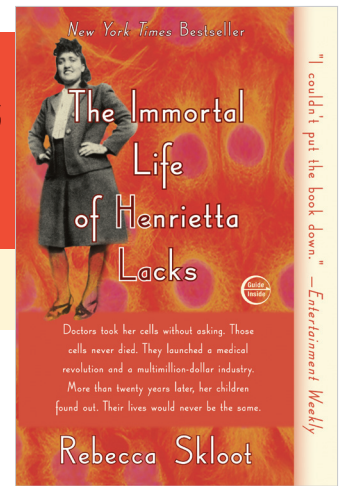


# The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks

## Rebecca Skloot

A Reader's Guide

A Broadway Paperback • ISBN 978-1-4000-5218-9 • [RebeccaSkloot.com](http://RebeccaSkloot.com) • [HenriettaLacksFoundation.org](http://HenriettaLacksFoundation.org)



## CAST OF CHARACTERS

### Immediate Lacks Family

David “Day” Lacks—Henrietta’s husband and cousin

David Jr. “Sonny” Lacks—Henrietta and Day’s third child

Deborah “Dale” Lacks—Henrietta and Day’s fourth child

Eliza Lacks Pleasant—Henrietta’s mother. She died when Henrietta was four.

Elsie Lacks (born Lucille Elsie Pleasant)—Henrietta’s second born and eldest daughter. She was institutionalized due to epilepsy and died at age fifteen.

Gladys Lacks—Henrietta’s sister, who disapproved of Henrietta’s marriage to Day

Johnny Pleasant—Henrietta’s father. He left his ten children when their mother died.

Lawrence Lacks—Henrietta and Day’s firstborn child

Loretta Pleasant—Henrietta’s birth name

Tommy Lacks—Henrietta and Day’s grandfather who raised both of them

Zakariyya Bari Abdul Rahman (born Joe Lacks)—Henrietta and Day’s fifth child. Henrietta was diagnosed with cervical cancer shortly after his birth.

### Extended Lacks Family

Albert Lacks—Henrietta’s white great-grandfather. He had five children by a former slave named Maria and left part of the Lacks plantation to them. This section became known as “Lacks Town.”

Alfred “Cheetah” Carter—Deborah’s first husband. The marriage was abusive and ended in divorce.

Alfred Jr.—Deborah and Cheetah’s firstborn child and Little Alfred’s father

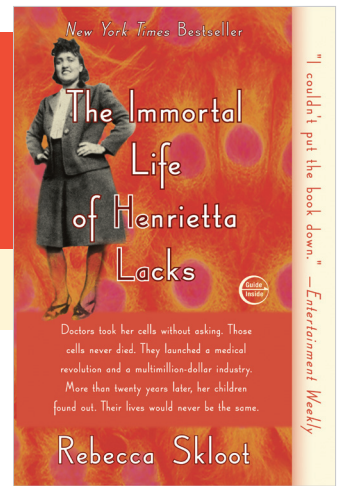
Bobette Lacks—Lawrence’s wife. She helped raise Lawrence’s siblings after Henrietta’s death and advocated for them when she discovered they were being abused.

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Cliff Garret—Henrietta’s cousin. As children, they worked the tobacco fields together.

“Crazy Joe” Grinnan—Henrietta’s cousin who competed unsuccessfully with Day for her affection

Davon Meade—Deborah’s grandson who often lived with and took care of her

Ethel—Galen’s wife, an abusive caregiver to Henrietta’s three youngest children

Fred Garret—Henrietta’s cousin who convinced Day and Henrietta to move to Turner Station

Galen—Henrietta’s cousin. He and his wife, Ethel, moved in with Day after Henrietta’s death to help take care of the children. He ended up abusing Deborah.

Gary Lacks—Gladys’s son and Deborah’s cousin. A lay preacher, he performed a faith healing on Deborah.

LaTonya—Deborah and Cheetah’s second child; Davon’s mother

“Little Alfred”—Deborah’s grandson

Margaret Sturdivant—Henrietta’s cousin and confidante. Henrietta went to her house after radiation treatments at Johns Hopkins.

Reverend James Pullum—Deborah’s second ex-husband, a former steel-mill worker who became a preacher

Sadie Sturdivant—Margaret’s sister, Henrietta’s cousin and confidante. She supported Henrietta during her illness. She and Henrietta sometimes sneaked out to go dancing.

### Members of the Medical and Scientific Community

Alexis Carrel—French surgeon and Nobel Prize recipient who claimed to have cultured “immortal” chicken-heart cells

Chester Southam—cancer researcher who conducted unethical experiments to see whether or not HeLa could “infect” people with cancer

Christoph Lengauer—cancer researcher at Johns Hopkins who helped develop FISH, a technique used to detect and identify DNA sequences, and who reached out to members of the Lacks family

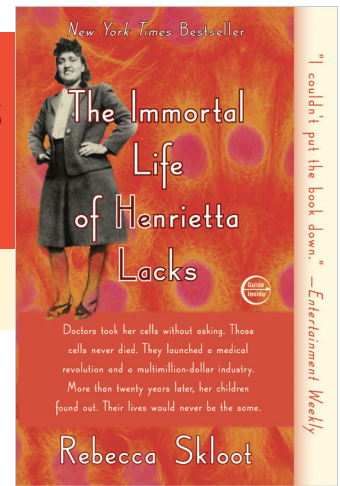
Emanuel Mandel—director of medicine at the Jewish Chronic Disease Hospital (JCDH) who partnered with Southam in unethical experiments

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Dr. George Gey—head of tissue-culture research at Johns Hopkins. He developed the techniques used to grow HeLa cells from Henrietta’s cancer tissue in his lab.

Howard Jones—Henrietta’s gynecologist at Johns Hopkins

Leonard Hayflick—microbiologist who proved that normal cells die when they’ve doubled about fifty times. This is known as the Hayflick limit.

Margaret Gey—George Gey’s wife and research assistant. She was trained as a surgical nurse.

Mary Kubicek—George Gey’s lab assistant who cultured HeLa cells for the first time

Richard Wesley TeLinde—one of the top cervical cancer experts in the country at the time of Henrietta’s diagnosis. His research involved taking tissue samples from Henrietta and other cervical cancer patients at Johns Hopkins.

Roland Pattillo—professor of gynecology at Morehouse School of Medicine who was one of George Gey’s only African American students. He organizes a yearly HeLa conference at Morehouse in Henrietta’s honor.

Stanley Gartler—the geneticist who dropped the “HeLa bomb” when he proposed that many of the most commonly used cell cultures had been contaminated by HeLa

Susan Hsu—the postdoctoral student in Victor McKusick’s lab who was assigned to make contact with the Lackses and request samples from them for genetic testing without informed consent

Victor McKusick—geneticist at Johns Hopkins who conducted research on samples taken from Henrietta’s children without informed consent to learn more about HeLa cells

Walter Nelson-Rees—the geneticist who tracked and published the names of cell lines contaminated with HeLa without first warning the researchers he exposed. He became known as a vigilante.

### Journalists and Others

Courtney “Mama” Speed—resident of Turner Station and owner of Speed’s Grocery. She organized an effort to build a Henrietta Lacks museum.

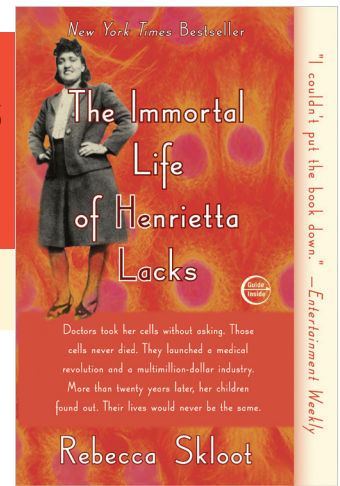
John Moore—cancer patient who unsuccessfully sued his doctor and the regents of the University of California over the use of his cells to create the Mo cell line

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Michael Gold—author of *A Conspiracy of Cells*. He published details from Henrietta's medical records and autopsy report without permission from the Lacks family.

Michael Rogers—*Rolling Stone* reporter who wrote an article about the Lacks family in 1976. He was the first journalist to contact the Lackses.

Sir Lord Keenan Kester Cofield—attempted to sue Johns Hopkins and the Lacks family

Ted Slavin—a hemophiliac whose doctor told him his cells were valuable. Slavin founded Essential Biologicals, a company that sold his cells, and later cells from other people so individuals could profit from their own biological materials.