

ISSUES IN TEACHING
AND LEARNING

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ISSUES IN TEACHING AND LEARNING, VOLUME 9

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ITL, published under the auspices of Rhode Island College, is an e-journal that seeks to foster and deepen pedagogical dialogue and by extension improve the teaching and learning process among Rhode Island College faculty and others.

The editorial board of Rhode Island College's online journal, *Issues in Teaching and Learning*, is pleased to bring you this latest edition, Volume 9. In the short piece that opens this edition, President Nancy Carriuolo considers the impact of the fall 2012 "Question 3" ballot initiative. "[P]erhaps the longest term impact of the funding came from the campaign itself," writes President Carriuolo as she points out that Question 3 signals not just financial support for much-needed upgrades for Gaige, Craig-Lee, and Fogarty, but also statewide support for Rhode Island College.

Next comes a reflective essay, "How I Unlearned to Teach" by Richard Feldstein, professor of English and winner of the 2012 Presidential Award for Excellence in Teaching. Feldstein's essay is both a look back at his journey as a teacher and an appreciation for the students he has learned from over the years. "If I have been successful in the classroom," he writes, "I owe it to my students who have taught me how to teach them about themselves."

Following Feldstein's essay is an article, part history, part memoir, by Richard Olmstead of the Department of Philosophy entitled "Don Averill and the RIC/AFT: A Memoir." "I began my university teaching career forty-six years ago," writes Olmstead. "At that time America was rich and getting richer, and she was investing heavily in a rapidly expanding system of higher education, soon to become the envy of the world." Olmstead discusses his involvement in the RIC/AFT and reflects on the impact of the faculty union and its first president, the late Don Averill.

Rounding out the issue, we are pleased to bring you a collection of articles written by faculty who have participated in this year's "Open Books -- Open Minds" (OBOM) initiative. This short series begins with an introduction by OBOM co-chairs Anita Duneer and Zubeda Jalalzai (Department of English), and follows with articles that present diverse ways three RIC faculty, James Scott (Rhode Island Nurses Institute Middle College Charter School), Daniel Scott (Department of English) and Mikaila Mariel Lemonik Arthur (Department of Sociology) have brought this year's OBOM selection, *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, into the classroom.

We want to take this moment to thank our contributors for their efforts. We hope you enjoy the energy and enthusiasm of this edition of *Issues in Teaching and Learning*.

— *ITL* Editorial Board

THE SHORT- AND LONG-TERM IMPACT OF QUESTION 3

by Nancy Carriuolo
President, Rhode Island College

Rhode Island College was on the ballot in November 2012, seeking \$50 million in general obligation bonds to renovate and improve the college's two main classroom buildings, Craig-Lee and Gaige Halls, as well as to expand the nursing portion of the Fogarty Life Science Building. The college was alone on the ballot for the first time in recent memory. The campus community was exhilarated but also a little unsure about venturing out without CCRI or URI sharing space on the ballot. Despite some misgivings, RIC's campaign succeeded. The voters approved the bond, and so now the college is moving from the completed feasibility studies to the architecture and engineering (A & E) phase and then to groundbreaking.

How Will the Funding Affect the College in the Short-Run? The renovations will affect the college profoundly. Although occasional minor work had been done on the 50-year-old buildings, faculty and students have repeatedly pointed out problems such as leaking pipes, inadequate temperature controls and poor acoustics. One particularly memorable and poignant description of the teaching and learning situation in Gaige Hall came from an anonymous faculty member who submitted the 2010 Chronicle of Higher Education survey. He described entering his classroom filled with enthusiasm, only to catch his foot on the torn carpet, trip across the

floor like Dick Van Dyke, dodge past the bucket catching drips, and end up grasping the podium to regain his balance and composure. (I assume the faculty member was a male senior professor because he compared himself to Dick Van Dyke.) The professor concluded by saying that he loved RIC and its students, but the facilities really made teaching a challenge. The situation, as described, was certainly discouraging for faculty and students. The situation had the attention of my administrative team.

Who are the faculty, staff and students who will benefit from the renovated buildings? Collectively, the buildings targeted for renovation house social sciences, humanities, the sciences, and nursing/allied health. The facilities also are host to campus tutoring and counseling services as well as Upward Bound and PEP, programs that serve students with economic challenges.

Of course, a great many more members of the campus community will benefit from the renovations. Students who take general education will all take courses in Gaige or Craig-Lee. They will benefit from the improved teaching space and technology (not just teaching tools but also mechanicals such as reliable elevators). The spaces will also feature student lounges and other specialized areas identified in the feasibility study phase, during which faculty and staff had an opportunity to give their input regarding needs.

Of course, another impact on teaching and learning will be the displacement of faculty and classes while the demolition



and rebuilding takes place. Think mud, noise and change. No one likes any of those dreadful three. However, the final result will be a teaching environment that is modern, comfortable, and efficient. One might say the inconvenience is well worth the trouble.

The long-term view: A long-term view of facilities planning is also important on a campus with 53 buildings, all of which get heavy use and suffer from some degree of deferred maintenance. RIC has a 2010 master plan that describes and prioritizes the buildings in the worst condition. The art center is under renovation, and the \$50M will improve three more classroom buildings. Those buildings were priority items in the 2010 master plan. The other classroom buildings are also in the plan. If RIC has continued good will from the Board of Education, Governor Chafee and the General Assembly, those other academic buildings will all rotate up for consideration. In the meantime, the administration will do its best to keep the buildings in sufficient repair that teaching and learning are not impaired.

Finally, perhaps the longest term impact of the funding came from the campaign itself. RIC had a campaign song penned by Holly Shadoian at my request. The song's catchy chorus was "Vote 'yes,' on Question 3, a \$50M bond for RIC." Viola Davis created a breathtaking radio ad about RIC, and Mayor Tavares provided at my request an equally noteworthy radio ad in Spanish that was aired on Hispanic radio. Patti Doyle, an alum and VP at RDW, volunteered her time to advise the campaign. Across the state lawn signs asked citizens to vote for RIC. The sides of buses promoted RIC. Faculty, staff, alums and students handed out bond information. The campaign even had a dog with a Question 3 blanket worn on his nightly walk in Providence. The result was 66 percent of the voters approved Question 3, which means that RIC is no longer a "hidden jewel." In the long run, maybe that strong support for the college is the best outcome of all.

HOW I UNLEARNED HOW TO TEACH

by Richard Feldstein
Professor, English



Richard Feldstein

When Michael Michaud asked me to write a piece for our on-campus journal, *Issues in Teaching and Learning*, I nonchalantly said yes, thinking that it would be an easy task. That breezy response on my part, however, has given me pause now that I am sitting down to write this short recollection. It is a little like penning your own obituary for one who has been teaching for 30 years! So much has changed for me over the last year alone that remembering where all this started is difficult, but I'll try to do so below.

I remember that I decided to become a Professor of English because I was intrigued with reading novels. As I read one after another, I found that I was witnessing mapped overviews of characters' lives, and those encapsulated depictions helped me to see my own life as an ongoing venture that could lead in any number of directions. Whether it was James Gatz's metamorphosis into Jay Gatsby or Lily Bart's descent and demise – I saw in each character depiction a chartered life story that showed me decisions in life matter. For the first time, my life spread out before me like a mappable matrix, offering choice after choice as navigational tools at my disposal. I was young then and believed that I

could steer the ship, and these novels gave me the incentive to do so. Only later did I realize that events beyond my control would intervene and impact these choices, shaping me as I shaped my life trajectory in the process.

So reading novels launched me upon navigational straits that lead me into the profession. Then a big change occurred in my career: I discovered critical theory and majored in it at SUNY at Buffalo. Once I actually began to teach, I utilized critical theory to help students to learn about issues of race, gender, class, and sexual preference. I was a multicultural theorist who believed that a progressive education was desirable. I maintained this approach until I made a discovery. Actually, it was past students writing to me about time spent in my classroom that helped me to make the discovery. They wrote me (always years later, always in retrospect) about an experience they had in our classroom that made a difference in their lives. And that it was always an unsuspecting variable instance they encountered out of the blue which contributed to that difference. It usually had to do with some undramatic moment in the classroom when some recognition about their lives welled up and became evident. They never wrote me to say that they remembered this or that novel or this or that theory; they always wrote about a conversation that helped them to see life differently – their life differently. One day I received a letter like this and the accumulative effect shifted my perception of my mission in the classroom. I realized that people are interested in their own lives, and that my job as a teacher was to use the novels and poems and theory we studied to help them to contemplate their existence – to liberate them from the ideological and discursive conditioning heaped upon each and every one of us from the educational and religious and familial systems that had indoctrinated us all these years.

I would say that was my project for the last 15 years: to help people to see themselves and their place in the universe differently – different than the way I saw them or another professor saw them or a family member saw them or, even, how

they saw themselves the day before. I guess you could say I used theory to encourage them to unleash a creative perceptiveness to see themselves and their world differently. If I have been successful in the classroom, I owe it to my students who have taught me how to teach them about themselves. At least I listened.

The final change in my teaching style occurred about a year ago. For it has been slowly dawning upon me that learning about ideological indoctrination, while extremely helpful, is not enough in this quick moving, digital era of techno-personal programming. To that end, I have begun to teach courses like “Consciousness East and West” and “Techno Zen and the Digital Tao” – courses that question the mind-forged manacles that Blake warned us against. Now I am teaching students not to believe in themselves! I know that sounds strange, but it is nonetheless my project. I am teaching them that the “self” is but a self-consuming narrative fiction that the mind tells itself over and over again as part of its groundhog-day process of proving the “I” exists at the center of its universe. Always the same story it relates to itself about itself, always a voice in the mind talking to us as if it knew itself to be itself.

Currently, I am teaching students ways of disengaging from the inner dialogue, of seeing words that pass through consciousness as mere vowels and consonants that hold no sway unless identified with and believed in. I am also pointing to the space through which these words and emotions journey. I “point” to it because this space is unfindable. It is, for lack of better words, a background which is undefinable, unknowable, beyond reason, beyond logos – a deconstructive site that challenges all human conclusions about ourselves and our place in this world. I do not promise anyone that they can escape the conditioning. I would never make such claims. I merely show them that identification is necessary if some thought is to be believed; in this identification, the thought becomes believable and thus gains power. Following Eleanor Roosevelt, I claim that “no one can make you feel inferior without your consent.” Only you can believe yourself into inferiority. If you don't believe your mind's self-condemnation, it has no power over you.

In sum, my project is to show people how to refuse consent by watching, not following, the thoughts that pass through consciousness and identifying them as mere words that must be believed into believability.



DON AVERILL AND THE RIC/AFT: A MEMOIR

by Richard Olmsted
Professor, Philosophy

There was a time when it was not a problem to bring the entire RIC faculty together. When I arrived in 1973 the College schedule included a special time during the week reserved for the RIC/AFT union meeting. There were no classes or other meetings scheduled at that time, and on a monthly basis virtually everyone in the faculty would come together to conduct business and share opinions. At that time the recent struggle to establish the union and win bargaining rights had involved every faculty member, and once established the feeling of ownership was almost universal.

I came to RIC with some prior experience trying to establish a faculty union. I began my university teaching career forty-six years ago. At that time America was rich and getting richer, and she was investing heavily in a rapidly expanding system of higher education, soon to become the envy of the world. The baby boomers were arriving at the colleges and there were shortages of everything—classrooms, dormitories, laboratories. And most significantly for an Indiana University graduate student looking for a career there was a shortage of professors.

The shortage of faculty ended in the early 1970's as the undergraduate population stabilized and the war in Vietnam provided other employment for many baby boomers. When I first arrived at Rhode Island College, it was one of the last places where there was still expansion. Twenty-seven new tenure track lines were added to the College faculty that year and a similar number were added in 1974. Then the expansion abruptly stopped. In 2004, when the 1973 cohort celebrated thirty-years, there were still 24 of us active at RIC. The shortage of faculty in higher education was over and with it the faculty mobility that characterized the 60's and early 70's.

But when I began my career the expansion was still on and college teaching was a mobile business. Rhode Island College was my third job. I started at UCLA and soon after moved to Boston University. In many ways it was an exciting time and place. BU was a haven for leftist academics persecuted during the McCarthy era. My mentor at BU, Theodore Brammell, who was one such professor, introduced me to

other liberal/radical faculty members including Robert Cohen, Ken Benne, Jack Stachel, and Howard Zinn. In that context I was involved in the increasingly aggressive anti-war movement and, also, a quite ineffective effort to organize the BU faculty into a chapter of the American Federation of Teachers.

My politics were not a barrier in my move to Rhode Island College, and my efforts to organize the AFT at BU was a positive factor. The Department of Philosophy and Foundations of Education that I joined was a large and influential part of the RIC campus. One very important member was Donald Averill. Averill was the founding President of the RIC/AFT and he did not mind having another enthusiastic union guy around, so long as I did not run against him in the annual election. I immediately joined the union and became active.

Fall Semester 1973 was the beginning of the second faculty union contract at RIC. The first contract covered only one year, 1972-1973, and was negotiated following a run-off election for bargaining rights between locals of the AFT and the NEA. The chief faculty negotiator for that first contract, which includes much of the language still a part of the current contract, was Tom Howell, also a member of my department.

I was delighted to find the RIC faculty with a contract that included many of the features we could only dream about at BU. There was a class size limit! At BU I taught some very large classes, often well over a hundred, and with very little support. At RIC there were written annual evaluations with open files and an open and reasonably simple promotion and tenure system. At BU there were multiple layers of committees, each of them star-chamber affairs sworn to secrecy, basing decisions on secret files. (A friend of mine was denied tenure. When he asked the reasons for the decision, he was told they were secret. When asked the reasons for the secrecy he was told that if revealed the reasons would hurt his career!) And at RIC there was a formal system of grievance including appeals that ended in third party arbitration with the American Arbitration Association. At BU the appeal process was decided ultimately by the President of the University, the person who had made the decision under appeal.



Don Averill was not married and spent most of his time on campus, eating every meal there. He talked with everyone, always wanting to know and to influence faculty opinion. At the time there was a separate food service line for faculty at lunch in the Faculty Center. (There was a billiard table and piano there too!). Administrators and faculty from the President down ate at the Faculty Center and it was a good place to take measure of things. Don stood for election every year and a “caucus” in opposition to his administration ran a slate every annual election. Don was very aware of the possibility of electoral defeat.

My first union job was as editor of the “Faculty Forum” on the back page Averill’s *RIC/AFT Newsletter*. Don wrote most of the rest of the 4-8 page newsletter, typing it himself on mimeograph masters with an electric typewriter and running it off and folding it for distribution to the faculty. He delighted in “scoops” of information--promotion lists, for example, distributed before any other media. Editing the “Faculty Forum” it was my job every two weeks to find someone with a strong opinion on some relevant topic. Usually that was not a problem. Every edition had a notice that made it very clear that the opinions in the forum did not represent those of the union (i.e. Averill). Often he would disagree with the authors I picked. Sometimes the article I solicited would make him very angry, but even though he would grumble and shout, he never refused to print the item.

Every year the President of the College would invite Don to address the opening convocation of faculty, and he would spend weeks on the draft of his speech. He would try it out on most anyone who came into the union office, amending it

and improving it after criticism.

In 1976 I took on the job of Chair of the Grievance Committee. The Grievance Committee had five members and was very active. At the time there was a provision for “merit pay” in the contract called “Outstanding Performance Increment.” It was set up in such a way as to almost guarantee extensive grievance litigation. Long-standing discriminatory practices, particularly against women, were coming to the surface producing significant grievances. And of course the faculty was young and promotion/tenure grievances were frequent. Each evaluation season I sent out a notice in the *Newsletter* reminding the members of their grievance rights under the contract.

As Chair I allocated the cases among the members of the committee often taking on the most difficult problems myself. It was a highly stressful job, but deeply satisfying. A remarkably high percentage of cases injustices were corrected. It is profoundly rewarding to help a colleague through a very difficult patch in his/her career and that is what the Grievance Committee is able to do. I was fortunate at the time to be doing business with an unusually good set of Deans and Presidents. They were uniformly interested in doing the right thing and not simply insisting that the first decision had to be right. Of course the fact that their decisions might face review by an arbitrator encouraged that attitude. Most, although certainly not all, of the cases that were taken up by the Committee were completed in a way that was satisfactory to me and to the grievant. But it was a job that put me in the middle of some highly acrimonious intra-departmental disputes.

After leaving the Grievance Committee in 1979, I was installed by Averill as Chair of the Assembly of Departmental Representatives. Averill was able to control the votes of a majority of the delegates and he wanted me to be Chair. However several members of the Assembly were understandably upset with my election on my first day as a member.

In the Fall Semester of 1980 I took a sabbatical leave in Ireland and on return I was elected Secretary. It was a closely-fought election, as were most of the elections during this period. A special edition of the *Newsletter* included statements by every candidate and most distributed circulars to the faculty. As I said earlier, there was an organized opposition caucus so there were always at least two candidates for every office. I ran against Carol Shelton and afterwards she and I agreed that I probably won by paying the \$20 that the College charged at the time to print and distribute a flyer to the faculty. She saved money by writing the address on each flyer but got tired and quit before she reached the end of the list. Afterward she laughed, concluding that the last half of the alphabet had swept me into office.

After I finished teaching a late class on a cold November night in 1983, I dropped in on Don in the RIC/AFT office which was then a floor above mine in Fogarty. We had a long discussion about a number of topics ultimately turning to death and the meaning of life. Don was a devout Catholic and I was working on my theology degree at Harvard. Don expected to die young, as both of his parents had, and although his doctor had warned him to slow down he continued as he always had working long hours for the RIC/AFT.

When I returned from Cambridge the next day I found that Don had collapsed and died in the Student Union while attending a meeting of the Ski Club as faculty advisor. After his funeral at St. Thomas Church, I remember standing at Don's grave in New Hampshire as he was buried, angry with him for dying so young.

It has now been almost 30 years since Don died, and of course the RIC/AFT has continued. It even survived four years of my Presidency. In the 80's we came within a few hours of a strike and in the early 90's we scraped through the Rhode Island banking crisis. But the RIC/AFT was never again quite the same as it had been when Don was around.



FROM THE ETHICS OF HELA RESEARCH TO THE MYSTERIES OF THE ANTARCTIC, OBOM VOYAGES INTO UNCHARTED ACADEMIC TERRITORIES . . .

by Anita Duneer, Assistant Professor and Zubeda Jalalzai, Associate Professor, English Department
Co-Chairs of Open Books – Open Minds

Open Books – Open Minds has been reimagining the role of the common book at Rhode Island College for the last two years. Common reading programs seek to generate intellectual and social engagement throughout the campus and help to create a sense of community, increase the vitality of academic discourse, and overall improve participants' feelings about their school. Evidence also suggests that these programs help with student retention. There are many versions of common book programs in colleges and universities across the country. Most target freshmen, who are asked to read the book over the summer and participate in events at the beginning of the fall semester. Some schools have college-wide discussion groups, author talks, or essay contests; a few have built common book instruction into the first two or three weeks of a required course, such as freshman writing or first-year experience. From its inception in 2006 at RIC, Open Books – Open Minds has engaged students in dialogue with the College and Rhode Island communities. We now envision a broader scope for the program, which continues to encourage the participation of freshmen in OBOM as we expand our year-long series of events inspired by the common book to involve students from all academic levels and diverse disciplines.

This year's series of events related to the common book, Rebecca Skloot's *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, has broadened the interdisciplinary OBOM horizons with participation in teaching panels, lectures, roundtable discussions, and film screenings by faculty in Anthropology, Biology, Education, English, History, Modern Languages, Nursing, Psychology, Sociology, Africana Studies, and First-Year Writing.

Book Selection

The main criteria for our book selection is three-fold: the text should have interdisciplinary potential for teaching and programming, intellectual and aesthetic appeal, and not be widely taught in high school. Our list of books for consideration

comes from the RIC community. Students, faculty, and staff are encouraged to submit suggestions for upcoming years. OBOM traditionally alternates between fiction and nonfiction years. Thus, we are already beginning to compile a list of non-fiction for the 2014-15 academic year, and fiction for 2015-16. The committee narrows the list and puts the top choices up for a campus-wide vote.

The OBOM Discussion Leader / Mentor Program and COLL 202

This year OBOM piloted a new Discussion Leader / Mentor Program, in which upper-level students served as embedded discussion leaders in a first-year writing course. Five sections of WRTG 100 participated, and we would like to expand the scope of the program in the 2013-14 academic year. Prospective OBOM mentors are recommended by faculty; students register with Zubeda Jalalzai for the one-credit course, COLL 202. Faculty from any discipline who are teaching the common book can request a mentor to help lead discussion and work with students on research or writing projects, and to encourage students to attend some of the exciting co-curricular events inspired by the common book.

Who's Involved? Just about everyone.

Thanks to wide-ranging support on and off campus, OBOM has been remapping the possibilities for a truly collaborative network of academic programs and events.

- OBOM is a department under Academic Affairs, with generous support from President Carriuolo and VPAA Ron Pitt.
- OBOM is also a key component in the First Year Experience initiative.
- Funding has come from College Lectures and events co-sponsored by the Dialogue on Diversity Committee.
- Last academic year, with substantial help from the Office of Research and Grants Administration, the Roger Shimomura lecture and art exhibit at the Bannister Gallery (as part of the series of events inspired by *When the Emperor Was Divine*) was made possible by a Major Grant

from the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities.

- RIC librarians create in-depth LibGuides for each common book for the use of faculty and students, which are then archived on the Adams Library webpage as permanent resources for future researchers.
- Student Affairs is planning extended orientation activities to increase freshmen involvement at the beginning of the fall semester, which will include events that introduce students to the common book.
- Student Activities Marketing designs promotional materials for OBOM, including posters, banners, and buttons.
- The student group, “Bringing Books to Life,” organizes discussion forums and workshops related to the common book.
- The Offices of Campus Communications and Web Communications have been busy with OBOM publicity.
- The Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning has provided a comfortable space and additional publicity for teaching workshops and committee meetings.
- The First-Year Writing Program has supported instructors who choose to teach the common book.
- The FYS program is offering an OBOM section in the fall structured by reading *Pym*: Open Books – Open Minds: Exploring the RIC Common Book in Literary and Cultural Contexts.
- Faculty, staff, and students with diverse interests serve on the OBOM Committee and the OBOM Student Conference Committee.
- There’s always room for more!

The Second Annual Open Books – Open Minds Student Conference: April 12, 2013

Another year of OBOM events culminated in the Student Conference where students showcased their writing and research on the common book or related issues of inquiry. This year’s conference included an exciting lineup of interdisciplinary panels of student papers and roundtables, including two Mock Institutional Review Board sessions that actively engaged the audience in ethical debate. Joana Ricou’s keynote lecture, “The Intersection of Biology and Art,” followed lunch. Ricou came from Portugal to the United States to study Biology and Fine Arts. She earned a Bachelor of Science and Arts at Carnegie Mellon University and a Master of Science in Multimedia Technology at Duquesne University. Her artwork has appeared on the cover of the *Journal of Neuroscience*, and she has collaborated with galleries, schools, and museums in Portugal and the United States, including the Andy Warhol Museum, the Carnegie Science Center, the Pittsburgh Zoo and Aquarium, the Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh, and the National Aviary. Ricou has created a series of paintings inspired by cell culture, called “Henrietta Lacks or HeLa.”

The conference ran from 8:30-2:00 in the Student Union Ballroom and nearby rooms. This event (like all OBOM events) was free and open to the public. The conference program is available at <http://www.ric.edu/obom/>.

Forging Ahead

Next year’s common book selection is Mat Johnson’s *Pym*. The narrator, who is obsessed with Edgar Allan Poe’s only novel, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, sails on a quest to retrace Pym’s voyage to Antarctica, where





OBOM Inaugural Conference 2012—photo by Hayden James '13

he encounters zombie-like monsters and global warming. It's an ironic comedy, a social satire, and a commentary on race in American culture and literature. We are now beginning to plan next year's events, and we welcome ideas from the College community. Related lines of inquiry for OBOM events and student research might include: the slave narrative or the narrative of exploration; social satire in literature and popular culture; race, literacy, and education; art and aesthetics; global warming; the Arctic and Antarctica; gender and sexuality; human-alien relations; and the zombie apocalypse. More information on *Pym* and Mat Johnson's other works (including two graphic novels) can be found at <http://matjohnson.info/>.

We aim to continue designing programs that bring together freshmen, upper-classmen, and the broader College community in an extended dialogue that opens a world of possibilities through critical inquiry and the exchange of ideas. We are also imagining ways to expand community involvement through outreach to neighboring academic institutions. This academic year, for example, members of the OBOM Com-

mittee have developed a relationship with administrators at Providence College, in which we have discussed future plans for our programs, and shared invitations to common book events. We hope to initiate more such relationships and, as our program grows, we imagine the OBOM Student Conference as an annual regional event that brings students from local colleges and universities together at Rhode Island College. The horizons are limitless for Open Books – Open Minds. Follow us with *Pym* to the Antarctic and beyond!

Rebecca Skloot, author of
*The Immortal Life of
Henrietta Lacks*



SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE: *THE IMMORTAL LIFE OF HENRIETTA LACKS* AND INTERDISCIPLINARY LEARNING

by James Scott, C.A.G.S.

The Rhode Island Nurses Institute Middle College

At times – and for most of the first two thirds of the book – *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* is electrifying to the point that it flirts with being a classic. Rebecca Skloot's triumph is that she distills hard science into a journalistic work that reads like a page turning beach novel. The text, at times, is limited by a redundancy of themes that suggests the difficulty of telling such a complex story. Despite its imperfections, *Henrietta Lacks* is an ideal core text for common readings. This text is masterful at starting discussions. It asks important questions while skating across several disciplines with ease. Nothing has to be forced on the teaching end. The presence of Skloot's story as a flagship for interdisciplinary discussion makes a statement about institutional values in setting a context for learning that is systemic and not compartmentalized. In short, the *Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* can be utilized to change the way students think about learning.

Those who are particular about books tend to organize their bookcases in a certain manner. Placing certain books in prime positions creates opportunities to make statements about tastes and values. Well placed books are discussion starters. Institution-wide readings can accomplish the same on a larger scale. President Obama attempted to define the institutional values of his cabinet choices in 2008 by repeatedly referencing Doris Kearns Goodwin's *Lincoln Biography*, *Team of Rivals* to set the tone for his executive branch. *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* as a campus-wide reading reinforces many of the core values, including inquiry and social justice that should define modern institutions of higher learning. Furthermore, it is a text that can be tailored to fit into an eclectic range of academic contexts.

The strong technical aspects of the book's writing provide perfect examples for writing instructors to use in deprogramming college writers from bad, test driven, high school habits. Skloot writes concise chapter openings that get right to the

point. She uses chapter titles that capture the essence of what the chapter is about. A variety of sentence lengths and structures add to the narrative flow. The text can be used as a model for how to write. The fact that the latter half of the novel lacks some of the sizzle of the excellent and groundbreaking first half is a teachable moment in itself. Instructors can invite students to identify an area in which they think the story declines and create an outline for how Skloot might have finished telling the story. It took Skloot ten years to write *Henrietta*. Perhaps the author's determination offers students the best advice of all: don't give up on a topic! Keep writing. An angle will emerge.

History, Social Science and Institution-wide discussions can be sparked about social justice and research. Skloot does us a favor by providing a balanced context in which to discuss social justice. It is clear that *Henrietta's* rights were violated. Dr. Gey – the researcher who successfully clones the cancer cells – does so without consent. But it is this unethical act that leads to medical advances (including Jonas Salk's Polio vaccine) that saves or improves countless lives. Skloot also notes that Gey never profited off of the cloned cells (a billion dollar industry). He gave them away for free. Issues of class, race and abuse of power arise from the Gey-*Henrietta* dynamic.

Dr. Gey and the *Lacks* families' respective financial insolvencies provide fertile ground for the business department. Dr. Gey could have used a business plan. Did the companies that profited from the cells owe anything to the *Lacks* family? Were the *Lacks'* financial problems a product of their mother's death, their own doing, or of an unbalanced and racially biased southern economy? An economics class can discuss the effect of the overall U. S. economy on the *Lacks* family over the more than half a century long narrative. It is also possible to research the overall economic impact of the cells. Conversely, the book provides opportunities to discuss and write about numbers in humanities classes.

Math lessons can focus on subjects such as exponential growth (cell reproduction) or inflation, as the story provides an interesting span over which to calculate items like wages and the Consumer Price Index. For the most part, potential math topics overlap with Economics and Science.

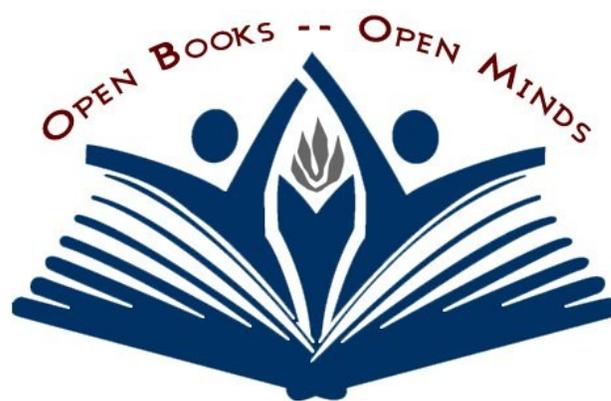
Skloot cultivates a comfortable middle ground for discussions about science and religion. The tension between science and faith is acted out in the relationship between the agnostic Skloot and the evangelical Lacks family. Skloot (2010) frontloads the theme of religion versus science into her prologue: “The Lackses changed everything I thought I knew about faith, science, journalism, and race. Ultimately, this book is the result” (7). Skloot takes a systemic approach to her subject in depicting a dialogue between the church and the laboratory. Pope John Paul II wrote that there is room for both faith and reason in public dialogue (Vatican 1998). Skloot, a science writer by trade, heeds this advice. The most striking integration of science and faith occurs when the similarities between “immortal cells” and the Biblical resurrection are addressed (Skloot 294-296). The text invites discussions about religion and science but suggests that it need not be a zero-sum game. There is room for both. In fact, they hold the story together.

At its core *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* is a story about learning. The advantage of Skloot inserting herself into the novel is that readers are invited to explore her learning process replete with setbacks, struggles, and moments of recognition. Ethical transgressions and financial illiteracy aside – Dr. Gey and his quest for knowledge illustrate the need to be persistent and methodical in the laboratory. The most poignant learning journeys are those taken by the Lacks family. From chapter thirty-one on the text focuses on Deborah Lacks’ intellectual awakening. Deborah learns to use the internet, finds out what happened to her daughter, Elsie, and visits Johns Hopkins Medical Center, with her brother, Zakariyya, where she holds a vial of her mother’s cells in her hand. The best evidence suggests the Henrietta was unaware that her cells were taken – one of Dr. Gey’s former colleagues

tells a story to the contrary on page 66; a story is of apocryphal origin. Henrietta leaves the world two legacies. The first legacy is the transformative effect her cells had on medicine and science. This legacy was largely anonymous. A second gift to the world comes in the form of this book. It is the gift of knowledge. Her cells grew exponentially; the academic applications of this text seem infinite as well.

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SOME APPROACHES TO TEACHING REBECCA SKLOOT'S *THE IMMORTAL LIFE OF HENRIETTA LACKS*

by Daniel Scott
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The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks relates to a great many strategies and themes that I use in my courses. Rebecca Skloot's narration of the personal, social and scientific forces that surround Henrietta Lacks, her family and her cells intersects with some of the most fundamental and controversial aspects of contemporary culture. As I considered how I might integrate the book into my courses, I arrived at clusters of texts and themes that I feel reflect some of the complexities that run through the book.

Commodification of the Black Body

One course I have imagined might examine the processes of commodification and de-humanization that have defined the West's relations with Africa and Africans. Such a course might include the *Narrative* (1845) by Frederick Douglass, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) by Harriet Jacobs, poems and short stories by Paul Laurence Dunbar, Claude McKay, Richard Wright, the history of the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment, and *Venus* (1996) a play by Suzan-Lori Parks. In *Venus*, Parks dramatizes the life of Sarah Baartman – known as the “Hottentot Venus” – who was made a public spectacle and scientific curiosity in the early years of the nineteenth century. Works like these could provide historical and cultural contexts for a broader discussion about the erasure of black subjectivity and personal agency. They could help a class connect the disregard of Henrietta Lacks' body (and soul) to forces and attitudes that extend well beyond Baltimore, 1951.

In addition, I think that material and texts that could problematize this further could ask questions about how and why black subjects have at times intervened in these processes of commodification to resist and subvert them. They throw commodification of the black body into stark relief (Josephine Baker); they re-signify these reductive energies. In *The Cancer Journals* (1980) Audre Lorde re-defines her illness in

terms of resisting medical discourses that would empty and ignore the realities of her black and lesbian experience.

Race, Science and Science Fiction

While it emphasizes the obvious seriousness of the events it documents, *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* reflects in its characterizations and descriptions some of the terms and tones of science fiction writing – as in this description of HeLa's contamination of other cells:

It turned out Henrietta's cells could float through the air on dust particles. They could travel from one culture to the next on unwashed hands or used pipettes; they could tide from lab to lab on researchers' coats and shoes, or through ventilation systems. And they were strong: if just one HeLa cell landed in a culture dish, it took over, consuming all the media and filling all the space. (153)

A course might ask the book to participate in an inquiry into the ways science fiction and even non-fiction participate in culturally-rooted and very popular notions of alien identities and alternative humanities – both here on earth and in outer space. (What can science fiction texts teach us about race and racial anxieties?)

Such a course could make a lot of non-print texts. In many science fiction films, race and racial otherness are constituent parts of the narrative's commentary on contemporary social realities – either directly as in John Sayles' *The Brother from Another Planet* (1984), or indirectly as in the problematic racial dynamics of George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979), and Francis Lawrence's *I Am Legend* (2007). In many of these films the possibilities of black agency in a scientific context are negated or abbreviated – as if such a thing could not be possible.

“Can black people be scientific heroes?” seems to be the question that is posed by these texts. Such representations as these – while more or less disposable individually – add up to a hesitation in science fiction texts to represent black subjects

as successful players in these imagined worlds. *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* may help us examine this hesitation.

In addition, there is a wealth of science fiction written by black writers that one might bring to bear on this question. Contrary to most science fiction texts, these works emphasize and celebrate the presence of the black subject in a scientific world: *Black No More* (1931) by George Schuyler; “The Space Traders” (1992) by Derrick Bell, *Kindred* (1971) and *Imago* (1997) by Octavia Butler, and much of the work of Samuel Delany (*Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand* – 1984).

Versions of Immortality

Of course, the very idea of immortality is an important and continuing presence in a wide variety of texts. In many cases immortality has been a motivator for producing the texts in the first place. So, we could use *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* to reflect and respond to some of these visions of immortality. Questions like “what does it mean to live forever?,” “what constitutes human life?,” and “is Henrietta Lacks really immortal?” could be the foundation for reading and discussing some of the Greatest Hits of Immortality Literature. Texts like: William Shakespeare’s *Sonnets*, William Wordsworth’s “Ode: Intimations of Immortality,” the work of Emily Dickinson, Greek mythology, African mythology, *Malone Dies* by Samuel Beckett, etc. We could even bring the consideration of the immortal human into more popular and contemporary expressions of the idea: vampires, clones, androids, and celebrities.

Migration and Urban Black Vernacular Culture

As she tells the story of Henrietta Lacks’ (and her family’s) relations with Johns Hopkins, Rebecca Skloot takes on the complex of issues of identity, community, and resistance-to-power. A course might use *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* as part of a concentration on the political and social changes taking place in black communities during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. More than focusing on the post-WWII activities of national organizers like a Philip Randolph and Adam Clayton Powell, this course could focus on the shaping

of black vernacular culture in America’s cities. This is the context for Henrietta and Day’s migration to Baltimore and for her family’s stories.

This story of black urban vernacular culture – especially during the period between the end of the war and the Civil Rights Era – has been under-discussed and under-documented by scholars. The course could bring to the surface the efforts of several unsung heroes of the pre-Civil Rights movement like Harry T. Moore and Ella Baker. And Baltimore itself plays a big part in the shaping of this vernacular culture. According to *Black Baltimore* (1993) by Harold McDougall, thirty-three thousand black people arrived in Baltimore in the few years of the early 1940s. They would have been aware of the still treacherous atmosphere in Maryland towards blacks: the spate of lynchings in Maryland’s Eastern Shore in the late 1930s and 1940s, the presence of the young Thurgood Marshall (who grew up in Baltimore). They would have also been attending popular musical and theatrical events that provided opportunities for release and relief. By the 1940s and 1950s, a black popular music and dance had begun to contribute considerably to American popular culture in general. It was the music and dance that Henrietta and Day loved in their younger days. It is reflected in the stance and the sass we see in the famous photo of Henrietta on the cover of the book.

Texts we could use include: the paintings of Jacob Lawrence, the collages of Romare Bearden, the music of Louis Armstrong, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday (who is from Baltimore); fiction like *The Simple Stories* of Langston Hughes, *Cotton Comes to Harlem* (1965) by Chester Himes, *The Street* (1946) by Ann Petry; poetry from Gwendolyn Brooks, Sterling Brown, and the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and 1970s.

But we must be careful not to be too quick or too neat about the terms of migration. *The Immortal* illustrates that for Henrietta the move to Maryland from Virginia was not a one-way departure (she returned to Clover often) and that even as she lived an urbanized life she loved, a life informed by the

rhythms and mores of the country: how might she help us to see the Great Migration as a more nuanced and fluid process? One that black Americans are still participating in. In fact, there have been many reports of a reversal of the migrations for blacks – back to the South.

We are early yet in the process of understanding the processes, consequences, and potentialities of migration. Perhaps, we would be able to use some of the insights emerging from the newly-constructed field of Migration Studies to open up the complexities that characterize the Great Migration here in the United States. There is friction between Henrietta's knowing of her own body and the medical knowledge Johns Hopkins mobilized to commandeer her body. Her racial, gender, class and cultural differences rendered her vulnerable to their authority. Henrietta's migration from Clover to Baltimore was more than a movement of people, it was (and is) a shifting of world-views, moralities and logics. When telling Henrietta's story and that of her children and grandchildren, Skloot's book opens the door for us to consider personal and communal displacement in a wider and even more global context.

As I said at the beginning of this piece, *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* has enormous potential to find its way into a lot of disciplinary and cross-disciplinary discussions in the College. I hope that the ideas and approaches above inspire more ideas about how to bring this book into the classroom. Lastly, though, I would like us to consider one of the book's most useful insights: that institutions – institutions like Rhode Island College – can be indifferent in their interactions with some parts of the U.S. population. A history of

ideological and systemic mis-use and mis-recognition has built a wall of distrust between such institutions and those who might benefit tremendously from participating more fully in them. How do we cross the divide and work towards a situation that benefits more people in Rhode Island? How can we become better teachers? How can educational institutions reach and change more lives?

“Can black people be scientific heroes?” seems to be the question that is posed by these texts. Such representations as these – while more or less disposable individually – add up to a hesitation in science fiction texts to represent black subjects as successful players in these imagined worlds.”



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**HELA'S ANCESTORS: TEACHING ABOUT RACE AND SCIENCE—A GUIDE TO
TEACHING WITH REBECCA SKLOOT'S *THE IMMORAL LIFE OF HENRIETTA LACKS***

by Mikaila Mariel Lemonik Arthur
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Rebecca Skloot's masterpiece of science writing, *The Immoral Life of Henrietta Lacks* (2009), tells the story of how American science developed the ability to culture and grow cell lines in science laboratories—and how this development is intimately tied to the story of one woman, her family, and their unfortunate experiences with racial and health care inequality in the United States. My goal in this Teaching Guide is to explore some of the ways in which Henrietta Lacks's story emerges from a larger history in which people of color have been mistreated by the scientific establishment in so very many ways. While Skloot alludes to some of these issues, her book is better understood as a biography of the HeLa cell line—and thus, it is up to those of us who use the book in our classrooms to ensure that we teach the book not only as the story of one poor woman and her family's suffering or as the story of the casualties of scientific progress but instead as a chronicle of one incident in a litany of incidents that make up the history of racial science in our nation.

While there are many ways to approach these topics, this teaching guide will focus on three particular aspects of the history of race and science of relevance for teaching and learning in the context of *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*: (1) race, ethics, and experimentation in relation to the development of protections for human subjects in research; (2) the history of attempts to “scientize” racial inequality; and (3) race-based medical practice. In each case, this teaching guide will briefly review the relevant historical and contemporary issues and provide suggestions for in-class exercises or assignments designed to enhance student learning around these issues.

Race, Ethics, and Experimentation

The United States has a long history of experimenting on people—particularly people of color—without informed consent. Henrietta Lacks's experiences comprise only one chap-

ter in this history. Here, I will briefly review several significant episodes in this history and discuss the importance of these developments to the emergence of Institutional Review Boards (IRBs). While this history really begins with the Nazi medical experiments (discussed below), I will concentrate here on the Tuskegee Syphilis Study and on the revelations in 2011 about sexually-transmitted disease research conducted without consent on Guatemalans.

Despite the fact that the Tuskegee Syphilis Study is one of the best-known examples of unethical research in the United States, few undergraduates have heard of it. The study, which was conducted under the auspices of the U.S. Public Health Service, was concerned with documenting the progression of untreated syphilis. At the beginning of the study, in the 1930s, treatments for syphilis were generally ineffective or had intolerable side effects. For example, mercury was often used as a treatment, but caused severe ulcers in the mouth (and mercury poisoning itself can be fatal). Participants were offered medical care (except for syphilis treatment) and food, and their families received burial stipends when they died (Skloot 2009). So far, so good, right? But by the time the study ended, in the early 1970s, medical professionals had known that penicillin would cure syphilis for several decades, and yet researchers had not provided penicillin to participants in the Tuskegee study. Indeed, researchers had at times actively worked to prevent participants from receiving treatment. This story is so horrible that it hardly needs embellishment, and yet the myth of Tuskegee became even worse than reality in the minds of many Black Americans. As Skloot details on page 186, it became common belief that the Tuskegee study had involved the deliberate infection of Black men with syphilis.

While the U.S. Public Health Service did not inject Black American men with syphilis, it did inject the bacterium into Guatemalans in a separate study. That study, which only recently came to light, was conducted between 1946 and 1948 involved approximately 5,500 individuals, at least 83 of whom

died (McNeil 2011). During the study, prostitutes infected with syphilis were paid to have sex with prison inmates. Additionally, syphilis bacteria were purposely placed in wounds made for this purpose on subjects' faces or genitals, and some were infected through punctures to the spine or the base of the skull (McNeil 2011; Presidential Commission for the Study of Bioethical Issues 2011). Subjects were not compensated for their suffering and not all received appropriate medical treatment. More details about the study can be found in a report issued by a White House commission established to investigate the matter (Presidential Commission for the Study of Bioethical Issues 2011) as well as in the John D. Cutler Records at the National Archives (<http://www.archives.gov/research/health/cdc-cutler-records/>).

It was episodes like these that lead to the development of the IRB as a body responsible for protecting the rights of human subjects in research. As the 1993 edition of the IRB Handbook states:

The modern story of human subjects protections begins with the Nuremberg Code, developed for the Nuremberg Military Tribunal as standards by which to judge the human experimentation conducted by the Nazis. The Code captures many of what are now taken to be the basic principles governing the ethical conduct of research involving human subjects. The first provision of the Code states that “the voluntary consent of the human subject is absolutely essential.” Freely given consent to participation in research is thus the cornerstone of ethical experimentation involving human subjects. The Code goes on to provide the details implied by such a requirement: capacity to consent, freedom from coercion, and comprehension of the risks and benefits involved. Other provisions require the minimization of risk and harm, a favorable risk/benefit ratio, qualified investigators using appropriate research designs, and freedom for the subject to withdraw at any time.

Such regulations were formally adopted in the United States in 1974, just two years after the Tuskegee Syphilis Study came to an end.

Class Exercise Suggestion

One starting point for discussing these issues would be conducting a mock IRB session in class. Stephan Sweet first proposed this method for teaching research ethics (Sweet 1999); I have modified his suggestions to incorporate more current events and issues as well as real research scenarios. In preparation for using this exercise in class, instructors—especially those teaching in courses or programs in which students will collect original data—may wish to require their students to complete the student training module from the CITI program, which provides background on IRBs and other issues related to human subjects in research (see <http://www.ric.edu/IRB/training.php>).

At the beginning of class, instructors should distribute the Mock IRB handout (see Appendix) and provide students with a suitable period in which to read the four scenarios. Instructors should note on the chalkboard or whiteboard that one side of the room represents “Approve” and one side represents “Disapprove.” Then, instructors should review the rules of the Mock IRB and contrast them with the workings of a real IRB. I typically say something like this:

Institutional Review Boards typically contain faculty members from a variety of disciplines, including social sciences as well as natural and medical sciences. They typically contain fewer members than the number of people in this room. Their role is to ensure the ethical treatment of participants in research. The IRB typically does not concern itself with empirical or research design issues unless there is something particularly risky or faulty about the research. As we discuss each of the four research proposals, you should move to the side of the room (“approve or “disapprove”) that represents your opinion, or stay in the middle of the room if you are undecided. You are free to change positions at any time, and we will discuss each proposal in turn and then vote on it at the end of the discussion. I will serve as committee chair and my role will primarily be to answer questions about the research proposals; I will only vote if there is a strict tie. I will not act as teacher during this time.

Spend five to ten minutes discussing each proposal. Read the scenario aloud, then ask students to move to the side of the room that represents their views. After students have moved, begin by asking those students who are opposed to explain why and encourage discussion and debate from others. Encourage those who are undecided to explain why or ask questions for further clarification. When it seems like several central issues have been raised, determine the final vote for approval or disapproval of the project.

After discussing all four scenarios, ask students to return to their seats and initiate a discussion of some of the issues these scenarios have raised. For example, when discussing the first scenario, I talk about the Milgram studies (Milgram 1965) as an example of the potential ethical issues around deception—as well as the scientific benefits of the Milgram studies in increasing our understanding of fascism and obedience to authority. I also play Dar Williams's song *Buzzer*, which was inspired by the Milgram experiments (Williams 2008). As a class, we then discuss when deception might be acceptable and when it might not.

In discussing the second and third proposals, I focus on the issue of confidentiality and the differences between the protections given to the sources of journalists and those given to those who participate in social science research. Courts have ordered that materials do have to be turned over, as in the case of Rik Scarce, who studied animal rights activists accused of illegal activities, Scarce spent months in jail because of his refusal to comply with such an order. I suggest to students that the only way to avoid such outcomes when researching potentially illegal activities—and this is one that Scarce himself feels is an unethical copout (Scarce 2005)—is to keep notes without any identifying information and then testify only as to the content of the notes.

When discussing the fourth scenario, I think it is important to emphasize that this really happened, as well as to discuss the history of medical experimentation during the Holocaust (See, for instance, Benedict 2003; Misterlich and Mielke 1949) and the fact that while many such experiments were nothing

more than sadistic torture, there were occasional exceptions that did result in findings which may have been useful to the development of biomedical science (such as those on hypothermia). You might want to discuss the debate between those who argue that the harm done by such research means it should be destroyed entirely and those who argue that those findings which are potentially useful should be preserved so that “at least some good” can come out of victims' suffering. Another potential avenue of discussion is the proposal, in relation to the recent revelations about the Guatemalan experiments, that researchers who conduct potentially harmful research on human subjects be required to carry insurance that would compensate victims.

I then turn to presenting several other examples of research that contemporary scholars might see as unethical, such as the Stanford Prison Experiment (Zimbardo 2012) and the Tea Room Trade study (Humphreys 1975), and especially in this context, the Tuskegee Syphilis Study (see above). We discuss the ethical problems related to each study; instructors using this exercise in a class in which students have read some or all of Skloot's book may then wish to return to the book to discuss the ethics of the medical experiment undergone by Lacks and her tissue, focusing on the text of the Afterword—as well as, perhaps, the prisoners Skloot discusses on p. 130–37. If this exercise is taking place in a research methods course, I recommend closing by developing a list of all the sorts of risks and harms human research subjects may experience (physical, medical, emotional, psychological, collective/stereotyping, legal, social/stigmatization, economic, etc.), the issues faced by so-called special populations (those under 18, prisoners, pregnant women, and the cognitively impaired), and the ways in which we minimize these risks (the role of the IRB, the importance of properly-obtained informed consent, maintaining anonymity and confidentiality of research data, and potentially compensating participants for risks if appropriate to a given study).

Race & Racial “Science”

While the research projects discussed below may be, in many

ways, just as unethical as those discussed above, they are problematic for a number of other reasons as well—most importantly because they attempted to use science to justify racial inequality. Henrietta Lacks’s story can be seen as a part of this historical lineage as well—in Skloot’s book, she discusses how HeLa cells, coming from a Black woman, could be seen as a “contaminant” of other cell lines (pp. 154, 199), for example—but it is a much broader and more involved history. I will not detail all of this history here, instead providing a schematic outline with suggested sources as well as some suggestions particular issues, topics, and ideas that are particularly worthwhile in connection with a discussion of Skloot’s book.

Attempts to use the methods of science to demonstrate the relative inferiority or superiority of various racial groups (not only the Black, White, Asian, and Native American categories of contemporary U.S. Census usage but often dozens of discrete groupings like “Southern Europeans”) have a long history. As Stephen Jay Gould detailed in *The Mismeasure of Man*, such attempts included filling skulls with lead shot or mustard seeds, weighing brains, taking dozens of measures of skull dimensions, and devising all manner of intelligence tests (Gould 1996). Many of these endeavors produced the exact results that researchers expected—for instance, the skull capacity of Blacks was repeatedly demonstrated to be less than that of Whites (though, it turns out, the skulls used in such experiments were obtained from Egyptian tombs; their classification by race and gender was based on nothing more than guesses). When the results did not turn out as expected, researchers turned to other methods or sought explanations for the deviations. For example, the brain-weighing experiments often resulted in findings of particularly low brain weight for scientific luminaries, which caused racial scientists to look elsewhere for their evidence. This is because the brain loses weight with age or prolonged illness, both common features in the biographies of the deceased scientists whose brains were weighed.

We as contemporary observers tend look back on this history

as evidence of the pseudoscience of racists, who simply did whatever they could to prove their theories right. The astonishing thing, as Gould demonstrates, is that many of these scientists worked hard to practice what was then seen as state-of-the-art science: they kept careful records, performed and re-performed their experiments to ensure the reliability of the results, and published their methods openly so that experiments could be replicated. As just one example of the racial scientists’ attempts to do “good science,” consider Morton’s skull-capacity experiments. He began measuring skull capacities with mustard seed, but found the measurements to be highly variable. Gould says of Morton:

“[Morton] eventually became discouraged, fired all his assistants, and redid all his measurements personally, with lead shot...[which] never varied by more than a cubic inch, and we may accept Morton’s judgment that measures by shot were objective, accurate, and repeatable...”

In other words, Morton’s procedures were good—it was his interpretations that were faulty.

Of course, not all racial science was based on such a rigorous methodology. One particularly noteworthy example of non-scientific racial “science” is the Hottentot Venus episode (Holmes 2007). The Hottentot Venus was the stage name of Saartjie Baartman, sometimes called Sarah Bartman, a young woman removed from her home country (Cape Colony, now part of South Africa) and brought to London to be publically exhibited due to the enlarged buttocks and labia common to her particular ethnic group. After her death in 1815, she was dissected and her body parts remained on public display; she was not buried until 2002. Baartman’s story, like Henrietta Lacks’s, is a reminder of how Black women’s bodies have long been treated by science as nothing more than curiosities to be poked and prodded. Instructors who are interested in a literary work to pair with Skloot’s non-fiction text may wish to consider the play *Venus*, an award-winning theatrical treatment of Baartman’s life (Parks 1997).

In the more modern era, racial scientists have turned to intelligence testing as their “scientific” tool of choice. It just so

happens that this new tool continues to provide results that help racial scientists continue to defend their suppositions—almost all standardized tests result in test score gaps between Whites and Blacks. While the exact magnitude of these gaps vary, they are often large and significant, especially on tests that are designed to measure intelligence or aptitude (for example, the Black-White test score gap on the SATs averages roughly 200 points). Statistical analyses can reduce the size of this gap by controlling for various factors like poverty, educational quality, and test preparation, but they cannot eliminate it (Farkas 2004; Jencks and Phillips 1998).

This means that explanations must be sought elsewhere—and as in days of old, some seek them in arguments about the underlying intellectual inferiority. Such arguments ought to be easy to debunk (Fischer, Hout, Jankowski, Lucas, Swidler, and Vos 1996). Once they have been debunked, we can turn our attention to the real culprits—educational and economic inequality, as mentioned above, as well as two more complex concepts: stereotype threat (Steele and Aronson 1998; Steele 1999) and testing bias (Gould 1996; Jencks 1998).

Stereotype threat refers to the notion that stereotypes of Blacks' inferior performance on standardized tests have become so powerful that they have taken on a life of their own—that they have become, in other words, a self-perpetuating and self-fulfilling prophecy. Proponents of stereotype threat as an explanation for continuing test score gaps have shown that these gaps are considerably larger when Black test-takers are told that the test they are about to take measures intelligence or aptitude than when they are told it measures achievement or learning; test score gaps are also larger when Black test-takers are primed to think about race before the test. Notably, Black test-takers with otherwise poor academic performance seem to be much less subject to stereotype threat. It seems that the mechanism here is that Black students who are academically strong are so worried about falling into the stereotypical category of “Black students who perform poorly on standardized tests” that they actually work *too* hard on the tests, second-guessing themselves, changing their answers, and otherwise working them-

selves out of a good score. And stereotype threat is not limited to Black test-takers—researchers have observed it among Koreans in Japan (who are stereotypically seen as inferior there) as well as among women in the United States who are taking tests of complex mathematic or spatial reasoning skills (Wraga, Helt, Jacobs, and Sullivan 2007). Finally, we come to arguments about bias in standardized testing—the subject of the in-class exercise below.

In-Class Exercise: Bias and Standardized Tests

For this exercise, instructors will need to download several pages from the Army Group Examination tests used in the 1920s for army recruitment and selection purposes. These tests can be found at the Eugenics Archive (<http://www.eugenicsarchive.org>) a resource collecting documents and images from the history of eugenics (Dolan DNA Learning Center n.d.). Visit the website, click “enter the archive,” click “search the archive,” accept the terms of service, enter “Army Group Examination” in the search box, and click “search.” When the Topics page comes up, click on “Physical and Intellectual Measurement,” and you will be taken to a set of 25 images. While not all of these are relevant, a number are pages from actual Army intelligence tests from the 1920s; particularly recommended are Test 3 (image #2323) and Test 8 (image #2328), though you may wish to use other or additional tests. Download the images you want and print copies for each student.

In class, with as little introduction as possible, hand out the test pages and instruct students to complete the assessment. As the pages you are distributing already have answers marked (unless you choose to retype them without markings), instruct students to ignore the marked answers and consider what they themselves believe the right answer to be. After students have completed the test pages—or become sufficiently frustrated—go through the questions as a class. Discuss which ones seem like adequate measures of intelligence or general knowledge and which seem culturally specific or biased. Ask students whether they think a test of this nature would accurately estimate their own intelligence, academic

skill, or capacity for military service. Do note that an alternative form of the test was available for illiterate recruits. Images from that test are also available on the Eugenics Archive site). You may also wish to note that when Alfred Binet developed the first IQ test in 1905, it was designed not as a test of innate intelligence but rather as screening tools designed to determine which young students might need extra attention in class (Lehmann 1999).

Next, tell students about some of the history of racial science as outlined above, and turn to a discussion of bias in standardized testing. As we all know, standardized testing companies have sought mightily to reduce biases like those observed on these 1920s army test. Research on methods of reducing biases, though, began not out of any great commitment to racial equality or educational progress. Rather, just like the racial scientists of old, standardized testing companies were concerned that the results of their tests did not line up with their theories about racial superiority. Indeed, northern urban Blacks outperformed southern rural Whites on early army tests (Gould 1996), due to the northern urban Blacks' superior diet, economic resources, and educational backgrounds. Gradually, attempts to reduce bias in tests evolved; today, test makers pre-test all questions in experimental non-graded test sections before using them in real graded tests. Any test question in which a particular demographic group performs differently from its average performance on the test in general is typically discarded—on some tests, this means that questions on which Blacks are disproportionately likely to do *well* may be discarded too!

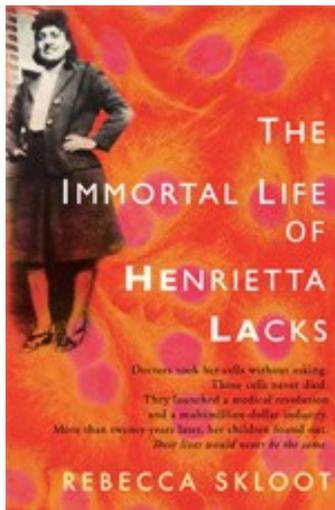
Given this history, open the class discussion to a broader consideration of the potential for bias in standardized tests today. Ask students about their own experiences with standardized testing and whether they perceived any biases in the tests. Present several examples of potential topics for reading comprehension sections, analogy questions, or math word problems and ask students if they think these might have the potential to introduce bias into the testing process. For example, you might propose:

- A question on a test for young children asking test-takers to read a paragraph about Holsteins (but not specifying that a Holstein is a dairy cow) and then answer reading comprehension questions.
- The following math problem, based on New York City buses: “Susan gets on the M15 local bus at 125th Street at 2 pm. Assuming that the M15 bus travels at an average rate of speed of 4.9 miles per hour, will Susan reach the M23 bus in: 30 minutes, 1 hour, 1.5 hours, or 2 hours?”
- A section on a high school level reading comprehension test asking test-takers to read a two-page synopsis of a cricket game and answer questions about who won and how various players felt.
- “Quahog is to stuffie as _____ is to dolma” (the answer is grape leaf, but you have to know something about both Greek *and* Rhode Island food to do well on that one!).

As a final—and up-to-date—example, you might present the case of the racing pineapple (Collins 2012). In April of 2012, eight graders in New York public schools took their standardized English test. The test included a reading comprehension passage entitled “The Hare and the Pineapple,” (Pearson Publishing 2012) a take-off on “The Tortoise and the Hare,” except this time the pineapple challenges the rabbit to a race. All the other animals assume the pineapple must have some scheme for beating the rabbit, but it does not, and the story ends with the animals eating the fruit (see the entire reading passage, and the inscrutable reading comprehension questions that follow it). Gail Collins, a columnist for the *New York Times*, describes the reaction and fallout: “*Jeopardy!* Champion Ken Jennings...concluded that ‘the plot details are so oddly chosen that the story seems to have been written during a peyote trip.’”

To make a strange story even stranger, we turn to the backstory (McGrath 2012). It seems that the author of the story, Daniel Pinkwater, had sold the rights to a testing company years ago. But the story he sold the rights to did not feature a pineapple—it featured an eggplant. The eggplant still ended

up as dinner, and Pinkwater ended his story with the moral “Never bet on an eggplant.” The story had been part of a collection of rather nihilistic fables, and according to McGrath, the one featuring the race was one of the least suited to standardized test adaptation. In any case, how did the eggplant turn into a pineapple? The test’s authors thought eighth graders might not be familiar enough with eggplants and that pineapples were a less biased choice.



Racially-Specific Medicine

Racial science is not limited to attempts to demonstrate racial superiority through skull measurements or intelligence testing. Today, racial scientists have turned to DNA and genomic medicine as the next and newest frontier. But just as in the examples discussed above, this is not exactly a new turn. Indeed, the history of racially-specific medicine is a long and colorful one, too long to detail here. Instead, I’ll begin with one central historical example, and then turn to more contemporary issues.

In 1851, a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania Medical School and practicing physician by the name of Samuel Cartwright published an article in *The New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal*—a respected scientific publication—entitled “Report on the Diseases and Physical Peculiarities of the Negro Race” (Cartwright 1851). This paper detailed several diseases unknown within the White population but supposedly

prevalent within the Black population living in Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. Among the purported diseases was “dysaesthesia aethiopica,” a condition marked by lack of worth ethic, lack of intellectual abilities, skin insensitivity, and lesions, and requiring care and supervision by Whites. Even more astounding is another of Cartwright’s conditions, “drapetomania,” a mental illness provoking its “sufferer” into fleeing from slavery. To prevent this condition, Cartwright instructed slave owners to treat their slaves kindly, like children, and if this failed, he recommended whipping.

While it may seem a big leap to travel from antebellum Cartwright to contemporary DNA, in fact the gulf is not so great. Today’s racial scientists look to DNA as a site for locating racial difference. Due to the work of the Human Genome Project, which spent thirteen years constructing a complete sequence of the genes that make up human DNA and released its work in 2003 (Biological and Environmental Research Information System 2012), we now have the capacity to engage in previously-unprecedented investigations into the meaning, nature, and prevalence of genetic markers. While much of this research focuses on how genetic markers for medical conditions can be used to improve treatment and detection, DNA is also being used to further the projects of racial science.

One of the more nefarious examples of such uses is a practice that has come to be known as “pharmacogenomics.” This term refers to the idea that pharmaceutical treatments can be customized to “match” individual patients’ DNA signatures. In some cases, this is actually what happens—for example, cancer researchers have been working to identify the genetic signatures of tumors so as to best match them to the types of chemotherapy drugs that they are most likely to respond to. However, in other cases, pharmacogenomics has become nothing more than a shorthand for a kind of racial science that allows pharmaceutical companies to profit off of purported racial difference (Lee 2003). For example, in the 1990s, a pharmaceutical company sought approval from the Food and Drug Administration to market a medication known as BilDil as a treatment for heart failure. BilDil is

nothing more than a pill combining two previously available medications, and the combination does not work differently than the two separate medications would if taken together. The first time around, the company's application was rejected because clinical trial data about BilDil's efficacy were inconclusive (Krimsky 2012; Sankar and Kahn 2005). However, it occurred to those involved in the application process that the company had data showing that BilDil was more effective among the 49 Black individuals who participated in a clinical trial—and thus, the company began an all-out effort to demonstrate that the drug should be approved as a treatment for heart failure among Blacks. The FDA was ultimately convinced to approve this marketing and treatment strategy, making the prescription of BilDil to non-Blacks an “off-label” treatment through the year 2020 (Sankar and Kahn 2005).

BilDil does, in fact, seem to be an effective drug—probably for people of all racial backgrounds. And while the company has traded on the idea of pharmacogenomics in explaining why it should retain exclusive marketing rights over this combination, there is nothing genomic about it—potential BilDil customers do not receive genetic testing, just an assumption about their genetics that is made based on their skin color (Duster 2005). Yet by approving this marketing method, the FDA has allowed a private pharmaceutical company to profit off of Americans' suppositions about racial difference.

The same sorts of arguments and techniques have been used for non-medical purposes as well. On the more harmful side, the FBI has a DNA database; this database and other associated information have been used to make racial assumptions (Duster 2005) and as evidence to approve “DNA dragnets” involving genetic testing of all Black males in a particular area (personal conversation with Troy Duster). Yet most Americans who have come into contact with the new racial science of DNA have done so in an entertainment context. Today, dozens of companies offer at-home DNA tests that, when mailed back to the lab, will generate a profile that purports to document an individual's “racial ancestry.” One of the oldest of these companies, Ancestry-by-DNA, has been actively

providing and marketing these tests for about a decade. While consumers are told that they will receive a profile detailing what percentage of their genetic “admixture” comes from European, Sub-Saharan African, East Asian, and “Indigenous American” ancestry (DNAPrint Genomics 2012), this is not in fact what the company is doing.

Here's the dirty little secret of racial science: there are no genetic markers for race (Duster 1994). Even skin color, the biological fact most Americans turn to first in making assumptions about individuals' racial backgrounds—is controlled by a number of different genetic markers, not all of which are scientifically understood yet. So companies like Ancestry-by-DNA can't simply do a test to see what race you are the way they could do a test to determine your sex, eye color, blood type, or susceptibility to certain cancers. Instead, they have amassed a vast database of DNA samples obtained from individuals who identify as European, Sub-Saharan African, East Asian, and Indigenous American, and who—given our understanding about human migration and reproduction—are unlikely to represent “pure” expressions of the genetic profiles that may be associated with such ancestry. When a customer sends in a sample of his or her DNA, companies like Ancestry-by-DNA then compare key portions of the customer's genetic code to the samples in the company's database. The resulting percentages are *not* percentages of ancestry, but rather figures indicating the probability that the customer's DNA is sufficiently similar to the samples from that group already in the database. Even Ancestry-by-DNA itself admits that a figure like “4% Indigenous American Ancestry” might be nothing more than statistical noise (DNAPrint Genomics 2012, FAQ section).

Yet these tests have become so popular that their use has extended beyond the pool of individuals who would pay for a genetic test and into the entertainment industry. In 2010, PBS broadcast a television series called *Faces of America* in which 12 famous Americans explored their genealogy, and—unless they refused—their so-called genetic ancestry (WNET.org 2012). Hosted by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., the notable Harvard professor who became famous after the confrontation with

the Cambridge, MA police department that earned him a “beer summit” with President Obama (Ogletree 2010), the series features individuals including Stephen Colbert, Mario Batali, and Eva Longoria; videos from the series are available on the website at <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/facesofamerica/>. So why include this “harmless” bit of entertainment and celebrity worship in a discussion of racial science? The issue here is that entertainment plays an important role in shaping our views about race. After watching *Faces of America*—and perhaps being motivated to order their own genetic test—Americans may be more likely to, in Duster’s words, “reify race” as a scientific truth (Duster 2005).

Furthermore, in considering the relationship between today’s racial science and Henrietta Lacks, it strikes me that today’s racial science might be seen, in some way, as the inverse of the science that marks Lacks’s legacy. Henrietta Lacks’s cells are not just immortal, they have also become universal. This poor Black woman’s biological material is now the cellular model for everything and everyone. But today’s racial science does the opposite. No longer does science, however unethically, look for a model for all of us. Instead, it subdivides humanity into smaller pieces and looks to profit off of these supposed differences, even where the evidence for said differences is scant.

Teaching the Debate: Race as Science or Social Construction?

There is a vast array of teaching resources available for teaching about the social construction of race, and I will not review them all here. For those instructors without a strong background in this area, a good starting point would be a different PBS mini-series: *Race: The Power of an Illusion* (California Newsreel n.d.). This mini-series, which debunks racial science, is not available for free, but it is excellent and widely-used teaching tool. The series website, <http://www.pbs.org/race>, provides suggested background readings, class exercises geared to K-12 students, and a useful teacher’s guide with discussion questions and class activities (California Newsreel 2003). My favorite is an exercise in which students sort them-

selves into groups on the basis of a wide variety of biological characteristics including those we conventionally associate with race, like skin color or hair texture, as well as those we tend not to think about, like whether one’s earlobes are attached or detached, and then consider why we make racial classifications the way they do. Instructors who have the time may wish to contrast *Race: The Power of an Illusion* with excerpts from *The Faces of America* to further highlight the shortcomings of more popular conceptions of racial difference. A fruitful class discussion could focus on the implications of these different perspectives on the biology of race for our understandings of and responses to contemporary (and historical) racial inequality.

Instructors who wish to connect issues of racial science back to *The Immoral Life of Henrietta Lacks* may find it useful to assign students to write an essay drawing on these issues. Here, I propose two potential questions for such essays; instructors could also adapt these to structured class discussions, debates, or other genres.

- 1) How might conceiving of race as biological and of racial groups as genetically distinct affect the future of medical science? Consider, for instance, whether the HeLa cell line would still be seen as broadly generalizable to all people, what sorts of new drugs might be developed—and what the limitations to their development might be—and how continuing racial inequalities in access to health care and in participation in medical research might be perpetuated.
- 2) Henrietta Lacks’s descendants are powerfully affected by her experiences and legacy. Put yourself in the shoes of the next generation of her family and imagine that you are a middle school student charged with writing a family history essay for school. Then, write the same essay from the perspective of a Henrietta Lacks descendent who had not known about his or her family history but who had discovered his or her family’s past by participating in a *Faces of America*-style show.

Conclusion

Rebecca Skloot tells us three stories simultaneously in *The Immoral Life of Henrietta Lacks*: she tells the story of a remarkable and vital development in biomedical science; she tells the story of a family devastated by the loss of its matriarch and suffering from poverty and oppression; and she tells the story of her own quest to uncover the first two stories. As a tool for teaching and learning, then, the material that can be mined from Skloot's book is bountiful. It can provide the material for discussions of storytelling, of scientific progress, of the power of family, and of continuing inequities in health care in the United States. This teaching guide has focused on another set of issues: those related to the history of race and science in the United States. We don't talk much about the way racial inequality has shaped and been shaped by scientific thought—we tend to want to believe in science as an unqualified good that brings progress to our world. But that progress has had costs, costs like the unethical treatment of the most powerless members of our society, and costs like long detours into science and pseudoscience that have been used to further racial subjugation. Indeed, the same is true of Henrietta Lacks's story itself. Lacks's cellular material has been a source of so much progress for biomedical science and has undoubtedly saved many lives. But to make these gains, the Lacks family suffered mightily, and did so without any compensation. They and their mother, like many poor Blacks in the history of American biomedical science, were treated unethically and unfairly, while the rest of us have reaped the benefits. Therefore, I think we owe it to them to remember the history of racial inequalities in scientific research and scientific thought. By keeping these memories alive and by developing an understanding of the inequities, errors, and atrocities committed by past generations as well as in today's scientific world, we have at least the hope of a future in which such inequities, errors, and atrocities are reduced.

Appendix :

<<Building Name>> Institutional Review Board

Today we will be considering four research proposals (all are

based on real research projects). Brief descriptions of each proposal appear below. <<Instructor Name>>, chair of the <<Building Name>> Institutional Review Board, has read the complete documentation submitted by the Principal Investigator of each study and will be available to answer any questions and issue any clarifications you might feel are necessary as you evaluate each of the three proposals. Please read each proposal before the Institutional Review Board meeting begins and note at least one question or concern about each proposal.

Proposal 1

Dr. Charoen (2011) wishes to study the ease of persuading individuals to provide sensitive financial information over the internet. He proposes sending "phishing" emails to MBA students that provide a link to a website which requests that students enter their electronic banking username and password, their bank account numbers, and their social security numbers. He promises that the information will be discarded after it is entered and that those participants who do enter information will be told of the deception and invited to participate in a focus group afterwards. Should the IRB approve this study? If so, under any specific conditions? If not, why not?

Proposal 2

Mr. Rik Scarce (2005) is a graduate student in sociology. He is proposing to conduct dissertation research on radical environmental activists, some of whom engage in illegal activities. He would like to interview these activists about the reasons they became involved in environmental activism, what such activism means for their lives, and the tactics they use in engaging in activism. Should the IRB approve this study? If so, under any specific conditions? If not, why not?

Proposal 3

Ed Moloney and Anthony McIntyre spent a number of years conducting in-depth oral history interviews with former members of the Irish Republican Army. The recordings of these interviews have been placed in an archive at the campus

library; interview participants were assured that the recordings would be kept secret during their lifetimes. The British government, however, has requested that the recordings be turned over to criminal investigators, and the U.S. federal courts have issued a subpoena for them (Mole 2012). Should the IRB support Moloney and McIntyre in their efforts to quash the subpoena, or should the IRB recommend the release of the recordings? Explain.

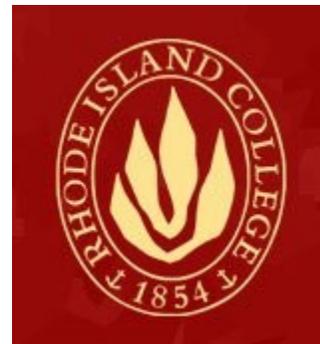
Proposal 4

In the late 1940s, the American Public Health service conducted a study in Guatemala of syphilis and gonorrhea infection. Infected prostitutes were paid to have sex with prison inmates. Other individuals were directly infected by the placement of pus into cuts on their faces or genitals, by spinal puncture, or directly into bodily orifices. About 5,500 Guatemalans were enrolled in the study, of whom 1,300 were deliberately infected with a disease. 83 died; about 700 received treatment with antibiotics (McNeil 2011). Records, which are haphazard, still remain. Should researchers be allowed to publish based on the results of this study? If so, under what conditions? If not, why not?

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