



# Examining Tuskegee: The Infamous Syphilis Study and Its Legacy

*Susan M. Reverby*

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## Examining Tuskegee: The Infamous Syphilis Study and Its Legacy Susan M. Reverby

The forty-year Tuskegee Syphilis Study, which took place in and around Tuskegee, Alabama, from the 1930s through the 1970s, has become a profound metaphor for medical racism, government malfeasance, and physician arrogance. Susan M. Reverby's *Examining Tuskegee* is a comprehensive analysis of the notorious study of untreated syphilis among African American men, who were told by U.S. Public Health Service doctors that they were being treated, not just watched, for their late-stage syphilis. With rigorous clarity, Reverby investigates the study and its aftermath from multiple perspectives and illuminates the reasons for its continued power and resonance in our collective memory.

## Examining Tuskegee: The Infamous Syphilis Study and Its Legacy Details

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# From Reader Review Examining Tuskegee: The Infamous Syphilis Study and Its Legacy for online ebook

## Doris Raines says

Hey. Is. This. A. Great. Book. Or. Not. You. Deserve. 5. Stars. This. Place. Is. For. Real. Small. Just. Like. A. Cup. Of. Tea. Tuskegee.

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## Emily says

Providing a meaningful update to past histories of Tuskegee, Reverby not only recounts the facts as we know them of Tuskegee, but also considers in turn specific perspectives, ranging from the black male subjects themselves to the physicians who conducted the study to the complex figure of Nurse Rivers. Reverby also adds significant rumination about how Tuskegee was and is constructed in the public imaginary and how its legacy fits into contemporary studies of medicine, public health, bioethics, and race.

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## Ashley says

Reverby's "Examining Tuskegee" is an incredibly well-written, well-researched, and thoughtful examination of the legacy of the Tuskegee Syphilis Study. She distinguishes between testimony and testifying, the former more fact-oriented and the latter more emotion-oriented, to blend the documentary history of the Study with its ongoing use in American life. Throughout the book, Reverby highlights how an era's political movements and issues shaped an interpretation of the study and its participants. She also highlights the distinction between a racial, racialized, and racist motivation(s) behind the Study.

Organized into three parts, the book begins with the 'objective' facts of the study. Then, it moves on to add nuance to portrayals of the white doctors, nurse Rivers, and study subjects. Rather than position the study participants on one side of a moral divide and doctors on the other, Reverby suggests that the men and women involved were motivated by a variety of competing, sometimes contradictory motives. She is particularly interested in nurse Rivers, a black woman, and outlines how her experience came to stand in for all the ambiguity associated with the Study. Finally, she examines how "Tuskegee" came to have so much cultural power. She begins with a long discussion of the growth of bioethics in the US and a critical reading of Jones' book "Bad Blood: The Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment." This portion of the book then moves on to cover everything from HBO documentaries to President Clinton's official apology in the 1990s. In the epilogue, Reverby notes that Tuskegee is now used to critique drug trials in the developing world.

The book also includes appendices with a chronology of the Study, a list of major actors, and other information for quick reference.

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## Phoebejones4 says

First textbook down!

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### **Dan says**

This is a difficult book to read, just because of the horrifying subject matter. But it is an important part of 20th century American history that needs to be examined, and Reverby's take is extremely strong. She aims to complicate a narrative saying that Southern racism was the only major factor behind the "study." Racism was clearly the canvas on which it was all painted, but there was also quite a bit about medical arrogance, knowledge, paradigms, government agency imperatives, etc. Her main point was that the *\*real\** crime, in the context of the day, was the systematic deception of the study's (exclusively black) participants. They were deprived of agency. Whether or not the intentions of the study's leaders were benign or malicious, then, would be besides the point.

The clinical writing in the studies and notes reminded me of Nazi Germany's sanitized documents about the Holocaust.

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