



# **Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present**

*Harriet A. Washington*

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## **Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present** Harriet A. Washington

From the era of slavery to the present day, the first full history of black America's shocking mistreatment as unwilling and unwitting experimental subjects at the hands of the medical establishment.

*Medical Apartheid* is the first and only comprehensive history of medical experimentation on African Americans. Starting with the earliest encounters between black Americans and Western medical researchers and the racist pseudoscience that resulted, it details the ways both slaves and freedmen were used in hospitals for experiments conducted without their knowledge—a tradition that continues today within some black populations. It reveals how blacks have historically been prey to grave-robbing as well as unauthorized autopsies and dissections. Moving into the twentieth century, it shows how the pseudoscience of eugenics and social Darwinism was used to justify experimental exploitation and shoddy medical treatment of blacks, and the view that they were biologically inferior, oversexed, and unfit for adult responsibilities. Shocking new details about the government's notorious Tuskegee experiment are revealed, as are similar, less-well-known medical atrocities conducted by the government, the armed forces, prisons, and private institutions.

The product of years of prodigious research into medical journals and experimental reports long undisturbed, *Medical Apartheid* reveals the hidden underbelly of scientific research and makes possible, for the first time, an understanding of the roots of the African American health deficit. At last, it provides the fullest possible context for comprehending the behavioral fallout that has caused black Americans to view researchers—and indeed the whole medical establishment—with such deep distrust. No one concerned with issues of public health and racial justice can afford not to read *Medical Apartheid*, a masterful book that will stir up both controversy and long-needed debate.

## **Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present Details**

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# From Reader Review Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present for online ebook

Alan says

This book is mandatory reading.

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Aubrey says

*In 1915, Dr. Harry J. Haiselden heralded the first wave of U.S. eugenics when he gained fame and wealth by exploiting the evil legacy of the black mother...On November 12, 1915, he announced to newspapers that he allowed the ailing but viable newborn of his patient Anna Bollinger to die in Chicago's German-American Hospital because he would have gone through life as defective. Between 1915 and 1918, Haiselden killed five other babies, drawing fawning attention from the press each time. Practicing negative eugenics very publicly, Haiselden encouraged parents and other pediatricians to follow his example by killing or allowing the deaths of the "genetically inferior." Parents began openly to recruit doctors to kill their children who were born with birth defects, and doctors came forward with their own proud confessions of infanticide....When he decided to make a film to popularize his eugenic ideals, starring himself, it became a hit, making him a wealthy movie star. The film was **The Black Stork**. It begins with the story of a white, wealthy, well-born slave owner who, in a moment of inebriation, is seduced by his "vile, filthy" black servant.*

When I was a child, I was gaslit with such implications that since I wasn't being physically/sexually abused in an obvious manner, I had nothing to complain about. Protest against this of any sort was met with the insistence that of course they had to treat me badly in order to prepare me for the "real world", as I certainly couldn't expect to survive in the "real world" if I felt entitled to people treating me humanely, regardless of my circumstances of age, intelligence, physical constitution, and personal appearance. Well. Here is this "real world" everyone's been talking about, albeit more sordid and strange and terrifyingly consistent than the average parent would wield in front of their children's faces when it came totalitarian pedagogy. The fact that my childhood imaginings that once kept me in line pale in the face of such truths is a boon rather than a disappointment, for it's given me an ironclad constitution for research and bred-in-the-bone ethics that trusts the ideologies on top as far as it can throw their idolaters. I don't give a fuck how comfortable the status quo makes you. You either dislike being a cannibal, or you don't, and pulling a Cronus isn't going to save you forever.

*Black bodies on anatomists' tables, black[ people's] skeletons hanging in doctors' offices, and the widespread display of purloined black body parts constituted the same kind of warning to African Americans as did the bodies of lynched men and women left hanging on trees where black[ people] would be sure to see them, or cut up as souvenirs of racial violence.*

In January of 2013, I made the decision to never conduct scientific research for money. Bear in mind this was from the perspective from Bioengineering, not the pre-med track, so I have no idea what kind of ethical bearings those who wish to become doctors get in the course of their university education. However, the

beauty of the pre-med is the applicability from a wide variety of majors, thus making it possible for an English major to self-study in the requisite scientific courses and do well enough on the MCAT to get into medical school. After that, how much of that grueling education is medicine, and how much of it is ethics? The reason of all the people I knew for making the pre-med way was money, money, money, so if their classroom doesn't make an explicit effort to make it clear that medicine with compromised ethics is a monster that only the sadists excuse, all they'll come out with is money, money, money, and the power to wield that money in and below and around the laws that bind their creed. The US may have a streak of anti-intellectualism, but I'll let you make the decision whether that's worse than medical researchers kidnapping homeless people and foster children and HIV babies for deals with the devil that were never about "the greater good."

*This essentially utilitarian argument presents an ethical balance sheet, with the savage medical abuse of captive women on one hand and countless women saved from painful invalidism on the other.*

*However, such an argument ignores the ethical concept of social justice, and these experiments violated this essential value because the suffering and benefits have been distributed in an unfair way, leading to distributive injustice. In this case, the most powerless group, which is also a racially distinct group **and** a captive group, is the group upon which doctors inflicted harm "for the grater good." Another, privileged group enjoys the benefits but shares near the pain nor the risks. Thus the moral unacceptability is clear.*

It'd be so easy to turn this into a critique of capitalism. Money needs to be made, so the slaves will be cannibalized to serve the masters. Money needs to be made, so the impoverished need be to cannibalized to serve the masters. Money needs to be made, so the imprisoned should be cannibalized to serve the masters. Money needs to be made, so citizens of third world countries are available to be cannibalized to serve the masters. People who demand I offer them a workable alternative to capitalism think themselves entitled to putting responsibility for a think tank effort onto single person in response to my desire that human sacrifices no longer be rendered acceptable. In response to them, I question their religion, because the only thing saving belief from extinction is some measure of social humanity. In response to them, I question their knowledge of science, for the majority of studies were not only human experimentation, but were riddled with so many scientific flaws that reliance on the conclusive results would more likely than not leave those would-be benefactors dead. In response, I question their faith that the horrors detailed in these pages will never happen to them by way of skin color, or economic security, or intelligence, or sanity. The beauty of eugenics and capitalism is both are hierarchies that always require a bottom tier, and exterminating that bottom for the sake of a better top will only push those middle liners down, a new generation become an antithesis to the concept of those worthy of survival.

*Via Operation Paperclip, the U.S. government supplied American hospitals and clinics with seven hundred Nazi scientists.*

*A common apology for experimental abuse insists that we should not apply present-day medical ethics to the medical behaviors of yesterday, which were governed by less enlightened medical standards fro everyone, not just African Americans. However, ethical strictures did govern the behavior of nineteenth-century physicians. Before the mid-twentieth century, these binding ethical standards were not enforced by federal laws, but consisted of medical oaths, professional codes, and rules governing clinical conduct within medical schools, hospitals, and other institutions. These rules were carefully adhered to in cases of white patients but were routinely broken for African Americans.*

*Yale Law School ethicist Jay Katz, M.D., avers that in the eyes of many American researchers*

*[the Nuremberg Code] was "a good code for barbarians but an unnecessary code for ordinary physicians."*

Beginning this, I quipped about a curiosity to discover from whence the Nazis drew their inspiration. Ending this, I'm tired, cause it's all right there, laid out in spades. History always makes everything a hell of a lot more complicated, because more often than not, the argument you're making only exists because of its history of abuse. People say fear of autism is the only reason anti-vaccinators have and I, looking at the CIA experimentation funded at home and abroad say no, that's not right. Others say Planned Parenthood is only capable of doing good with its proving for abortion and I, looking at its eugenicist creator and original goals of involuntary sterilization say no, that's not right either. The human population is burgeoning, but that doesn't mean we ignore the pockets that have been carved out for purposes of genocide or the military industrial complexes that require three earths to sustain their current rate of consumption. Medical advances are nice, but if you're willing to be treated by people who would gleefully forget the difference between therapy and research if they didn't live in fear of hoards amateur journalists descending on hospitals and scientific centers, camera phones and Wikipedia articles at ready, you're just a meal that's currently off limits.

*Medical theories of criminality are important because medicine has long claimed a special provenance over criminality. The very frequent reference to a prison as a site of rehabilitation and treatment is the sine qua non of modern penology.*

*Leaving aside for a moment the egregious **social** fallout of selecting only black and Hispanic boys, this racial selection also created serious **scientific** error. When only one ethnicity is considered in an experiment to elicit general information about a heterogeneous population, an unacknowledged set of socioeconomic variables are introduced.*

*Silence governs those risk factors that cannot be laid to a blame-the-victim paradigm that emphasizes patients' high-risk behaviors.*

The kind of shifts that would fulfill the adage of learning from history in order to avoid the doom of repeating it would require reparations for slavery and holistically ethical learning and all sorts of things that will never happen so long as society defends to death its playing to the tune of your money or your life. Those with scientific training that hide behind the excuse that the public who volunteers as subject material will never understand it aren't scientists, but piss poor socioeconomic abusers who aren't qualified enough to perform research due to a lack of ability in being able to explain every aspect to all and sundry. All and all, this work is an exact reason why the willful pretense that there is no confluence between science and the arts will forever entail that children are trained from the cradle to be sadists, because what is consent? What is worth? What can history tell us about why "the world" is acceptably wielded as some vague juggernaut to scare people into line, up until the point someone deconstructs "the world" and attempts to publish their findings of things more nightmarish and more unquestioned than the metaphor itself?

*South Africa's systematic murders via biological agents are important to this book because so many of the scientists involved in crafting South Africa's racist bioterror were Americans. In fact, the science of the apartheid could not have existed without the avid participation and guidance of a handful of American scientific renegades.*

*During World War II, prisoners had been commonly used as research subjects, and after the war, the United States was the only nation in the world continuing to legally use prisoners in clinical trials.*

People who aren't African Americans or Africans or in anyway associated with the concept of "black" can afford to read this because the process doesn't dehumanize via proxy for 500+ pages, especially in the case of those who gulped down *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* and all its white author glory. There are instances of broad spectrum eugenics involving mental illness and poverty that touch upon other demographics, but intersectionality is the goal of this work, and you can't have that without black women. If you can't do it because you have a weak stomach, don't become a doctor. If you won't do it because it doesn't interest you, don't go to a doctor. It's alright for medicine to cost more than the human beings it sacrificed to better itself can afford, but for it to cost a recognition of those human beings? Absurd. Wouldn't you agree?

*...[W]hen the desperately ill are confronted with extreme measures and heroic experimental ventures, they risk confusing research with therapy, and so do their doctors. Patients rarely understand that physicians conducting the research are primarily interested in the research, not an individual patient's survival and quality of life.*

*It is not necessary to waive informed consent in order to provide the unconscious with treatment: Laws already exist that permit doctors to offer the best-available treatment to patients who are comatose, unconscious, underage, or in other ways unable to consent to treatment. But these laws do not extend to experimentation, and rightly so.*

*"We now know, where we could only surmise before, that we have contributed to their ailments and shortened their lives."*

*-Oliver Clarence Wenger, M.D., U.S. Public Health Service, 1950*

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## **Elsbeth says**

This is a disturbing book. It's also excellent. The author, Harriet Washington, documents a long and shameful history of medical research and experimentation on African Americans in the United States (often against the will and/or knowledge of the test subjects), from slavery to the present day. Washington argues that medical experimentation on blacks is not an aberration that peaked during the infamous Tuskegee syphilis experiments, but rather has been so common in U.S. history that blacks are justifiably suspicious of doctors and hospitals today. From experimental surgeries on slaves without anesthesia during antebellum America to experiments by the CIA using infectious mosquitos to test biological warfare technology on black neighborhoods as recently as the 1950s to the 1970s, Washington presents a shocking history of the medical dehumanization of African Americans. Her evidence is both convincing and tragic.

By unearthing and discussing this history rather than ignoring it, Washington hopes to lay the groundwork for developing a new level of transparency and trust between African Americans and doctors/medical officials today. In contemporary America, blacks are less likely to receive equal or quality healthcare than whites; i.e. due both to persisting racial inequality in the form of the intersection of race and poverty and as a result of an understandable widespread distrust of the medical system among African Americans. Albeit acknowledging the rational historical basis for this distrust, Washington emphasizes how important it is to reverse these statistics today. In her words, "Today, much medical research is more safe for African Americans...No one can dismiss blacks' historical grounded fear of research to regain any credibility." On the contrary, we "must acknowledge the past in order to regain trust and to seize the future" (386).

Washington writes in an engaging and accessible style. Her book should be "essential reading" for everyone

working in medical fields in the United States, particularly doctors, nurses, and medical researchers. I also recommend it to anyone interested in learning more about racial inequality in America, or studying these issues in academia.

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### **Shanae says**

This took forever for me to read (I started in March - oh wow!!). It took forever to finish this book and not because it was incredibly hard for me to read, but because I found it a little redundant. The book is well written and Harriet A. Washington is very clear throughout it. I really appreciated that and I feel that I have learned a lot from *Medical Apartheid*. I recommend *Medical Apartheid* to those who are interested in learning more about the history of medical experimentation.

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### **MissFabularian says**

This. Book. Is. Explosive.

I found this book about a year ago in the huge Barnes and Noble in Union Square. It was somewhere on the bottom shelf in the African American section. The fact that I, even if accidentally, came across this book shows my dedication to finding a good book. The title is striking, and as knowledgeable as I am about Black History, the assertions laid out in this book shocked me.

Harriet Washington has written an extensively researched book that rebuts the negative assumptions made about Black Americans on how well or not they maintain their health. Almost from the moment Black Americans entered this country they have been subject to some of the most dangerous and sadistic medical experimentations, the likes of which Washington describes in detail. She sources actual medical journals and government texts. For a majority of the history of these illicit practices doctors, scientists, and politicians spoke freely about experimentations because: for much of the history of Black people being in America it was illegal for them to read - and no one ever thought they'd be able to.

The book is long.

The print is small, single spaced and every word is used with weight. The cynic in me couldn't help but think of all experimentations that went undocumented. The most inhumane experiments described I dare not recount the details here. Some of the topics that sparked the most heat during our humble book club was experimentations on female slaves that propelled modern gynecology, the sometimes theft and often times misuse of black cadavers in teaching institutions and science labs, the experimentation of known fatal chemicals on young African American children - some as young as 6 months old, and the current one-sided biochemical war going on in Black communities around the country.

Harriet Washington has written a monumental documentation of the seedy aspects of the medical world chronicling centuries of abuses on the black community that have brought many in the medical and scientific fields fame, fortune and respect. This book should be required reading for all Americans - if these things have happened within just one group, they certainly can happen to others. This book is a long read, and one that may cause you to lose sleep, but the subject matter is so important to the history of medicine and



ultimately healthcare in the world as we know it.

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### **Cindy Leighton says**

The most disturbing book I have ever read and I read a lot. It took me forever to read because I had to take breaks. When we tell Black Americans to "get over it - slavery was a long time ago" we speak from an uneducated place - ignorant of the systemic abuse and experimentation of and on Black bodies. Harriet Washington is not some random conspiracy theorist- she has been a fellow in ethics at Harvard Medical school, a Fellow at Stanford, a senior research scholar National Ctr for Bioethics. When she provides over 400 pages of centuries of evidence that Black Americans were used in horrifying experiments because "it was cheaper to use Niggers than cats because they were everywhere;" that their bodies were dug up for use in medical school trainings, that they were sterilized, not only without their consent but often without their knowledge, that they were used in experiments to "prove" existing racial stereotypes like Black Americans have lower IQs, don't feel the heat or cold, that Black Americans were displayed in museum displays, circuses and zoos- you have to take her seriously.

When you understand that between 1987 and 1991 US researchers "administered as much as five hundred times the approved dosage of an experimental Edmonton Zagreb measles vaccine to AA and Hispanic babies in black neighborhoods in LA" you begin to understand why some African American groups and individuals are nervous about vaccines. When you see that children were intentionally left in apartments filled with lead paint in the 1940s and 1950s as canaries in the coal mine you begin to understand why some AA persons have trouble trusting the government. When you understand the long history of forced sterilization and gynecological experimentation that was done- often without anesthesia on Black women - you begin to understand why some African American women are leery of Depo shots and IUDs- are resistant to go to public clinics for birth control out of fear they may be sterilized. When you learn more about the Tuskegee experiments where Black men were purposely infected and not treated for syphilis- where their suffering and spreading of the disease to their wives and children was carefully documented - and when in 1958 the PHS gave each surviving man a certificate of appreciation for their "service" and 25\$- one dollar for each year of the experiment - you begin to understand. When the 1904 St Louis Worlds Fair showcased hundreds of "strange persons" from around the world in their "natural habitat" - this "human zoo" only a hundred years ago- you begin to understand.

Washington says yes things are better today, though not perfect, in the US. But we are recreating this entire system by turning to Africa for experimental testing. Our government has increased regulation to protect the lives of people in drug experiments. So the drug companies have turned to the entire continent of Africa to experiment without cumbersome ethical restrictions, on poor, dark, desperate people who trust the US.

I can't recommend this book highly enough. It is dense. It will hurt. But it is very well written, very easy and critically important to understand.

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### **Charlene says**

Excellent book! This author presents a plethora of in depth research finding that point to overt, and at times unintended, systematic racism that has informed decision making in medicine. Extremely thorough review of how Blacks were used for medical experimentation from the time they were slaves until now. Having studied

and read about inequality, I thought I would not find much that was new in this book. Wow, was I wrong. Washington put together a strong case, using a novel lens, that shined a light on how the medical decisions of yesterday are still informing the medical decisions of today. The health outcomes for black people, especially poor black people, is the worst of any group in America. Why and how did it get that way? Washington provides a very detailed answer.

I listened to this in audio version. It was 19 hours, longer than the average book, but felt like it zipped by. I was shocked by much of what was in this book and could not stop thinking about it. I love a book that provides me with new awareness to a social/medical problem in my own country and around the world. The content of this book will disturb me for a long time, and I hope more people become aware of the inequality in medicine and that it disturbs enough people to serve as a motivation for change.

What Michelle Alexander's book *The New Jim Crow* was to mass incarceration and the justice system, this book will be to medicine at large in the U.S. and globally.

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## **Laura says**

Washington is a former ethics fellow at Harvard Medical School. She catalogs a shameful, centuries long tradition in American medicine of using African Americans in medical experiments. I knew vaguely that had happened, and happened in living memory, but she provides details. Gory, gory details.

I'm glad I read this book, but I wish it had had the benefit of a hard edit. Stephen King said to authors that you have to kill your babies, and I often felt like Washington couldn't bear to do that. The New York Times went through some of the factual assertions in the book and found them wanting, which is disappointing. <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/18/boo....>

It also would have benefited by honing down the marginal portions. For example, she tells us the story of Ebb Cade, a truck driver who was brought to a hospital near death after a terrible accident in 1945. (216). Doctors, under contract with the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission, she says, believed he was going to die and injected him with radioactive material so they could test how it would affect his soon-to-be-dead body. Only he didn't die; he walked out and had very nasty side effects. Horrible story, and the specific words she attributes to the doctors are shameful. But she didn't present particularly persuasive evidence that this project's experimental subjects were picked on the basis of race.

I don't think she was writing for me. I don't know that she's pro life, but phrases she uses like "abortion on demand" (313) are often code for that. As someone who thinks the ability to control when and if you have a child is essential for autonomy, that's like fingernails on a chalkboard. Similarly, discussing the now mostly-discarded use of sterilization in child abuse cases, she writes:

"Forced contraception use in response to allegations of child abuse is punishment, not therapy, because it does not protect the existing children, as counseling would. It delays, not prevents, births for the duration of the Norplant 'sentence.'" In any event, preventing a child's birth is a draconian method of protecting it from abuse." (211).

That statement makes me roll my eyes. I haven't seen our courts use 'forced contraception' out here. I've worked a lot of parental termination cases, and the idea that counseling protects existing children is, well, unlikely in many circumstances. More irking to me is the implication that "preventing the child's birth" is

about protecting some specific child from abuse presumes that there is some child out in the ether cued up for birth. That makes no sense to me. It implies some inchoate child has a right to be conceived.

She also lost me when she was discussing HIV. She seemed so wedded to her thesis that African Americans were the special targets of abuse by our medical establishment that she felt compelled to minimize how gay men with HIV were also treated poorly. (330-31). Both can just be terrible. I didn't expect her to discuss the country's shameful response to HIV when it was perceived as a disease in the gay community, but she seemed to be going out of her way to be dismissive.

Her discussion of prison experiments – including interviews with survivors – was chilling and compelling. I will remember her descriptions of a man whose skin had basically been removed piece by piece for a long time. Her recap of the Tuskegee Syphilis experiment was very well done. Her discussion of grave robbing of African American cemeteries – very compelling.

An interesting follow up to *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, which my group read a few months ago. A much more disciplined text, but in both, the author's perspective was sometimes intrusive.

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## **Sikivu Hutchinson says**

A powerful indictment of how white supremacy and institutional racism shaped the regime of medical experimentation on black bodies

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## **Emmett says**

Now, I consider myself only SORT of dumb, and there have been some words which I did not know what they meant and there have been some words that I have never, ever seen, and look Lewis Carroll-y at first glance. But, Harriet Washington made me feel dumber than hell with her prodigious use of obscure words, both large and small.

Ironically, multiple times throughout the book she criticizes (rightly, of course) the use of high medical jargon that no non-medical expert could ever hope to decipher in the disclosure forms that some poor, unfortunate was goaded into signing. And then she peppers some dumb rube like me with all these big fancy words, to the detriment of my ability to understand the sentence or sometimes even the paragraph. So, I'm all like, "Whatever!", and I go on to the next sentence.

Anyways, the book: The book is good. The book is likely as good as a book about deplorable medical acts to Black Americans can be. Washington does a fine job of being clear and has a reporter-like detachment throughout the laundry list of experiments (the majority stomach-churning in their inhumanity). Thankfully, she doesn't really ever fall victim to the temptation of sensationalism or of editorializing too often.

On the downside, and this might not be something that bothers everyone, but there is little cohesion to the book. Each chapter has its distinct theme, so much to the point that it reads like a series of essays, rather than a book. Which would be fine, with a different author writing each one, but given Washington's wordy, editor-needed style, this lack of cohesion and having to start over with a brand new cast of mini-figures and

themes, it began to get a bit tedious at the end and in the chapters that I didn't find as interesting.

The only part of the book I did not agree with her, was the chapter on prisoners as experimental subjects. Each previous chapter had been grounded in the fact that while blacks only made up roughly 10% of the population at any given time over the last 200 years, blacks made up the majority of, or even the vast majority of test subjects, and of course the number shouldn't be, yet is, very disproportionate. Considering the book is not just about unjust medical experimentation in general, but instead medical experimentation on Black Americans, this is a very important statistic that Washington uses liberally throughout the chapters, and rightly so.

However, when talking about the use of prisoners for medical experiments, this fact no longer comes into play, yet she tries to force it on the reader. She continues to cite the statistic of 10% of the population being 50+% of test subjects, however in the universe of the prison this is no longer so. Since, blacks make up (according to Washington) 46-48% of the prison population, this statistic should be tossed out the window. The fact that blacks make up such a disproportionate number of inmates in America is a subject for any numbers of books about the social issues that come with poverty, etc... But, the fact is, rightly or wrongly, blacks are not a minority in prison populations and a few of the experiments that Washington details in prisons say that the divide of black to white prisoners as subjects was about even relative to their total percentage population. Yet, Washington then continues to make the claim that the experiment was still racially biased, because the outside population. Which, I don't agree with when considering what the pool of people they had to pick from, they were constrained in their selection. Scientists on the outside were not, and still chose to choose subjects based on, or because of, race.

That might seem like a small issue, but in a book which Washington so smoothly laid out all of her points with great supporting evidence, that one chapter kind of swung and missed for me, since it seemed in my opinion, obvious that prison experimentation was worthy of an entire other book (of which I'm sure there are plenty), and Washington tried to quickly consolidate it into a chapter and messily stamp it with her book's agenda.

Could have used an editor, could have put away the thesaurus some. But, an incredible variety of sources and a good job of making a book both clinical and disturbing in its content and characters.

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## Dave says

Washington's book is more encyclopedic than argumentative, though she makes overtures in both directions. *Medical Apartheid* is an exhaustive look at how prejudice has played out in the sphere of medicine and healing, exclusively focusing on Western medicine's dark interaction with the subjected and forgotten enslaved and poor. She also attempts to establish causation between a current African American iatrophobia (fear of medicine) and the many abuses of African Americans at the hands of American medicine, and her strategy is the well-intentioned but somewhat tiring beat-the-reader-over-the-head approach.

It's sad that there is so much evidence to support Washington's claim. However, as the book goes on, Washington's zeal to incorporate further weight to the burden of proof causes her to grasp at reductive arguments and split hairs. For me, this shift began with her examination of experimentation on prison populations. Washington downplays experimentation that occurred before African Americans made up the shockingly disproportionate percent of the prison population, asserting a black and white racial narrative in

the place of the more complex narrative of American incarceration (though race certainly plays a part).

In a subject that is so rife with unquestionable evidence in support of her claim, I was disappointed that Washington resorted to juking stats and leaving out complicating details.

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### **Shelley says**

It is very rare that I give a book 5 stars but this one earned it. This was a deeply disturbing and chilling book. Normally I do not read this type of book because I do not have time to invest in it but I took time this time. It was well researched and presented an awful picture of how so many people were injured and killed in the name of science and in order to justify medical testing and experimentation. I have studied this topic in the past in regards to early settlers in the deep south, primarily the creole and cajun slaves in Louisiana and the tortures they endured at the hands of their French owners. This book only reinforced the stories I had already found and added more credibility to the truth that so many people try to shovel under the rug. Good book.

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### **Bill says**

This book is incredibly hard to read in that it's so harrowing sometimes your stomach just turns as you turn the pages. However, it is masterfully written, immensely researched, and should be mandatory reading for, probably, the entire planet.

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### **Carolyn Fitzpatrick says**

This was the most disturbing history book that I've read in a looong time. First it discusses the horrible medical experiments conducted on slaves in antebellum days, some of which make those Nazi experiments look like nothing at all. Then it moves into the experiments and graverobbing that free African Americans were more vulnerable to, due to poverty and racism. Then it wraps up with the examples of racist medical practices in the modern day plus medical abuses practiced in prisons, which are disproportionately populated by African Americans. Not a fun read by any means but an interesting side of American History that I had only been partially aware of previously.

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### **Ashley says**

What to make of this book? It's so important and yet it left me wanting more. "Medical Apartheid" catalogs the many, many racial injustices perpetrated in the name of medical advancement. Washington writes passionately and ends with a strong call for better, more just policies regarding medical experimentation and truly informed consent. She also emphasizes that, all too often, "Tuskegee" is used to explain all African American mistrust of the medical system. Washington argues that the Tuskegee Syphilis Study was one of many unethical (and scientifically useless) studies. Although Washington is an excellent writer (her background in journalism no doubt helps), this is not an easy book to read. Even readers familiar with issues

in health inequity will be shocked by some of the studies and practices she uncovers.

The book begins with colonial America and ends in the early 21st century. This long timeline successfully places Tuskegee and other infamous studies (like the Baltimore lead study) in their context but sacrifices depth. I suggest reading portions of Washington's book in addition to more in-depth accounts (e.g. Examining Tuskegee: The Infamous Syphilis Study and Its Legacy or Dying in the City of the Blues: Sickle Cell Anemia and the Politics of Race and Health). I imagine that "Medical Apartheid" is very useful in the classroom or as an introduction to racial inequities in medical research. However, for readers familiar with the history it may lack desired depth and nuance.

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## **Michelle Wright says**

Medical Apartheid is a must read for anyone interested in social justice issues. The facts are disturbing but well documented. At times this book made me cry. There are no words to express some of the horrors that 'black ppl' have gone through in this country and around the world. If you would like to read true un-sugar coated history then this is the book for you. It is so amazing how some (so called) human beings had so much hate for other human beings that they justified such horrible events such as these. I say that it is a must read!

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## **I. says**

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/18/boo...>

I haven't checked Washington's sources obviously but the NYT assessment seems accurate to me. This was a very disappointing read - tbh, books like this are why I'm hesitant to read those 'this year's feted nonfiction' lists. So many works of popular nonfiction have this awful journalistic tone (sensationalizing, decontextualizing) which makes me question everything that they say and unfortunately this is one of them.

In regards to the lack of context, for example, if you're talking about medicine and rights then you should canvass (to some degree!) the development of health law as it relates to informed consent, battery, medical research, mature minors etc. I was incredibly irritated by Washington's recap of a case wherein a mother sued a surgeon after he did a procedure on her 15 year old son without her knowledge and initially lost via the mature minor rule as her son had consented. This decision was reversed as it was determined that the surgery was not in the child's best interests and that he was unclear as to the risks involved in the procedure, but Washington doesn't discuss the mature minor rule/the best interests test or the justifications for these tests. Instead, Washington presents mature minor consent as a way of letting evil doctors off the hook for their illegitimate experiments on coerced black children. Washington also actually says that children are incapable of consent because they cannot understand medical procedures, weigh risks etc, which is an appallingly ignorant thing for someone who has studied medical ethics to say, imo. There are other issues of course, but children's autonomy in medical decision-making is one of my soapbox issues. Maybe I would have given the book 3 stars but for the 'children can never consent because you can bribe a six year old with a toy' nonsense. But maybe not, it's reflective of this book's complete lack of nuance tbh.

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## **Spicy T AKA Mr. Tea says**

A wonderfully written yet horrifying history of the use of black bodies for medical experimentation from slavery to now. Washington does a great job of explaining and clarifying experiments we've heard about like the Tuskegee syphilis experiment and the not so well known like the injection of plutonium into non-consenting African Americans to see what would happen. I appreciated and disliked the objectivity she exuded with her writing voice. On the one hand, I thought she would be more passionate in her writing--she was fairly reserved with a "just the facts" kind of mentality--or at least that's how it felt when I read it. On the other hand, passion aside, the way she paced herself in her writing and her ability to tell the history of these atrocities in a way that allowed me to get through them without feeling dread, was also welcome. She's a well-rounded writer who took on a history that not many would dive into and was successful in her endeavor. This is an absolutely worthwhile history to become acquainted with.

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## **Traci at The Stacks says**

A hard read. Full of so much information. Not really enjoyable but beyond necessary. The detailed examination of racism in medicine and science is terrifying. It also exists in the shadows and this book gives the victims of these crimes a voice. I didn't like reading this book but I'm glad I did and I'm incredibly grateful it exists.

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## **Nancy Oakes says**

In this book, the author has compiled and analyzed a vast amount of research to make the case that racist practices toward African-American people from slavery onward, in the name of science and medicine, have created an atmosphere of distrust among African-Americans toward the medical profession. As a result of this distrust, and often fear, this group of people may not be getting proper medical care when necessary.

I won't go into a major discussion here, but I thought the author did a fine job in terms of research and presentation. I'm not a scientist, nor am I conversant enough in the topic to judge her research, but this book really opened my eyes to some less than professional and less than ethical practices. I must say that I'm not surprised -- earlier I read the book "Bad Blood" about the syphilis experiments at Tuskegee -- but that was probably the extent of my knowledge on the topic. Washington's book makes that study seem like only the tip of the proverbial iceberg. I have to say that sometimes she was a bit repetitive, but not enough to distract from the main points of her work.

I truly hope her work does some good. I'd recommend it to people who are interested in the topic, especially people like myself who have only a limited knowledge, or to people who want to add yet another dimension to their understanding of African-American history.

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