

**As a member of the Goucher Community, you will have many opportunities to discuss and explore your own identity; to examine the ways in which race, ethnicity, gender, religion, socio-economic status, and many other markers of identity affect levels of privilege and access to power; and to develop skills in communicating across difference in the classroom and beyond. The First Year Summer Read is your first step in what will be a four-year exploration of Race, Power, and Perspective – a central component of the Goucher Commons Curriculum and an expression of the social justice commitments of Goucher College.**

Goucher College First Year Reading Assignment

*The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*,<sup>1</sup> Rebecca Skloot

INSTRUCTIONS: As you are reading, you should take detailed notes on the text. You should come prepared to your discussion session in August 23<sup>rd</sup> (1:30-3:00 pm) with notes and examples from the text.

**Section I. (Take notes and bring to your discussion session).**

This book has a point of view and in many ways is about how circumstances give rise to a point of view. As you are reading, note:

1. The author's biographical information;
2. Historical information as presented by the author;
3. First-person reporting or Second-person reporting (about someone else, as told to the author by that person) presented by the author.

**Section II. (After completing Section I, for Section II, you will complete two short one-page essays using the following prompts below).**

1. Choose a specific encounter among persons in the text (e.g., Skloot, Deborah, Day, Cootie, George Gey, Zakariyya, Christopher Lengauer, etc.) and consider each of their perspectives or points of view. For one person in the encounter, select factors (such as parents, community, personal situation, identity, cultural or religious background, education, etc.) that may have

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<sup>1</sup> **A word of caution:** Chapter 15, "Too Young to Remember", describes incidents of sexual violence and child abuse and may be upsetting. If at any point you find the materials too upsetting, you are welcome to skip this chapter. In the event that you become very distressed, you may contact Goucher College 24/7 Mental Health Line: 855-236-4278.

influenced their point of view or perspective. Thinking about your interpretation of the text, what factors or experiences have shaped your point of view about the life of Henrietta Lacks?

2. In the text, Skloot writes:

On March 25, 1976, when Mike Roger's *Rolling Stones* article hit the newsstands, it was the first time the mainstream media had reported that the woman behind HeLe was black. The timing was explosive. News of the Tuskegee study was still fresh; the Black Panthers had been setting up free clinics for black people in local parks and protesting what they saw as the racist health-care system, and the racial story behind HeLe was impossible to ignore. Henrietta was a black woman born of slavery and sharecropping who fled north for prosperity, only to have her cells used as tools by white scientists without her consent. It was a story of white selling black, of black cultures contaminating white ones with a single cell in an era when a person with "one drop" of black blood had only recently gained the legal right to marry a white person. It was also the story of cells from an uncredited black woman becoming one of the most important tools in medicine (p. 197).

This passage points to larger socio-cultural, economic, medical/ scientific, and political contexts. Choose one of these contexts and discuss how race in this context shaped the story of Henrietta Lacks. Throughout your answer, take care to give clear evidence and examples from the text.

**You will upload your essay during the first or second week of class as an assignment posted on your First Year Seminar's Canvas site. You will learn more about how to access and use Canvas during orientation.**