**The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks **

**Book Forum | Greenwood Library | August 8 2012**

1. On page 261, Deborah and Zakariyya visit Lengauer’s lab and see the cells for the first time. How is their interaction with Lengauer different from the previous interactions the family had with representatives of Johns Hopkins? Why do you think it is so different? What does the way Deborah and Zakariyya interact with their mother’s cells tell you about their feelings for her?
2. Consider Deborah’s comment on page 276: “Like I’m always telling my brothers, if you gonna go into history, you can’t do it with a hate attitude. You got to remember, times was different.” Is it possible to approach history from an objective point of view?
3. Deborah says, “But I always have thought it was strange, if our mother cells done so much for medicine, how come her family can’t afford to see no doctors? Don’t make no sense” (page 9). Should the family be financially compensated for the HeLa cells? If so, who do you believe that money should come from? Do you feel the Lackses deserve health insurance even though they can’t afford it? How would you respond if you were in their situation?
4. Why do you think George Gey gave out so many Hela cells for free?
5. As much as this book is about Henrietta Lacks, it is also about Deborah learning of the mother she barely knew, while also finding out the truth about her sister, Elsie. Imagine discovering similar information about one of your family members. How would you react? What questions would you ask?
6. What do you think contributed to the delay of dispatched information about the woman behind the cells?
7. Henrietta signed a consent form that said, “I hereby give consent to the staff of The Johns Hopkins Hospital to perform any operative procedures and under any anaesthetic either local or general that they may deem necessary in the proper surgical care and treatment of: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_” (page 31). Based on this statement, do you believe TeLinde and Gey had the right to obtain a sample from her cervix to use in their research? What information would they have had to give her for Henrietta to have given informed consent? Do you always thoroughly read consent forms before signing them?
8. If you knew that you could help advance medical research, would you be willing to donate some of your tissues and cells to researchers? How would you react if you didn’t know some of your tissues and cells were being used for research?
9. Rebecca Skloot becomes a significant part of the story. Why do you think the author decided to include herself as a character in the book?
10. How do you think the Lacks family is doing now? Do you think they feel better about the Hela cell situation now?

Questions adapted from:

<http://rebeccaskloot.com/the-immortal-life/reading-group/>

<http://www.ncsu.edu/uap/reading/docs/HeLa-Discussion-Questions.pdf>

<http://www.tjhsst.edu/~emglazer/TheImmortalLifeofHenriettaLacksDiscussionQuestions.pdf>