

By Charles Apple | THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

Ninety years ago, a study was begun of 600 Black sharecroppers in and around Tuskegee, Alabama, to record and track the natural history of syphilis among the Black male population. Fifteen years later, a cure was found for syphilis. But the U.S. Public Health Service — the agency that conducted the experiment — decided to withhold treatment from the participants. The result is one of the most shameful incidents in U.S. medical history.

AN 'ETHICALLY UNJUST

The offer seemed too good to be true: The United States Public Health Service asked men ages 25 or older in Macon County, Alabama, to sign up for a medical study.

"Free Blood Test," the signs said. "Free treatment by county health department and government doctors. You may feel well and still have bad blood."

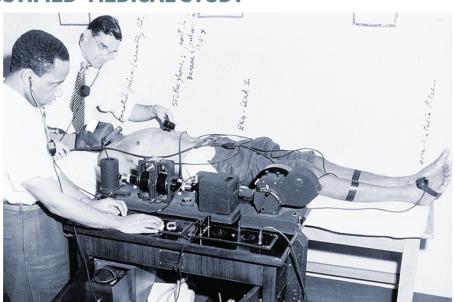
But what was "bad blood"? It was a nonmedical term used at the time to refer to a variety of ailments such as anemia and fatigue.

What the PHS really wanted to study was the history and spread of syphilis — a contagious venereal disease - in Black males and how the disease might differ in white patients. But the men of Macon County weren't told that.

Participants were promised free medical care — which most had never been able to afford before as well as rides to and from the clinics, free meals on exam days and a promise that their families would receive money to pay for

The original plan was to study the disease for several months and then follow up with treatment. But

their burials when the time came.



Researchers for the U.S. Public Health Service use an electrocardiogram to check the heart of a participant in the Tuskegee Syphilis Study — most likely in 1932.

when funding for the experiment dried up not long after it began, the treatment phase was quietly dropped. Participants were given placebos — fake medicine aimed at making patients feel like they were receiving treatment — but no actual treatment.

When some of the participants

enrolled in the Army after the start of World War II and were found to be infected with syphilis, PHS researchers stepped in to prevent military doctors from treating them

In 1947, penicillin became the standard treatment for syphilis in the U.S. Again, researchers from

the PHS convinced local doctors in

Macon County to not treat the participants with the new drug.

It wasn't until the 1950s that doctors reading published data of the study began raising ethical questions. In 1966, a venereal disease investigator raised concerns with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention which, by that time, controlled the experiment.

Getting an unsatisfactory response from the CDC, the investigator took the story to a newspaper reporter. The Washington Star broke the story on July 25, 1972, and it appeared on the front page of the New York Times the next day.

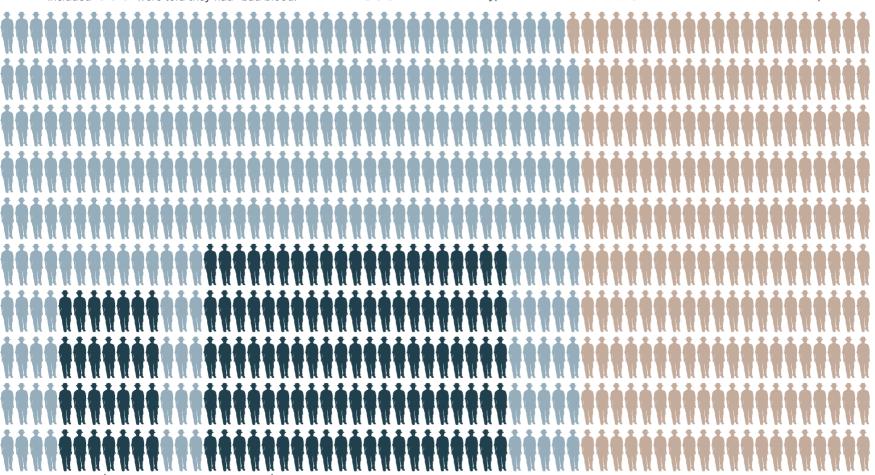
The media coverage resulted in Congressional hearings. The CDC appointed an advisory panel to review the study. The panel determined the study was "ethically unjustified." The CDC officially halted the study on Nov. 16, 1972.

The next spring, the Department of Health, Education and Welfare ordered that all necessary medical care be provided to survivors of the study. Two years later, that was expanded to wives, widows and children of study participants.

STUDY PARTICIPANTS BY THE NUMBERS

African-American men who were told they had "bad blood." of the men were diagnosed with late-latent syphilis

of the men did not have syphilis. They served as the "control" of the experiment.



Ву

1972:

A class-action lawsuit is filed on behalf of participants and their families.

28 of the men had died from syphilis.

1974

The suit is settled out of court, resulting in more than \$9 million for study participants. **MAY 16, 1997** President Bill Clinton issues a formal

apology for the study.

of the men had died from complications

100 of the men had died nom 22. , resulting from their untreated condition.

40 spouses were ... with syphilis and ... addition,

spouses were infected

children were infected with syphilis at birth.

SUMMER 1973

JANUARY 2004 The last study participant dies. The last widow dies

in 2009.

TODAY

Participants' children continue to receive medical and health benefits, the CDC says.