
On the Legacy of Slavery in Healthcare

Slavery And Its Lasting Impact On Healthcare

Slavery, while abolished many years ago, still impacts people's lives today in the 21st century. One place that slavery has had a lasting impact is through healthcare. The health care industry has a history of not giving African Americans proper medical treatment or treating them like humans, and the lies that were spawned during slavery about black people's bodies still linger today.

During slavery, doctors made up many lies about how the bodies of slaves worked to try and prove that they really were inferior. They said that black people had smaller skulls, weaker lungs, thicker skin, and higher tolerances for pain. These lies made up hundreds of years ago are still believed by some doctors today in the 21st century. According to *How False Beliefs in Physical Racial Difference Still Lives In Medicine Today* by Linda Villarosa, "A 2016 survey of 222 white medical students and residents published in *The Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* showed that half of them endorsed at least one myth about physiological differences between black people and white people, including that black people's nerve endings are less sensitive than white people's." Because there are doctors who think that these falsehoods are true, some African Americans don't end up with proper care. There have been many examples of them not receiving the correct amount of pain relief, meaning that they suffer more because of lies that have been around since slavery. This is only one of the ways that slavery has impacted healthcare in the 21st century.

African Americans have been repeatedly mistreated by the medical industry throughout history. This pattern started during slavery, and it continues now in the 21st century. Throughout slavery, many slaves were given to doctors to practice painful techniques and experiments on. When slavery was abolished, many African Americans were getting very sick because they weren't given any supplies to help them survive. To try to stop this, the government paid for a health program called the Freedmen's Bureau Medical Division. Even though the government was willing to pay for them, they didn't really care about the health of the African Americans living in the hospitals. This was very apparent in the way that the hospitals were run. They were very undersupplied and very understaffed. As Jeneen Interlandi said in *How The Bad Blood Started*, "Officials wanted their communities clean enough to prevent diseases that might eventually spread into white communities, but they don't want to provide any free assistance, because they're worried that it's going to create dependency among the black American community."

Another example of the medical industry treating black people poorly is the Tuskegee Syphilis Study. In this study, about 600 black men in Tuskegee were studied to see how syphilis impacted the human body. This study started when there wasn't a cure for syphilis. When a cure finally came out, about 200 of the men weren't given the cure and were forced to continue living with the disease. Almost everyone who participated in the study ended up dying from either side effects from syphilis or diseases that came from it. These, of course, aren't the only examples in history of the medical industry not treating African Americans properly. This is a pattern that has been around for hundreds of years.

This past of repeated abuse has caused some mistrust towards the medical field. One side effect of this mistrust is that African Americans are statistically less likely to participate in clinical trials. This has caused some problems in medicine and has made clinical trials very difficult. As said in the *Scientific American* article *Clinical Trials Have Far Too Little Racial and Ethnic Diversity*, "For example, Black Americans are more likely to suffer from respiratory ailments than white Americans are; however, as of 2015, only 1.9 percent of all

studies of respiratory disease included minority subjects, and fewer than 5 percent of NIH-funded respiratory research included racial minorities.” If African Americans aren’t represented in clinical trials, the people who make the medicine don’t know what side effects the medicine may have on them. They don’t know whether it will be effective or not. The medical industry repeatedly mistreating African Americans has now affected medicine and clinical trials in the 21st century.

In conclusion, though slavery is over, it still influences the way people live today in the 21st century. The incorrect beliefs formed then continue to linger in the minds of doctors today, causing unnecessary pain and suffering. The pattern that started during slavery about the way that the medical industry treats African Americans remains now. The mistrust formed from this pattern affects current medicine and clinical studies, meaning that some medicines aren't as efficient or as helpful as they could be. Slavery is done, but its legacy remains.

Works Cited

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