

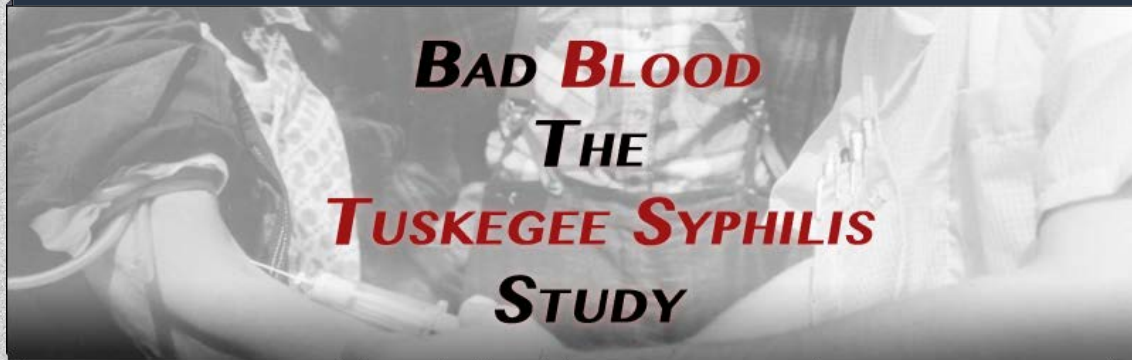
HISTORICAL EXHIBITS HOME

BAD BLOOD: THE TUSKEGEE SYPHILIS
STUDY IN MACON COUNTY, ALABAMA —
1932-1972

Tuskegee Syphilis Study
Symposium at the University of
Virginia — February 23, 1994

Final Report of the Tuskegee
Syphilis Study Legacy Committee
— May 1996

President Bill Clinton's Apology
for the Tuskegee Syphilis Study
at the White House — May 16,
1997



Bad Blood: The Tuskegee Syphilis Study in Macon County, Alabama — 1932-1972

Racism in Medicine, Unethical Research, and Government Abuse

For forty years, from 1932 to 1972, 399 African-American males were denied treatment for [syphilis](#) and deceived by officials of the [United States Public Health Service](#).

As part of a study conducted in [Macon County, Alabama](#), poor sharecroppers were told they were being treated for “bad blood.” In fact, the physicians in charge of the study ensured that these men went untreated. In the 25 years since its details first were revealed, the [Tuskegee Syphilis](#) study has become a powerful symbol of [racism in medicine](#), [unethical human research](#), and government abuse of the vulnerable.



A Troubling Legacy

The 1990's were a time of reflection upon the Tuskegee Study and its troubling implications. In February 1994, the issue was addressed in a symposium entitled, “Doing Bad in the Name of Good?: The Tuskegee Syphilis Study and Its Legacy,” convened at the [University of Virginia](#) Claude Moore Health Sciences Library. The discussion at the symposium led to the creation of the Tuskegee Syphilis Study Legacy Committee. In January 1996, the Committee met at [Tuskegee University](#) to explore how the government and the nation could publicly address the Tuskegee Syphilis Study and its impact.

In its final report the following May, the Committee urged the United States President, [Bill Clinton](#), to apologize for the wrongs of the Tuskegee Study. The Committee's work bore fruit on May 16, 1997 when the President apologized on behalf of the United States government to the surviving participants of the study. These men and members of the Legacy Committee were invited to the White House to witness the apology.

Although the President's words formally closed this ignoble chapter in the history of American public health, the Study's repercussions are still felt in African-American communities and the biomedical professions. In keeping with the goals of the Legacy Committee, this exhibit aims to preserve collective memory of the Tuskegee Syphilis Study and the ongoing transformation of its legacy.