



Written by [Kelly Holt](#) on March 17, 2011

## Guatemalans Sue United States for 1940s STD Inoculations

The court documents claim,

This decision to move to Guatemala was part of a deliberate plan to continue the Tuskegee testing [referring to testing done by the U.S. Health Service on the progression of untreated syphilis in poor blacks, who were never told they had the disease] offshore, where it would not be subject to the same level of oversight as in the United States.

The U.S. government "knowingly engaged in non-consensual human medical experimentation on highly vulnerable populations" that resulted in harm. From their offices in the United States, [Public Health Service] and other U.S. entities decided to seek a location where they would be able to carry out more invasive methods of inoculation without ethical scrutiny.



The medical team started with inmates in the national penitentiary, using American taxpayer money to hire prostitutes who tested positive for syphilis or gonorrhea to offer sexual services to inmates.

Guatemalans argued that, consent was given only by the institutions housing the subjects, not by the individuals themselves, that is, prison inmates, orphanage children, and inmates at a mental health institution.

Piper Hendricks, a lawyer for the Guatemalans, said last week that she hoped for an agreement that would avoid litigation and trial. The Associated Press reported,

Attorneys representing the Guatemalans asked the Obama administration to set up an out-of-court claims process similar to those established in the Gulf of Mexico oil spill and the 9/11 terror attacks. But they say they got no response by a Friday deadline and so filed the suit Monday morning.

CNN World reported that the suit compares the project to the Alabama Tuskegee syphilis experiment, except that the U.S. blacks already had the disease while the Guatemalans were deliberately injected with STDs, and were treated with penicillin in an attempt to determine if the drug could do more than just cure the diseases. The study sought to learn if it could prevent them. The experiment never provided any useful information, and the records were then hidden until Dr. Reverby's discovery in 2009.



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The report didn't conclusively answer which top U.S. officials approved the study, including the deception inflicted on the Guatemalans.

Last fall, the United States issued a formal apology, coinciding with calls to National Institute of Health Director Francis Collins and Assistant Secretary of State Arturo Valenzuela. Americans were astonished to learn that officials said there were "no formalized regulations regarding protection of human studies during the 40's" and wondered why the United States needed a formal regulation to know that such practices were wrong.

*Photo of Tuskegee test subject Herman Shaw: AP Images*



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