

Involuntary ICE sterilizations of migrant women are barbaric



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In September, Dawn Wooten, a former nurse at Irwin County (Georgia) ICE Detention Center, filed a federal whistleblower citing secret hysterectomies on immigrant women.

Trump appointees yawned, but human rights officials at the United Nations were horrified. Secret sterilization is more than breathtaking medical malpractice, it is a crime against humanity and genocide, according to the Geneva Convention of 1948.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi led a chorus of legislators that called on the Department of Homeland Security to investigate.

“If true, the appalling conditions described in the whistleblower complaint – including allegations of mass hysterectomies being performed on vulnerable immigrant women – are a staggering abuse of human rights,” she said. “This profoundly disturbing situation recalls some of the darkest moments of our nation’s history, from the exploitation of Henrietta Lacks,

to the horror of the Tuskegee Syphilis Study, to the forced sterilizations of Black women that Fannie Lou Hamer and so many others underwent and fought.”

Hard to believe?

Hardly.

Americans may think something this atrocious could never happen on our soil, but Pelosi reminded us that it could and it has.

Henrietta Lacks was a Black woman who suffered from cervical cancer in 1951. Her cells were harvested

without her knowledge and continue to be used in laboratories without any compensation. They are known as HeLa cells and are used in cancer research, in vitro fertilization, immunology and most recently development of COVID-19 vaccines.

It gets worse.

Much worse.

The Tuskegee Syphilis Study was a 40-year observation of the effects of untreated syphilis in Black men. It began in 1932 when syphilis had

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no cure. When penicillin became available for treatment, the U.S. Public Health Service made sure study victims did not receive it.

The Nuremberg Code and Human Rights Declaration of Helsinki were written to end Nazi-inspired secretive experimentation on humans, but the Center for Disease Control, which assumed supervision of the experiment, ignored the decrees.

It was not until 1972, when the gruesome story was leaked to the press, that the horrific syphilis study ended. By then 128 patients had suffered terrible deaths from syphilis or complications, 40 of their wives had been infected and 19 of their children developed congenital syphilis. Countless others suffered from the painful, pernicious disease, including brain damage.

It gets worse.

Much worse. American physician John Charles Cutler traveled to Guatemala in 1946 to experiment on vulnerable people by infecting them with gonorrhea and syphilis. He targeted Guatemalan soldiers and prisoners. He hired impoverished prostitutes to have sex with as many of the men as possible after he had inserted with cotton swabs soaked with pus from the infection into their genitals.

Victims did not know they were infected and received no treatment. When that did not yield fast enough results for Cutler, he inserted cotton swabs with the pus deep into the men's urethras. He also put the pus in people's eyes and scraped penises with hypodermic needles and dressed the wound with bandages contaminated with syphilis.

Women were made to swallow syphilitic solutions and even had it injected in their spinal cords. One woman named Berta was injected with the infection in her arm and days before her death had gonorrhea pus rubbed in her eyes and was reinfected with syphilis.

Today Guatemalan people still suffer the effects of gonorrhea and syphilis passed down through generations.

America's Mengele was never brought to justice. He trod over his Hippocratic oath to "Do no harm," torturing thousands of innocent and unsuspecting Indigenous people.

Fanny Lou Hamer was a mid-century Black Civil Rights activist sterilized without her knowledge. She later discovered that six of 10 hospitalized Black women were unknowingly sterilized. The procedure was so common it was known as the "Mississippi Appendectomy."

Native American women in the 1960s and 1970s were victims of mass sterilization at the hands of the Indian Health Services, an agency originally created to help them. Data indicates more than 25 percent of indigenous women of child-bearing age were sterilized. Researchers said that figure is probably much, much higher.

Between 1970 and 1976 somewhere between 25 to 50 percent of Indigenous American women were sterilized, according to investigator Jane Lawrence. Dwindling Native American populations are the result, Lawrence reported.

The Geneva Convention of 1948 determined "that genocide is a crime under international law, contrary to the spirit and aims of the United Nations and condemned by the civilized world." Americans have violated many of these articles in the past 70 years. Article II, subsection d, states that the act of genocide includes "imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group." Subsection e, genocide includes "forcibly transferring children of the group to another group." Native Americans have suffered both of these crimes against humanity on U.S. soil.

Sterilizations of refugee women in ICE detention centers are heinous and cruel acts of genocide that must be investigated and prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. No one engaged in this kind of barbarity should be allowed to keep a medical license. It is a slippery slope from here to Cutler, Mengele and other medical monsters.