ESCAPING MELODRAMAS: HOW DO WE THINK ABOUT THE INFAMOUS STUDIES IN TUSKEGEE AND GUATEMALA?

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Monday, April 4
4:30-5:45pm
Nelson Auditorium, 112 Anderson

A historian of American health care, Dr. Reverby’s research has been on women’s health, women as health workers/professionals, and the ethics of public health and research. In recent years she has focused on what is often called the infamous “Tuskegee” syphilis study, the four decades-long (1932-72) U.S. Public Health Service study in which African American men were deceived into believing they were being treated, not monitored, for their disease. She edited a collection on this study called Tuskegee’s Truths: Rethinking the Tuskegee Syphilis Study (2000). Her book Examining Tuskegee: The Infamous Syphilis Study and Its Legacy (2009) won three major academic awards. She was also a member of the Legacy Committee that led to President Clinton’s federal apology for this study in 1997.

In the course of her research on Tuskegee, Reverby found unpublished papers about a Public Health Service study (1946-48) in Guatemala that involved infecting men and women with sexually transmitted diseases in a prison, an army barracks and a mental hospital. Her work led to a U.S. government apology by the Secretaries of State, and Health and Human Services, to the people of Guatemala, a major report from the President’s Bioethical Issues Commission in the US and another from Guatemalan government, and a reassessment of the protections we give to the subjects of research, especially in studies that take place outside U.S. borders.

Her current research is for a biography of Alan Berkman (1945-2009), a global health physician who fought to get anti-retrovirals for HIV/AIDS into Global South countries in the early 2000s and helped to shape U.S. policy.

Cosponsored by the Sociology Department, the Community Health Department and the Science, Technology, and Society Program at Tufts University