



#### **MEDIA RELEASE**

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## **Henrietta Lacks' Family Commemorates Her 101st Birthday by Advancing HELA100 Initiative to Achieve Equity and Seek Justice**

**BALTIMORE, MD (August 1, 2021)** — Today, the Lacks Family honored the 101st anniversary of the birth of Henrietta Lacks by announcing the advancement of HELA100, their family-led initiative to educate future generations on the impact of her HeLa cells while promoting equity and social justice.

Henrietta Lacks, a Black woman born on August 1, 1920, in Roanoke, Virginia, was a wife and young mother of five. Before her untimely passing at 31 years old on October 4, 1951, in Baltimore, Maryland, her cancer cells were taken without her or her family's knowledge. Her cells would become known as "HeLa cells" and are responsible for some of the greatest scientific advancements of our time.

At the Lacks Family's 101<sup>st</sup> Henrietta Lacks Birthday CELLebration, Alfred Lacks Carter, the Grandson of Henrietta Lacks, said, "Her legacy lives on in us. As we honor our Hennie's 101<sup>st</sup> birthday, we remain united towards educating the next generation on the impact of her HeLa cells, advancing equity to access the breakthroughs that her HeLa cells created, and seeking justice for Henrietta Lacks."

August 1, 2020, marked the launch of HELA100, with the year-long Henrietta Lacks Centennial CELLebration. Since its inception, HELA100 has educated more than 20,000 students, advocates, researchers, patients, health care providers, policymakers, and leaders. Highlights from this historic year include the recognition of Henrietta Lacks by the World Health Organization, the National Women's Hall of Fame, and Miss America. In addition, the signing of the Henrietta Lacks Enhancing Cancer Research Act into law to help ensure all people have more equitable access to potentially lifesaving advances in cancer treatment.

"The Lacks Family is taking action towards a more just world, and we want everyone to say my grandmother's name – Henrietta Lacks. She has done a lot for the world and needs to be recognized for what she has done," said Alan Wilks, the Grandson of Henrietta Lacks. "Our family has done a lot to continue her legacy, and we are going to continue to do that, and we thank everyone that has helped. We are advancing HELA100 and have various initiatives to promote her legacy."

"HeLa" cells - derived from the first two letters of Henrietta Lacks' first and last name - are miracle cells. HeLa was the first immortal line of human cells and launched a multi-billion-dollar industry. Yet advances made possible by Henrietta Lacks' HeLa cells and their generated revenues were not known to her family for more than twenty years. To date, the Lacks Family has never directly received any of the revenues HeLa cells generated.

On the eve of her 101<sup>st</sup> birthday, the Lacks Family announced they are seeking justice for Henrietta Lacks. Wilks joined his father, Lawrence Lacks Sr., Henrietta Lacks' Eldest Son, his family, and their legal team led by civil rights attorney Ben Crump. "There are family members that are young and impressionable. They need to know that every life matters – Black lives do matter," said Wilks. This has been a long time overdue. At what point does a person's property – or cells belong to them? Of course, we want her HeLa cells to do great things for everyone because she was a person of great strength and great power. Again, Say Her Name – Henrietta Lacks."

To learn more about how the Lacks Family will continue to honor Henrietta Lacks, visit [hela100.org](http://hela100.org) and follow the conversation @CELLebrateHeLa.

### **About HELA100**

HELA100 is the Lacks Family-led initiative to honor Henrietta Lacks' legacy by educating future generations on the impact of her HeLa cells while promoting health equity and social justice. Henrietta Lacks was a Black woman, wife, and mother of five, whose HeLa cells - taken unbeknownst to her - would become responsible for some of the greatest scientific advancements of our time. Learn more at [hela100.org](http://hela100.org).

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