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Private Bodies, Public Texts: Race, Gender, and a Cultural Bioethics

Karla FC Holloway

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In *Private Bodies, Public Texts*, Karla FC Holloway examines instances where medical issues and information that would usually be seen as intimate, private matters are forced into the public sphere. As she demonstrates, the resulting social dramas often play out on the bodies of women and African Americans. Holloway discusses the spectacle of the Terri Schiavo right-to-die case and the injustice of medical researchers' use of Henrietta Lacks's cell line without her or her family's knowledge or permission. She offers a provocative reading of the Tuskegee syphilis study and a haunting account of the ethical dilemmas that confronted physicians, patients, and families when a hospital became a space for dying rather than healing during Hurricane Katrina; even at that dire moment, race mattered. *Private Bodies, Public Texts* is a compelling call for a cultural bioethics that attends to the historical and social factors that render some populations more vulnerable than others in medical and legal contexts. Holloway proposes literature as a conceptual anchor for discussions of race, gender, bioethics, and the right to privacy. Literary narratives can accommodate thick description, multiple subjectivities, contradiction, and complexity.

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