# Film Reflection: Miss Evers' Boys (Duty-based Ethics)

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## Summary

*Miss Evers' Boys* is a powerful film based on the real historical events surrounding the Tuskegee syphilis study. The story focuses on a group of poor African American men in Macon County, Alabama, who were involved in a medical study conducted between 1932 and 1972. The U.S. government and medical researchers selected hundreds of men who were suffering from what was commonly called "bad blood," a term that was used to describe several illnesses, including syphilis. However, instead of providing proper treatment to these men, the researchers used them as subjects for medical observation. The film shows how these men were misled, denied treatment, and treated as research objects rather than human beings with dignity and rights (Brandt, 1978; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2024).

The story is mainly told through the character of Nurse Eunice Evers, an African American nurse who works closely with the men involved in the study. At the beginning, Miss Evers believes that she is helping the patients by assisting the doctors and supporting the research program. She feels emotionally connected to the men and wants to protect them. However, as time passes, she begins to understand that the medical experiment is not truly designed for their benefit. Instead, of receiving effective treatment, the men are being watched so that researchers can study the natural progression of syphilis. This realization creates a deep moral conflict for Miss Evers because she is torn between obeying the instructions of doctors and fulfilling her duty as a nurse to protect and care for patients (Sargent, 1997).

The film highlights one of the most unethical examples of human experimentation in American history. The patients were not given full information about their condition, and they were not properly informed about the purpose of the study. They trusted the medical staff and believed they were receiving care, but in reality, their trust was exploited. This makes the film an important example of why informed consent, honesty, and patient dignity are essential in medical practice (CDC, 2024; National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979).

From the perspective of duty-based ethics, also known as deontological ethics, the actions of the research team were morally wrong because they violated their basic duties toward human beings. Duty-based ethics focuses on moral obligations and principles rather than only the outcomes of an action (Alexander & Moore, 2025). In healthcare, doctors and nurses have a duty to treat patients with respect, provide truthful information, prevent harm, and offer the best available care. In *Miss*

*Evers' Boys*, these duties were ignored. The researchers placed scientific goals above human life, which made their actions deeply unethical (American Nurses Association, 2025a).

Miss Evers herself represents a complicated ethical character. She is not shown as completely evil or completely innocent. Instead, she is portrayed as someone who initially believes she is doing good but later realizes that she has become part of a harmful system. Her duty as a nurse should have been to protect the patients, advocate for their treatment, and ensure that they were not harmed. However, her loyalty to the medical institution and her trust in authority prevented her from fully challenging the injustice. This makes her character important because the film shows how ordinary people can become involved in unethical systems when they fail to question authority (American Nurses Association, 2025b; Sargent, 1997).

The movie also points out the importance of scientific integrity. Medical research is necessary for the progress of healthcare, but it must always be conducted in a moral and responsible way. Human subjects should never be used without their informed consent, and researchers must never sacrifice human dignity for scientific knowledge. The Tuskegee study teaches that research must be guided by ethical principles, especially when vulnerable communities are involved. Poor, marginalized, and minority populations must be protected from exploitation, not used as convenient subjects for experimentation (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979).

Another important issue shown in the film is racial injustice. The men involved in the study were poor African American men who had limited access to healthcare and education. Their social and economic position made them vulnerable to manipulation. The researchers took advantage of this inequality, which makes the study not only a medical ethics failure but also a racial and social injustice. The film therefore reminds viewers that ethical healthcare must include fairness, equality, and respect for all people, regardless of race, class, or background (Brandt, 1978).

# Conclusion

The goal of *Miss Evers' Boys* is quite clear: it portrays one of the most unethical examples of human testing in American history. The film is based on a true story and reflects a dark chapter in the history of medical research. The government and medical team had the ability and responsibility to provide treatment to the patients, but instead, they used them for experimentation and observation. This was a serious violation of medical ethics and human rights (CDC, 2024).

From a duty-based ethical perspective, the actions of the American research team were wrong because they failed to fulfill their moral and professional duties. It is the duty of every doctor, nurse, and healthcare professional to protect patients, provide honest information, reduce suffering, and offer the best possible treatment. In this case, the medical team did the opposite. They withheld treatment, misled patients, and allowed preventable suffering to continue for decades (American

Nurses Association, 2025a; CDC, 2024).

Miss Evers' role also shows the importance of moral courage in healthcare. Even when professionals work under authority, they must be willing to question unethical instructions. Obedience to an institution does not remove personal responsibility. A healthcare worker must always remember that the patient's life, dignity, and well-being come first (American Nurses Association, 2025b).

In conclusion, *Miss Evers' Boys* is an important film because it teaches a powerful lesson about medical ethics, duty, and human dignity. It shows that scientific research should never be separated from morality. Progress in medicine is valuable, but it must never come at the cost of human suffering. The film reminds healthcare professionals that their first duty is always to the patient, not to research, power, or institutional pressure (Alexander & Moore, 2025; National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979).

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