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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

In my previous academic life, as a historian, I thought a great deal about the role of race in American life. I was particularly interested in emancipation during the American Civil War, and in why it took a war to end an injustice as profound as slavery. I understood, moreover, that the questions I had about race were not definitively answered in the nineteenth century; that people in the United States and around the world continue to work within and against the boundaries and perceptions about race in everyday life. Still, when I came to *JLME* I thought my professional interest in questions of race had largely come to an end.

As usual, I found myself pleasantly surprised by the breadth of interest and coverage of this journal. More than a year ago, Professor Susan M. Wolf of the University of Minnesota came to us with a proposal to publish papers delivered at a conference on the responsible use of racial and ethnic categories in biomedical research. Upon reading the proposals it was clear that the essays as a whole provide an important overview of this controversial topic. This symposium, like many others that appear in *JLME*, serves as an excellent starting point to learn about and assess different views of critical questions. But it is most certainly not the last word on the topic of race and ethnicity in medicine; study of these essays suggest that scholars have hardly agreed on the role of social construction of race in medicine, and most certainly have not found universal ground on how race should factor in (if at all) to medical research. It is obvious that additional debate is sure to follow the lead of this symposium.

I always like to use these last few lines of my letter to suggest an "independent" article in our current issue, as these essays are a vital part of what makes our journal unique. In this issue, long-time *JLME* contributor Peter Clark gives us a fascinating look at the role of medical ethics and abuse at military detention facilities like Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib. Despite the Bush Administration's recent declaration of compliance with the basic tenets of the Geneva Convention, it would be naive to think that the occurrence of torture and abuse in United States military detention facilities will disappear outright. Clark's thoughtful overview provides a clear way of thinking about the problem of medical doctors serving at U.S. facilities like Guantanamo, where they are sworn by oath to both protect their patients, and serve their country. As Clark demonstrates, it is a question with few easy answers.

Ted Hutchinson
Editor