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## **Anti-Prop 2 campaign full of shameful distortions**

*FREE PRESS EDITORIAL BOARD*

Shame is often a casualty of a political attack campaign.

But opponents to Proposal 2, the Nov. 4 ballot initiative that would legalize embryonic stem cell research in Michigan, may have set new standards for shameless fear-mongering.

And they're doing it with the blessing of the Michigan Catholic Conference, which has poured more than \$4 million into the anti-Prop 2 campaign.

The anti-Prop 2 ads, running in heavy rotation on television in the Detroit area, have mostly invoked hyperbolic absurdities designed to make stem cell research look like some sort of Frankenstein-inspired quackery.

The opponents went even further last week, though, and embraced a horribly offensive, racially tinged comparison.

An ad titled "In the Name of Good," (See it at [www.2goes2far.com/in-the-name-of-good.html](http://www.2goes2far.com/in-the-name-of-good.html)), compares the research that Prop 2 would allow to the human experimentation horrors at Tuskegee University. The commercial says, falsely, that stem cell research won't be regulated, and implies that it could therefore lead to abuses similar to the Tuskegee experiments, in which researchers denied treatment and information about their disease to hundreds of African-American who were infected with syphilis.

The point is clearly to frighten minorities into voting against Prop 2 by drawing a false connection with past abuse.

It's far past shameless, and well into reckless and even pernicious campaigning.

For the record, the comparison could not be more factually absurd.

Tuskegee was an awful tragedy, a government study that went on for decades without participants knowing what was being done to them.

But it spurred massive reform and was directly responsible for much of the regulation that now governs all human research, including any stem cell research that would be conducted should Prop 2 pass. (Yes, even research on embryonic stem cells is regulated as live-subject human research.)

Those regulations begin with the Institutional Review Board process, which is administered by the Food and Drug Administration as well as the Department of Health and Human Services. And they stretch further to the stringent rules enforced by the National Academy of Sciences and the International Society for Stem Cell Research.

It is simply false even to suggest the threat that stem cell research might repeat the horrors of Tuskegee.

Beyond the false facts in the ads, though, the Tuskegee reference does even more harm by preying directly on the distrust minority communities already harbor for medical research.

The distrust fueled by the ads is one of the primary hurdles to getting enough black organ donors, research participants, even blood donors. Are those problems that the Michigan Catholic Conference wants to make worse?

How can the Catholic Church bankroll a campaign that has so badly escaped the bounds of decency?

Whether Prop 2 succeeds or fails, this is the wrong way to make the case against it.