

Birth in the Nation: A History of Reproduction in the United States

HIST 359W/459

W 2-4:40pm

Location: Rush Rhees Library 305

Instructor: Brianna Theobald

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454 Rush Rhees Library

Office Hours: T 1:30-3:00pm and by appointment

Course Description:

Why did fertility rates decline over the nineteenth century? Why did women begin choosing hospital rather than home births in the twentieth century? What difference have the Pill and other reproductive technologies made in shaping how Americans think about pregnancy and childbirth? How have reproductive experiences differed along lines of race and class? How have movements for trans rights altered cultural attitudes regarding and medical approaches toward reproduction? We will consider these questions and more as we explore how and why reproductive experiences and the meanings attached to such experiences have changed over time. This is a research seminar, so students will further explore these issues through their own research and writing on some aspect of the history of reproduction. Readings and discussions will focus on the United States in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but students may explore the location and period of their choice in their papers.

Required Reading:

Students are responsible for acquiring the following books:

Laura Briggs, *Somebody's Children: The Politics of Transracial and Transnational Adoption* (Duke University Press, 2012).

Deirdre Cooper Owens, *Medical Bondage: Race, Gender, and the Origins of American Gynecology* (University of Georgia Press, 2017).

Jennifer Holland, *Tiny You: A Western History of the Anti-Abortion Movement* (University of California Press, 2020).

Sara Matthiesen, *Reproduction Reconceived: Family Making and the Limits of Choice After Roe v. Wade* (University of California Press, 2021)

Brianna Theobald, *Reproduction on the Reservation: Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Colonialism in the Long Twentieth Century* (University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

*PDF available upon request!!

Judith Walzer Leavitt, *Brought to Bed: Childbearing in America, 1750-1950* (University of Oxford Press, 1986). [A later edition is fine!]

Additional required readings—book chapters, articles, and primary sources—will be available as PDFs or links on Blackboard.

I also recommend the following **optional resources** regarding historical research and writing:
 Zachary Schrag, *The Princeton Guide to Historical Research* (Princeton University Press, 2021).
Drafting the Past podcast

Grade Breakdown:

94-100% = A	87-89% = B+	77-79% = C+	67-69% = D+
90-93% = A-	83-86% = B	73-76% = C	63-66% = D
	80-82% = B-	70-72% = C-	60-62% = D-

Assessment:

Participation:	25%
Research Proposal:	10%
Historiography Paper:	15%
Written Critique:	5%
Final Research Paper:	45%

Participation: This is a seminar-style course, and the success of the course depends on active student participation. Students are expected to attend each class session, having carefully read the assigned reading for the week. I understand that life happens, and missing a class or two should not negatively impact your grade, but your attendance should be regular, and your participation engaged. Whenever possible, please let me know if you need to miss a class session for any reason, so that we can work together to make sure that you stay on track.

When completing each week's reading, be prepared to discuss the following questions: What topic or topics is each author addressing? How, in your own words, would you summarize each author's main arguments? What forms of evidence are presented in each reading? What are the advantages and/or limitations of this source base? How might we put the assigned readings in dialogue with one another? How do they compare—in terms of argument, methodology, and/or style? Does the assigned reading relate in any way to your own chosen research topic? If so, how? I reserve the right to assign written work as a component of your participation grade if I conclude that students are not adequately prepared for class discussions.

Written Work: An overwhelming majority of your grade will be derived from *writing*. We will spend time discussing what constitutes good academic writing in class, but I encourage anyone who would like extra writing assistance to reach out to the Writing and Speaking Center. They're fantastic! Learn more about this resource here: <http://writing.rochester.edu/tutoring/index.html>.

Students will research a topic in the history of reproduction, chosen in consultation with me. This research will culminate in a **final paper** that asks a significant historical question, situates this question within a body of scholarship, answers it with a clear thesis and a logical argument,

supported with both primary and secondary sources documented according to the standards of *Chicago Manual of Style*. I will also be looking for clear and artful prose with the grammar and spelling associated with formal composition. Undergraduate papers should be approximately 20 pages in length; graduate papers should be of publishable (25-35 pages) length.

Two shorter assignments are designed to assist students in working toward the above goal. The **research proposal** (5-7 pages) consists of a brief discussion of your chosen topic and working research questions and a preliminary list of primary and secondary sources. See the assignment sheet on Blackboard for further instructions. The **historiography paper** (4-5 pages) discusses the historiography of your topic: How have scholars approached the topic? What arguments have others made? What scholarly debates or conversations present themselves in the secondary literature?

The final piece of assigned writing is a short (2-3 page) **critique** of another student's rough draft. Your critique should be respectful and constructive; disrespectful or mean-spirited reviews will not be tolerated. This written critique should: 1) offer a brief summary of the author's topic and argument, as you understand it; 2) address the draft's strengths and weaknesses; and 3) make one or two concrete suggestions for improvement.

Each of the above assignments should be submitted via Blackboard in size 12 Times New Roman font (or comparable), double-spaced, with standard margins. See below schedule for all deadlines.

Course Policies and Expectations:

Credit Hours: The College's credit hour policy on undergraduate courses is to award 4 credit hours for courses that meet for the equivalent of 3 periods of 50 minutes each week. Students enrolled in HIST 359W are expected to devote at least one hour each week outside of class to analyzing the course readings, working alone or in groups, and to researching in depth their topics for the final paper.

Late Assignments: This course is designed to have us work through material and hit various benchmarks as a group, so it will be a smoother experience for everyone if we all remain on track. That said, I understand that life happens, so this course's late work policy aims to strike a fair balance. With the exception of the written critique, each deadline (see course schedule below) has a two-day grace period before any late penalty is applied. This is a no questions asked grace period; you're free to take advantage of it if and when you need it, but I ask that you aim for the stated deadline when that's possible. After the grace period, late papers will incur a 10-point penalty for every 24-hour period or portion thereof that passes from the deadline until the assignment is submitted.

Accommodation Policies: I'm happy to make accommodations as recommended by UR Disability Services. Should you need accommodations, I encourage you to make these arrangements sooner rather than later.

Academic Integrity: Academic honesty is at the core of the historical discipline, and you'll find that it is something I care deeply about. All work submitted must be your own, prepared especially for this course. The use of AI tools is not outright prohibited, but the writing and analysis you submit must be your own, and you are responsible for the quality and integrity of the work you submit. I will report all suspected cases of academic dishonesty to the University's Board on Academic Honesty. That said, I am happy to discuss any questions you may have about what does and does not constitute plagiarism, provided this conversation occurs *before* you submit the assignment. For helpful discussions of plagiarism (including subtle instances), see the American Historical Association's "Defining Plagiarism," <https://www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/teaching-resources-for-historians/plagiarism-curricular-materials-for-history-instructors/defining-plagiarism>.

Schedule:

Week 1: Jan. 17 Welcome and Introductions

Optional but encouraged reading: Ross, "Reproductive Justice as Intersectional Feminist Activism"

Week 2: Jan. 24 Introduction to the Field

Reading: Leavitt, *Brought to Bed*

Research: Visit to Rare Books and Special Collections.

Week 3: Jan. 31 In the Archive(s)

Reading: Guise, "Who Is Doctor Bauer?"
O'Donnell, "The Activist Archive"
Grutman, "Money in the Archives"
Withycombe, "Discharged Well"

Research: Visit to Miner Library.

Week 4: Feb. 7 Gynecology and Obstetrics

Reading: Cooper Owens, *Medical Bondage*
Cooper Owens and Fett, "Black Maternal and Infant Health"

Research: Formulating research questions and getting a handle on the historiography. Come to class prepared to discuss possible research topics.

Week 5: Feb. 14

NO CLASS: Research Week. Students should arrange to meet with me individually this week.

Week 6: Feb. 21 Ask Me Anything!

Reading: Theobald, *Reproduction on the Reservation*

Research: Proposal preparation. Students should be prepared to discuss early research progress. Challenges? Exciting finds?

Week 7: Feb. 28 Transnational Histories of Reproduction

Reading: Briggs, *Somebody's Children*

Research: Prospectus due via Blackboard at the beginning of class.

Week 8: Mar. 6

NO CLASS: Research Week.

Week 9: Mar. 13

NO CLASS: Spring Break.

Week 10: Mar. 20 All Politics are Reproductive Politics?

Reading: Matthiesen, *Reproduction Reconceived*

Research: Building scholarly arguments.

Week 11: Mar. 27 The Past and the Present

Reading: Holland, *Tiny You*

O'Donnell and Rodgers, "Revising the History of Abortion in the Wake of the *Dobbs* Decision"

Research: Each student will make a brief presentation that outlines the historiography on their chosen topic and suggests how their research builds on or challenges previous interpretations.

***Historiography paper is due via Blackboard by Friday 3/29 at 5pm.**

Week 12: Apr. 3

NO CLASS: Students should arrange to meet with me individually sometime this week.

Week 13: Apr. 10

NO CLASS: Rough drafts are due via email to me and your assigned peer reader by **Friday, April 12 at 5pm**. The draft you submit should be at least 2/3 complete and **MUST** include a clear thesis statement and argument.

Week 14: Apr. 17 Peer Review Workshop

Reading: your partner's draft

Research: Email a copy of your **written critique** to me and your peer review partner by the start of class, *and* please bring a hard copy to class. Be prepared to discuss your rough draft, as well as the draft you reviewed.

Week 15: Apr. 24 Enter Trans Studies

Optional preliminary reading: Stryker, *Transgender History*, ch. 1

Reading: Gill-Peterson, *Histories of the Transgender Child*, intro
Kukura, "Reconceiving Reproductive Health Systems"

Research: Informal presentations regarding students' topic, argument, and evidence.

Final paper due via Blackboard Monday, May 6 at 8am.