

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

HIS359W/459

Thurs. 2:00-4:40pm

Location: RR456

**Instructor:** Dr. Brianna Theobald

**Contact Info:** brianna.theobald@rochester.edu

454 Rush Rhees Library

**Office Hours:** W 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 women think about pregnancy and childbirth? Why have breastfeeding rates been rising since the 1970s? How have women's reproductive experiences differed along lines of race and class? In this course, we will consider these questions and more as we explore how women's reproductive experiences and the meanings attached to such experiences have changed over time and why. 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 text:

Judith Walzer Leavitt, *Brought to Bed: Childbearing in America, 1750-1950* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 1986).

\*This book is available at the University Bookstore, can be purchased inexpensively online, and is on reserve at Rush Rhees Library. Additional readings—book chapters, articles, and primary sources—will be available as PDFs or links on Blackboard.

## **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 Prospectus:	10%
Historiography Paper:	15%
Written Critique:	5%

Formal Presentation:	5%
Final Research Paper:	40%

**Participation:** This is a small, 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. 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.

Students will also be expected to discuss their research progress each class session, and this will factor into participation grades. Sometimes students will be asked physically to bring in a book, primary source, or other object associated with their respective research. See the below schedule for more details about research benchmarks.

**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 U of R Writing and Speaking Center. 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 myself. This research will culminate in a **final paper** that asks a significant historical question, situates it within a body of scholarship, answers it with a clear thesis and logical argument, supports it with both primary and secondary sources documented according to the standards of Chicago Manual of Style, and articulates its points in 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 and quality.

Two shorter assignments are designed to assist students in working toward the above goal. The **research prospectus** (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 assignment sheet on Blackboard for further instructions. The **historiography paper** (4-5 pages) discusses the historiography regarding 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 in size 12 Times New Roman font, double-spaced, with standard margins. See below schedule for all deadlines. Emailed papers will not be accepted without prior permission.

Presentation: During week 15, each student will make a 10- to 15-minute presentation outlining his or her topic, argument, and evidence.

### **Course Policies and Expectations:**

Late Assignments: 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. If an assignment is due at the start of class on February 13 and it is not turned in until the evening of February 13, ten points will be automatically deducted. If it is not turned in until the afternoon of February 14, twenty points will be deducted. Note that because of timing presentations cannot be made up.

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. Unacceptable breaches of your obligation as a student include: submission of the same work or portions of the same work to more than one class, turning in work prepared by another person as if it were your own; and the unattributed use of text of any length from any source, including websites. 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 and all questions you may have about what does and does not constitute plagiarism, provided this conversation occurs *before* you submit the assignment.

### **Schedule:**

Week 1 (Jan. 16): Introductions and Definitions

**Reading:** Reagan, "Medicine, Law, and the State"  
Leavitt, *Brought to Bed*, Introduction

Week 2 (Jan. 23): Social Childbirth in the Nineteenth Century

**Reading:** Leavitt, *Brought to Bed*, chs. 1 & 4  
 Withycombe, *Lost: Miscarriage in Nineteenth-Century America*, ch. 1  
 Wright, “The Woman’s Lodge”

**Research:** We will spend the second half of class exploring available resources in Rare Books and Special Collections, Rush Rhees Library.

Week 3 (Jan. 30): Origins of Obstetrics and Gynecology

**Reading:** Leavitt, *Brought to Bed*, ch. 2  
 Cooper Owens, *Medical Bondage*, ch. 1

**Research:** We will spend the second half of class exploring available resources in the Miner Library.

Week 4 (Feb. 6): Childbirth and Evolution

**Reading:** Leavitt, *Brought to Bed*, ch. 3  
 Briggs, “The Race of Hysteria”

**Research:** Students will discuss ideas for research topics, and we will explore library resources.

Week 5 (Feb. 13): RESEARH WEEK

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

Week 6 (Feb. 20): Progressivism and Professionalization

**Reading:** Leavitt, *Brought to Bed*, chs. 5-7  
 Excerpts from Litoff, *The American Midwife Debate*

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

Week 7 (Feb. 27): Controlling Fertility

**Reading:** Tone, *Devices and Desires*, ch. 7  
 Briggs, *Reproducing Empire*, ch. 3

**Research: \*\*Prospectus due at the beginning of class.**

Week 8 (Mar. 5): Reproductive Rights and Wrongs

**Reading:** Schoen, *Choice and Coercion*, ch. 3  
 Theobald, *Reproduction on the Reservation*, ch. 6  
 Holland, TBA.

**Research:** Close readings. Students will make a presentation that offers a close reading of a key passage or passages from a primary source. Make copies of the passage for the class, or get an original to me by Wednesday (3/4) at noon.

Week 9: Spring Break  
**NO CLASS**

Week 10 (Mar. 19): Modern Midwifery and “Natural” Childbirth

**Reading:** Leavitt, *Brought to Bed*, ch. 8 & Epilogue  
 Kline, “Communicating a New Consciousness”

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

**\*Historiography paper is due in my mailbox Friday (3/20) by 5pm.**

Week 11 (Mar. 26): Recent Reproductive Trends

**Reading:** Wolf, *Deliver Me from Pain*, ch. 6  
 Solinger and Ross, *Reproductive Justice*, ch. 2

**Research:** Organizing a research paper.

Week 12 (Apr. 2): RESEARCH/WRITING WEEK

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

Week 13 (Apr. 9): RESEARCH/WRITING WEEK

**NO CLASS: Rough drafts** are due via email to me and your assigned peer reader by **Friday (4/10) at 11:59pm**. The draft you submit should be at least 2/3 complete and **MUST** include an argument. Full drafts are preferred but not required.

Week 14 (Apr. 16): Writing Workshop

**Research:** Bring two copies of your **written critique** to class—one for me and one for the author of the draft you reviewed. Be prepared to discuss your rough draft, as well as the draft you reviewed.

Week 15 (Apr. 23): Presentations

**Research:** Each student will make a 10-minute presentation that outlines his or her topic, argument, and evidence. Presentations should be well-organized and engaging.

**Final paper deadline TBA.**