Course Description
Childbirth is a powerful event, physiologically, psychically, and—for many—spiritually. It marks the entry of a new human being and new relationships into the world. At the same time, structural forms of power deeply shape how, when, and for whom birth happens: birth is a key site of both oppression and resistance.

This course examines birth and power in both of these senses through a reproductive justice framework, a framework for analysis and action developed by women of color health organizers and scholars. We will analyze contexts, experiences, practices, ideologies, and historiographies of childbirth in the United States from roughly the 17th century to the present, with the heaviest emphasis on the 20th and 21st century.

We will examine the ways that colonization, genocide, enslavement, racism, capitalism, heterosexism, patriarchy, and ableism have shaped all of these aspects of childbirth. We will also inquire how key movements and groups resisting some of these forms of oppression have had the power to reshape birth, as well as locating in birth a source of transformational power.

The course is divided into four units: 1) Reproductive Justice, 2) Alternative Birth: A Critical Engagement, 3) Writing Birth Histories (parts I & II), and 4) The Politics of Birth Work.

Course Learning Objectives
Students who successfully complete this course will:

- Attain a deep understanding of the framework of reproductive justice, and use it to analyze contemporary discourses, practices, and conditions of childbirth
- Understand how racial, sexual, gender, economic, and colonial domination and resistance have shaped both reproductive realities and the ways that childbirth histories have been written and circulated
- Identify and discuss shifting ideologies and practices of childbirth in the US over time, and relate these to power
- Carry out an independent oral history project on childbirth
Classroom expectations and discussion guidelines
Students are expected to complete the assigned readings before coming to class and to take responsibility as active participants in class discussions. You should come to class prepared to engage in thoughtful and constructive conversation that is respectful of others in the classroom and takes seriously the issues and themes presented in the readings.

That said, discussion participation and silence often manifest structural power differentials. The historical and contemporary forms of oppression, violence, and resistance that have shaped the history of childbirth also shape this campus. The classroom cannot be a “safe space,” but my hope is that it can be a space of learning and growth.

In order to foster such a space, the following guidelines and discussion starters were developed by experienced social justice educators Özlem Sensoy and Robin DiAngelo. These guidelines are “intended to recognize and respond to unequal power relations in the room, help more reticent students speak up, help more dominant students slow down, and guide open and humble entry into the conversation” (2014, p. 8).

Discussion Guidelines
• Strive for intellectual humility. Be willing to grapple with challenging ideas.
• Differentiate between opinion—which everyone has—and informed knowledge, which comes from sustained experience, study, and practice. Hold your opinions lightly and with humility.
• Let go of personal anecdotal evidence and look at broader group-level patterns.
• Notice your own defensive reactions and attempt to use these reactions as entry points for gaining deeper self-knowledge, rather than as a rationale for closing off.
• Recognize how your own social positionality (e.g., race, class, gender, sexuality, ability) informs your perspectives and reactions to your instructor, other course members, and those whose work you study.
• Differentiate between safety and comfort. Accept discomfort as necessary for social justice growth.
• Keep focused on yourself, What does this mean for me and my life?
• Identify where your learning edge is and push it. For example, whenever you think, I already know this, ask yourself, How can I take this deeper? Or, How am I applying in practice what I already know?

Discussion Starters
• I’m really nervous/scared/uncomfortable to say [X], but . . .
• From my experience/perspective as [identity], . . .
• I’m afraid I may offend someone, and please let me know if I do, but . . .
• It feels risky to say [X], but . . .
• I just felt something shift in the room. I’m wondering if anyone else did . . .
• It seems like some people may have had a reaction to that. Can you help me understand why?
• Can you help me understand whether what I’m thinking right now might be problematic?
• This is what I understand you to be saying: . . . Is that accurate?
• I’ve been wondering about how we are using [term] in this discussion . . .
• Is [X] a good example of what the author was saying?
• How would you respond to [X] from a reproductive justice framework?
• I am having a “yeah, but...” (sceptical/defensive) moment. Can you help me work through it?
• What is another example of [X]?
• This perspective is new to me, but I’m wondering if it is accurate to say that . . . ?


Assignment submission and late work
Assignments are due by 2 pm on the due date as an upload to Canvas. Email attachments will not be accepted except as a time stamp (e.g. if Canvas is not functioning, send the assignment to me and then upload it later that day).

Late work will be accepted with a grade deduction of 10% every 24 hours. Unavoidable delays due to an emergency will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Being present in class and life issues
Attendance is required—and life also happens. If you are going to miss a class, please provide a one-(full) page, single-spaced written précis and response to the readings, emailed to me as an attachment, within 48 hours of the missed class start time.

If any problems arise, either academic or personal, that might jeopardize your participation in the course, please try to inform me of the problem and set up an appointment with me as soon as possible.

Disability Access
In order to receive disability-related academic accommodations in GWS 533, students must first be registered with the McBurney Disability Resource Center (http://www.mcburney.wisc.edu/). Students who have or think they may have a disability are invited to contact the McBurney Center for a confidential discussion at 608-263-2741 (phone), 608-225-7956 (text), or by email at mcburney@studentlife.wisc.edu.

If you have already registered with the McBurney Center, and if you wish to request any accommodations on the basis of disability, you should schedule an office appointment with me within the first two weeks of the semester. Please schedule this office appointment by email. To maintain
the confidentiality of your request, please do not approach me before or after class to discuss your accommodation needs. You should bring a copy of your service plan to our meeting.

Please note that I am unlikely to honor an accommodation request made within 72 hours of an assignment due date. Advanced planning on your part enables both of us to create an accessible classroom environment. Please do not delay in contacting me regarding your accommodation requests.

**Academic Honesty**
Students are required to familiarize themselves with the UW policies on plagiarism and to assume responsibility for honesty in all course work.

**Grading:**

- Participation: 20%
- Reflection Paper: 15%
- Critical Engagement Paper: 20%
- Oral History Project: 30%
- Take-Home Final: 15%

**Honors option**
Additional assignment: Narratives of Reproductive Justice in Wisconsin ~7 page analysis paper, based on oral history interview with a reproductive justice organizer/practitioner in Wisconsin. Interview subject cannot be a course visitor. You must meet at least once with the Oral History Program staff to plan your interview.

**Required Reading:** (Available at Room of One’s Own)


Julia Chinyere Oparah and Alicia Bonaparte, eds, *Birthing Justice: Black Women, Pregnancy, and Childbirth*

Miriam Zoila Perez, *Radical Doula Guide*

Class Schedule Fall 2017

Week 1  Introduction
W September 6
Introductory discussion, syllabus review

**Friday, September 8, 7 pm: Professor Judy Leavitt, in conversation about the 30th Anniversary Edition of Brought to Bed, at Mystery to Me bookstore, 1863 Monroe Street, Madison

Reproductive Justice

Week 2
M September 11
Ross and Solinger, Reproductive Justice: An Introduction (2017), 1-57

W September 13
Reproductive Justice, 58-96

Week 3
M September 18
Reproductive Justice, 97-116, 238-266

W September 20
Birthing Justice selections:
Syrus Marcus Ware, Confessions of a Black Pregnant Dad, 63-71
Christ-Ann Magloire and Julia Chinyere Oparah, Unexpected Allies: Obstetrician Activism, VBACs, and the Birth Justice Movement, 156-165

**ASSIGNMENT 1: REFLECTION PAPER DUE

Alternative Birth: Critical Engagement

Week 4
M September 25

W September 27
Gaskin, Ina May’s Guide, 133-182
Williams Obstetrics, 24th ed., Ch 22, Introduction through “Management of Normal Labor” (online through library)
Week 5  
M October 2  
*Ina May’s Guide* 183-247

W October 4  
*Ina May’s Guide* 248-273  

Week 6  
M October 9  
*Ina May’s Guide*, 274-304  
In-class video and discussion: *The Farm*

W October 11  
*Ina May’s Guide*, 305-330  
Guest visitor: Gretchen Spicer, CPM  
**ASSIGNMENT 2: CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT PAPER DUE**

**Writing Birth Histories I:**

Week 7  
M October 16  
Oral History Workshop: Troy Reeves, UW Oral History Program  
Oral history readings TBD

W October 18  
Leavitt, *Brought to Bed*, Introduction and Ch. 1, 1-35  

Week 8  
M October 23  
*Brought to Bed*, Ch. 2  

W October 25  
*Brought to Bed*, Ch. 3  

Week 9  
M October 30  
*Brought to Bed*, Ch. 4

W November 1
*Brought to Bed*, Ch 5
Susan Smith, *Japanese American Midwives* (2005), selection

**ASSIGNMENT 3a: ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT DUE**

Week 10
M November 6
*Brought to Bed*, Chs. 7-8

**Writing Birth Histories II: Testimonies**

W November 8
Smith and Holmes, *Listen to Me Good* (pages TBD)

Week 11
M November 13
*Listen to Me Good* (pages TBD)

W November 15
Katsi Cook, interview selection

Week 12
M November 20

W November 22
Trevor MacDonald, *Where’s the Mother? Stories from a Transgender Dad* (2016), selection

**ASSIGNMENT 3b: ORAL HISTORY PAPER DUE**

**The politics of birth work**
Course visitors during this unit will include:

Tehmina Islam, CPM
Access Midwifery
Tia Murray, BS, CLC
Birth & Postpartum Doula, Birthwise Doula Services,
Certified Lactation Counselor
UW Infant, Early Childhood, & Family Mental Health Fellow

Kristen Kali, CPM, Maia Midwifery, Seattle, WA

Week 13
M November 27
Suzanne Arms, Immaculate Deception, selection

W November 29
Heather Sinclair, Birth City (dissertation, University of Texas at El Paso, 2015), selection
In-class video and discussion, Catching Babies

Week 14
M December 4
Perez, Radical Doula Guide
Midwives of Standing Rock video

W December 6
Black Women Birthing Justice, selections

Week 15
M December 11
Black Women Birthing Justice, selections
Additional readings TBD

W December 13 Final discussion and send-off