

Politics of Reproduction

GOVT 1101 FWS

Instructor: [Emily B. Jackson](#)

Fall 2023

Email: ebj28@cornell.edu
Class Hours: T/R 2:55-4:10pm
Classroom: Ives Hall 107

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Course Description

Is reproduction political? Though reproduction was long relegated to the so-called “private sphere,” it is impossible to ignore debates over birth, sex, and bodies in modern politics. The state and its agents have a stake in who reproduces, when, and how. Where do those interests come from, and how do they evolve over time and space? What are the implications for people who reproduce, and how do people respond and navigate their own reproductive rights and responsibilities? This course will give you the tools to answer these questions by analyzing the relationship between reproduction and politics in the Americas. Students will hone their analytical and writing skills with short-form journal entries, active reading assignments, a research paper, and opportunities to exchange feedback with peers.

When we think about the politics of reproduction, one of the first issues that might come to mind is abortion. This course will ask you to consider a broader view of what reproductive politics means. Throughout US history, as white middle-class feminists primarily focused on access to contraception and abortion, Black and indigenous people of color have mobilized to defend their right to reproduce and raise their children in a healthy, safe environment. Further, while governments implemented policies to restrict contraception access for some in the US, USAID and a myriad of international organizations were promoting contraception abroad (sometimes forcefully) in a global population control campaign. While we focus largely on the US, this course will also explore reproductive politics in Latin America to show how political economic conditions, religious and cultural contexts, and unique historical experiences influence reproductive political outcomes in different countries around the world.

Learning Objectives

1. **Gain an understanding of reproductive politics in comparative perspective.** The goal of this course is to prepare you to understand, discuss, and write about reproduction as a political phenomenon in the Americas. By the end of the course, students should be able to define “reproductive politics” and other important terms, and to recognize and describe the links between reproduction and major political debates.
2. **Develop college-level writing skills.** High quality writing is concise, organized clearly, grammatically accurate, and conveys an argument and/or analysis persuasively and with sophistication. Good writing is clear, not flashy. You will have numerous opportunities to write, receive feedback, and revise writing throughout the course to improve your writing.
3. **Read strategically and efficiently.** You will likely be assigned thousands of pages of readings over the course of your college career. One goal of this course is to help prepare you to read efficiently, extracting the necessary information from advanced academic readings without getting bogged down in the details.

4. **Provide thoughtful, actionable peer feedback.** Providing constructive feedback is an important skill in college and in the workplace. You will have several opportunities to exchange feedback with peers.
5. **Conduct original research.** The final project for this course is an independent research paper focused on any reproductive politics topic in a country of your choosing. Together we will learn about using library resources, selecting high-quality sources, building an argument with evidence, and properly citing your work.

Reading Materials

All of the reading material for this course will be available for free. If it is not accessible through the [Cornell Library](#), I will post a copy on Canvas. We will read longer excerpts from the Briggs book so if you prefer to read physical books, you may consider purchasing your own copy (but you don't have to).

- Briggs, Laura. 2017. *How All Politics Became Reproductive Politics*. University of California Press.

Assessments

1. **Reading Responses (20%).** All students are required to write 4 three-page reading responses. These reading responses will be due throughout the semester and will provide students with an opportunity to practice summary writing, argumentative or persuasive writing, comparison, and deeper critique and reflection.
 - RR 1 will be a summary of an introductory reading on "reproductive politics." Due August 31.
 - RR 2 will be an argumentative essay. This RR should summarize the argument and evidence from one reading on birth control and abortion, and provide an argument and evidence against it. This RR will build on your summary skills and provide an opportunity to practice persuasive writing. Due by October 1.
 - RR 3 will include a summary and comparison of two readings on reproductive rights in comparative perspective. You might also consider comparing a reading focused on Latin America to a reading focused on the US. The goal of the third response is to build even more on the first and second RRs to produce an even more engaged, critical argument. You must submit by October 27.
 - RR 4 will be the culmination of your practice in summary writing over the semester. The goal of the fourth RR is to synthesize at least three readings from over the course of the semester, compare and contrast them, and provide a thoughtful, critical discussion that links all three readings into one argument. You can write this at any point in Units 5 or 6, but you must submit by November 30.
2. **Active Reading Assignments (10%).** Reading for college is a new, unique skill. To hone this skill, you will have two active reading assignments. The goal of these is to practice reading academic research and extracting the core, necessary information. For these assignments, you should turn in a highlighted and annotated hard copy of the reading, plus a one-page summary of the reading to Canvas. The one-page summary should state the author's argument, define key terms, and explain the evidence used to support their argument in your own words. Due September 5 and October 13. See the following resources for guidance:
 - [Timothy Burke, "How to Read in College"](#)
 - [Amelia Hoover Green, "How to Read Political Science: A Guide in Four Steps"](#)
3. **Paper Topic (5%).** Students must submit a one paragraph summary of their final research paper topic to Canvas by October 20. This is not a formal writing assignment; it is just an opportunity for you to tell me what you are interested in so that I can give you advice on how to move forward with the paper proposal.
4. **Paper Proposal & Annotated Bibliography (10%).** Students will be required to submit a paper proposal and annotated bibliography with at least 5 outside sources to Canvas by November 10.
 - The 1-2 page (double spaced) proposal should motivate your research question, provide a hypothesis or preliminary argument, and explain how your topic relates to reproductive politics topics that we have discussed in class. A strong proposal will show a direct link to at least one reading from class while also demonstrating how the paper will build on new concepts.

- The annotated bibliography should include at least 5 sources from outside of class. Include the source citation and a bullet point list of the 6-point notes outline (motivation, argument, methods/data, results, discussion/critique). In your discussion/critique section, be sure to explain how the source relates to your topic or how you plan to use it in your research paper.
5. **Peer Review Memo (10%).** Students will exchange paper proposals and give each other thorough written feedback in the form of a 2-page Peer Review Memo by November 21. Feedback should be constructive and highlight strengths as well as areas for improvement. In addition to constructive criticisms, students are encouraged to share recommendations for further readings. You might also annotate your partner's paper proposal to provide written annotated comments.
 6. **Research Paper (30%).** Students will write a final research paper (5-7 pages double spaced) about a reproductive politics topic of their choosing. The paper should summarize the historical and social context of the topic in question; explain how it relates to rights and citizenship; and its implications for reproductive health and political agency. You are encouraged to think creatively about what constitutes "reproductive politics"—this may include family planning and abortion, but you may also choose a policy or issue that reflects a broader conception of social reproduction, such as welfare, foreign aid, political violence, or laws related to trans rights, sex work, migration, or something else. This is an opportunity to apply your knowledge of reproductive politics to any topic that is interesting or relevant to your studies. Due by December 14.
 7. **Participation (15%).** Fruitful discussions and engagement with the course material can only occur if everyone comes to class prepared, and I expect everyone to participate in a meaningful way. This means asking thoughtful questions, reflecting on the readings, engaging in small-group discussions, bringing in evidence from the readings or real life, and more. Consistent lack of participation will affect your participation grade. If you are uncomfortable speaking up in class, please come to office hours so we can discuss a solution.

Course Policies

Grading Policy

This class will follow [Cornell's standard grading policy](#). I reserve the right to curve the scale dependent on overall class scores at the end of the semester. Any curve will only ever maintain or improve students' letter grades— I will never artificially lower grades.

Attendance & In-Class Expectations

Attendance. Attendance is mandatory. Repeated or unexcused absences will reduce your participation grade. You have 2 "no-questions-asked" absences. If you are unable to attend class for a legitimate reason, please notify me in advance. I understand that emergencies sometimes occur. If you are unable to attend class because of a medical or personal emergency, I reserve the right to ask to see a doctor's note or other evidence of the necessity of your absence.

Punctuality. Late arrivals are disruptive and disrespectful to everyone. If you are over 15 minutes late, you will be marked absent. Consistent tardiness will reduce your participation grade.

Respect. It is everyone's responsibility to make the classroom a welcoming and tolerant space. I expect you to engage thoughtfully, listen attentively, behave considerately and act professionally.

Grading & Late Policy

I will not reconsider any grades more than 30 days after the semester ends. If you wish to contest a grade on any assignment, you must provide a one-page written statement to me addressing the comments after a 24-hour wait period (any emails before this time period will not be answered) but within four days of the assignment being returned. Writing such a statement does not guarantee any changes in grades. Only extraordinary circumstances will result in grade changes. I will respond in writing to all queries. Late assignments will be marked down a full letter grade for every 24 hours they are overdue. If you have a legitimate reason that prevents you from completing an assignment on time, please reach out to me in advance of the deadline. I will try to be understanding, but I reserve the right to deny requests for extensions.

Academic Integrity and Honesty

I take plagiarism and academic integrity very seriously. Each student in this course is expected to abide by the [Cornell University Code of Academic Integrity](#). Any work submitted by a student in this course for academic credit will be the student's own work. As a Cornell University student, it is your responsibility to do your own work, observe scholarly norms, and learn to properly cite others. I encourage you to read widely, consult outside sources, and share ideas with the class, but your written work should be yours and your alone. When in doubt about whether you need to cite someone else's idea, err on the side of caution. Always properly cite quotations. Even if you paraphrase, you should still cite the original source. Do not use ChatGPT or other AI tools for writing; this is lazy and will only prevent you from learning and improving as a writer. The penalty for violating the Code of Academic Integrity will be a zero on the assignment. If you have any concerns, I recommend viewing [this tutorial](#).

Accommodations and Resources

Students with Disabilities

Your access in this course is important to me. I look forward to working with you to make sure you have everything you need to succeed in this classroom and at Cornell. Please request your accommodation letter early in the semester, or as soon as you become registered with SDS, so that we have adequate time to arrange your approved academic accommodations.

- Once SDS approves your accommodation letter, it will be emailed to both you and me. Please follow up with to discuss the necessary logistics of your accommodations.
- If you are approved for exam accommodations, please consult with at least two weeks before the scheduled exam date to confirm the testing arrangements.
- If you experience any access barriers in this course, such as with printed content, graphics, online materials, or any communication barriers; reach out to me or SDS right away.
- If you need an immediate accommodation, please speak with me after class or send an email message to me and SDS at sdscu@cornell.edu.

Cornell University (as an institution) and I (as a human being and instructor of this course) am committed to full inclusion in education for all persons. Services and reasonable accommodations are available to persons with temporary and permanent disabilities, to students with DACA or undocumented status, to students facing mental health or other personal challenges, and to students with other kinds of learning challenges. Please feel free to let me know if there are circumstances affecting your ability to participate in class. Some resources that might be of use include:

- [Office of Student Disability Services](#)
- [Cornell Health CAPS \(Counseling & Psychological Services\)](#)
- [Undocumented/DACA Student support](#)

Mental Health

In this course we will encounter reading material that is both intellectually and emotionally difficult to comprehend. This is a difficult topic, polarizing and emotionally volatile, and that is why it is politically salient and important for us to study. I will include a content warning in the syllabus for any particularly graphic readings that I expect may be disturbing or challenging for some readers. You do not need to force yourself to read anything that you think may create discomfort or unwarranted stress. Please come talk to me in [office hours](#) if you are concerned about content or would like to discuss your triggers or your reactions to the reading.

If you are feeling overwhelmed, or are worrying about a friend, please reach out to one of your instructors or your academic adviser. We can try to help or we can put you in touch with someone who can help. Cornell has trained counselors available to listen and help: [Empathy, Assistance, and Referral Service](#) (213 Willard Straight Hall, 607-255-3277), [Cornell Health's Counseling and Psychological Services](#) (CAPS, 607-255- 5155), and [Let's Talk](#), the drop-in service that provides informal, private consultation with a Cornell Health counselor. The [Learning Strategies Center](#) also offers a range of academic resources.

Course Schedule

The schedule is tentative and subject to change. Please refer to Canvas for the latest version. "Recommended" readings are not required for class discussion. I include these on the syllabus to provide additional information and context if you would like to read further on that week's topic.

1. What is Reproductive Politics?

August 22

- Weiss-Wolf, Jennifer. "Are Women's Rights the Canary in the Coal Mine of a Democracy in Decline?" *Ms. Magazine*, 15 May 2023.
- Cain Miller, Claire, et al. "Childbirth Is Deadlier for Black Families Even When They're Rich, Expansive Study Finds," *The New York Times*, 12 February 2023.
- *Recommended*: "Unwanted Epidurals, Untreated Pain: Black Women Tell Their Birth Stories" *The New York Times*, 12 May 2023.

August 24

- Briggs, Laura. 2018. "Introduction," in *How All Politics Became Reproductive Politics*, University of California Press, 1-18.

August 29

- Yuval-Davis, Nira. 1997. "Chapter 1: Theorizing Gender and Nation," in *Gender & Nation*, SAGE Publications, 1-30.

August 31: NO CLASS.

- Reading Response 1 due by 8:00am on August 31.

September 5: Meet in Uris Library Classroom

- Getting to know the Cornell Library!
- Amelia Hoover Green, "How to Read Political Science: A Guide in Four Steps"
- Active Reading Assignment 1 due in class. Choose one of the following articles to read, annotate, and summarize. You should submit your 1-page summary to Canvas, and bring your annotated hard copy of the reading to class to turn in.
 - Molyneux, Maxine. 1985. "Mobilization without Emancipation? Women's Interests, the State, and Revolution in Nicaragua," *Feminist Studies*, 227-254.
 - Htun, Mala. 2004. "Is Gender like Ethnicity? The Political Representation of Identity Groups," *Perspectives on Politics*, 439-458.

2. Race and the Origins of Birth Control

September 7

- Roberts, Dorothy. 1997. "Introduction," (read 3-10, skim 10-21 starting at "Jezebel") and Chapter 1, "Reproduction in Bondage," (read pages 29-41, stopping at "The Cycles of Work and Childbirth") in *Killing the Black Body*. ****Content warning: Chapter 1 contains racist language and depictions of sexual and physical violence.**

September 12

- Davis, Angela. 2003. "Racism, Birth Control and Reproductive Rights." *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, 353-367.

September 14

- No required reading. In class we will watch the documentary *La Operación*.
- *Recommended*: Gordon, Linda. 2002. "Race Suicide," in *The Moral Property of Women*, 86-104.

September 19

- Gordon, "Birth Control and Social Revolution," in *The Moral Property of Women*. 138-160 (read from "The Pioneers" and stop at "Opposition and Setbacks").

3. The A Word

September 21

- Gordon, "Abortion, The Mother Controversy," 295-320.

September 26

- Dannenfels, Marjorie. 14 June 2022. "[Authentic Feminism is Pro-Life. Just Ask Susan B. Anthony.](#)" *Newsweek*.
- Mathewes-Green, Frederica. 22 January 2016. "[When Abortion Suddenly Stopped Making Sense,](#)" *National Review*.
- *Recommended:* Green, Emily. "[Can you be a "pro-life feminist"? The Women's March on Washington offered some insights.](#)" *Vox*, 22 January 2017.
- *Recommended:* Ziegler, Mary. 2013. "Women's Rights on the Right: The History and Stakes of Modern Pro-Life Feminism, 1968 to the Present." *Berkeley Journal of Gender Law & Justice* 28, 232-268.

September 28

- Reading Response 2 due by 11:59pm on Sunday, October 1.
- Parker, Willie. 2017. Prologue "The Women" and Chapter 1 "Conversion," from *Life's Work: A Moral Argument for Choice*. Simon and Schuster. 1-37.

4. Reproductive Rights in Comparative Perspective

October 3

- Sutton, Barbara and Nayla Luz Vacarezza. 2021. "Abortion Rights and Democracy: An Introduction," in *Abortion and Democracy: Contentious Body Politics in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay*, Routledge.
- *Recommended:* Daby, Mariela and Mason W. Moseley. 2022. "Feminist Mobilization and the Abortion Debate in Latin America: Lessons from Argentina," *Politics & Gender*, 359-393.

October 5

- Keefe-Oates, Brianna. 2021. "Transforming Abortion Access through Feminist Community-Based Healthcare and Activism: A Case Study of Socorristas en Red in Argentina," in *Abortion and Democracy: Contentious Body Politics in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay*, Routledge.

October 12: NO CLASS

- Active Reading Assignment 2 due by 4:00 pm on Friday, October 13. Find an academic journal article (preferably political science or sociology) on a topic that you might like to write about for your final research paper. Please submit your 1-page summary to Canvas.

October 17

- No required reading.
- In-class prep for paper topic.
- *Recommended:* Bouvard, Margeurite. 1994. Chapter 1, "The Dirty War," in *Revolutionizing Motherhood: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo*, Rowman & Littlefield. 19-45.

October 19

- Bouvard, Chapter 7, "Socializing Maternity," *Revolutionizing Motherhood*, 175-193.
- In-class prep for Reading Response 3.
- Paper topic due to Canvas by 11:59pm on Friday, October 20.

October 24

- Briggs, Laura. 2012. Chapter 5: "Uncivil Wars," in *Somebody's Children: The Politics of Transracial and Transnational Adoption*, Duke University Press. **160-172 (up to "El Salvador.")**
- In-class writing & peer review of Reading Response 3.
- Reading Response 3 due by 11:59pm on Friday, October 27.

5. Modern Families

October 26

- Briggs, Laura. 2012. Chapter 5: "Uncivil Wars," in *Somebody's Children: The Politics of Transracial and Transnational Adoption*, Duke University Press. 172-196.
- In-class peer feedback on paper topic; prep for paper proposal and annotated bibliography

October 31

- Briggs, Chapter 4: "The Politics and Economy of Reproductive Technology and Black Infant Mortality," 101-148, *How All Politics Became Reproductive Politics*
- *Recommended*: Layne, Linda L. 2003 *Motherhood Lost: A Feminist Account of Pregnancy Loss in America*, Routledge.
- In-class: prep for Reading Response 4 assignment (due by November 30)

November 2

- Briggs, Chapter 5: "Gay Married, with Children," 149-187, *How All Politics Became Reproductive Politics*
- In-class work on annotated bibliography

November 7

- Selected pages from Gould, Deborah. 2009. *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight Against AIDS*, University of Chicago Press.
- *Recommended*: Knauer, 2016. "LGBT Older Adults, Chosen Family, and Caregiving," *Journal of Law and Religion*, 150-168.

November 9

- Singal, Jesse. July 2018. "When Children Say They're Trans," *The Atlantic*.
- Peterson, Matt and Caroline Kitchener. "What Do the Parents of Trans Kids Have to Say? Parents of trans children respond to Jesse Singal," *The Atlantic*.
- *Recommended*: Nixon, Laura. 2013. "The Right to (Trans) Parent: A Reproductive Justice Approach to Reproductive Rights, Fertility, and Family-Building Issues Facing Transgender People." *William & Mary Journal of Women and the Law*, 73-103.
- Paper proposal and annotated bibliography due to Canvas by 11:59pm on November 10.

6. Third-Wave Feminism, Reproductive Justice, & Contemporary Issues

November 14

- Price, Kimala. 2010. "What is Reproductive Justice?: How Women of Color Activists are Redefining the Pro-Choice Paradigm," *Meridians*, 42-65.
- *Recommended*: Snyder-Hall, R. Claire. 2010. "Third-Wave Feminism and the Defense of 'Choice.'" *Perspectives on Politics*, 255-261.

November 16

- Cross, Katherine. "[The Price of Our Blood: Why Ferguson is a Reproductive Justice Issue](#)," *Rewire News Group*.
- Hoover, Elizabeth et al. 2012. "[Indigenous Peoples of North America: Environmental Exposures and Reproductive Justice](#)," *Environmental Health Perspectives*, 1645-1649.
- In-class work on peer feedback memos.

November 21

- Bullock, Maggie. March 2020. "The #MeToo Case that Divided the Abortion Rights Movement," *The Atlantic*.
- In-class peer feedback & writing.

November 28

- Reading TBD. In-class peer review & writing.

November 30

- Reading TBD. In-class peer review & writing.
- Reading Response 4 due by 11:59pm.

Final paper due December 14.