# VASSAR COLLEGE

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

**POLI 376: THE POLITICS OF HUMAN REPRODUCTION**

**Senior Seminar**

Vassar College

Spring 2015

Tuesday 4-6 pm

Annie Menzel

103 Rockefeller Hall

Office Hours:

Thursday, 2:15-4:15 p.m.

**DESCRIPTION**

What is the relationship between human reproduction and our political worlds? This course examines the nexus between parent-child relationships and political subjectivities, as well as the very meaning of human reproduction itself, from socialist, existentialist, feminist, critical race, anti-colonial, post-humanist, and queer theoretical perspectives. We approach these themes through three units, each comprising a key conceptual angle on reproduction and the political, as well as a more empirical text that will orient our theorizations toward a contemporary political problem of human reproduction. We begin with *kinship and citizenship*, how we think the kinship relations at the core of our notions of “the human,” and how these categories connect with both private and state violence. We then consider *bodies: generations and circulations:* the power and the pathologies that circulate intergenerationally, in our bodies and the symbolic investments through which we live them, in both biological and non-biological family formations, within local, national, and global economies. Finally, we turn to *biopolitics*, or the official regulation and optimization of collective life through technologies of measurement and intervention (usually entailing violence, exclusion, or even death for some categories of people). Beginning with Michel Foucault’s seminal conceptualization of the term, we turn to recent work that tracks biopolitical management, violence, and subversion at scales from the societal to the sub-cellular, with implications for how we understand the relationships between technoscience and some key contemporary political questions, including gender identity, racial disparities in health, and feminist practice.

**TEXTS**

The books below are available for purchase at the Juliet bookstore. Readings not included below will be uploaded to Moodle.

Sophocles, *Antigone*, translated by Ruby Blondell (Focus Classical Library, 1998)

Judith Butler, *Antigone’s Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death* (Columbia University Press, 2002)

Bonnie Honig, *Antigone, Interrupted* (Cambridge University Press, 2013)

Andrea Smith, *Conquest:* *Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide* (South End Press, 2005)

Audre Lorde, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name—A Biomythography* (Crossing Press, 1982)

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

Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction* (Vintage, 1990) (Older edition OK)

Paul (Beatriz) Preciado, *Testo Junkie*: *Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era* (The Feminist Press at CUNY, 2013)

Michelle Murphy, *Seizing the Means of Reproduction: Entanglements of Feminism, Health, and Technoscience* (Duke University Press, 2012)

**REQUIREMENTS and ASSIGNMENTS**

Each class will consist of lecture and active discussion, beginning with a 30-minute student presentation of the assigned text. Attendance and participation are required.

Everyone is expected to:

1. Complete each session’s reading prior to the seminar and bring the reading to seminar;

2. Participate regularly and thoughtfully;

3. Listen carefully to others;

4. Write a short response paper (see instructions below) to the assigned text(s) each week, due at 5 pm Mondays, uploaded to Moodle;

5. Complete one of the following: 1) a 12-15-page research paper that theorizes a political problem of human reproduction OR 2) a creative or service project related to human reproduction, accompanied by a short essay reflecting on the project in terms of one or more of the theoretical texts that w read in class. A proposal is due 3/10 in class, final draft due 5/20 in my mailbox. More precise parameters will be defined a few weeks into the semester;

6. Prepare a 30-minute presentation on the assigned material for one week of the semester.

**Evaluation**

In-Class Participation: 15%

Weekly Response Papers: 25%

Research paper/project: 40% (proposal 10%; final draft/product 30%)

30-minute in-class presentation of assigned text: 20%

**Reading Response Assignment**

Due Date: ongoing, 5 pm Mondays before every class meeting for which readings are assigned.

The reading response consists of two parts:

**1) Summary**

A succinct summary of the reading for the day (for days with multiple readings, you may select one), approximately 250-300 words.

**2) Quoted passage and discussion**

From the text(s)s, choose, quote, and cite with page numbers a passage that you find particularly striking—important, problematic, interesting, insightful, wrong, inspiring, confusing, eloquent, revealing, etc. Briefly discuss the passage. Starting points for discussion might include:

* questions that the passage raises
* how it surprised you (and what was surprising in particular)
* what it reveals or adds to our knowledge about the unit theme/broader course themes
* how it connects with other course readings

**The response should be 500-750 words in total.**

**Presentation**

The content of your presentation should include 1) the major take-away of the reading(s) for the week, perhaps (though this is not mandatory) including the identification and interpretation of a few key passages; and 2) a substantive discussion or demonstration of what the reading(s) add(s) to our understanding of the political entailments of human reproduction. This may include linking the text to other course readings; to other relevant scholarly work; to issues in law or jurisprudence; to current and/or historical events; to cultural products—films, music, advertisements, etc; or to other elements of our collective life.

There is no prescribed format for the presentation; you may incorporate handouts, powerpoint, youtube clips, facilitated discussion, audio and/or visual resources, a skit, etc, or just use the board. Feel free to ask other students to participate, though they are not required to do so and the presenter is responsible for the final product. Both organization and creativity will be rewarded, so choose a format that you feel best suits you and the material.

Do remember that this is a major assignment and prepare accordingly.

**DISABILITIES SUPPORT**

Academic accommodations are available for students registered with the Office for Accessibility and Educational Opportunity.  Students in need of ADA/504 accommodations should schedule an appointment with me early in the semester to discuss any accommodations for this course that have been approved by the Office for Accessibility and Educational Opportunity, as indicated in your AEO accommodation letter.

**ELECTRONIC DEVICES**

Laptops and smartphones are fine for note-taking, scheduling, and perhaps the occasional info look-up to enhance or clarify discussion, but please do not email, text, update social media, surf the net, make purchases on amazon.com, etc., as these activities draw energy away from the discussion and are distracting to me and to fellow students.

**SCHEDULE**

2/3 Introduction: What is reproduction? What is “the human?” What are the politics of these designations?

**Part I: Kinship and Citizenship**

2/10 Sophocles, *Antigone*

(2/24 actual class meeting) 2/17 Butler, *Antigone’s Claim*

(3/3) 2/24 Honig, *Antigone, Interrupted*

(3/10) 3/3 Smith, *Conquest*

**Part II: Bodies: generations and circulations**

RESEARCH/PROJECT PROPOSAL DUE 3/17 TO ME BY EMAIL

3/31 Lorde, *Zami*

Film: When the Bough Breaks

4/7 Beauvoir, *Second Sex* (selections: “Childhood” and “The Mother”)

Hortense Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book”

4/9 (THURSDAY MAKE-UP SESSION)

Lee Edelman, *No Future*, Chapter 1, The Future is Kid Stuff

Jafari Allen, For “The Children” Dancing the Beloved Community, *Souls*, 2009

James Baldwin, “My Dungeon Shook: Letter to My Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Emancipation” from *The Fire Next Time*

4/14 Briggs, ***S****omebody's Children: The Politics of Transracial and Transnational Adoption*

**Part III: Biopolitics**

4/21 Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Vol. 1* and selections from *Society Must Be Defended*

4/28 Preciado, *Testo junkie*: *Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*

5/5 The Politics of Reproductive Technologies

Dana Ain-Davis, Between Womb and Home: Neonatal Intensive Care Units and The Aftermath of Prematurity

Guest visit: Professor Davis, Queens College, CUNY

Additional readings may include:

Dorothy Roberts, *Fatal Invention* (selections)

Sarah Franklin, *Biological Relatives* (selections)

Mary Shanley, *Making Babies, Making Families* (selections)

Charis Cussins, “Confessions of a bioterrorist”

5/12 Murphy, *Seizing the Means of Reproduction: Entanglements of Feminism, Health, and Technoscience*

**FINAL DRAFT OF RESEARCH PAPER/PROJECT DUE IN MY MAILBOX BY Friday, 5/22 AT 5 PM14**