

Image: Teree and Kennasha, Midwives, My Sisters Keeper Birth and Midwifery Services

http://lanebphotography.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/MSK-Blog-10-1024x683.jpg

Fulbright-Hays Group Project Abroad Program

African Knowledge Systems: Health, Healing, and Well-being in South Africa

Reclaiming the Womb: Indigenous Knowledge, Medical Authority, and the Black Doula Birth Renaissance

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Overview

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in 2021, the birthing mortality for Black American women was 69.9% per 100,000, regardless of age, educational attainment, or socioeconomic status. While this number has decreased, according to the report on "Maternal Mortality Rates in the United States, 2022" by Donna L. Hoyert, Ph.D., Division of Vital Statistics of the CDC, as of "2022, the maternal mortality rate for Black women was 49.5 deaths per 100,000 live births and was significantly higher than rates for White (19.0), Hispanic (16.9), and Asian (13.2) women."[1]

The project examines the transnational continuities and ruptures in Black maternal care practices by tracing the epistemological lineage from Indigenous African midwifery to contemporary Black doula movements in the United States. Through a reproductive justice framework, this project interrogates how colonial, Western biomedical, and carceral systems have historically undermined Black American women's autonomy over childbirth, while also foregrounding the resilience and revival of culturally rooted birth practices.

This work contributes to scholarly and activist conversations about reproductive governance, health equity, and the reclamation of Indigenous and diasporic knowledge systems in maternal health policies and practices. From a multidisciplinary approach, it integrates feminist theory, historical public health records, and Black maternal memoirs to reveal how African midwives and U.S.-based doulas navigate and challenge state-sanctioned definitions of "skilled" care. By centering the knowledge of Black birthing practices, *Reclaiming the Womb* repositions the act of birthing as a site of political resistance and cultural survival.

[1] Hoyert DL. Maternal Mortality Rates in the United States, 2022. *NCHS Health E-Stats*. 2024. DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.15620/cdc/152992

Project oriented toward college-level courses:

- Introduction to Black Feminisms
- Constructs of Poverty in the U.S.
- Black Perspectives: Race, Class, and Gender

Goals

1. **Explore African Midwifery as Foundational to Diasporic Birthing Epistemologies**
   Position African Indigenous midwifery as a primary, authoritative system of maternal care that colonial and racist biomedical frameworks have systematically marginalized.

2. **Examine Black Doula Work as Continuation and Resistance**
   Explore how Black doulas in the U.S. carry forward African-centered practices and challenge institutional racism in reproductive health through community-rooted models of care.

3. **Articulate a Transnational Reproductive Justice Framework**
   Connect African and diasporic birthing practices to highlight a global tradition of Black maternal knowledge, resistance, and advocacy beyond Western definitions of expertise.

4. **Challenge Western-centric Definitions of "Expertise" in Maternal Care**
   Reposition marginalized midwifery traditions rooted in African Indigenous knowledge systems and establish an epistemic and practical validity within contemporary reproductive health discourse. Center traditional birth attendants as legitimate and critical actors in global health systems.

5. **Analyze the Contemporary Doula Movement as a Site of Cultural and Political Resistance**
   Investigate how Black doulas in the United States draw from ancestral knowledge and community-based care models to counter medical racism, obstetric violence, and institutional neglect. Explore how the doula movement functions not only as a form of care but also as a strategy for reclaiming reproductive autonomy and advocating for structural change.

6. **Bridge Transnational Perspectives on Reproductive Justice and Maternal Advocacy**
   Connect maternal health struggles and innovations across South African Zulu culture and the U.S., to build a comparative and transnational framework for understanding reproductive justice. Emphasize shared histories of medical exclusion and resistance while illuminating the global scope of Black women's activism in reimagining maternal health care that is culturally grounded, equitable, and person-centered.

Key Themes

- Black Birth Renaissance: Gestures toward embracing the U.S. doula movement and reincorporating Indigenous birthing practices.
- Indigenous Knowledge: Connects to African epistemologies.
- Medical Authority: Acknowledges/challenges Western dominance.
- Reclaiming: Signaling a restorative justice and decolonial frame.
- Wisdom of the Womb: Honors ancestral and embodied knowledge.

Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

1. Compare Western biomedical paradigms with African Indigenous birthing epistemologies in historical and contemporary contexts. Construct arguments and collaborative problem-solving for culturally inclusive and decolonized approaches to global maternal health.

2. Analyze the role of reproductive justice and feminist standpoint theory in maternal health discourse. Engage and apply the Safe Motherhood Initiative (SMI) and its implications on Indigenous birthing practices and African continental birthing practices in Africa and the United States. The Safe Motherhood Initiative (SMI) is a global effort, launched in 1987, to reduce maternal mortality and morbidity during pregnancy and childbirth, and initiated by the World Bank, WHO, and UNFPA, the primary goal was to reduce maternal deaths by half by the year 2000. The SMI emphasizes the importance of providing access to quality reproductive health services, including family planning, antenatal care, and skilled birth attendance.[2]

3. Articulate the principles of reproductive justice. Identify and explain epistemic and obstetric violence related to global health strategies and reproductive governance.

4. Critically assess the sociopolitical structures across geographic contexts (racial, cultural, and institutional) that influence maternal health outcomes and the exclusion of Indigenous midwifery.

5. Interpret and synthesize interdisciplinary sources, including scholarly texts, personal narratives, and policy documents, to produce original academic, policy-based, or creative work that proposes culturally inclusive, decolonized approaches to maternal care.

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[2] Emily Santora, "The Impact of the Safe Motherhood Initiative from 1987 to 2000." *Embryo Project Encyclopedia* (2020-05-02). ISSN: 1940-5030 https://hdl.handle.net/10776/13150

Methodology

Exploring reproductive justice, Indigenous epistemologies, and carceral control, **Reclaiming the Womb: Indigenous Knowledge, Medical Authority, and the Black Birth Renaissance** employs a qualitative, interdisciplinary pedagogical methodology rooted in critical feminist praxis and decolonial education theory. Designed for undergraduate students in Black Studies, Women and Gender Studies, or Public Health, the approach is informed by bell hooks' concept of education as the practice of freedom. It incorporates Black feminist thought and Indigenous epistemological frameworks.

1. **Curriculum Design Framework**
   - Lesson plans are structured to engage students in dialogical learning, centering marginalized voices and knowledges. Each plan is anchored by key themes: reproductive justice, epistemic violence, medical authority, carceral maternal care, and Indigenous midwifery traditions. To encourage students to question hegemonic systems, particularly in maternal healthcare, and recognize power dynamics in knowledge production, key themes are explored through multi-modal materials including scholarly articles, policy briefs, video journalism, documentaries, and oral histories.

2. **Content Curation and Textual Selection**
   - Chosen core texts span continental African and U.S. contexts, enabling comparative transnational analysis, highlighting how structural violence operates across geopolitical spaces. Selected texts demonstrate intersectional relevance and scholarly rigor.
     - Esther Ajayi-Lowo's analysis of the Safe Motherhood Initiative
     - Legal and medical critiques from Diaz-Tello, Sufrin, and Nash
     - Narratives from reproductive justice organizations (e.g., SisterSong)
     - Media representations of Black maternal mortality and doula activism

3. Student-Centered Learning Activities

- Designed to promote agency, encourage diverse forms of intellectual expression, and facilitate embodied learning experiences, lessons incorporate student-centered strategies, including:
  - Close readings and text-based analysis to develop critical literacy
  - Lectures to scaffold key theoretical frameworks
  - Small group discussions for collaborative learning and reflection
  - Multimedia analysis to visualize lived experiences (e.g., birth documentaries, doula movement videos)
  - Assignments such as critical analysis papers, zines, podcasts, and policy briefs to engage diverse learning styles

4. Decolonial Pedagogical Ethos

- From a standpoint epistemology, considering that the lived experience of Indigenous African, Black American, and incarcerated birthing people is a critical site of knowledge production, a decolonial pedagogical methodology privileges non-Western knowledge systems and positions students as co-creators of knowledge. By reclaiming Indigenous birthing practices and interrogating Western medical authority, the curriculum works to decolonize how health, motherhood, and expertise are taught in academic spaces.

5. Assessment Philosophy

- Students are evaluated not only on content mastery but also on their ability to articulate ethical, culturally competent responses to contemporary issues in maternal health. Assessment strategies are formative and summative, aiming to measure comprehension and transformative engagement. Rubrics are aligned with Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs), which emphasize:
  - Critical thinking and comparative analysis
  - Cultural literacy and epistemological critique
  - Interdisciplinary synthesis and creative communication

Sources (Textual):

"Ostara Initiative." n.d. Ostara Initiative. https://www.ostarainitiative.org/research--policy.html.

"Race and Birth in Dallas-Ft.Worth – Guest Post by My Sister's Keeper – Lane B Photography." n.d. https://lanebphotography.com/race-and-birth-my-sisters-keeper/.

Ajayi-Lowo, Esther Oluwashina. "Safe Motherhood Initiative: Whither African Indigenous Birthing Knowledge?" *Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism* 23, no. 1 (2024): 263-294. https://muse.jhu.edu/article/932629.

Bondar, Sarah. Hurt. *Hungry, and Handcuffed: How the Prison System Fails Pregnant Women and Their Newborns*, 25 Marq. Ben & Soc. Welfare L. Rev. 248 (2024).

Crenshaw, Kimberle. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1241–99. https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039.

Messelaar, Aaron Martin William. "A True Story of the Midwife," in *Griqua Culture and Superstitions*. South Africa: Mbana Designs and Printing, 2023.

Monroe, Shafia M., Zalayshia Jackson, Mariah A. Taylor, and Consuelo Vazquez. "Birth, Healing, and Women of Color: Symposium Keynote Lecture and Discussion." *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 117, no. 2 (2016): 232–51. https://doi.org/10.5403/oregonhistq.117.2.0232.

Mulaudzi, Fhumulani Mavis, and Rachel T. Lebese, eds. *Working with Indigenous Knowledge: Strategies for Health Professionals*. Cape Town: AOSIS Books, 2022. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK601357/.

- Musie, Maurine R., Rafiat A. Anokwuru, Roinah N. Ngunyuiu, and Sanele Lukhele, "Chapter 6: African Indigenous Beliefs and Practices During Pregnancy, Birth and After Birth," 85 - 106.

Nash, Jennifer C. "Birthing Black Mothers: Birth Work and the Making of Black Maternal Political Subjects." Women's *Studies Quarterly* 47, no. 3/4 (2019): 29–50. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26803260.

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Pollock, Anne. "Reproductive Injustice: Serena Williams's Birth Story" in *Sickening: Anti-Black Racism and Health Disparities in the United States*, 117–32. University of Minnesota Press, 2021. https://doi.org/10.5749/j.ctv1t2mz9r.10.

Roberts, Dorothy E. *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*. 1st ed. New York: Pantheon Books, 1997.

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Roth, Rachel. "Prisons as Sites of Reproductive Injustice." *Off Our Backs* 36, no. 4 (2006): 69–71. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20838728.

Sanchez, Corrie. "Herstories and the Braiding of Environment and Reproductive Justice to Protect Those Most Vulnerable." *Journal of American Indian Education* 55, no. 3 (2016): 48–71. https://doi.org/10.5749/jamerindieduc.55.3.0048.

Sharif, Sasha. "Where Have All the Midwives Gone? The Campaign Against Black Midwives and Its Impact on Black Maternal Outcomes," *Public Square*, August 8, 2024. https://www.publicsq.org/latest-articles/where-have-all-the-midwives-gone-the-campaign-against-black-midwives-in-the-us-and-its-impact-on-black-maternal-outcomes.

Shockley, K.G. The Complexity of Developing Properly Trained Education Professionals for African American Children: Exploring an African Indigenous Socialization Process. *Urban Rev* 43, 379–395 (2011). https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-010-0157-7

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Sources (Videos):

American Black Women Face Disproportionately High Rates of Maternal Mortality
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xq1G2pKCYyw

Are Doulas the Answer to Reducing the Black Maternal Mortality Rate?https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DhfEA9rfKzs

Belly of the Beast (Film Trailer)
https://youtu.be/IoD7VgFl9EI?si=c3ggR5p58eSGpLVk

Birth: The Midwives' Fight for Life in Africa
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mWfKP2DUoKY

Birth Behind Bars: The Black Maternal Mortality Crisis Part 2
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sLHJl8BLicI

Black Doulas Combat the Maternal Mortality Crisis
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5IlYqxmfj9E

Black Mothers Matter: Racism and Childbirth in America (highlights)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cPRPZclLluY

Black, Pregnant, Detained
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2NDto_YVo1Y

Black Women at Greater Risk for Maternal Mortality | GMA
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nlfHmWInYGA

Born Behind Bars: They Can Take Your Baby Away | Full Episode (S1, E1) | Lifetime
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lE6Qm_Q6Vh8

Expectant Black Mothers Find Support with Doulas and Midwives | Nightline
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qozewq0YvEY

Giving Birth While Incarcerated: What Becoming a Mother in Prison Looks Like
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BOl_hPaQEYU

Hospital Chaos & A Brutal Confrontation | Born Behind Bars | Full Episode (S1, E6) | Lifetime
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ua2YonDObJU

Liberia: Safe Birth with Midwives
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CHCMpF4kHSI

Lifelines - Between Life and Death
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0TcG-jfCZuA

Many Incarcerated Women Shackled in Childbirth
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WxSfVQ0dUnU

Mothers in Prison: The impact of Incarceration on Motherhood
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pqTXt3jqchQ

Pregnant Inmates Battle It | Born Behind Bars | Full Episode (S1, E9) | Lifetime
https://www.youtube.com/watchv=xhRYd3T0iP4&pp=ygURQmlydGggQmVoaW5kIEJhcnM%3D

South Africa: Traditional Birth Attendants Conference Highlights
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=smTrcFM_MmM

The Boma Show Kikuyu Childbirth Ceremony
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BNsvlwE-ick

The Hell and Horror of Giving Birth While Black
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZeihIUKOL94

Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs) in Loiborsiret Village
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OPmrvs5AhiU

Why Pregnancy Is So Dangerous for Black Women | Perspective
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fiZYqWHgMjc

Zulu Birth Project in Grand Rapids, Michigan
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1G8KFeJveTc&pp=ygUXenVsdSBiaXJ0aGluZyBwcmFjdGljZXM%3D

Lesson Plan 1: Competing Epistemologies

Indigenous Birthing Practices, Western Medicine, and Black Doulas in the U.S.

Key Terms:

Indigenous Knowledge; Western Biomedical Authority; U.S. Doula Movement

Objective:

Students will investigate the delegitimization of African and Black American Indigenous birth knowledge and how African Indigenous birthing knowledge challenges dominant Western biomedical models. They will explore how the resurgence of the doula movement in the U.S. represents a cultural reclaiming of holistic, community-based birth support for Black women.

Key Concepts:

- Birth as Ceremony vs. Birth as Procedure
- Birth Justice
- Cultural Appropriateness in Healthcare
- Indigenous Epistemology
- Reproductive Autonomy
- Western Biomedical Paradigm

Materials:

- "Race and Birth in Dallas-Ft.Worth – Guest Post by My Sister's Keeper – Lane B Photography." n.d. https://lanebphotography.com/race-and-birth-my-sisters-keeper/.
- Ajayi-Lowo, Esther Oluwashina. "Safe Motherhood Initiative: Whither African Indigenous Birthing Knowledge?" *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* 23, no. 1 (2024): 263-294 (pgs. 268-71, 278-84) https://muse.jhu.edu/article/932629.
- Monroe, Shafia M., Zalayshia Jackson, Mariah A. Taylor, and Consuelo Vazquez. "Birth, Healing, and Women of Color: Symposium Keynote Lecture and Discussion." *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 117, no. 2 (2016): 232–51. https://doi.org/10.5403/oregonhistq.117.2.0232.
- Mulaudzi, Fhumulani Mavis, and Rachel T. Lebese, eds. *Working with Indigenous Knowledge: Strategies for Health Professionals*. Cape Town: AOSIS Books, 2022. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK601357/.
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- Video: Expectant Black Mothers Find Support with Doulas and Midwives
    - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qozewq0YvEY
- Video: Why Black Maternal Health & Doulas Are So Important
    - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ece3D7Q6dMk

Key Questions:

- How is "skilled" birth defined and by whom?
- In what ways are African and African American birthing people reclaiming authority over childbirth?
- What does the doula movement represent in terms of resistance and return?

Lesson Structure (75 minutes):

Students will analyze the structural erasure of Indigenous birth knowledge. They will compare traditional midwifery practices from Ajayi-Lowo and Monroe with the doula care models Nash describes.

1. **Opening Activity (10 min)**
   - Writing Reflection:
     - What comes to mind when considering a 'normal' birth in the U.S.
     - Who decided what is normal?
     - Who is regarded as an expert in birthing care?"
     - Define "skilled birth" in their own words.

2. **Lecture Part I: Competing Knowledge Systems (15 mins)**
   - Introduce Indigenous Knowledge vs. Western Biomedical Paradigms
   - Define Indigenous Epistemology using Mulaudzi & Spitzer:
     - Emphasis on community, spiritual connection, and oral traditions.
   - Contrast with Western Biomedical Paradigm:
     - Standardization, hierarchical "expertise" (doctor > midwife > doula).
     - Introduce the concept of "Birth as Ceremony vs. Procedure"
     - Monroe: Discussion of birth as *healing*, *ancestral*, and *sacred*.
     - Safe Motherhood Initiative's exclusion of African midwifery.
     - What happens when only one way of knowing is institutionalized in birth care?

3. **Video: Guided Reaction (10 mins)**
   - Why Black Maternal Health & Doulas Are So Important" (5 min)
     - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ece3D7Q6dMk

   - **Think-Pair-Share:**
     - What knowledge do doulas bring to the birthing space?
     - How do doulas reclaim care from institutions?
     - What parallels do you see between Indigenous African midwives and modern U.S. Black doulas?

4. **Lecture Part II: Doula Movement as Resistance (15 mins)**
   - Birth Justice and Cultural Reclamation
     - Define Birth Justice and Reproductive Autonomy
     - Discuss the lived impact of medical racism
     - Explore how Black doulas:
       - Act as cultural translators and advocates
       - Counter epistemic and obstetric violence
       - Bridge intercultural and intergenerational wisdom

   - Aspects of Birthing Criminalization:
     - Black birthing people and doulas: Surveilled, silenced, or excluded.
     - Growing criminalization of abortion and limits on doula access.

5. **Small Group Discussion (15 mins)**
   - How is "skilled" birth defined and by whom?
   - In what ways are African and Black American birthing people reclaiming authority over childbirth?
   - What does the doula movement represent in terms of resistance and return?
   - What role does the criminalization of abortion or doula exclusion play in this larger story?

6. **Wrap-Up and Exit Ticket (10 mins)**
   - Map epistemic tensions: Indigenous vs. Western Biomedical
   - Connect epistemology to power, policy, and personhood
   - Exit Ticket:
     - What's one thing that surprised you or shifted your thoughts about birth care today?

Take Home Assignment(s):

For this assignment, you will explore how reproductive injustice affects birthing practices across different contexts (locally and globally). Using sources from this module, reflect on the systems of control, knowledge, and power that shape reproductive experiences. Pick one of the formats below that best fits your learning and creative style:

1. **Position Paper (5 pages)**
   - Using Ajayi-Lowo and Nash, evaluate community doulas' integration (or co-optation) into public health strategies. What lessons can be learned from African Indigenous frameworks for resisting medical hegemony?
2. **Comparative Fieldwork Journal (Creative/Analytical)**
   - Observe or interview (hypothetical/simulated) traditional and clinical birth care providers. Based on assigned readings (e.g., Monroe, Ajayi-Lowo), write a comparative journal blending observations with critical theory.
   - Skills: Ethnographic thinking, reflective writing, critical comparison
3. **Digital Story Map or Interactive Poster**
   - Use platforms/mediums to create an interactive presentation contrasting Indigenous birthing traditions across two regions (e.g., KwaZulu-Natal vs. Oregon-based Black midwives). Include audio clips, images, and citations.
   - Skills: Digital storytelling, comparative research, visual organization
4. **Video Record Mini-Debate**
   - Groups represent health ministries, Indigenous midwives, or doulas. Simulate a policy meeting about integrating traditional knowledge into maternal health systems. Students must prepare a position paper or negotiation script.
   - Skills: Argumentation, collaboration, role-based empathy

Lesson Plan 2: Reproductive Justice and Obstetric Violence

From South Africa to South Central: Reproductive Justice and Carceral Control in Maternal Health

Key Terms:

Carceral Feminism; Obstetric and Epistemic Violence; Reproductive Justice

Objective:

Students will critically examine how reproductive justice frameworks apply not only to global health policy but also to U.S. policing and carceral practices, especially in the treatment of marginalized pregnant women during childbirth.

Key Concepts:

- Reproductive Justice
- Epistemic and Obstetric Violence
- Carceral Feminism
- Institutional Racism
- Intersectionality (Crenshaw)
- Structural Violence

Materials:

- “Ostara Initiative.” n.d. Ostara Initiative. https://www.ostarainitiative.org/research--policy.html.
- “Reproductive Justice, Sister Song.” n.d. *Sister Song*. https://www.sistersong.net/reproductive-justice.
- Crenshaw, Kimberle. “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color.” *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1241–99. https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039.
- Pollock, Anne. “Reproductive Injustice: Serena Williams’s Birth Story” in *Sickening: Anti-Black Racism and Health Disparities in the United States*, 117–32. University of Minnesota Press, 2021. https://doi.org/10.5749/j.ctv1t2mz9r.10.
- Roberts, Dorothy E. *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*. 1st ed. New York: Pantheon Books, 1997.
- Ross, Loretta J., and Rickie Solinger. *Reproductive Justice: An Introduction*. Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2017. https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520963207.
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- Video: Belly of the Beast (Film Trailer)
    - https://youtu.be/IoD7VgFl9EI?si=c3ggR5p58eSGpLVk
- Video: Birth: The Midwives’ Fight for Life in Africa
    - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mWfKP2DUoKY

Key Questions:

- How does the idea of Intersectionality help us understand the challenges faced by Black women when it comes to reproductive rights?
- After hearing about Serena Williams’s birth story and the midwives working in Africa, how does racism and lack of resources affect maternal health in different parts of the world? Are there any similarities?
- What does “reproductive justice” mean, and how is it different from just talking about being “pro-choice”? Why is this difference significant for Black incarcerated women?

Lesson Structure (75 minutes):

1. **Opening Activity (10 min):**
   - View Video Clip: Belly of the Beast (Film Trailer)
     - https://youtu.be/IoD7VgFl9EI?si=c3ggR5p58eSGpLVk
   - Students journal for 5 minutes. Resume and Discuss:
     - What feelings or thoughts does this raise for you?
     - What assumptions might society hold about who deserves dignity during childbirth?"

2. **Lecture (15 min):**
   - Introduce the concept of reproductive justice theory.
     - The right to have/not to have children
     - The right to parent children in safe and supportive environments. Connect to systemic control over birth (e.g., forced sterilization, shackling in prisons, denial of doulas for Black mothers).

3. **Jigsaw Reading and Small Group Discussion (45 min):**
   - Explore reproductive justice through various lenses (race, incarceration, healthcare, and global health) using a jigsaw discussion format to promote student engagement and deeper understanding.
     - "Ostara Initiative." n.d. Ostara Initiative.
     - "Reproductive Justice, Sister Song." n.d. *Sister Song*.
     - Sufrin, Carolyn, Alexa Kolbi-Molinas, and Rachel Roth. "Reproductive Justice, Health Disparities and Incarcerated Women in the United States." *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* 47, no. 4 (2015): 213–19.
   - **Guiding Discussion Questions:**
     - What are the overlapping issues/key takeaways in reading/video?
     - What injustices or challenges were highlighted?
     - How do readings/videos reflect reproductive rights in/justice?
     - What similarities exist in the denial of bodily autonomy?
     - What role does race play in both scenarios?
     - How is authority (power and systems) constructed in relation to "expertise" and "control" over pregnant bodies?
     - How can this knowledge help us think about real-world change or advocacy?

- **Breakout Groups:**
  - Intersectionality & Identity
    - Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins" (selected sections)
    - SisterSong website: Reproductive Justice definition
  - Incarceration & Reproductive Rights
    - Ostara Initiative website
    - Sufrin et al., "Reproductive Justice and Incarcerated Women"
    - "Belly of the Beast" film trailer
  - Race, Health, and Reproductive Injustice in the U.S.
    - Pollock, "Serena Williams's Birth Story"
    - Dorothy Roberts, Killing the Black Body (selected excerpt)
  - Global Maternal Health & Midwifery
    - "Birth: The Midwives' Fight for Life in Africa" video
    - Ross & Solinger, Reproductive Justice: An Introduction (global perspectives chapter)

4. **Exit Ticket (5 min):**
   - On a sticky note or digital form, respond to:
     - "What is one action, policy, or cultural change needed to advance reproductive justice for birthing people globally and locally?"

Take Home Assignment(s):

For this assignment, you will explore how reproductive justice is more than a set of policies. Using sources from this module, reflect on the systems of control, knowledge, and power that shape reproductive experiences. Pick one of the formats below that best fits your learning and creative style:

1. **Critical Reflection Paper Assignment:** (5 pages)
   - Using Anne Pollock's "Reproductive Injustice: Serena Williams's Birth Story," Dorothy E. Roberts' *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty,* and at least one documented U.S. case, reflect on how reproductive injustice manifests across borders. How does carceral control over birthing people in the U.S. echo the epistemic and obstetric violence described in Nigeria? What does this tell us about whose knowledge and bodily autonomy are valued—and whose are not?
   - Skills: Critical Thinking, Interdisciplinary Research Skills, Ethical Reflection

2. **Policy Brief (2–3 pages)**
   - Write a policy brief for a state legislator about ending the shackling of pregnant incarcerated individuals. Include background, current law, ethical considerations, and evidence-based recommendations.
   - Skills: Policy Translation, Persuasive Writing, Legal Analysis

3. **Podcast Segment (10–15 minutes)**
   - Record a narrated podcast-style segment addressing obstetric violence in carceral settings. Use Loretta J. Ross and Rickie Solinger's *Reproductive Justice: An Introduction* and Carolyn Sufrin, Alexa Kolbi-Molinas, and Rachel Roth's "Reproductive Justice, Health Disparities and Incarcerated Women in the United States," critique of global maternal health policy.
   - Skills: Oral Storytelling, Communication and Writing, Comparative Analysis

4. **Visual Timeline or Infographic**
    - Create a timeline or digital infographic illustrating the evolution of reproductive control in carceral systems (U.S. or global). Must include at least five scholarly references and two case examples.
    - Skills: Visual Literacy, Synthesis, Research Presentation

Rubric

Analytical/Critical Essay

Criteria	Excellent (A)	Proficient (B)	Developing (C)	Needs Work (D/F)
Thesis & Argumentation	Clear, original thesis with strong argumentation throughout	Clear thesis; mostly sustained argument	Thesis is present but underdeveloped	Lacks thesis or coherent argument
Engagement with Readings	Integrates multiple readings with depth, quotes, and synthesis	Uses 2+ readings effectively, though with less nuance	Refers to readings but may summarize without analysis	Limited or incorrect use of texts
Critical Thinking	Demonstrates insight, complexity, and originality	Competent analysis with occasional depth	Some descriptive writing; limited critical engagement	Mostly summary; lacks analysis
Structure & Clarity	Well-organized with clear transitions and academic tone	Logical flow; a few minor issues with clarity	Organization is uneven or confusing	Lacks coherence or clarity
Citation & Mechanics	Free of grammatical errors. Uses citations consistently.	Minor grammar issues. Mostly correct citations.	Several grammar/citation issues.	Frequent errors in grammar and citation.

Policy Brief (2–3 pages, concise and applied)

Criteria	Excellent (A)	Proficient (B)	Developing (C)	Needs Work (D/F)
Problem Identification	Clearly identifies issue with data and context	Identifies issue with some clarity	Problem is vaguely described	Lacks clear definition of problem
Evidence & Support	Uses strong evidence from course texts and external sources	Uses appropriate but limited sources	Evidence is weak or poorly integrated	Lacks credible support
Recommendations	Actionable, realistic, and well-argued recommendations	Logical recommendations but limited detail	Recommendations are vague	None or unrealistic suggestions
Conciseness & Format	Follows professional brief format; clear and concise	Mostly follows brief format; wordy at times	Disorganized or too wordy	Off-topic or unstructured
Style & Professionalism	Tone is persuasive and tailored to a policymaker audience	Tone mostly appropriate	Tone inconsistent or casual	Unprofessional tone

Creative/Multimedia Project (zine, podcast, story map, exhibit)

Criteria	Excellent (A)	Proficient (B)	Developing (C)	Needs Work (D/F)
Conceptual Depth	Shows exceptional creativity and depth of thought; strong integration of course themes	Creative and well-conceived; connects clearly to course	Concept is somewhat shallow or unclear	Weak or disconnected concept
Connection to Readings/Theory	Strong, explicit connection to 2+ course readings or theories	Clearly engages with 1–2 readings/theories	Mentions readings but lacks depth or accuracy	Minimal or no engagement with course material
Execution/Presentation	Professionally presented with attention to aesthetic and technical quality	Clear effort; well-designed or produced	Adequate effort but basic or incomplete design	Rushed, sloppy, or difficult to follow
Reflection Component	Accompanied by a compelling written artist's statement that explains intention and theoretical connections	Statement included; some explanation of choices	Short or underdeveloped reflection	No reflection or minimal explanation
Collaboration (if applicable)	Equitable and coordinated group effort	Mostly equal contribution	Some uneven contribution	Evidence of minimal collaboration