

Web Roundup: Covid-19, Racial Justice, Immigration, Climate Justice, Reproductive Justice, or "How All Politics Became Reproductive Politics"

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By

As I was thinking about the task of reviewing the anthropological, bioethical, and/or STS implications of the past month of news, my mind kept returning to the introduction of Laura Briggs' recent book [How All Politics Became Reproductive Politics: From Welfare Reform to Foreclosure to Trump](#). In Briggs' introduction, she finds "reproductive labor" is necessary to both biological reproduction as well as the social reproduction of human life, drawing inherent connections between the "private" and "public" spheres (2017:2). Furthermore, in the U.S. "our public conversations about feminism, race, immigration, trans and gay liberation have centered around questions of children, households, and families" (Briggs 2017:18). In Briggs' book, she points to the interconnections between issues like policing, immigration, civil rights, poverty and reproductive technologies, citing how the common rhetoric surrounding these issues is often discussed through a neoliberal framework as a debate about individual behaviors, characteristics or decisions, rather than what we need to address – the impacts of [structural violence](#), [settler colonialism](#), and [white supremacy](#) on our increasingly unequal society.

The Covid-19 epidemic has brought many social inequalities to the surface of public consciousness. The following examples highlight how social inequalities can be understood through reproductive labor and as reproductive politics. Reproductive politics are important to understanding movements for social justice, as well as the importance of the idea of reproductive justice. [Sistersong](#) defines reproductive justice as "the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities." This movement shows the ways that reproductive politics are inherently connected to other social justice issues, and how many contemporary political rhetoric can be traced back to ideas about households, families, and communities and how people are able to care for themselves and their families.

The [Black Lives Matter \(BLM\) Movement](#) has been successfully advocating for racial justice, currently focusing on police [abolition](#) or [defunding the police](#). In a recent interview, sociologist Daanika Gordon discusses how policing strategies are connected to racial segregation in neighborhoods, where “predominantly Black neighborhoods are simultaneously over-policed when it comes to surveillance and social control, and under-policed when it comes to emergency services.” This is a form of structural racism, connected to historical residential segregation, where U.S. federal housing policies in the 1940s and 50s mandated racial segregation by prohibiting the sale of homes to African American residents, especially in suburban areas ([Rothstein 2017](#)). Racial segregation of neighborhoods is just one factor in unequal investment in communities through state and federal policies and allows for differential strategies such as over- and under-policing. The [Reproductive Justice](#) movement has put out various statements noting how problems like police violence are important for reproductive justice. For example, [Dorothy Roberts recently discussed](#) how police violence is connected to family regulation systems like child protective services; she finds that “regulating and destroying black, brown and indigenous families in the name of child protection has been essential to the [“ongoing white supremacist nation building project”](#) as much as prisons and police.” Having safe neighborhoods with adequate resources in which to take care of one’s children and family is an important tenant of reproductive justice, and police violence is just one area that impacts this ability to care for one’s family.

Environmental racism, such as the [impacts of climate change](#) can also be understood through the a reproductive politics lens, especially in considering the health impacts for pregnant people in communities of color. A recent [review study](#) has found that [“pregnant women exposed to high temperatures or air pollution are more likely to have children who are premature, underweight or stillborn, and African-American mothers and babies are harmed at a much higher rate than the population at large.”](#) The review compiles studies to look at the connections of pollution and birth outcomes, noting that neighborhoods closer to sources of air pollution are connected to lower birth weights. This shows how racial segregation in housing further impacts the safety of neighborhoods, as residents in neighborhoods closer to sources of pollution or in “heat islands” may have not only disparate birth outcomes, but also may have greater expenses for air-conditioning, less access to green spaces, and increased respiratory illnesses based on greater exposure to air pollution.

Furthermore, minority communities have less access to healthcare and receive unequal medical treatment, which can take the form of [systemic medical racism](#). [Health disparities](#) for Black patients have been long documented, as well as the health impacts of systemic racism on Black

bodies, including the finding that “chronic, sustained stress contributes to health conditions like diabetes, obesity, and depression.” Clarence Gravelee’s recent article in Scientific American discusses how [“Racism, not genetics, explains why Black people are dying from Covid-19.”](#) Institutionalized medical racism in scientific research promotes the idea that genetics is the primary factor predisposing African American patients to greater Covid risk, instead of systemic racism and implicit bias. This represents a harmful, disproven [racialized view of biology](#). However, a recent article pointed to implicit bias as a reason that African American patients [were six times less likely to get treatment or testing than white patients](#). This is important to understanding the higher death rates from Covid amongst African Americans, as well as how underlying conditions often pointed to by physicians as “genetic” are actually connected to [structural racism within healthcare institutions in the U.S.](#), as well as social, political and economic inequalities.

These issues have come to the forefront in thinking about the role of medicine in perpetrating [anti-Black policies in medical care](#) both contemporary and historical, and finding solutions for the [medical racism that is exacerbating Covid infection inequalities](#). This month the CDC found that [“age-adjusted hospitalization rates are highest among non-Hispanic American Indian or Alaska Native and non-Hispanic black persons, followed by Hispanic or Latino persons.”](#) Unequal access to healthcare will only exacerbate these pre-existing inequalities, as minority communities may have less access to transportation to medical facilities (for example: the limited [intensive care IHS services near reservations for Native American communities](#)), racial housing segregation, and the communities may be in food deserts. Minority communities are more likely to be essential workers and therefore have a greater chance of exposure to COVID, or have higher rates of preexisting conditions, which may be connected to the previous examples of environmental factors, as well as socio-economic circumstances. These issues all connect to reproductive politics, as they are factors that impact the ability to raise one’s children in healthy, safe, sustainable communities.

Furthermore, the Covid pandemic has resulted in increased state restriction of reproductive rights. The [March web roundup](#) featured a discussion of some of the debates around “essential” medical services and attempts to restrict access to services such as abortion. On June 19, Tennessee passed a [6-week abortion ban](#); abortion bans disproportionately affect women of color, and states passing abortion bans also have the [highest maternal mortality rates](#) for Black women. The pandemic has also caused increased difficulties in accessing reproductive healthcare, especially for [populations who are already impacted by economic, racial and social inequalities](#). However, this weeks Supreme

Court decision in the case [June Medical Services v. Gee](#) case, upheld the [Whole Women's Health v. Hellerstadt](#) ruling from 2016, citing that hospital admitting privileges constitute an undue burden on abortion access. This is an important protection for [abortion access](#), as upholding the law would have closed clinics in Louisiana, requiring additional time, resources, and travel to other states for people seeking abortion care.

Finally, immigration has been a major issue since the start of the pandemic, with travel restrictions limiting global movement and the recently passed [Covid immigration ban](#). Covid cases have [continued to rise](#) in ICE [detention centers](#), which has resulted in a judicial ruling requiring the release of children from ICE custody by mid-July. Immigration and reproduction are deeply connected, often through ideas about [reproducing the nation](#) and [population control policies](#) which historically and currently rely heavily on [racial logics](#) and in the U.S. imperialist ideas about [American exceptionalism](#). These national policies banning immigration in the guise of protecting “American workers” use xenophobic discourse that is ultimately connected to white supremacy, such as [fears that the U.S. population will no longer be majority white](#), and that immigration will result in the loss of jobs for citizens – a [statement which is continually disputed by economists](#).

These examples have shown just some of the interconnections of politics surrounding discussions on race, policing, immigration, climate change and healthcare with reproductive politics. There are so many more examples than the few I have selected as being relevant to this month's news. To find additional commentaries on how contemporary social issues have been shaped by white supremacy, settler colonialism, and structural violence look to organizations such as Sistersong, Black Lives Matter, the NAACP, and other racial and reproductive justice organizations.

As Laura Briggs notes: “Racial justice movements, feminism, and labor have long, deep, and intimate links—including failure and betrayal but also support, solidarity, and, especially because of the many people who worked simultaneously in all of them, inextricable interconnection. Above all, what I want to call to our attention is the ways they were all about reproductive politics—imagining a just society that would see that children were fed, fighting to limit the overreach of business and the long workday, trying to halt involuntary sterilization and sexual assault, and ensuring communities, families, and households had the resources to safely raise healthy children and care for others who could not work” (2017:30). Understanding the interconnections of these movements for social justice, as well as their histories is important for working to change current systems. While this month has seen a few victories such as the passing of [protections for LGBTQAI workers](#), strides forward in the [BLM Movement's](#)

work on [police abolition](#), and the [protection of abortion access](#) – there is still so much work to be done.

For example, we should ask ourselves: how might social issues and inequalities in academia also be connected to reproductive politics? As academics and researchers, we can think about how to make our work align with anti-racist principles, promote social justice through activist scholarship, and interrogate the policies at our institutions which enact violence, especially on minority communities. We can urge universities to [divest from connections to national police violence tactics](#) as well as [on-campus policing](#), provide greater [financial support for faculty of color](#), in order to support [academic diversity](#) threatened by COVID. We can recognize how we are complicit in the reproduction of social inequalities, and work for change. These suggestions are a start, and what follows are a list of just some of the ways that you can support the various social, racial and reproductive justice movements across the U.S.

Do Something:

[American Civil Liberties Union](#)

[Bail Funds](#)

[Navajo & Copi Covid Relief Fund](#)

[Sistersong](#)

[Racial Justice Organizations](#)

[More Racial Justice Organizations](#)

[Reproductive Justice Organizations](#)

[Climate Justice Alliance](#)

[Violence Against the Transgender Community](#)

<https://medium.com/equality-includes-you/what-white-people-can-do-for-racial-justice-f2d18b0e0234>

<https://nymag.com/strategist/article/where-to-donate-for-black-lives-matter.html>

Feel free to add more in the comments...

Further Reading:

[Anti-racism](#)[Anti-racism 2](#)[Anti-racism 3](#)

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AMA citation

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