

## **Celebrating Women's History Month March 2024**

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### **A Note from Our Program Director**

Dear Friends,

When I joined Our Bodies Ourselves Today as its new Program Director last August, my friend Julie exclaimed, “Now you’re not only a women’s historian – you ARE women’s history!” Among the many wonderful congratulations I received, that might be my favorite.

My field of study, gender history, dates to the same time when Our Bodies Ourselves began. The rising swell of feminism in the 1960s asked lots of questions about sexism, oppression, and patriarchy, including when all that happened and who had fought against it before. The Boston Women’s Health Book Collective wasn’t writing a history book in 1969 (or 1984 or 2011) but they made history. Putting women at the center. Talking frankly about our bodies and what they’ve been through. Naming our sexuality, without judgment. Sharing with one another what we know about ourselves. These were and continue to be radical acts. Feminist historians practice them too.

Our Bodies Ourselves Today is focused on connecting people to information, activism, and community in the present. Our most pressing challenge is staying up to date. But at the same time Our Bodies Ourselves has deep roots that help us weather the storms of changing culture, politics, policy, and lived experiences.

As we take time in March to look back at the past, let’s remember our history isn’t just a month or a season. Our history is our root system. It nourishes and grounds us as we keep reaching upward all year long.

Warmest wishes,  
Laura



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### **Explore Our Resources**

#### **The Story of Black Midwifery**

A century ago, there were tens of thousands of Black "granny midwives" in



the United States. Through the 1940s, they delivered a majority of Black babies in many parts of the South. Then government policies and programs drove them out of legal practice.

Today, under 2% of professionally trained nurse-midwives are Black. Meanwhile, maternal mortality in the U.S. keeps increasing, and rates of pregnancy-related deaths are twice as high among Black women. The statistics are connected.

This episode from the podcast *Sexing History* examines the rise, decline and rebirth of Black midwifery. It includes the voices of practitioners who "did more than just catching babies" to sustain their communities.

Historian and Our Bodies Ourselves Today Leadership Council member [Saniya Ghanoui](#) is *Sexing History's* Senior Producer.

Image: Nurse-midwife Maude Caullen, North Carolina, 1951; photograph by W. Eugene Smith. Library of Congress.

[More about the history of African American midwives...](#)

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## Our Bodies Ourselves & the Internet Era

### Kiki Zeldes, Web Manager

We talked with Kiki Zeldes, who has had many different roles with Our Bodies Ourselves since 1997, from developing health and sexuality content for the books to running the website.

**Please tell us about what it was like when you first worked with Our Bodies Ourselves.**

Kiki: In 1997, a lot of people were starting to hear about and explore what we then called the World Wide Web. My first job was to write an introduction for the 1998 print edition of "Our Bodies, Ourselves" about how readers could use the internet to find info on women's health and sexuality. The introduction gave instructions on how to access the internet, recommended specific resources, and listed chatrooms and listservs where readers could connect with other women.



**How have the challenges facing Our Bodies Ourselves changed?**

Kiki: When the founders of Our Bodies Ourselves first met - in 1969 - it was next to impossible to find even the most basic information about women's

bodies, sexuality and sexual health. Today, there is no lack of information – as a matter of fact, a single Google search of “women’s health” brings up more than 4 billion results in less than a second! But the quality of the content varies enormously, and there’s just so much bad information and misinformation out there.

On the other hand, many groups and individuals – including those in the public health, self-help, disability rights, reproductive justice, and patient-centered communities — have been motivated to create better health and sexuality information. They are often small groups with little funding, and their ability to reach a large audience is often limited. I am thrilled that Our Bodies Ourselves Today is expanding on the original mission of Our Bodies Ourselves by not only creating new content but also by finding, vetting, and sharing the best materials from across the internet.

We know that all people deserve the right to healthcare and body autonomy. We know which policies and programs support the health, well-being and human rights of women and gender expansive people. Working together, we have a better chance of creating change, being healthy, and ensuring our rights.

[Learn More about Kiki...](#)

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## Pregnancy Loss: Personal and Historical

### Changing Our Expectations

Historian Lara Freidenfelds reflects on her own personal experience of pregnancy loss and how it shaped the book she ended up researching and writing. She writes, "As a historian, I wanted to investigate why Americans came to have unrealistic expectations about early pregnancy, and how early pregnancy losses went from being an accepted part of reproductive life to a devastating loss for many people."

Freidenfelds published "[The Myth of the Perfect Pregnancy: A History of Miscarriage in America](#)" with Oxford University Press in 2020.



[Read Lara's Story...](#)

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## Upcoming Public Events

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## Our Bodies Ourselves, Then and Now

Thursday, March 28, 2024  
6:30–7:45pm EST  
Live via Zoom

Since its birth at a 1969 female liberation conference in Boston, *Our Bodies Ourselves* has been the source of information on health and sexuality for generations of women -- and it still is! Join us for a discussion

with *Our Bodies Ourselves* co-founder [Judy Norsigian](#), and *Our Bodies Ourselves* Today program director [Laura Prieto](#), about the history and the continuing work of *Our Bodies Ourselves*.

Free public program hosted by the Wilmington (Massachusetts) Public Library in honor of women's History Month.

[Register for Our Bodies Ourselves Women's History Month program](#)

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## Gender Equality and Reproductive Rights after *Dobbs*

Tuesday, April 2, 2024  
3:30–4:45pm EST  
Live via Zoom

The overturning of *Roe v. Wade* by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2022 dramatically changed the landscape of abortion and reproductive rights in the United States. *Our Bodies Ourselves* is a co-sponsor of this panel at Suffolk University; it examines the far-reaching consequences of restrictions

on reproductive and LGBTQ rights and what we can do in response.

Moderator: **Shoshana Madmoni-Gerber**, PhD, associate professor and chair, Communication, Journalism, & Media Department, Suffolk University.

Panelists: **Dallas Ducar**, RN, CEO, Transhealth; **Polly Crozier**, Esq., Director of Family Advocacy, GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders (GLAD), and **Kristie Monast**, MS Ed, Executive Director, HealthQ.

[Register for Gender Equality & Repro Rights after Dobbs](#)

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***Fight Like Hell:***  
**The Activist Life of Mother Jones**

Friday, May 10, 2024  
6–7:45pm EST  
Film screening and panel  
Streaming and in person  
Suffolk University's Modern Theater  
525 Washington Street, Boston, MA

*"I'm not a humanitarian, I'm a hellraiser."*

Our Bodies Ourselves Today invites you to spend some time with Mother Jones over Mother's Day weekend.

This public program will share and discuss the award-winning documentary film, [Fight Like Hell](#) (Bullfrog Films, 2022), a portrait of the fiery labor activist Mary Harris "Mother" Jones – called in her lifetime "the most dangerous woman in America" and the "grandmother of all agitators."

Jones and the film about her are especially resonant as we witness an ever growing gap between rich and poor, challenges to democracy, and a surge of labor activism – including many victories for the half million American workers in healthcare, manufacturing, and creative industries who went on strike in 2023.

A panel after the screening will include the film's writer and star Kaiulani Lee, along with academic and local activist perspectives. Please mark your calendars and watch your inbox for an invitation with further details!



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Now!



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