

*One Woman's Labor:  
Judith Leavitt's Academic Contributions and  
Influence on the Profession*

*October 1 and 2, 2010*

*Madison, Wisconsin*



*Judith Walzer Leavitt, PhD*

*Ripple Bascom and Ruth Bleier Professor Emerita*

*Department of Medical History and Bioethics*

*University of Wisconsin – Madison*

# *Professional Biography*

Judith Walzer Leavitt began her academic career at Antioch College and received a BA in Social Science in 1963. She studied History at the University of Chicago, earning an MA in 1966 and a PhD in 1975. Leavitt joined the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1975 as an Assistant Professor in the History of Medicine, History of Science, and Women's Studies. After promotion to Associate Professor in 1981, she became chair of the History of Medicine department and held this position until 1993. In 1985 she became an adjunct and permanent honorary faculty member of the History department. Leavitt achieved her full professorship in 1986 and has since been recognized for excellence with the following named professorships: the Evjue-Bascom Professor of Women's Studies (1986-1995) and the Ruth Bleier WARF Professor of History of Medicine, History of Science, and Women's Studies (1997-2010). She currently holds the title of Ruppel Bascom and Ruth Bleier Professor Emerita of Medical History & Bioethics, History of Science, and Gender and Women's Studies. In addition to her professorships, Leavitt served as Associate Dean for Faculty in the Medical School from 1996-1999, and as a member of the University Committee—the executive committee of the Faculty Senate—from 2000-2004. Judith Leavitt has also been a longtime active member of the American Association for the History of Medicine (AAHM), serving as member and chair of numerous committees, on the Executive Committee, as Vice President (1997-1999), and as President (2000-2002).

In many of the positions she has held, Leavitt was a pioneer. She was the first woman faculty member of the History of Medicine department and was among the first women to hold leadership positions in the School of Medicine. She relied on her experiences to become a dedicated mentor to women faculty members and an effective advocate for underrepresented groups. In all the positions Judith Leavitt has held, she has aimed to advance her discipline, her organization, her colleagues, and her students.

Professor Leavitt has pursued an ambitious and far-reaching research program on the social history of medicine, childbirth, fatherhood, and public health. Her first book, *The Healthiest City: Milwaukee and the Politics of Health Reform*, demonstrated how social history could broaden understanding of medical history. She showed how class and ethnicity, as well as politics and economics, were essential to the successful implementation of public health initiatives based on new scientific understandings of disease and its transmission. Her next book, *Brought to Bed: Childbearing in America, 1750-1950*, transformed the history of childbirth by focusing on the experiences of birthing mothers. It illustrated how women's perspectives and decisions changed medical practice by influencing the movement of birth from the home to the hospital. *Typhoid Mary: Captive to the Public's Health* humanized one of the most infamous figures in the history of disease—Mary Mallon, previously demonized as “Typhoid Mary,” the first person identified as a “healthy carrier.” By analyzing a variety of perspectives on Mary Mallon, Leavitt showed how new scientific knowledge interacted with gender, ethnicity, class, and media coverage to influence Mallon's experiences. She focused throughout on the conflict between protecting the public's health and preserving individual rights. Leavitt's most recent book, *Make Room for Daddy: the Journey from the Waiting Room*

*to the Birthing Room*, used first-hand accounts from letters, journals, personal interviews, and other sources to understand the changing experiences of expectant fathers from the 1940s to the 1980s. Leavitt argued that men, along with their wives, pressured doctors and hospitals to admit expectant fathers into labor and delivery rooms to share in the miracle of birth.

In all her research, Leavitt focused on people and their stories—on immigrants and workers; on patients, pregnant women, and expectant fathers; on people neglected or overlooked in previous historical accounts. She addressed themes of power and control, or lack of control, and deepened our understanding of the complex ways in which science and society, politics and personality, identity and perspectives interact to transform medical practice and public health.

Leavitt also worked to bring the most recent scholarship in the history of medicine and public health into the classroom. With her colleagues she edited several volumes: *Medicine Without Doctors: Home Health Care in American History* (co-edited with Ronald Numbers and Guenter Risse), *Wisconsin Medicine: Historical Perspectives* (co-edited with Ronald Numbers) and *Sickness and Health in America: Readings in the History of Medicine and Public Health* (co-edited with Ronald Numbers). These books embraced the social history of medicine, insisting that “irregular” physicians, ailing patients, and unsuccessful therapies all belonged at the core of our discipline. Her other edited collection, *Women and Health in America: Historical Readings* continued this tradition, highlighting scholarship that analyzed and explored the experiences of women—women as caregivers and as patients. *Women and Health* and *Sickness and Health* remain staple texts in medical history course across the country.

Above all, Judith Leavitt has inspired generations of undergraduate, graduate, and medical students as a teacher, mentor, and role model. Her commitment to evidence, her investment in clarity of expression and argument, her sense of the human dimensions of historical events and actors, as well as her kindness and good humor have profoundly influenced her students and colleagues.

*We look forward to celebrating her life and legacy.*

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**Friday, Oct 1**

**6:00-6:30 pm**    **Reception, Cash Bar**

**6:30-10:00 pm**    **Introductory Remarks**

- *Susan E. Lederer, PhD, Robert Turell Professor of Medical History and Bioethics and Chair, Medical History and Bioethics*
- *Robert N. Golden, MD, Robert Turell Professor in Medical Leadership and Dean, University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health*

**Dinner**

**Reminiscences/Testimonials**

*Emcees:*

- *Leslie J. Reagan, PhD, Professor of History, University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana*
- *Eve Fine, PhD, WISELI, University of Wisconsin - Madison*
- *Beth Black, MA, Act 3 Organizational Collaborators*

**Saturday, Oct. 2, 9:00 am - 4:00 pm**

**9:00-9:20 am**    **Introductory Remarks**

- *Susan E. Lederer, PhD, Robert Turell Professor of Medical History and Bioethics and Chair, Medical History & Bioethics*
- *Jane Collins, PhD, Evjue Bascom Professor of Community & Environmental Sociology and Chair, Gender & Women's Studies*

**9:20-10:45 pm**    ***Sickness and Health in America:***

**New Research in the History of Health and Disease**

*Moderator: Rima D. Apple, PhD, Professor Emerita, University of Wisconsin-Madison*

9:20-9:35            "From the Cradle to the Grave: Infectious Disease in the Twentieth Century American Home"

*Bridget Collins, ABD, History of Science*

9:35-9:50            "Nutrition and the Health Department in the History and Historiography of American Public Health."

*Andrew Ruis, ABD, History of Science*

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## **Saturday, Oct. 2, 9:00 am - 4:00 pm**

- 9:50-10:05 "Unexpected: German measles, a place where two fields meet"  
*Leslie J. Reagan, Ph.D., Professor of History, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign*
- 10:05-10:20 "Mustard Gas and Me: Reflections on a Research Journey"  
*Susan L. Smith, Ph.D., Professor of History and Classics, University of Alberta, Canada*
- 10:20-10:45 Comments and Discussion
- 10:45-11:00 Break**
- 11:00 – 12:10 *Women and Health in America:***  
**New Research on Women's Health and the Medical Profession**  
Moderator: *Vanessa Northington Gamble, MD, PhD, University Professor of Medical Humanities, Professor of Health Policy and American Studies, The George Washington University*
- 11:00-11:15 "Just Your Average Doctor: A Social History of Women Physicians in 19th-century Chicago"  
*Eve Fine, PhD, Researcher, WISELI, University of Wisconsin-Madison*
- 11:15-11:30 "Choosing the Student Body: Race, Gender and Science in the history of Medical School Admissions in the U.S."  
*Charlotte Borst, PhD, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Professor of History, Whittier College*
- 11:30-11:45 "With A Flashlight And A Speculum: Envisioning A Feminist Revolution"  
*Judith A. Houck, PhD, Associate Professor of Gender and Women's Studies, Medical History and Bioethics, and History of Science and the Center for Women's Health and Women's Health Research*
- 11:45-12:10 Comments and Discussion
- 12:10-1:30 LUNCH**
- 1:30-1:45 Post-lunch fun & games**
- 1:45-3:00 Panel Presentation – The Impact of Judith Leavitt's work**  
Moderator: *Gregg Mitman, PhD, William Coleman Professor of History of Science, Medical History and Bioethics, and Science and Technology Studies and Interim Director, Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies*  
History of Medicine  
*Ronald L. Numbers, PhD, Hildale Professor of the History of Science and Medicine, Medical History and Bioethics and History of Science*  
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## **Saturday, Oct. 2, 9:00 am - 4:00 pm**

History of Public Health

*Naomi Rogers, PhD, Associate Professor of History of Medicine and of Women's and Gender Studies*

Gender & Women's History

*Linda Gordon, PhD, Professor of History, New York University*

Teaching

*Judith A. Houck, PhD, Associate Professor of Gender and Women's Studies, Medical History and Bioethics, and History of Science and the Center for Women's Health and Women's Health Research*

Academic Service to the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the UW School of Medicine and Public Health

*Murray Clayton, PhD, Professor and Chair of Plant Pathology and Professor of Statistics; Gloria Hawkins, PhD, Assistant Dean of Multicultural Affairs, University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health; and Rosa Garner, JD, Ombudsperson, University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health*

Service to the American Association of the History of Medicine (AAHM)

*John M. Eyster, PhD, Professor Emeritus, History of Medicine, University of Minnesota*

**3:00-3:20**

**Comments and Testimonials**

**3:20-4:00**

**Concluding Remarks and Activities**

*Eve Fine and Judith Houck*

*Judith Walzer Leavitt, PhD, Professor Emerita*