

**Audio Title: Brittany Carmona-Holt**

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### Transcript

**Rebekah Borucki:** Hello, friend! I heard you were looking for our spot. I got you.

So, you're going to go past the corner bodega and down the block from the fresh cuts barbershop, and there you'll find a brick row house at the intersection of Literature Place and Social Justice Blvd. That's the stoop.

Amanda, Amanda Lytle, she will be there to welcome you to the conversation. *The Book Stoop*, that's the name of the spot. We got the hottest takes on book culture, nerd culture, current events, with best-selling authors, change-makers, and risk-takers, the best kinds of folks.

Oh, me? I'm Rebekah Borucki, President of Row House Publishing, and this is our podcast. I am so glad you're here.

Now, I'm going to let you get to Amanda.

**Amanda Lytle:** Thanks Bex. Hey friend. Let me be the second to welcome you to our spot, *The Book Stoop*. I feel incredibly honored to be the host of this podcast and I'm so grateful to have you here.

Today on *The Book Stoop*, I'm speaking with Brittany Carmona-Holt. Brittany is a full spectrum doula, tarot reader, birth and life photographer, artist, reproductive justice advocate and author of a forthcoming book called "Tarot for Pregnancy: A Companion for Radical, Magical Birthing Folks".

In this conversation, Brittany starts by sharing her journey into writing and the importance of writing from a place of passion and understanding our divine assignments. She tells us about her upcoming book and about the creative process.

Brittany talks about the community and the lack thereof during pregnancy and post-partum and how white supremacists and patriarchy culture factor into the deep prioritization of those who have the physical mechanics of bringing a baby into the world. We wrap up with some powerful perspectives on honoring black grand midwives and why funding black midwives and birth workers is so important and it's also old.

We start our chats on *The Book Stoop* with a rather fitting question, "So what are you reading these days?"

**Brittany Carmona-Holt:** Well, that's never a simple question for me. I have little background. I have ADHD so I'm always reading multiple things and whether or not I finish them is a mystery.

So right now, I'm reading three things. I'm reading Braiding Sweet Grass by []. That was one that has been on my to-read list forever and every time I picked it up, I always know when something is not ready for me if I can't focus on it. That's kind of the nice – the good side of ADHD is that you have a built-in litmus test for what ...

**Amanda Lytle:** It's so true.

**Brittany Carmona-Holt:** You do. So I have just recently been able to pick it up and keep reading it. So I'm like, oh, OK, it's time. It's time for me to read this book. I'm also reading Spirit Babies by Walter []. That's an interesting one. I'm almost finished with it. Again, read that really fast. So I know like OK, I'm meant to have this information.

That's kind of about the spiritual journey that babies take on their way into this realm both pre-womb and while they're in the womb and their like experience of birth and stuff.

So it's super interesting. It's written by a clairvoyant who works like particularly with spirit babies. So he works with people who are having fertility issues.

I think that that's the majority of the reason why people go to him. But actually this knowledge, I wish everyone would read this book. I wish everyone would read this book who has ever miscarried. I wish everyone would read that book who has ever had an abortion.

I wish everybody who's just trying and they're not having issues yet would read this book or even just for yourself. You know, it's for everybody. We were all born.

**Amanda Lytle:** True,

**Brittany Carmona-Holt:** We were all gestated. Like people think that birth and babies is a super like niche topic when we were all babies, and we were all born. So we should all care about this.

The other thing I'm reading, I'm almost always reading some kind of raunchy Harlequin romance novel.

**Amanda Lytle:** Sometimes we need the fluffy.

**Brittany Carmona-Holt:** Yes, it's a little palate cleanser to like remind me that I like reading. It was the first thing that I ever read as a kid. It's the first thing I ever read as a kid that taught me that I like reading because like I didn't get an ADHD diagnosis until I was an adult.

So I went my whole school life just thinking I can't read well, I can't focus. Then one day when I was I think like 15, my aunt slipped me a Julia Quinn novel which they've now made a whole Netflix series out of her books Bridgerton, and I got hooked on that series.

I was like, “Oh, there’s sex in this. Like I can suddenly pay attention to a book when there’s the promise of sex.” So yeah, that’s like what reminds me that oh, you can read Brittany as long as there’s ...

But yeah. Oh, right now I didn’t even name the book I read. It’s called “A Lady’s Guide to Celestial Mechanics” by Olivia Wait and it’s actually the first lesbian regency romance novel I’ve ever read, which is interesting because they’re doing it historically accurate. So everything is very secretive and it’s interesting.

**Amanda Lytle:** Yeah. I bet. It’s almost like that reset. I find for me the same thing. Super busy brain. Yeah.

**Brittany Carmona-Holt:** Yeah, it’s just like there was so much shame around that like growing up like as if you were just lazy that you couldn’t force yourself to read something. But I know now why it is that that book was – is for me now, why Braiding Sweet Grass is for me right now and it came in the chapter when she was talking about how she had a choice between studying botany and writing.

She chose botany and she goes in to like the difficulties of the fact of that choice. Like kind of how the relationship with plants, the beauty, the magic is kind of like sucked out of it in – when you’re talking about like a Western colonial look at the relationship to plants or lack of a relationship to plants I should say.

But anyways, so she chose botany and I feel like I had that same choice, and I chose writing and I realized now looking back I’m like I made the wrong choice.

Like when you study, you don’t need to necessarily study writing if you study the thing you’re meant to write about and then the poetry comes naturally by way of having an actual relationship with that thing, whatever the thing may be. For Robin, it’s plants and [ ] and ecosystems.

Like that’s true for me as well but more so like with birth. It comes through experience that you have anything to say. So I’m like oh my gosh, I really wasted my whole degree with – I have a creative writing degree and now I’m realizing just how useless it is because all the – you know, throughout college, it’s just like this isn’t how your writing is wrong anyways and bless Row House because they don’t – like my whole editing process was not editing how I say things.

You know, that’s not what the editing was about, which is like all I learned in college was how to write correctly which is not at all. I write how I speak more or less.

**Amanda Lytle:** Like that’s what I think makes writing so beautiful is that you’re going to be able to come through as you in your work because it’s like a signature of you.

**Brittany Carmona-Holt:** Right. But when you’re writing technical and correctly, it’s supposed to be devoid of all that because like everything, this is all like the standards of what is correct is through like an English Anglo colonial white supremacist lens as is everything.

**Amanda Lytle:** Exactly.

**Brittany Carmona-Holt:** So yeah. It's funny I learned like how to write in a way that I now have to unlearn in order for it to be authentic.

**Amanda Lytle:** Well, that actually is such a beautiful segue into your own book Tarot for Pregnancy because I know that there's so much passion between birth, pregnancy, tarot, spirituality, and the journey that allows you to use that authentic voice and screw creative writing 101. Like let's actually write from the heart, you know.

So tell me about that journey.

**Brittany Carmona-Holt:** So I was a writer before I was any of those other things and I now realize, I now notice like any talents that we have are not random. They are diving assignments. Like you have them because you are meant to do something about that.

So writing for some reason was the thing that came first. I should also credit []. She's a, I would say, ancestral remediation teacher of some sort and she's the one who has kind of expanded my vision when I say that, that your talents aren't your own.

They're like a culmination of like what the ancestors have decided you need in this lifetime to carry out your work in the world. So like to do right by your ancestors is to honor your talents, honor what you're good at and I have a really hard time owning being good at anything. But writing is one of the things that I will say, OK, I think I'm pretty good at that.

So that's one part of it and then eventually came – tarot and spirituality have kind of like always been in my peripherals. I was gifted my first deck at like 16. I didn't do much with it at the time. I didn't start reading more intentionally until like 2015. I was on a like road trip tour living out of a Subaru with my friends who are in a band and was gifted again another tarot deck.

So I was reading more intentionally. I ended up getting this – you won't be able to see it on the podcast. But I got this tattoo before I ever even officially read tarot and just so people know what it is. It's like a whole tarot card on my arm that I like basically designed. I like put the things in it that I wanted to focus on and now that I look at it, it's actually very [].

But that wasn't the intention at the time. I didn't even read professionally at the time and then in terms of birth work, that really started when I became pregnant for the first time. I miscarried at about seven weeks and so I was unwittingly initiated into that world of like, oh, nobody talks about this and that seems to be what fuels my writing is whatever nobody is talking about, what's taboo to talk about and then I like to talk about it in a way that is a little bit TMI.

So I took my – I have another business. I'm a wedding videographer, a wedding photographer and that page basically got taken over by me writing about my journey with miscarriage, what

pregnancy after a miscarriage was like, writing really openly about my birth experience, writing really openly about parenthood and all of that.

That was where I first got that kind of feedback from an audience that was like – made me pause and be like, oh, like I’m saying something that’s actually worthwhile and apparently not many people are talking about it.

When I was putting together my book Proposal for tarot for pregnancy, I don’t have a huge platform. I’m a newbie in this world. I’m small potato. So I don’t have like accolades and articles and point to. So I went back, and I looked through comments of all of those reassuring things that people said about what I wrote and stuff.

I was like holy shit, yeah, this actually is meaningful. As much as like we downplay ourselves so much, we downplay our own contributions and like it doesn’t actually serve anybody, it’s like it’s not even a humbleness thing. I think it’s a fear thing. I think it’s a perfectionism thing. It’s certainly not because I’m humble.

But yeah, so that was when I started writing about birthy type shit. I vehemently was against joining into birth work even though like that calling was very obvious and very prevalent after I had my kiddo. But I was just like nope and I think like on a spiritual level, I knew that like I was going to have to throw away everything that I had already built with my other business or not throw it away but leave it behind, leave it in my partner’s capable hands because birth work was going to consume me and that’s exactly what happened.

So yeah, but the environment was necessary. I think I went in there with like a pinky toe into birth work. Like oh, I will be a birth photographer. I already am a photographer. I just would like to be a knowledgeable presence in the room.

You know, like it wouldn’t be bad to have this doula certification under my belt. Also if I’m going to be in birth spaces or maybe for my friends and family members that get pregnant, blah, blah, blah, and yeah, no.

Like there was a bigger assignment and they do a really good job at that doula training program of really initiating you into this work, making you feel a part of – making you feel the calling. Like you might have heard it but then by the time you leave, it’s so loud that you can’t deny it, even if you want to.

So – and then in terms of the book – I’m so sorry.

**Amanda Lytle:** Oh, gosh. I understand. Don’t be ...

**Brittany Carmona-Holt:** Finally getting to your question. In terms of the book, the idea came. In November of 2019, I was driving home from a family trip. We were on a long road trip. It was that night. So there’s nothing to look at very meditative. You know, the times when they’re quiet

enough for ancestors or guides to speak and the main realization was that I at the time had three pregnant friends like all in the same trimester too, all in the same – nearly the same month.

I was just supporting them via text a lot. That's the majority of what I do as a doula is texting. Like birth isn't even the main event and it hit me as I was, I don't know, talking to a friend about something, about whatever month of pregnancy they were at.

All the energy of the cards Ace through 10 are coordinating to the energy of the months of pregnancy from conception through month nine, birth and post-partum. So like an ace would be the equivalent of the fertility stage, the seed initially being planted, conception and then – well, pregnancy is more than nine months.

Forty weeks. So the tens are the final month of pregnancy and birth and early days of post-partum. All those cards include all that. So that was an issue that I had with my editor is that like some cards are really wordy, really heavy and I'm like well, yeah, because in the tens, all of this is happening.

Like every month, you know, ace through nine, leading up to that is just another month of pregnancy whereas the tens have to hold that liminal space of the final weeks of pregnancy, birth, huge and then the – another liminal space of the early days of post-partum. So it's a lot and I'm like I'm going to fight for this.

I think these should be disproportionately long. But it's great. She's very understanding. So yeah, and everything in between. It's not just that – like around month six, in the sixes, I was noticing a little bit of that return to being back in your body, return to sexuality and that is a theme in like the sixes.

Same with the fives. The fives are like almost all like a sticky, uncomfortable card that most people don't like, and the fifth month of pregnancy is transitioning from the first half to the latter half and for some people that's when shit starts to feel real.

Like halfway there holds some weight to it, you know, and you're like oh fuck, I'm going to have to birth. So yeah, it made sense for all of them. The nines are all about like – not all. But some of the nines are about pausing and celebrating how far you've come before you get to the end because once you get to the end, you're already moving onto the next thing, which is absolutely true when it comes to birth.

Like once you get to the end-end, it's like, OK. Now we have a human to take care of. We're moving right along. The celebration really has to happen before the baby is born because that's when you have time to celebrate yourself.

So yeah, I looked it up. I was like how has nobody noticed this correlation yet. How come nobody has written this yet? And then there's a bunch of other reasons too. There are the obvious things of like there is the death card in tarot. There is the devil. I know for a fact a lot of folks who steered clear of their tarot decks while they were pregnant because they didn't know how to

read those cards in a way that wasn't going to freak them out and cause them more anxiety and if you're going through the major life transition of transitioning from individual person to parent, like I can almost guarantee that the death card is going to come up for you at least once because there's going to be a death of your previous self.

So if you look at that and you don't know that that's a way to read the death card – and it's not that death doesn't actually mean death. It's just that there's a lot of other cards in the tarot that indicate real death of a person.

But yeah, I didn't want people to freak themselves out with stickier cards in the tarot because – just because of not having a pregnancy specific perspective on them. So that's what the book is. It's a pregnancy and birth specific perspective on every single card in the tarot.

**Amanda Lytle:** I want to know about the creative process behind tarot for pregnancy because the writing process of just anything. Like I know how much you love it. But when you're actually getting into the process of writing something that's going to be published, it's going to be out in the world. Can you tell me about what kept you inspired and motivated in the actual writing process?

**Brittany Carmona-Holt:** Sure. This is a really annoying answer because I did not keep myself inspired. I did not try whatsoever. This book was like really itching to get out of me. I had lower breakdowns about the fact that I had so much in me, that I didn't have time to write because I had a toddler. I have a toddler.

So it initially was just like I was collecting. Whenever I had a thought, I just have to honor it. I know it's some people's process to schedule some time and you sit down and you have to write, and I am sure that that works for those people and maybe this is also an ADHD thing.

Absolutely cannot force myself to say anything meaningful. It just has to come. So the real work there is when it comes, you have to fucking do the work and that when it comes, it's often like **Brittany Carmona-Holt:** 00 in the morning. Cute little insomnia times, you know, or first thing in the morning where you would really like to go back to sleep but like shit is calling.

So I would honor whenever I had the inspiration. That was where I collected a bulk of the book and then I had the extreme privilege of coming here to my childhood home to be able to get some space from my toddler and any other distractions and I hold myself up in a room in my parent's house and I made that really intentional space to do that and had the privilege to do so.

So that was it. That was the majority of like the minors. Most of the majors wrote themselves through like moments of inspiration and then there were certain cards. All of the tens were written through moments of inspiration, and this was all before Row House existed, I think.

I did take Rebekah Borucki's Blocked to Book Proposal Writing Class even though I wasn't blocked. So that wasn't the issue. But I was like, "How am I going to get this out in the actual world?" One day I was like crying in my car by myself. Like just very frustrated that I wanted to

sit down and write, and my precious angel kiddo wants nothing but my attention and that's beautiful and I should like want that. I should be in that space with them and yet, here I am just wanting to be pulled to like get this writing out of me.

As I was sitting in the car kind of woe-is-me-ing, Rebekah Borucki's Blocked to Book course came up. That was like [] writing a book proposal that you would actually send to agents and publishers and such, which I didn't end up needing. But it built my relationship with Rebekah who is one of the founders of Row House. So she already knew that tarot for pregnancy was basically good to go when she started Row House and she really – like her belief in tarot for pregnancy has made me have [] in it because I was like I'm just going to write it and I'm just going to self-publish it and who needs to see it will see it.

You know, I was totally fine with it being small and in fact way more comfortable with it being small because then I wouldn't be on a podcast talking about it. Sorry. No offense to you. You're wonderful but this is my nightmare.

**Amanda Lytle:** Yeah.

**Brittany Carmona-Holt:** So Blocked to Book was like happening right at the onset of the pandemic. It started right before, and we were all kind of going through that together and then there was the mass exodus of folks from Hay House.

So that was where Rebekah started Row House and once that was even a blip on her maybe radar, she had sent me a voice message on Instagram. Like we're maybe going to do this, and we want Tarot for Pregnancy if you want us. I was like, "Are you fucking kidding me?"

**Amanda Lytle:** Yeah.

**Brittany Carmona-Holt:** Of course I do.

Rebekah Borucki: Hey friend. We are coming straight back to The Book Stoop after a quick break.

**Amanda Lytle:** Here's my experience of that. Because I had actually – like that week, that she made that official offer was the same week that my father passed away. It was [] of last year and a major thing was when I wanted to take Blocked to Book. It was an investment. It cost money and I was like I don't have [].

So I'm going to do a brave thing and ask my parents for it because I really hate/loathe asking them for anything, but especially money. And at the time, they did – I was like I know that I just have to be brave and do the asking. But if they say no, I'm just going to do it anyways with a credit card and I'm going to trust that shit will be figured out because this assignment wouldn't have been given if there weren't the resources to do it.



So I did ask, and they did the thing where they're like, "Oh, I don't know." I was like, "OK, no, no, that's fine. That's good." I paid for it myself on credit and then – so it was the week that my dad passed away that I got that book deal and with all of the readings that I was having going – I was doing a lot of readings with mediums to communicate with him. It felt very much like I am so sorry; I didn't invest in this for you while alive like – and let me help you out with the financial aspect of getting your work in the world from beyond. So yeah.

**Amanda Lytle:** I think that that's really special.

**Brittany Carmona-Holt:** Yeah, yeah, it is special. It actually helped me understand what it is to be hearing voices in your head that aren't yours and like what is an ancestor talking. What is the guide talking versus what is just your own thought? And he was the closest person to me to have ever died. So I started to hear it. I was like, oh, the way that that thought came out was in his cadence. It was still him. It wasn't necessarily his voice. I'm not clairaudient. So I didn't hear his literal voice.

But it was the way he said things because he's a man of very few words. My dad was dyslexic. He was born in 1948. I have a large age difference between my parents and I. My mom had me when she was 40 and so my dad was 42 at the time, so yeah.

**Amanda Lytle:** I was hopeful to come back to the community or lack thereof in the post-partum and parenting season because you had kind of just touched on it, but I think that that is such a collective yet isolating feeling.

**Brittany Carmona-Holt:** Yeah.

**Amanda Lytle:** So can you speak to that?

**Brittany Carmona-Holt:** Yeah. This is the main thing that I have to support folks through. During pregnancy when they're preparing for post-partum, the issues already come up. But it's also present all throughout the actual experience of it. I don't know of anybody who doesn't experience some kind of lack of community post-partum and if they say they don't, I don't know if I believe them.

The way that we do birth and the way that we do post-partum and by we, I'm talking Western, Anglo colonial version of post-partum because there are indigenous folks almost every other culture as some protocols for how we take care of people post-partum, how we center them and prioritize them, prioritize their rest, prioritize their healing. So it should be known that when I'm speaking we, yes, I'm talking about American culture. But that is white supremacist culture too. White supremacist patriarchy culture I should say because of course it has to do with the de-prioritization of those who have the physical mechanics to bring a baby into the world.

That's part of the lack. But what I'm mostly – there's no real thing to say to my clients. I can tell you here's how you could try and set yourself up to plan. But at the end of the day, most of us –

many of us are either completely estranged from family or semi-estranged from family. Don't want to reach out.

Not all of us have the privilege of family either living close by or being in good relationship with said family. So at the end of the day, no matter how much preparing we do, we're still living in this culture that prioritizes capitalism, getting back to work after having grown a human and birth them.

These are just still the cultural ideals that we're working under that like there's just going to be this friction. So I tell people that even though I know this is hard, I know that this is not how it's supposed to be, I know that we were never meant to be doing this alone and yet – and not and yet. And like a spiritual bypassing way in a like I have to give you some hope at the end of this because otherwise, I'm mostly just saying I know it sucks. I know.

I know that you are tired, and I know that you are alone, and I know that me coming over and bringing some soup and listening to your birth story is nice for now and it's not going to mean anything in the middle of the night when you're up with sore, bleeding nipples and you're so tired that you want to cry.

But I remind people that like this is the work of our particular generation. Every other generation before this, other than those who have managed to stay connected to their indigenous traditions around post-partum, every other generation before us has said no to this healing has not looked to – of how they can take care of people in the post-partum era better and we are – for a large part, our generation is seeking to do this better.

So of course there's friction. You're trying to do a like cultural 180 of how we treat pregnant people. We treat post-partum people like oh, yeah, you can come to my wedding when you're – bring the baby. The baby will be two weeks old. How cute.

Like not cute. Stay home. Most people make plans like for right away after birth and I do think that we have folks who want to help but we don't know how to ask for help. That's another major thing is that we – like this is another thing. It always loops back into white supremacist capitalism because we're supposed to be super self-sufficient and post-partum makes you into a brand new baby just like the one you just birthed.

Like you are leveled back down and mainstream feminism, I would name it white feminism rails against the idea that you're giving yourself up when you become a parent or identify as a mother. We should be OK with the reality that of course you are going to lose your previous self. You are only creating – this is what I talk about in the ten of swords chapter.

You're only going to be creating immense friction for yourself by trying to fit back into a previous skin that you already shed when you birthed.

**Amanda Lytle:** That's so powerful because think of every societal message that tells you that that's what you need to do.

**Brittany Carmona-Holt:** Bounce back.

**Amanda Lytle:** Bounce back bullshit.

**Brittany Carmona-Holt:** I don't even like saying ...

**Amanda Lytle:** No.

**Brittany Carmona-Holt:** ... the word, yeah, because like I feel like I'm; so beyond that anyways. But like it shows up in sinister ways that isn't even about body image. It shows up in like how productive you think you should be able to be. It shows up in how you think you should still be able to load the dishwasher when like you have absolutely intentionally been leveled to be at a space where you can empathize with what your baby is experiencing right now, and your baby can't do anything for themselves.

Your baby is completely self-reliant on you and their caretakers, and I feel like birth is our big tower moment. That's a card in the tarot for those who don't know. That's the moment where we get leveled as a person. That's the importance of the intensity of sensation that we experienced with contractions is to humble us completely back down to brand new baby status. That's the fool card in the tarot. It's all relevant I swear.

So much – every card in the tarot is relevant. That's why I wrote a book about it. But yeah, and then I also want to add that this has a lot to do with how we treat birth as well as something that somebody does privately, and we don't really talk about the story. You have to be somebody who has either birthed before or interested in birth in some way to be the type of person to ask. So do you want to unpack your birth story? Are you cool with like sharing what happened over some tea?

And because we don't know what somebody just went through, we do not know how to properly treat them. We are not telling our stories. We're not telling our birth stories to be like I just went to the motherfucking edge of the earth and back to bring this baby here. Lower your voice when you talk to me, you know.

Like you are not the same. You are changed after that experience. The folds in your brain change during pregnancy. The common phrase for it is “mama bear” but not everybody identifies that way. But like this frame of mindset changes and never goes back where you are now all of a sudden extremely hyperaware of all threats from all sides.

So like it's treated as if it's like a funny thing to make fun of, how protective a new parent is who just birthed when literally like we are hardwired to do that. Like this is a protective measure for you to protect your baby. It's not something to be like dismissed or like treated like, oh, she's just being – or they're just being like overly protective. They won't let anybody hold the baby.

You know, like nobody really should be holding the baby other than who just birthed them in my honest opinion. But yeah, because we don't know and we don't have a normalized like manner of talking about people's birth stories, how do you even know how to address them? Are you addressing somebody who literally just went through something extremely traumatic and now just has to pretend like oh, well, at least the baby is OK? At least we're alive. Like the bar is so fucking low in the US. Like at least you're alive. Because of the maternal death rate, particularly among black women, like it has gotten to a point where we're grateful to not be dead, particularly for black birthing people and that bar is abominable.

Like it's time for there to be a higher standard for this experience. We shouldn't just be expecting that every time somebody tells us their birth story, I'm expecting some measure of trauma.

**Amanda Lytle:** Right. That is such a beautiful segue. I really wanted to hear your perspectives on the importance of funding black midwives.

**Brittany Carmona-Holt:** So historically, black grand midwives are who birthed America and I say America because I'm not just talking about black babies who were born to people who were kidnapped and enslaved. I'm talking about everybody.

Grand midwives are who had that ancestral knowledge that they also delivered the white children of their kidnappers. That was who had that ancestral knowledge for hundreds of years for the birth of this country, this "country," so-called country.

Then at the time when I would say – I would name it that midwifery was colonized by the modern medical model which is very white-male-centered. So I'm also going to step back and acknowledge that this is what I mean when I say that it's not me being humble, that I don't want to be in the spotlight. It makes no sense for me as a white woman to be the one like educating on this. So that's where I'm like I don't want to be talking about this because my voice shouldn't be centered about this.

But if this is the first time you're hearing, let me point you in the direction of some other books. *Killing the Black Body* by Dorothy Parker.

**Amanda Lytle:** OK.

**Brittany Carmona-Holt:** Last name – it's either Parker or Robertson. I always []. *Listen To Me Good*, these are books like to actually look to who has been doing this work. So I try and make that known throughout *Tarot for Pregnancy* that like this is a very specific and niche look at pregnancy that has to do with where spirituality intersects with the birth process, which does also intersect with social justice. It cannot – spirituality is entirely wrapped up in that too. But yeah, just pulling back, I don't want to like speak from any place of authority on this.

But if you haven't heard, black grand midwives are like the reason why we're all alive and they often had to also – not necessarily grand midwives but black kidnapped, enslaved people. Also

had to breastfeed white children at the expense of being able to nurse their own children because white children were prioritized.

So anyways, this is the history lesson. It became colonized in – I'm not even entirely sure of the dates. I would say around the turn of the century where there would be white male-led physicians coming in and telling black grand midwives how to deliver babies, telling them that their practices are dirty and that their practices are killing babies.

Meanwhile, they had just as good, if not better outcomes for all children, all babies back then. So it's not like this case where medical advancement has necessarily – like there are cases where medical advancements have absolutely saved lives, yes. But there are cases where medical interference where it doesn't belong in a bodily, physiologic process that for most people, for most birthing people does not need medical management.

There have been places where it has been harmful and how that shows up today is in implicit bias, racism in the medical system. Black women are still seen as able to withstand “pain” more than non-black women. So their cries have been letting their physician know that they're pain is often seen as “dramatic”.

Black women die because of racism. It's not because of any other factors that people like to argue it is and there are even people like well-entrenched in the birth world like [] who are still confused about what it is that is killing black people in birth or saying that it's because of diet or it's because of lifestyle and it's like no, it's because of racist care providers who are holding all of these biases about what they think about the person in front of them.

One of the faces of like the unfortunate faces of the movement for bettering care for black people in maternity care and post-partum care is Charles Johnson and his wife Kiera Johnson. Passed away during her second C-section out of complete medical negligence. She was complaining of abdominal pain after her cesarian. I believe something was left in her and they ignored their asks for help for so long and asks I mean like Charles Johnson is a black man and he had tone policed himself to not be that black guy in the hospital who is becoming belligerent because his wife is being ignored and that's exactly what happened was that she was ignored until she passed and he's a huge advocate for maternal and infant health now.

He had a huge role in just passing the [] act that is working towards getting doulas for – covered by insurance and for every birthing person. He's a major voice. His Instagram is called [] with the number four.

So that's somewhere to look in terms of information and advocacy. Back to your question about black midwives and why they matter, honestly, like there's a lot to it. But I can also just leave it at this work belongs to them. It went from being that the majority of midwives in the US were black grand midwives to now it's like less than two percent because when midwifery was making a “comeback” in the '70s, it was by women like [] who were looking to other indigenous cultures appropriating what she found and not at all looking at like what happened on this soil. What was actually colonized on this soil?

Like in – you know, like she’s going everywhere, traveling all over. [] finding these like birth practices and cultures that like she doesn’t belong to and doesn’t really have the right to extract from. Writing books, using, touting that knowledge and she’s what’s seen as like the face and the mother of midwifery in the US and that’s a problem when like she’s not at all acknowledging and isn’t even aware of like what’s behind the black maternal mortality crisis.

For those of you that don’t know that number, black women die at three to four times. In some states, it’s up to 12 times the rate of white birthing people, black birthing people in childbirth and in the year following childbirth and the same statistics ring true for their children, which has a lot to do with bias in lactation support and has a lot to do with epigenetics as well in terms of like what’s DNA written from racial weathering for centuries.

So again a whole another podcast. Not at all [] be considered an expert on this. But that’s why black midwives matter.

**Amanda Lytle:** Yes.

**Brittany Carmona-Holt:** We absolutely need to fund them because it’s owed, because it was taken. It was stolen. So it needs to be given back and there are all of these barriers in midwifery certification. Like the model of it calls for free labor and what’s the other word for free labor, you know? Like the model of becoming a midwife requires that you do so many hours in birth under a preceptor who does not pay you and they essentially get a free birth assistant to teach you how to be a midwife for hundreds of births and then the exams are extremely expensive.

You can’t hold another job while you have to be on call for all these other births. Like the midwife that I work with in Grand Rapids, Tiffany Townsend, her business’s name is []. She’s the mother of five children whom she had to leave to go work for almost two years at a high-volume birth center in El Paso to be able to quickly get those births under her belt, so she could open up her practice and become the first black midwife in Grand Rapids. She’s the first Afro-Latino midwife in the entire state of Michigan and there are all these barriers, both monetary and just regular gatekeeping, even down to like questions on the exams.

This is just barely scratching the surface of all of it but one of the major ways that we can support black midwives is to fund their journey because a lot of the gatekeeping is monetary. The communities that need black midwives the most, like the likelihood of black birth worker being able to jump through all of those hoops and get through all of those obstacles in order to come back and be able to serve their own communities is immense.

Every single black birth worker, every single black midwife is a fucking miracle. Like they were intentionally eradicated. So yeah, it’s really the least we could do to give them money and help with writing letters in terms of like changing things that actually – like changing the status quo for NARM, the North American Registry of Midwives. That is what dictates all of this, what dictates the protocols with testing, and this is not even talking about the cost of school and then for most black midwives who are wanting to come back and serve their own community.

I know that many of them take pro bono clients as well. So like when you fund a black midwife, you are funding the care of their clients and you're also funding the care – therefore like the long-term trajectory of that baby's like wellness, you know, and like just to me why I'm in birth work is because it's the root. There's that kind of corny but I think it's true, saying of like peace on earth begins with birth and I believe it.

This is the root. If we change how we did this, if we got this right, the trajectory of like overall health for children, children who become parents, it's immense. It's like if you help a black midwife, like the ripple effect is huge. You know, it's not just helping. This is [] anyways. If you have a regular practice of paying reparations, in my opinion, it makes sense for that to go to a black midwife.

**Amanda Lytle:** This has been incredible. Brittany, thank you so much. We wrap up the book stoop chats with the opportunity to give a shoutout to an account, a person, organization, disruptor, activist or change agent. Is there anyone that you would like to give a shoutout to?

**Brittany Carmona-Holt:** Absolutely. A couple of people if I may. One is who I already mentioned, Tiffany Townsend. Her practice is called Bella Fleur Midwifery. She has been in our community for only a year officially, like as a certified midwife, and already made so many waves, served so many clients, saw so many babies gently [] side and right now, any money that goes to her also always funds her being able to take clients on sliding scale.

But also right now I have two links in my profile on Instagram to her. There's one that is to fund her clients, to be able to receive midwifery care and there's one to fund Tiffany's rest right now because Tiffany has had a very intense year. I know we all have achieved []. Like I had said just coming out of almost two years of being away from her five children. Also had a pulmonary embolism this year. Has lost family members and just has had a lot of big difficult stuff and she dove right back into work as soon as she got back here after those two years.

So she's now trying to take some intentional time off to be present with her children and just be present for her extremely deserved rest. So please help fund that rest for Tiffany.

The other person that I want to shout out and highlight is Dr. Stephanie Mitchell. She is at [] on Instagram and she is creating the first freestanding birth center in Rural Alabama. It's called Birth Sanctuary Gainesville and she's currently crowd funding for the huge endeavor that it is to build – to reclaim this old building and create it as a beautiful birth center that is going to be servicing rural Alabama where there are not very great options for birthing folks. So yeah, funding Bella Fleur Midwifery and funding Birth Sanctuary Gainesville is what I would like to highlight.

**Amanda Lytle:** Thank you so much for this.

**Brittany Carmona-Holt:** Oh, and also I forgot to mention that Dr. Stephanie Mitchell wrote a chapter for Tarot for Pregnancy. She wrote the chapter about the history of birth in the US.

**Amanda Lytle:** I know you also wanted to make mention of your illustrator as well.

**Brittany Carmona-Holt:** Oh, yeah. Yeah. I had planned on not having anything special for the book and then it very last-minute kind of aligned for Kimberly Rodriguez who is known as Poeta Goddess on Instagram. She has gorgeous, intuitive, ancestral drawings that are – like I’m just ecstatic. She’s going to be drawing a work of art for each of the major [] and then a couple of other things that decorate the book and that we have had a couple of back and forth talking about ideas for it and it’s just going to be gorgeous and magical and emergent, and her work is so beautiful. It’s just going to make the book so much richer than if it were just me.

**Amanda Lytle:** I can’t wait to see it. I cannot wait to get my hands on it.

**Brittany Carmona-Holt:** Me too.

**Amanda Lytle:** Yeah. Well, thank you so, so much for joining us on The Book Stoop.

**Brittany Carmona-Holt:** Thank you.

**Amanda Lytle:** Thank you so much for being with us. We hope you loved the conversation, and we will be back again soon. Please be sure to follow us on your podcast app and leave a rating where you’re able to do so. Writing a written review helps reach more listeners too. Check out all of the show notes for the links and share *The Book Stoop* with your friends. Talk soon.

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