



Did You Know?

Did you know that midwives deliver half of all babies in Great Britain and about three-quarters of all Scandinavian and French babies – but less than 10 % in the US?

We sure didn't. We knew that midwifery is not given full respect by the medical community. We knew that, despite a shortage of hospitals and ob-gyns, especially in rural areas, midwives are still considered quite risky.

Did you know why? Neither did we.

Turns out, like many of our customs, it can be traced back to white supremacy and racial scapegoating in America.

The campaign against midwives began in the early 1900's, a period when U.S. doctors were being criticized as poorly trained and ineffective. A report by The American Foundation for the Advancement in Teaching specifically called out childbirth practices as "the very worst showing." Doctors began looking at ways to better legitimize their profession and *delegitimize* midwives, who were, according to UC Berkeley professor Laurie Wilkie, "their competitors for what would become the most common cause of hospitalization in America, and a reliable source of revenue." At this time, according to *Quartz*, most American babies *were* delivered by midwives "who were, until then...overwhelmingly African American and Native American."

Doctors went to work. In 1911, New York obstetrics professor Clifton Edgar summed up the argument against midwives: They are "dark, dirty, ignorant, untrained, incompetent women....she is evil, though a necessary evil, and must be controlled. We must save our women."

Sound familiar? This is not unlike the campaign to reject breastfeeding and opt for formula, convincing women their own bodies were not hygienic or capable enough to nourish their children. And the profits flowed like rivers. Nor is it unlike the movement to save women from abortion access, claiming that abortion not only damages women's bodies, but also their psyches, leaving them traumatized. We women are just getting saved all over the place.

But *anyway*...

Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English emphasize the racism behind the anti-midwife movement in their book, *Witches, Midwives and Nurses*: “It wasn’t difficult to spread suspicions that midwives, who relied on traditional birth practices, were dedicated to witchcraft and sorcery.” The medical community was then able to “convince women that having a doctor—white and male—deliver a child was a safer option than involving a midwife—typically black and female.”

The attitudes stuck—as revealed in the numbers stated above. In many developed countries, delivery by midwife is natural and common. In the US, it’s anything but.

To learn more, check out this article from *Quartz*:

https://qz.com/1119699/how-racial-segregation-led-childbirth-in-america-to-be-over-medicalized/?utm_source=email&utm_medium=daily-brief&utm_content=e2f461f9-0f20-11ed-a684-52f172cb1c64

And from *Scientific American*, on the legitimacy and need for midwives:

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-u-s-needs-more-midwives-for-better-maternity-care/>



The culture war between doctors and midwives, explained...



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