

History of Birth & Midwifery in the United States

No matter what path you choose to follow in your work with childbearing families, it is important to understand this work within the context of the history of birth and midwifery practices.

A significant portion of the history of midwifery in the United States is intertwined with the history of slavery and the traditional Black midwifery practices that emerged in that context. This is a history that has been ignored and downplayed in the past, and it is crucial that American birth workers take active steps to correct these gaps in our individual and collective knowledge. Whenever you encounter a general history of American birth and midwifery, notice whether it includes to Black midwifery; if it does not, it is incomplete – and maybe not fully trustworthy.

Please review some of these resources -- and/or find your own -- about this part of birth and midwifery history in the United States. If you live outside of the US, seek similar materials for your own historical and geographical contexts, paying close attention to the roles played by oppressed and marginalized populations.

Video: [The US Medical System is Still Haunted by Slavery](#)

Scholarly Article: [Nothing to Work With but Cleanliness: The Training of African American Traditional Midwives in the South](#)

Resources: [Midwifery in Color: A Repository of Multicultural Midwifery History](#)

Article: [Duke University Midwifery - Historical Background](#)

Reading list: [Black Mamas Matter Alliance- Literature](#)

Journal Prompts

What echoes/ripples of this history do you notice as you begin to work with families?

Where do you see examples of communities or systems pushing back on this legacy?

Where do you, as a doula and childbirth educator, fit in this history?