

In North America

Before the 1900s, birth was considered a natural phenomenon. As medicine progressed, a new specialty called obstetrics was developed. These physicians have done everything in their power to make midwifery illegal in North America. Their motives were to improve American medical schools that were competing with European medical schools in the late 1800s. 19th century literature about obstetrics mentions how poorly trained obstetricians were and that that was due to the few hands-on experiences they had in schools. Since women did not have a right to vote, male doctors found it easy to eliminate female midwives by encouraging legislatures to adopt laws eliminating midwifery. New York State passed the first law against the practice of midwifery in 1896. By 1917, the law passed there was used verbatim to eliminate midwifery in California, so the idea had spread across the country. Only in the southern states where doctors did not want to eliminate the midwives did midwifery survive for some time – these doctors just wanted to train the midwives. Yet most doctors agreed that to improve medical schools they had to raise the standard of obstetric instruction and by eliminating the midwives they could take on more observations and hands-on training.