

ABSTRACT
CARRYING THE MIDWIFE'S BAG ACROSS THE ATLANTIC:
IMMIGRANT MIDWIVES AND THE FATE OF
MIDWIFERY IN THE UNITED STATES,
1850S – 1920S

Melanie Simone Lorenz

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This dissertation compares the occupational development of midwifery in the United States and Germany between the 1850s and the 1920s. It examines how midwifery in nineteenth-century Germany developed into an early paraprofession through its inclusion in the paramedical division of labor and the creation of professional associations and a trade journal. In the United States, by contrast, such a development did not occur. Instead, physicians excluded midwives from the emerging paramedical division of labor.

Even though a dedicated group of German American physicians and midwives attempted to replicate the German model of midwifery in St. Louis, Missouri, this paraprofessional form of midwifery failed to take root in the United States. American physicians' unwillingness to incorporate midwifery into the paramedical division of labor prevented a development similar to that found in most European countries. When the question about midwives' future position in American health care reemerged in the early twentieth century, midwives' close association with immigrant communities further hindered paraprofessionalization and led American health experts to frame midwifery primarily as a public health problem. This dissertation argues that the decline of midwifery in the United States was not the result of physicians pushing midwives out of the medical system; rather, midwives had never been fully included in the American medical landscape.

Drawing on German and American sources, particularly midwifery journals, this dissertation contributes to the historiography of midwifery by offering a new framework for understanding the decline of midwifery in the United States. At the same time, it highlights the efforts of educated immigrant midwives to replicate the German model in the United States and examines how their transnational experiences and connections shaped how they understood themselves, their profession, and other women working within the same field.