

SAVING OUR BABIES, MOTHERS AND FAMILIES Then and Now

**Midwives Save Lives: An Introduction to the Grand Midwives
of the United States of America**

**A Pictorial History of African-American Midwifery
in the United States 1600's - Present**

We Speak Your Name

by Pearle Cleage

Because we are free women, born of free women, who are born of free women, back as far as time begins, we celebrate your freedom.

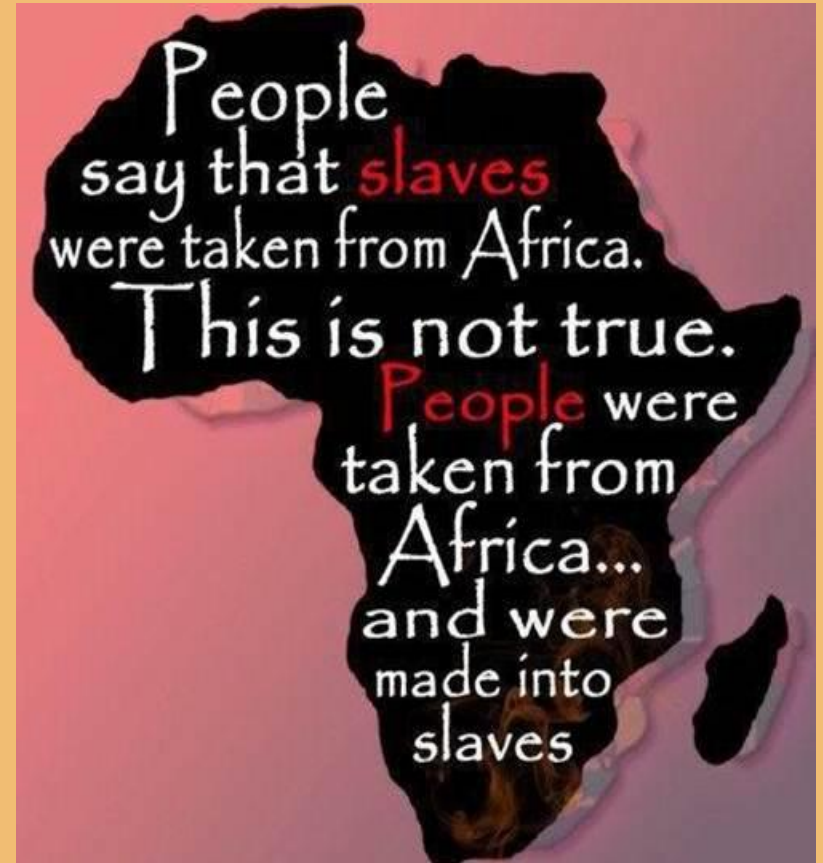
Because we are wise women, born of wise women, who are born of wise women, we celebrate your wisdom.

Because we are strong women, born of strong women, who are born of strong women, we celebrate your strength.

Because we are magical women, born of magical women, who are born of magical women, we celebrate your magic.

The Maafa

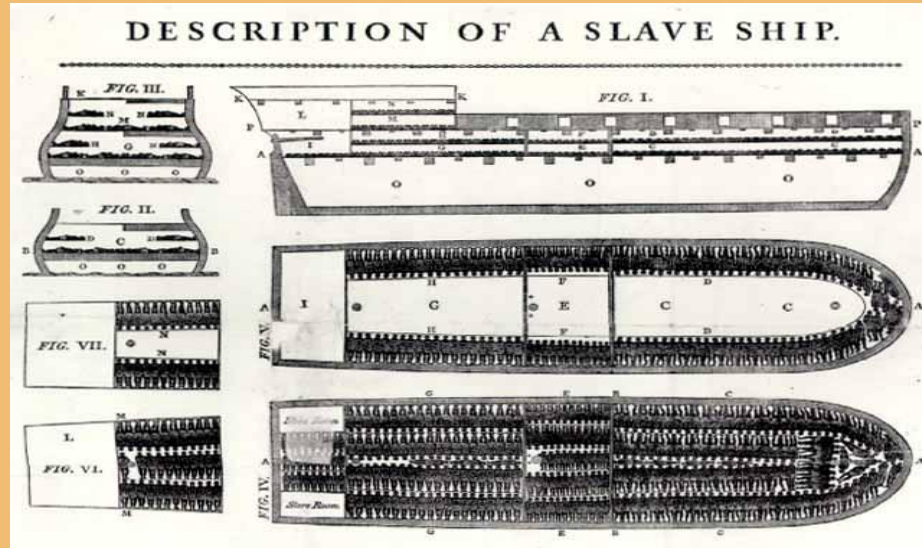
(Kiswahili for Holocaust) it is estimated to have involved the kidnapping, sale and enslavement of between 25 to 100 million humans.



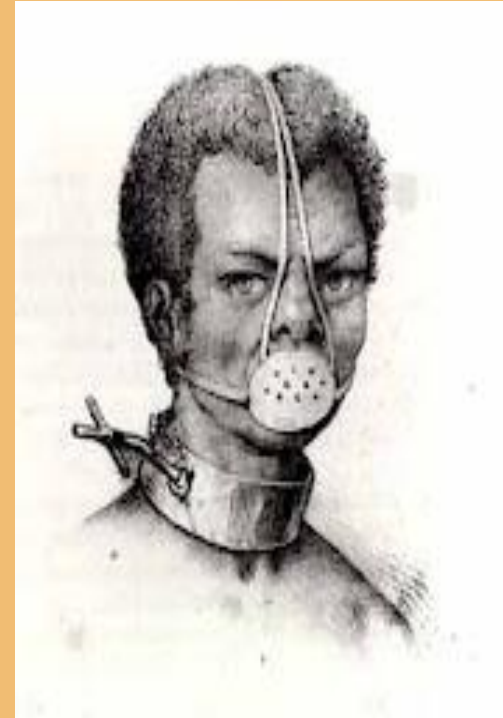
The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Triangle



A Typical Slave Ship



The Kidnapping



According to chattel records, the first African Midwives arrived in America in 1619, bringing with them centuries of healing wisdom from diverse African cultures.



Slavery in America





Gynecological Torture

In addition to the African women being used as chattel, for labor and for breeding purposes, they were used for scientific experiments by now renowned American doctors.









DULA



KING

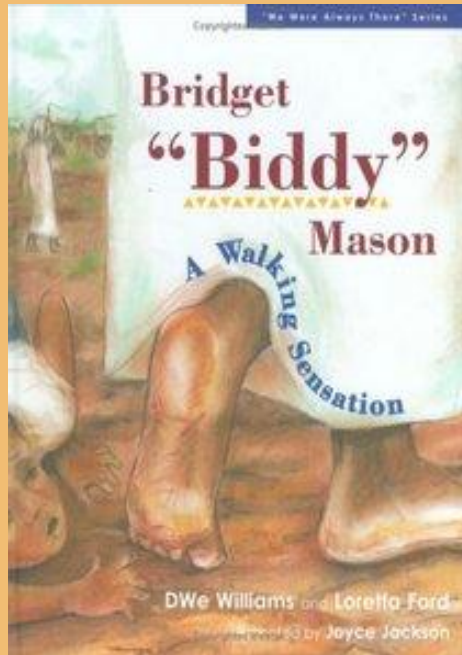


MCCLAIN



ALEXANDER

Bridget Biddy Mason



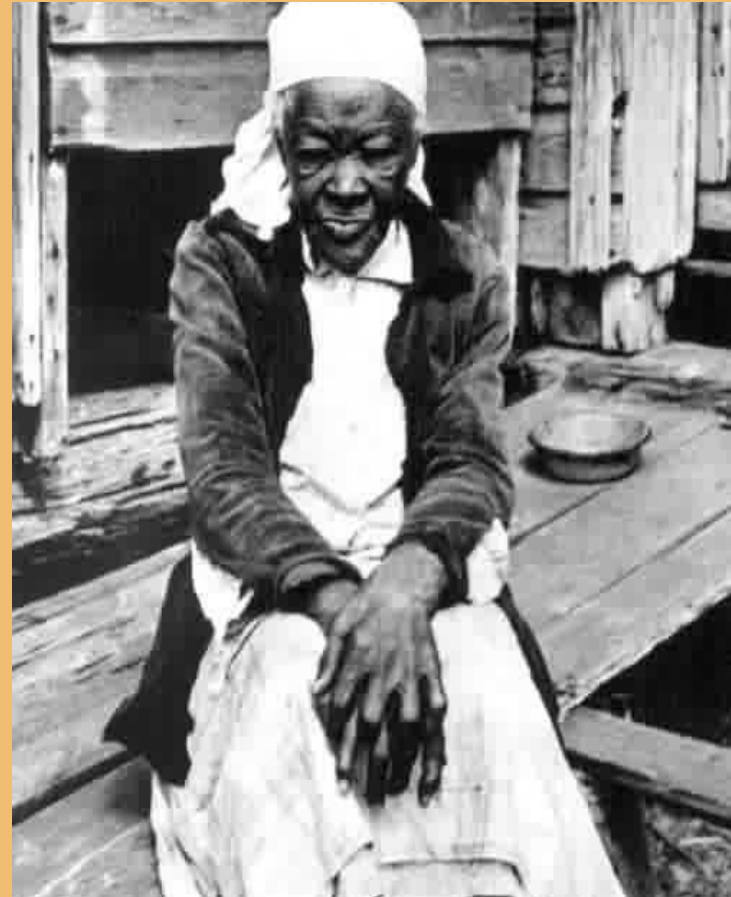
Mrs. Pearl M. Finely Henry



There were times she would leave home to deliver a baby and not return until weeks later. When she did return home, sometimes her pay would be a live pig or chicken, a ham, eggs, or a piece of material if she was blessed.

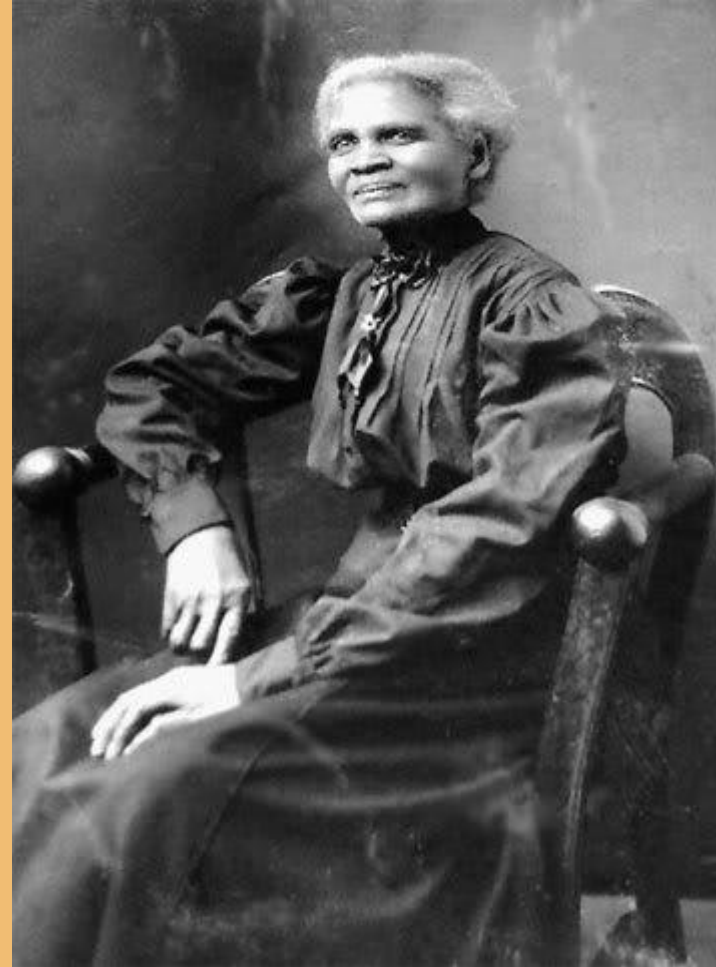
Sibby “Old Sibby” Kelly

A former slave and one of the last Midwives in Petersville, Georgia. 'Those hands caught many a baby'. She lived until 1934. Her spirit continues to live.



Amelie “Millie” Weaver Roberts

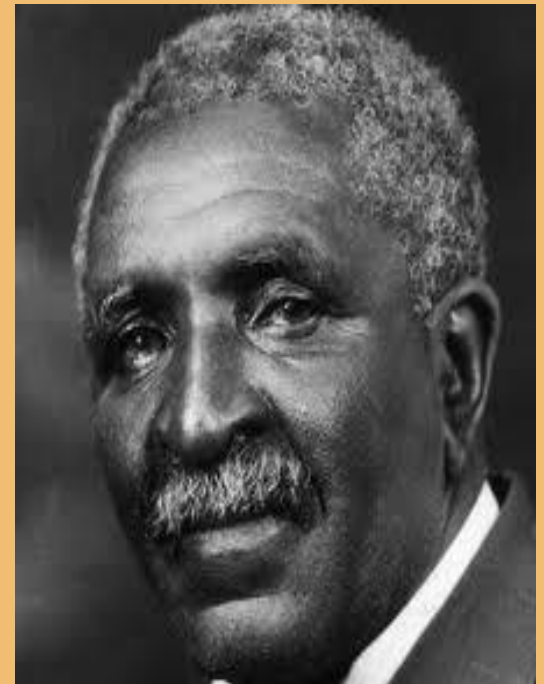
A Midwife, as was her mother before her, in slavery and in freedom. She was famous for healthy deliveries and healthy mothers, who never died of childbed fever.

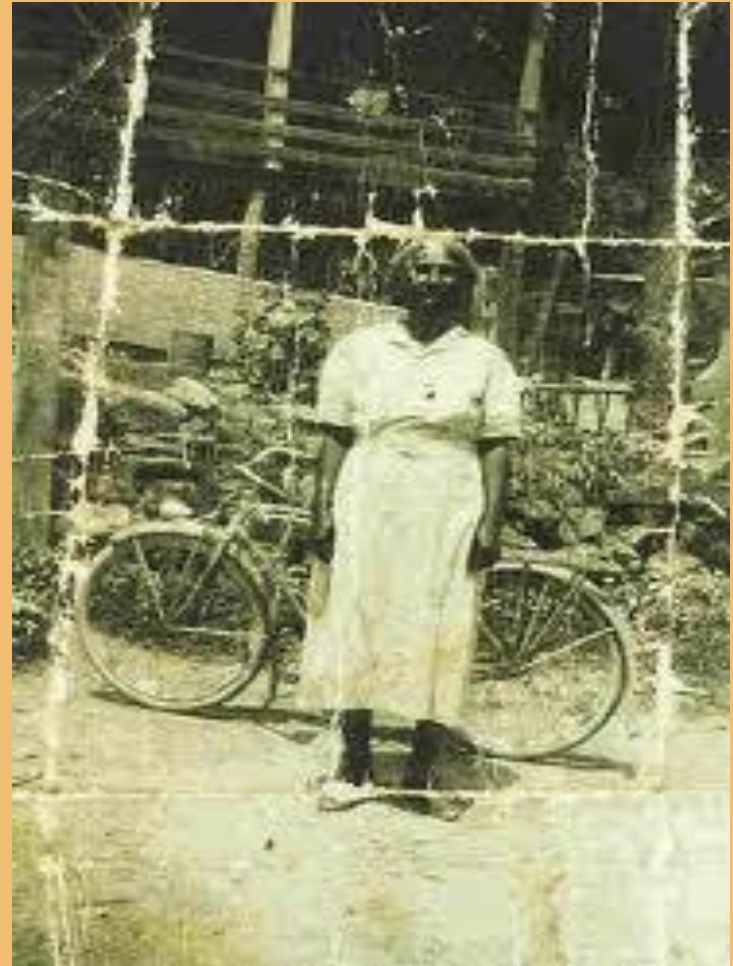




Mariah Scales Watkins
1824

George Washington Carver famous American scientist, botanist, educator, and inventor was birthed into the hands of Midwife Mariah.





Aunt Ellen Lewis

Born in 1869, Mrs. Lewis was a “gifted” Midwife serving her community and practicing her trade for 50 years.

Midwife Sybil Harper

Prominent Midwife in Oregon during the late 19th century. She was also the mother of Cowboy Bert Harber.



Nancy Phillips

A nurse and
Midwife in remote
gold towns in
Wyoming had
been born into
slavery in 1834.



The Beginning of the End of African American Midwifery



Midwives attended about 50 percent of births in 1900, but only 10 percent in 1935

Freedman's Hospital



Courtesy Meharry Medical College Archives

**In the first half of
the twentieth
century, American
Midwifery did not
disappear-it was
racialized.**

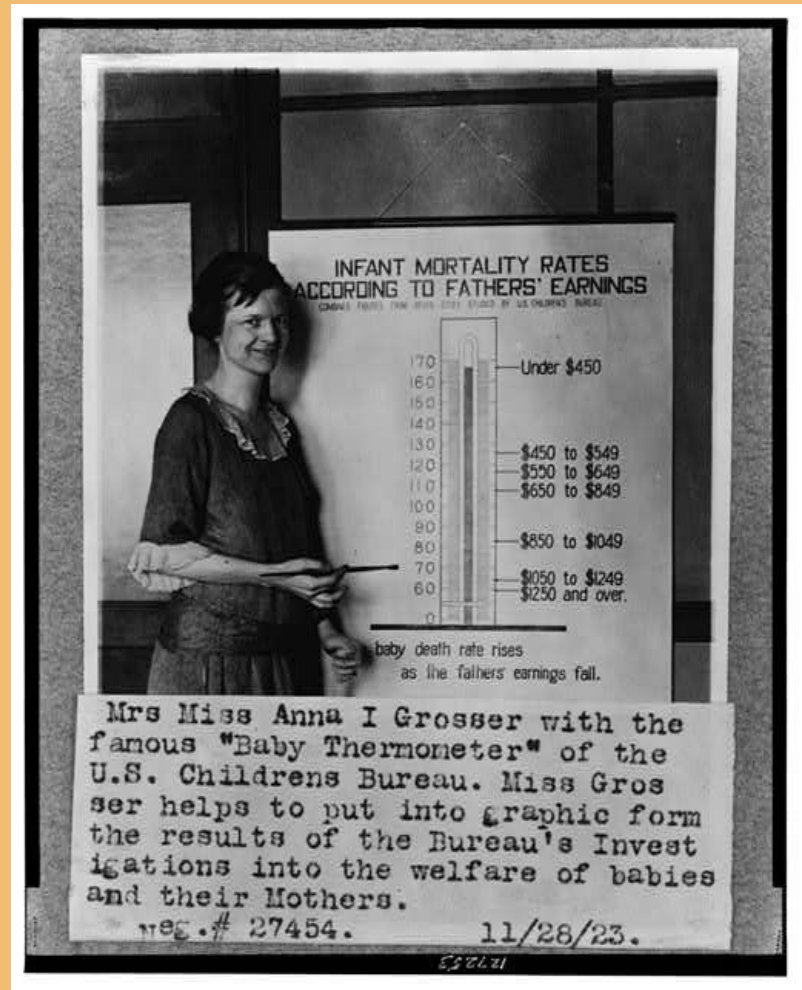
The Sheppard-Towner Act 1921



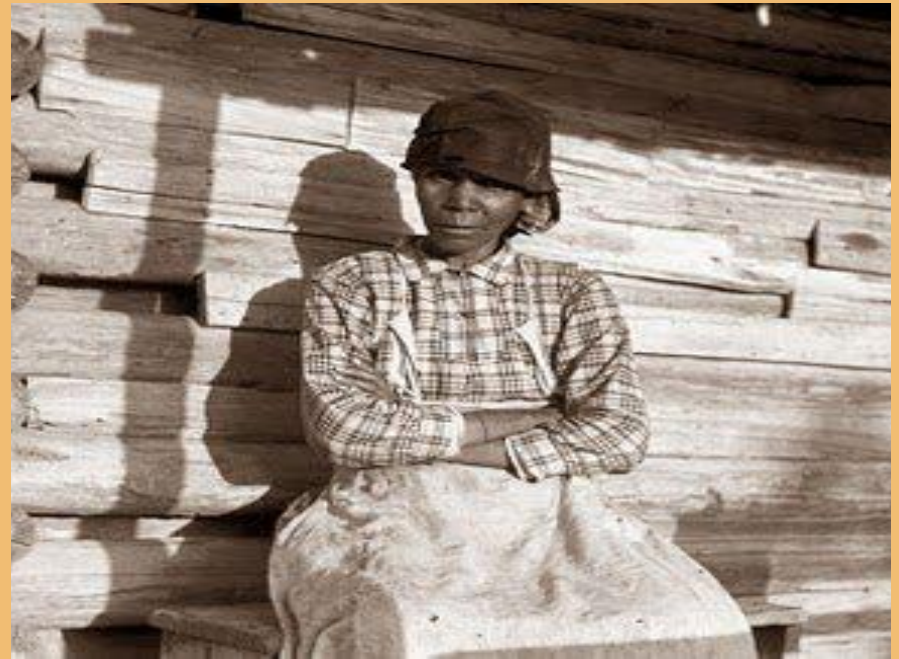
American women exercise their right to vote and pass the first major
© legislation to address women's issues

A Children's Bureau poster shows the relationship between fathers' earnings and infant mortality, 1923

Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-127253



Midwife Aunt Sally, from Gees Bend Alabama, was the only medical personnel in the entire area. This photo was taken in 1939.



Mama Lou delivered babies in Baldwin Georgia from 1925-1950





Mary Moss Simmons
Midwife In South Hill Virginia
in the 1930's



Midwife Lairna Green
Camden County, Georgia,
between 1920 and 1930



Midwife Lizzie Perkins
Wolfe County, Kentucky
1920's and 1930's

Federally-financed instruction in maternal child health care began



The public health nurses address the 'Midwife problem'



Union County Midwives 1942



MILLIE SIMPSON, HATTIE STONE, LOUANNA BELL,
RHODA MORRIS, AND MAGGIE VENZANT,
MIDWIVES OF UNION COUNTY, 1942

Courtesy of the Union County Historical Society, New Albany.



MIDWIFE'S EQUIPMENT

This bag should contain a clean washable lining.

Safety Razor - with new blades.

Sterile Gown. Nail brush.

Bottle of Synol Soap.

1 per cent Silver Nitrate Solution.

2 Sterile sets of cord dressings.

1 Sterile set of wipes.

Mask for nose and mouth.

Sterile cap. Orange stick.

Bottle of Lysol. Blunt Scissors.

Sterile tape to tie cord.

The **Safe Midwife** keeps her bag **clean and ready** at all times.

(OVER)

Trained Midwives had their bags inspected and 'passed' by public health nurses in Florida



STATE OF FLORIDA
HONORABLE  DISCHARGE
STATE BOARD OF HEALTH

WHEREAS, _____ OF THE COUNTY OF _____ STATE OF FLORIDA, HAS FAITHFULLY SERVED THE MOTHERS AND BABIES OF THE STATE OF FLORIDA IN THE PRACTICE OF MIDWIFERY AND HER SERVICE HAS BEEN LONG AND DEVOTED; AND,

WHEREAS, SHE HAS NOW VOLUNTARILY RESIGNED FROM THE PRACTICE OF MIDWIFERY, THEREFORE,

THIS CERTIFICATE OF HONORABLE DISCHARGE FROM THE PRACTICE OF MIDWIFERY IN THE STATE OF FLORIDA IS HEREBY GRANTED.



GIVEN UNDER THE HANDS AND HEAD OF THE
FLORIDA STATE BOARD OF HEALTH AT THE
CITY OF JACKSONVILLE,

THIS _____ DAY OF _____ 19____

STATE HEALTH OFFICER

DEPUTY CHIEF OF BUREAU OF PUBLIC HEALTH

STATE HEALTH COMMISSIONER

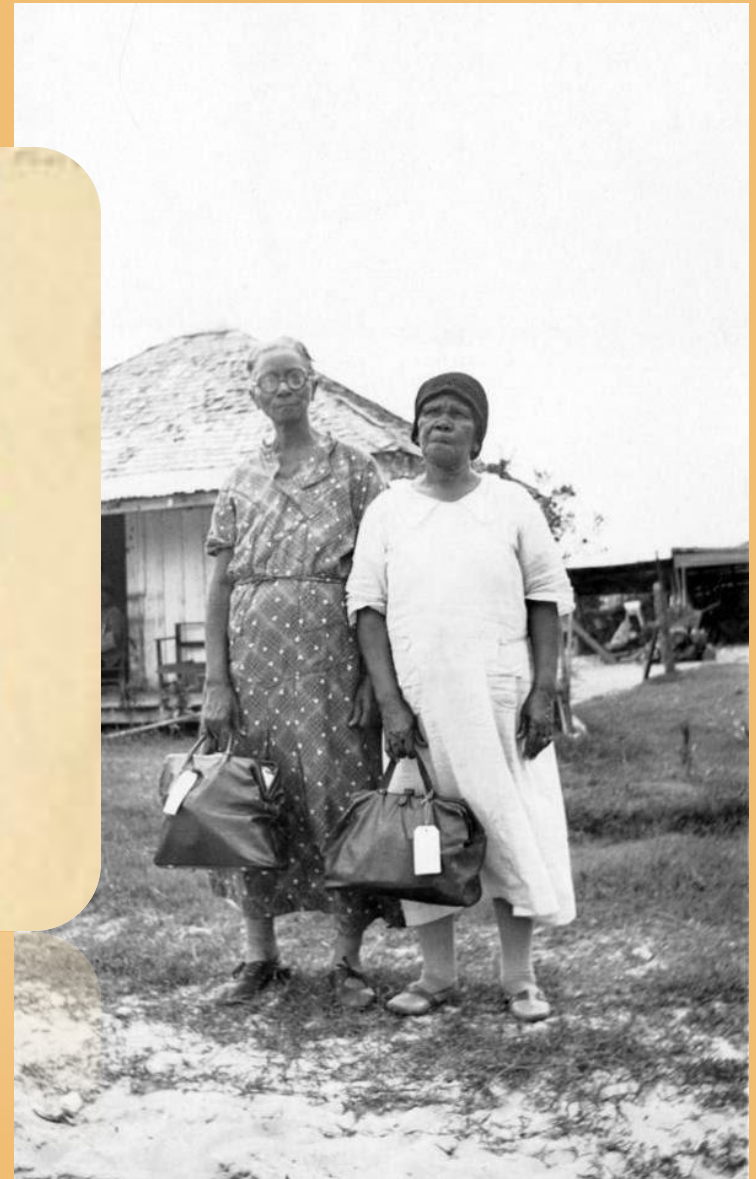
PRESIDENT, BOARD OF HEALTH

RECORDING MIDDLE TITLE

RECORDING MIDDLE INITIAL

RECORDING MIDDLE IN FULL AND STATE PEOPLE

RECORDING MIDDLE INITIAL



Julia Marguerite Mills Shade 1907-1999

In 48 years of work
she never lost a
mother or child...



Tuskegee School of Nursing



Public Health Nurse McGreen



Mamie Odessa Hale was a Nurse-Midwife who worked for the Crittenden County Health Department in 1942



©

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Courtesy of the UAMS Library's Historical Research Center

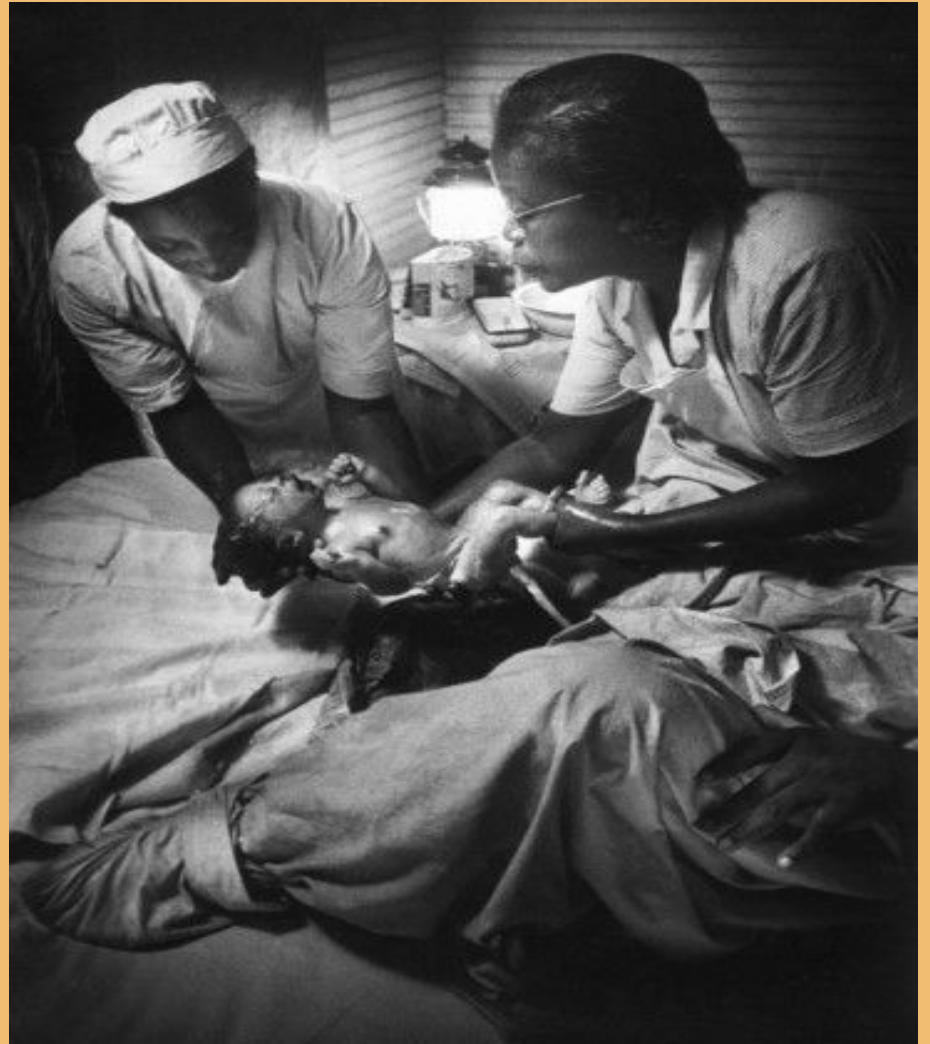
Mamie Odessa Hale Garland 1911–1968

Nurse Midwife and Consultant
to the Arkansas Department
of Health from 1945-1950.
Her contributions improved
maternal/infant mortality rates
and led to the regulation of
Midwives.



Courtesy of the UAMS Library's Historical Research
Center

Midwife Maude Callen





Miss Mary Francis Coley

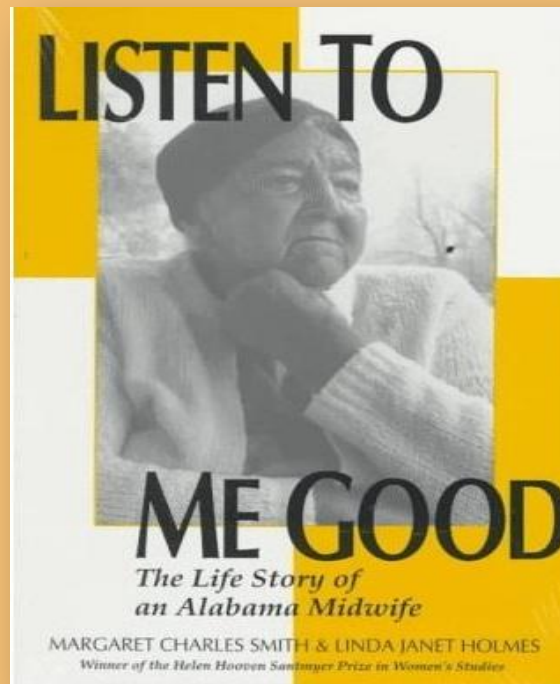
Midwife Coley became the star of an award winning documentary film, *All My Babies*, in 1952.





Miss Margaret Charles 1906-2004

Attended over 3,500 homebirths in
Greene County Alabama in the
midst of Jim Crow, the Klu Klux
Klan and the Civil Rights
Movement





Bringin' in Da Spirit by Rhonda L. Haynes



Gladys Milton (1924-1999)

Established a
Midwifery clinic in 1976
and as Northwest
Florida's only Midwife,
made health care
available to poor rural
women. Over a 40
year period she
delivered 3,000 babies



Midwife Maria Milton

Glays Milton's daughter pictured her with one of the 'babies' her mother caught

Owner of Milton Memorial Birthing Center, Florida



The 1970's



UmmSalaamah “Sondra” Abdullah-Zaimah, with Ina May Gaskin at The Farm c. 1980 *Spiritual Midwifery*
2002 Book Publishing Company, Summertown TN

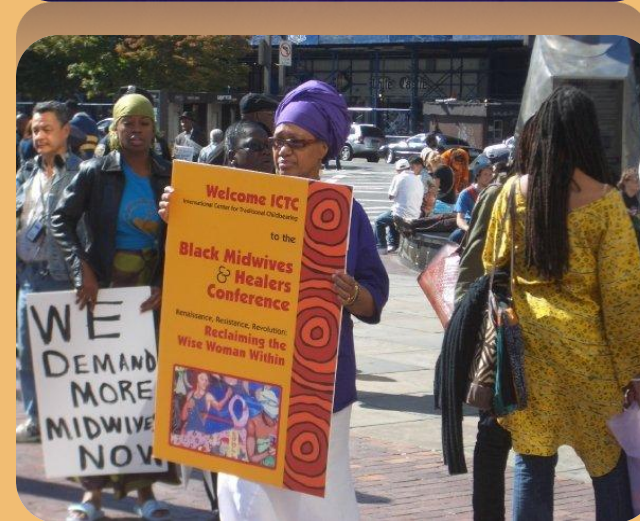
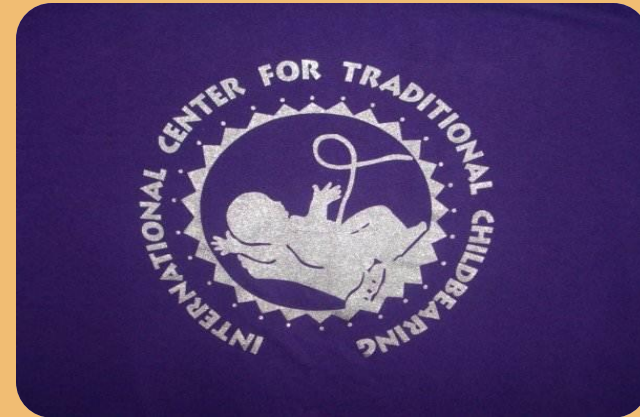
African-American Midwives at the end of the 20th Century



Childbirth Providers of African Descent (CPAD)



International Center for Traditional Childbearing (ICTC)





African-American Midwives of the 21st Century

The African-American Midwives of the 21st Century

We are everywhere pursuing all routes to Midwifery

? CNMs

? CPMs

PEP (apprentice trained)

MEAC (institutionally accredited)

? Traditional

We serve all communities via hospitals, clinics, birth centers, home birth and home visits

We own our own clinics and birth centers and have our own National Organization of Birth Centers (and Clinics) of Color (**NABCC**)

We own our own schools and training sites – Commonsense Childbirth School of Midwifery in Florida; ICTC –Full Circle Doula Training in Oregon; Darynee Blount at Birth Roots Babies and Racha Lawlor at Community Birth Center in California; and others.

We work in every birth settings throughout the United States



The Hands of African
America Midwives
Have Always Saved
Lives



Birth-related organizations: (Sourced from SQUAT Birth Journal Fall 2012)

The International Center for Traditional Childbearing: “The International Center for Traditional Childbearing is an infant mortality prevention, breastfeeding promotion, midwife and doula training non-profit organization. The ICTC’s mission is to increase the number of midwives, doulas and healers of color, to empower families in order to reduce infant and maternal mortality.”

Black Women Birthing Justice: “A collective of African-American, African, Caribbean and multi-racial women who are committed to transforming the birthing experiences for Black women.”

Black Women Birthing Resistance: “Our mission is to document, honor and sustain the role of Black women, families and our traditions of birthing as legacies of survival and resistance against the attempted genocide of our communities.”

Mobile Midwife: “Our mission is to expand Birth Justice by using story-telling, popular education, and community organizing to improve access to midwifery care.”

Mamas of Color Rising: “Collective of working class and poor mothers of color based in and around Austin, TX. We are interested in organizing ourselves and other women/mamas of color around issues with accessing needs like food, housing, education and safety, finding out together what our larger ideal community looks like and building it together.”

Books on African American Midwives in the United States

Board, Wendy and Gladys Milton. *Why Not Me? The Story of Gladys Milton, Midwife*. Summertown, TN: Book Publishing Co. , 1993.

Fraser, Gertrude Jacinta. *African American Midwifery in the South: Dialogues of Birth, Race, and Memory*. Harvard University Press, 1998.

Lee, Valerie. *Grand Midwives and Black Women Writers: Double-Dutched Readings*. New York: Routledge, 1996.

Logan, Onnie Lee and Katherine Clark. *Motherwit: An Alabama Midwife's Story*. New York: Dutton, 1989.

Susie, Debra Anne. *In the Way of Our Grandmothers: A Cultural View of Twentieth-Century Midwifery in Florida*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988.

Robertson, Mildred. *The Life and Times of a Virginia Midwife*

Smith, Claudine Curry and Mildred Baker Roberson. *My Bag Was Always Packed: The Life and Times of a Virginia Midwife*. Bloomington, IN: First Books, 2003.

Smith, Margaret Charles and Linda Janet Holmes. *Listen to Me Good: The Life Story of an Alabama Midwife*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1996.

Wilke, Laurie. *The Archaeology of Mothering: An African- American Midwife's Tale*

Additional Reading

Beautiful! Images of Health Joy and Vitality in Pregnancy and Birth by Jennie Joseph

Baby Mamas: A Midwife's Guide to ending The Epidemic by JayVon Muhammad

The Big Book of Soul: The Ultimate Guide to the African American Spirit by
Stephanie Rose Bird

The African-American Women's Guide to Breastfeeding by Katherine Barber

A Healing Grove: African Tree Remedies and Rituals for Body and Spirit by
Stephanie Rose Bird

Having Your Baby: A Guide for African American Women by Hilda Hutcherson

Holistic Parenting From the Pan Afrikan Perspective by Iya Raet

Killing the Black Body by Dorothy E. Roberts

Medical Apartheid by Harriet A. Washington

Resources - Suggested Viewing

[All My Babies A Midwife's Story](#)

[Legacy of the African-American Midwife by Shafia Monroe](#)

[Making Mothers Trailer](#)

[Miss Margret Preview](#)

[Midwife Anna Grier](#)

[Alabama Birth Stories](#)

[Birth Right](#)

Resources

[Bringin in Da Spirit by Rhonda L. Haynes](#)

<http://ictcmidwive.org/>

<http://bakerblockmuseum.org/basurname.htm>

<http://Midwiivesofcolor.wordpress.com/2012/03/03/more-than-a-Midwife-ummsalaamah-sondra-abdullah-zaimah-mn-cnm-cpm/>

<http://blog.amnestyusa.org/women/why-Midwiives-mothers-and-maternal-health-need-to-go-hand-in-hand-in-the-usa/#more-20469>

http://www.tuskegee.edu/academics/colleges/cvmnah/school_of_nursing_allied_health/department_of_nursing/history_of_nursing_at_tuskegee.aspx

<http://www.africanholocaust.net/articles/TRANSATLANTIC%20SLAVE%20TRADE.htm>

<http://infocus.nlm.nih.gov/2010/02/exhibit-recognizes-african-ame.html>



Jennie Josephs LM, CPM
Common Sense Childbirth

Claudia Booker CPM
Birthing Hands of DC



Ayesha Curry Ibrahim
Student Midwife

