

The Policing and Prosecution of Abortion in Early 1900s New York City
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Abstract

Police and prosecutors in the early 1900s in New York City faced many difficulties in court cases involving abortionists. Two New York City abortion trials during this time illustrated these difficulties. One abortion case involved a servant woman who sought an abortion and had to receive emergency care at a hospital because of the botched procedure. Another trial was an undercover operation to catch an abortionist in the act. Both abortionists in these trials were found not guilty. It was difficult to police abortion during this time period because a woman who had gotten an abortion had to end up in the hospital or the police had to do an undercover operation. Undercover investigations done by police were also examined closely by judges and defense lawyers because they had to make sure it was done legally by police. Women who sought out the operation played a huge role in testifying in court and were often threatened by police and prosecutors to do so. The police and doctors also shared information about women who came to the hospital with suspected abortions. These policies and alliances were dangerous for any woman having a miscarriage because she could not get treatment unless reporting her abortionist. This information is relevant to today's hearings about abortion because the policing and prosecution of it could again be difficult and women suffering from any form of miscarriage could be denied healthcare.