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LUCY PAGE GASTON: THE FORGOTTEN ANTI-SMOKING EDUCATOR OF THE TURN OF THE 20TH CENTURY'S CLEAN LIVING MOVEMENT

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Lucy Page Gaston (1860-1924) was born in Delaware, Illinois of staunch abolitionist and prohibitionist parents who were friends of Francis Willard, the founder of the WCTU (Women's Christian Temperance Union). Gaston attended the Illinois State Normal School, where she led raids on saloons, gambling dens, and tobacco shops as an active member of the WCTU. The WCTU was against alcohol, tobacco, gambling, sexual transmitted diseases, prostitution, the double standard of sexuality and other "bad habits and evils." In 1884, it developed a Department for the Overthrow of the Tobacco Habit. It cited the health hazards of smoking and suggested the best opportunity to make headway against this practice was with the young.

Gaston taught both in the public and in Sunday school for about 10 years and worked on the local WCTU editorial staff. She gave anti-cigarette lectures and lobbied the state legislature to ban cigarettes when she moved with her parents, in 1893, two Harvey, Illinois, a planned "teetotaler" community. As part of her campaign in the 1890s, she imitated the "cold water armies" of the previous generation of anti-alcohol crusaders. She and other reformers urged children to sing anti-tobacco songs, where pins, join parades, and take the "clean life pledge."

In terms of changing health behavior deemed negative by certain segments of society, *moral suasion*, or education, is generally the first step. In the late 19th and early 20th century, sentiments concerning tobacco and health were largely left to those involved in the health reform, eugenics, and temperance movements rather than medicine and public health. Some physician maintained moderate smoking caused little harm.

In the 1890s, anti-cigarettes advocates began proclaiming that smoking lead to alcoholism, drug abuse, crime and insanity. One author of the era, however, expressed concern about the emotional and exaggerated tactics used by reformers. He felt that the dangers to which smokers were exposing themselves should be described to them factually and objectively. An editorial a decade later in the March 1907 *American Monthly Review of Reviews*, stated that Crusaders "exaggerated the evils of tobacco... in the name of hygiene" in their attempt to forbid its use in any form. These activities and attitudes are similar to the late 20th century anti-tobacco aspect of the third social-reform Clean Living Movement, with moral undertones.

In 1895, the WCTU argued the merits of fresh air and advocated that smoking be permitted only if it did not interfere "with the rights and freedoms of any other individual." Various WCTU affiliates deluged Congress with petitions demanding a federal ban on cigarettes on grounds that they were causing insanity and death to thousands of American youth.

In 1899, a group of Chicago businessman helped Gaston create the Anti-Cigarette League, which became the National Anti-Cigarette League in 1901, and Anti-Cigarette League of America in 1910. This organization over it's life time secured laws to prohibit the manufacture and consumption of cigarettes and to prosecute violators of the law.

In addition to these anti-tobacco groups formed by Gaston, other associations sprang up between 1884 and 1917, including the Society Against Abusive Tobacco, National Anti-Cigarette Association, the No to Tobacco League, the Clean Life Army, and the Non-Smokers Protective League. Although these groups differed in their objectives, they were united in demanding curbs on public smoking. Constant anti-cigarette agitation by all the advocacy groups quickly led to a *coercion phase* (legislation and public policy) of the anti-tobacco cycle which coexisted with *moral* suasion.

Laws against tobacco use were aimed mostly at the "little white slaver" and not pipes or cigars. The 12 August 1905 *Harper's Weekly* implied that this was because cigarettes were new, inexpensive, and tended to be smoked by boys and poor immigrants. In 1888, parents and anti-tobacco crusaders registered outrage against advertisement and enticement that encourage boys

to smoke. Cigarette manufacturers were pressured to eliminate these tactics, similar to efforts during the last decade of the 20th century. In 1893, the state of Washington prohibited cigarette use for minors and adults, but the law was soon struck down by the federal court.

In 1899, Gaston founded a monthly called, *The Boy*, aimed at preventing the use of "coffin nails"- a term she supposedly coined - among young boys. Besides many anti-cigarette societies, she founded a smoking cure clinic with physician D. H. Kress in 1913. Treatment consisted of swabbing the throat with a silver nitrite solution and having the patient chew on gentian root whenever the smoking urge returned.

By 1900, most states had banned cigarettes and tobacco sales to minors. Between 1895 in 1900, Iowa, North Dakota, and Tennessee had outlawed the sale of cigarettes and/or cigarette papers or imposed prohibitory taxes in response to lobbying by the anti-cigarette crusaders. New Hampshire, in 1900, and Oklahoma territory, in 1901, passed anti-cigarette laws. In 1901, the March *Outlook* reported that "only two states, Wyoming and Louisiana, have not given some attention to cigarette smoking." However, most states generally ignored the enforcement of the laws until the U. S. Supreme Court upheld the Tennessee statute in 1900. This spurred greater anti-cigarette activity on the state level.

In 1905, Wisconsin and Nebraska banned cigarette sales in Indiana and prohibited even the possession of cigarettes. In 1907, Illinois and Arkansas, and by 1909, Kansas, South Dakota, Minnesota, Missouri, Iowa, Michigan, West Virginia, and, again, Washington past bans or prohibitive taxes against cigarettes.

New York City, in 1908, passed an ordinance which banned smoking in public by women, but it was soon repealed. There was also social coercion against smoking. The 12 August 1905 *Harper's Weekly* reported that some railroads, post offices, and other businesses including Sears, Montgomery Ward, and the Ford Motor Company refused to hire cigarette smokers on grounds that smoking caused inefficiency, unreliability, and under-productiveness. These restrictions were generally accepted by both the courts and opinion makers.

As the anti-cigarette movement developed its "second wind," Thomas Edison and Henry Ford in 1914, wrote tracks expounding the health dangers of smoking. In 1920, an Indiana legislature advocated, as punishment for smoking in public, imprisonment and hard labor. The measure did not pass. In 1921, both Idaho and Utah passed anti-smoking laws. However, after some prominent business men were arrested in Salt Lake City, Utah's law was soon repealed. In 1921, Iowa, Arkansas, and Tennessee repealed their ineffective statutes. The last states to repeal their laws were North Dakota in 1925 and Kansas in 1927. By 1930, cigarettes were again legal in every state. Most states, however still prohibited sales to minors.

Because of alleged fiscal mismanagement and her combative style which brought lawsuits against the anti-smoking leagues, Gaston was forced to resign twice from this group. Gaston went on to found leagues in Kansas and Chicago from which she was also fired. During her lifetime, she enjoyed being referred to as the "Carrie Nation of cigarettes." Gaston announced her candidacy for President of the United States on anti-tobacco platform in 1920. She opposed "cigarette face" Warren G. Harding, a smoker. She announced her candidacy shortly after she was forced to resign from the league, but soon withdrew, as she had little support.

Due to Gaston's effort, most states passed anti-smoking laws and banned the sale of cigarettes to minors. Gaston died in 1924 of throat cancer, which ironically, is usually associated with smoking. Her death brought the end of the anti-cigarette campaign during this era and she became forgotten by the end of the 20th century.

Despite the reformers anti-alcohol campaigns, tobacco consumption continued to increase. During this turn this 20th century reform movement, the Tobacco Trust began fierce lobbying to prevent total prohibition of tobacco and cigarettes. In 1900, it was considered vulgar for a woman to smoke. However, 15 years later many women began to smoke as a symbol of suffrage and emancipation. The cigarette became part of the flapper costume in the 1920s.

Gaston, and the groups she founded, were instrumental in the passage of many anti-smoking laws and a campaigns for both school and public education on the dangers of smoking at the turn

of the last century. A combination of education and legislative efforts were effective in making the public aware of the dangers of smoking during the second clean living movement.

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