

Tobacco's scandalous past



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Tobacco's Scandalous Past In the last century tobacco has gone from a hallmark of society acceptance to a product on the fringes of legality. As more has been learned about tobacco and its effect on health, the once popular cigarette has fallen into disfavour. Still, many people turn to tobacco in its many forms as a form of enjoyment or a force of habit. Tobacco's past is marked by industry pressure to maintain sales while navigating a sea of controversial news.

At the turn of the 20th century, tobacco was popular and was appreciated not only for its flavour and nicotine, but also as a fashion statement. In 1901, " Edward VII, the tobacco-hating queen's son and successor, gathers friends together in a large drawing room at Buckingham Palace... and announces, " Gentlemen, you may smoke" (Borio). Smoking jackets became popular and advertisements glorified the attractiveness of smoking. This was the age when it was fashionable to enjoy a glass of port wine with an elegant after dinner cigar (" History of Smoking"). This sensation swept Great Britain and began the conflict between good health and fashion for the tobacco industry.

Soldiers during World War I were treated to cigarettes in their rations and as they brought the habit home, it gained even greater popularity. According to Borio, one-third of the returning soldiers were addicted to cigarettes. By 1935 the reported cases of lung cancer among cigarette smokers were skyrocketing and in 1938 the first medical report on the ill health effects of tobacco was released by John Hopkins University (Borio, " George Seldes on Tobacco"). By 1948, lung cancer was growing at 5 times the rate of any other cancer and had become the most common form of disease (Borio). Many of the victims of smoking were veterans who had gained the habit

during World War I.

The last half of the 20th century witnessed a string of monumental events concerning tobacco. In 1950 evidence of a link between lung cancer and smoking was first published in the British Medical Journal ("History of Smoking"). In 1964, the UK banned cigarette advertising and in 1971 the industry agreed to voluntary warnings on packaging. In 1994, 56 years after the John Hopkins report, "Executives of seven largest US tobacco companies swear in Congressional testimony that nicotine isn't addictive and deny manipulating nicotine levels in cigarettes" ("History of Smoking"). These companies now face further legal liability and lawsuits.

The past 100 years has seen tobacco go from the darling of the fashionable to the scourge of the health care system. In the first half of the 20th century sales flourished as companies promoted tobacco as a safe and luxurious product. By 1938 as medical reports began to confirm the health risks, the tobacco companies went on the defensive and denied the allegations. Subsequent to the British Medical Journal article in 1950 the anti-tobacco movement has gained momentum. Yet, even in the face of mounting evidence the industry still maintains its innocence. The industry continues to navigate the rough waters of eroding public support as its ship slowly sinks over the horizon.

Works Cited

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