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A MOVEMENT FOR CHANGE:

Horatio Robinson Storer and Physicians' Crusade Against Abortion

RYAN JOHNSON



Abortion has not always been a controversial topic in American politics. The modern debate can be traced back to physicians' crusade against abortion in the second half of the 19th century, led by Harvard-educated and New England-based Horatio Robinson Storer. Storer launched the crusade in 1857, in part to criminalize abortion and in part to bring respect to the medical field in a time when doctors were not highly esteemed. This paper surveys Storer's publications and correspondence and analyzes the motives and results of Storer's campaign.

ABSTRACT

The issue of abortion on the eve of the Civil War was one of the most contentious topics in the United States. Abortion was legal with virtually no restrictions for much of the 19th century; however, by 1900, abortion was a criminal offense almost everywhere in the U.S. Such a drastic shift in national policy was not a sudden occurrence, but the result of a long campaign by physicians to denounce the practice of abortion. At the helm of the physicians' crusade was a Boston doctor named Horatio Robinson Storer, a graduate of the Harvard Medical School and a specialist in obstetrics and gynecology. In 1857, Storer publicly launched what became one of the most successful public policy crusades in American history, as it led to the creation of anti-abortion statutes in every state.¹

Abortion is the intentional early termination of a pregnancy by removal of the fetus. In the early 19th century, and for many centuries before that, abortion was an accepted practice and a private issue that the government did not regulate in the U.S. A majority of the American public did not consider abortion to be immoral, and the practice was often viewed as helpful to a woman because it was a way of avoiding the public humiliation of giving birth to a child out of wedlock.

¹ To understand the anti-abortion movement in the U.S., one must first understand what abortion is. In order to do this, see Rita J. Simon, *Abortion: Statutes, Policies, and Public Attitudes the World Over* (Westport, CT; Praeger, 1998). To understand general abortion policy in the U.S., see Simone M. Caron, *Who Chooses?: American Reproductive History Since 1830* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008); Andrea Tone, *Controlling Reproduction: An American History* (Wilmington, DE: SR Books, 1997); Rosemary Nossiff, *Before Roe: Abortion Policy in the States* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2001); and Leslie J. Reagan, *When Abortion Was a Crime: Women, Medicine, and Law in the United States, 1867-1973* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). For information about the status of physicians in U.S. in the 19th century, see William G. Rothstein, *American Physicians in the Nineteenth Century: From Sects to Science* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972); and Richard Harrison Shryock, *Medicine in America: Historical Essays* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1966). For more information about the physicians' crusade against abortion, see James C. Mohr, *Abortion in America: The Origins and Evolution of National Policy, 1800-1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979). Also, see Frederick N. Dyer, *The Physicians' Crusade against Abortion* (Sagamore Beach, MA: Science History Publications, 2005). Both Mohr and Dyer's books are two of the best studies of the physicians' crusade. Information about Storer can be found in Frederick N. Dyer, *Champion of Women and the Unborn: Horatio Robinson Storer, M.D.* (Canton, MA: Science History Publications, 1999). Finally, there are many primary sources that show the attitudes of physicians at the time, such as Horatio Storer, *Why Not? A Book for Every Woman* (Boston, MA: Lee and Shepard, 1866); and Horatio Storer, *Is It I? A Book for Every Man* (Boston, MA: Lee and Shepard, 1868).

Furthermore, a doctor-induced abortion was considered a safe procedure with minimal risks to the mother's health. It was also considered acceptable to obtain an abortion any time before "quickening" occurred, which refers to the fetus's first movements in the womb that the mother could physically feel.² Similarly to contemporary arguments, women believed that abortion was a personal decision that should be made by women and women only. There were no criminal statutes in place to prevent a woman from receiving an abortion before quickening, and restrictions only applied after it occurred.³

A doctor-induced abortion was considered a safe procedure with minimal risks to the mother's health.

While abortion was an acceptable practice in the U.S. during the 19th century, it was often difficult to diagnose a pregnancy and abortion techniques were sometimes performed on women who were not actually pregnant. Because there were no foolproof methods to test for pregnancy, a woman often had to wait until she could feel the fetus move to confirm that she was pregnant, which is why such emphasis was placed on quickening.

Physicians and medical professionals believed that conception occurred because a woman's menstruation was blocked and, if left untreated, a blocked menstrual cycle could wreak physical harm on a woman's body.⁴ Therefore, it was imperative that a woman's natural cycle be restored. Because understanding of conception and pregnancy was so limited, physicians would sometimes even cut a woman on a part of her body to try and start the menstrual cycle.⁵ Also, it was not uncommon for a woman to seek a physician to relieve a stopped menses, which would result in a procedure that would abort the fetus.

² "Quickening" usually occurred around the 4th month of pregnancy. Great emphasis was placed on the fetus' first movements as society did not believe the fetus was a human until after quickening (including the Catholic Church). The term "abortion" was originally used to refer to pregnancy terminations that occurred after quickening.

³ Established in 1803, British common law stated that abortion was illegal after quickening; Mohr, *Abortion in America*, 3, 16, 18; Caron, *Who Chooses?*, 3; Simon, *Statutes, Policies, and Public Attitudes*, 1; Rosalind Petchesky, *Abortion and Woman's Choice: The State, Sexuality, and Reproductive Freedom* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1990), 68-69.

⁴ Physicians believed that a woman's menstruation cycle could be interrupted by factors such as diet and weather patterns.

⁵ 19th-century physicians believed that letting blood from any part of the body would flush the womb in the same way that a woman's menstrual cycle would.

Abortion was administered in several different ways in the 19th century. Many women used home remedies that were passed down from generation to generation. These remedies included the consumption of plants such as aloe, black hellebore, indigo, turpentine, and mistletoe—many of which, while effective, also severely compromised the health of the mother. In fact, there were many available books that listed plants and natural remedies that would facilitate an abortion. Furthermore, pharmacies throughout the country sold over-the-counter drugs that induced an abortion and restored a woman's menstrual cycle. The prevalence of abortion-related material throughout society reflects women's increased implementation of the practice. Another procedure often performed by a physician, or sometimes even the mother herself, included sticking a probe into the uterus. This procedure would tear the uterine sack containing the fetus, resulting in an abortion.⁶

Abortion rates rose by nearly 300 percent from the early 19th century to the second half of the 19th century.

As a result of the limited restrictions and easy access to abortion, the birth rate in the U.S. plummeted from about seven children per woman to about four during the 19th century. Abortion rates in the U.S. were on the rise and the abortion industry was booming. Abortion rates rose by nearly 300 percent from the early 19th century to the second half of the 19th century. By the 1840s, abortion was no longer taboo to discuss; rather, it was an acknowledged social reality. In fact, it was not uncommon to see an advertisement for abortion-related products in newspapers, which show that there was a thriving market for abortions and that many women accepted this practice. Early in the century, usually only poor, single mothers sought abortions; however, white, middle-class, and Protestant women were now seeking abortions. In fact, by the second half of the 19th century, about 67 percent of women seeking abortions were married—something that upset the more conservative, traditionalist groups.⁷

⁶ Janet Farrell Brodie, *Contraception and Abortion in Nineteenth-Century America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 42, 70-71; Caron, *Who Chooses?*, 16; Reagan, *When Abortion Was*, 8-9.

⁷ Caron, *Who Chooses?*, 14-16; Joanna N. Lahey, "Birthing a Nation: The Effect of Fertility Control Access on Nineteenth-Century Demographic Transition," *Journal of Economic History* 74, no. 2 (June 2014): 482, 486; Tone, *Controlling Reproduction*, 80; Mohr, *Abortion in America*, 46-47.

In an indirect response to the spike in abortions,⁸ the first legislation regulating the practice was passed beginning in 1821 in Connecticut. This law prohibited a woman from taking any poisons or toxins with the intent to miscarry after the woman was quick with child—the punishment for the offense being life imprisonment. This legislation was significant because it was the first criminal statute that explicitly confronted the abortion issue. What previously fell under the jurisdiction of the common law was now being written into the legal system. Following Connecticut's landmark law, Missouri (1825), Illinois (1827), and New York (1828) each passed legislation that addressed abortion. The Missouri and Illinois statutes removed the quickening specification, making it illegal to ingest poisons to abort a fetus at any time during the pregnancy. Overall, early legislation was more geared towards poison control than the anti-abortion issue itself, and the practice of abortion was left relatively unaffected. However, this legislation served as a foundation upon which American physicians would build their anti-abortion crusade.⁹

Physicians in the U.S. during the 19th century were not held in high esteem, and they looked to professionalize the practice of medicine. The medical profession was unreliable, and physicians had a difficult time treating even simple ailments. In fact, newspapers commonly denounced and insulted the medical profession. For example, the *Reporter* announced that the entire medical guild was "a stupendous humbug."¹⁰ Furthermore, in the 1850s, the editor of the *Cincinnati Medical Observer* explained that "It has become fashionable to speak of the medical profession as a body of jealous, quarrelsome men, whose chief delight is in the annoyance and ridicule of each other."¹¹ This description of the medical field by someone involved in medicine showed the true disastrous nature of the profession. There were few medical schools established during this time, and no regulations existed that required physicians to attend medical school in order to practice.¹² While the state of medicine in the 19th century was in disarray, there were select physicians who attended the nation's reputable medical schools and were committed to practicing sound, scientific medicine. These physicians wanted to professionalize medicine, to establish standards for the

⁸ Abortion was still not viewed as a social evil by the American public early in the nineteenth century, but some legislation appeared during this time period that targeted the practice of abortion.

⁹ Mohr, *Abortion in America*, 20-21, 25-26; Reagan, *When Abortion*, 10.

¹⁰ Found in Shyrock, *Medicine in America*, 151.

¹¹ Found in Shyrock, *Medicine in America*, 151.

¹² The medical schools of the time were not administered as they are today where an applicant must meet certain standards in order to be admitted. They were often run as private, profit-focused businesses with few applicants were turned away because the doctor who would teach the students did not want to lose any money.

practice, and to denounce the amateurs who dominated the field. In an effort to do so, the American Medical Association (AMA) was founded in 1847.¹³

These physicians wanted to professionalize medicine, to establish standards for the practice, and to denounce the amateurs who dominated the field.

The AMA was formed as a way for physicians to set nationwide standards and to recognize those physicians who practiced medicine correctly, for the benefit of the American public. One of the AMA's earliest missions was to criminalize abortion. Many AMA-recognized physicians did not perform abortions because they believed it violated the Hippocratic Oath,¹⁴ and as a result, women looked elsewhere for the procedure.¹⁵ In effect, by not performing abortions, physicians forced their patients to seek the procedure from amateurs or the medically untrained. Therefore, AMA physicians believed that they could gain more control over the practice if abortion was outlawed altogether. This notion caused many problems amongst physicians, and Dr. Evan Rush attributed "the whole odium of the hostility of physicians" to "their competition for business and money."¹⁶ Many physicians wanted to end this strife and believed that ending abortion would help achieve this goal.¹⁷

Physicians wanted to outlaw abortion for several reasons, but the driving force behind their campaign was a sincere belief that abortion was an inherently immoral practice. Because there was no way to prove exactly at what point life began, physicians assumed that life began at conception. Therefore, physicians thought that aborting a fetus in the womb at any point of pregnancy was nothing short of murder. Also, abortion was explicitly forbidden in the Hippocratic Oath, and physicians viewed it as a direct violation of ethics. Furthermore, physicians wanted more respect for their practice, and

they believed that if they portrayed abortion as a social evil, the practice of medicine would be viewed as a just and moral profession.¹⁸

At the head of the crusade to criminalize abortion was Dr. Horatio Robinson Storer. A graduate of Harvard Medical School, one of the few prestigious medical schools in the country, Storer followed in his father's footsteps as a specialist in gynecology and obstetrics. He quickly rose in the medical profession and made a name for himself as an expert in reproductive health. His father was also a well-respected physician, and as a result of heritage and education, Storer became associated with excellence. By the end of the 19th century, Storer would become one of the most recognizable names in the country. Through public forums, popular literature, and publications, Storer revolutionized the medical profession.¹⁹

Horatio Robinson Storer became the undisputed leader in the effort to criminalize abortion.

Horatio Robinson Storer became the undisputed leader in the effort to criminalize abortion. Earlier physicians such as Hugh L. Hodge and Storer's father, David Humphreys Storer, were influential. The elder Storer was chosen to speak to the Massachusetts Medical Society in 1851, and he criticized abortion in the medical practice. His 1855 introductory lecture at Harvard College also deeply influenced his son. In his Harvard address, D. H. Storer explicitly stated with regard to abortion laws that "Reason should be dealt with; moral suasion should be used, and *no one can exert a greater influence than the physician.*"²⁰ The fact that Storer, a respected physician and expert in gynecology, believed physicians could single-handedly change abortion laws in the U.S. helped make the possibility of a physicians' crusade a reality. Another prominent physician Hugh L. Hodge wrote an essay on criminal abortion in 1854 that explained abortion was a "crime against the natural feelings of man—against the welfare and safety of females—against the peace and prosperity of society."²¹

Horatio Storer took the developing anti-abortion sentiments within the medical field and united them

13 Mohr, *Abortion in America*, 32-34; Brodie, *Contraception and Abortion*, 269; Rothstein, *American Physicians*, 18-21.

14 The Hippocratic Oath is an oath that all doctors take before they start practicing medicine. While the specifics of the oath itself have evolved, the 19th century oath included a provision that forbade a physician to abort the fetus of a pregnant woman through the use of medicines.

15 Women would seek abortions from mal-practicing physicians and rely on home remedies.

16 Shryock, *Medicine in America*, 157.

17 Brodie, *Contraception and Abortion*, 269-270; Mohr, *Abortion in America*, 34-38.

18 Mohr, *Abortion in America*, 163-168.

19 Mohr, *Abortion in America*, 148-149; Dyer, *Champion of Women*, 43.

20 Found in Dyer, *Champion of Women*, 83-84 (my emphasis).

21 Hugh L. Hodge, *On Criminal Abortion: A Lecture Introductory to the Course on Obstetrics, and Diseases of Women and Children* (Philadelphia, PA: T.K. and P.G. Collins Printers, 1854), 15.

under one cause.²² As Storer began his campaign, the most important aspect was the issue of morality. Raised as a Utilitarian by his family, Storer converted to Episcopalianism in 1869 and later to Catholicism in the 1880s. Throughout his life, Storer was an active member of his church and was even named a trustee of his parish, St. Joseph's. His deep religious roots were a driving factor in his belief that abortion was inherently immoral. In fact, he converted to Catholicism in the 1880s due to the Church's strict stance against abortion.²³ He, and other physicians, decried abortion from a moral standpoint in an effort to make the medical profession more respectable and professional, which was their primary concern. Storer's first step in initiating the physicians' crusade was to write doctors across the nation in 1857, inquiring about abortion statutes in their state. Responding to Storer's request, C. W. LeBoutillier, a doctor from Minnesota, explained:

The practice of producing abortion is frequently resorted to in our vicinity, and it is not un-frequent for married women of high social position to apply for medicines which will produce an abortion—and I regret to say that Regular physicians have in many instances assisted in these damnable practices. The law as it stands is to us worthless, and unless it is amended, the evil will not soon cease.²⁴

LeBoutillier's response outlining the unenforceable laws against abortion motivated Storer to lead a campaign to restore morality to the medical profession—something Storer thought would be missing as long as abortion was an accepted practice.

Furthermore, physicians such as Dr. J. Berrien Lindsley of Nashville and former AMA president Dr. Charles Pope, in their letters responding to Storer's request, encouraged Storer to present his anti-abortion message to the American Medical Association. Responses such as these motivated Storer to pursue his mission to criminalize abortion and showed him that he had a strong national backing. In fact, Dr. Thomas Blatchford of New York was so enthusiastic about Storer's campaign that he wrote him: "I am glad, right glad, you have got hold of the subject of criminal abortion—a crime which 40 years ago, when I was a young practitioner, was of rare and secret occurrence has become frequent and bold."²⁵ While corresponding with many physicians across a vast area, Storer only solicited such assistance

22 Unlike late 20th-century activists, Storer's focus was not on the fetus or the notion that the fetus had any rights—his sole focus was on the health of the mother.

23 Dyer, *Champion of Women*, 138-139.

24 C. W. LeBoutillier, "Letter to Horatio Robinson Storer," *Letters to Horatio Storer* (28 March 1857).

25 Thomas W. Blatchford, "Letter to Horatio Robinson Storer," *Letters to Horatio Storer* (23 March 1857).

from doctors who were already committed to the anti-abortion movement.²⁶

After building a base of support from important physicians across the country through the mail, Storer decided to bring his anti-abortion campaign to the public. On 28 February 1857, Storer gave a long presentation on the topic of criminal abortion to the Suffolk District Medical Society in Boston, Massachusetts using the information that he gathered through his correspondence. Referencing his father's address in 1855, Storer called upon the society "to take such steps as would alike further ensure the innocence in this matter of all its members" and "show to the community the sincere abhorrence with which they viewed the crime [of abortion]."²⁷ By lobbying such an influential medical society to criticize the practice of abortion publicly, Storer showed his desire to unite the medical profession in opposition of abortion, which would further professionalize the industry.

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In addition to criticizing abortion as a practice, Storer also suggested to the Suffolk Medical Society that a committee be formed to "consider whether any further legislation is necessary in this Commonwealth, on the subject of *criminal abortion*" and to report any "such other means as may seem necessary for the suppression of this abominable, unnatural, and yet common crime." His suggestion would remove the practice of abortion from the hands of incompetent, amateur physicians. Then, such a report would be "recommended to the Massachusetts Medical Society as a basis for its further action." Storer wanted to further professionalize medicine, as a report to the most powerful medical society in the state would send a strong message that physicians everywhere were united in their efforts to fight abortion.²⁸

The Suffolk District Medical Society (SDMS) accepted Storer's submissions and designated him to head the committee that would suggest legislation. Storer and his

26 Charles A. Pope, "Letter to Horatio Robinson Storer," *Letters to Horatio Storer* (24 March 1857); J. Berrien Lindsley, "Letter to Horatio Robinson Storer," *Letters to Horatio Storer* (4 July 1857); Dyer, *Physicians' Crusade*, 32.

27 Horatio R. Storer, "Criminal Abortion," *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* 56, no. 14 (May 7, 1857): 283.

28 Storer, "Criminal Abortion," 282-283.

committee of three members delivered their report to the SDMS on April 25, 1857. The report addressed the fact that criminal abortion was not punishable by law and had “found public and unblushing defenders, who have so blunted the moral and religious sense of the people, that many respectable women do not hesitate to avow their belief that abortion is no crime.”²⁹ Storer criticized abortion from a moral standpoint and argued that those who support abortion corrupted the values of Americans. Physicians, then, according to Storer were moral and upright people.

Because of the printing wars between the major medical journals, the anti-abortion crusade gained credibility as more and more people sided with Storer.

While many physicians across the country were fully devoted to Storer’s movement, the support was not universal. Medical journals such as the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* published articles that criticized Storer’s actions with the SDMS committee. In fact, Charles Edward Buckingham, a physician, complained that Storer’s committee report “seems to have thrown out of consideration the life of the mother” and that the “Committee will fail to convince the public that abortion in the early months is a crime.”³⁰ Surprisingly, as a result of this small amount of protest to Storer’s campaign, many large, respected journals such as the *New Hampshire Journal of Medicine*³¹ and the *Medical and Surgical Reporter*³² of New Jersey condemned the protestors and publicly endorsed Storer’s efforts. Because of the printing wars between the major medical journals, the anti-abortion crusade gained credibility as more and more people sided with Storer. In fact, after it was chastised for publishing the criticism of Storer, the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* recanted its statements and came out in support of him.³³ After these events, what began as a small movement had now grown into a formidable force for change. Storer emerged from

29 Horatio R. Storer, “Criminal Abortions,” *American Medical Gazette and Journal of Health* 8, no. 7 (July 1857): 391.

30 Charles Edward Buckingham, “Report upon Criminal Abortions,” *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* 56, no. 17 (May 28, 1857): 346.

31 *New Hampshire Journal of Medicine* 7, no. 7 (July 1857): 216.

32 “Criminal Abortion,” *The Medical and Surgical Reporter* 10, no. 4 (April 1857): 207.

33 “The Report of the Committee upon Criminal Abortion,” *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* 56, no. 19 (June 11, 1857): 386-387.

this opposition stronger than before and showed that he was more than capable of leading the physicians’ crusade against abortion.³⁴

Up to this point, Storer was only well known in the Northeastern states; however, in 1858 he decided to try to expand his crusade nationally. With the support of Dr. Samuel D. Gross, the leading surgeon of the era and editor of the *North-American Medico-Chirurgical Review*, Storer wrote a series of articles about obstetric jurisprudence.³⁵ Storer used a moral argument as reason to outlaw abortion when he observed: “if abortion be ever a crime, it is, of necessity, even in isolated cases, one of no small interest to moralist, jurist, and physician.” Here he makes a blatant connection comparing physicians to moralists in an effort to depict physicians as justly fighting a moral war against abortion. Furthermore, Storer depicted the physician as a protective figure when he explained that “medical men are the physical guardians of women and their offspring” and it is their duty to fulfill this role. Once again, Storer took the moralistic perspective in an effort to depict physicians as principled in order to bring credibility to the practice.³⁶

As another example of his widening national campaign, Storer prepared a report for the national meeting of the AMA in Louisville, Kentucky in 1859. Storer’s objective was to convince the AMA to take a public stand against abortion. While Storer’s popularity was growing, only medical journals and small medical organizations such as the SDMS had come out in support of the anti-abortion crusade. However, if the AMA, the official national organization for recognized practicing physicians, supported Storer, his campaign would grow exponentially. Storer asked the AMA “publicly to enter an earnest and solemn protest against [the] unwarrantable destruction of human life.” Once they completed this request, the AMA would be tasked with encouraging “the several legislative assemblies of the Union” to change their abortion laws. By soliciting the support of the AMA, Storer tried to expand his mission of criminalizing abortion.³⁷

The report stated several reasons for the country’s generally degrading morals, such as the false importance that was placed on quickening.³⁸ Also, Storer chastised

34 Dyer, *The Physicians’ Crusade*, 40-45.

35 Obstetric jurisprudence refers to the legal issues surrounding abortion and reproductive rights.

36 Horatio R. Storer, “Contributions to Obstetric Jurisprudence: Criminal Abortion,” *North-American Medico-Chirurgical Review* 3 (January 1859): 64, 66.

37 “Minutes of the 12th Annual Meeting of the AMA,” *Transactions of the American Medical Association* 12 (May 1859): 27.

38 Storer believed that life began at conception, not at the first perceivable movements by the fetus. He thought the emphasis on quickening caused more confusion than anything else.

those within the medical profession who condoned abortion stating that physicians “themselves are frequently supposed careless of foetal life.” He challenged physicians to break the stereotype that those in the medical field were cold-hearted, immoral people. Also, he separated physicians who support and physicians who do not support abortion (putting the anti-abortion group in more respectable light), which created a clear distinction between the two camps. By making a moral plea to physicians, Storer asked the medical community “by every bond we hold sacred, by our reverence for the fathers in medicine, by our love for our race, and by our responsibility as accountable beings, to see these errors removed and their grievous results abated.” Storer portrayed the current generation of physicians as moral crusaders whose duty it was as citizens to rid the world of the corrupt and evil abortion laws put in place by earlier generations.³⁹

Storer portrayed the current generation of physicians as moral crusaders whose duty it was as citizens to rid the world of the corrupt and evil abortion laws put in place by earlier generations.

Storer’s proposals were unanimously adopted by the AMA committee and highly praised by all. Dr. Thomas W. Blatchford, writing to Storer, excitedly commented that “I cannot tell you the number of Gentlemen who have spoken to me about your Report since I read it nor can I begin to tell you the high encomiums, bestowed upon it without a single drawback.” This acceptance of the anti-abortion movement by the official national organization of physicians was a huge victory for Storer and further brought his works to the national stage. Also included in Dr. Blatchford’s letter was a reference to Storer’s moral strategy, which indicated that their “labors are appreciated by our brethren when those labors have been bestowed in the cause of humanity is a precious cordial for one’s soul in this old and thankless world.” This remark further illustrates the strong moral based argument that the anti-abortion crusaders were using to make physicians appear to be compassionate individuals.⁴⁰

Around the same time that he delivered his report to the AMA, Storer published several articles on criminal

³⁹ Horatio R. Storer, “Report on Criminal Abortion,” *The Transactions of the American Medical Association* 12 (May 1859): 75, 77.

⁴⁰ Thomas W. Blatchford, “Letter to Horatio Robinson Storer,” *Letters to Horatio Storer* (5 May 1859).

abortion in which he focused on the individuals involved in the process.⁴¹ Whereas Storer’s goal was to portray physicians as moral, upright people, in these articles he wanted to portray those involved as wicked and hedonistic. In a scathing description of the women who procured abortions, Storer observed:

It has been said that misery loves companionship: this is nowhere more manifest than in the histories of criminal abortion. In more than one instance, from my own experience, has a lady of acknowledged respectability, who had herself suffered abortion, induced it upon several of her friends, thus perhaps endeavoring to persuade an uneasy conscience, that, by making an act common, it becomes right. Such ladies boast to each other of the impunity with which they have aborted, as they do of their expenditures, of their dress, of their success in society. There is a fashion in this, as in all other female customs, good and bad. The wretch whose account with the Almighty is heaviest with guilt, too often becomes a heroine.⁴²

Storer depicted women who received abortions almost as temptresses, slowly corrupting society around them in an effort to justify their own actions. By drawing this comparison, Storer made the physician appear to be the savior of humanity by ending the practice of abortion. Storer then stated “Under these circumstances, therefore, it becomes the medical profession to look to [ending abortion], lest the *whole* guilt of this crime rest upon themselves.” The physicians were at the helm of the anti-abortion crusade, and it was their responsibility to bring credibility to the practice.⁴³

Now that the majority of the medical profession supported Storer and his anti-abortion crusade, it was time to begin focusing on convincing the general American public of the evils of abortion. In 1864, *The Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* published an editorial that called for a propaganda campaign against abortion, explaining that “Society needs a thorough awakening upon this subject” of abortion and it should be “taught in every school book of physiology, and every public print should reiterate” that life begins at conception. Physicians were ready to take their arguments to the American public, and Storer was ready to lead the charge.⁴⁴

⁴¹ i.e., the mother, father, physician, midwife, nurse, etc.

⁴² Horatio R. Storer, “Contributions to Obstetric Jurisprudence: Its Perpetrators,” *North-American Medico-Chirurgical Review* 3 (July 1859): 466.

⁴³ Horatio R. Storer, “Contributions to Obstetric Jurisprudence: The Duty of the Profession,” *North-American Medico-Chirurgical Review* 3 (November 1859): 1039.

⁴⁴ “Infanticide,” *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* 71, no. 3 (August 18, 1864): 66-67.

In response to this editorial that was popular amongst medical professionals, the AMA decided to “offer a premium for the best *short and comprehensive tract* calculated for circulation among females, and designed to enlighten them upon the criminality and physical evils of forced abortion.”⁴⁵ This offer was significant because by rewarding physicians to write material for the general public about the evils of abortion, the AMA sparked a propaganda campaign. At the annual AMA meeting in Boston in 1865, the Committee of Prize Essays⁴⁶ announced that Horatio Storer won the award with his essay, “The Criminality and Physical Evils of Forced Abortion,” which was later published by the AMA in book form entitled *Why Not? A Book for Every Woman*.⁴⁷

Throughout his prize-winning essay, it was evident that Storer wanted to improve the image of the medical profession. For example, when discussing physicians who wanted to provide abortions to patients, Storer argued that “the law should offer him its protecting shield, saving him even from himself, and helping him to see that the fee for an unnecessarily induced or allowed abortion is in reality the price of blood.”⁴⁸ Storer took the focus off the physician and put more blame on the law for allowing abortions to occur. Up to this point, Storer had painted abortion as an astronomical evil, but he did not want the reputation of physicians to be diminished because of this campaign. Therefore, he offered the public a scapegoat—the law—in an effort to prevent the destruction of the status of physicians. And to further emphasize the position of the profession, Storer explained that “Physicians have now arrived at the unanimous opinion that the foetus in utero is *alive* from the very moment of conception.”⁴⁹ Storer’s resounding rhetoric was not an actual reflection of the position of the entire medical profession, but an effort to unite physicians.

Furthermore, in “The Criminality and Physical Evils of Forced Abortion,” Storer portrayed physicians as noble trailblazers for justice. Fed up with the outstanding silence on the issue of abortion for the previous century, Storer explained that it was time for physicians “to strip down the veil” and that “the physician needs courage as well as the patient, and may well overflow with regretful

45 “Minutes of the 15th Annual Meeting of the AMA,” *Transactions of the American Medical Association* 12 (June 1859): 50.

46 The Committee was made up entirely of Bostonians and the head of the Committee was none other than David Humphreys Storer, Horatio’s father. This combined with the fact that the meeting was held in Storer’s home state of Boston led many to believe that Storer’s prize winning essay was the result of internal collusion.

47 Mohr, *Abortion in America*, 158.

48 Storer, *Why Not?*, 26.

49 Storer, *Why Not?*, 28.

sympathy.”⁵⁰ Here Storer depicted the medical profession as heroically revealing the truth about abortion to the public, while at the same time being a compassionate profession.

After publishing *Why Not? A Book for Every Woman* in 1866 to great public acclaim, Storer wrote a book on abortion addressed to men.⁵¹ Because he had already addressed women in his prize winning essay, Storer

Storer depicted the medical profession as heroically revealing the truth about abortion to the public, while at the same time being a compassionate profession.

wanted to inform men on the evils of abortion. His book, *Is It I? A Book for Every Man*, was published in 1867 and depicted physicians as noble crusaders. For example, while describing abortion, he explained that “a voice will go out into every corner of the land, caught up and re-echoed by all the medical men thereof, that will cause those who care either for their souls or their bodies, to pause and tremble.”⁵² Storer believed that the physicians of the U.S. would be the voice of truth and restore morality to the country. Furthermore, Storer explained that “Indelicacy in the physician lies rather in ignoring. . .these problems, that lie beneath all social life and all domestic happiness, than in sensibly studying their phenomena, and throwing upon them the light of science.”⁵³ Once again, Storer depicted the physician as empathetic and understanding in an effort to prove to society that it was a moral profession.

After successfully informing all of the American public about the evils of abortion, Storer decided to address lawmakers by convincing them that the United States was in need of anti-abortion laws. In a book addressed to lawmakers, *Criminal Abortion: Its Nature, Its Evidence, and Its Law*, Storer criticised abortion from a legal standpoint. He began by explaining that physicians and lawyers were “associates working together for the common good of society.” Storer compared lawyers and physicians in an effort to put the medical practice on the

50 Storer, *Why Not?*, 35.

51 Some believe that Storer’s second book was also submitted to the AMA award committee in 1864, but his father believed his address to women would be more powerful. Therefore, his address to women won the prize and his address to men was left to be published at a later date.

52 Storer, *Is It I?*, 58.

53 Horatio R. Storer, “On Self Abuse in Women: Its Causation and Rational Treatment,” *The Humboldt Medical Archives* 1, no. 2 (October 1867): 121.

same level of respectability as law.⁵⁴ He included statistics that showed that rates of birth in the United States were much lower than in European countries because of abortion. He used these points to show the ethical decay in society and called for widespread federal laws banning abortion to restore moral structure.⁵⁵

Storer's book was one of his last published works as his health soon began to decline in the late 1860s, and by 1872 he had to leave the country to search for medical

Between 1860 and 1880, more than 40 anti-abortion statutes were written into state and territorial law codes.

treatment. Despite losing its leader, the anti-abortion crusade continued on and influenced the passing of legislation across the country. Between 1860 and 1880, more than 40 anti-abortion statutes were written into state and territorial law codes. More importantly, such statutes approved the physicians' claim that abortion during any term of pregnancy was a crime and the government had a responsibility to inhibit access to abortion.⁵⁶

One of the most significant anti-abortion laws occurred in Connecticut in 1860. The state passed a statute that dismissed the quickening doctrine and made abortion a felony that was punishable by up to five years in prison and a \$1,000 fine. Also, both the woman seeking the abortion and the abortionist would be held responsible for the act, not one or the other. In addition, the Connecticut statute outlined anti-advertising clauses that resulted in fines if violated. Thus Connecticut became the first state in the Union to pass full-fledged anti-abortion laws, undeniably as a result of Horatio Storer's revolutionary physicians' crusade—Connecticut passed this legislation in the same year that the AMA publicly adopted Storer's anti-abortion policy. Soon after, states across the nation adopted laws similar to Connecticut, and by 1900, anti-abortion became national policy. While it is absolutely certain that Storer's campaign was successful in changing national policy and outlawing abortion; however, the crusade completely excluded women from the debate. The effort to criminalize abortion was created and dominated by men in the medical profession hoping to gain respect. The female perspective was all but ignored, which makes Storer's

crusade a one-sided affair.⁵⁷

The success of Storer's efforts to professionalize medicine and improve the status of physicians is a little more unclear. There is no doubt that the credibility of the medical field increased substantially throughout the 19th century; however, the evidence of such improvements was not apparent until at least 1900. Also, such improvements were not a direct result of Storer's efforts to enhance the image of physicians. There were several new innovations to the medical field that drastically improved the practice of medicine in the 19th century and professionalized medicine as a result. For example, nitrous oxide (better known as laughing gas) began to be used during surgery as an anesthetic around 1847, which improved the quality of treatment during surgery. Also, Joseph Lister discovered that the use of antiseptics during operations would prevent infections, which was a groundbreaking discovery as infections during surgery was a tremendous problem in the 19th century. Furthermore, towards the end of the 19th century, medical schools began setting standards for admissions and increasing their academic curriculum to become more demanding. These are just a few of the improvements to the medical field in the 19th century that dramatically improved the reputation of physicians and the medical field as a whole. Storer's physicians' crusade was an attempt to professionalize medicine and improve the image of physicians, but it had a very limited impact in this respect compared to the innovations in medicine. Overall, Storer's efforts contributed to a gradual improvement of the medical field by advocating for women's rights and were instrumental in changing national policy. Although Storer perceived his crusade as advocating for women's rights, women saw a "decline in their power and status."⁵⁸ By removing a woman's right to choose, some women felt that they lost over their bodies; this sentiment would lead to further controversy in the realm of women's rights in the future.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Law at this time period was a well-respected profession.

⁵⁵ Horatio R. Storer and Franklin F. Heard, *Criminal Abortion: Its Nature, Its Evidence, and Its Law* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, and Company, 1868), v, 60.

⁵⁶ Mohr, *Abortion in America*, 159, 200-201; Petchesky, *Abortion and Woman's Choice*, 78-84.

⁵⁷ Mohr, *Abortion in America*, 201-202.

⁵⁸ Petchesky, *Abortion and Woman's Choice*, 68.

⁵⁹ Shryock, *Medicine in America*, 150; Rothstein, *American Physicians*, 250-293.

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