



Edward S. Curtis photo from the Library of Congress
Sioux Chiefs on Horseback, 1905

Commercialized tobacco

Native Americans gave tobacco to the first European colonizers in the 1520s. They inhaled the smoke, which gave them a buzz and addicted them to nicotine. It became a craze in Europe. So, it became the first cash crop in the American colonies, mass-produced by African slave labor for big profits. In the 1970s, Big Tobacco started putting additives in tobacco products. Today, cigarette smoke can have up to 600-cancer causing chemicals.

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Honoring the traditional way of life means saying, 'Thank you' to the Creator. Traditional tobacco is offered to the earth for the survival of the people and as a gift of honor to show respect for good deeds. Our children learn what is modeled in the home.

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Diana Bird
Blackfeet Elder



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Edward S. Curtis photo from the Library of Congress tobacco ceremony (Crow), 1907

Sacred plant

For over 12,300 years, the tobacco plant has held a profound and sacred place in many Indigenous cultures. Ancient peoples of Central and South America used it first and revered it long before Europeans knew about it.

American Indians make sacred offerings of tobacco to the Creator with prayers for use in sweat lodges, pipe ceremonies, and as gifts. As a sacred plant, its smoke is not inhaled.

Ironic twist

Sadly, European colonizers didn't grasp the reason Native people used tobacco and made it a commercial product that spread worldwide. Tobacco's addictive and cancer-causing chemicals have killed millions. Ironically, it's the top cause of cancer deaths among Indigenous Americans.



TRADITIONAL TOBACCO PROMOTES

PHYSICAL WELL-BEING

SPIRITUALITY

EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

HEALING

PRAYERS

RESPECT

CEREMONIES

No Native religion

The government's Indian Religious Crimes Code of 1883 tried to end "American Indian religion" and the use of sacred tobacco. For almost 100 years, the law "prohibited Native American religious activity under pain of imprisonment." So, they had to use cancer-causing commercial tobacco in religious ceremonies. The **1978 American Indian Religious Freedom Act** ended the practice. But by then, many Native people were addicted to smoking.

Sacred tobacco

There's a movement afoot in Indian Country to use only organic traditional tobacco in religious, healing and sacred ceremonies. But Indigenous Americans are as diverse as the 574 tribes and nations they represent. Each has its own history, and bond with tobacco. Their

rituals and ingredients may differ, but tobacco is often carefully hand-prepared for prayers, healing and ceremonies. Traditional tobacco users at ceremonies do not inhale. It doesn't lead to addiction or have an adverse impact on your health.

Keeping it sacred

Traditional tobacco promotes physical, spiritual, emotional and community well-being. Many Native people offer it to the Creator. Some gift it as a sign of respect. And many people use traditional tobacco for healing or as a medicine. They burn it or smoke it in a pipe.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Diana Bird, Blackfeet Elder