The Tobacco Epidemic

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Section A

History: “Discovery” and Early Use of Tobacco and the Foundations of the Modern Epidemic
Any of numerous species of Nicotiana or the cured leaves of several of the species that are used after processing in various ways for smoking, snuffing, chewing, and extracting nicotine.


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Early Forms of Use in the Americas

- Smoking
- Ingested orally as syrup
- Snuff
- Chewing tobacco
- Enemas
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Global Spread of Tobacco

- 1530: Europeans begin cultivation in Santo Domingo
- 1556-59: Introduced in France, Spain, Portugal, and Japan
- 1612: John Rolfe plants first commercial crop in Virginia

Global Spread of Tobacco

- 1619: Africans brought to Virginia as indentured tobacco workers
- 1710: Russia’s Peter the Great encourages his courtiers to smoke tobacco to look more European
Early Concern

- King James on smoking
  - “Smoking is a custom loathsome to the eye, hateful to the nose, harmful to the brain, dangerous to the lungs, and in the black, stinking fume thereof nearest resembling the horrible Stygian smoke of the pit that is bottomless.”

- King James on passive smoking
  - “The wife must either take up smoking or resolve to live in a perpetual stinking torment.”


1600: Chinese Philosopher Fang Yizhi points out that smoking “scorches one’s lung”

Motivation for Early Efforts at Control

- Tobacco seen as an “evil plant” associated with savages from the New World
- Tobacco use viewed as a sin
- Addictive qualities begin to be recognized
  - Smokers are described as “besotted” or “bewitched”
- Initial health concerns include cancer, impotency, “drunkenness”

Evolution of the Modern Cigarette

- 1852: Introduction of matches
- 1880: Bonsack machine patented
- 1912: Book matches perfected by Diamond Co.
- 1913: Birth of the “modern” cigarette; R.J. Reynolds introduces the Camel brand

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Foundations of Modern Industry

- 1854: Philip Morris begins making cigarettes in London
- 1874: Washington Duke builds first factory
- 1884: J.B. Duke signs contract with Bonsack
- 1899: R.J. Reynolds incorporates

1874

1850 1870 1890 1910 1930 1950

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Foundations of Modern Industry

- 1910: Duke’s American Tobacco Co. controls 92% of world tobacco business
- 1911: U.S. Supreme Court dissolves Duke’s trust; American Tobacco, R.J. Reynolds, Liggett and Myers, Lorillard, and British American Tobacco emerged
- 1930-1940: cigarette consumption in the U.S. doubled

1940

1850 1870 1890 1910 1930 1950

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“What the [tobacco] industry wants people to believe is that a cigarette is nothing but a natural product grown in the ground, ripped out, stuffed in a piece of paper and served up. It’s not. It’s a meticulously engineered product. The purpose behind a cigarette . . . is to deliver nicotine—an addictive drug.”

— Jeffrey Wigand