

King James I of England, in 1604, wrote *A Counterblaste to Tobacco* which concluded with the following:

*Have you not reason then to be ashamed, and to forbear this filthy novelty, so basely grounded, so foolishly received and so grossly mistaken in the right use thereof? In your abuse thereof sinning against God, harming your selves both in persons and goods, and raking also thereby the marks and notes of vanity upon you: by the custom thereof making your selves to be wondered at by all foreign civil Nations, and by all strangers that come among you, to be scorned and contemned. A custome 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.*

Europeans had been exposed to tobacco as early as 1560 and used it primarily as medicine. At the time people believed that tobacco treated or cured many illnesses, such as headaches, stomach problems, coughs, epilepsy, and cancer. In the following decades, tobacco use among Europeans dramatically increased, not only for medicinal use but also for recreation. For many rulers in Europe, including King James I, tobacco smoking represented a major social and health problem. English leaders did not make the sale and smoking of tobacco illegal, although many other European countries did, including France, Russia, Sweden, and Switzerland. Instead, King James I tried hard to reduce tobacco usage, not only by writing *A Counterblaste to Tobacco* but also by introducing a massive tax increase in 1604. The price increase, however, did little to reduce English demand for the “noxious weed.” By 1614, the Virginia Colony, which King James had approved, was shipping tobacco and production rose sharply in the following years. Ironically, tobacco cultivation would lay the foundation for the success of England’s American colonies.

