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THE CIGAR PRIMER AT THE BEGINNING

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The joy of smoking rolled tobacco leaves began in the Americas hundreds of years ago and was introduced to Europeans after Christopher Columbus' return from his first voyage in 1492.

Since then, the cigar has become perfected and has experienced peaks and valleys in popularity. This Cigar Primer is a starting point for those seeking to understand cigar history, the health risks of cigars, how to select and enjoy cigars and much more.

For many, cigar history began when Christopher Columbus found Cuba during his first voyage in October 1492 and sent two men – Rodrigo de Xerez and Luis de Torres - to explore the island and meet with the natives. They introduced the Spaniards to the after-dinner practice of inhaling the smoke of burned leaves into the nose through a Y-shaped device called a “tobacco.”

The leaves and the “pipe” were taken back to Spain and over the next two centuries, the process was refined into the cigar we know today, produced primarily in Seville, Spain under monopoly of the Spanish Crown. Although there was tobacco grown on other Caribbean islands by the mid-1500s, Cuba was well established as the headquarters of the tobacco trade and cigars produced there carried the same notoriety they do today.

Cigars continued to be made in other places, of course, and in the 20th Century, American consumers primarily enjoyed domestic cigars with some higher-end brands imported mostly from Cuba. When U.S. President John F. Kennedy imposed a ban on Cuban products in February 1962, the door was opened for producers from other countries. Cuba retains its tradition in cigars, but the sale of products from Cuba continues to be illegal in the United States.

Today, American consumers enjoy machine-made cigars manufactured in the U.S. and premium (handmade) cigars made in the Dominican Republic, Honduras, Nicaragua, Mexico and Indonesia, among others.