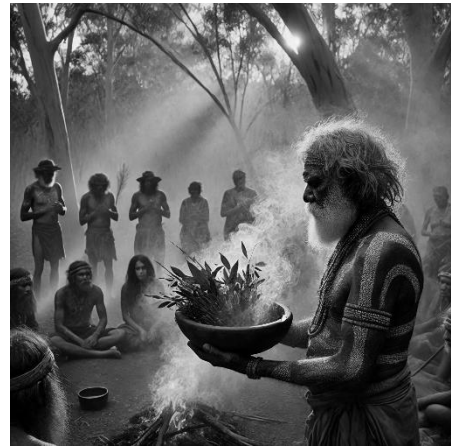


Australian Aboriginal Cultural Traditions in Contemporary Culture

The Australian Aboriginal smoking ceremony is an ancient and contemporary custom among some Aboriginal Australians that involves smouldering native plants to produce smoke. This herbal smoke is believed to have both spiritual and physical cleansing properties, as well as the ability to ward off bad spirits. In traditional, spiritual culture, smoking ceremonies have been performed following either childbirth or initiation rites involving circumcision. In contemporary culture, smoking ceremonies are sometimes held to mark the opening of a new hospital, or the opening of the Australian parliament at the beginning of the year.



A 'Welcome to Country' is an acknowledgement given by a Traditional Custodian to welcome visitors to their Country. A smoking ceremony is a separate ritual with its own purpose and process. Both can occur at the same event. (Wikipedia)

Article 1

Purpose of Australian Aboriginal Smoking Ceremonies

Smoking ceremonies have been performed by some Aboriginal Peoples for thousands of years to cleanse people and places of bad spirits and to treat sickness. These ceremonies encourage good health and wellbeing through connection to culture and the health benefits of traditional Aboriginal medicine. They are regarded as an important part of connecting people to Country and keeping them safe from the dangerous powers of the spiritual beings residing in the land and waters.

These ceremonies play several roles in some Indigenous communities. They are used to connect with ancestors and the spiritual realm, seeking protection. Socially, they are integral to community events, often marking the commencement of significant gatherings or celebrations.

Cleansing ceremonies

Cleansing ceremonies are perhaps the most widely recognised form of smoking ceremonies. They involve using smoke to purify a space, object, or person, removing bad spirits or negative energy. This practice is commonly seen at the commencement of significant events, ensuring that participants are spiritually clean and that the event is conducted in a safe and protected environment.

Significance of 'Country' in Aboriginal Cultures

Country as a living entity

In some Aboriginal cultures, 'Country' is believed to have places where ancestral beings reside. The interconnectedness of the ancestral past and the present is expressed in these places and in the ancestral affiliations with animals and plants and features in the landscape.

Ceremonies as acts of respect

Smoking ceremonies are acts of respect and care for Country. They acknowledge the land's significance and seek to maintain the balance and harmony of the natural and spiritual world.

Role of ceremonies in maintaining connection to Country

Reaffirming ties to the land

Through smoking ceremonies, some Indigenous Peoples reaffirm their ancestral ties to the land and their role as its custodians. These ceremonies are often part of rituals that mark significant life events, ensuring that these moments are grounded in the context of peoples' relationship with Country.

Cleansing and protecting the land

The act of producing smoke is seen to cleanse and protect the land, an expression of stewardship and care for the environment.

<https://www.ngarrngga.org/curriculum/understanding-smoking-ceremonies>

Article 2

Acknowledgements of 'country' have become a familiar part of the daily and weekly routines of Australian people. At the start of a school class, university lecture, work meeting, or public event, silence falls over the crowd and they are reminded that the land on which they live was stolen by British colonists. The wording might vary, but it often goes like this:

'We begin today by acknowledging the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we gather, and pay our respects to Elders past, present and future. I extend that respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples here today. Sovereignty has never been ceded. It always was and always will be, Aboriginal land.'

The sermon has become part and parcel of everyday life. There is no denying that the British parked their ships, committed atrocities, and laid dubious claims to land that did not belong to them. However, incessantly reinforcing the notion that people centuries removed from

these events – families, newlyweds, immigrants – somehow do not have a right to their own property only serves to hinder the country's progress.

Australian businesses routinely employ Indigenous organisations to perform Welcome to Country and Smoking Ceremonies at professional meetings. The event involves an Aboriginal Elder attending corporate offices to 'officially' welcome the company to the land. The smoking ceremonies, which can cost in the thousands, include the expulsion of bad spirits from the office space.

The audience – more often than not composed entirely of non-Aboriginal Australians and immigrants – watch on like atheists at church, bowing their heads in deference and allowing the burning sticks to wash away their ancestral guilt. It's truly a bizarre occurrence. These ritual practices have become so *ubiquitous* that they can sometimes be heard many times in the same day, even multiple times in a single meeting. They are present on most corporate websites and are even printed onto supermarket receipts.

A plane lands at its destination: *'We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we fly.'*

A football team is playing: *'We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we play.'*

A CEO presents the finance update: *'We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we sell homewares.'*

These constant reminders that Australians reside on stolen land and must pay respect to people they don't know and will probably never meet have become an *omnipresent* source of *guilt-tripping*. Respect is something that should be from the heart, not something you can conjure through political *incantation*. The *rhetoric* concerning Welcome to Country practices often claims that the protocol has been in use for tens of thousands of years, serving as a means for Aboriginal communities to offer safe passage to foreign tribes on their ancestral lands. However, there exists limited concrete evidence supporting the assertion that the tradition dates back further than a few decades, and the idea that it was universally practised is implausible.

Many Australians are in disagreement or are sceptical. Even Aboriginal communities are divided on the topic. Many leaders have come out against the events – including Indigenous Australian Senator, Jacinta Nampijinpa Price, who labelled the practice 'divisive'. The dogmatic approach towards these cultural narratives has pervaded even the highest levels of government. The Australian Government Style Manual, the authoritative resource for government content, also widely used by private publishers, includes a chapter on correct language usage for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs. The advice offered by the government is a political correctness minefield that asserts phrases like 'Indigenous

Australians' and 'Australian Indigenous peoples' can be discriminatory and offensive. It also includes advice like: Make sure to:

- Use empowering, strengths-based language.
- Tell positive stories.
- Emphasise ongoing connections to community, culture and country.

Aboriginal people have excelled to the highest ranks of our society in politics, sport, entertainment and academia despite the challenges they face. They do not need words of acknowledgement to legitimise them; they do not need censorship to protect them. While the majority of Australians genuinely support and respect Aboriginal people and culture, the current climate of virtue signalling and *tokenism* has grown *untenable*, stifling free speech, and discouraging open and honest dialogue. It is imperative to move beyond symbolic gestures and take a more balanced, sensible approach to addressing historical and contemporary challenges. The country's strength has always been its ability to adapt and evolve, and by moving beyond superficial acknowledgements and politically correct language, Australia can regain common sense in its workplaces, public events and government affairs.

<https://www.spectator.com.au/2023/09/acknowledgements-of-country-smoking-ceremonies-and-australias-austerity-problem/>

Questions

1. What is an Aboriginal Smoking Ceremony?
2. What is 'welcome to Country'?
3. Compare the first article with the second article. What is the difference in tone between the two?
4. Aboriginal smoking ceremonies and 'welcome to Country' acknowledgments are now taking place outside of Aboriginal communities, providing a ceremonial opening to all kinds of Australian events. Make a list of places where the general public might experience:
 - a) a smoking ceremony
 - b) a 'welcome to Country'
5. Do you think that these Aboriginal traditions should be part of the events attended by all Australian? Give reason.
6. Do these two ceremonies conflict with the Biblical worldview? Give reason.