didn't happen a hundred years ago—they are still happening today.

After five hundred years of White exploitation, there is a very real feeling among some Native people that, now that Whites have taken everything else, we want their religion, too. Louis always spoke of such things as the sacred pipe and the drum as his people's "instruments of worship" and the ceremonies as their "ways of worship." The statement is often made that these "ways of worship" do not constitute a religion. This is usually stated in the positive sense that these ways are not reliant on a written code and that they are a way of life, as opposed to something outside of daily life. Yet, I believe such statements can lead some people to want to borrow bits and pieces of these ways of worship as spiritual "exercises." Within Native communities, the ceremonies are used to help heal broken families, alcoholism, and all the terrible effects of oppression. It should not surprise us if some Natives are reluctant to welcome Whites who want to use Native sacred instruments of worship because it is now the "spiritually cool" thing to do.

The bridge Louis wanted to create was one of mutual respect. If calling his people's spiritual ways a religion afforded them the same respect as the so-called Great Religions, then he would call them a religion. It bothered him to no end that money was being charged for his people's sacred ceremonies. He likened it to money being charged to take part in a Catholic Mass.

Many aspects of the New Age approach to Native American spirituality both amused and troubled Louis. The idea that picking up a drum and performing certain rituals learned in one or two weekend workshops could make one a shaman was an utterly foreign concept to him. Within most Native traditions, a shaman is one who is chosen or deemed worthy by the spirits. The ease with which some people claimed to have obtained animal spirit guides was also amusing to Louis. Almost everyone today has an eagle, bear, or other equally majestic animal as a guide, but few understand those powers. Bear medicine, for example, was very powerful-something obtained through a dangerous encounter with a bear, or through a lifetime of observing and living and breathing Bear. These days, most people's knowledge of bears is limited to images from Disney cartoons or, at best, from Discovery documentaries; few people are willing to make any effort to learn more—much less to make the sacrifices necessary to obtain and maintain Bear medicine.

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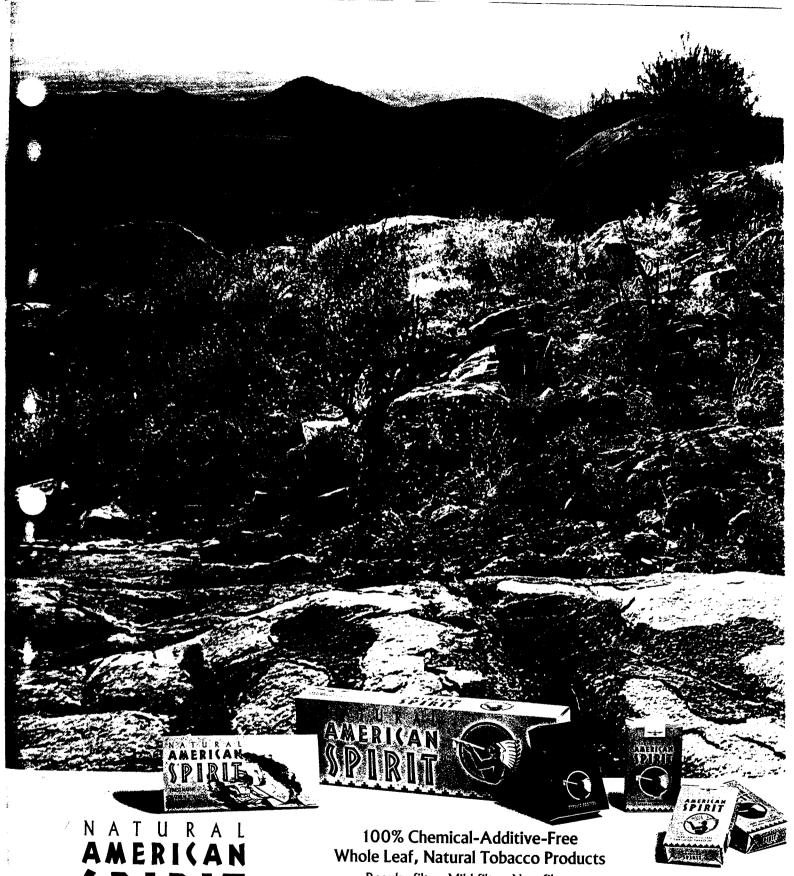
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