



The Master Plant: Tobacco in Lowland South America

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Described as a 'master plant' by many indigenous groups in lowland South America, tobacco is an essential part of shamanic ritual, as well as a source of everyday health, wellbeing and community. In sharp contrast to the condemnation of the tobacco industry and its place in contemporary public health discourse, the book considers tobacco in a more nuanced light, as an agent both of enlightenment and destruction.

Exploring the role of tobacco in the lives of indigenous peoples, *The Master Plant* offers an important and unique contribution to this field of study through its focus on lowland South America: the historical source region of this controversial plant, yet rarely discussed in recent scholarship. The ten chapters in this collection bring together ethnographic accounts, key developments in anthropological theory and emergent public health responses to indigenous tobacco use. Moving from a historical study of tobacco usage – covering the initial domestication of wild varieties and its value as a commodity in colonial times – to an examination of the transcendent properties of tobacco, and the magic, symbolism and healing properties associated with it, the authors present wide-ranging perspectives on the history and cultural significance of this important plant. The final part of the book examines the changing landscape of tobacco use in these communities today, set against the backdrop of the increasing power of the national and transnational tobacco industry.

The first critical overview of tobacco and its uses across lowland South America, this book encourages new ways of thinking about the problems of commercially exploited tobacco both within and beyond this source region.

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