



The Pursuit of Oblivion: A Global History of Narcotics

Richard Davenport-Hines

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A startling account of the history of drug abuse, this book forces us to reconsider many of our views on a controversial issue.

Spanning five centuries and several continents in a sweeping portrait of addiction, *The Pursuit of Oblivion* traces the history of the use and abuse of narcotics, revealing their subtle transformation from untested medicines to sources of idle pleasure and, relatively recently, to illegal substances. Richard Davenport-Hines, an eminent, prize-winning historian, uncovers the centrality of drug abuse in our modern industrial society, from the drug habits of Charles Dickens and John F. Kennedy to today's \$400 billion annual worldwide trade in illicit drugs (the same volume as the oil industry). A vivid portrayal of the people and events that have shaped the history of narcotics, *The Pursuit of Oblivion* reveals that, contrary to the assumption underlying current drug policies, our need to escape reality and our body's need for physical pleasure are both ineradicable aspects of our humanity, unchangeable by government initiative. 16 pages of b/w illustrations

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