Over 1 billion people smoke tobacco worldwide, making it one of the most widely used and popular drugs in human history. The inclusion of the Surgeon General’s Warning on a package of cigarettes, along with well-publicized lawsuits against the major tobacco companies, reminds us of the ill effects of smoking tobacco. Yet contrasting media images often reinforce the notion that smoking is a sophisticated activity, perhaps associated with artistry, creativity, and individuality. From both diachronic and synchronic perspectives, tobacco smoking also presents itself as a highly ritualized event, from Native American ceremonies to Chinese business negotiations.

Despite its global impact, the phenomenon of tobacco has its roots in the Americas, from indigenous use to its introduction to European explorers in the fifteenth century. Tobacco can be considered one of the first true American commodities to enter the colonial export trade (Horn 1994: 6). Proof can be found in the archaeological record. Along with piles of broken and discarded ceramics, corroded nails, and other artifacts, clay tobacco pipes are sprinkled on the trash heaps of historical archaeological sites, testifying to the popularity of smoking. Thus historical archaeology is well suited to reveal the story of tobacco in America.

The main theme of this book is to demonstrate how well positioned historical archaeology is to explore the role that tobacco and smoking played in the formation of American identities and cultural practices over a span of more than three hundred years. As mass consumables, tobacco, sugar, and other stimulants revolutionized the world and changed the course of history. The New World cultivation and export of tobacco fostered the development of social transformations both in Europe and in the colonies. Throughout
the subsequent centuries, tobacco smoking in America would come to repre-
sent and symbolize deeply held ideas about identity, gender, status, and class,
in the relational sense (see Wurst 2006). Tobacco was also instrumental in
negotiating politically charged relations between various actors in diverse
contexts.

For historical archaeologists, clay tobacco pipes have been primarily used
as a relative dating tool. Only recently have clay pipes been subject to more
in-depth anthropological investigations for assessing culture change and
processes in the Americas. Works by Lauren Cook (1989), Michael Nass-
aney (2004), Sean Rafferty and Rob Mann (2004), Paul Reckner (2001,
2004), myself (Fox 2004), and others provide meaningful analyses in the
interpretation of Native North American ethnohistories, working-class cul-
ture in Lowell, Massachusetts, patriotism in New York’s Five Points neigh-
borhood, and socioeconomic change in British America.

What does historical archaeology have to offer in the study of tobacco
and smoking in the American experience? Historical archaeology can con-
tribute to the dialogue in three ways. First, it is text-aided through the docu-
mentary record. One of the great joys of working in the historical period is
using primary sources and iconographic evidence that can either refute or
support the archaeological evidence as well as testing proposed models and
theories. For example, probate inventories and shipping records can shed
light on the economies of the colonial tobacco trade as well as the distribu-
tion and trade of clay pipes. Pamphlets, tracts, advertisements, and Dutch
genre paintings are some of the many sources that can offer insight into the
more symbolic aspects of tobacco and its material culture.

Second, historical archaeology offers tangible evidence for the long tra-
jectory of the various economic, social, and cultural contexts in which to-
acco use took place, from early culture contact to the more recent past.
Long before the arrival of Europeans, indigenous use of tobacco played a
key role in Native American relations, spirituality, and cosmology. As part of
the “Columbian Exchange,” documented European encounters with Native
Americans using tobacco began with Christopher Columbus’s second voy-
age in 1493. Not long thereafter, specimen samples of tobacco plants were
brought back to Europe for cultivation. With an unprecedented zeal, society
transformed tobacco from a “curious” substance of indigenous peoples to an
economically important commodity (Heidtke 1992: 117). The archaeological
evidence for such developments can be seen in the remains of clay tobacco pipes, which were easy to transport, smoke, and discard. Once clay pipes were mass produced, they became the ubiquitous accessory to daily life, as revealed by the thousands of pipes found on historical sites such as Port Royal, Jamaica (see chapter 6).

Third, historical archaeology is suitable for the study of tobacco because of its focus on exploring the lives of everyday people, the less documented and “voiceless” peoples who were instrumental in forging a nation (Orser 1996: 68). This begins with indigenous peoples, followed by the early English colonists and later immigrants who populated the cities and towns of a growing country. I hope that this study demonstrates that tobacco provides an excellent means by which to understand how various groups formed their identities as they faced the challenges of modernization, globalization, and culture change, as tobacco’s appeal extended to all classes and ethnicities.

In the discussion on tobacco and smoking, it is necessary to appreciate the important role that alcohol played, as drinking and smoking often went hand in hand. Alcohol and tobacco were part of the group of drug/stimulant foods that anthropologist Sidney Mintz (1985: 99–100, 1996: 19–20) refers to in Sweetness and Power and Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom. David Courtwright (2002: 2) refers to alcohol, tobacco, and caffeine as the big three stimulants of the “psychoactive revolution,” and it is no coincidence that the rapid growth of distilling, tobacco imports, and coffeehouses all happened within the seventeenth century. Psychoactive substances are a natural fit for anthropological study, because they are a part of the anthropology of consumption (Sherratt 2007: 6). Rather than treat such consumables separately, Phil Withington (2011: 637) suggests that it makes more sense to view alcohol, tobacco, coffee, and other commodities as a group of intoxicants that spanned a wide social spectrum, as they gained popularity in the early modern era.

Having a psychoactive chemical effect on the human brain, tobacco has long served as a drug of choice for inducing altered states of consciousness, especially during Native American rites and ceremonies. Rafferty and Mann (2004: xiii) have described tobacco pipes as “drug delivery devices.” For Europeans, tobacco may have been used to curb hunger among the poor and at times for medicinal purposes (Braudel 1979: 261; Brooks 1937, 1: 31; Goodman 1993: 43; Monardes [1577] 1925: 90; Shammas 1990: 297).
Some scholars attribute the appeal of tobacco to its addictive qualities; yet the use of tobacco cannot be fully explained by addiction alone. In fact, Janet Farrell Brodie and Marc Redfield (2002: 4) argue that the concept of addiction itself is essentially a modern and predominantly Western cultural construct. The concept of addiction, born of the late Victorian age, reflected an emerging risk-taking society, whereby a confluence of industrialization, urbanization, consumerism, and affluence intersected with individual freedom of choice and autonomy. This took place against a social backdrop of self-control; anyone who deviated from this (say, in terms of excessive behavior) was deemed by the medical profession to be pathological, suffering from a disease of the will. An individual’s overpowering desire for substances like alcohol and opium became known as addiction. Such behavior was seen not only as a medical disease but also as a moral failing that posed a threat to the stable order of society. This became a paradox of modern life—the freedom to choose—where the individual risked the very real possibility of becoming enslaved or victimized by the act of conscious choice (Lyng 2005: 12; Margolis 2002: 20; Reith 2004: 283–84, 287–88). In this respect, the idea of addiction thus became “a radical break from the past,” as a condition of modernity and an industrialized capitalist society where opiates, alcohol, tobacco, and other substances were available for any consumer who could afford or obtain them (Alexander and Roberts 2003: 2; Brodie and Redfield 2002: 3).

Despite its addictive qualities, tobacco smoking functioned in two main capacities: to provide solace and as a form of sociability. As a drug, like alcohol, tobacco could alleviate anxiety resulting from the unpredictability of life (Smith 2008: 99). Given the tensions sparked by European and indigenous encounters, the fear and uncertainty of colonial settlement, and the encroaching complexities of modern life with the rise of capitalism and the Industrial Revolution, the adoption of tobacco in the last several hundred years makes sense as a salve to help ease social tensions.

People also enjoyed tobacco for pure pleasure and sociability, however, as they did with alcohol. Both were often consumed in public places and in an atmosphere of conviviality. The appearance of clay pipes in the archaeological record may reflect these behaviors and provides a window into the social transformations that occurred over the course of American history. The wholesale adoption of tobacco smoking and usage ushered in new habits.
that became deeply ingrained in the culture. Tobacco smoking engendered the material objects of smoking, such as clay tobacco pipes, tobacco boxes, and other accoutrements, and most importantly signaled the beginning of an early consumerism and the desire for non-necessities made possible by changing socioeconomic conditions. Such conditions were stimulated through expanding markets in a developing system of trade and colonization and the importation of raw materials that could be processed into readily consumable goods like tobacco, coffee, sugar, and other commodities that became available in the early modern era.

More than a century later, social life came to represent group and personal identity formations that could be expressed through the act of tobacco smoking itself, its material culture, and related activities, both public and private (see chapter 5). Such social transformations were important, because they mirrored the broader American national identity, which was perceived as including qualities of individuality, freedom of expression, and pride in a country often characterized by ambition and restlessness in its growth and development.

Chapter Overviews

To situate the reader, chapter 2 delves into several theoretical constructs that offer a means by which to understand the popularity of tobacco and smoking. They include world-systems analysis and consumer theory, which dovetail, while requiring some modifications. The world-systems analysis of Immanuel Wallerstein (1974, 1980) and André Gunder Frank (1978) serves as a useful theoretical tool to study the roots of a precapitalistic society in historical archaeology; but as in the case of many theoretical frameworks, one size does not fit all. The model overlooks the role of desire in influencing consumer choice in the early modern era. Although Wallerstein (1974: 302) recognized that non-necessities (which he called “preciosities”) represented a specialized trade in the world-systems exchange between core and periphery, the element of desire helped instigate the agricultural initiatives of tobacco and sugar cultivation. This book proposes that the desire for luxury goods and psychoactive consumables such as tobacco provided the bridge between the world-systems model and the growth of mass consumption in a preindustrial era.