



Botánicas: Sacred Spaces of Healing and Devotion in Urban America

Joseph M. Murphy

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Botánicas is an exploration in text and photographs of spiritual shops found in Latino neighborhoods throughout the United States. Readers discover these marvelous spaces and their alternative spiritualities that help patrons cope with the grind and challenges of city life. Botánicas provide access to an array of invisible powers and sell the ingredients to construct symbolic solutions to their patrons' problems. The stores are bright and baroque, and the powers they invoke come from religious traditions in Africa, Europe, Asia, and the native Americas. In *Botánicas*, Joseph M. Murphy offers a cultural history of the devotions on display and a reflection on the efficacy of their powers to heal. Readers will come to see that the goods and devotions of botánicas give their patrons--mostly Latino, often immigrants--pathways for empowerment and transformation. The name *botánicas* comes from the "botanicals" for sale, herbs and plants with healing powers. The pharmacopeia of botánicas can be vast, and owners may know hundreds of remedies for treating problems of health, wealth, and love. Botánicas vend herbs for upset stomach, herbs for finding a job, and herbs for wooing back a wayward spouse. Supplementing these medicinal and magical plants, botánicas sell candles, holy statues, and tools for devotion to an array of spiritual powers--Catholic saints, African gods, indigenous spirits, and Asian divinities. Each spirit has its own ritual of petition, and botánica owners can discern the proper offerings and prayers to help the supplicant. Murphy explains the religions of the botánica with subtlety and sensitivity. He gives readers a deep sense of the contexts of the stores and a sophisticated analysis of the religious traditions that suffuse them. Visually fascinating, culturally rich, and religiously profound, *Botánicas* is a window into a world of beauty and power.

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