



Indian Pilgrims: Indigenous Journeys of Activism and Healing with Saint Kateri Tekakwitha (Critical Issues in Indigenous Studies)

Michelle M. Jacob

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In 2012 Kateri Tekakwitha became the first North American Indian to be canonized as a saint by the Roman Catholic Church, an event that American Indian Catholics have awaited for generations. Saint Kateri, known as the patroness of the environment, was born in 1656 near present-day Albany, New York, to an Algonquin mother and a Mohawk father. Tekakwitha converted to Christianity at age nineteen and took a vow of perpetual virginity. Her devotees have advocated for her sainthood since her death in 1680. Within historical Catholic writings, Tekakwitha is portrayed as a model of pious, submissive femininity. *Indian Pilgrims* moves beyond mainstream narratives and shows that Saint Kateri is a powerful feminine figure who inspires decolonizing activism in contemporary Indigenous peoples' lives.

Author Michelle M. Jacob examines Saint Kateri's influence on and relation to three important themes—caring for the environment, building community, and reclaiming the Native feminine as sacred—and brings a Native feminist perspective to the story of Saint Kateri. The book demonstrates the power and potential of Indigenous decolonizing activism, as Saint Kateri's devotees claim the space of the Catholic Church to revitalize traditional cultural practices, teach and learn Indigenous languages, and address critical issues such as protecting Indigenous homelands from environmental degradation. The book is based on ethnographic research at multiple sites, including Saint Kateri's 2012 canonization festivities in Vatican City and Italy, the Akwesasne Mohawk Reservation (New York and Canada), the Yakama Reservation (Washington), and the National Tekakwitha Conferences in Texas, North Dakota, and Louisiana. Through narratives from these events, Jacob addresses issues of gender justice—such as respecting the autonomy of women while encouraging collectivist thinking and strategizing—and seeks collective remedies that challenge colonial and capitalist filters.

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