



The Common Pot: The Recovery of Native Space in the Northeast (Indigenous Americas)

Lisa Brooks

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Literary critics frequently portray early Native American writers either as individuals caught between two worlds or as subjects who, even as they defied the colonial world, struggled to exist within it. In striking counterpoint to these analyses, Lisa Brooks demonstrates the ways in which Native leaders—including Samson Occom, Joseph Brant, Hendrick Aupaumut, and William Apess—adopted writing as a tool to reclaim rights and land in the Native networks of what is now the northeastern United States.

“The Common Pot,” a metaphor that appears in Native writings during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, embodies land, community, and the shared space of sustenance among relations. Far from being corrupted by forms of writing introduced by European colonizers, Brooks contends, Native people frequently rejected the roles intended for them by their missionary teachers and used the skills they acquired to compose petitions, political tracts, and speeches; to record community councils and histories; and most important, to imagine collectively the routes through which the Common Pot could survive.

Reframing the historical landscape of the region, Brooks constructs a provocative new picture of Native space before and after colonization. By recovering and reexamining Algonquian and Iroquoian texts, she shows that writing was not a foreign technology but rather a crucial weapon in the Native Americans’ arsenal as they resisted—and today continue to oppose—colonial domination.

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