



Native American Worldviews: An Introduction

Jerry H. Gill

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In this excellent survey of Native American worldviews, philosopher of religion Jerry H. Gill emphasizes the value of tracing the overarching themes and broad contours of Native American belief systems. He presents an integrated view to serve as an introduction to ways of life and perspectives on the world far different from those of the dominant Euro-American culture.

Drawing on the scholarship of anthropologists and specialists in American Indian Studies, Gill brings together much original research in broad, accessible chapters. He explores Native American origin stories, the special connotations given to spatial concepts such as the cardinal directions and the circle, the influence of the seasons and the cycles of life on different cultures, and clan and kinship systems. Separate chapters are devoted to key ceremonies and customs as well as to concepts of health, harmony, virtues, wisdom, and beauty.

The final chapter considers the devastating effects on native peoples of the European incursion into North America. Gill discusses the reservation system, attempts at assimilation and resistance, the recent renaissance of American Indian cultures, and prospects for the future. A valuable appendix presents a representative sampling of Native American writings on beliefs and origin stories.

This excellent introduction to the many diverse yet related American Indian worldviews will be a welcome resource for teachers of introductory courses in Native American Studies or philosophy of religion, as well as laypersons with an interest in native cultures.

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