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Contact: Kathleen J. Martin
Ethnic Studies Department
805-756-2827; kamartin@calpoly.edu

Power of Indigenous Symbols Studied in Book by Cal Poly Professor

SAN LUIS OBISPO – Cal Poly Ethnic Studies Professor Kathleen Martin has co-authored the book “Indigenous Symbols and Practices in the Catholic Church: Visual Culture, Missionization and Appropriation,” due Feb. 1 from Ashgate Publishing.

The text focuses on Native American and indigenous people and their relationship with the Roman Catholic Church. It illustrates the effects of appropriation of indigenous symbols, as well as the political, educational and economic oppression of indigenous peoples the authors contend were the result of Christian organizations.

The authors contend that interdisciplinary investigation is necessary since power and oppression continue to frame the lives of indigenous peoples through visual messaging despite the Civil Rights Movement and the American Indian Freedom of Religion Act.

The concept for this volume arose from a visual inspection of Catholic churches and the ways indigenous symbols are employed. Martin visited 50-60 churches on reservations, took 600-700 photographs, and conducted interviews for the project, which includes 17 full-page photographs, personal narratives and data analysis.

Several notable colleagues from colleges and universities across the country contributed to the volume, most of them Native American and indigenous writers who are also members of the American Academy of Religion and/or the American Educational Research Association.

The book will be available in El Corral Bookstore Feb. 19 and will be used as a text in the course “Native American Cultural Images.”

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