

Piety and Power



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Piety and Power explores gender and religion in the seventeenth century in three American Colonies, each with a dominant religious tradition. The book examines not only the domestic and devotional aspects of women's lives, but also the more public roles that women engaged in as arbiters of community morals and public order. This book places women at the centre of early American religious history and blurs the lines between public and private spheres, lines that many other scholars have posited as immutable. The Reformation's radical conception of 'a priesthood of all believers' was central to women's emergent role in early modern times. It was in their roles as religious and moral guardians that seventeenth-century women identified avenues of influence, and even power, within the context of a socially constructed patriarchy that deemed them inferior to men. Denied access to formal political structures, colonial women found ways to assert themselves in the public sphere. Religious practice in each colony within the context of each denomination provided women with a platform from which to assert their authority, even as the doctrine itself lauded their submissiveness.

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