



*The story of how American Indian women promoted temperance in their communities*

# In League Against King Alcohol

*Native American Women and the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, 1874–1933*

By Thomas John Lappas

Many Americans are familiar with the real, but repeatedly stereotyped problem of alcohol abuse in Indian country. Most know about the Prohibition Era and reformers who promoted passage of the Eighteenth Amendment, among them the members of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. But few people are aware of how American Indian women joined forces with the WCTU to press for positive change in their communities, a critical chapter of American cultural history explored in depth for the first time in *In League Against King Alcohol*.

Drawing on the WCTU's national records as well as state and regional organizational newspaper accounts and official state histories, historian Thomas John Lappas unearths the story of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union in Indian country. His work reveals how Native American women in the organization embraced a type of social, economic, and political progress that their white counterparts supported and recognized—while maintaining distinctly Native elements of sovereignty, self-determination, and cultural preservation. They asserted their identities as Indigenous women, albeit as Christian and progressive Indigenous women. At the same time, through their mutual participation, white WCTU members formed conceptions about Native people that they subsequently brought to bear on state and local Indian policy pertaining to alcohol, but also on education, citizenship, voting rights, and land use and ownership.

Lappas's work places Native women at the center of the temperance story, showing how they used a women's national reform organization to move their own goals and objectives forward. Subtly but significantly, they altered the welfare and status of American Indian communities in the early twentieth century.

**Thomas J. Lappas** is Professor of History at Nazareth College in Rochester, New York.

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FOR AUTHOR INTERVIEWS AND OTHER

PUBLICITY INQUIRIES CONTACT:

KATIE BAKER, PUBLICITY MANAGER

UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA PRESS

TEL: 405 325 3200

FAX: 405 325 4000

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