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On Our Own Ground: The Complete Writings of William Apess, a Pequot (Native Americans of the Northeast: Culture, History, the Contemporary)

William Apess

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Editor O'Connell has done something very valuable in making these forgotten texts available to a wider audience. The writings of Pequot William Apess are, sadly, highly relevant even now. This is partly because of the universal import of religious conversion, ethnic identity and the personal challenges he confronted, but even more because American Indians are still denied the civil and human rights enjoyed by fellow citizens. Apess's fiery prose and profound insights on America from his Indigenous perspective not only shed much light on his life and times, but will shatter cherished myths of Euramericans about the presumed fairness of our society. Opponents of multiculturalism would probably complain that yet another marginal author has been dredged up from the past. But Apess is not obscure, rather, his brilliance was obscured by neglect of those who most needed to hear his message. There is far more to his work than merely documenting Indian victimhood. As author, minister and also activist on behalf of his Mashpee Wampanoag congregation in the 1830s, Apess's life work testifies eloquently that Indians have always exercised agency in shaping their history and ours as a whole---even in circumstances not of their choosing.

William Apess was the first Native American's to fully, and publicly, speak out regarding the racism and unfair treatment that he and others endured. The author's writing is eloquently delivered, instilling the reader with a realistic framework of a political, historical, and personal mindset.

From Publishers Weekly
O'Connell, a professor of English at Amherst College since there's also UMass Amherst, has performed a real service in compiling and editing the complete works of Apess. A member of the Pequot tribe of Massachusetts, Apess became, in 1829, one of the first Native Americans to write and publish an autobiography. Further, he did so with only six years of formal education. *A Son of the Forest* tells the story of Apess's early life (he was scarcely 30 when he wrote it) and of his conversion to Christianity in 1818. Eleven years later, he was ordained a Methodist minister. O'Connell notes as especially remarkable that Apess, unlike many of his contemporaries and their white tutors (who saw Christianity as a way to speed the Native Americans's cultural assimilation), used his Christianity to better assert his Indianness. Nowhere is this more evident than in his "Eulogy on King Philip" and "The Indians: The Ten Lost Tribes," which are at once impassioned pleas on behalf of Native Americans and fierce denunciations of white colonialization. O'Connell provides an extensive and invaluable introduction and footnotes to aid the reader in the recovery of this important Native American figure. Copyright 1992 Reed Business Information, Inc.
From Library Journal
Editor O'Connell (English, Amherst Coll.) has gathered together the complete 19th-century writings of Apess, a mixed blood of Pequot and white descent. A Textual Afterword discusses difficulties with different texts and explains the dearth of editorial notes. A brief Bibliographical Essay covers works by and on Apess, on Pequots and other New England Native Americans, and on general autobiographical and literary studies. But the essay emphasizes the works of Apess, an interesting man of deep Christian convictions who fought for the United States in the War of 1812 and then focused the nation's attention on the plight of the Mashpee Indians. This scholarly work, first in a new series, is recommended for research and Native American collections.- Patricia A. Clark, Los Angeles P.L.
Copyright 1992 Reed Business Information, Inc. "Makes available in a superb scholarly edition not only the first published autobiography by a Native American (1829 originally), but also a range of historical, political, and personal writings. The anger in Apess's work, . . . always eloquent, serves a depth of analysis and a layered irony that make pressing claims on any catalog of what is finest and most significant in American literary history." *New York Times Book* "The appearance of this volume brings to center stage a writer of great importance and power, the first Native American to speak fully in his own words about the appalling racism of the early republic. . . . With the publication of this work, those who care about what passes for nineteenth-century American literature can never be the same." *New England Quarterly* "A milestone in the evolution of American literary and historical scholarship. By bringing Apess's voice before the public, Barry O'Connell has both broadened our understanding of the literary canon and extended our definition of Native American history. . . . This book should be a part of any library of American letters." Frederick E. Hoxie, Director, D'Arcy McNickle Center for the History of the American Indian, Newberry Library "O'Connell's introduction is exemplary in the solidity of its research and the sophistication of its readings. This volume renders a real service to students in a variety of disciplines." Arnold Krupat, Sarah Lawrence College "In addition to rescuing Apess from obscurity, the book adds substantially to our understanding of New England Indian history in the post-colonial period. . . . O'Connell's introduction is a first-rate piece of work that will be widely recognized above and beyond the edited collection for a long time to come." Neal Salisbury, Smith College