

A son of the forest and other writings by william apess, a pequot

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A Son of the Forest and Other Writings is a collection of writings by William Apess, a 19th-century Native American. He was the first Native American to write extensively in the English language.

Aside from culling from his first published autobiography, *A Son of the Forest* (1829), this volume also contains other autobiographical works like "The Experiences of Five Christian Indians of the Pequot Tribe" (1832) and his "Eulogy on King Philip" (1836).

In *A Son of the Forest*, he narrates about being born in a tent in the woods of Colrain, Massachusetts, to a Pequot mother and a mixed-blood (white and Pequot) father who later separated. He describes his participation in the War of 1812 between the United States and Britain (after he ran away from indenture servitude) and his conversion to Methodism.

He also talks about how his grandfather was a white man who married the granddaughter of King Philip. He shares how he was abused by his alcoholic grandparents and eventually sold as an indenture slave while he was very young. His master introduced him to Christianity and allowed him to go to school. This part was the most influential phase of his life. He became a preacher in 1833 and moved to Mashpee, the last Indian town in Massachusetts.

Here he was able to experience first hand the incompatibility of his Christian faith and the racial prejudice and injustice the whites have done towards the natives. These became the recurring themes of his writings. In his famous *Eulogy on King Philip* in Boston in 1836 he strongly forwarded the idea that Indians wanted what the Pilgrims wanted: justice and Christian fellowship.

This gripping volume is a subtle political work of Apess of the Pequot Indian people. He articulated Native American consciousness and sentiments through his fiery Christian evangelism. His topics range from poverty, child abuse, alcoholism (which he himself became one later in life), ethnic identity and religious conversion.

This volume is historically significant because it speaks and argues about racism during the early period of the republic. Apess chronicled the abuses and injustices suffered by the Indians in the hands of the whites and those acting in God's name. Methodism appealed to Native Americans then because of its enthusiastic style and its emphasis on equality. The work gives an alternative view of the often-written Native American marginalization and rationalization of Indian extinction.

The work describes the character of the Native Americans first-hand by one of their own. His most powerful polemic is Eulogy on King Philip where Apess compared the seventeenth-century Wampanoag leader, Metacomb or "King Philip" to the English, to the republic's early national hero and founding father, George Washington.

He lectures about the relations of Native Americans with the whites in New England. Apess further argues that the Native American cause should not be isolated from American history because Indian history and culture is part thereof. Their cause is likened to the American Revolution.

Published in 1830, *A Son of the Forest* implicitly challenges the national controversy of the times over the Indian Removal Bill which legalized the federal government's decision to force Native Americans off their traditional

homelands east of the Mississippi River. Here he promotes the Indians' humanity, worth, and potential with his life as an example.

References

- O'Connell, B. (Ed.) (1997). *A Son of the Forest and Other Writings by William Apess, a Pequot*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.