

*Eulogy on King Philip*  
William Apess (1836)

*William Apess (also spelled Apes) was of Pequot ancestry, the Pequots being an indigenous nation whose tribal lands had been reduced, ever since the late 1600s, to two small reservations in Connecticut. Born off-reservation, Apess was reared mostly in white households as an indentured servant, after white authorities removed him from the home of his abusive, alcoholic grandmother. During the War of 1812, Apess enlisted in the US military and fought in Canada. He was later licensed as a Methodist preacher, ministering mostly to Native Americans and African Americans.*

*The speech excerpted here, delivered to a white audience in Boston, exemplifies Apess's impassioned advocacy of indigenous rights. Apess frames the speech as a eulogy of Metacomet, known in English as "King Philip," a Wampanoag chief who led an unsuccessful anti-colonial uprising in 1675-76. But Apess uses the speech to give a lengthy narration of colonial atrocities against indigenous people of New England from the Pilgrims' arrival in 1620 up through King Philip's War, with a jump forward to the 1830s—the present day, for Apess—to denounce the United States' Indian Removal policy. The selections given here highlight how Apess variously invokes or denounces elements of US civil religion: the glorifying of the Pilgrims and the American Revolution, the ideal of a Christian nation, and a national mission to cultivate the wilderness.*

*[“As glorious as the American Revolution”]*

I appeal to the lovers of liberty. [...A]s the immortal Washington lives endeared and engraven on the hearts of every white in America, never to be forgotten in time, even [so] is the immortal Philip honored, as held in memory by the degraded but yet grateful descendants who appreciate his character—those few descendants who now remain as the monument of the cruelty of those who came to improve our race and correct our errors. So will every patriot, especially in this enlightened age, respect the rude yet all-accomplished son of the forest that died a martyr to his cause, though unsuccessful yet as glorious as the American Revolution. [...]

Who is Philip? He was the descendant of one of the most celebrated chiefs in the known world, [celebrated] for [his] peace and universal benevolence towards all men;<sup>a</sup> for injuries upon injuries, and the most daring robberies and barbarous deeds of death that were ever committed by the American Pilgrims, were with patience and resignation borne in a manner that would do justice to any Christian nation or being in the world [...] For injuries of much less magnitude have the people called Christians slain their brethren till they could sing, like Samson, “With a jawbone of an ass have we slain our thousands and laid them in heaps.” It would be well for us to lay those deeds and depredations committed by whites upon Indians before the civilized world, and then they can judge for themselves. [...]

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<sup>a</sup> Apess is referring here to Metacomet's father Massasoit, who was leader of the Wampanoag people when the Pilgrims established Plymouth colony in Wampanoag territory. Massasoit forged an alliance with the Pilgrims, for which he was positively memorialized by white Americans.

*[“Let the children of the Pilgrims blush”]*

December [22,] 1620, the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth, and, without asking liberty from anyone, they possessed themselves of a portion of the country, and built themselves houses, and then made a treaty and commanded [the Indians] to accede to it. This, if now done, would be called an insult, and every white man would be called to go out and act the part of a patriot, to defend their country’s rights; and if every intruder were butchered, it would be sung upon every hilltop in the Union that victory and patriotism was the order of the day. And yet the Indians (though many were dissatisfied) bore it without the shedding of blood or imprisoning anyone. And yet, for their kindness and resignation toward the whites, they were called savages and [were said to have been] made by God on purpose for [the whites] to destroy. [...]

Writers of the history of New England say that our tribes were large and respectable. [...] How have they been destroyed—is it by fair means? No. How then? By hypocritical proceedings, by being duped and flattered [...] We might suppose that meek Christians had better gods and weapons than cannon, weapons that were not carnal but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds. These are the weapons that modern Christians profess to have; and if the Pilgrims did not have them, they ought not to be honored as such. But let us again review their weapons to civilize the nations of this soil. What were they? Rum and powder and ball, together with all the diseases, such as the smallpox and every other disease imaginable; and in this way [they] sweep off thousands and tens of thousands. [...]

Let the children of the Pilgrims blush while the son of the forest drops a tear and groans over the fate of his murdered and departed fathers. He would say to the sons of the Pilgrims (as Job said about his birth day): Let the day be dark, December 22, 1620; let it be forgotten in your celebration, in your speeches, and by the burying of the rock that your fathers first put their foot upon. For be it remembered [that] although the gospel is said to be glad tidings to all people, yet we poor Indians never have found those who brought it [to be] messengers of mercy, but contrawise. We say therefore: Let every man of color wrap himself in mourning, for the 22nd of December and the 4th of July are days of mourning and not of joy. [...] Let them, rather, fast and pray to the Great Spirit, the Indian’s God, who deals out mercy to his red children and not destruction.

O Christians, can you answer for those beings that have been destroyed by your hostilities—and beings, too, that lie [as] endeared to God as yourselves, his Son being their Savior as well as yours, and alike to all men? And will you presume to say that you are executing the judgments of God by so doing?—or, as many really are, [by] approving the works of their fathers to be genuine, as it is certain that they do every time they celebrate the day of the Pilgrims. Although in words they deny it, yet in works they approve of the iniquities of their fathers.

*[“The spirit of the Pilgrims yet remains”]*

And as the seed of iniquity and prejudice was sown in that day, so it still remains; and there is a deep-rooted popular opinion in the hearts of many that Indians were made on purpose for destruction—to be driven out by white Christians, and they to take their places—and that God had decreed it from all eternity. If such theologians would only study the works of nature more,

they would understand the purposes of good better than they do: that the favor of the Almighty was good and holy, and all his nobler works were made to adorn his image by being his grateful servants and admiring each other as angels, and not, as they say, to drive and devour each other.

And that you may know the spirit of the Pilgrims yet remains, we will present before you the words of a humble divine of the far west. He says, “The desert becomes an Eden.” Rev. Nahum Gold, of Union Grove, Putnam [County, Illinois], writes under [the] date June 12, 1835. Says he:

Let any man look at this settlement and reflect what it was three years ago, and his heart can but kindle up while he exclaims, “What has God wrought!” The savage has left the ground for civilized man; the rich prairie, from bringing forth all its strengths to be burned, is now receiving numerous enclosures and brings a harvest of corn and wheat to feed the church. Yes, sir, this is now God’s vineyard; he has gathered the vine, the choice vine, and brought it from a far country, and has planted it on a goodly soil. He expects fruit now. He gathered out the stones thereof and drove the red Canaanites from trampling it down or in any way hindering its increase. (*N.Y. Evangelist*, August 1)

But what next should we hear from this very pious man? Why, my brethren, the poor missionaries want money to go and convert the poor heathen, as if God could not convert them where they were but must first drive them out. If God wants the red men converted, we should think he could do it as well in one place as in another. [...] But I would suggest one thing, and that is: Let the ministers and people use the colored people they have already around them like human beings before they go to convert any more, and let them show it in their churches, and let them proclaim it upon the housetops. And I would say to the benevolent: Withhold your hard earnings from them unless they do do it—until they can stop laying their own wickedness to God, which is blasphemy. [...]

[“August 1676”]

But we have another dark and corrupt deed for the sons of the Pilgrims to look at, and that is the fight and capture of Philip’s son and wife and many of his warriors, in which Philip lost about 130 men, killed and wounded; this was in August 1676. But the most horrid act was in taking Philip’s son, about ten years of age, and selling him to be a slave away from his father and mother. While I am writing, I can hardly restrain my feelings to think a people calling themselves Christians should [be guilty of] conduct so scandalous, so outrageous, making themselves appear so despicable in the eyes of the Indians; and even now, in this audience, I doubt not but there are men honorable enough to despise the conduct of those pretended Christians. And surely none but such as believe they did right will ever go and undertake to celebrate that day of their landing, the 22nd of December. [...]

Gentlemen and ladies, I blush at these tales, if you do not, especially when they professed to be a free and humane people. Yes, they did. They took a part of my tribe and sold them to the Spaniards in Bermuda, and many others; and then, on the Sabbath day, these people would gather themselves together and say that God is no respecter of persons, while the divines would pour forth, “He that says he loves God and hates his brother is a liar, and the truth is not in him”—and at the same time, they hating and selling their fellowmen in bondage. [...]

*[“How true was Philip’s prophecy”]*

How deep, then, was the thought of Philip, when he could look from Maine to Georgia, and from the ocean to the lakes, and view, with one look, all his brethren withering before the more enlightened [nation] to come; and how true his prophecy, that the white people would not only cut down their groves but would enslave them. Had the inspiration of Isaiah been there, he could not have been more correct. Our groves and hunting grounds are gone, our dead are dug up, our council fires are put out [...] Look at the disgraceful laws, disfranchising us as citizens. Look at the treaties made by Congress, all broken. Look at the deep-rooted plans laid when a territory becomes a state, that after so many years the laws shall be extended over the Indians that live within their boundaries. Yea, every charter that has been given was given with the view of driving the Indians out of the states or dooming them to become chained under desperate laws that would make them drag out a miserable life, as one chained to the galley. And this is the course that has been pursued for nearly two hundred years—a fire, a canker, created by the Pilgrims from across the Atlantic to burn and destroy my poor unfortunate brethren, and it cannot be denied.

What, then, shall we do? Shall we cease crying and say it is all wrong, or shall we bury the hatchet and those unjust laws and Plymouth Rock together and become friends? And will the sons of the Pilgrims aid in putting out the fire and destroying the canker [...]?

*[“I cannot call it religion”]*

[...B]y this time, you have been enabled to see that Philip’s prophecy has come to pass. Therefore, as a man of natural abilities, I shall pronounce him the greatest man that was ever in America; and until he is proved to the contrary, so it will stand, to the everlasting disgrace of the Pilgrim fathers.

We will now give you, in his language, the Lord’s Prayer:<sup>b</sup>

Noo-chun kes-uk-qut-tiam-at-am unch koo-we-su-onk, kuk-ket-as-soo-tam-oonk pey-au-moo-utch, keet-te-nan-tam-oo-onk ne nai; ne-ya-ne ke-suk-qutkah oh-ke-it; aos-sa-ma-i-in-ne-an ko-ko-ke-suk-o-da-e nut-as-e-suk-ok-ke fu-tuk-qun-neg; kah ah-quo-an-tam-a-i-in-ne-an num-match-e-se-ong-an-on-ash, ne-match-ene-na-mun wonk neet-ah-quo-antam-au-o-un-non-og nish-noh pasuk noo-na-mortuk-quoh-who-nan, kah chaque

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<sup>b</sup> Apess has imperfectly copied here a syllabic transcription of the Lord’s Prayer in the Massachusett language, as published in 1833 by white historian Samuel Drake, who in turn was adapting the Massachusett translation of Luke 11:2-4 produced in the 1660s by Puritan missionary John Eliot. (Multiple indigenous peoples of New England, including the Wampanoags, spoke Massachusett or a related dialect.) When Drake placed the Lord’s Prayer in Massachusett at the end of a biographical profile of Philip, he explained that his purpose was to “present the reader with a specimen of the language in which [Philip] spoke.” What purpose does the Massachusett text of the Lord’s Prayer serve in Apess’s speech?

Samuel G. Drake, *The Book of the Indians of North America* (Boston: Josiah Drake, 1833), 3:40, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/inu.30000053306043>.

sag-kom-pa-ginne-an en qutch-e-het-tu-ong-a-nit, qut poh-qud-wus-sin-ne-an watch match-i-tut.

[I have] now given historical facts and an exposition in relation to ancient times, by which we have been enabled to discover the foundation which destroyed our common fathers in their struggle together: it was indeed nothing more than the spirit of avarice and usurpation of power, that has brought people in all ages to hate and devour each other. And I cannot, for one moment, look back upon what is past and call it religion. No, it has not the least appearance like it.

**Source:** William Apes [*sic*], *Eulogy on King Philip, as Pronounced at the Odeon, in Federal Street, Boston* [...] (Boston: Published by the author, 1836), 5-8, 10-11, 19-22, 45-46, 53-56, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc2.ark:/13960/fk7xk8557b>. Public domain.

Excerpts edited and annotated by John-Charles Duffy. Italicized section headings added by Duffy. Paragraph and sentence breaks adjusted for readability. Some phrases or clauses relocated within sentences for clarity, but without square brackets in order to reduce textual clutter. Noun-verb agreement errors corrected. An erroneous year corrected. A reference to *the Pilgrims' fathers* emended to *the Pilgrim fathers* because the latter makes better sense in context. Spelling (including the spelling of a biblical name), punctuation, typography (small caps, italics), and the abbreviation of ordinal numbers emended in line with modern American conventions. Two passages reformatted as block quotations. Month-day-year formatting for dates regularized. An extraneous &c. omitted. An *oh* converted to vocative *O*.

The capitalizing of *Pilgrims* regularized. The use of lowercase for the racial labels *white* and *red* reproduces the usage of the source publication. In references to Plymouth Rock, the word *rock* is capitalized in this edited text only when the full name is given; hence an instance, in the source, of *the Rock* has been converted here to *the rock*. The words *west* and *state*, capitalized in the source, are downcased here.

These edited excerpts from Apess's speech are intended for **teaching** purposes only. For **research** purposes, you should consult, quote, and cite the source publication listed above.



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