Sovereignty, Separatism, and Survivance
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INTRODUCTION

BENJAMIN D. CARSON

Broad in its scope, Sovereignty, Separatism, and Survivance: Ideological Encounters in the Literature of Native North America explores rich and multi-faceted literary works by and about Native Americans from the “long” early American period to the present. What links these essays is a concern for the ways in which Native Americans have navigated, negotiated, and resisted dominant white ideology since the founding of the Republic. Importantly, these essays are historically situated and consider not only the ways in which indigenous peoples are represented in American literature, film and history, but pay much needed attention to the actual lived experiences of Native Americans inside and outside of native communities. As Drew Lopenzina writes, in “Compromised Currencies: Why Samson Occom is not Pictured on the One Hundred Dollar Bill” (included in this volume): “The very fact that the figure of the Native has been one of the most ubiquitous and powerful tools of ideological representation in American literature demands that we seek and promote a better understanding of the significant gap between popular perception and the lived experiences of Natives as witnessed by their own textual productions.”

By addressing cross-cultural protest, resistance to dominant white ideology, the importance to natives of land and land redress, literary and national sovereignty, cultural separatism and cultural healing, Sovereignty, Separatism, and Survivance seeks to interrogate the gap that Lopenzina identifies, and to contribute to our understanding of the discrepancy between ideological representations of native peoples and the real-life consequences those representations have for the ways in which indigenous peoples live out their daily lives.

The authors in this collection take for granted the right of indigenous peoples to self-determination. In McClanahan v. Arizona State Tax Commission (1973), Justice Thurgood Marshall argues that recognizing the sovereignty of tribal nations is important not because it provides a definitive resolution of the issues... but because it provides a backdrop against which the applicable treaties and federal
statutes must be read. It must always be remembered that the various Indian tribes were once independent and sovereign nations, and that their claim to sovereignty long predated that of our own Government. (qtd. in Duthu 12)

The importance of Marshall’s words cannot be understated, but the contributors to this volume would amend them slightly, reminding readers and lawmakers alike that Indian tribes are still independent and sovereign nations, even if they are no longer recognized as such by the federal government.

Native sovereignty is not just a juridico-legislative issue, though. It is a cultural one as well. As Craig S. Womack argues, “sovereignty is an intersection of the political, imaginary, and literary” (26). Self-representation, or native peoples expressing their “idea of themselves” (14), is an essential element in the building and maintaining of indigenous nations and a sense of “nationhood” (14). Womack writes:

The ongoing expression of a tribal voice, through imagination, language, and literature, contributes to keeping sovereignty alive in the citizens of a nation and gives sovereignty a meaning that is defined within the tribe rather than by external sources. (14)

When it comes to native concerns—what it means to be Indian; what defines Indian cultural practices; what constitutes native literature, etc.—the terms of the discussion must be set by natives. For too long, Euroamericans have, by rhetorical, judicial, and military force, delineated the parameters of the discussion involving natives in North America. One of the consequences of this often one-sided conversation is the perception that native literature is as new—a recent arrival on the literary scene that can now be included in the emerging multi-cultural canon—as Indians are old. But like the sovereign tribal governments that pre-date the founding of this Republic, tribal literatures, Womack reminds us, are

the oldest literatures in the Americas, the most American of American literatures. . . Native people have been on this continent at least thirty thousand years, and the stories tell us we have been here even longer than that, that we were set down by the Creator on this continent, that we originated here. For much of this time period, we have had literatures. (7)

The right to tribal self-determination, then, extends to conversations about what constitutes native literature, a point Kirby Brown address directly in his essay in this volume. Oral and written literature, by natives about natives, play a crucial role in nation building because, as mentioned
above, they give native peoples an “idea of themselves.” This is no less true today than it has been for the last thirty thousand years of indigenous history. The ongoing survival of native peoples in North America and around the world depends in no small measure upon their ability to represent themselves. So the importance of contemporary indigenous art must be recognized for what it is: evidence of native “survivance”—that is, evidence that native peoples have not vanished but are actively present, resisting physically and discursively dominant ideologies, and, most importantly, flourishing.  

In “William Apess’s Nullifications: Sovereignty, Identity and the Mashpee Revolt,” John J. Kucich illuminates the sophisticated ways in which Apess (1798-1839) and the Mashpee use the “double nature of nullification” to wrest tribal sovereignty away from the U.S. government. Turning his attention to the late eighteenth-century Mohegan writer Samson Occum (1723-1792), Drew Lopenzina, in “Compromised Currencies: Why Samson Occom is not Pictured on the One Hundred Dollar Bill,” not only reevaluates Occom’s place in early American literature, but also argues for the importance of Occom’s work in countering what Gerald Vizenor calls “manifest manners,” those representations of native peoples imposed by dominant ideology through various discursive means, including the one dollar bill issued by the Susquehanna Bridge Company in 1817. In “Timothy Dwight Encounters the Indian: Greenfield Hill and Travels in New England and New York,” Ann Brunjes exposes the contradictory impulses in Timothy Dwight’s attitude toward Indians in his writings. Brunjes’s reading of Greenfield Hill and Travels in New England and New York shows Dwight trying to shore up an ideology that will confirm the superiority of colonial settlers’ land management techniques to those of the Indians and at the same time assure white readers that Indians are a relic of the past. Like Kucich’s work on Apess and Lopenzina’s essay on Occom, Brunjes’s historical reading of Dwight sheds light on the ways in which discursive practices not only perpetuate Euroamerican ideology, but also how such practices can be frustrated and undermined by a concentrated and effectively deployed counter-narrative.

In “Land and Literature: Situated Self-Determination in James Welch’s Fools Crow,” Ashley Hall, like Ann Brunjes, addresses the interplay between indigenous and Euroamerican relationships to the land and, in Hall’s words, “the ongoing political consequences of that interplay.” In his insightful reading of Welch’s Fools Crow, Hall makes it clear that the health of indigenous nations is inextricably linked to their relationship with the land, and argues that possession of ancestral homelands is central
to national sovereignty. On this point, H. Bruce Duthu writes, “it is within these ancestral homelands that the heart of tribal sovereignty resides, and where it is given expression on the ground by tribal people in their exercise of self-government” (xxv). The right to self-government is the key concern of Kirby Brown’s essay “Indigenous Communities, Indigenous Nations: Interrogating Contemporary Indigenous Intellectualisms.” Brown reviews the work of indigenous scholars like Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, Jace Weaver, and Daniel Heath Justice in order to tease out the way these scholars view the role of “nation” and “community” in native American nationalist discourse. Brown ends his essay with a discussion of Marilou Awiakta’s “Amazons in Appalachia,” arguing that, even though Awiakta is not a Cherokee citizen, her work stands as “a powerful Cherokee nationalist-feminist act of decolonization in response to the history of violence, oppression, disempowerment, and silence imposed upon Native women through the colonizing process.” Brown, a citizen of the Cherokee Nation, writes as a committed nationalist, and his work is dedicated to affirming the sovereignty of the Cherokee nation and their right of self-governance and self-determination.

In “From Apocalypse to Nuclear Survivance: The Transpacific Nuclear Narrative in Gerald Vizenor’s Hiroshima Bugi: Atomu 57,” Kyoko Matsunaga turns her critical eye to Vizenor’s 2003 novel Hiroshima Bugi: Atomu 57. She shows how Vizenor’s trickster narrative subverts the “apocalyptic mode of the dominant nuclear narrative” and challenges “the ideology of peace,” which, Matsunaga argues, denies “nuclear survivance, or the survival and sovereignty of the actual atomic bomb victims.” In her analysis of Louis Erdrich’s The Antelope Wife, “Unraveling ‘This Tangle of Blame and Killing Anger and Wilted Love’: Women and Cultural Healing in Louise Erdrich’s The Antelope Wife,” Jessica Chainer Nowacki argues that maintaining the traditional native belief of the connectedness of all things is central to restoring balance and hope within Native culture, and healing broken communities and broken relationships. In “This ain’t Dances with Salmon you know”: Postindian Simulations in Sherman Alexie’s Smoke Signals,” Awndrea Shar Caves looks at the way Alexie’s Smoke Signals (dir. Chris Eyre) challenges dominant Western images of Indians. Caves argues that Victor and Thomas are what Gerald Vizenor calls “postindians,” because, as Caves writes, “they create and act out new ways of viewing themselves and their lives as American Indians.”

As all of the authors in this collection ably demonstrate, indigenous narratives expose the pervasiveness and insidiousness of dominant Western discourses; but at the same time they show them not to be infallible. Indeed, these essays, taken together, argue that indigenous narratives have
the power to mute the white noise\(^3\) of dominant discourses—those of the vanishing Indian, Manifest Destiny, etc.—and replace them with narratives of survivance. By addressing directly the literature and cultural politics of native peoples, from the founding of the Republic to the present, the essays in collection hope to make a modest contribution to native sovereignty, separatism, and survivance.

**Notes**


**Works Cited**


 CHAPTER ONE

WILLIAM APESS’S NULLIFICATIONS:
SOVEREIGNTY, IDENTITY
AND THE MASHPEE REVOLT

JOHN J. KUCICH

In his 1995 autobiography, the longtime chief of the Mashpee Wampanoags, Earl Mills, Sr., traces the current Mashpee revival back to the early 19th century. The tribe, gathered as a village of Christian Indians in the 1660s, had long struggled with white encroachment and white overseers who were at best paternalistic and at worst racist and exploitative. Mills writes, “It was the arrival of yet another preacher in Marshpee [sic] life that made a significant change in the entire community. William Apes [sic] was his name. A Pequot from Connecticut, he was adopted by the Marshpee Wampanoags . . . and soon became the Wampanoag’s eloquent leader. . . Indeed William Apes was Marshpee’s first Indian political/social activist” (10). Mills refers here to the Mashpee Revolt of 1833-4, a concerted protest that led to the Mashpee winning township status from the Massachusetts legislature—a rare victory in the era of Indian removals and a crucial step in the tribe’s path to federal recognition in 2006.

While Mills somewhat overstates Apess’s role in the revolt—Apess took his place in a long line of Mashpee activists, and he worked very much in tandem with established Mashpee leaders—the issues Mills raises were as relevant in Apess’s day as they are in ours. Definitions of sovereignty, programs for pan-tribal activism, questions of Indian identity and cross-cultural rhetoric lie at the heart of Indian Nullification; these issues grow out of earlier struggles to preserve Native American communities in the face of European American colonialism and anticipate key issues in Native American studies today. We can begin with the paradox in Earl’s description: how did a Pequot become Mashpee’s first Indian? The answer, I suggest, is contained in Apess’s title. Nullification,
a concept rooted in U. S. sectional politics of the 1830s as well as in the traditional governance of southern New England’s tribes, neatly captures Apess’s own approach to Indian activism. Since Apess was highly attuned to contemporary politics, *Indian Nullification* is carefully modulated to take advantage of earlier examples of oppositional politics from European, native and African-American perspectives. Nullification, in his formulation, is a tactical, measured withholding of consent from the dominant government that preserves critical aspects of cultural and political sovereignty while remaining within the larger political structure. This double nature of nullification—at once rooted in Indian culture and fully engaged with the broader context of Jacksonian America—is the key to the Mashpees’ successful effort to win control over their community and their identity.

In a critical landscape still shaped by the American Indian Movement, Apess’s fortunes have varied. As a Methodist minister working primarily among the descendents of New England’s Praying Indians, his work has often been neglected in favor of literature more firmly rooted in traditional culture, more closely tied to central works of the Native American Renaissance, and more clearly the provenance of large, politically active tribes. The attention Apess has garnered in recent years follows the contours of ongoing critical debates. Much of the criticism about Apess, beginning with Barry O’Connell’s edition of his writings and assessments by Arnold Krupat, Bernd Peyer and Hilary Wyss, focuses on the hybrid nature of Apess’s writing and its canny exploitation of European American discourse. Some more recent criticism, often by native scholars such as Ron Welburn, Jace Weaver and Robert Warrior, read Apess from an insistently native perspective, recovering the elements of traditional Algonquian culture in his texts, emphasizing Apess’s effort to fashion a distinct Indian identity and seeing in his tragically foreshortened career a powerful model for contemporary Native American intellectuals.

The debate, I should make clear, is one of emphasis rather than kind—readers of Apess universally recognize his subversive mastery of white discourse, his strident anti-racist agenda and his nascent pan-Indian politics. Indeed, I would suggest, following Robert Warrior, that Apess’s work offers a useful corrective to an essentializing impulse in Native American studies. Warrior sees Apess as an “experiential” theorist of Native identity, working from the constantly negotiated terms of lived relations rather than from fixed categories of culture and tribe. Apess is particularly well suited to the cosmopolitan perspective called for by Arnold Krupat and Lucy Maddox—a stance that, in Maddox’s phrase, “desegregates” Native and white culture and allows us to better understand
how intellectuals like Apess situated the concerns of particular native peoples within broader social and political issues (15). Though Indian Nullification is, for most readers, a problematic text, a pastiche of different voices and competing agendas that gives a somewhat confusing account of its topic, it nevertheless offers a crucial example of how one Native writer effectively negotiated the treacherous legal, political, cultural and literary complexities of nineteenth century Indian-white relations.

Apess himself had long negotiated these complexities in his own life. Having been abandoned by his parents and severely beaten by a drunken grandparent, Apess was indentured to a white neighbor at the age of four or five. He was thus raised outside the Pequot community; at one point during his childhood, during a berry-picking excursion, he runs in terror from what he thinks is a party of Indians. The rest of his autobiography, A Son of the Forest (1831), details his long journey towards a native identity—a process that involves a series of struggles against white masters, service in the War of 1812, alternating bouts of religious enthusiasm and alcoholism, and chronic destitution. The turning point is his encounter with Canadian Indians—a Mohawk community south of Montreal and a Mississagua community on Lake Huron. “My brethren were all around me,” he writes, “and it therefore seemed like home” (32). He returns to Connecticut to reconnect with his Pequot relatives and begins a career as a Methodist preacher ministering to blacks, whites and especially to Indians living across New England. Apess’s Indian identity is thus forged at the margins of American culture and politics, on the heels of a long series of negations—of his Pequot family, of his status as an indentured servant, of his role as a U.S. soldier. Apess consistently refuses to fully accede to the categories imposed by the dominant culture, and only in the wake of these nullifications does he craft a more stable self, one that combines a pan-Indian sensibility with a Christian mission.

This combined mission ultimately takes Apess to Mashpee. Indian Nullification of the Unconstitutional Laws of Massachusetts Relative to the Mashpee Tribe; or, The Pretended Riot Explained, to give the text its full title, captures the tensions of Apess’s own life, poised between calculated recognition of lawful authority and outright rejection of it. The book also takes shape in the context of a number of crises in the 1830’s about how to negotiate group and national identity. The options for ethnic minorities in the U.S. at the time were stark. Apess carefully monitored an abolitionist press that was growing increasingly strident, particularly in Massachusetts. David Walker’s call for black resistance in his Appeal (1829) attracted the same charges of “riot” that would face the Mashpees a few years later.
fierce rejection of white authority—“Yea, would I meet death with avidity far! Far!! In preference to such servile submission to the murderous hands of tyrants!” (17)—sparked an hysterical reaction from many whites that presaged the response to Nat Turner’s Rebellion in 1831. Apess was certainly capable of militant rhetoric—his “Indian’s Looking-Glass for Whites” (1833) owes much in tone and imagery to Walker. The fact that he removed the essay when he republished “Experiences of Five Christian Indians” in 1837 suggests that he doubted the utility of such a stridently oppositional tone. The emancipation of slaves in the British West Indies in 1833 may have suggested to Apess the relative effectiveness of legal avenues to secure Indian rights; in Boston, the example of William Lloyd Garrison, who insisted on non-violent protest and advocated disunion with slaveholding states, may have served as a more direct inspiration for the strategy of nullification.3

Native American contexts offered similar lessons. Brotherton, founded a generation earlier by Southern New England Indians who opted to remove to Oneida land in Upstate New York rather than continue to battle white encroachment on their traditional homelands, provided a model of cultural accommodation combined with political separatism. Members farmed, wore European dress and practiced Christianity, but jealously protected their sovereignty; by 1831, members of the community began to remover further west, ultimately settling in Wisconsin. While the Brotherton movement was a powerful lure at the turn of the 19th century, many more New England natives opted to remain and work to preserve their existing communities.4 The more militant separatism of Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa in 1812 and of Black Hawk in 1832 combined cultural revitalization and open warfare, but while Apess certainly followed their fortunes, he makes few references to them in his writing. Such silence is resonant. As a Christian minister and U. S. Army veteran, he would have had a hard time imagining himself in a community like Prophetstown; as someone living in New England a hundred and fifty years after King Phillip’s War, armed resistance, however heroic, had long since ceased to be an option, no matter what the feverish rhetoric of the white press around Mashpee suggested. Instead, Apess focuses on Indian communities that managed to find a measure of accommodation with white society on their own terms—the Mohawk and Missoqui in Canada immediately after the War of 1812 and the Mashpees in 1832.

In seeking models for how to resolve the Mashpee crisis, Apess attended more carefully to the removal crises taking shape in the southeastern U. S. The experiences of the Choctaws, Seminoles, Chickasaws and Creeks highlighted the perils, on the one hand, of the U.
S. government’s promises of peaceful relocation—the Choctaws’ forced migration to Indian Territory, poorly planned and under-provisioned, gave birth to the term “trail of tears.” On the other hand, those Chickasaws and Creeks who agreed to accept the sovereignty of state governments in order to stay in their traditional territory found their allotments overrun by white settlers and their legal rights ignored. More promising were the constitutional appeals of the Cherokees. Apess learned both from their strategic adoption of elements of European American culture and their mastery of the U. S. legal system. Writing between the Cherokee victory in Worcester v. Georgia in 1832 and the Trail of Tears in 1838 in a part of the country that was largely sympathetic to the Cherokees, Apess had every reason to press for a greater degree of Indian sovereignty using the dominant political process. Still, history showed how elusive success in such efforts had proven. Maureen Konkle’s analysis of treaty discourse in the early nineteenth century has shown how the U. S. government used these documents to suppress its nation-to-nation relationship with individual tribes, replacing the concept of tribal sovereignty with notions of unbridgeable racial difference and Indian inferiority. Thus when Apess found the Mashpees living a marginal existence on their own land, their resources appropriated by their white overseers and their tribal leadership ignored, he chose the terms of their protest carefully.

The trick was to say “no” to a colonial power in terms that were strong enough to have an impact but familiar enough to gain traction among supportive whites. Louis Althusser describes ideology as a process of “interpellation,” in which the state repeatedly “hails” its subjects through its many apparatuses (schools, courts, police and, in the case of early 19th century Massachusetts, churches). An individual becomes a subject of the state by acknowledging that the “hail” is addressed to him or her. In Althusserian terms, Apess sought a rhetorical position that recognized the “hail” of the Massachusetts government without being fully subject to it. Thus Apess weaves into his title the phrase “pretended” riot, clearly disavowing such an outright rejection of state authority. By promising to explain the pretended riot, Apess acknowledges the legitimacy of the state’s power and hence claims a voice within it—by recognizing the “hail” of Massachusetts law, he can speak back as an equal subject within civil society. This stance is far removed from the radical separatism of a traditional tribal leader like Black Hawk, who refused to recognize U. S. political and cultural authority (in Althusser’s formulation, they amount to the same thing), and more in line with Cherokee claims to constitutional protection—a claim to which Apess’s title alludes in referencing Massachusetts’ unconstitutional laws. Yet as Apess, his Mashpee comrades
and his wider white audience were keenly aware, claiming subjectivity within the U. S. political framework could make a tribe subject to the whims of its power. Thus Apess chooses “nullification”—a term that finds a middle ground between acceding to and rejecting state authority.

Apess’s title refers to the Nullification Crisis that surfaced in 1828—South Carolina, angered by a tariff it saw as skewed towards Northern interests, threatened to “nullify” federal laws in its own territory. Drawing on the language of Jefferson and Madison, John Calhoun argued that the United States was made up of “concurrent majorities” that retained a measure of sovereignty within the federal government. For Calhoun, the sovereign people upon which political authority rested were the people of individual states, rather than the nation as a whole. In this view, “organic local communities,” in H. Lee Cheek’s phrase, had the right to protect themselves from the tyranny of a national majority—in South Carolina, this took the shape of a slave state protecting itself from Northern interests. Andrew Jackson threatened to respond to what he saw as secession with military force, and a constitutional crisis was barely averted with a compromise tariff in 1832. New England states watched with ambivalence. They had used similar arguments during the War of 1812, and most recoiled from what they saw as Jackson’s domineering threat of force; on the other hand, its leading politicians were staunch nationalists opposed to states’ rights. Yet while reformers had little sympathy with the effort to preserve slavery, Apess found in South Carolina’s argument a useful model for the Mashpee’s position in Massachusetts.  By suggesting that the Mashpee were a sovereign people within a larger political framework, Apess hoped to find a means to preserve their political independence while maintaining their standing within the U. S. political structure. By using the language of nullification, Apess hoped to gain access to the broader public sphere while preserving tribal cohesiveness and autonomy. In the process, Apess poses questions at the heart of U. S. politics and of Indian identity: how are a “people” defined? How do they speak for, and govern, themselves? And how do different peoples negotiate the terms of their relationship?

*Indian Nullification* starts by destabilizing the ideology that constituted European American identity in the early nineteenth century. Apess’s narrative thus opens with his visit to the mission church at Mashpee:

The sacred edifice stood in the midst of a noble forest and seemed to be about a hundred years old, circumstances which did not render its appearance less interesting. Hard by was an Indian burial ground, overgrown with pines, in which the graves were all ranged north and south.
A delightful brook, fed by some of the sweetest springs in Massachusetts, murmured beside it. (170)

The scene is saturated with the ideology of American romanticism: the picturesque landscape rises naturally out of an Indian past, quietly bespeaking the ordained succession of races and a providing a vision of an American people tied to an iconic New England setting. Apess taps into the same cultural vein that brought people in droves to see the play *Metamora, or, Last of the Wampanoags*, in the 1830’s and that fueled the vogue for the New England sketch and the Hudson River School landscape. Yet by viewing this iconic scene through the eyes of an Indian who has clearly not vanished, Apess lends to it an element of strangeness that he quickly amplifies:

After pleasing my eyes with this charming landscape, I turned to meet my Indian brethren and give them the hand of friendship; but I was greatly disappointed in the appearance of those who advanced. All the Indians I had ever seen were of reddish color, sometimes approaching yellow, but now, look to what quarter I would, most of those who were coming were pale faces, and, in my disappointment, it seemed to me that the hue of death sat upon their countenances. It seemed very strange to me that my brethren should have changed their natural color and become in every respect like the white men. (170)

The passage is unsettling, both for the growing sense on Apess’s part of the dark politics that lurk behind this charming landscape and for the inversion of this iconic New England scene—a stream of white settlers on their way to church suddenly seems completely unnatural. These, clearly, are not the people Apess, or we, expect. Apess plays here with several markers of identity. The setting is a touchstone of white New England identity, carrying with it the work of cultural nostalgia that was meant to elide the traumas of colonization upon which that identity rested. Apess’s rewriting of the scene re-opens those historical wounds, making every white church-goer bear the trace of New England’s violent past.

At the same time, Apess establishes an Indian title to a New England identity. The context places the iconic meetinghouse at Mashpee firmly within Indian territory—like the Cherokee who adopted many of the norms of their white neighbors, the Mashpees stake their claim to the New England village ideal, rooted in both Christian faith and a local landscape. Yet Apess is careful to indicate that identity doesn’t depend on one’s clothing or place of worship. In his description, the Mashpees’ Indian difference is signified by their skin color. Blood matters, and Apess makes it clear that while Indians may adopt aspects of European American
culture, they will not become “in every respect like white men,” for to do so, he implies, would be their death. They will remain a separate people. The white worshippers in this church are not the people of Mashpee, and Apess asks a question completely elided in works predicated on the vanishing of the land’s original inhabitants: where are the Indians?

Forced to answer, the state-appointed minister, Phineas Fish, replies “that they are at a place called Marshpee, and that there was a person called Blind Joe who tried to preach to them” (171). It’s an odd moment—the Mashpee where Fish presides over his church is suddenly no longer the Maspee of the Indians, and in this dissonance Apess hammers in the wedge of Mashpee sovereignty. His terms, crucially, shift from the discourse of race to the discourse of ideology. The next day, Apess “paid the people of that place a visit,” preaches on temperance and reads from his pamphlet on the history of Indians in New England. A Mashpee shouts “Truth, truth!” (172), and with this moment of Althusserian recognition, Apess is welcomed into the community. The terms of his recognition are significant—they are based more on shared history and political affinity than on biology.

Apess meets in council with the Mashpees, who offer a long tale of distress; Apess responds by suggesting they take their grievances to the Massachusetts governor and legislature, offering his assistance if the tribe will adopt him. He argues:

As I was not a son of their particular tribe, if they wished me to assist them, it would be necessary for them to give me a right to act in their behalf by adopting me, as then our rights and interests would become identical. They must be aware that all the evil reports calumny could invent would be put in circulation against me by the whites interested, and that no means to set them against me would be neglected. (173).

Apess has already established a shared Indian perspective that overrides their membership in any “particular tribe;” he proposes his formal adoption in part to forestall white attacks on his status and in part to guarantee the full support of the Mashpees. The Mashpees agree, and a flurry of documents follow that establish the tribe’s sovereignty, appeal its grievances to the legislature and make its case to its white neighbors.

Apess here finds a language of protest that establishes a middle ground between Indian and white norms, between “legal” obedience to the state and its “riotous” opposite. Theresa Gual notes that Apess manages to translate the traditional protocols of native government—open councils that feature oral debate and build towards consensus—into the written discourse of white politics. Taiaiake Alfred argues that such indigenous
political culture is crucial to the process of decolonization, and notes further that indigenous models of consensus, of “collective self-determination,” preclude European notions of sovereignty. Native governance doesn’t assert its sovereignty over its members, but allows for individual dissent. As Apess joined the Mashpee community and began mapping out a strategy for resisting state authority, then, he had before him both Indian and white models of resistance. Indian Nullification thus enacts a powerful cross-cultural strategy, drawing upon both Indian and European political discourse in order to gain access to a dominant power without surrendering cultural autonomy.

This strategy becomes manifest in the critical episode of the Mashpee Revolt: having prohibited whites from taking wood off Mashpee land without permission, Apess and a group of Mashpee confront a pair of whites doing just that. After exchanging words, the Mashpee peacefully unload the wood from the cart and insist that the whites leave. The language Apess uses to describe the episode is crucial. He is careful, first, to frame his actions in the language of white politics. The whites came “in defiance of our resolutions,” having ignored the tribe’s written notifications, and Apess is at pains to indicate that he followed the genteel conventions of the public sphere. He “begged them to desist, for the sake of peace;” he cautions his brethren “to do no bodily injury to any man, unless in his own defense, but to stand up for their rights,” and contrasts the Indians’ mild words to the “bitter language” used by the whites. That passage also suggests that the Mashpee have fully incorporated European norms of ownership: “the men who owned the wood were resolved to carry their resolutions into force,” Apess proclaims, and he notes that the episode ends with the Mashpee having successfully defended their rights (181).

Yet Apess also weaves unsettling notes of difference into the passage. If, on the one hand, the Mashpee are “the men who owned the wood” according to the universalizing discourse of property rights, Apess also repeatedly refers to his own people as “the Indians,” a term he typically employs with irony, and one that, somewhat jarringly, seems not include Apess himself—“I told him that the owners of the wood were at hand, and by the time one of the teams was laden, the Indians came up” (181). Apess’s problematic deployment of the term opens a space between the neat binary of Indian and white upon which mainstream ideology depended. The Mashpee are, at once, men of property asserting their rights as Americans and Indians asserting their sovereignty as a separate people. Similarly, Apess undermines the very legal discourse he deploys: one of the offending whites is a justice of the peace, and Apess notes with some
sympathy his frustration at being denied “what had always been as lawful
spoil to them hitherto” (181). By dwelling on the figure of the white man
who leaves the scene to “get the aid of legal might to overcome right,”
Apess opens a space between the legal framework of individual rights
within the state and the claims of competing sovereign communities. At
the end of the day, he writes, “the tribe were left in peaceable possession
of their property” (182). The Mashpee act of civil disobedience at the heart
of the “revolt” is, thus, a double-voiced protest, an act of Indian
sovereignty that signifies within the framework of Massachusetts law even
as it subverts it.

Yet while the struggle over a cartload of wood is the center of Apess’s
narrative of the Mashpee revolt, it occupies only a small portion of the text
itself. His own voice quickly gives way to a pastiche of testimonials,
resolutions, newspaper articles and legislation. While any number of
readers have found it slow going, this scrapbook rhetoric is a key part of
Apess’s strategy. He constructs in his narrative a multi-voiced discourse
that begins with Apess and his Mashpee brethren but extends outwards to
include a wide array of his white neighbors. The shift from personal
narrative to pastiche immediately follows the woodlot episode, and it can
be read as Apess’s rhetorical response to the charge of riot leveled against
him. By bringing in the voices of sympathetic white neighbors and
newspaper editors to echo the proclamations of the Mashpee council,
Apess’s own stridently oppositional voice is contextualized and refracted
among a community of voices. In Althusserian terms, Apess deflects the
force of the “hail” by shunting it onto supporting whites; in terms of native
governance, Apess responds to effort to single him out as the source of
such riotous action by gesturing to the communal nature of his actions.
And as in the woodlot scene, the strategy signifies in two fields at one.
Apess represents himself as a spokesman for the Mashpees, one voice
among his adopted people; he also represents himself as an aggrieved
member of the people of Massachusetts, claiming rights due to any of its
citizens, standing by his conscience and happy to welcome the support of
his neighbors.

Such a strategy accounts for the oblique means by which Apess reveals
that he was sentenced to thirty days in jail for his role in the revolt. He
does not give the vivid, brutally ironic account of the trial of which he was
certainly capable; nor does he deny the authority of the court. Instead,
Apess reproduces a highly critical reaction to the trial from the Boston
Advocate. “We are mortified for the honor of the state,” the article begins,
“to learn that the Barnstable court have tried and convicted William Apes
and six Indians of the Marshpee tribe upon charges connected with the
efforts of the Indians to obtain justice from their white masters. . . . The Marshpee Indians are wronged and oppressed by our laws, nearly as much as ever the Cherokees were by the Georgians” (200-1). In refuting the charge of riot, Apess strengthens his own voice by interweaving with it the voice of his fellow citizens. Furthermore, by letting sympathetic whites raise the comparison to the Cherokees, he is able to assert his Indian distinctiveness while remaining within the Massachusetts polity. Such a strategy helps ensure that an authentic Mashpee voice reaches a broad white audience; it also, however, undercuts—nullifies—white sovereignty. When he does directly respond to his imprisonment, he asserts that “in my mind, it was no punishment at all; and I am yet to learn what punishment can dismay a man conscious of his own innocence. Lightning, tempest and battle, wreck, pain, buffeting, and torture have small terror to a pure conscience” (203). The passage draws on the long-established rhetoric of rebellion central to American ideology; it also anticipates Thoreau’s statement of civil disobedience by more than a decade. Yet Apess doesn’t merely position himself as one in a long line of martyrs to liberty. The context of his imprisonment is critical. Apess’s innocence depends, in part, upon his readers’ ability to recognize him as an American patriot fighting for the rights upon which the country was founded and, in part, upon his reader’s ability to recognize him as a member of the Mashpee Wampanoag tribe fighting for its sovereignty. His dissidence is at once that of an individual and an Indian. He is, to borrow from both Thoreau and Calhoun, a concurrent majority of one. Alone in his prison, Apess preserves his innocence by locating it within an American discourse of natural rights; he preserves his sovereignty by locating it within the people of Mashpee.

Apess’s strategy also summons a more deeply rooted discursive tradition, for in his account of his own exploits, his eagerness to have others tell of his deeds and defend his reputation, and his determination to gather all the different voices in the Mashpee discussion, Indian Nullification reproduces in its pages the elements of the native councils that had long structured Southern Algonquian politics. Indeed, by integrating his own narrative voice into those of his fellow Mashpee and their white neighbors, Apess secures his individual voice, and by extending that network to the Massachusetts public sphere, he gains for that individual and communal voice a far broader power and reach.

It was a voice that proved remarkably effective. A delegation that included Apess traveled to Boston, where they petitioned the state legislature, gave several well-received public addresses, and attracted
considerable attention. In the end, the legislature abolished the tribe’s overseers and incorporated Mashpee as a town, with the ability to govern itself, though without the ability to send a representative to the legislature. The Mashpee modeled their government on the New England town, choosing three selectmen and appointing various officers, but with a critical difference: land was held in common. While the Mashpee vigorously pursued economic development throughout the century, selling lumber, welcoming tourists, fishermen and hunters, manufacturing traditional crafts and farming cranberries, these efforts were communal in nature, and the tribe resisted any effort to allot land to individuals or to impose citizenship (Mandell 105-142). In the decades that followed the Mashpee Revolt, the tribe flourished. Termination and the long struggle for federal recognition would come later—a struggle that was shaped by the definition of sovereignty forged in *Indian Nullification*.

The means by which the Mashpees won this one crucial battle resonate powerfully with some critical issues in Native studies. First, while the Mashpee Revolt was primarily a political struggle, *Indian Nullification* records a broader strategy of cultural revitalization, redressing in combination problems in its economic life (focused on its control of its woodlands), its spiritual life (crystallizing around two popular Indian preachers) and its social life (highlighting Apess’s temperance work). Apess is no Tenskwatawa preaching a return to pre-contact Indian life, but he does shift European aspects of Mashpee life back to the control of the Mashpees themselves. Apess’s work at Mashpee fits within Simon Ortiz’s conception of cultural sovereignty—a perspective that stresses no single marker of Indian identity, whether blood, land, religion, language, or work, but instead focuses an “indigenous cultural consciousness” that can easily accommodate and adapt elements from different cultures. From this perspective, it doesn’t matter that Apess writes in English, that the Mashpees wear European-style clothes or build hotels for tourists—what matters is the integrity of their communal identity.

Second, Apess helps secure Mashpee sovereignty largely due to his success in working across cultural lines. *Indian Nullification* works because it is a hybrid text, firmly rooted in Mashpee culture and fully engaged with Jacksonian America. In bringing together different voices, white and Indian, in the pages of his text, Apess constructs a discursive community that incorporates both the Mashpee and their neighbors, framing his appeals using shared language and allowing his white readers to occupy, however tentatively, an Indian perspective. In this, *Indian Nullification* is an exemplary text of the contact zone, the space in which people from different cultures, locked into the upheavals and exploitations
of colonial conflict, can negotiate the terms of their difference. This hybridity is not a substitute for Apess’s Indian identity; instead, it guarantees it.

Finally, *Indian Nullification* offers a powerful model for framing that difference. Apess was, as Robert Warrior suggests, an “experiential” theorist, whose thinking about community, identity and sovereignty was formed in the long, hard school of activism. Nullification, for Apess, emerged from the Mashpee Revolt as a critical term for theorizing the relationship between Indian and white. It offered a way of framing how one could be both Indian and American without having to give up either community; it offered a model for how to manage multiple layers of sovereignty while still locating one’s primary allegiance in one’s tribe—or, in Apess’s case, multiple tribes. Most importantly, nullification offered a means to preserve one’s difference by strategically withdrawing consent not just from governmental authority, but from all the apparatus of colonial control. The Mashpee, in this account, nullify white efforts to control their property, their religion, their use of alcohol. Above all, they nullify white efforts to define who they are. Apess reserves his harshest vitriol for those who claim he isn’t part of the Mashpee tribe. He doesn’t defend his identity by any method recognizable to whites of the time—he doesn’t describe his skin color, demonstrate his command of traditional culture or claim ties of blood or marriage. He simply points to his adoption. He is Mashpee because the Mashpee say he is, and that cross-tribal adoption establishes his Indian identity. Through these nullifications, this dialogic, dynamic series of “no’s, Apess opens up a space for a pan-Indian identity and establishes a method of resisting white authority that helped the Mashpees preserve their status as a separate people.

While the Mashpees thrived in the wake of the revolt, Apess didn’t. For reasons that remain unclear, Apess lost his standing among his adopted tribe and, after delivering his “Eulogy on King Philip” in Boston, he left for New York. The “Eulogy on King Philip” and his departure from Mashpee show the limits of this open discourse and communal identity; indeed, his account of King Philip can be read as an effort to find a mythic, ancestral ground for Apess’s individual identity as his communal one collapses. These last two works enact, to some degree, the larger American movement from a communal model of authorship grounded in the public sphere to romantic norms of authorship rooted in radical individualism. Apess, in this reading, enacts the breakdown of the public sphere and falls victim to the factionalism and dissensus of Jacksonian America. “The Eulogy on King Philip” marks Apess’s turn from the cross-
cultural communalism of *Indian Nullification*, but his final effort to forge a more forceful “no” to America’s genocidal ideology ultimately doesn’t succeed. Apess’s turn to a more individual, oppositional rhetoric may have been either a symptom of his fall from the community of Mashpee or part of its cause; either way, what’s so attractive about the “Eulogy on King Philip” to readers who want to see a rebel, an Indian counterpart to David Walker, proves untenable. Apess succumbs to abjection after saying “no” with such force—whatever the aesthetic merits of Apess’s final work, it proved, politically, a dead end.

Yet Apess’s untimely death doesn’t diminish his remarkable achievement, both in leaving behind such a rich and compelling body of writing and in his almost unique success, for a nineteenth century native writer, in using his extraordinary literary gifts to achieve concrete and lasting political ends. Apess’s discursive strategy in *Indian Nullification*, at once tribal, pan-Indian and cross-cultural, helped to preserve one native community in an American legal and cultural system that relentlessly enforced the vanishing of so many others.

**Notes**

1. With William Apess, questions of orthography lead quickly to questions of identity. “Marshpee” was the accepted spelling of “Mashpee” into the twentieth century. The name itself refers to both a tribe within the broader Wampanoag culture group and a town on Cape Cod. By using the older spelling, Mills underscores his tribe’s historic claims to a town that has undergone rapid development. The spelling “Apes” is more controversial. Barry O’Connell prefers “Apess,” following Apess’s own very deliberate spelling of the name in the final works he published in 1837, where he changed his earlier spelling. Robert Warrior, in a panel presentation at the 2002 MLA convention, argued that whatever the spelling, the name is pronounced as one syllable among the Pequot who share the surname today. Jessie Little Doe, the Mashpee Wampanoag linguist, notes that the name is pronounced with two syllables (AH-pesh) in Wampanoag. It is likely that Apess changed the spelling to better represent the name’s Wampanoag pronunciation, and hence to signify his identity as member of the Mashpee tribe.

2. This rather tangled path to a Pequot identity is hardly unique in the era. Daniel Mandell notes that such shifting identities became increasingly common in the 19th century, particularly in tribes without a substantial land base and among families with exogamous marriages. This was particularly true for people with mixed Indian and African ancestry.

3. The increasing radicalism of the abolitionist movement in the 1830s is well documented, beginning with Benjamin Quarles’s classic *Black Abolitionists*. One reason for the movement’s shift from its more genteel, gradualist mode is the growing prominence of African-Americans within its ranks. John Stauffer, in *The Black Hearts of Men*, offers a compelling account of how the cross-cultural
dynamics of abolitionism helped to complicate evolving notions of race and identity.

4. Mandell describes how the desire of many Brotherton Indians to sell lands on their home reservations helped catalyze efforts by Mohegans, Pequots and Narragansetts who remained to guarantee their land base.

5. Two thorough recent accounts of the Nullification Crisis include Lacy Ford’s article “Inventing the Concurrent Majority” and H. Lee Cheek’s *John Calhoun and Popular Rule*. In a review of Cheek’s book, James Read notes that Calhoun’s organic communities denied rights to many of their members and wonders how the concept might have played out in non-slave-holding context. Apess’s work in Mashpee offers one interesting case, particularly in defining the limits of an Indian community. During the Mashpee Revolt, Apess clearly identified himself as Mashpee; at other points in his career, he adopted a broader pan-Indian perspective. In his view, at least, the definition of community was highly contingent.

6. There is a vigorous scholarship around the origins and social function of regionalism. Most critics, including Stephanie Foote, emphasize the genre’s role in solidifying a national identity in an era of intense, dislocating modernization. Other critics, such as Elizabeth Ammons and Valerie Rohy, stress the oppositional force of regional literature and the access to mainstream culture it afforded to writers from marginalized groups (particularly women). Increasingly, critics like Amy Kaplan and Hsuan L. Hsu have insisted that regional writing be understood not as a “fly-in-amber” discourse meant to celebrate isolated communities from a safe, aesthetic distance but as an integral part of ongoing national and trans-national dynamics.

**Works Cited**


CHAPTER TWO

COMPROMISED CURRENCIES:
WHY SAMSON OCCOM IS NOT PICTURED
ON THE ONE HUNDRED DOLLAR BILL

DREW LOPENZINA

About this Time there was a Cry among the People for more
Paper-Money.
—Ben Franklin

Dollar bills cause the memory to vanish.
—Louise Erdrich

In 1817 a run of one dollar bills was issued in upstate New York
picturing an Indian brave paddling his canoe through an idyllic riverine
setting. By 1817 this part of the country, identified on some old maps as
“Iroquoia,” had gone from “the waste of creation” (9) William Cooper had
described in his early promotional tracts of the American frontier to the
quickest developing region in the largest state of a new and energetic
nation. If the land appeared unoccupied to James Fenimore Cooper’s
father in 1785, by 1817 white settlements flourished. There were
established towns with churches, factories, academies for higher learning,
public libraries, and newspapers (James Cooper, A Guide iii). The 1794
Treaty of Canandaigua between the United States and the Six Nations had
guaranteed American merchants free access to harbors and rivers on
Indian land “for the passing and securing of vessels and boats” (Densmore
133). And on July 4th of 1817 the digging of the Erie Canal had begun in
Rome, NY, thereby permanently altering the waterways and ancient trade
routes of the region which had once been under the sole provenance of the
powerful Haudenosaunee nations. Nevertheless, the one dollar notes
suggest to the viewer a pre-Columbian past (assuming one ignores the
incongruous cape and headgear worn by the brave which appear to belong
more to ancient Rome than any sort of indigenous American garb). It is a
fantasy of pastoral quiescence and one might almost assume that all these rapid changes upon the land had provoked in the settler nation a kind of nostalgia for earlier and presumably simpler times. But such an assumption would be inaccurate. The initial bucolic impression formed by the scene on the dollar bill is subtly ruptured by the idiosyncratic presence of a stone bridge spanning the waters behind the brave, and its implication of divergent cultural trajectories. The solitary Native, who commands the forefront of the image, is hastily propelling himself out of the picture, while the bridge, though in the background, anchors itself in a horizontal line over the scene, its form suggestive of solidity and permanence. The representation lends currency to the notion that the old trade routes of the Indian are giving way to the modern commercial road and waterways of the colonist. While the Indian is on his way out, the bridge (the true focus of the illustration) with its stone framework and state of the art arch construction, is here to stay (see figure 1).

The bill was authorized by the Susquehanna Bridge and Bank Company of Unadilla, New York, and it recycles a motif, hardly uncommon in nineteenth-century representation, of the American Indian as a figure locked in the past, psychologically and technologically unprepared to confront the sudden onrush of European modes of progress. It was a motif busily employed in the literary productions of the day as well, permanently imprinted upon the American psyche by works such as James Fenimore Cooper’s Leatherstocking Tales, Catherine Maria Sedgwick’s *Hope Leslie*, John Augustus Stone’s popular play *Metamora*, *The Last of the Wampanoag*, and countless other variations on the same theme. Cooper’s Indians, in particular, always seemed cognizant that their time on the soil had run its course. They are left to mouth dire pronouncements such as in *The Last of the Mohicans* when Natty Bumppo’s faithful companion, Chingachgook laments that he is the “last of his color . . . a blazed pine, in a clearing of the pale faces” (373). Just like the nameless Indian fleeing from the bridge in the bank note, Cooper’s Indians are not forced from their lands by warfare, violent removals, or the pressures of colonization, but rather by their own passive recognition that the times have passed them by and they have already been marked for harvesting in order to make way for white settlement.

Lest we blame Cooper for such a motif, however, we should note that the one dollar bill issued by the Susquehanna Bridge Company predates Cooper’s first frontier novel, *The Pioneers*, by some four years. It is possible to imagine, in fact, that Cooper, himself, had used the pictured banknote for tender. Unadilla was, and remains, a close neighbor of Cooperstown in the Ostego region of New York, reinforcing for us in a