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APOCALYPSE OUT OF TIME: WILLIAM APRESS'S POLITICAL THEOLOGY

A Thesis Presented

by

Jeffrey G. Adams

to

The Faculty of the Graduate College

of

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Abstract

In this thesis, I examine the work of William Apess, a Methodist minister who was perhaps the most noteworthy Native American public intellectual of the nineteenth century. Specifically, I look at Apess's only surviving sermon, *The Increase of the Kingdom of Christ*, and his sermon's appendix, "The Indians: The Ten Lost Tribes." By arguing that Apess's devout Methodism closely aligns with his anti-colonial convictions, I demonstrate that his political positions cannot be understood outside of his religious beliefs. I believe it is Methodism's heretical status during the early republic that allows Apess to articulate his anti-colonial position. Scholarship on this period often treats political theory as a secular concern. However, Apess's writing demonstrates the influence religious beliefs can have on political ideas in the nineteenth-century United States, and Apess's work is an example of how theology can have liberatory political potential. By drawing on research that addresses seemingly diverse topics such as sentiment, indigenous temporalities, and the Apocalypse, this thesis works through Apess's attempt to articulate the incomprehensible impact of American colonialism.

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Introduction: William Apess's Methodism and Effaced Encounters

In the original 1829 publication of *A Son of the Forest*, Methodist minister and Native American public intellectual William Apess laments that: “It is a great trial for me to be a *mouth for God*—to stand up before my fellow men, and warn them to flee the wrath to come. I do it to please God and not man, from a settled conviction that it is my duty, and that I cannot remain in the enjoyment of religion if I neglect it” (Emphasis in original, 144)¹. In the subsequent 1831 publication of *A Son of the Forest*, Apess does not articulate his compulsion to warn people about “the wrath to come,” and much of Apess’s critique of Methodism—a criticism that is an active presence in the 1829 edition of his autobiography—is absent from the text’s 1831 edition. A distinct feature of Apess’s critique of Methodism in *A Son of the Forest* is that it is directed at the faith’s structural problems. Addressing the racism of the individual Methodists with whom Apess interacts with allows Apess to attack specific instances of mistreatment by drawing on personal experience. The Methodists in the 1829 publication of *A Son of the Forest* are racist towards Apess, and he believes that their racism is wrong which is why he includes their exclusionary behavior in his autobiography. By citing his exclusion from Methodism, Apess demonstrates how Methodists during his lifetime do not work to include himself and other people of color into their social sphere. However, Apess’s focus on his personal exclusion does not bring in theology to rally against Methodism’s racist practices, a lack that I argue lessens the power of his criticism in the original version of *A Son of the Forest*. It is not until later in Apess’s career that he uses Christian theology to push past

¹ In the “Introduction” to this thesis I will be using the separate 1829 and 1831 editions of William Apess’s *A Son of the Forest* as they appear in their original forms. For the rest of my thesis, I will be using Barry O’Connell’s edited collection of William Apess’s works titled *On Our Own Ground*. For my introduction, the varying 1829 and 1831 editions of *A Son of the Forest*’s separate treatment of Methodism is crucial for my argument.

his personal experiences with racism to craft a doctrinal assault on racist and colonial practices in the United States. The majority of this thesis will be looking at Apess's deployment of theology to articulate political stances which transcend the limits of personal narrative.

The 1829 and 1831 editions of *A Son of the Forest* are vastly different documents because of their respective treatments of Apess's initial inability to become a Methodist minister. Despite the changes not comprising much of narrative, the fact that Apess chose to change anything at all in *A Son of the Forest*'s second pressing demonstrates a drastic shift in Apess's values. Apess vaguely addresses these differences in the respective editions in the "Preface" to the 1831 version when he claims that "parts which some persons deemed objectionable have been stricken out" (1). With more specificity than Apess, Barry O'Connell explains that these "objectionable parts appear to be entirely his account of his being rejected as a candidate for ordination in the Methodist Episcopal church and his decision to join the Protestant Methodists, who did ordain him" (3). Apess's effacement of his critique of Episcopal Methodists makes sense because of his social and political goals, but what does not make sense is the removal of Apess's articulation of his desire to warn people of the coming "wrath" and his perception of himself as a "*mouth for God.*" It is Apess's assertion that the wrath is coming which provides a brief glimpse into his Methodist theology, a glimpse which is not often given in *A Son of the Forest*. However, this window into his faith is ultimately stricken from the text.

In this thesis, I will be examining William Apess's sermon *The Increase of the Kingdom of Christ* and its companion piece "The Indians: The Ten Lost Tribes" to

understand their liberatory political potential and their anti-colonial sentiments. I will do this by considering Apess's use of Methodist theology as a tool to modify Christian history to achieve his political goals. Before unpacking Apess's political theology, I believe Apess's personal relationship to Methodism should first be explored. In *A Son of the Forest*, Apess discusses his religious convictions regularly, but what Apess less regularly discusses is what drew him to Methodism over other sects of Christianity. Specifically, Apess never explains why Methodism's theological framework gives him the tools he needs to articulate his political ideals. In fact, the visibility of Methodism's importance for Apess's anti-colonial arguments do not emerge until later in his career. However, Apess does provide information about Methodism's social appeal in his autobiography. Specifically, Apess gives a good deal of attention to the religious feelings that drew him to his faith.

Despite the 1829 and 1831 editions of *A Son of the Forest* having drastically different treatments of Methodism near their respective conclusions, each edition represents Apess's discovery of Methodism identically. While living with Mr. Williams, Apess reflects that the local Methodists began to hold their meetings in "the neighbourhood" which led to "every evil report prejudicial to this pious people [being] freely circulated" (37). The circulation of these malicious attacks on Methodists allowed Apess to see a commonality between himself and the local Methodists. Apess sees this similarity because of his perception of the Methodists' pariah status, a status he believes to be equivalent to his own. What both editions of *A Son of the Forest* show in their respective representations of Apess's discovery of Methodism is that Apess believes he

finds a community—a community that he does not have with the white people he lives among—with his fellow Methodists.

Both editions of Apess's autobiography stress the belonging Apess felt upon his discovery of Methodism, but only the 1829 edition of *A Son of the Forest* represents the complexities of Apess's social involvement in Methodism. Apess's relationship with Methodism is not nearly as idyllic as the 1831 edition of his autobiography leads its readers to believe. The issues with Apess's ability to fully engage with Methodism emerge as a result of him being a Native American. Apess is accepted into the Methodist community initially despite his indigeneity, but this acceptance ultimately leads to rejection once Apess wants to become a Methodist preacher and gain authority in the church. In his explanation of Apess's initial barring from becoming a minister, Harry Brown posits that "Apess hints that racism motivated the elders' decision to deny him license. As an itinerant, he realizes painfully that some of his brethren see him not as an authority but as a curiosity—an Indian aping preacher" (189). Brown argues that the Methodist church's acceptance of Apess is only a partial one. Ultimately, as Brown explains, the Methodists view Apess as more of a curiosity than a religious authority which is why when Apess eventually acquires authority he uses it to petition for indigenous rights. For the religious messages of his writings to be clear, Apess does not have to address his indigeneity. However, texts such as *The Increase of the Kingdom of Christ* and "The Indians" choose to simultaneously expound religious truths while reminding their audiences that Apess is a Native American. During a sermon such as *Increase*, the audience would not have to be reminded that the preacher speaking before them is a Native American. However, beyond representing his own indigenous identity,

Apess weaves Native American dispossession throughout his writings to demonstrate the struggles himself and other indigenous people face in the United States. It is not just that Apess is a Native American and has been marginalized because of his race. Rather, it is the mass genocide and systematic exclusion of Native Americans broadly that Apess seeks to address by using his own indigeneity as steppingstone into a larger conversation.

Later in this thesis, I will unpack U.S. Methodism's historically fraught relationship to race, but, for now, I am bringing up Apess's societal rejection due to his indigeneity to explain what initially drew Apess to Methodism. For Apess, Methodism's initial draw was a social and emotional one. Laura Donaldson's exploration of Apess's relationship with Methodism is helpful for understanding Methodism's initial appeal to Apess. Referencing Native American Methodists, Donaldson explains that "[f]or many American Indian celebrants...shouting exerted a particular attraction because it functioned as a variation on the verbal performances of their own cultures" (35). By connecting indigenous and Methodist cultural practices, Donaldson explains how the orality of both cultures may have been appealing to Apess who strongly identifies with his Pequot heritage. Throughout much of Apess's early life, he is kept away from indigenous cultural practices by his white caregivers, but with Methodism, Apess finds white people whose religious practices are comparable to indigenous oral culture. Despite the similarities between Methodist and indigenous "verbal performances," I argue that the social component of Methodism cannot be the only appealing component of the faith for Apess. Ultimately, Apess's perception of the outsider status of Methodists being akin to his outsider status is a false one that ignores the complexities of racial politics during the early U.S. republic. Apess's initial misreading of the Methodists' social status being

identical to his social position is represented as a false judgment at the end of the 1829 edition of *A Son of the Forest*, when Apess addresses the racism of the Methodists he knows. However, at the end of the 1831 edition of *A Son of the Forest*, Apess allows his readers to continue to believe that Methodism fully accepts racially marginalized people.

Despite the different treatments of Methodism in the different editions of *A Son of the Forest*, what is identical is Apess's interest in the aural and—as a result—the emotional components of Methodism. In both editions of *A Son of the Forest*, Apess mentions the “*noisy Methodists*,” and, by doing so, Apess turns an epithet used to debase Methodists into a term of endearment that highlights their boisterous behavior (Italicized in original, 38). The aural practices of Methodists are a factor that draws Apess to his religion. Apess's fascination with the presentation of Methodists' messages is important to consider because of Apess's eventual status as a preacher. In a more detailed explanation of his first encounter with Methodism—which is identical in each edition of *A Son of the Forest*—Apess explains:

Their countenance was heavenly, their songs were like sweetest music—in their manners they were plain. Their language was not fashioned after the wisdom of men. When the minister preached he spoke as one having authority. The exercises were accompanied by the power of God. His people shouted for joy—while sinners wept. (38)

In this passage, Apess gives a great deal of attention to the sounds of his first encounter with Methodism. Furthermore, Apess's enjoyment of Methodism's orality comes directly after Apess's misrecognition of his social rejection being akin to the Methodists. When Apess discusses “language” in this passage he is referring to the spoken words of the

Methodists, not their writings. Apess's claim that the spoken language of these Methodists were not "fashioned after the wisdom of men" demonstrates his perception of the transcendental powers of holy speech. It is through Apess's engagement with sound that he can begin his intellectual and emotional engagement with Methodism, an engagement that informs his political ideals while giving him the tools to express his anti-colonial convictions.

Apess's initial interest in aural texts and noise's religious qualities are why I have chosen to address Apess's sermon *The Increase of the Kingdom of Christ* and its companion piece "The Indians" in this thesis. What initially drew Apess to Methodism were the sounds of the faith, and I believe that Apess's interest in the sounds of Methodism points to the significance of *Increase* and "The Indians" in relation to his other works. *A Son of the Forest*'s status as the first autobiography by a Native American written in English has allowed it to—understandably—receive a wealth of critical attention in the years following the publication of O'Connell's *On Our Own Ground*. However, the critical focus on *A Son of the Forest* has ignored Apess's suggestions about the significance of his orations. Specifically, Apess's posturing towards the transcendent capabilities of aural texts—and their ability to evoke emotions directly—remains underexplored. For Apess, what initially drew him to Methodism was the sounds of its practice, and in *Increase* Apess is attempting to construct the same types of orations which led him to his faith. In *A Son of the Forest* it is clear why Apess was drawn to Methodism, but what the text leaves ambiguous is what made Apess stay a Methodist and eventually become a minister. I want to gesture back to "the wrath to come" that Apess feels that he needs to warn people about, a wrath which is ambiguous as it is ominous.

My thesis will be focusing on similarly vague moments in Apess's works. These instances are where the theological and the political break down and, perhaps, become indistinguishable from each other.

Methodism, Colonialism, and Indigenous Temporalities

Scholarship on William Apess often considers his political ideals, his devout Methodism, and often Apess scholars consider his Methodism and political ideals in conversation². Although much scholarship addresses Apess's status as a public intellectual and preacher, barely any critical attention has been paid to his only published sermon—*The Increase of the Kingdom of Christ*—or its companion piece—“The Indians: The Ten Lost Tribes.” Instead of addressing Apess's most directly theological writing, most criticism on Apess focuses its attention on *A Son of the Forest*. Apess's autobiography is a text with Methodist conversion narrative genre characteristics that allow for scholarly considerations of religion even though the text presents an often ambiguous theological message. Despite *A Son of the Forest*'s unclear theology, it is still a deeply religious text and Apess's religious enthusiasm is legible throughout. In his essay on *A Son of a Forest*, Mark Miller—like I have done in this thesis's “Introduction”—points to the 1829 edition of the text's epigraph where Apess refers to himself as a “mouth for God” to demonstrate Apess's belief in the importance of his spoken words. Correctly, Miller argues that Apess's positioning of himself as a person who God speaks through “announces the triumph of divine word over corrupt flesh,” an announcement that demonstrates the importance of Apess's sermons and other oral performances in his broader intellectual project (227). However, while pointing out Apess's belief in the

² The work of scholars who have written on Apess such as Barry O'Connell, Shelby Johnson, Mark Rifkin, Elizabeth Fenton, Philip Gura, Mark Miller, Peter Bayers, Drew Lopenzina, Laura Donaldson, Harry Brown, Rochelle Zuck, and Jarrett Anthony have guided my thinking on Apess and his work in ways that I cannot fully fathom. Despite not directly quoting from all of these authors in this thesis, their ideas and writing have given me a wealth of insights into Apess that were essential for this project's completion.

importance of speech, Miller focuses his work on Apess's autobiography, a text whose design is non-aural.

By stressing the importance of oratory in a textual document, Apess creates a contrast between his text's message and the medium that carries that message. I believe that Apess is preemptively stressing the importance of his future orations in *A Son of the Forest*, and, perhaps, while constructing his autobiography Apess already sees his project's theological and political limits. One striking instance of Apess's realization of autobiographies' limits comes at the end of *A Son of the Forest* when Apess quotes from Isaac Watts's hymn "God, My Only Happiness." By quoting a hymn, Apess aids his narrative voice while offering a more conventionally theological message, a message that lends his autobiography validity beyond Apess's experiences as a Methodist. Watts's hymn assists Apess in demonstrating authority by pulling from an existing religious dialogue. Theology universalizes the personal for Apess, and this universalization allows for Apess's oppression as a Native American—and indigenous dispossession broadly—to be communicated to non-indigenous people. Creating an autobiography is the construction of a body made of text, and—if we follow Miller's argument—Apess's larger philosophical project transcends corporeal limits, limits the genre of autobiography imposes.

A Son of the Forest accounts for the theological, but it does so by accounting for Apess's experiences with Methodism and his own religious beliefs. Apess's experiences—like all human experiences—have limits in their ability to reveal religious truths. By writing in a more didactic style later in his career, Apess is capable of expounding religious truths that elude representation in his earlier writings. I posit that

because of the universalizing logic of Methodist theology Apess's "The Indians" and *The Increase of the Kingdom of Christ* is where his anti-colonial convictions are the most visible. Apess's anti-colonial beliefs are present in his earlier writings, but their presentation lacks the force that his engagements with Christian history contain. Before addressing *Increase* and "The Indians" directly, I will zoom out in the following section of this thesis to understand the historical and religious contexts of these pieces which I hope will illuminate their significance. Specifically, I will now turn to Methodism's historical and theological specifics to set up this thesis's argument.

Methodism was a crucial vehicle for Apess's political goals because of the sermon's flexibility as a genre, which is aided by Methodists' belief in doctrinal revision, and Methodism's investment in oral culture, which is most clearly seen in the Methodist camp meeting. As Laura Donaldson explains, Methodism was essential for Apess's ability to discuss his anti-colonial ideals, and she posits that Methodism's insistence on the importance of oral culture allows Apess to "launch a trenchant analysis of Christianity's imperialist complicities" (33). However, Donaldson—like Miller—turns most of her critical attention towards Apess's non-oral and less directly theological texts such as *A Son of the Forest*. Even when Donaldson points to "Apess's anticolonialist and antiracist interpretations of the Bible," she does so in reference to his autobiography without considering works such as *The Increase of the Kingdom of Christ* where Apess's Biblical hermeneutics are the most visible. Crafting documents for aural consumption instead of visual engagement poses complications for literary critics because of the inaccessibility of the text in its original medium. These issues of engagement especially heighten if the text's original aural status was essential for its inclusive project like the

sermons Apess delivered throughout his lifetime. The inaccessibility of Apess's only surviving sermon in its original form complicates the ways that literary critics can engage with *Increase*. However, I do not think this complication should bar Apess's sermon from critical consideration. Instead, I believe it becomes even more urgent to study *Increase* because of the difficulty it poses for its readers who perhaps should have been, but never can be, its listeners.

It is important to note here that I am highlighting the orality of *Increase* not to privilege sound in my study on Apess. Rather, it is the intensely emotional dimension of sound and other Methodist practices that interest me. Sound emotionally engrosses its listeners while a screech or holler's origin is often the product of the person who produces the noise experiencing an intense feeling. Unlike Donaldson's study's privileging of literal sound, my engagement with sound in this thesis is more metaphorical. Drawing on the work of William James, who argues that, "Music gives us ontological messages which non-musical criticism is unable to contradict," I am interested in the uncontradictory nature of religious feelings (364). Apess attempts to communicate these emotions in his work, emotions which may only begin to be understandable when comparing them to the feelings music and sound evoke. When I privilege sound in this thesis, I am more readily privileging emotions. By performing this gesture, I am trying to understand sound's important role in making sense of the irrational yet irrefutable truths that religious feelings convey.

Methodism's (seemingly) non-hierarchical structure is largely why its practitioners insisted on oral as opposed to textual political and theological interventions. Claudia Stokes has pointed to Methodism's "heretical"(3) status during the early U.S.

republic, and David Hempton notes its “more radical approach to race relations”(24) than other dominant sects of Christianity. Both Stokes and Hempton agree that many early Methodists were economically and socially disenfranchised so they were accepting of other populations living on the margins of society. Specifically, Hempton argues that in many “parts of the English-speaking world” Methodism “became both the instrument and the beneficiary of the rise of more populist and egalitarian brands of Christianity” (22). However—despite the faith’s populist origins—Methodism’s acceptance of non-white populations in the U.S. did not hold up as the faith spread and its leaders gained power. Hempton explains that, “In America [Methodism] first renounced slavery, then accommodated it, liberated women and then controlled them. Everywhere, Methodists began as cultural outsiders, but through work discipline and an unquenchable passion for education, they remorselessly moved to the cultural center, sometimes with remarkable speed” (31). What Hempton implies but does not explicitly say is that the Methodists who quickly gravitated towards the cultural center are white men whose outsider status was largely contingent on their wealth (or lack thereof). Once these white male Methodists gained social autonomy, they quickly neglected the women and people of color whose dispossession they initially rallied against but whose pariah status could not be remedied through the acquisition of money.

Despite Methodism being a more liberatory theology than other dominant strains of Christianity, Apess was initially barred from becoming a Methodist minister, a barring which I have discussed at length in my “Introduction.” Apess’s barring was racially motivated which demonstrates the limits of a universal understanding of Methodism’s progressiveness during the early U.S republic. Methodism was perhaps a more liberatory

sect of Christianity during Apess's lifetime than Catholicism or Calvinism, but even its progressiveness is complicated by the racial politics of the early U.S republic. Methodism's inability to escape the pernicious racial politics of the nineteenth century U.S. is legible in the faith's treatment of black people. Hempton points to Methodism's racism by drawing on an encounter that Frederick Douglas had with Northern Methodists shortly after being freed from slavery. After all the white members of the congregation are called forward "to partake of the sacrament," Douglas explains that the minister, a Brother Bonney, "raised his voice to an unnatural pitch, and looking to the corner where his black sheep seemed penned, beckoned with his hand, exclaiming, 'Come forward, colored friends! Come forward! You too have an interest in the blood of Christ. God is no respecter of persons'" (Hempton 105-6). Upset about being an afterthought because of his race, Douglas storms out the church and Hempton explains that, "The layers of paternalism, social segregation, and liturgical discrimination so evident in Douglas's narrative proved impossible to bear for many African Americans who thought they were part of a movement of spiritual and social egalitarianism" (106). The myth surrounding Methodism represented its inclusiveness as unconditional, but the faith's reality did not hold up to these social ideals.

Despite the complications that arise when considering Methodism's racism, it is telling that Apess was drawn to Methodism over other sects of Christianity. Part of the reason that Apess was drawn to Methodism was because of the theological components of the faith despite Methodism's visible structural issues. A key Methodist theological concept in Apess's work is the faiths' push against predestination and willingness to view all sinners as spiritually redeemable. For instance, *The Increase of the Kingdom of Christ*

is a text that seeks to spiritually and morally reform those white citizens of the early U.S. republic whose indirect or direct participation in colonialism marks them as sinners. Religions that believe in predestination—a belief that an individuals’ bodily and spiritual fate is predetermined by God with no space for redemption during their lifetimes—would not allow Apess to invite sinners into his faith’s fold. As a result, Methodism’s assertion of all people’s potential for salvation is essential for Apess’s ethical perspective’s assertion. Dating back to Methodism’s founders, the brothers John and Charles Wesley, the faith has sought the salvation of all sinners while championing moral reform. Apess’s message appropriately aligns with traditional Methodist theology’s goal of universal salvation. Charles Wesley’s hymnal “The Great Supper”³ serves as a canonical example of Methodism’s inclusive vision for moral reform. In Wesley’s hymn, he proclaims, “Ye need not one be left behind, / for God hath bid all humankind” (136). For Wesley—and Methodist theology writ large—an individuals’ worth is contingent on being one of God’s creations. By being a person, you are worth saving, which is an appealing theological message for Apess because of the universal redemption that this message offers. This message is appealing because it gives indigenous people equal rights to white people while ceding to colonial sympathizers and participants’ potential for moral reform.

In a faith that believes in predestination, Apess’s argument for the universal humanity of indigenous and white people could not be as effective. Apess’s argument would be met with hostility by white colonizers. Ultimately, a theology that believes in predestination would inevitably demonstrate that white citizens of the early U.S. republic were sinners and thus unable to achieve spiritual and moral reform. In *A Son of the*

³ Also sometimes called “Come, Sinners, to the Gospel Feast” which is the first line of the hymnal.

Forest, Apess's most direct critique of faiths that believe in predestination can be seen in his encounter with a preacher named Brother Foster. Apess claims that Foster was "highly tinctured with Calvinism," and Apess implies that Foster's corruption as a result of Calvinist theology is why Foster dislikes Apess. For Apess, it is Calvinism's belief in predestination which leaves Calvinists not readily accepting of people's potential for moral reform and spiritual growth. However, Methodism does not have this problem for Apess. Through Methodist theology, Apess can highlight the problems of colonialism and critique the oppression of indigenous people while still arguing for white citizens' ability to remedy their past sins. If there is no reward for moral improvement most people—unfortunately—will not strive towards developing themselves spiritually and ethically. Apess is aware of predestination's potential to exclude white citizens—citizens whose participation in anti-colonial efforts is essential for indigenous prosperity—so Methodist theology allows Apess to articulate his message despite Methodism's racially divisive social structure.

Unlike sects that subscribe to predestination, Methodism's belief in universal grace gives Apess the ability to assert a postcolonial argument such as the one I have just outlined. Ultimately, Apess's indigeneity would be less of an issue for practitioners of Methodism than Christians who believe in predestination. However, to excuse the problematic components of a faith that had structural issues solely because they had a single Native American minister would be dismissive. Despite Methodism's doctrines initially having good intentions, Philip Gura explains—in his biography of Apess—that "Methodists' once-constitutive and liberating discipline had become a tool of homogenization and repression" during Apess's lifetime (43). Gura's insights into the

ways that Methodism grew into an exclusionary faith during the early to mid-nineteenth century provide a context which allows Apess's writings' argument for indigenous rights to be seen as revolutionary. The Methodist church's structural problems highlight that Apess's sermons would not have only been listened to by those who shared his anti-colonial convictions. Many of the white Methodists who Apess spoke in front of during camp meetings would have been initially shocked by Apess's race and then further affronted by his sermons' critique of U.S. colonialism. However, despite Methodism's homogenizing, repressive structure during Apess's lifetime, I still insist that Methodism gave Apess many of the tools which he implements throughout his career. Beyond Apess's Methodism, it is clear that these tools would not have given Apess's political project the same radical potential if it were not for his experiences as a Native American in the early U.S. republic.

Considerations of Apess's Methodism should not obscure his Native American racial identity despite his message's dependence on Methodism. Despite Apess's anti-colonial message's articulation in mediums whose primary use is theological, Apess's usage of religious genres should not obfuscate these texts' political messages. To ignore Apess's indigeneity while solely privileging his religious convictions would be perpetuating a narrative that positions Native Americans as passive consumers of colonial ideologies and technologies. However, it would be just as effacing to not consider that Apess's intellectual development was influenced by white settler culture. Yael Ben-Zvi calls this understanding of colonialism "antifoundationalist," and she argues that thinking of colonialism in antifoundationalist terms:

[D]isrupts hegemonic portrayals of the colonial encounter that pit Europeans as possessors of religious, political, economic, and scientific knowledge against presumably epistemologically destitute Indigenous peoples and arrivants whose historical roles are reduced to the passive consumers and objects of colonial discourse. Settler discourses were shaped by communication with Indigenous peoples and arrivants to the same extent that Indigenous and arrivant discourses were shaped by communication with the settler regime. (19)

Apess's fusion of Methodist theology and anti-colonial political sentiments are an excellent example of the hybridization of indigenous and Anglo-European cultures that Yael Ben-Zvi outlines. It is through Methodism that Apess can argue for Native American rights, and it is through his indigenous identity that Apess can understand the political and social potential of Methodist theology, a potential which is often neglected by white Methodists. It is important to consider Apess's Methodism and indigeneity in tandem because, as Jarrett Anthony explains, "assuming an opposition between authentically 'Indian' identity and 'Christian' discourse...perpetuates the nineteenth-century assumption that Indian identity and Christianity are somehow incompatible...and that Christianity is essentially a white religious practice" (120). The merging of Methodism and indigeneity gives Apess the ability to pose an anti-foundationalist critique of colonialism and grapple with the complications that Anglo-Europeans' and Native Americans' respective discoveries of each other poses.

The limits of Methodism's inclusivity point towards the need to consider Apess's indigeneity and his unique status as a Native American Methodist minister. Often, Apess asserts his indigeneity to demonstrate the limits of considering his writings within an

exclusively theological paradigm. By doing this, Apess also demonstrates the limits of secular considerations of racial politics in the early United States. Considering the chaotic violence of colonialism that Native Americans experience in relation to Apess's religious convictions—convictions that he uses to make sense of his world—is essential. As Jodi Byrd suggests colonialism is “rhizomatic and fluid rather than hierarchical, linear, and coherent”(13) which leads her to argue for an “understanding [of] colonialism as a cacophony of contradictorily hegemonic and horizontal struggles” (53). Through Byrd's theorization, the colonial genocide of Native Americans is not stuck in the past, an event that can be learned from but never undone. Rather, Byrd's understanding of U.S. colonialism challenges dominant notions of temporality by suggesting that colonial violence is still impacting indigenous individuals during Apess's lifetime and today. Specifically, Byrd's understanding of colonialism as a “cacophony” is important for understanding the ways that Apess makes sense of his experiences. Positioning colonialism as cacophonous bridges a gap between Methodist religious practices and the ways Native Americans experience colonialism. Returning to the “noisy” practices of Methodists Apess knew, a connection can be drawn between a cacophony that triggers spiritual bliss and a cacophony that simultaneously disrupts and is triggered by the loss of indigenous life.

The screams of Native Americans murdered by white settlers and the boisterous yells of Methodist's worshipping are both oral expressions but of vastly different experiences. However—as a Methodist minister and Native American—Apess is intimately familiar with these separate cacophonies. For my purposes, the literal cacophonies of Methodism and colonialism are less important than an understanding of

cacophony as a metaphor for these separate yet connected experiences. Understanding cacophony metaphorically begins to make the incomprehensibility of indigenous loss palatable just as the emotions evoked by music can start to make religious feelings comprehensible. Sound is emotionally evocative, and the sensory overload of chaotic noise is an experience that evokes intense, memorable affects. Before becoming a Methodist, Apess grew up as a Native American and experienced oppression as a result of his indigeneity. This oppression is the most visible in the random violence Apess experiences at the hands of his often-white caregivers, violence which sprinkles Apess's account of his childhood in *A Son of the Forest*. It is not just these childhood abuses that inform Apess's understanding of Native American dispossession, and his other work's discussion of indigenous oppression—texts such as *The Experiences of Five Christian Indians* and *Indian Nullification*—demonstrate Apess's understanding of colonialism's systemic properties.

In Christian theology, chaos is often represented as a tool for accomplishing God's divine plan. Two of the Bible's most chaotic narratives are the Genesis flood narrative and Revelation's prediction of the Apocalypse, two events that God deploys to punish sinners. In Christian history, the flood is an event that has occurred while the Apocalypse still looms in the future, an event that has yet to occur but must be anticipated. Both Biblical events inform Christian subjects' engagements with their worlds, but in fundamentally different ways that I aim to explain. A linear understanding of temporality positions the flood as inalterable, an event to be examined but which ultimately cannot be stopped. Under this temporal formation, the Biblical flood may be an apt narrative for understanding the horrors of American colonialism, but—as Byrd

explains—the genocide of Native Americans is not an event stuck in the past but rather a stain that continues to harm indigenous subjects. Scholarship points to the limits of understanding colonialism in relation to the Biblical flood, and Daniel Richter directly places the flood and colonialism in contradiction with each other. Richter argues that, “Unlike Noah and his family, the Revolutionaries and their successors had to unleash a very human deluge if they were to clear that old Indian world away and claim the continent as their own” (251). For Richter, the Biblical flood occurs without a human agent driving it forward because the flood was a product of divine, not human will. In contrast, humans deploy colonialism’s chaos to murder and displace other people which ultimately makes colonialism incompatible with the flood. This difference emerges from their vastly different origins and the varying intentions behind each event which complicates their respective moral dimensions. Beyond the moral differences, the Biblical flood signals rebirth and redemption while colonialism is antithetical for Native Americans’ ability to flourish in a colonial landscape. Additionally, understanding American colonialism as comparable to the Biblical flood creates a myth of white settlers being capable of prospering in the wake of colonialism’s violence. This myth neglects the active harm that colonialism—and its accompanying repressive structures—continues to inflict on humanity.

The Bible positions the flood as essential for creating the world we live in today, and the flood represents a crucial shift in Christian history. Historically, colonialism is falsely considered an essential leap into “modernity,” a consideration that ignores the temporal disruptions that colonialism triggers. Ignoring these disruptions thrusts colonialism into the past while ignoring its active presence. Contemporary scholarship on

indigenous temporalities—specifically the work of Mark Rifkin—suggest that if colonialism’s impact on indigenous peoples is to be understood critics need to understand colonialism as not simply still happening but—unfortunately—bound to continue happening without appropriate resistance. Understanding colonialism and Native American genocide as apocalyptic is more productive than attempting to understand it through the Biblical flood. The Apocalypse provides a more productive hermeneutic for addressing colonialism because colonial violence should not be seen as just past and present events but as a future occurrence as well.

Unlike indigenous dispossession, there is a post-flood world in Christian history. After the flood, Noah and his progeny along with the animals aboard their ark are able to repopulate the Earth to rectify the life that was lost. According to the Biblical account of the flood, the world flourishes after the destruction the flood triggers, and ultimately, the world is better because of the flood. To understand colonialism as analogous to the Biblical flood positions indigenous loss as essential for human flourishing. This analogy plays into the myth of white settler-colonists being the beacons of civilization whose mission’s moral value outweighs the consequences of their actions. As Byrd explains, colonialism is not simply an event that occurs which can be moved on from, but rather, colonialism is an active presence that haunts indigenous lives and stories years after the initial displacement of Native Americans. Beyond these limits, Apess wrote towards the end of the Second Great Awakening so the end of the world was a central cultural concern for himself and other U.S. citizens because of perceptions of the Apocalypse’s imminence.

Unlike the Biblical flood, scholarship by critics such as Jonathan Elmer and Kevin Pelletier use the Apocalypse to address colonialism and racially motivated violence in the early United States. Positing an understanding of colonialism as apocalyptic, Jonathan Elmer claims that, “If apocalypse and discovery become indistinguishable, the land can be understood as simultaneously pre- and post-historical, unfixed by temporal codes altogether” (180). When white settlers “discovered” the “new world” there was a rupture in their epistemological framework, and, in many ways, the old world—or at least the old way of seeing and being in the world—did end with colonialism. By understanding colonialism as apocalyptic, Apess is able to better make sense of indigenous experience. Again, it is not just that colonialism has happened and is happening. Rather, reading colonialism in apocalyptic terms highlights the temporal destabilization which it triggers, and this destabilization allows Apess to highlight the fact that colonial violence is bound to keep happening under the settler state. Elmer points to the temporal warping that the imposition of white settler governance causes. By drawing on Christian scripture, Apess creates a Biblical temporality that epistemologically remedies the temporal unfixing that Elmer diagnoses and colonialism triggers.

Mark Rifkin’s book *Beyond Settler Time* informs my thinking about anti-colonial temporal configurations broadly and my understanding of Apess’s writings specifically. Rifkin theorizes settler colonialism’s imposition of a specific temporal framework which disrupts indigenous temporalities. For Native Americans, there was a specific way of being in the world that ended with settler contact. However, Rifkin does not believe that this shift and its impact is fully understood. In his book, Rifkin argues that, “U.S. settler

colonialism produces its own temporal formation, with its own particularly ways of apprehending time, and the state's policies, mappings, and imperatives generate the frame of reference (such as plotting events with respect to their place in national history and seeing change in terms of forms of American progress)" (2). In these examples, Rifkin shows the ways that U.S. conceptions of national history produces the allusion of a linear temporality that is pushing its citizens into modernity. With the formation of the settler state, a framework for experiencing time in the settler state is produced and positioned as the dominant epistemic framework. Rifkin's understanding of temporal dynamics is helpful for considering Christian history. As much as the U.S.'s budding national history, Christian history informs the temporal framework of U.S. citizens in the early republic. Apess understands that he cannot fully disrupt the state's legal and political structure and the epistemic framework that this structure produces by narrating a national history. However, Christian history is more malleable. As a Methodist, Apess believes holy doctrines are more interpretable than the strict legal doctrines used to efface indigenous history. By discussing The Book of Revelation in *The Increase of the Kingdom of Christ*, Apess posits an interpretation of Christian history that pushes against a temporal experience that, as Rifkin explains, "appears intimately connected to the decimation of Native peoples" (8). This thesis will largely be addressing Apess's Biblical permutations which he deploys to argue for the achievement of his political goals.

As I have previously explained, my project will consider Apess's *The Increase of the Kingdom of Christ* and its companion piece "The Indians," two documents that have been largely ignored in the growing scholarship around Apess's writings and his life. It is not just Apess's sermons that have been understudied, but in U.S. and early American

literary studies, the sermon is still an under-explored genre despite its popularity in the pre-1900 United States. In her *Preaching and the Rise of the American Novel*, Dawn Coleman addresses the sermon as a genre by examining representations of sermons in nineteenth-century U.S. novels. In her text, Coleman provides helpful insights into why the sermon is an underexplored literary genre, and Coleman points to “the implicit secularism of the humanities” as a reason for the sermon’s limited examination (4). Coleman forwards that because many people who study the humanities are secular subjects, they approach their objects of study as if these documents share their secular concerns and beliefs (5). The secularization of the humanities is largely why authors such as Apess’s theological writings have been given less critical attention than the biographical *A Son of the Forest* and the revisionist history of his *Eulogy on King Philip*.

Recent scholarship on U.S. literature—such as the work of Coleman—increasingly considers the role of religion in early U.S. literature and culture. For instance, much of the scholarship on William Apess examines his relationship with the social structure of nineteenth-century U.S. Methodism, but less critical attention has been paid to Apess’s theology and its political implications. Before looking at *The Increase of the Kingdom of Christ* and “The Indians” more directly, I want to turn to the work of Michael Kaufman whose scholarship on secularization in the humanities compliments Coleman’s positioning of humanities scholars as predominantly secular individuals. Kaufman argues that “it is no longer possible to claim that secularity constitutes a neutral view from nowhere, or that it provides objective, impartial grounds from which to investigate religion or, for that matter, secularity itself” (622). When secular academics approach religious texts they do so with the illusion of objective secularity, but the

religious dimension of their texts of study will always shine through and de-secularize their criticism. While studying Apess, it can be uncomfortable to think about his at times conservative religious ideals and anti-colonial political beliefs in tandem, but it is essential to do just that because of the ways that Apess's faith brings him to his political positions and practices. The importance of this connection is perhaps the most visible in *Increase*, but for *Increase*'s message to be understood its companion piece—"The Indians"—must be examined first.

Christian History, Colonial Brutality, and the Sovereign's Shadow

Through vast valleys I wander

To the highest peaks

On pathways through a wild forgotten landscape

In search of God, in spite of man

— Agalloch, “In The Shadow Of Our Pale Companion”

In his essay “The Indians: The Ten Lost Tribes,” William Apess claims to be writing about “the Indian tribes...whose history has been blotted out from among the nations of the earth—whose history, if history they have, is a series of cruelties and persecutions without a parallel” (113). This essay is one of the multiple instances throughout Apess’s career where he argues for Native Americans to be recognized as members of the ten lost tribes of Israel, a popular myth of the period that he readily adopts to argue for indigenous rights. The lost tribes’ myth is often believed to have emerged from the epistemological crisis that white Europeans’ and Native Americans’ respective discoveries of each other triggers. As Rochelle Zuck explains, “Soon after their first encounters with Anglo-New Englanders, Pequots, Mohegan, Abenaki, Narragansett, Wampanoag, and other Indigenous peoples were confronted with rhetorical attempts to narrate their presence on the American continent and to frame their place within a Christianized view of history” (4). Native Americans are not explicitly present in the Bible so for white settlers to situate indigenous presence within Christian cosmology the invention of myths—such as Native Americans being members of the ten lost tribes of Israel—became an imperative.

Proudly, Apess embraces Christian history's positioning of indigenous people as Israelites despite this theory's effacement of the intricacies of Native American culture. Rather than assert his indigeneity, Apess chooses to situate himself and other indigenous people within an altered but still intact Christian narrative. Contemporary liberal political sensibilities—belief systems which are largely informed by identity politics—likely recoil from Apess's desire to adopt an Anglo-European historical narrative that misrepresents indigenous people. However, I argue that this misrepresentation of native history ultimately aids Apess's political project. When reading Apess's writing, his adoption of a Christian framework to express his ideas enhances their disruptive potential. It is the comfort that the colonizers find in Biblical narratives which draws them into dialogue with Apess. Adopting a Christian history that Apess distorts—but does not cast away—legitimizes the small doctrinal gaps Apess opens to criticize colonialism. It is likely that Apess truly believed certain Christian narratives that permitted the disavowal of Native American life such as the lost tribes' theory. Human in his flaws, I believe that Apess's complicity with certain oppressive narratives should not obscure his liberatory modifications to Christian history.

Beyond his Methodism, Apess's reason for not discarding Christian history can be seen in the above passage with his faltering "if history they have," a hesitant aside that prefaces his push against white settler violence. As a Native American who often asserts his Pequot heritage, Apess's remark about there being a potential absence of indigenous history is initially confusing. However, by situating indigenous people into Christian history through the lost tribes' theory, Apess can demonstrate Christian cosmology's ability to make what was once unknown knowable to a large population. The Bible's

expansive scope does not address all worldly phenomena, but the text's ambition of constructing a universal theory for all human relations makes it a helpful epistemological tool. In "The Indians," Apess is not exceptionally liberal in his modifications of Christian history, and he primarily borrows from white settler-imposed narratives of indigenous presence. What "The Indians" does demonstrate is how Christian history's modifications can account for what was once unaccountable or simply not accepted. By pointing to the Biblical narratives' malleability, Apess reworks Christian history through the suggestions of others. However, in the history set forth by *The Increase of the Kingdom of Christ*, Apess makes his own modifications to Christian history that do not directly draw on white settler Biblical hermeneutics. Using Christian scripture and Methodist religious practices, Apess makes the horrifying effects of colonialism on indigenous populations understandable for white citizens of the early republic. Just as white settlers modified their epistemic framework when first encountering Native Americans, Apess's sermon modifies Christian history to account for indigenous presence and Native American loss as well.

Conventionally, sermons do not often have appendices so Apess's inclusion of "The Indians" as, in Philip Gura's words, "an appendix of sorts" to *The Increase of the Kingdom of Christ* is at the very least a structural curiosity (52). However, in Apess's writing, appendices are not particularly rare. For instance, in *A Son of the Forest*, Apess uses an appendix to add validity to his autobiography by drawing on the work of Elias Boudinot. Despite Apess not being shy to use an appendix in his works, his implementation of appendices is ultimately, I argue, unorthodox. In reference to *A Son of the Forest's* appendix, which Apess shortened his memoir to include, Elizabeth Fenton

writes that “Apess complicates longstanding notions of the function of the appendix, which dictionaries and common practice alike treat as documentation designed to complement but not complete, to support but remain detachable from the main body of text” (105-6). Fenton’s articulation of Apess’s complication of the appendix’s traditional relationship to the primary text positions “The Indians” as a text which perhaps completes rather than compliments the sermon it was published beside. I am choosing to consider “The Indians” prior to *Increase* to skew the chronology of Apess’s two prominent publishers: G.F. Bunce and Barry O’Connell. Apess’s and his publishers’ positioning of “The Indians” as an afterthought to Apess’s only surviving sermon implies the text’s tertiary significance which I want to push against. By moving *Increase*’s appendix to the forefront of this thesis, I am mining the text for its exegetical potential for understanding Apess’s sermon while privileging its standing as an artifact with literary merit worthy of critical attention.

Chronology is important in my consideration of Apess’s work because of the aforementioned hesitancy that Apess has in asserting that Native Americans have a history. I believe that Apess’s apprehension around asserting a uniquely indigenous history arises from his anxieties around the linear temporal configurations that settler colonialism mandates. On the development of settler-colonial temporality and modernity’s linear, progressive chronology, Mark Rifkin explains that:

The shift from that earlier experience of time to modernity is explained through Native subjection to enduring kinds of expropriation and exploitation of their homelands, communities, and bodies. The resulting “history,” then, clearly involves Indigenous people(s) but arrives as a “painful” and violent disruption

whose propulsive force arises from the “other people” who “were building a world” around and on top of them, primarily against their will (or at least without their meaningful consent). (7)

Rifkin’s hesitancy to use the word history in his discussion of the ideological narrative of American progress—progress achieved at the expense of indigenous lives—mirrors Apess’s inability to confidentially claim a Native American history. History, as Apess experiences it, is in opposition to the experience which he desires for his fellow Native Americans. In his “if history they have,” Apess is arguing against the ways that settler colonialism effaces indigenous histories. However, I believe that Apess—like Rifkin—may not believe that an indigenous history separate from an American history is the solution to this loss. Any native history which Apess produces to challenge colonialism’s dominant historical framework can never heal the wound of colonial contact and the loss triggered by that event. Ultimately, this inability to ever articulate a native history that does not bear the stain of white settler violence is why, I argue, that Apess asserts a Christian history in his writing.

It is clear to Apess that American history cannot be employed to argue for indigenous rights because the narrative of U.S. exceptionalism is built upon Native American genocide. Methodism’s subjective approach to the Bible allows for Christian doctrine’s utilization in challenging the temporal framework that white settler violence imposes. In “The Indians,” Apess claims that, “I have been asked, time and again, whether I did not sincerely believe that God had more respect to the white man than the untutored son of the forest. I answer, and always answer such, in the language of Scripture. ‘No: God is no respecter of persons...’” (113). Apess replaces his voice here

by drawing upon a divine authority, specifically the voice of Saint Peter. In his response, Apess does not answer the inquiry that he says has been posed to him “time and again” by claiming that God respects either “the white man” or “the untutored son of the forest” more. To claim either of these would center humanity—and humanity’s values—in Apess’s discussion. Instead, Apess makes a universalizing assertion based on scripture which decenters human racism by highlighting what he believes is God’s indifference towards—or there being no religious authority behind—race or racism.

Just as Apess is unable to articulate an indigenous history, the challenges that articulating any history poses is a dominant theme in Apess’s works. *The Increase of the Kingdom of Christ* works through the incomprehensibility of colonialism with Methodist theology, but “The Indians” is similarly interested in the limits of human understanding, specifically in reference to religious experiences. In “The Indians,” Apess claims, “That men have but *finite* conceptions of the *infinite* glory,” and ultimately asserts that people “cannot fathom a measureless depth with a measured line” (Emphasis in original, 113). Epistemologically, Apess is pointing to the limits of human understandings of divine knowledge, a limit which complicates his assertion of a Christian history to challenge colonial history. But by pointing to the limits of human understanding in “The Indians,” Apess gives his readers a productive tool for decolonial thinking. Pointing to the limits of human comprehension is helpful because Apess’s contemporaries—and those who study his work today—have never inhabited a non-colonial, or even truly postcolonial, United States. However, most of Apess’s contemporaries believe in certain holy phenomena which they may have never directly experienced. This lack of experience does not stifle these believers’ urge to push towards accomplishing their ultimate goal of divine reward.

Similarly, contemporary readers of Apess should not allow their lack of experience in a decolonized world to hinder their desire to strive towards rectifying the damage colonialism has caused and is still causing.

An understanding of Apess's reworkings of Christian history to critique colonialism provides a helpful context for understanding his direct attacks on the settler state. In "The Indians," Apess directly positions himself in opposition to the white settler state when he explains near the end of his essay that as "the white man came upon our shores—he grew taller and taller until his shadow was cast over all the land—in its shade the mighty tribes of olden time wilted away" (115). By condensing all white settlers into this image of a solitary, male, and ever-expanding figure, Apess deploys a critique of colonial expansion that lacks specificity but provides a haunting and provocative image. By personifying the white settler state, Apess engages in a long tradition within English political theory that dates back to Thomas Hobbes. This tradition insists that social systems can be understood through bodily metaphors. However, it is telling that Apess does not include himself or other members of "the mighty tribes" within this monstrous, growing body. Apess's personification of the white settler state grows "taller and taller," but Apess and other non-white individuals' incorporation into this social system is not what triggers its growth. What does allow for the settler state's unbridled growth is the dispossession of Native Americans and other people of color and it is the loss of their lives which enables its expansion. The settler state's shadow obscures Apess and other non-white people, and, ominously, Apess uses the past tense to announce that the individuals under the United States' shadow have already "wilted away."

Playing on a prevalent trope in the writing of the nineteenth-century United States, “The Indians” positions Native Americans as an atavistic culture who must always be represented in the past. Apess’s complicity in this ideological framework makes his anti-colonial sentiments seem as if they have come too late, a thoughtful gesture but perhaps for naught. However, in her essay on “The Indians,” Renée L. Bergland pushes back against an understanding of Apess playing into this racist trope. Bergland claims that as Apess “rehearses the tale of the ‘vanishing Indians,’ he inverts and resists the conventions that figure those Indians as supernatural if not satanic figures, explaining Indian disappearance as the result of whites’ evil magic” (123). Though Bergland is not specific in how Apess evokes an image of white settlers as evil figures, the shadow of colonialism in “The Indians” is certainly supernatural and terrifying. “The Indians” does not represent the shadow as the only thing that is growing, but rather, Apess specifically talks about this personification of the white settler state growing: a metamorphosis that would not be out of place in a horror film.

Apess ends his discussion of the white settler state’s growth when the state’s shadow covers “all the land,” but Apess does not specify what land he is referencing. Inferring that Apess is talking about the U.S. would be a safe claim, but the U.S. empire did not cease its literal growth with the acquisition of the continental United States. In fact, the U.S. empire continues to grow. The claim that the U.S. empire continues to expand by disregarding human life can still be controversial, but Apess’s implicit claim that the expansion of the U.S.’s sovereign rule deforms those complicit in its growth brims with radical potential. Correctly, indigenous studies points towards the trauma inflicted on Native Americans by white settlers. However, what still alludes full

consideration—and what “The Indians” taps into—is that colonialism does not only harm the oppressed. What Apess claims in his essay is that the trauma of colonialism circulates and inflicts psychic—if not physical—wounds upon all its participants. The body whose shadow continues to grow is as sick as it is menacing. As the shadow continues to obscure the land, the body that casts this shadow is further deformed. Apess feels—at some level—sympathy towards the white settlers just as he is concerned for the future of Native Americans. Both of these groups live in a post-Columbian world where their lives are rife with turmoil because of white citizens’ inability to recognize indigenous peoples’ humanity. While addressing similar imperial encounters and working through what he calls the “turbulence of Relation,” Édouard Glissant explains that, “The more it works in favor of an oppressive order, the more it calls forth disorder as well” (138). Through Glissant’s formulation, white citizens of the U.S. are the group who benefit from indigenous displacement and genocide, but—by enforcing an order at the expense of others—white citizens trigger chaos that negatively affects all participating parties.

I bring up Apess’s diagnosis of the circulating and active chaos of colonialism not to evoke sympathy for white settlers and other malicious participants in the United States’ colonial history. Rather, I point to colonialism’s production of chaos to highlight the incomprehensible ways that early colonial encounters still affect indigenous and non-indigenous people. The incomprehensible event of the colonial encounter is not unlike the incommunicable nature of religious feeling that Apess’s work seeks to explore. The white man’s shadow that Apess discusses still lingers over the contemporary United States, and, as Mark Rifkin argues, Apess’s indigeneity amplifies the shadow of colonialism’s importance in “The Indians.” In his essay on Apess, Rifkin asserts that

“shadows and silence serve to indicate, and theorize, an active set of memories and experiences that offer the informing context for what is said/written and that provide an unstated referent for the terms and stories that appear explicitly in Native texts” (694). Rifkin’s articulation of the significance of shadows in indigenous texts points to shadows as an active presence that refutes common-sense understandings of shadows. Shadows are often seen as something which signifies presence but are incorporeal and not worth consideration due to their immateriality. Rifkin’s theorization of shadows as immaterial but still impactful creates a parallel between the shadow that covers the land in “The Indians”—a shadow that serves as a metaphor for the expansion of the U.S.’s empire—and the religious experiences that thread throughout Apess’s writings. Both presences cannot be held by those considering their impacts, but their respective effects can be felt by those who actively consider each.

Shadows present theological significance beyond Rifkin’s explanation of their importance in indigenous texts. Like Apess, the Bible depicts shadows as obfuscating forces that often attempt to work against God’s divine will. However, the Bible demonstrates God’s perseverance in the face of the evil forces that shadows often represent. Psalm XXIII provides the best example of this trope with its memorable, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou *art* with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me” (Italicized in original, Psalm 23:4)⁴. I find “the valley of the shadow of death” an appropriate companion passage to help understand the shadow that lingers over the United States in “The Indians.” Despite the

⁴ When quoting the Bible, I will be quoting from Joseph Benson’s *The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments (according to the Present Authorized Version) with Critical, Explanatory, and Practical Notes, vol. 1-5*. I have chosen this edition of the Bible because Philip Gura shows that Apess owned Benson’s Bible during his lifetime (161).

shadow's presence in Psalm XXIII and "The Indians" respectively, both texts draw upon a divine authority to stave off the shadow's malignant presence. Needing to draw upon a divine authority to challenge an Earthly oppressor may seem like an unorthodox practice in asserting a progressive political stance. However, this strategy was common during Apess's lifetime and Kevin Pelletier—in reference to enslaved black writers who were Apess's contemporaries—explains that, "it is the slaves' dependency and submission to a higher spiritual power that ends up being the very source of their strength" (21). Just as his black contemporaries draw on their faiths to rally against slavery, Apess fights against colonialism in his writing by drawing on a holy authority. This divine law that Apess references transcends all Earthly sovereigns and becomes irrefutable when attacking a state crafted from sin.

In secular terms, Apess's compulsion to look towards Christianity to overturn corrupt human governments may initially seem like a desire to fight fire with fire. In "The Indians," Apess furthers his critique of corrupt states by drawing on the story of Jesus Christ's crucifixion. Apess explains:

And when the Savior of sinners made his humble appearance on the earth, to redeem its inhabitants from the thralldom of sin and death and restore them to the favor of heaven, they received him not; they disdained him, simply because he did not come in princely splendor, swaying the conqueror's scepter of blood and carnage, and dominion over the nations. They cried out, 'He is not the Christ, crucify him, crucify him,' and nailed the Lord of the universe to the cross. (114)

There is a clear connection between how Christ's contemporaries expected their savior to appear to them and the reality of how Native Americans perceived colonists. The

“conqueror’s scepter of blood and carnage” that allows for “dominion over the nations” evokes the violence that Anglo-European settlers enacted on indigenous people during their colonial ventures. According to Apess, Christ’s contemporaries desire a forceful entrance from that which will save them spiritually and physically. Apess is implying that Christ’s lack of violent attributes was perhaps what initially qualifies him as being unable to be humanity’s savior. During his lifetime, Apess’s white Christian readership would recognize the ethical flaw in Christ’s contemporary’s dismissal then murder of Jesus. Apess and other Methodists morally align themselves with Christ, not the people who “nailed the Lord of the universe to the cross.” Through his retelling of Christ’s crucifixion, Apess demonstrates disgust towards the people who killed Jesus. In “The Indians,” Apess forwards a strong argument against the historical fetishization of violence by showing the negative results of expecting violence then enacting brutality when violent expectations are not met. For Apess, violence is not that which imbues an individual with authority and he alludes to Christ’s “humble appearance” to establish his scriptural argument against violence.

Drawing a parallel to Apess’s representation of Christ and Native Americans would make sense because of their respective unjust deaths, but this is not the comparison that Apess ultimately draws in “The Indians.” After he recounts Christ’s crucifixion, Apess explains that, “Suddenly, the storm of divine wrath overtook them—their city, over which he who suffered on the cross had shed the tears of sorrow, was razed to the ground, and the once warlike and powerful nation of Jews melted away before the overwhelming and countless legions of foes that rose up to chastise and crush them” (114). Referring back to Apess’s previous claim of Native Americans’ Jewish

heritage, Apess is arguing that the individuals who rejected Christ and his message were Native Americans' ancestors. This pseudo-historical association between indigenous people and Christ's killers works to represent the cyclical, endless repetition of violence in Christian history. However, this human violence triggers a "divine wrath" that is reminiscent of Apess's desire to warn people of the "wrath to come" which he articulates in his autobiography.

The holy terror that Apess recounts in "The Indians" has already occurred as punishment for Christ's execution, but in the 1829 edition of *A Son of the Forest* there is another wrath on the horizon: the events predicted in The Book of Revelation. I believe using the word wrath to discuss both of these events connects their significance for Apess. Beyond this connection, the immense amount of human loss during both of these Biblical events creates a clear connection between these narratives and the genocide of Native Americans. Following Apess's historical logic, it is indigenous peoples' ancestors who suffered from God's wrath after their transgression against Christ. But during Apess's lifetime, he is experiencing and hearing about the killing of Native Americans at the hands of white settlers. Apess believes that during the wrath to come, it is the enablers of colonial brutality who will face God's judgment, not the native people whose suffering is so visible to him. To better understand this judgement, I will now turn to Apess's sermon *The Increase of the Kingdom of Christ*. Apess discusses the wrath that Revelation predicts in *Increase*, but Apess sets up his apocalyptic prophecies by first discussing religious feelings. In the next chapter, I will examine Apess's use of sentiment while further exploring Methodist theology's ability to assist his anti-colonial critique.

Theologies of Feeling: William Apess's Pulpit and Sentimental Indigeneity

We suffer day by day; we lose each other to humanity

I'm urging for the rapture of heart

I'm urging for the rapture of heart

— Enabler, “No Deliverance”

Historically, Methodism represents Native Americans as the passive recipients of Christian theology rather than active agents in its interpretation and dissemination. The nineteenth-century engraving featured below (Fig.1) shows John Wesley preaching to a group of Native Americans. In his commentary on this image, David Hempton points to the fact that John Wesley never preached to Native Americans, and he argues that this image is a part of Methodist myth-making, a practice that attempts to add authority to Methodist theology through grand narratives of the faith's dissemination (12). However, this fictitious image of Wesley preaching to Native Americans provides insight into early Methodists' attitudes towards indigenous people. In the image, the Native Americans are shown in traditional native garb which positions their culture as anachronistic and incompatible with the “civilizing” discourse that the well-groomed, book holding Wesley is preaching. Despite their willingness to listen, the Native Americans in the image's facial expressions and body language communicate an understandable distrust towards Wesley. Ultimately, this image positions Methodism and indigeneity as incompatible despite the illustration of Wesley's attempts to welcome Native Americans into his faith.



Fig. 1. *John Wesley preaching to native American Indians*. Engraving. Welcome Collection. Web.

This image highlights the dominant narrative of Methodism's relationship to Native Americans during William Apess's lifetime which is why I turn to it before directly examining *The Increase of the Kingdom of Christ*. Apess's role as a Native American minister in the early republic is a direct challenge to the engraving of Wesley preaching to indigenous people. Unlike the image's suggestion of indigeneity's incompatibility with Methodism, Apess's preaching reverses the racial roles that this engraving is attempting to reinforce. While inverting these roles, Apess's involvement with Methodism strengthens his relationship with his indigenous identity. Eileen Razzari Elrod argues that, "Christianity itself exposes the racism that leads [Apess] to vigorous reidentification with the Pequots, Methodism, and a powerful sense of Indian identity and sovereignty" (170). For Elrod, Apess would not be as devoutly Methodist if he were not a

Pequot nor would Apess so readily embrace his indigeneity if it were not for Christianity's moral teachings. Unlike the image of Wesley and the Native Americans—a picture which suggests a contrast between Christianity and indigeneity—I argue that it is behind the pulpit where Apess can most authentically engage with his identity as a Native American while critiquing U.S. colonialism.

The Increase of the Kingdom of Christ is Apess's only published and surviving sermon, and thus, this sermon gives the clearest insight into Apess's work as a minister and his religious beliefs. To whom this sermon was originally delivered is unknown and why Apess chose to publish this sermon over other sermons is also a mystery. Published by the printer G.F. Bunce, who simultaneously published the 1831 edition of *A Son of the Forest*, *Increase* gives little insight into Apess's life during the period of its initial publication. However, I believe that Apess's sermon demonstrates his development as a theologian and political theorist since the initial publication of his autobiography. Coming into these two separate yet intertwined identities—native and Christian—is important for Apess because his work as a minister and activist comprise the bulk of his post-*A Son of the Forest* career. Unfortunately, not much is known about Apess's life around the publication of *Increase* and "The Indians." Philip Gura writes that there are many "tantalizing clues"(52) about Apess's life during the period, and, speculatively, Drew Lopenzina claims that "[t]he timing of [*Increase*'s] publication suggests that [Apess] prepared this sermon for his ordination and therefore hewed closely to the expectations of the church hierarchy, some of whom would have been in attendance for the performance" (165). I find Lopenzina's argument that Apess was abiding by church hierarchy when writing *Increase* compelling because of the allegorical components of the

sermon. Yes, most sermons use Biblical allegories to convey their spiritual messages, but I believe that Apess's allegories are unique in relation to many other sermons of the period. In *Increase*, Apess deploys allegory not only to communicate religious truths, and Apess's Biblical allusions double as coded critiques of colonialism. Some of Apess's denunciations of the settler state are overt, but, if Lopenzina is correct, Apess must have held back some of his rightful vehemence towards the U.S.'s abuse of power. Having more concrete information about the history of the production and reception of *Increase* would be helpful. However, the fact that so little historical information is known about Apess's life during the sermon's initial delivery and publication opens up its criticism of white settler colonialism. This gap in knowledge about Apess's life—a life Apess has documented up until 1829—allows *Increase* to slip outside the temporal confines of its initial conveyance which instills its critique of the settler state with a sense of urgency that I will now demonstrate.

In *The Increase of the Kingdom of Christ*, Apess develops a postcolonial, or decolonial, theology that goes beyond his critique of racial politics in *A Son of the Forest*. Apess's sermon offers a clear attack of the ways that Christian doctrines and theology are misappropriated by white U.S. settlers to condone colonialism by forwarding that:

The white man, who has most cruelly oppressed his red brother, under the influence of that Gospel which he has long professed to believe, and just now begins to feel, pours out unavailing tears over the wasted generations of the mighty forest hunters and, now they are almost all dead and buried, begins to pity and lament them. (102)

In this passage, Apess is not critiquing Christian scripture despite his critique of scripture's "influence" on white settlers. Rather, Apess is demonstrating the problems that the interpretability of religious doctrines pose by pointing to misreadings of the Gospel, misreadings that often justify violence towards and the exclusion of Native Americans. Ultimately, I do not believe that *Increase* presents the interpretability of religious scripture as malign. In fact, dominant Methodist theology during Apess's lifetime embraces the interpretability of holy doctrines. As William J. Abraham explains, Methodist theology has "the clear intention to allow for the revision of all doctrine provided the appropriate official procedures were followed" (43). Due to Methodism's support of doctrinal revision, Apess can argue against one interpretation of the Bible—an interpretation that seeks to justify colonialism—and forward his interpretation which argues against colonial violence. Scripture's malleability is more beneficial than detrimental for Apess despite the problematic ways that religious doctrines were used to disenfranchise Native Americans. However, the above passage is not just helpful for understanding Apess's anti-colonial attitudes which are visible throughout his works. I find this passage particularly significant because it highlights Apess's theologically informed epistemology. To demonstrate the political potential of this influence, I will now explain Methodist theology's influence on Apess's epistemic framework.

To justify his anti-colonial understanding of Christianity—a faith that many of his white contemporaries were mining to justify racism—Apess posits an epistemological distinction in *The Increase of the Kingdom of Christ* that I will now unpack. In *Increase*, Apess points to a difference between what people "believe" and what they "feel," which highlights a contrast between religion's ideological components and the emotional

responses that religion triggers. For Apess, the emotions felt during what he deems as authentic spiritual practices would not have been a bodily affect. Due to his Methodist convictions, Apess believes that there is an immaterial component to what people feel while engaging with religious texts and holy rituals. Beyond *Increase*'s problematic participation in the "vanishing Indian" trope, I ultimately believe that Apess is arguing for an anti-colonial methodology of scriptural hermeneutics. This method that Apess is proposing closely aligns with the revisionist Christian history which he adopts in "The Indians" and crafts in his sermon. Ultimately, this mode of Biblical reading and the epistemology it forwards challenges the ideological, colonial misreadings of the Bible that white citizens of the early U.S. republic were practicing. Apess argues that the white citizens' misreadings utilize an epistemology of "belief" with little concern for the rich emotional dimension of religion. Religious feelings are essential for Apess and his Methodist contemporaries who deem the emotional dimension of worship important—if not an imperative—for spiritual and moral growth.

Looking back to Apess's first encounter with Methodism in *A Son of the Forest*, which I have unpacked in this thesis's "Introduction," it is clear that Apess's emotional response to the sounds of Methodist worship was the most memorable part of his first engagement with his faith. During this encounter, Apess is not drawn to Methodism because of the faith's theology. *The Increase of the Kingdom of Christ*'s theologically influenced epistemology of feeling goes beyond Gilles Deleuze's assertion that "Science and poetry are equal forms of knowledge" (18). For Apess, texts which privilege and demonstrate emotional epistemologies—such as poetry and sermons—transcend all other modes of knowing and are not merely these epistemologies peers. Texts of this nature are

essential for Methodist practices because of their ability to reveal what Methodists of the period believe to be authentic religious truths. As Abraham explains, for Methodists “[d]evolving the life of the mind did not undermine the enthusiasm of the heart” (49). Abraham’s assertion can be seen in Apess’s attention to what citizens of the U.S. republic feel which he often considers in relation to what they think. I believe that *Increase* would not contain such a convincing anti-colonial argument if it were not for Apess’s and Methodism’s privileging of the heart’s enthusiasm. In *A Son of the Forest*, Apess recounts a moment of divine bliss where, “I lifted up my heart to God, when all at once my burden and fears left me—my heart melted into tenderness—my soul was filled with love—love to God, and love to all mankind. Oh, how my poor heart swelled with joy—and I could cry from my very soul, Glory to God in the highest!!!” (21). In this instance, Apess recounts a moment where the religious feelings which he experiences overwhelm him while informing his moral paradigm. Apess’s love of God leads to his love of “mankind,” and he wants others to embrace the religious feelings that compel him towards a respect for all people.

To understand *The Increase of the Kingdom of Christ*’s privileging of feelings, I will situate it within the genre of sentimental literature. Specifically, I believe that Apess’s sermon’s sentimental characteristics are important to consider because, as Claudia Stokes explains, of Methodism’s essential influence on the rise of sentimental literature in the United States (3). Stoke’s term “sentimental piety” aptly describes Apess’s religious participation because *Increase* is “untouched by doctrinal specifics” (1). Instead, Apess privileges religious feeling over doctrinal authority in *Increase* by heavily altering the Biblical stories he draws on and by inserting his responses to these

narratives in the sermon. In *Increase*, Apess chooses to privilege religious feeling over bland rationalism to persuade individuals of the validity of his religious message. I categorize *Increase* as sentimental not to efface the literary contributions of female authors of the U.S. during the nineteenth century such as Harriett Beecher Stowe and Louisa May Alcott. Rather, I am trying to align the works of canonical authors such as Stowe and Alcott with Apess to demonstrate the multi-faceted use of sentiment in nineteenth-century U.S. literature. Especially, I want to demonstrate sentiments deployment in literary genres that allude comprehensive critical attention, but whose influence on the American literary landscape is undeniable. Often, scholars study the novels and poems of white female authors' utilization of sentimental tropes to enact political change. Along with these novelists and poets, racially marginalized groups in the nineteenth-century U.S. utilized sentiment to achieve similar liberatory social and political goals. However, in many cases, the literary genres which were often more readily available to racially oppressed persons were political pamphlets, sermons, and autobiographies. As I examine *Increase*, I will refer back to Stoke's *The Altar at Home* to point to the ways that Apess's sermon is a sentimental text. Ultimately, Apess's sermon's privileging of emotions is what makes it a piece of sentimental literature, but there are more subtle rhetorical motifs that strengthen a reading of Apess as a sentimental author that I hope to expand upon in the next chapter of this thesis.

Instead of producing a simple dichotomy between "believe" and "feeling," the sentimental piety which Apess displays in *The Increase of the Kingdom of Christ* highlights the clear connection between these two distinct but not entirely separate modes of knowing. Apess highlights this connection by pointing towards the importance of

feeling in any type of religious and social engagement. For Apess, there would have been the perception of a difference between beliefs that manifest from scriptural interpretation and the types of feelings that authentic religious engagement produces. Apess's discernment of this distinction would have been fueled by Methodism's belief in the importance of spontaneity as a religious practice. Methodism's spontaneity is perhaps most visible in the camp meeting as a theological space which, as Karen B. Westerfield Tucker explains, "participants regularly denoted as hallowed or sacred" (Tucker 75). For American Methodists, the camp meeting emerges to fill the need that the church met in other sects of Christianity. Largely, the camp meeting is a product of necessity brought on by the scarce resources of the nineteenth-century U.S. frontier. However, the camp meeting is an institution that is simultaneously the product of the spontaneous improvisation that Methodist theology privileges while also being evidence of spontaneity's importance in Methodist religious practices. Methodism's privileging of spontaneity is not just visible in the camp meeting's structural qualities, but it is also clear in the camp meeting's participants' spiritual practices. While discussing the nineteenth-century American camp meeting, Tucker claims that "[t]exts were improvised by using snippets of Scripture along with generous portions of 'hallelujah,' or by taking a familiar hymn text and adding to it an independent—and sometimes thematically unrelated—refrain or chorus" (76-7). Structurally, Methodist camp meeting practices were chaotic and random, but, as a result of these practices, Methodism's theology on a whim became a crucial component of the faith.

The chaos of the camp meeting would have been fertile soil for the types of emotional religious engagements that Apess claims to value in *The Increase of the*

Kingdom of Christ. Unlike sects of Christianity such as Catholicism—where ritual and repetition are king—the unpredictable practices of the Methodist camp meeting cannot be easily anticipated. Ultimately, I believe that the spontaneity of the Methodism’s religious practices is what allows Apess and his contemporaries to privilege holy emotions. In her description of camp meeting congregants’ expressions of religious feelings, Tucker writes that, “The shouting, barking, laughing, singing, jerking, falling, rolling, dancing, and running ‘exercises’ that were distasteful to outsiders and condemned by them were, for the campers, visible evidence of the Spirit of God moving in their midst and thus essential signs of spiritual life” (77). Beyond providing evidence of God’s presence, the signs of spiritual life manifesting through the bodies of camp meeting attendants heighten the chaos of the camp meeting. These spontaneous bodily practices create a sort-of feedback loop where religious emotions felt by an individual can trigger similar sensations in one of their peers. At camp meetings, it is the preacher’s job to amplify these feelings through their sermons. As a preacher, Apess would have been intimately familiar with Methodist camp meeting participants’ rapturous articulations of felt divine presence. The joyous behavior of Apess’s fellow Methodists would ultimately be encouraged by his own words. Drawing on the few existing accounts of Apess’s sermons, Lopenzina writes that Apess was “a forceful and charismatic speaker” (164-5). Apess’s sermons would not have been delivered the way that Lopenzina describes if Apess did not value the religious feelings that the spontaneous environment of the camp meeting sow.

Unlike Apess’s articulation of the difference between “believe” and “feeling,” Methodism’s emphasis on spontaneity is unclear in *The Increase of the Kingdom of*

Christ. However, the camp meetings where Apess would have delivered *Increase* and his other sermons were structurally random. Therefore, camp meetings are spaces that act as catalysts for the emotions that Apess values. In the sermon, Apess does not unpack his epistemological privileging of feelings. However, in *A Son of the Forest*, the distinction Apess is drawing between feeling and believing becomes clear. In his autobiography, Apess claims to “have heard a great deal said respecting infants *feeling* as it were the operations of the Holy Spirit on their minds” (Italicized for emphasis, 8). Apess’s discussion of infants feeling the effect of an immaterial spiritual presence highlights his belief in the non-lingual, irrational power of authentic religious feeling. Apess is interested in the ways that religious feeling informs human intellect even before language acquisition. For Apess, there is something irrefutable about religious feelings and the intuitions that it provides. Due to the emotional nature of Methodist’s devotional practices, Apess and his fellow Methodists have a theology that cannot be reductively understood by referencing doctrine. Like the spontaneity that Methodism privileges, Apess’s story about the infant cannot be reduced to a formula for conversion that hypothesizes the most logical ways for religious truths to be told. This hypothetical conversion formula cannot exist for Apess because of the random nature of these spiritual occurrences which lend to their authenticity.

When not informed by religious feeling, belief can be clearly articulated, but *The Increase of the Kingdom of Christ* is attempting to privilege a mode of believing that cannot be so easily articulated. Despite the difficulty in accessing this type of knowing via religious feeling, the process of trying to think in this way is, for Apess, epistemologically productive. *Increase* discusses the “unspeakable glory from heaven,”

and by calling heavenly glory “unspeakable” Apess—like in his discussion of the infant— addresses the incommunicable and allusive nature of religious feelings and other emotion-based epistemologies (106). Despite Apess knowing that what his sermon addresses is ultimately incommunicable, *Increase* works within the limits of language to direct Apess’s audience towards his understanding of authentic religious understanding. One way of reading *Increase*’s argument against belief without feeling is aligning it with contemporary discussions of ideology, discussions which represent ideology as a veil which obfuscates everything and is ultimately never completely escapable⁵. Like all literary and cultural texts, *Increase* is informed by ideology’s permeating influence, but, I argue, that Apess is trying to push beyond the obscuring shroud of ideological readings of Christian theology by using sentiment. Apess’s task is impossible, but—by attempting to do what is impossible—Apess better postures himself as an anti-colonial thinker. In his lifetime, Apess has witnessed ideological misreadings of the Bible that justify the death of Native Americans and other people of color. In his search for an alternative to these misinterpretations, Apess turns to feelings and other inexpressible occurrences that work against the multiplicity of understandings that alphabetic texts produce. Language stains and makes imperfect all human communication which is why Apess turns towards the Bible’s representation of a post-human world. The Bible’s non-human environments

⁵ In his book *Ideology*, James M. Decker gives an overview of contemporary critical debates on ideology and the history of discussions about ideology. Specifically, Slavoj Žižek’s conception of ideology is helpful for considering the obfuscating ideological readings of the Bible that Apess is trying to push against. While explaining Žižek’s understanding of ideology, Decker writes that Žižek believes that ideology consists “of a deluded ontological frame of reference” and that “ideology lies so deeply encoded within the basic form of, for instance, capitalism, that the subject cannot even detect its ontological misapprehension” (41). I believe that Žižek’s understanding of ideology helps demonstrate the complexity (and perhaps impossibility) of what Apess is trying to do in *Increase*. Žižek is not alone in his pessimistic view of ideology, and Decker argues that “most seminal theories [of ideology] characterize the subject’s role in the creation of ideology as an enabling one. The subject not only operates from a false position, but it actively shapes that distorted reality and thus reinforces institutional hegemony” (43).

highlight where human comprehension fails, and where religious truth perseveres in light of this failure. I argue that it is Apess' representation of the Biblical Apocalypse in *Increase* where his most threatening attack on colonialism surfaces, a representation I will now examine.

At the World's End: William Apess's Revision of The Book of Revelation

William Apess privileges feeling-based over ideology-based theology in *The Increase in the Kingdom of Christ* by evoking sections of the Bible that demonstrate the limits of human understanding. While pointing to these portions of scripture, Apess demonstrates how his emotion-oriented theology which I have outlined in the previous chapter has political as well as spiritual potential. One such section of the Bible that Apess utilizes in his demonstration of the limits of human knowledge is The Book of Revelation. Revelation predicts the Apocalypse and Christ's return to Earth to save his followers from eternal damnation. As the title *The Increase in the Kingdom of Christ* suggests, understanding Revelation is essential for comprehending what Apess's sermon is trying to articulate. It is essential because of Apess's belief that only those in Christ's kingdom will be saved when the end of the world occurs. For Apess and other Christians during the nineteenth century, the Apocalypse as predicted in Revelation would signal the second coming of Jesus Christ and Christ's disciples' spiritual reward. Through an epistemology uninformed by the religious feeling, Christians—and Methodists specifically—could only trust that the events foretold in Revelation would occur. What Apess argues is that through an epistemological framework that is a result of religious feeling, the incomprehensibility of what Revelation predicts begins to become palpable to his fellow Methodists. *Increase's* audience cannot see a post-apocalyptic world just as they cannot see a postcolonial United States because—just as the world has always been pre-apocalyptic—the U.S. has always been a settler state. However, by demonstrating white citizens' belief in something intangible to them (i.e. the Biblical Apocalypse)

because of their counterintuitive trust of religious feelings, Apess plants the seeds for his decolonial argument.

It is unknown if Apess's audience was predominantly white when he delivered *The Increase of the Kingdom of Christ*, but—what is known—is that many Methodists during Apess's lifetime were white and that Native Americans were underrepresented in Methodism. As I have previously stated, Methodism's racial politics were more progressive than most other sects of Christianity during the early republic. However, as I have pointed out, Apess's personal experience with certain Methodists' racism point out the limits of Methodism's progressive stance on race. The combination of Apess's personal experience with racist Methodists and the historical data that shows Methodism's predominantly white membership during Apess's lifetime lead me to believe that *Increase's* audience may have not been entirely sympathetic towards Apess's sermon's political message. Due to this lack of sympathy Apess's sermon's politics do not fully surface unless the theological is understood as being also allegorical.

To understand how Apess creates his sentimental political argument in *The Increase in the Kingdom of Christ*—an argument he makes by pointing to the limits of human comprehension—it is essential to examine his most overt reference to The Book of Revelation. During the early republic, Apess was not the only radical thinker who drew on Revelation and other apocalyptic Biblical texts. In fact, many of Apess's contemporaries—many of whom were people of color—utilized apocalyptic language in their writing. In *Apocalyptic Sentimentalism*, Kevin Pelletier examines how apocalyptic language was deployed in the U.S. during the nineteenth century to challenge oppressive ideologies of the period. Pelletier's understanding of the Apocalypse is helpful when

thinking about Apess's sermon's ability to address colonialism because even if colonialism has apocalyptic components it would not be the Apocalypse as predicted in Revelation. In this chapter, I will be adopting Kevin Pelletier's understanding of the term Apocalypse as "a warning that God will scourge reprobates for their sinful ways but never an actual depiction of this scourging" (12). By borrowing from Pelletier, I can situate the Biblical Apocalypse as yet-to-be but—at least for Apess—quickly approaching event. The only deviation from this usage of the term Apocalypse will be when I use representations of the apocalyptic to make sense of colonialism's brutality. Like Gerald Horne's usage of the term in his *The Apocalypse of Settler Colonialism*, my utilization of the word Apocalypse in those instances is more-so a metaphor to make sense of indigenous loss. Despite its yet-to-be occurrence, the Apocalypse is a prevalent trope in political writing in the nineteenth-century United States, and I will unpack the significance of the Apocalypse in the period's writing before addressing Apess's deployment of the apocalyptic.

Part of the reason for the Apocalypse's regular usage in the nineteenth century U.S. is its ability to provoke a sense of urgency by evoking fear. In reference to the work of Harriet Beecher Stowe, Pelletier argues that when "Stowe could not depend on love to produce a sympathetic response in readers, fear often served as an incentive to love, energizing love's power and underwriting its potential to convert Americans from fallible sinners into moral beings" (3). For sentimental writers, the goal of their writing was the moral and spiritual reform of their audience. By pointing to the impending Apocalypse, sentimental writers such as Stowe and Apess are capable of bringing their audiences to love and moral reform through the threat of spiritual punishment. Ultimately, Pelletier

posits that, “Sympathy...was not sufficiently powerful on its own to enact the kind of transformation that it was deployed to achieve. The terror of being a potential victim of God’s wrath served as a prerequisite to sympathy when sympathy was not an automatic or guaranteed response” (9). Specifically, Pelletier’s book examines the limits of sympathy that white audiences felt towards black slaves in the nineteenth-century United States. By examining the works of authors such as David Walker and John Brown, Pelletier can demonstrate the ways that fear informs love and ultimately evokes sympathy from white audiences despite the rampant racism of the period.

Despite its focus on abolitionist writing, Pelletier’s book serves as a helpful model to explore how Apess’s allusion to The Book of Revelation works to advocate for Native American rights. Like many abolitionist writers, Apess uses fear to evoke sympathy for indigenous people because of the lack of sympathy that many of his white contemporaries would have felt towards Native Americans. Through Methodist theology, Apess threatens individuals who are complicit in the genocide of Native Americans similarly to the threats of violence against slaveholders by abolitionist writers. Pelletier forwards that “this type of violent expression cannot always be easily accommodated to a liberal, secular, post-Enlightenment worldview” which is why critics are often hesitant to point towards the calls for violence by anti-racist and anti-colonial political thinkers of the early republic (21). However, the expressions of violence in Apess and his contemporaries’ writings should not be ignored because they are as essential to their political projects as the theological dimensions of their writings. Shelby Johnson addresses Apess’s violent rhetoric in his essay “An Indian’s Looking-Glass for the White Man” where Apess discusses his fantasy of the crimes of white settlers being marked on

their flesh. Ultimately, Apess wants these white bodies to be marked to make the horrors of colonialism visible. Johnson argues that through Apess's fantasy, "the genocides of the American past become thinkable, conceivable, and publicly visible on the skins of the white inhabitants [of the U.S.] and that nonwhite casualties of colonialism will be active readers of those violations on white skin" (15-6). The violence that Apess is conceptualizing in Johnson's example is not a call to action, but rather, Apess is using metaphor to make tangible the intangibility of colonialism's traumas. The marking of white bodies so that their own and their ancestors' transgressions are visible just like Apess's allusion to Revelation—which I will now turn to—is a tool that Apess uses to make colonialism and his anti-colonial arguments tangible.

In his writings, Apess's regularly draws from and modifies Biblical narratives to add authority to his political arguments. I am particularly interested in his reference to Revelation because of his desire to warn people about "the wrath to come," a desire he effaces from the 1831 reprint of *A Son of the Forest*. Apess's evocation of the apocalyptic is clearest when he all but quotes Revelation by claiming that:

The strong arm of Almighty power will gloriously defeat the enemy of man on his own ground, and will abase him, and chain him in the sight of his deluded followers, and cast him with his angels and all impenitent sinners into the bottomless pit. For a thousand years the hated form of the old dragon, the deceiver, shall not be seen on earth. Before all eyes in heaven, as well as all eyes below the skies, the glory of God shall be vindicated by the overthrow, the writhings, the chains, and the torments of the old serpent, who has long deceived the nations. (105-6)

In the above quote, Apess is reimagining the beginning of Chapter XX of Revelation which begins:

And I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and, bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, til the thousand years should be fulfilled; and after that he must be loosed for a little season. (Revelation 20:1-3)

Apess's evocation of this specific passage from Revelation is significant because it is a passage that does not show the destruction of human life as a result of God's wrath.

Rather, this specific section of Revelation shows God enacting vengeance on Satan and ultimately triumphing over evil. In both *Increase* and Revelation, an angel casts a dragon into an abyss which is ultimately sealed shut for a thousand years. Both texts position the dragon as antithetical to God's divine will so when the angel chains the beast and casts it into a void the audiences of these respective texts are meant to rejoice. Theologically, when the dragon is cast into a bottomless hole, Christians understand their salvation has come. Allegorically, the angel's defeat of the dragon signifies the resilience of justice in the face of evil. Despite the theological importance of the Devil's demise, I believe the allegorical potential of Apess' reference to Revelation connects his sermon to the writing of his abolitionist contemporaries. Unlike an abolitionist, the issue of slavery is not central to Apess's sermon, but abolitionist writers and Apess both assert an anti-racist political agenda. When referring to abolitionist writing, Pelletier explains that "apocalyptic retribution allowed [abolitionist] writers to express fantasies of brutal

violence against slaveholders,” and I believe that by borrowing from this part of Revelation, Apess is using the same rhetorical strategies abolitionist writers implement to critique settler colonialism (19). Furthermore, I believe it is significant that—in Revelation—Satan is “loosed for a little season” after a thousand years while—in *Increase*—Apess’s dragon is permanently vanquished.

Using the Apocalypse, Apess can threaten white U.S. citizens in an indirect way that transcends the limits of Earthly punishment. By alluding to Revelation, Apess evokes an authentic emotional response—one of fear—and challenges his audience to imagine the unimaginable. Apess’s use of the Apocalypse closely aligns with Pelletier’s description of the Apocalypse’s political usage during the nineteenth-century. Pelletier explains that allusions to the Apocalypse were “reformatory” in that they were “not about the end as such, but about creating a temporal opening in the present in which readers have time to change their hearts before the actual end arrives” (12). In *The Increase of the Kingdom of Christ*, Apess creates a “temporal opening” for individuals to change their moral convictions and political beliefs while still allowing his sermon to be, in Pelletier’s words, “about the end as such.” For Apess, there is no distinction between the political and theological. By using the Bible to create a moral framework, Apess critiques settler colonialism and its advocates by forcing white citizens to consider their actions in relation to their culture’s dominant religious doctrine. The politicization of religious scripture does not remove its theological validity for Apess and his audience. Arguably, the religious fervor near the end of the Second Great Awakening was more intense than many surges of faith experienced in U.S. history. Apess’s audience would have been intimately familiar with the Bible and its narratives, so Apess’s apocalyptic allusion

would have had immediate resonance for them. Apess's allusion to Revelation gives his audience—who may have a minimal comprehension of the horrors of colonialism—a cultural reference to grab onto, an allusion that gives *Increase*'s critique of colonialism doctrinal authority while also demonstrating to its audience their existing belief in something incomprehensible.

It is important to mention that in *The Increase of the Kingdom of Christ* Apess never rejects those who are racist towards Native Americans, despite Apess's biting criticism of colonialism and colonizers. For Apess, there is always space for these sinners in his theorization of Christ's kingdom⁶. Apess's capacity for forgiveness and belief in redemption further aligns *Increase* with sentimental literature because, as Claudia Stokes explains, Methodism's "belief that salvation was available to anyone seeking it" was widely influential on sentimental literature's development (3). Despite his willingness to forgive, Apess does believe that there is an urgency to join Christ's kingdom, and in *Increase*, he explains that, "A moment's delay is dangerous, for there is an hour in which a man may hate God and holiness, and the next hour he may love God and holiness, or be in eternity an heir of eternal woe" (111). The "temporal opening" for those complicit in colonialism exists in Apess's political theology, but there is an understandable sense of political and theological urgency to *Increase*'s message. In *Increase*, before the text reformulates Revelation, Apess highlights the slow and partial epistemic development of white citizens of the early U.S. republic who seek to justify colonialism with the Bible which I have examined in the previous chapter. However, Apess argues that these

⁶ It is worth noting that in *A Son of the Forest* Apess's first encounter with people who he believes to be Native Americans sends him running in fright (11). Despite concepts like internalized racism not existing during Apess's lifetime, Apess understands that racism is learned and, therefore, can ultimately be unlearned.

citizens are now starting to regret their complicity and participation in colonialism as they witness its material consequences. The immaterial consequences of colonialism are just as important for Apess to consider as its material consequences, which is why he addresses both in his sermon.

The Increase in the Kingdom of Christ merges the theological and the political seamlessly so that it is impossible to differentiate between Apess's political and religious messages. Carl Schmitt's argument that "[a]ll significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts," is useful when engaging with *Increase* because Apess's sermon demonstrates the merging of theological and political concepts (36). However, Apess's work complicates Schmidt's assertion that modern political structures are secular because Apess is non-secular in his critique of the state's unjust practices despite being a post-Enlightenment thinker. As Apess demonstrates, the secularization of modern concepts of the state is a false narrative. It is impossible to fully secularize the political because of political thoughts doctrinal etiology. Due to the theological origins of the political, it may be that the only effective way of critiquing a corrupt state born out of theological concepts is through the theology that informs its existence. Apess's work demonstrates the potential of liberatory theology by effectively opposing the U.S. government's authority. Ultimately, Apess attacks the corruption of the state by turning towards a divine sovereign.

By analyzing Apess's reimagination of The Book of Revelation, I believe that the radical potential of turning towards theology to critique human sovereignty becomes legible. This merging of the theological and political is further illuminated when considering Revelation and Apess's reimagination of Revelation's respective uses of the

word “nation.” Each text is specifically concerned with the deception of the nations which they respectively evoke, and, in *Increase*, through deception, the citizens of the early U.S. republic are misled by dominant myths of U.S. exceptionalism. By using a Biblical narrative, Apess implicitly critiques early U.S. nationalism by pointing to the fact that in Christian history nations have been deceived by evil forces that the nations’ citizens could not comprehend. By demonstrating this, *Increase* is implicitly asking why the U.S. would be any more exempt from this almost universal potential for human corruption through deception than other nations past and present. *Increase*’s radical Biblical hermeneutics pose challenges for readings of the Bible which seek to justify colonialism by pointing to specific sections of scripture that complicate Christian morality in relation to colonialism. Apess mainly does this by referencing the universal fallibility of people and their nations. Apess applies Christian history to the struggles of indigenous people which does not dismiss his sermon’s theological basis, but, rather, Apess allows his religious and political ideals to coexist harmoniously while informing each other.

By returning to the work of Claudia Stokes, it becomes visible that Apess’s reworking of The Book of Revelation in *The Increase in the Kingdom of Christ* is sentimental beyond his sermon’s privileging of emotions. Stokes explains that “Sentimental texts...offer a triumphalist portrait of a religious world in which a particular religious belief set has successfully vanquished its critics and found absorption into the mainstream, its sectarian specifics replaced by intimations of ecumenical unity” (6). *Increase* is not a call for ecumenical unity. Rather, the unity that Apess is seeking in his sermon is a racial one where indigenous people can coexist harmoniously with white

settlers. When Apess writes about God's intention to "cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him," Apess demonstrates a narrative of triumph where the oppressor's defeat creates social equilibrium (105-6). The familiar story of good triumphing over evil in sentimental literature is not just the triumph of one belief system over another. This triumph has broader social implications for Apess, implications that fully surface when considering Apess's social stigmatization because of his indigeneity.

After Apess's reimagination of Revelation, he makes a clear argument for indigenous rights. Apess asks, "have not the great American nation reason to fear the swift judgments of heaven on them for nameless cruelties, extortions, and exterminations inflicted upon the poor natives of the forest?" (106). By asking this question almost immediately after Apess reveals what "the swift judgments of heaven" looks like in the Bible, he challenges colonialism by demonstrating its fatal results. After this question concerning indigenous people, Apess argues that "America has utterly failed to amalgamate the red man of the woods into the artificial, cultivated ranks of social life" (107). In his declaration, Apess points to the United States' rejection of Native Americans by pointing to white citizens' unwillingness to socialize with indigenous people. However, beyond this critique, Apess attacks the structure of the U.S. by using the word "artificial" which places Apess's theorization of Christ's kingdom in opposition to the United States. Unlike the United States, Christ's Kingdom—which Apess is urging his audience to join—is not merely the product of human social bonds. Christ's Kingdom is all-inclusive, particularly towards the people whose death was positioned as necessary for the construction of the artificial United States. Apess forwards his political message

without disrupting the religious narrative his sermon deploys. Methodism's belief in the potential for all people's moral and spiritual redemption is an imperative to properly forward Christ's Kingdom as a clear alternative to all Earthly Kingdoms.

Significantly, a key component of Methodist theology is the revisability of scripture which informs my reading of Apess's allusion to Revelation. If Revelation was quoted without alteration, Apess's belief in scripture's malleability would not be visible despite it being a dominant component of Methodist theology. The reference to Chapter XX of The Book of Revelation in *The Increase of the Kingdom of Christ* is similar enough that its origin is clear, but Apess's sermon changes enough of Revelation so that Apess's voice clearly rings through the scripture he is drawing from. What Apess changes about Revelation demonstrates the political potential of the Biblical hermeneutics which Apess readily employs. To highlight the power of Biblical revision, I want to unpack the differences between what Revelation says and what Apess changes about the Biblical passage he is quoting. In *Increase*, Apess asserts that "The strong arm of Almighty power will gloriously defeat the enemy of man on his own ground, and will abase him, and chain him in the sight of his deluded followers" (105). Apess sets up a spectacle of punishment where the deluded followers of "the enemy of man" must watch humanity's foe face divine justice for his transgression. However, unlike Revelation, *Increase* is vague about the identity of the enemy of man. If *Increase* were examined outside of its social context the answer could easily be Satan, the same enemy who is explicitly vanquished in Revelation. However, I believe that Apess is intentionally vague in this section as a part of his colonial critique. It is easy for Apess's audience members

to position themselves in opposition to the literal Devil, but Apess's ambiguity lingers and allows for a lingering doubt about the true identity of humanity's foe.

Where Apess's enemy of man is brought to his end is also significant. When Apess articulates that the enemy of man will be defeated "on his own ground" he temporarily cedes to white settler conceptions of land ownership. However, this brief acknowledgment of settler territory possession is only done to critique these claims legitimacy. By validating white settler claims to the land that is now the United States, Apess poses a trenchant refutation of the unjust nature of these claims of sovereignty. Settler land claims can be seen as illegitimate because of the eventual fate of the possessor of the ground in Apess's narrative. The stealing of land leads to death for Apess. But the U.S. law's perpetuation of white supremacy and indigenous genocide becomes null when considering divine law. Using the Apocalypse, Apess generates a moral theory that questions the legitimacy of the formal government of the early United States. By drawing on but not effacing Christian doctrine, Apess can address the material problems that face himself and other Native Americans by evoking immaterial punishment. What Apess changes is not drastic, but the fact that he does change scripture is significant. The context Apess provides for his holy message further complicates the way it is received.

Ultimately, I argue that it is *The Increase of the Kingdom of Christ's* revisionist Christian history permits it to engage with the supporters of colonialism that Apess critiques. It is no surprise that Apess's sermon offers a critique of colonialism. What is surprising is that Apess's critique of one major belief system of the period—the legitimacy of the settler state—is aided by his evocation of another dominant belief

system—Christianity—which is less often deemed to be transgressive in its message and practice. Despite arguing against the settler state, *Increase* is not anarchic in its goals. In an urgent tone, Apess proclaims:

Before Christ will take to himself the entire rule on earth, everything proud and haughty must be abased and brought low. The Savior will not permit of man-worship in his earthly kingdom. He must reign and be worshipped undivided and supreme. The haughty kings of the earth, the proud nobles, the oppressive and unjust governments, must all be dashed to pieces, or brought into a lamblike submission to Christ. (107)

This statement is far from anti-hierarchical. Rather, Apess is arguing for religious rather than human domination. A theocracy is not most people's ideal political system.

However, I think that by being able to propose a clear alternative to the oppressive, human-controlled political structures of the period Apess can more aggressively call for their respective destructions. What Apess proposes in *Increase* is radical and violent, but to argue against Apess's vision during his lifetime could be seen as sacrilegious. The political theory that predates Apess accounts for God's will superseding all human governments. By arguing for human government's destruction to trigger Christ's Kingdom's construction, Apess follows the logic of many political theorists read by the citizens of the early republic. An example of a philosophical text that contains a similar argument to *Increase* is Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* which asserts that, "It is true, God is the Sovereign of all Sovereigns; and therefore, when he speaks to any Subject, he ought to be obeyed, whatsoever any earthly Potentate command to the contrary" (415). As he explains in *A Son of the Forest*, Apess is a subject who God speaks through and therefore

Apess's argument for state abolition gains theological validity because of this association between his authority and God's authority. It is counterintuitive to replace a law that demands its subjects' complicity with another law that demands the same, but that is exactly what Apess does in his sermon.

Despite secular discomforts with embracing divine will over human authority the arguments that Apess forwards for decolonization in *The Increase of the Kingdom of Christ* are powerful ones. I argue that Apess's political theology should be understood as a thought experiment, something that pulls its readers outside of their comfort zone into a land of epistemic uncertainty. Readers of Apess do not need to embrace his millennialism to challenge themselves to see colonial genocide from his perspective. With the Bible being the text that ultimately informs Apess's moral framework, Apess would have seen the violence around him and understood the history of colonialism in Biblical terms. What the white settlers were doing was in direct violation of what Apess perceived as God's will. As Peter Coviello explains, "Secular moderns *become gods*, and know that divinization [is] nothing so much as the exercise of planetary dominion" (Italicized in original, 45). Apess recognizes the flaws in white secular subjects' goal of planetary dominion because of the life that is being lost in this process. To stop these white settlers from becoming "gods," Apess must assert the presence of his God whose doctrines challenge colonialism and question people's ability to, in Coviello's terms, "*become gods*." Dominant myths of the nineteenth-century position Christianity and Native Americans as respectively incompatible with a post-Enlightenment world. By embracing his Methodism and indigeneity, Apess illuminates the perseverance of indigenous people and Christians despite the dispossessing myths that they both are quickly fading away.

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