

## Reading

# An Indian's Looking Glass for the White Man, 1833 (Abridged)

*The following text is excerpted from an essay written by William Apess in 1833. The essay was originally published as an addendum to Apess's edited collection The Experiences of Five Christian Indians of the Pequot Tribe. Apess was of European and Pequot descent. As an author and minister, he dedicated his life to the cause of racial equality and Native American rights.*

[W]hy are not we [Native Americans] protected in our persons and property throughout the Union? Is it not because there reigns in the breast of many who are leaders, a most unrighteous, unbecoming and impure black principle . . . while these very same characters take our skin color as a pretext to keep us from our lawful rights? I would ask you if you would like to be disfranchised from all your rights, merely because your skin is white?

What can you infer about the intended audience for this essay, based on the title and questions the author poses to his audience?

. . . I am merely placing before you the black inconsistency that you place before me—which is ten times blacker than any skin that you will find in the Universe. Let me exhort (*urge*) you to do away with that principle. If black or red skins, or any other skin of color is disgraceful to God, it appears that he has disgraced himself a great deal—for he has made fifteen colored people to one white, and placed them here upon this earth.

In this essay, the author repeatedly uses the word “black” (“black inconsistency”) to mean immoral or wrong. Why do you think the author makes that word choice?

What does he mean when he says, “I am merely placing before you the black inconsistency that you place before me—which is ten times blacker than any skin that you will find in the Universe”?

. . . Assemble all nations together in your imagination, and then let the whites be seated amongst them, and then let us look for the whites, and I doubt not it would be hard finding them; for to the rest of the nations, they are still but a handful. Now suppose these skins were put together, and each skin had its national crimes written upon it—which skin do you think would have the greatest?

I will ask one question more. Can you charge the Indians with robbing a nation almost of their whole Continent, and murdering their women and children, and then depriving the remainder of their lawful rights?<sup>1</sup>

What is the author's point about which nations are most guilty of committing crimes?

How might this argument be a response to theories of racial superiority that were commonly held during the when period this essay was written (the 1830s)?

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<sup>1</sup> Quotes from William Apess, *An Indian's Looking Glass for the White Man*, 1833.