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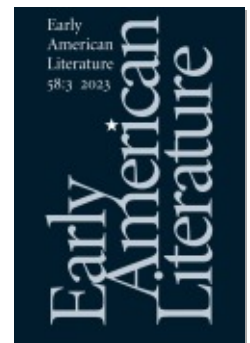
Stopping by Woods in Mashpee Territory: Belonging in William  
Apess's *Indian Nullification*

Lloyd Alimboyao Sy

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# Stopping by Woods in Mashpee Territory

Belonging in William Apess's

*Indian Nullification*

*Abstract: This essay analyzes how William Apess's Indian Nullification (1835) articulates a form of belonging that emphasizes inclusivity and communality (affiliative belonging) against settler colonialism's insistence that belonging is anchored in possession and property (proprietary belonging). It draws on recent critical appraisals of Indigenous kinship and community that emphasize the commingling of Native and white practices, but it centers tangible environmental markers—specifically the cutting and carting away of wood as presented in Apess's text—as the loci for a more general argument over how people should live with each other. I draw much from Apess's depiction of the Mashpee Meeting-house, a religious structure made of wood whose retrieval by the Mashpee concurrently pushes to establish their conception of communal belonging with nature and with each other. The Mashpee form of belonging is also incarnate in two other ways in Indian Nullification: in Apess's discussion of his adoption into the Mashpee tribe and in the very structure of the book. By contrasting how the Mashpee treat the management of wood and wooden creations with settler colonial impositions, Apess conceptualizes how Indigenous peoples could create communities and express an alternative idea of belonging in the antebellum United States.*

KEYWORDS: William Apess, *Indian Nullification*, belonging, community, property, Indigenous resistance, forests, settler colonialism, Wôpanâak/Wampanoag, Mashpee, Massachusetts, wood, Meeting-house, adoption, literary form

## 1. DEFINING BELONGING

About wood-carting they were never wrong, the Old Masters: how well they understood its elusion of primacy, how it takes place furtively, swept behind more evident urgencies. In the frontispiece to William Apess's *Indian Nullification* (1835), for instance: a white man grins in the background, cartoonish with a countenance barely sketched, riding a horse,

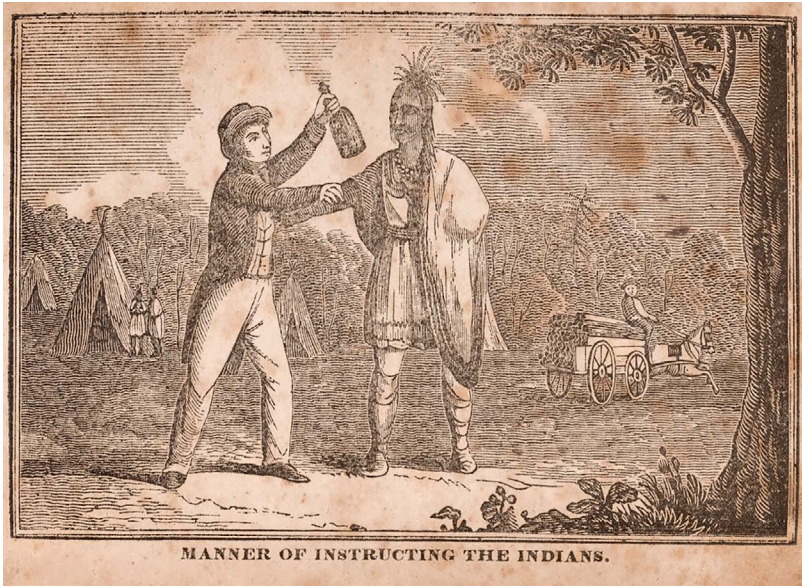


FIGURE 1. *Frontispiece*, Indian Nullification of the Unconstitutional Laws of Massachusetts Relative to the Marshpee Tribe, or, the Pretended Riot Explained. *Albert and Sidney Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia.*

which pulls a wagon full of logs closer to the picture's edge. Our eyes turn from him, for foregrounded instead are two adversaries: an Indian stretching out his right arm and a white man grabbing him while holding up a bottle of alcohol, the presumed object of the Native man's reach.<sup>1</sup> The engraving's caption reads "Manner of Instructing the Indians"—but the school is wretched, "instruction" being that maligned distribution of liquor, or else a synonym for "conversion," which Apess often used ironically in referring to European land thefts (O'Connell 213). The Latin *struo*, "to place together, heap up" is the etymological keystone of "instruction," but also "construct," "obstruct," and "superstructure." Thus the frontispiece's caption doubles down on the hypocrisy of white colonialism; to "instruct" is actually to carry away, surreptitiously, small in the distance, the materials that must be piled up and joined together for the sake of the habitations on the engraving's left, emblems of Indigenous life.

The frontispiece includes a visual correlation between the Indigenous man's headdress, the tops of the poles holding up the teepees, and the tallest

tree's spiky branches. This formal kinship suggests a convergence of human, building, and environment, all of which are threatened by the white man's fellings, represented by the denuded logs being carried away. But cutting down trees does not simply stand in for the Euro-American incursion into Indigenous life and land, or a settler mentality about nature. Because colonialism is based on extracting environmental resources, it is tempting for readers and critics to equate settler colonialism and deforestation, rendering tree-cutting the exclusive provenance of intruding settler classes.<sup>2</sup> This essay cautions against that correspondence. That both Indigenous persons and Euro-Americans cut trees down is an assumption embedded in *Indian Nullification's* frontispiece; that their manners and visions of cutting diverge is the artwork's shadow thesis; that such a divergence stands for the question of how people ought to relate to the land and to others is this essay's primary argument. *Indian Nullification* details the Mashpee Revolt, an event in which an Indigenous tribe pushed back against white settler incursions into their woodlands.<sup>3</sup> Apess's articulation of the struggle refutes white power over the Mashpee forests in particular but also seeks to overturn the entire settler conception of environmental control: as I show, Apess advances a way of relating to land rooted in nurturing communality with and within it.<sup>4</sup>

To explain the distinction between Apess's vision of land relation and the relationship of possession marking settler colonialism, I propose a schema of difference based on an inherent tension in the word *belonging*. To "belong" implies, in one sense, to be divested of self-control, rendered objective, sublimated into another person's agency. I term this "proprietary belonging," exemplified by the settler colonial tendency that seeks to own, shape, cut, and trade trees—to force logs to belong to someone. It is the usual denotation of "belong" and used profusely throughout *Indian Nullification*. Yet "belonging" can also surprisingly signify a superbly voluntary and even empowering form of being with each other and with the world, drawing from and contributing to a sense of associative life. This occurs when one feels a "sense of belonging" somewhere or with some group of people. This kind of belonging, which I call "affiliative belonging," occurs when one participates in a group and its qualities, or partakes of a communal space. It is more of a "belonging among" or "belonging with" than a "belonging to," though the latter grammatical formulation is commonly used in the references to affiliative belonging strewn throughout *Indian*

*Nullification*, when people are described as “belonging to” various groups: “the [Mashpee] Plantation,” “Nathan Pocknet’s family,” “the Methodist Protestant Church” (232, 243).

These proposed forms of belonging can be mapped onto the dispute about forestry in *Indian Nullification*. As the frontispiece to *Indian Nullification* suggests, the Indigenous opposition to white presence in their forests was not tree-cutting but, rather, tree-carting—not the felling but the removal of trees, and the broader vision of land as exploitable. In other words, Apess does not render tree-cutting anathema—it is indeed necessary for Mashpee life, as the wooden habitations of the frontispiece remind us. What is important is that the log should not become an absolutely transportable commodity. Instead, the tree could be envisioned as an important, if not vital, part of a certain spatial locality; cut down, its materials ought to remain in bounds, contributing to the lives and fates of a place’s inhabitants, who could concurrently ensure the wood’s sustainable usage. At stake in the wood-carting of the frontispiece is not mere control of the trees but the manner of conceiving how to live among them.

The distinction between the two forms of belonging is slippery, not in one-to-one correspondence with two different cultures. I do not mean to say that the Mashpee pursued affiliative belonging exclusively: part of their struggle is gaining actual proprietary belonging over that which white property claims ostensibly deemed to be already theirs. An article from the *Liberator* quoted in *Indian Nullification* sums up the Mashpee’s aims in one way: “What belongs to the red man shall hereafter in truth be his” (223). Furthermore, affiliative belonging implies a sacrifice of individual will to a group identity that could be described as entering a relationship of proprietorship. To belong with others often implies not belonging totally to the self—to be, happily or not, responsible to others. Thus, proprietary and affiliative belonging are in tension but are not entirely antagonistic. That they share the word *belonging* is meant to serve as a counterpoint to oversimplified distinctions between Indigenous and white land relations. Steve Garner’s divide can be seen as representative of the kinds of dichotomies to which I encourage an alternative: “Property was conceptualized in . . . European terms” as “the right of an individual to acquire and dispose of. Native Americans did not own land in this way, rather they saw themselves as collective stewards of the land, managing it for the following generations” (28).

In presenting and naming white and Indigenous relations to land as closer than Garner's separation might suggest, I follow several decades worth of scholarship concerning the two races' conceptions of property. Much of this conversation centers on whether the terminologies of "individual" and "communal" property are in opposition or even accurate at all. In his *Changes in the Land*, William Cronon wrote against the "popular idea that Europeans had private property, while the Indians did not," arguing that both cultures noted "important distinctions between sovereignty and ownership, between possession by communities and possession by individuals" (69). In the years since Cronon's complication, critics like Eric Cheyfitz and Joshua David Bellin have extended his critique, quibbling with the semantic assumptions inherent in talking about communalism and individualism. Cheyfitz challenges Cronon's terminology for being problematically European. English words, Cheyfitz contends, cannot adequately describe Indigenous conceptions of land and ownership (46, 58). Bellin, on the other hand, argues that individualism and communalism ought not to be seen as mutually exclusive (111–12). The commingling of the two may be seen in something like the trope of the "common pot," analyzed and discussed in Lisa Brooks's monograph of the same name. Brooks regards the figure as a way of conceiving of a "Native environment" at once "cooperative" and "interdependent," allowing for both the importance of individual agency and that agency's service of the community (3).

These critics' hesitancy with the available semantic distinctions leads me, in my discussions of proprietary and affiliative belonging, to stress their shared word. Unlike *property*, *belonging*, as explained above, captures both ownership and communality in the space of one word. *Belonging's* legion and varied usage in *Indian Nullification* proves that my exegesis of the word is not anachronistic, but even beyond the text, *belonging* found a plethora of uses in early American letters.<sup>5</sup> Unsurprisingly, possessive connotations of *belonging* abound in the early Republic, where notions of ownership undergirded the nation's determined slave power and their continuous land theft from Indigenous communities. Indeed, *belonging* signifying the power of an owner is literally written into the Constitution: "The Congress shall have Power to dispose of and make all needful Rules and Regulations respecting the Territory or other Property belonging to the United States" (art. IV, sec. 3). But the more affiliative sense of belonging also finds its place in the American tradition leading up to Apees. White Quakers, for

instance, displayed an affiliative conception of belonging when they speak of “belonging among Friends” as far back as their religion’s development in the seventeenth century.<sup>6</sup> Considering their reputation for communality in antebellum culture, Indigenous persons were uncommonly discussed in terms showcasing an affiliative sense of belonging, as represented in a negative example from James Fenimore Cooper’s *Last of the Mohicans* (1826): “Send these greedy and lying Mohawks and Oneidas . . . where in nature they belong, among the outlandish Frenchmen” (87).<sup>7</sup>

Arguably, the rich denotative potency of *belonging* finds analogs among similar words in the Wôpanâak language, one of whose dialects was spoken by the Mashpee. James Hammond Trumbull’s 1903 dictionary of the Natick language lists a whole slew of words which may serve as translations of the English *belong*.<sup>8</sup> While some of these clearly express a kind of proprietary belonging, several of them also capture the doubly loaded sense of belonging I trace in this essay. For instance, Trumbull’s dictionary lists the noun *ohtóonk* as signifying “a having or belonging, a possession,” while its derived suffix *-ohtâe* “signifies belonging to, of the nature or quality of” (225, 103). The concurrent states of owning and partaking arise in another of Trumbull’s listed translations, *wutchaiyeumoo*, “it belongs to, in the sense of it proceeds from, is caused by” (225). The word is a form of the verb *wadchinat*, “to come or proceed out or from,” among whose representative examples Hammond lists “*neg wadchiitcheg Christ*,” taken from the Wôpanâak translation of Galatians 5:24 “And *they that are Christ’s* have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts” (179; Gal. 5:24, King James Version). This usage displays Wôpanâak’s linguistic capacity to combine the idea of submitting to another’s control with participation within a community (in this case, Christian believers). Hoping to get away from the dichotomies with which we speak about Indigenous and white property, I propose centering the term *belonging*, which captures both senses in English *and* translates into various terms from Wôpanâak that also hold this loaded semantic potential.

To place the revolt in its proper regional history, I provide a broad overview of the Mashpee tribe’s struggles concerning forest land in the century leading up to the event. This serves to contextualize Apess’s arrival in Mashpee lands, which I also locate within Apess’s biography. Within this explication, I single out the scene of *Indian Nullification* most pertinent to my essay: the description of the Sampson brothers’ wood poaching, which

Apess and the Mashpee wield to enact the demands of the revolt. I read this moment along the terms of interest outlined in my analysis of the text's frontispiece: How does the wood evoke questions of property and land? How does the moment stand as a conflict between proprietary and affiliative belonging? Moving from this bird's-eye view of the Mashpee Revolt, I argue that Apess locates a model for affiliative belonging in one entity in particular: the wooden Meeting-house. I read the building as standing in for the hope of an integrated landscape of belonging, drawing on the work of ecocritics, who consider interspecies belonging in the chaos of forest spaces. By demanding the restoration of the Meeting-house and regarding it as essential to the Mashpee's sense of tribal integrity, Apess suggests that belonging among a community necessarily requires a harmonic relationship with the other beings populating nature. The diverse hodgepodge of life finds a formal analog in the structure of Apess's text, as I detail in the final section of the essay. I read affiliative belonging within the strange, miscellaneous form of *Indian Nullification* overall: a conglomeration of thoughts and voices sparring over a tiny patch of woodland on Cape Cod, *Indian Nullification* gives us an Indigenous proposition on how to belong in nineteenth-century America.

## 2. THE FOREST PROTECTORS OF CAPE COD

William Apess's adopted tribe, the traditional inhabitants of Cape Cod, had bothered the Massachusetts government for decades before he belonged among them. The Mashpee Revolt was the culmination of over a century of tensions surrounding the state government's establishment of the guardianship system. In the early eighteenth century, responding to complaints from Native tribes about poaching and trespassing, the Massachusetts Assembly began to assign "guardians" to the tribes, ostensibly to keep the peace. These guardians were "secular officers from nearby towns . . . who were supposed to help natives handle the legal and economic system" (Mandell 519). This practice was made systemic by a 1746 act for "Better Regulating the Indians." Predictably, abuses by the appointed guardians proliferated.

Among the various Massachusetts tribes, the Mashpee were probably the guardianship system's most fervent protestors, repeatedly petitioning the Assembly in complaint, at one point even sending a delegate—the Mohegan



Ruben Cognehew—to personally appeal to George III in England. In 1763 the Marshpee Act theoretically “restored self-government to Mashpee and banned both settlement and wood poaching” (Brooks 172). But the triumph was short-lived. After the American Revolution, during which the Mashpees had served as soldiers, the government revived the guardianship system, and for the decades to come the tribe faced “the continual threat of poachers, settlers, missionaries, and guardians” (Brooks 173).

In 1811 the minister Phineas Fish was tasked with overseeing the Mashpees’ spiritual lives by offering services at the Mashpees’ meetinghouse. Fish’s Unitarian-inspired doctrines, “based in intellect rather than emotion,” were “unlikely to appeal to his charges, who had been accustomed to Fish’s predecessor’s Calvinist principles” (Gura 75). Throughout the 1820s this grievance, added to the Mashpee overseers’ laxity toward trespassers and Massachusetts’s inadequate support for Indian education, compelled the tribe to exert *de facto* self-rule. The Mashpee fever for self-government culminated on May 21, 1833, when the tribe signed a petition to governor Levi Lincoln that stated, “We, as a tribe, will rule ourselves and have the right to do so; for all men are born free and equal, says the Constitution of the country” (Apress, *IN* 175).

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Mashpees and their neighboring tribes had repeatedly complained about one specific offense: wood poaching (Brooks 169–73). The crime proliferated out of need, as Massachusetts’s forests had been “so extensively felled as scarcely to have left sufficient timber and fuel for the necessary use of the inhabitants” (Dwight 4:456). In the early nineteenth century, northern New England was especially subjected to the invasive and extractive practices of the emerging lumber industry. The region was ideal for loggers for several reasons. Its geographic position meant its logs were easily and quickly transported by sea to the major urban trade centers of Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. But the region’s ecology fueled logging because agriculture was comparatively weak. Logging historian Thomas Cox writes that the region’s farmers had to cut trees to “augment the meager output of their farms” (6). For manifold reasons, then, Massachusetts’s forests had been vastly denuded by the 1820s.

The state’s tribal lands proved an exception: on them, Indigenous peoples kept forests sustainably—especially the Mashpee, whose lands were perceived as what Lisa Brooks calls “an untapped source of timber begging

for domestication" (170). From Brooks's characterization, we can see how respect for Indigenous rights and territory impedes settler colonialism and its commercial engine. While this is a common aspect of any encounter between settler colonials and Indigenous persons, it was especially true in the case of northern New England's lumber industry. As Cox notes, it was only when "Indian . . . threats" were "eliminated" that "settlements largely dependent upon timber" could arise on the St. Croix and Penobscot Rivers in Maine (34). The lumber trade emerging in Apess's time and place was an active agent in eliminating Indigenous stewardship for the sake of settler colonial proprietorship and economy. These historical conditions added to the guardianship system's continued blind eye to wood poaching rendered the Mashpee's trees ripe for wanton cutting, objects of proprietary belonging.

Appropriately, Apess's account of the revolt pivots on a moment of wood poaching. The theft occurs a few pages into *Indian Nullification* and thereafter is persistently referred back to as a test case of Mashpee rights. On June 25, 1833, a little over a month after making their initial resolution for self-government, the Mashpee sent a "notice" to the "public at large" of their intention to "put a stop to" being "distressed, and degraded, and robbed daily" (179). Conjoined to this notice was a letter to the current Mashpee guardian Gideon Hawley, in which the tribe declared Hawley's dismissal from any oversight duties by July 1. As Apess relates, this new set of resolutions was met with "astonishment" from its addressees, who reported "open rebellion" to the governor (180). But before the governor could intervene, the matter came to a head.

On July 1, Apess and other members of the Mashpee confronted two brothers of the Sampson family, who "holding themselves in readiness to break up the new government . . . came, in defiance of our resolutions, to take away the wood in carts" (181). Per his own account, Apess "mildly stated . . . the views and intentions of the tribe" to one of the Sampsons, "begg[ing] them to desist, for the sake of peace" (181). The Sampsons refused, saying that "they knew what they were about and resolved to load their team," but Apess defiantly ordered the Mashpees to "unload" the Sampson teams (181). Though one of the Sampsons, a "justice of the peace," "threatened to prosecute them," the Mashpees' insistent unloading forced the Sampsons' "teamsters" to run off, while the Sampsons themselves "hurried off to get the aid of legal might" (181–82). The event was an apex of action in more

ways than one: it was the first physical escalation of the Mashpee Revolt as well as the climactic event of *Indian Nullification*, a text whose subsequent pages deal mostly with the print battle over the Mashpees' rights.

I want to rest on this pivotal moment in *Indian Nullification* to make an important distinction: while the implicit felling of the trees underpins the scene and all the Mashpees' complaints, Apess's depiction makes the Sampsons' offense far more about the *carting away* of the trees. It is the carting, after all, that we see in the frontispiece, not the cutting. It is the carting that is persistently named as the Sampsons' affront in Apess's account: "They came to *take away our woods in carts*"; "when they had done, I told the justice that he had, perhaps, better encourage others to *carry away* what did not belong to them"; "it was useless to attempt to *load the carts*" (181; emphasis added). We come to the poaching scene with the trees already cut. What is up for grabs is not whether the trees are felled, but which people get to move the logs. The Mashpee desire not so much the preservation of upright trees but, rather, the right to dictate where to lug their felled remains. Against the Sampsons' insistence on "load[ing] their teams," Apess ironically retorts that "the men who owned the wood were resolved to *carry* their resolutions into force" (181; emphasis added). If the disparagement of Indian rights was represented by the removal of felled trees from Mashpee lands, the restoration of those rights could be figuratively achieved not by preventing woodcutting but by ensuring control over the timber's mobility.

Apess's pun on "carry" joins political self-determination with control over wood. Indeed, sovereignty has long been bound up with forest management, but the conflation of forest sovereignty with sovereignty writ large ought not compel us to a straightforward reading of the poaching scene as a conflict over political power. Proprietary belonging—who owns the logs and holds power over their source lands—is less at stake than the question of whether trees qua logs can dependably partake in the practice of affiliative belonging, components in a locality's continuing integrity. Wood-carting, not wood-cutting, is the highlighted offense because it is the act of carrying away that extracts substance from the Mashpee's territory by altering its material composition. Maintenance of the forests on Mashpee land is crucial to the possibility of the tribe's coherent and consistent affiliation with their territory. More than merely laying claim to possession over the Mashpee trees, Apess's text hypothesizes an altogether different notion of property, rooted not in individual claims to power over

land but in a relationship with land that nurtures communality with nature and in nature.

### 3. THE MASHPEE NULLIFICATION

Though one day fated to join the ranks of the Mashpee, William Apess was born with Pequot roots. His family had lived near Colchester, Connecticut, close to territory given to what remained of the Pequots in the eighteenth century, but had moved to the small town of Coleraine, Massachusetts, shortly before Apess's birth in 1798. His father, also William Apes (b. 1770), was of mixed-race heritage but, by Apess's own account, saw himself as a Pequot. Scholars regard the identity of his mother as a veritable unsolvable mystery, as she is unlisted by birth records and William Apes's wife at the time, Candace Taylor, was a mixed African-Native enslaved woman who would not be freed by her master Captain Joseph Taylor until 1805, making an extended stay with her husband in Colrain unlikely (Gura 4–5).<sup>9</sup>

Whoever his biological parents were, Apess's various guardians—his father, Candace Taylor, and his grandmother—were all so abusive of Apess that he was placed into the care of various white families and eventually bound out as an indentured servant (Gura xiv). A teenage Apess enlisted as a drum boy in the War of 1812 and contemporaneously developed an interest in Methodism, formally converting after the Treaty of Ghent (Gura xiv). In 1825 Methodist leaders assigned Apess to work as an exhorter, so that over the next few years he itinerantly preached in northeastern cities while simultaneously working as a colporteur of religious books (Gura 39).

Having honed his oratorical and written skills on the circuit, in 1829 Apess self-published *A Son of the Forest*, an autobiography of his life up to that point, but it sold poorly until he revised it in 1831. Later that year, Apess moved to Boston, a hotbed for the abolition movement, where, according to Philip Gura, he crystallized his views on racism and the American government's dispossession of the nation's Indigenous people (44–45, 54).

*Indian Nullification of the Unconstitutional Laws of Massachusetts* covers the Mashpee Revolt, which Apess became involved in after encountering the tribe's struggle on a ministerial trip in May 1833. Upon arriving in Mashpee territory, Apess was greeted by the white minister mentioned above, Phineas Fish, who offered him the pulpit for the following Sunday.

Apess expected to find tribal churchgoers in the Mashpee Meeting-house but found, instead, that most of the Meeting-house's attendees were white. The Mashpee Christians congregated elsewhere in the territory, instructed by the Baptist minister Blind Joe Amos. The Mashpees met Apess in the woods the following afternoon, when the Pequot preached to them about education and temperance and offered his sympathies with regard to the recent trouble with the Massachusetts government.

Over the next few weeks, mingling and preaching among the Mashpees, Apess eventually "so energized" the tribe that they called a council of the whole tribe on May 21, 1833 (Gura 79). At this meeting, Apess encouraged the tribe toward drafting their firmest resolution yet toward the state government. Briefly quoted above, this resolution demanded self-government and the prohibition of wood poaching. The notice also promised that the Mashpee themselves would enforce their determinations against trespassing. Finally, the council pushed through another resolution, affixed to the others: the adoption of Apess and his family, avowedly for the legal convenience it would afford him in his advocacy for the Mashpee.

It was in the wake of these declarations, and its reaffirmation on June 25, 1833, that the July 1 incident between the Mashpees and the Sampson brothers' team of wood-haulers occurred. On July 3, two days after the wood-poaching dispute came to pass, a representative of governor Levi Lincoln named Josiah Fiske arrived in Mashpee territory and asked the Mashpee to meet him at the tavern of Ezra Crocker, a man who "not unfrequently [*sic*] thrust" Indians "out" of his establishment (Apess, *IN* 182). Affronted, the Mashpee made a counteroffer to meet on the following day at the Meeting-house. Thus, on Independence Day a crowd of Mashpees occupied their Meeting-house and, when Fiske and his ilk arrived, aired their grievances.

In the course of their meeting, Apess was arrested on charges of "riot, assault, and trespass"; he was eventually sentenced to thirty days in jail and a fine of one hundred dollars (Apess, *IN* 184). Over the course of the next year, the plight of the Mashpee was the subject of fervent debate in local newspapers; excerpts from these comprise much of *Indian Nullification*, which Apess published in 1835. Victories eventually came, but took time: not until 1836 did the Mashpee earn the right to pick their own clergyman, and not until 1840 was Fish moved to a neighboring community (Gura 96-97).

*Indian Nullification* homes in on the resistance of a few hundred people over a few years; it is a small history of a small patch of land on Cape Cod. Yet the book's title explodes its scope, immediately summoning associations with the near-contemporaneous Nullification Crisis of 1832–33. Through the title of his text, Apess was suggesting that the Mashpee could counteract Massachusetts's laws, unjust in their inadequate protection of land ownership. Nullification, more than simply refusing a law, "draw[s] attention to [the law's] injustice," as Hannah Manshel writes (755). The Apessian claim drew on newfound proclamations of local political power: "Who can say that little Mashpee might not have discomforted great Massachusetts?" (Apess, *IN* 183). Apess's declaration of the doctrine of Indian Nullification places the Mashpee desire to consolidate their lands and its contents into a national conversation about federalism.

In 1833 the nation already had an Indian political entity to act as a test case in questions of federal relations. The Cherokee's centrality in discussions and determinations of Indian rights in the early 1830s emerged from a pair of Supreme Court cases involving their territory's jurisdiction. In *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* (1831), Cherokees appealed to the Supreme Court in the aftermath of the passage of the Indian Removal Act; their grievances centered around Georgia's incursions into Cherokee land in violation of the tribe's treaties with the federal government. In that case, Chief Justice John Marshall famously defined the Cherokee polity as a "domestic dependent nation," a phrase that slyly eluded "an unwanted confrontation with state power and the executive branch" (Howe 355). Marshall was more firm with his support of Native sovereignty in the next year's *Worcester v. Georgia* (1832), in which he declared that "the law of Georgia can have no right to enter [tribal lands] but with the assent of the Cherokees" (Howe 356).

Apess's inquiry into the possibility of a tribal nation's sovereignty was undoubtedly invoking the contemporaneous Cherokee dilemma. Indeed, the comparison between the Mashpee and the Cherokee is made time and again in *Indian Nullification*, usually to the detriment of white intellectuals in Massachusetts, a group who, in the early 1830s, was "generally pro-Cherokee" (Konkle 135). "Sympathy for Indians," Maureen Konkle says, "was . . . the correct, moral position for U.S. elite intellectuals to espouse" (24). With the plight of the neighboring Mashpee so nearby and so obviously parallel to the Georgia tribe's troubles, Apess depicted exclusive

support for the Cherokee as indicative of the hypocrisy and limited vision of Boston's intellectual class. Strewn throughout the pages of *Indian Nullification* are indictments of that cultural milieu: "If the good people of Massachusetts were as ready to do right as to have the Georgians do right, the Marshpee Indians might, perhaps, send a representative to the Legislature"; "Where are all our Cherokee philanthropists, at this time?"; "How will the white man of Massachusetts ask favor for the red men of the South, while the poor Marshpee red men, his near neighbors, sigh in bondage?" (Apess, *IN* 192, 202, 205).

Apess's advancement of tribal sovereignty shows that the Mashpee Revolt was, in part, about what I have called proprietary belonging. The ability to control a piece of territory and enforce laws on its inhabitants is vital to fostering a communal life within it. Proprietary and affiliative belonging are never quite extricable, some degree of the former necessary to engender the latter. In the next section, I explore how the Mashpees' attempts at achieving proprietary belonging over the wooden Meeting-house are concurrently enrichments of their territory's affiliative belonging.

#### 4. BELONGING AMONG THE MASHPEE

For the Mashpees to create something in and of the forest, they first had to ensure their avowed property rights over their lands, possession of which could provide the security to expel white people trespassing in bad faith. In a letter to Hallett reprinted in the *Boston Daily Advocate*, an unnamed Mashpee "correspondent" observes: "It is true we have land in Mashpee" (Apess, *IN* 197–98). The statement's simplicity, nearly tautological, underscores the illogicality of the subsequent sentences: "We can stay upon it; but we have had to pay one dollar per cord, to the overseers, for our own wood, and take it or carry it just where these men said" (Apess, *IN* 198). The Mashpee author hopes to display the hollowness of the state government's claims of having acknowledged Indigenous property, exemplified by the white congregants having taken control of the Meeting-house made for the Mashpee: there is no consistent relationship between the standard claim of "having land" and having bona fide control over the land's materials. "All the Indians ask," wrote Apess, was to "take away [the] pretended gift. . . . Let us have our Meeting-house and our land" (255).

Wood represents property in general, a relationship implied by Apess's own slippage between the terms at the beginning of his recollection of the wood poaching: "As I was walking in the woods, I discovered [the Sampsons] in the act of removing our property" (181). When the wood is removed, it comes to represent the extraction of value, suggesting wood's eminent fungibility. Carting away logs might represent the carting away of anything, a level of transformative potential voiced by Apess himself: "They might have carted a few more good suppers and dinners out of our woods" (186). Since trees are typically aged, at least compared to humans, they are easy emblems of Indigeneity; to take them away is to take away a birthright and display irreverence for the level of familiarity achieved only by extended acquaintance. In an 1833 article in the *Boston Advocate* (reproduced by Apess in *Indian Nullification*) evaluating Massachusetts laws pertaining to Indian governance, one law is said to cause the Indians to "greatly complain": "No Indian or other person is to cut wood without a permit in writing" (Apess, *IN* 210–11). This causes grief to the Indians because "it gives them no more privilege in cutting their own wood than a stranger has" (Apess, *IN* 211). To make the Mashpee equivalent to "strangers" is to reverse their Indigeneity with a cruel irony, to abolish what Australian Aboriginal scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson describes as the "radical, indeed incommensurable difference" between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples: the "inalienable relation to land" (11). The age of trees worth cutting is matched by the longevity of Indigenous life in the woodlands. The Mashpees' grab at their "inheritance," the trees in danger of carting, was a grab at objects that attractively represent a *longue durée* to which the tribe could lay an equivalent claim.

But if wood and the Mashpees both occupy subject positions marked by an extended inhabitation of Cape Cod, the great symbol of their comingling, of the Mashpees living with the woods and through the wood, was one structure: the Meeting-house, constructed out of wood in 1684, standing on Mashpee lands even today. The Mashpee Meeting-house is the primary setting for *Indian Nullification's* opening scenes; the building's takeover by white adherents led by Fish is the text's initial problem. Apess's pastoral description of the Meeting-house stresses its age while seeming to integrate the building into its adjacent environment, the woodlands nominally owned by the Mashpee: "The sacred edifice stood in the midst of a



noble forest and seemed to be about a hundred years old, circumstances which did not render its appearance less interesting. Hard by was an Indian burial ground, overgrown with pines" (170). A meetinghouse was vital in structuring Native space and society in Apess's life and times, as Lisa Brooks explains: "The Indian meetinghouse . . . became an embedded part of the landscape: it visibly marked the village territory and . . . maintain[ed] the communal body" (166).

The Meeting-house, in other words, was the primary locus of affiliative belonging, and its appropriation by white stymied Mashpee efforts to cultivate a sense of place. We have seen already that wood's figurative flexibility allows its theft to stand for the breaking of the avowed property relation more generally. By taking effective possession of the Mashpees' most sacred wooden construction—the highest mark of their tribal usage of the forest—Fish and his ilk placed a roadblock in the Mashpees' capacity to foster affiliative belonging with their environment; the structure in question was meant for worship, the most important communal practice for the tribe. Fish has enacted, in Hallett's words, "a *perversion* of [the] *liberal purpose*" of "erect[ing]" buildings "for the mental and moral improvement of the Indians" (Apess, *IN* 234–35; emphasis in the original). Fish's theft of spiritual expression through his occupation of the wooden building is underscored by the fact that Fish himself is a wood thief, at the time of the revolt "cutting perhaps 200 cords of wood, justly belonging to the Indians," by "employing men to cut and cart wood off the plantation, for his support" (Apess, *IN* 252, 264). The seizure of wood in this instance concomitantly threatens Mashpee souls.

The Meeting-house's wooden composition also made it a site of belonging insofar as its integration into the forest landscape casts it as a model for commingling, or belonging with, the environment. The Meeting-house's teeming presence in the Mashpee woods opposes the ethos of the Sampsons' wood-carting, which took trees away from use on tribal lands. We can conceive of the Meeting-house as a structural reconfiguration of the forest, especially considering the latter site's capacity to inspire religious gathering. Methodist camp meetings, of course, often took place in the woods. That both the wooden Meeting-house and the forest—the human construction and its raw material analog—could serve the Mashpee's religious needs underscores the amalgamation of the tribe's territory. The Meeting-house and its surroundings are an exhibition of how diverse parts affiliate.<sup>10</sup> Apess's

vision of the Meeting-house shows that, in Mashpee hands, the ax builds communality; a tool of elimination could build. Could the transformation of the woods into the Meeting-house, a process of synthesis tokened by the vistas of Mashpee lands, represent healthy assemblage and fashioning?

Apess's theorization anticipates contemporary ecocritics who propose one way humans might relate to the forest: through psychological and spiritual interspecies connections. The forest space is especially interesting in this regard for the vast diversity of its ecological life, whose interactions with each other create a complexity that challenges, at times overwhelmingly, the attempted ideas of order that humans foist on the land. As Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing writes in *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, "interspecies entanglements" have become "materials for serious discussion" among contemporary biologists, who "show how life requires the interplay of many kinds of beings" (vii). Humans, Tsing writes, "cannot survive by stomping on all the others," displaying an ethic of life within nature exemplified by the sylvan underpinnings of the Mashpees' spiritual entrenchment in their Meeting-house (vii).

In the same vein, Eduardo Kohn's *How Forests Think* asks us to see the forest as "filled with selves," neither reducible "to the forest nor to the cultures and histories of those humans who relate to it" (217). The challenge of life in the forest, Kohn writes, is to "blu[r] . . . interspecies boundaries" while yet "maintaining difference," recognizing humanity as distinct from other species but inextricable from them (140). The blurring of boundaries between humans and nature is a recurring element of Apess's works, perhaps best exemplified by the title of his autobiography, *A Son of the Forest*. That book also contains a more extended paean to the life of the forest in Apess's recollection of his leisurely expeditions into the woods near the Bay of Quinte, a place full of the "most beautiful and romantic appearance," displaying the "wisdom of God in order, regularity, and beauty of creation" (33). God's benevolence is even better showcased in the Indigenous inhabitants whose lives are marked by "the utmost order and regularity," making the forest "see[m] alive"; chaos, by contrast, is brought in by white settlers who do not "act like a civilized people" (33). Apess continues his depiction of vibrant sylvan life marked by the human concordance with nature in his final published work, the *Eulogy on King Philip* (1836), which describes the eponymous royal as an "all-accomplished son of the forest" (277). Apess ensures that Philip's impressiveness is seen in

conjunction with his sylvan state: “Who was Philip[?] . . . A son of nature, with nature’s talents alone. And who did he . . . contend with? With all the combined arts of cultivated talents of the Old and New world. . . . And yet Philip . . . accomplished more than all of them” (305). In *Indian Nullification*, this notion of human existence in tandem with nature grounds Apess’s condemnation of the removal of Mashpee logs from its forest but not its overall cutting. Apess’s advocacy displays an acknowledgment of the human dependence on wood, not only insofar as it facilitates life but as it builds communality.

*Indian Nullification*’s narrative and spatial centering on the wooden Meeting-house can be seen not only as an affirmation of the Mashpees’ property rights in a Euro-American conception of possession but also as a proposal of a different relationship between people and environment. Drew Lopenzina characterizes the reoccupation of the Meeting-house on July 4, 1833, as “shift[ing] the very ground on which matters stood, converting the meetinghouse from a site of colonial control to a space of Native resistance” (202). Indigenous resistance resisted colonial spatiality in particular. Brooks distinguishes European land tenure practices, which “involved delineating boundaries between subjects and between subjects and objects” from Native “understandings of land ‘rights,’” which “were always relational” (68). Retrieving the Meeting-house that had been built for them restored the building to its proper owners—and its proper conceivers of ownership. The desire to belong among other people and things sustains the Mashpee efforts at regaining control of their wood, their woods, their Meeting-house, and their land. I have gleaned these affiliative tendencies from what Apess tells us in the pages of *Indian Nullification*, but in this essay’s final section I suggest that affiliative belonging appears in the text’s multivocal structure, which emphasizes compilation and discourse.

##### 5. STRUCTURING BELONGING

The question of belonging is one of form. How one might envision relationships between people and their environments, and the forces shaping both, can be explored in the construction of a literary text, especially one as heterogeneous as *Indian Nullification*. If *Indian Nullification* seeks to promote and affirm affiliative belonging among the Mashpee, it is also a text whose own construction displays relationally.

Apess's text is a formal hodgepodge. Gura calls it an "amalgam of newspaper articles, documents, and [Apess's] own commentary" (97). An enormous part, quite possibly a majority, of the book quotes words other than Apess's. The text provides examples of points and counterpoints from the battle in print during and after the Revolt: "All the editors were very willing to speak on the favorite topic of Indian wrongs" (Apess, *IN* 190). The clippings are often merely affixed to each other, presented with the barest comment; articles in favor of the Mashpee are placed into the text with something like Apess's mute endorsement, while those against the tribe are thrown in ironically, with sarcastic impatience. Barry O'Connell describes the text as an "odd book," "directly and indirectly . . . the work of many hands, more a documentary of the controversy than a singular account" (165).

As mentioned before, the book is subtitled "The Pretended Riot Explained." The thoroughness of the text's coverage of the Mashpee Revolt and the discourse it inspired fulfill the enlargement promised by the etymology of *explain*: "to spread out flat," "to unfold." Apess renews the covenant of explanation in his primary narrative's opening line, which itself unfolds, yawning: "It being my desire, as well as my duty as a preacher of the gospel, to do as much good as in me lay to my red brethren, I occasionally paid them a visit, announcing and *explaining* to them the word of life, when opportunity offered" (169; emphasis added). In Apess's introduction, he also vows to explain "how he has become one of" the Mashpee by adoption (168). Apess's generous and zeugmatic employment of explanation—onto the "Pretended Riot," the "word of life," and his own adoption—reflects the text's other commitments to remodeling and augmentation (169). Wood for instance, arguably also "explains"—unfolds out into—property, which itself may be seen as "explaining" a more generalized concept of belonging.

The text's propensity to "explain," presenting itself as a multitude of things, may drive it toward incoherence, as O'Connell seems to suggest. In other ways, however, its tendency toward collection fulfills generic conventions: extensive quotation is typical in critiques of antebellum racial systems. Abolitionist texts like David Walker's *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World* (1829), Theodore Dwight Weld's *American Slavery as It Is* (1839), and Harriet Beecher Stowe's *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1853) all depend on reproducing testimonials, articles, and other secondary sources. But besides drawing off of the era's generic expectations, the

text's messiness may also reflect a peculiarly Indigenous attitude toward assemblage. Lopenzina points out that Apess's inclusion of his opponents' editorials makes *Indian Nullification* a "uniquely spatially conceived text," in which one tome contains various, opposing voices (208). For Lopenzina, the text represents a "decidedly indigenous approach to conflict resolution," like the "condolence ceremony of the Haudenosaunee that asks all parties to join in a cleared space to ritually wipe away the tears and obstructions of grief" (208).

In such a process, Apess himself can become obscured. Indeed, at times in *Indian Nullification* Apess willfully and vocally recuses himself from possessing too much influence, as though he prefers a minimalist authorial presence: "My comments thereupon will be omitted, because, should I say all the subject suggests, it would swell my book to a bulk that would be wearisome to the reader" (205). In removing himself from the perch of overwhelming authorship Apess brings himself into the text as one among many, a model of affiliative belonging. Instead of an omniscient, detached narrator of fiction, the centered narrator-subject hybrid of autobiography, or the narrator-as-character of a novel like *Tom Jones*, the Apess of *Indian Nullification* sits in a position of seeming equality with the others involved in the Mashpee Revolt. He is a narrator who, as we see, makes gestures to refuse narratorial control, as often vilified in the pages of *Indian Nullification* as he is vindicated by his personal account.

Indeed, the one moment when Apess's personal story *does* take center stage proves to model the associative form of belonging exhibited by the text's structure. Apess's adoption is primarily discussed as a formality performed to seal legal leaks: "As . . . I was not a son of their particular tribe, if they wished me to assist them, it would be necessary for them to give me a right to act in their behalf by adopting me" (173). Critics like Lopenzina, David Carlson, and Margaret Bruchac have followed Apess's lead in placing it within this avowed legal milieu (Lopenzina 199; Carlson 118; Bruchac 740). In a sense, then, these critics suggest that Apess envisioned his relationship with the Mashpee as one of proprietary belonging, allowing the tribe to use his services effectively.

I take a different view, finding the brief remarks that Apess presents about his newfound affiliative kinship status inextricable from the models of belonging in his depiction of the wood poaching. The adoption

declaration contains words of uncharacteristic warmth in the mostly legal-political-speak of *Indian Nullification*:

*To all whom it may concern from the beginning of the world up to this time, and forever more.*

Be it known, that we, the Marshpees, now assembled in the presence of God, do hereby agree to adopt the Rev. William Apes, of the Pequot tribe, as one of ours. He, and his wife, and his two children, and those of his descendants, forever, are to be considered as belonging to the Marshpee tribe of Indians. And we solemnly avow this, in the presence of God, and of one another, and do hereby attach our names to the same, that he may take his seat with us and aid us in our affairs. Done at the Council House in Marshpee, and by the authority of the same, May 21st, 1833.

EBENEZER ATTAQUIN, *President*

ISRAEL AMOS, *Secretary* (174)

There is, to be sure, an eye to the practical in the notice: Apes is “avow[ed]” a Mashpee to “aid us in our affairs.” It is admittedly a document marked by immediate circumstances, by tribal members “now assembled” at a specific place and date. But on the other hand, this minuscule paragraph reaches high: by this notice the Mashpee expanded their tribe by four (for the present moment), an augmentation reflecting the breadth of the notice’s header, which universalizes the claim across time and humanity. The notice’s listing of Apes and his various family members is paradigmatically additive, the preponderance of connecting conjunctions and commas slowing the sentence down, culminating in the promise that the Mashpee’s embrace of the Apesses is both abundant (“his descendants”) and perpetual (“forever”). And right at the heart of the declaration is the definition of the Apesses’ relation to the tribe: “belonging,” here shining in its affiliative form, displayed by this vow made by the Mashpee “in the presence . . . of one another,” exuded by the announcement’s shape and signification.

The adoption notice reflects the expansiveness of kinship practices among Indigenous tribes of the Eastern Woodlands, as explained by Mohegan scholar Melissa Tantaquidgeon Zobel: “Indigenous kinship allows differing communities to cohabit a shared ecosystem for many generations, and even, in the aftermath of war, to make peace by making new

relatives. Indigenous kinship allows one person to trust another person with their children, as their own" (xii). Among the Mashpee of Cape Cod, Apess, long worn down by abusive familial relationships, found a people to claim him—in writing, no less—with echoing enthusiasm, as in the text's most poignant affirmation of the adoption's claims of everlasting tenure: "We have made choice of the Rev. Wm. Apes, of the Pequot tribe, and have adopted him as one of ours, and shall hear him preach, in preference to the missionary, and we should like to have him aided, if you can do it. If not, we cannot help it—he is ours—he is ours" (176–77).

The Mashpee's pithy and resounding claim of possession over Apess marks his adoption as a model of intersubjectivity. There is a redefinition of "ours" in the repetition of "he is ours," which itself reiterates the promise of the adoption notice: "one of ours." The word is used not, as is usual, to indicate possession over an entity but, rather, as the marker demanding and reiterating the joining together of Apess with his tribe. Belonging is a yoking in "he is ours—he is ours," the duplicate phrases brought together by a punctuational bridge, whose connected sides become altered, unable to be understood alone. The dash represents the social bond forming the affiliation in which Apess, at long last, had become enmeshed. It shows us how text presents belonging, an emblem of the book's formal unifications.

How to live among others and in space? These are questions that Apess implicitly answers in his manner of structuring his odd text. In considering how form represents affiliative belonging, I have been guided by David Palumbo-Liu's direction that "form is always . . . an integral aspect of a meditation on the possibilities of being together, and the conditions in which such being can be not only imagined, but built" (224). Native hopes of construction, whether aimed at building structures or cohesive communities and networks, have long been stymied by colonial intrusions, settler thefts, white wood-carvings. If to see an old tree is, to invoke philosopher David Wood's lyrical description, to get an "uncanny sense . . . that this living being existed before my time, and before all the things that concern me, and very likely will carry on after me," then seeing that old tree's remains dragged off its native territory threatens the memory of an Indigenous past and the possibility of an Indigenous future (47).

I have read *Indian Nullification* as Apess's optimistic supposition of the Indigenous nations that could be, an optimism at odds both with the nation's history of Indigenous and environmental policies and with Apess's life

to come. By late 1836 Apess had left his adopted tribe for New Bedford, and by 1837 we find him in New York, where advertisements for his speeches call him “an educated Indian of the Pequot tribe” (Lopezina 238). Here, in the slightest of presences, Apess is no longer nominally Mashpee, and we can only surmise how he thought of his adopted tribe. But perhaps the temporariness of his association may remind us of the precarity, and thus the preciousness, of belonging, which coming into fragile being demands the higher esteem. Though all human things are subject to decay, the Old Indian Meeting-house still stands, among the trees, belonging—*ours*—for now, in lovely coexistence with its neighbors.

#### NOTES

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1. Their poses and positions recall Robert Vaughan’s depiction of John Smith “tak[ing] the King of Paspahgh prisoner,” printed next to the map of “Ould Virginia” in Smith’s *The Generall History* (18a).
2. For instance, Andil Gosine calls deforestation “the direct consequence of industrialization . . . and capitalist territorialization” (153). Similarly, Jennifer L. Anderson connects the “widespread deforestation” of mahogany trees to colonial drives to “find, access, and control mahogany sources” in response to “rising consumer demand” (3).
3. Contemporary accounts spell the tribe’s name “Marshpee,” which may occasionally show up in primary source quotes. I follow practically all contemporary scholars, along with the modern-day Wampanoag Mashpee Tribe, in using “Mashpee.”
4. Apess was inconsistent about spelling his name: sometimes it is “Apess,” but more often it is “Apes.” Gura surmises that Apess added the extra “s” to avoid associations with apes. I follow contemporary scholars in using “Apess.”
5. The *Oxford English Dictionary* entry for “belong” is much more extensive than the two meanings I explore here. But both of the meanings of “belong” I am interested in—“to be owned by” and “to be a member or affiliate of a particular group or category”—go back as far as John Gower’s *Confessio Amantis* (1393).
6. For example, a 1684 letter by William Penn reprinted throughout the nineteenth century is directed “to be communicated in . . . the Territories thereunto belonging among Friends” (Clarkson 326). Similarly, the Quaker minister Joseph Hoag alludes to a girl who “did not belong among Friends” in his memoirs (40). Samuel Osgood describes a “sense of belonging to the great spiritual family . . . being cheered by the Universal Light” (52).



7. Later in the century, J. W. De Forest and Felix Octavius Carr Darley's history of Connecticut Indians contains a similar discussion of Indigenous persons: "The General Court . . . ordered them to send away all Indians who did not belong among them" (263).
8. "Natick" is an alternate name for the Wampanoag/Wòpanàak language.
9. My sentence suggests how tangled and poorly documented Apess's biography is, unsurprising for a person of color in the nineteenth century.
10. At one point in *Indian Nullification*, Fish "refuse[s] to let the Indians go into their own Meeting-house," and they simply shuffle off to "assemble under the trees" to pray instead (252).

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