

WILLIAM APPESS, ELIAS BOUDINOT, AND SAMUEL CORNISH:  
NATIVE AMERICANS AND AFRICAN-AMERICANS LOOKING FOR FREEDOM  
OF EXPRESSION, REPRESENTATION, AND RHETORICAL SOVEREIGNTY  
DURING THE AGE OF JACKSON

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ABSTRACT

During the age of Jackson, freedom of expression benefited Native Americans and African-Americans in the United States, as it helped them to battle against misrepresentation and controls of information and to develop a form of rhetorical sovereignty, despite pressures that put some limits upon that freedom of expression and form of sovereignty. Pequot writer William Apess, Cherokee editor Elias Boudinot, and African-American editor Samuel Cornish sought and practiced the right to represent themselves and their ethnic groups. This contributed to the political and cultural survival of their ethnic groups. Scott Lyons says, “Rhetorical sovereignty is the inherent right and ability of *peoples* to determine their own communicative needs and desires in this pursuit, to decide for themselves the goals, modes, styles, and languages of public discourse.” This dissertation puts rhetorical sovereignty into a historical context, finding that the concept may promote freedom of expression and the right of rhetorical representation for “*peoples*” but not for individual people.