

Excerpt from *The Barbarous Years: The peopling of British North America: The conflict of civilizations, 1600-1675* by Bernard Bailyn. © 2012 by Bernard Bailyn. Published by Vintage Books, a division of Random House, Inc., New York. Used here under Fair Use guidelines for educational purposes.

As for the Indians, whose conversion he had expected to accomplish, he found them

entirely savage and wild, strangers to all decency, yea, uncivil and stupid as garden stakes, proficient in all wickedness and ungodliness, devilish men, who serve nobody but the Devil, that is, the spirit which in their language they call Menetto, under which title they comprehend everything that this subtle and crafty and beyond human skill and power. They have so much witchcraft, divination, sorcery and wicked arts that they can hardly be held in by bands or locks. They are as thievish and treacherous as they are tall, and in cruelty they are altogether inhuman, more than barbarous, far exceeding the Africans.

He could not imagine how the Dutch had been misled into believing the “docility of this people and their good nature.” He could find “hardly a single good point” in them. Their language, full of “difficult aspirates and many guttural letters ... formed more in the throat than by the mouth, teeth and lips,” seemed impossible for others to learn. In fact, “they rather try to conceal their language from us than to properly communicate it.” It was not, he concluded, a proper language at all, but something “made up, childish,” a private jargon, so private that when spoken in conversation even the most experienced traders could not understand it. Given what he considered to be the Indians’ stupidity, superstition, and barbarous language, it was hopeless to think of leading them to salvation. God, when described, had no reality for them (it was “like a dream”), and if one appealed to their own culture and referred instead to “one great, yea, most high sackiema” (sachem), that struck them as “a silly fable.” What could one do with people like this? The only possibility he could see was to concentrate on the children: wean them away from their own people with “presents and compromises” and teach them a proper language, the fundamentals of Christianity, and virtuous living, all of which they might spread among their people.