

BERNARD BAILYN

*Pulitzer Prize-winning author of VOYAGERS TO THE WEST*

# The Barbarous Years

*The Peopling of British North America:  
The Conflict of Civilizations, 1600-1675*

THE PEOPLING OF  
BRITISH NORTH AMERICA

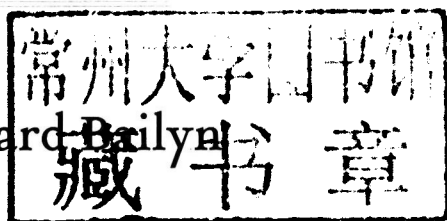


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1600-1675

Bernard Bailyn



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# **The Barbarous Years**

FOR  
LOTTE

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## Introduction

THIS BOOK IS a major part of a project I set out some years ago, to give an account of the peopling of British North America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Publication began with a sketch of aspects of the subject as a whole (*The Peopling of British North America: An Introduction*), which traced the broad outlines of the European population movements that resulted in the repeopling of the eastern borderlands of North America. That book concluded with a view of an emerging North American society that mingled barbarism and gentility, and that contained strange, at times bizarre, distensions of familiar European forms of life.

There followed a study of the movements of some ten thousand immigrants from Britain to America in the years 1773–76. The statistical base of that book, *Voyagers to the West: A Passage in the Peopling of America on the Eve of the Revolution*, was made possible by the survival of a complete register of departures from the British Isles in those pre-Revolutionary years. From the register's 350 closely written folio sheets one could reconstruct the predominant socioeconomic characteristics of this entire migrant population, the geographical contours of their wanderings, the new communities they formed, modeled on what they recalled of those they had left behind, and the transatlantic communication networks they created.

The present book precedes *Voyagers* in time. It first sketches the world of the native Americans in eastern North America before the arrival of significant numbers of Europeans, then recounts in regional narratives the first great transit of people from Britain, Europe, and Africa, and concludes

with a sketch of the transformed world of British North America after seventy-five years of conquest. It is an account of the fortunes of the founding generations of Europeans and their conflicted involvements with the indigenous peoples. But though contemporary population estimates and local censuses of particular groups appear throughout the book, it has no comprehensive statistical base. The data do not exist. Much is known, however, of the migrants', and to a lesser degree the natives', backgrounds, behavior, enterprises, and common experiences; and in the scattered sources one can find some evidence, however fragmentary, of their inner lives, their motives, beliefs, fears, and aspirations.

Of one characteristic of the immigrant population there can be no doubt. They were a mixed multitude. They came from England, the Netherlands, the German and Italian states, France, Africa, Sweden, and Finland; and they moved out to the western hemisphere for different reasons, from different social backgrounds and cultures, and under different auspices and circumstances. Even those who came from England—the majority of the immigrant population of the founding years—fitted no distinct socioeconomic or cultural pattern. They came from all over the realm, bearing with them diverse lifestyles. They came from the commercialized, modernizing southeast, especially the great conurbation of London; from remote, isolated farmlands in the north still close to their medieval origins; from enterprising towns in the midlands, the south, and the west; from dales, fens, grasslands, and wolds; and they represented the entire spectrum of Christian communions, from Counter-Reformation Catholicism to Anglican Episcopacy, Puritan Calvinism, Arminianism, Anabaptism, Millenarianism, and semimystical Quakerism. For England in the seventeenth century was composed of a multitude of regional and religio-ideological subcultures, which would meld and re-form in the open environment of the colonies. And the English mingled with other Europeans, clashed at times savagely with the indigenous peoples whose worlds they exploited but did not understand, and formed networks of association stretching from the Appalachian Mountains to western Europe, Latin America, the Caribbean, and Africa, all part of the immense socio-economic structure of Atlantic civilization.

**HERBERT BUTTERFIELD** REMARKED that history should be both a study and a story. What follows are studies within stories, long familiar stories and new stories of the early years of British North America—narratives

of how the land was peopled and then repopled and with what results. I have attempted to tell these stories with new details of individual lives, however obscure, and within a broad pan-Atlantic framework. At the heart of these narratives is the struggle of the Europeans, low and high born, to re-create, if not to improve, in this remote and, to them, barbarous environment, the life they had known before. But their experiences were not mainly of triumph but of confusion, failure, violence, and the loss of civility as they sought to normalize abnormal situations and to recapture lost worlds, in the process tearing apart the normalities of the people whose world they had invaded. In this, British and Dutch America was not different from Spanish or Portuguese America. The British and Dutch overseas conquests were as brutal as those of the other conquering nations, in certain places and at certain times as genocidal. All the people involved—native Americans, Europeans, latterly Africans—struggled for survival with outlandish aliens, rude people, uncultured in what mattered. All—native Americans, Europeans, and Africans—felt themselves dragged down or threatened with descent into squalor and savagery. All sought to restore the civility they once had known.

Later generations, reading back into the past the outcome they knew, would gentrify this early passage in the peopling of British North America; but there was nothing genteel about it. It was a brutal encounter—brutal not only between the Europeans and the native peoples, despite occasional efforts at accommodation, and between Europeans and Africans, but among the Europeans themselves, as they sought to control and prosper in the new configurations of life that were emerging around them. In the process they created new vernacular cultures and social structures similar to but confusingly different from what had been known before, yet effective in this outback of European civilization.

My aim is to recount their experiences as simple narratives that have beginnings and developments but no inevitable outcomes; to identify individuals wherever possible, their personalities, appearances, fortunes, and passions; to reach back into their prior experiences; and to suggest the involvements of this emerging world with the larger scenes of Atlantic history.

B. B.

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PART I

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Foundations







## CHAPTER 1

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# The Americans

## 1

**T**HEY LIVED crowded lives. Few in number by modern demographic standards, even before European diseases tore through their villages like the wrath of God, their world was multitudinous, densely populated by active, sentient, and sensitive spirits, spirits with consciences, memories, and purposes, that surrounded them, instructed them, impinged on their lives at every turn. No less real for being invisible, these vital spirits inhered in the heavens, the earth, the seas, and everything within. They drove the stars in the sky and gave life and sensibility to every bird, animal, and person that existed, and they were active within the earth's materials—rocks, hills, lakes, and rivers—and in the wind, the cold, the heat, and the seasons.

These purposeful, powerful spiritual forces that crowded the Indians' world required respect; care had to be taken not to offend them. One must act prudently, obey ancient precepts, learn complex prescriptions, and take advice from the gracious and sage. There were right ways and wrong ways. There were life-giving empowerments and tangles of prohibitions. When the rules were broken, people suffered.<sup>1</sup>

The earth's generosity, on which survival depended, could be jealously withheld. Profligacy, waste, irreverence could offend. Though a