

# Ronald takaki's "the tempest in the wilderness" essay

[Literature](#), [William Shakespeare](#)



The problem of racial identity remains vital in some parts of the world, even though people claim to live in the civilized racism free society. Thereby, if modern civilized people are unable to cope with racial prejudices, what we can say about England of Shakespeare times. Ronald Takaki tried to consider the problem of racial discrimination of Indians in one of his essays.

He used Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* where the examples of treating Indians by English people are observed. Moreover, Ronald Takaki raises the problem that New England was formed in the conditions of constant discrimination supported with unreasonable stereotypes that gave rise to "the racialization of Indian savagery" (Takaki 907). Having read an essay by Takaki, the following words caught attention:

This process of dehumanizing the Indians developed a peculiarly New England dimension as the colonists associated Indians with the devil. Indian identity became then a matter of 'descent': their racial markers indicated ineradicable qualities of savagery. This social construction of race occurred within the economic context of competition over land (Takaki 907).

The information provided in the essay perfectly states that this was exactly as it was stated. Using *The Tempest* and other plays by Shakespeare, Ronald Takaki tried to show the examples of the attitude of the citizens of New England to Indians. The seizure of Indian property by English is seen.

To begin with, it should be mentioned that Ronald Takaki uses *The Tempest* by Shakespeare not by chance. This play was the first where Indian character was presented. Furthermore, the time when the play was written coincides with the important period in the history of America.

According to Takaki, the time he considers in the essay as the reference to Indian expansion was as follows, " it came after the English invasion of Ireland but before the colonization of New England, after John Smith's arrival in Virginia but before the beginning of the tobacco economy, and after the first contacts with Indians but before full-scale warfare against them" (Takaki 893).

It is really important to consider the time period to understand why the author of the essay dwells upon racialization of savagery. This was the period when English expansionism considered " not only as an imperialism but as a defining moment in the making of an English-American identity based on race" (Takaki 893).

The racialization of savagery was the consequence of mistaken understanding of the reality, wrong conclusions, and lack of desire to evaluate the situation correctly, as it is always easier to place the stereotype on other peoples than to consider their culture, search for specific information and create new opinion.

Ireland was a colony, and English people treated them accordingly. Even the law was cruel, marriages between Irish and English were not allowed, and English apparel and weapons were also forbidden for Irish. The social structure of the society became two-levelled. Irish people were considered as savages, as cultural awareness was one of the main features which made English different from Irish.

Irish people deserved the definition ' savages' as in most cases they behaved accordingly. When the frontier stretched to America, Englishmen began to treat Indians the same as Irish. The parallel which was drawn was one of the main reasons to consider Indians savages, in spite of the fact that the actions of Indians differed from Irish ones.

Takaki refers to the example when the English wrongly considered Irish as only hunters (drawing a direct parallel between hunters and savages), in spite of the fact that they were good farmers (Takaki 906). Such examples are numerous and on their basis it is possible to build a theory that English colonizers did not care much about the real state of things. They have created a specific stereotype which was convenient for them that is why they did not want to ruin it.

Savagery and civilization are two notions which are constantly contrasted in the essay. Having created a wrong opinion that Indians were savages and hunters, the ability to work on the land was not considered as their common occupation, in spite of the fact that they used to be good farmers.

Having passed the law that only those people who use land can possess it, the problem of giving land to Indians has fallen down as " Indians are not able to make use of the one fourth part of the Land"(Takaki 907) according to the opinion of the English. If to consider the problem of land possession as the central one, it may be easily concluded that the authorities tried to limit the number of those who could pretend for land possession.

The economic value of land that time was really high, and the division was considered to be extremely important for many people. The more land one possessed, the more power he/she had. It was obvious that uncivilized Indians which were uneducated could be easily treated. It was necessary to set all Americans against Indians to get the necessary effect. The declaration of all Indians' religion as " diabolical and so uncouth" (Takaki 908) was a profitable step for colonizers.

The cases of epidemic death of Indians may be considered at the actions provoked by the authorities to use the land which belonged to Indians. Still, this fact is difficult to imagine as according to the possessed information European diseases were new for Indians and the absence of immunological defences. This idea was used to make Indians more evil, to relate the case of epidemic case to God's actions and make all people believe that Indians were as bad as were thought to be.

The problem with land and the desire of the authorities to use it in their own purposes led to the situation that many Englishmen became to consider Indians as devil tribes, always savage and violent. Now, this problem is considered to be racialization of savagery as thinking about the Indians, the native population of America, many Englishmen still consider those as savages and unable to become civilized, no matter how long they can live in the modern society.

The main problem considered in the article is the problem of stereotyping attitude to Indians and creation of wrong image with the purpose to benefit

from this. Being Indians, the tribes were considered to be savages as there were no other variants, and as a result, Indians could not be civilized.

One of the main reasons for Indians to be savages was the parallel made between them and Irish. Irish deserved such definition by their actions, rude and violent, while Indians just appeared in the wrong place and the relation to Irish automatically transferred to Indians.

Takaki, Ronald. "The tempest in the wilderness: The racialization of savagery." *The Journal of American History*, 79. 3: 892-912.