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Going to the Source
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respect that I had shown, concerning your Holy Body; you heard the cries of my soul. One of my two French companions, having perceived me, told me that, if those Barbarians saw me keep my thumb, they would make me eat it and swallow it all raw; and that, therefore, I should throw it away somewhere. I obeyed him instantly. They used a scalp or an oyster-shell for cutting off the right thumb of the other Frenchman, so as to cause him more pain. The blood flowing from our wounds in such great abundance that we were likely to swoon, a Huron—tearing off a little end of my shirt, which alone had been left to me—bound them up for us; and that was all the dressing and all the medical treatment applied to them. . .

Word was brought that some warriors, or hunters of men, were conducting thither some Hurons, recently taken. I betook me to the place as best I could. I consoled those poor captives, and having sufficiently instructed them, I conferred upon them holy Baptism; in recompense, I am told that I must die with them. The sentence decreed in the Council is intimated to me; the following night is to be (as they say) the end of my torments and of my life. My soul is well pleased with these words, but not yet was my God—he willed to prolong my martyrdom. Those Barbarians reconsidered the matter, exclaiming that life ought to be spared to the Frenchmen, or rather, their death postponed. They thought to find more moderation at our forts, on account of us. . . Life being granted us, they did us no more harm. . . Some women, more merciful, regarded us with much charity and were unable to look at our sores without compassion.

3 The Mohawks believed they could use Jogues and his compatriots as bargaining chips with the French.

Mary Rowlandson, 1682

The most famous Indian captivity narrative of the colonial era was Mary Rowlandson's, first published in 1682 with the encouragement of Puritan clergyman Increase Mather. It was the first North American captivity narrative with a woman as the central character and the first to be published as a book of its own, rather than as part of a larger travel narrative or collection of stories. It quickly went through several editions in Massachusetts and London. Today, scholars regard it as a classic of early American literature. The following passages describe the Indian attack on Rowlandson's home, her relationship with her captors, and her spiritual reflections on the ordeal.

Now is the dreadfull hour come, that I have often heard of (in time of War as it was the case of others), but now mine eyes see it. Some in our house were fighting for their lives, others wallowing in their blood, the House on fire over our heads, and the bloody Heathen ready to knock us on the head, if we stirred out. Now might we hear Mothers and Children crying out for themselves, and one another, "Lord, what shall we do?" Then I took my Children (and one of my sisters, hers) to go forth and leave the House; but as soon as we came to the door and appeared, the Indians shot so thick that the bullets rattled against the House as if one had taken an handful of stones and threw them so that we were fain to give back.\textsuperscript{1} But out we must go, the fire increasing and coming along behind us roaring, and the Indians gaping before us with their Guns, Spears, and Hatchets to devour us. No sooner were we out of the House, but my Brother in Law (being before wounded, in defending the house, in or near the throat) fell down dead, whereat the Indians scornfully shouted, halloed,\textsuperscript{2} and were presently upon him, stripping off his cloaths, the bullets flying thick, one went through my side, and the same (as would seem) through the bowels and hand of my dear Child in my arms. One of my elder Sisters children, named William, had then his Leg broken, which the Indians perceiving, they knockt him on the head. Thus were we butchered by those merciless Heathen, standing amazed, with the blood running down to our heels.

My eldest Sister being yet in the House and seeing those woeful sights, the infidels hailing mothers one way and children another and some wallowing in their blood, and her elder Son telling that her Son William was dead and my self was wounded, she said, "And, Lord, let me die with them." Which was no sooner said, but she was struck with a Bullet, and fell down dead over the threshold. I hope she is reaping the fruit of her good labours, being faithful to the service of God in her place.... The Indians laid hold of us, pulling me one way, and the Children another, and said, "Come go along with us." I told them they would kill me. They answered, if I were willing to go along with them they would not hurt me....

I had often before this said that if the Indians should come, I should chuse rather to be killed by them than be taken alive, but when it came to the trystal, my mind changed; their glittering weapons so daunted my spirit, that I chose rather to go along with those (as I may say) ravenous beasts than that moment to end my dayes....

A certain number of us\textsuperscript{3} got over the river that night, but it was the night after the Sabbath which all the company was got over. On the Saturday they boiled an old Horse's leg which they had got, and so we drank of the broth as soon as they thought it was ready, and when it was almost all gone, they filled it up again.

\textsuperscript{1} Wished to retreat.
\textsuperscript{2} Gave the war cry.
\textsuperscript{3} Rowlandson is traveling with a band of her captors and fellow captives, who were mostly women and children.
The first week of my being among them I hardly ate anything; the second week, I found my stomach grow very faint for want of something; and yet it was very hard to get down their filthy trash, but the third week, though I could think how formerly my stomach would turn against this or that, and I could starve and die before I could eat such things, yet they were sweet and savoury to my taste. I was at this time knitting a pair of white cotton stockings for my mistress\(^4\) and had not yet wrought\(^5\) upon a Sabbath day; when the Sabbath came they bade me go to work; I told them it was the Sabbath day, and desired them to let me rest, and told them I would do as much more to morrow, to which, they answered me, they would break my face. And here I cannot but take notice of the strange providence of God in preserving the heathen. They were many hundreds, old and young, some sick, and some lame, many had Papooses\(^6\) at their backs, the greatest number at this time with us were Squaws, and they travelled with all they had, bag and baggage, and yet they got over this River aforesaid. And on Monday they set their Wigwams on fire, and away they went. On that very day came the English Army after them to this River and saw the smock of their Wigwams, and yet this River put a stop to them. God did not give them courage or activity to go over after us; we were not ready for so great a mercy as victory and deliverance; if we had been, God would have found out a way for the English to have passed this River, as well as for the Indians with their Squaws and Children and all their luggage. "Oh that my People had hearkened to me, and Israel had walked in my ways, I should soon have subdued their Enemies and turned my hand against their Adversaries," Psalm 81:13, 14.\(^7\) ...

My master\(^8\) had three Squaws, living sometimes with one, and sometimes with another one, this old Squaw at whose Wigwam I was, and with whom my Master had been those three weeks. Another was Wettimore, with whom I had lived and served all this while; A severe and proud Dame she was, bestowing every day in dressing her self neat as much as any of the Gentry of the land, powdering her hair, and painting her face, going with Neck-laces, with Jewels in her ears, and Bracelets upon her hands. When she had dressed her self, her work was to make Girdles of Wampum and Beads.\(^9\) The third squaw was a younger one, by whom he had two Papooses. By that time I was refreshed by the old Squaw with whom my master was. Wettimore's Maid came to call me home, at which I fell a weeping. Then the old Squaw told me, to encourage me, that if I wanted victuals, I should come to her, and that I should lie there in her Wigwam. Then I went with the maid and quickly again and lodged there. The Squaw laid a Mat under me and a good Rugg over me; the first time I had any such kindness shewed me. I understood that Wettimore thought that if she

\(^4\) One of the wives of the Indian who took Rowlandson captive.

\(^5\) Worked.

\(^6\) Infants and young children.

\(^7\) Rowlandson's narrative often cited biblical passages as commentary on her experiences.

\(^8\) The Indian who had taken Rowlandson captive.

\(^9\) Belts and sashes made from marine shells and trade beads.
should let me go and serve with the old Squaw, she would be in danger to lose not only my service but the redemption-pay also. And I was not a little glad to hear this, being by it raised in my hopes that in Gods due time there would be an end of this sorrowfull hour. Then came an Indian and asked me to knit him three pairs of stockins, for which I had a Hat and a silk Handkerchief. Then another asked me to make her a shift, for which she gave me an Apron.

10 At this point, colonial agents were negotiating with Rowlandson's master a price for her return.
11 A loosely fitted dress.

Analyzing Captivity Narratives

1. How does the information you have assembled on each of these captives affect your judgment of them as sources? Which narrator — Cabeza de Vaca, Jogues, or Rowlandson — do you consider most truthful or reliable? Why?

2. What roles did each of these captives play in the Indian communities they encountered? Why do you think those roles differed from one time or place to another? How do you think the personal background of the individual captive affected his or her treatment and incorporation into Indian society?

3. What do these captivity narratives tell you about the Indians' practice of taking captives? Do you see any evidence in these sources of how contact with Europeans changed the Indians' practice of captivity?

4. How did gender shape the captivity experience? Does Rowlandson's narrative differ from that of Cabeza de Vaca or Jogues in any significant way because she is a woman? Why do you think female captivity narratives came to dominate this literary genre?

5. In these narratives, do you see any significant differences in the way Spanish, French, and English captives interpreted their experiences? What role did religion play in shaping the captives' interpretation of their experiences?

6. Imagine that the Indians who held Cabeza de Vaca, Jogues, or Rowlandson captive had the opportunity to tell their story. Explain how their version might have differed from the one you have read.

The Rest of the Story

Captives who returned to their society of origin often faced a difficult transition, depending on the age at which they were taken and the length of time they stayed among their captors. Young children assimilated quickly into Indian society, forgot European languages, and were reluctant to leave adopted parents and kin. Captive women who took Indian husbands were also less
Inclined to seek repatriation because they correctly suspected that former friends and neighbors would view them as sexually polluted and any children they had by Indian husbands as racially degenerate.

Some former captives used skills and knowledge they had acquired from Indians to work as traders, interpreters, and go-betweens. Jogues, for example, returned to North America after a short stay in France. His familiarity with the language and customs of his former captors led the governor of Canada to send him as an envoy to the Mohawks. Jogues's adopted Mohawk kin welcomed him back, but others blamed him for a crop failure that coincided with his return and murdered him. Like Jogues, Cabeza de Vaca returned to America after an interlude in Europe, but not to the site of his captivity. He acquired a commission from the Spanish king to serve as a governor in South America. His career as a colonial administrator was almost as disastrous as his first American expedition. Political rivals had him jailed and sent back to Spain, where he died under house arrest in 1557. Of the three captives featured in this chapter, we know the least about what happened to Mary Rowlandson after her redemption. Her husband died not long after her return, after which she remarried and slipped quietly back into colonial life, a fate indicative of her status as a Puritan woman, but also ironic for the most famous Indian captive of the colonial era.

During the eighteenth century, the captivity narrative grew in popularity. Initially, Puritan captives like Mary Rowlandson dominated the genre, telling tales of spiritual trial and physical torment along the New England frontier. During the French and Indian War (1754–1760), the captivity narrative shed some of its regional distinctiveness. Tales of captivity from the Pennsylvania and Virginia frontiers did not place the same emphasis on spiritual introspection as had those that originated in New England. Instead, the narratives became more secular and much more graphic and violent, lingering over descriptions of torture, scalpings, and hair-raising escapes. By the 1790s, frontier warfare in the Ohio region had given rise to hundreds of sensationalistic accounts of captivity that demonized Indians and mixed fact with fiction. The success of these sensationalistic accounts inspired early American novelists such as Charles Brockden Brown and James Fenimore Cooper to incorporate captivity stories into their plots. As the nation's Indian wars moved westward, so too did the setting for captivity narratives, real and imagined. From dime-store novels of the Old West to films such as *The Searchers* and *Dances with Wolves*, the "white Indian" has remained a stock character in American arts and literature, used to illustrate the gap between Indian and European cultures as well as the constant desire to pass between them.
To Find Out More

Captivity Narrative Anthologies

Secondary Sources on Indian Captivity and Captivity Narratives