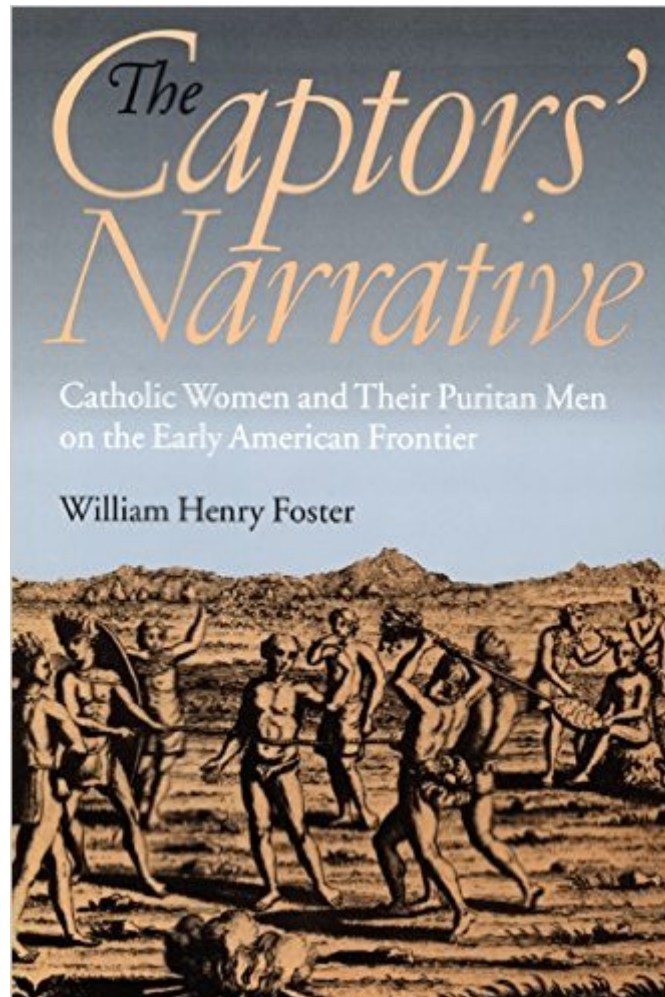


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The Captors' Narrative: Catholic Women And Their Puritan Men On The Early American Frontier



Synopsis

Between 1690 and 1760, close to two thousand New Englanders were taken captive by French Canadians and their Native American allies during five intercolonial wars. Puritan propagandists reacted by evoking the vulnerability of New England's homes and Protestant faith with images of captive women in sexual peril, a titillating vision only amplified in popular Victorian and modern portrayals of female captives as stock literary figures. In *The Captors' Narrative*, William Henry Foster demonstrates that the majority of Anglo-American captives taken along the New England frontier were, in fact, men. Free French Canadian women (both secular and monastic) routinely became the men's captors and benefited from their labor when they were brought to New France. In testimonials written by returning male captives, Foster finds fascinating instances of protest and resistance against the female authority that Protestant New England deemed "illegitimate." In the tales of Catholic women captors, Foster uncovers evidence that the control of male captive domestic labor expanded the public roles of the women in charge. The author painstakingly reconstructs the lived experience of both captors and captives to show that captivity was always intertwined with gender struggles. *The Captors' Narrative* provides a novel perspective on the struggles over female authority pervasive in the early modern Atlantic world.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

As an amateur historian, I found this book a carefully considered and refreshingly factual historical evaluation of an important topic in early American History. The author, a sophisticated prose stylist, writes in a muscular style that carries the reader with ease through the narrative. His wry turn of

phrase belies his deep understanding of the complexities of this time period. I heartily recommend this book.

New England captivity narratives---accounts by those early Americans who had been captured by Indians or French raiders and later ransomed or escaped their captivity---have become recently popular among historians and literary studies scholars for the information they contain about gender. The prevailing image of the captive is that of a young woman. Several of these women remained with their captors despite the payment of ransom and the pressures of their families to return to America because they found in French Catholic Canada empowerment denied them in Puritan America. Despite the stereotype, Bill Foster has found that boys and men constituted more than 80% of those taken from 1675-1763. Bill's discovery and scholarship significantly and importantly opens up the gender discussion for early American history because these Puritan men found themselves working for and taking orders from French and former American Catholic women many of whom were quite young. This condition the men found shameful and degrading and only a handful became assimilated to the French Catholic culture. Those who returned frequently would not name their captor because of the shame of having been bossed by a woman. Bill's research in the archives in Canada and the U.S. sheds new light on these highly prejudiced male captivity narratives.

Well-researched, primary source for a nearly unknown niche of American history. A thorough piece of historiography that is well-organized and easy enough to read so that it progresses more like a good story than an academic work.

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