



# The Captors' Narrative: Catholic Women and Their Puritan Men on the Early American Frontier

*William Henry Foster*

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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.



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