Early Colonial Captivity Narratives:

The Foundation of Puritan Ideologies Concerning Native Americans

Life in New England during the early colonial era was undoubtedly characterized by hardship and uncertainty. Puritans newly arrived from England settled in the nascent towns and villages surrounded by a territory they perceived to be a vast and desolate wilderness. The unknown and mysterious frontier that lay before the colonists was home to many well-established Native American groups that became increasingly hostile to the occupation of the colonists as the Massachusetts Bay Colony continued to expand as Puritans found religious freedom from Britain in the New World. In this stage of colonial antiquity neither the settlers nor the Native Americans knew how this unprecedented cohabitation would manifest. The cultures of these two peoples, separated by the Atlantic Ocean, had evolved in near complete autonomy for millennia and ultimately proved incompatible. The intricate and lengthy history of the struggle between the settlers and Native Americans for primacy in New England carries with it battle, betrayals, bloodshed, and most importantly for the purposes of this study, the taking of captives.

In reviewing the available primary sources concerning the occupation, development and expansion of the British Colonies in the New World, one can not help but ponder the importance of the many captivity narratives written during the early colonial period. Captivity narratives of the seventeenth century are varied in terms of the authors who wrote them and the outcome of their captivity. Some authors, like Mary Rowlandson, were educated, prominent and respected
individuals with a developed literary style. Other authors, like Elizabeth Hanson, were Quaker and in her case illiterate, requiring a third party to transpose her narrative. Despite the narrators background, all seventeenth-century captivity narratives invariably concluded with the escape, ransoming, transculturation, or in the most unfortunate situations, death of the captive.

The following work analyzes two pertinent captivity narratives to identify the religiously-based ideological commonalities concerning Native Americans, which effectively contributed to their inhuman classification by the settlers: Mary Rowlandson’s *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God* (1682), and Elizabeth Hanson’s *God’s Mercy Surmounting Man’s Cruelty* (1702). These narratives were chosen because of the disparate backgrounds of the women, Rowlandson being a Puritan and Hanson a Quaker. In evaluating the narratives of two unique individuals we can effectively see how, despite their backgrounds, these women still held common perceptions of Native Americans that always incorporated the divine will of God as the causation for the outcome of their captivity.

By analyzing these women’s narratives we can begin to understand how and why the attribution of the divine will of God to the outcome of their captivity fostered negative collective ideologies concerning Native Americans. In the narratives, a myriad of psalms and other biblical references were continually related to the various occurrences during the narrators’ captivity. Rowlandson’s narrative is perhaps most indicative of this trend, as she was a devout Christian and the wife of a prominent minister. Religion was centrally important to the captives of the early colonial period in reconciling the traumatic and violent experiences incurred during their captivity. Furthermore, faith provided hope for survival while they were taken into unknown territories by people incomprehensibly different from themselves.
To the Puritan settler the culture and physical appearance of the Native Americans seemed increasingly horrific as violent conflicts between the two groups became more common. A short-lived period of acceptance and cohabitation occurred during the early years of contact between the two groups,¹ but the conflicts that arose gave way to a collective perception on behalf of the settlers that characterized the Native Americans as inassimilable, barbarous heathens. The adoption of this perception resulted in a deteriorating relationship between the two groups. The captivity narratives of this time contain fervently dehumanizing language which effectively stripped the Native Americans of any legitimacy in laying claim to the disputed territories of New England. There were instances within some captivity narratives when the author noted acts of kindness bestowed upon them by their captors. However, by and large, the authors of these early colonial captivity narratives outweigh the limited positive discourse with repeated statements which effectively categorized Native Americans as beings so unlike the civil and genteel British settlers that they were nothing short of wretched savages.

Religiously-based perceptions continued to feed the negative collective ideology concerning Native Americans fortified at this time. As the colonies grew in size and population, the livelihood of the Native Americans became increasingly threatened, resulting in more frequent and desperate attacks upon the settlers. The ideological schism between the two groups infected the minds of the settlers to an irreparable degree. Captivity narratives promulgated this ideological dichotomy as the narratives were published and distributed throughout the colonies and Britain.

In February of 1675, Mary Rowlandson found herself amidst Metacom's War, one of the bloodiest conflicts between settlers and native populations during the early colonial period. Continued colonization in present day Rhode Island posed a threat to the neighboring Narragansett populations which had been decimated by European diseases. Fearing for their diminishing primacy in the region, the Narragansetts launched an armed attack against the English settlers under the command of their chief Metacom. What ensued was the most causality-stricken war in American history in terms of proportion of the population killed.\(^2\) In the midst of the chaos, the Narragansetts took Mary Rowlandson captive for almost three months until they ransomed her for twenty pounds.

Rowlandson's narrative is revered as one of the most influential early captivity narratives because of her refined literary style which contributed to success in publishing, selling more than one thousand copies in the Colonies and England in 1682.\(^3\) Rowlandson's narrative was extremely popular because it recounted the triumph of the devout Rowlandson over the Native Americans, symbolic of the growing prominence of the settlers in their new land. The account is sensationaly vivid, while extremely religiously oriented. Throughout her account Rowlandson continually attributes the salvation of herself and most of her family to the will of God, with the exception of the death of her newborn child a few days after she was taken captive. The title itself, The Sovereignty and Goodness of God, indicates the preeminent role that religion played for Rowlandson in reconciling the events she experienced while captive. The relatively brief narrative is inundated with a wealth of biblical references and quotes, which serve to explain the events to which she was subjected. In total, Rowlandson referenced the scripture more than

eighty times throughout her narrative.\textsuperscript{1} By employing biblical references, Rowlandson legitimized many of her claims in the eyes of her literary audience, many of whom were Puritan settlers as well. Additionally her marriage to the prominent pastor Joseph Rowlandson likely added to the perceived authenticity and popularity of her narrative. Rowlandson’s favorable background and pronounced devotion to Christianity coupled with her enthralling and captivating literary style proved to be a recipe for widespread success and publication of her narrative.

Rowlandson presented her perceptions of the Native Americans frequently and unabashedly. She described her interactions with the natives while providing her own unsavory, religiously-buttressed opinions. Words like “murtherous wretches,” “pagans,” “barbarous savages,” “inhuman creatures” and “heathens” are used throughout the narrative. By using such language Rowlandson effectively stripped the native populations of any relation to the English settlers. Her telling of Native American practices created an irreparable divide between the Native Americans and the English Settlers. Furthermore, this schismatic discourse invoked fear and hatred of the Indians amongst her fellow settlers. For example Rowlandson highlighted the celebration of the Natives after they burned the village of Lancaster, where Rowlandson had resided, immediately after she was captured.

\textit{Oh the roaring, and singing, and dancing, and yelling of those black creatures in the night, which made the place a lively resemblance of hell: And as miserable was the waste that was there made, of Horses, Cattle, Sheep, Swine, Calves, lambs, Roasting Pigs, and Fowls (Which they had plundered in the Town) some roasting, some lying and burning, and some boiling, to feed out merciless Enemies; who were joyful enough though we were disconsolate.}\textsuperscript{2}


\textsuperscript{2} Derounian-Stodala, \textit{Women’s Indian Captivity Narratives}, 15.
In this passage Rowlandson effectively demonstrated to the reader that the Natives were, according to her, not even humans, but rather mere “creatures”. Additionally, she described their celebration as something so inassimilable to the practices of good Christians that it resembled hell. We should consider that Rowlandson had just witnessed the natives brutally murder many of her fellow villagers and subsequently torch her house and most of the town, but regardless of the series of events that led up to her initial description of the natives, the importance lays in the fact that she in no way depicted the Natives as humans. This type of dehumanizing language became increasingly pervasive in her narrative as she continually sought to demonstrate to the reader that the culture and values of the inhuman Natives was inferior to the Puritan settlers.

It is probable that Rowlandson had uninhibited journalistic freedom when compiling her narrative. Not only did she use less than laudatory language to describe the Indians, but she also told in a sensational manner how she was taunted and ridiculed. When Rowlandson became increasingly inquisitive as to the whereabouts of her son, she asked a traveling Indian from another band of the same tribe about his condition.

He answered me that such a time his Master roasted him; and that himself did eat a piece of him, as big as two fingers, and that he was very good meat: but the Lord upheld my Spirit, under his discouragement; and I considered their horrible addictedness to lying, and that there is not one of them that makes the least conscience of speaking the truth.  

The sensational quality of this excerpt undoubtedly caught the attention of her audience as it tells of the alleged cannibalization of her son. We later find out this claim was false, as Rowlandson was eventually reunited with her son, but the importance of this claim lies in Rowlandson’s noting the “addictedness to lying” which she purports is a sinful quality that Native Americans possess. This claim is exaggerated and unsubstantiated as she provided no

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further evidence of the predisposition of Native Americans to lie, which she alleges. By
generalizing the Natives as liars, she effectively, yet subtly, categorizes them as sinners
and therefore ungodly. Adding to the moral polarity of the excerpt is the claim by
Rowlandson that the “Lord upheld my Spirit” through this encounter and allowed her to
persevere. In summation, the Puritan reader saw a schismatic divide between the devout
Rowlandson subjugated by the ungodly Indians who are not only sinful liars, but claim to
have partaken in the barbarous practice of cannibalism.

This type of discourse is indicative and encouraging of the growing polarity
between the two groups. Rowlandson, given her situation, was not interested in
reconciling with the Indians by trying to understand how through disease, betrayal and
loss of territory the Indians ended up taking captives out of desperation. The point of
reconciling with the Indians had passed for Rowlandson, as demonstrated by the moral
polarity her narrative exudes. Her stance was one of us-versus-them manifesting as a
narrative, which promulgated the notion of the divine right versus heathen sinners.

To further fortify her own opinions, Rowlandson incorporated accounts from
other captives she interacted with while a captive herself. Another Puritan captive told
Rowlandson the unfortunate fate of an uncooperative English woman and her child.

They knock’t her on the head, and the child in her arms with her: when they
had done that, they made a fire and put them both into it: and told the other
Children that were with them, that if they attempted to go home they would
serve them in like manner.¹

This excerpt is unique in that it is told to Rowlandson by a third party captive during her
own captivity. Rowlandson’s reason for incorporating this account within her narrative
was most likely an effort to portray to the reader two main things. Primarily the account
demonstrated to

¹ Derouinian-Stodala, Women’s Indian Captivity Narratives, 20.
the reader that she was by no means the only captive taken during Metacom’s War. Additionally, this excerpt provided a buttressing story to substantiate Rowlandson’s earlier accounts that sought to display the inhuman savagery of Native Americans. The inclusion of the fate of other colonists gives breadth to Rowlandson’s account; Rowlandson’s captivity was not merely an isolated or unique event. During the course of Metacom’s War more than 300 captives were taken by Native Americans, many of whom died as a result.8 It is likely that this third party account was authentic as many men, women and children were killed by Native Americans who sought to inhibit the rapidly growing population of colonists. By stripping the Native Americans of any human traits while retelling these accounts in a sensationalist manner, Rowlandson created a captivity narrative that undoubtedly enhanced the distaste and hatred for Native Americans that was already growing at this time.

Although the narrative, more often than not, described the unsavory behavior of her barbarous captives, Rowlandson did, on occasion, give examples of interactions that the reader could have perceived as something approaching civility. In one account Rowlandson tells how a Narragansett returning from raiding an English village gave her a bible.

I cannot but take notice of the wonderful mercy of God to me in those afflictions, in sending me a Bible: one of the Indians that came from Medfield fought and had brought some plunder; came to me, and asked me, if I would have a Bible, he had got one in his Basket, I was glad of it, and asked him, whether he thought the Indians would let me read? he answered yes; so I took the Bible, and in that melancholy time, it came into my mind to read the first the twenty eight Chapter of Deuteronomie.9

Rather than attributing the gift of the Bible to the generosity of the Native American, Rowlandson merely saw him as the conduit by which the “mercy of God” was responsible for sending a Bible. The last sentence of this passage is ripe with implications as well. Rowlandson declared that “in this melancholy time, it came to me to read first the twenty-eighth Chapter of

8 Colley, Captives: Britain, Empire and the World 1600-1850, 160.
9 Derouinian-Stodala, Women’s Indian Captivity Narratives, 19.
Deuteronomie.” In the most basic interpretation of this sentence, it is evident that Rowlandson found comfort in the Bible, and that somehow her reading thereof would help to alleviate her from her “melancholy time.” Upon deeper analysis the implications were far greater when considering the religiously informed audience to whom Rowlandson wrote. Chapter twenty eight of Deuteronomy lists the Blessing for Obedience, a series of twelve short passages which explain the rewards given to those who obey God’s will. The seventh passage is extremely pertinent to Rowlandson’s situation.

The Lord will grant that the enemies who rise up against you will be defeated before you. They will come at you from one direction but flee from you in seven.

By mentioning the twenty eighth Chapter of Deuteronomy, Rowlandson made her intentions quite clear. The strict obedience to the divine will of God would resolve her conflict with the Indian enemy. When Puritan settlers read this personal account they undoubtedly knew what she implied; a strict devotion to God would deliver them from a similar conflict. Given the frequency and intensity of conflicts between settlers and Native Americans at the time, those who read Rowlandson’s narrative likely took the implied advice with all seriousness.

Rowlandson’s allusions to the Bible promulgated a feeling of divine indignation throughout the Puritan community. In her eyes, Rowlandson, and all her fellow settlers, were chosen by God to inhabit the New World. Rowlandson’s mention of the Scripture calcified the dominating role of the settlers in the minds of those who read her narrative.

On another occasion Rowlandson was informed that her son was in a nearby Narragansett village and she quickly requested to go visit him. Her captors allowed her to make the journey to be with her son for a brief time.

My Son being now about a mile from me, I asked the liberty to go and see him, they bade me go, and away I went; but quickly became lost myself travelling over the Hills
and through Swamps, and could not find the way to him. And I cannot but admire the
wonderful power and goodness of God to me, in that though I was gone from home,
and met all sorts of Indians, and those I had no knowledge of, and their being no
Christian Soul near me; yet not one of them offered the least imaginable miscarriage to
me. I turned homeward again, and met with my Master; he shewed me the way to my
son.¹³

Again, Rowlandson did not mention the generosity or compassion of the Narragansett as a
reason for her being allowed to see her son but rather saw it as an act of God. Even though she
ended up losing her way in the woods and required the escort of her captors who initially
allowed her to make the journey without supervision, Rowlandson felt God was responsible for
her smooth travels to visit her son.

These limited examples of what might have been interpreted as civility by the Native
Americans quickly were attributed to the divine will of God, who was portrayed by Rowlandson
as responsible for nearly every aspect of her captivity and subsequent release by a ransom
payment. The discourse in the narrative is evidence of a Rowlandson’s feeling of divine
indignation. To Rowlandson, it was the will of God to allow for her safe return. Furthermore, it
was the desire of God for the Puritan colonists to overpower the Native Americans while
continuing to impose their religion upon them. As disease continued to decimate native
populations, that too would be attributed to the divine will of God.

For Rowlandson, her time in captivity with the Native Americans was a test of her
devotion to God. As the narrative demonstrated, Rowlandson knew that if she adhered to the
scripture and prayed frequently, God would somehow get her through this horrid experience.
However, it seems peculiar that Rowlandson did not find a way to reconcile the killing of her
children to the divine will of God. The seemingly traumatic event which is mentioned in the
beginning of the narrative was not recounted by Rowlandson. Perhaps she was too disturbed by
the event to make further mention, or perhaps Rowlandson was unable to construe a religiously-

based explanation for the killing of her children. Given the trauma of infanticide it is altogether peculiar that Rowlandson did not attribute a religious reconciliation for the event, while employing the divine will of God for issues of far lesser importance.

The motives individuals such as Mary Rowlandson had to write such a narrative are often questioned. Was her devotion to God so profound that she felt the need to share her story with her Puritan brethren? Or was she influenced by members of the religious community that sought to promulgate fear and hatred for the Indians through narratives like Rowlandson’s? The answer to this question can be gleaned from an unlikely source.

All of the four editions of the Sovereignty and Goodness of God start with a preface to the reader. This Preface gives a brief background to the time and place in which Mary Rowlandson’s captivity occurred. It speaks of the “dear Children, wounded and captivated (as the issue evidenced, and the following Narrative declares) by these cruel and barbarous Salvages.”\(^{11}\) The overall aim of the preface was to introduce dehumanizing discourse to the reader to ensure their agreement with the protagonist, Mary Rowlandson. The author of the preface went on to provide a very coercive caveat.

I hope by this time none will cast any reflection upon this Gentlewoman, on the score of this publication of her Affliction and Deliverance. If any should, doubtless they may be reckoned with the nine Lepers.\(^{12}\)

Undoubtedly this proclamation invoked a feeling of necessary complacency among its readers fearing the retaliation of the divine powers. The preface comes to a climactic close stating, “Reader, if thou gettest no good by such a Declaration as this, the fault must be thine own.”\(^{13}\) The preface was then signed by Per Amicum, which translated from Latin means “By a

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\(^{11}\) Derouinian-Stodala, Women's Indian Captivity Narratives, 9.

\(^{12}\) Derouinian-Stodala, Women's Indian Captivity Narratives, 9.

\(^{13}\) Derouinian-Stodala, Women's Indian Captivity Narratives, 11.
Friend,” a most unusual attribution for such a sentiment. Through historical analysis it has been concluded that Puritan minister Increase Mather not only wrote the preface for Rowlandson’s narrative but also encouraged her to write the story.\textsuperscript{14} Judging by the fervor of his preface, we can assert that his intention of promulgating the stories of the atrocities imposed upon the Puritan colonists by their Native American counterparts was extreme. Mather was an important religious figure in the Massachusetts Bay Colony with close ties to the prominent printers John Foster and Samuel Seawall.\textsuperscript{15} By using his connections with the printers of Boston and encouraging Rowlandson to write the narrative it seems as though Increase Mather was significantly responsible for the publication of \textit{The Sovereignty and Goodness of God}. It is probable that without Mather’s encouragement Rowlandson may have very well never written her account. Mather was well aware that such a sensational captivity narrative would help to galvanize the colonists’ collective ideology founded on the hatred of the barbarous savages who threatened their burgeoning primacy in the New World.

Rowlandson and Mather, along with the rest of the colonists, were undoubtedly pleased with the outcome of the conflict. Although substantial losses were incurred by the Massachusetts Bay Colony during Metacom’s War, the colonists proved to be the victors. Metacom was shot to death by the colonial troops in August of 1676. The jewelry he possessed was sent back to London for the King to see. His ornaments demonstrated to the imperial powers the success of the colonists in obtaining primacy in the colonies at the expense of the Native American way of life that had been uninterrupted until the arrival of the colonists. As for Metacom himself, he was dismembered and subsequently hung, piece by piece, to a tree as a token of the indisputable


\textsuperscript{15} Derounian, \textit{Early American Literature}, 242.
resilience of the colonists in inhabiting their new land.\textsuperscript{16}

Due to its widespread distribution, Rowlandson’s narrative is certainly the preeminent narrative by which many subsequent early colonial captivity narratives are judged. The reading of her account by many settlers in the colonies caused a stir of emotional support for any cause that sought to eradicate Native Americans. However Rowlandson’s narrative is not necessarily representative of the thousands of other captivity narratives from this period.\textsuperscript{17} Although religiously-based perceptions pervade much of the available narratives, not all are as fervently dehumanizing as Rowlandson’s.

Elizabeth Hanson, the wife of a Quaker farmer, was captured by Abenakis with four of her children and her female servant on August 27, 1724, from her home in New Hampshire.\textsuperscript{18} Upon the initial siege, the Indians killed and scalped two of her children. After their capture, the group marched toward Canada only to be separated; Elizabeth went with her infant and six year-old son with the Abenakis, while the other three were bought by a Frenchman who later ransomed them to Elizabeth’s husband, John Hanson. By September 1725, the family was reunited due to the diligent pursuit of John Hanson, who paid the ransom demanded for the safe return of his family. Their daughter Sarah, however, had been married to a French officer and despite repeated attempts was never reunited with the family.\textsuperscript{19}

Hanson, unlike Rowlandson, did not write her own narrative, but rather dictated the account to Samuel Bownas, a well-known English Quaker missionary who published her narrative.\textsuperscript{20} The Society of Friends published the account in 1728 and re-released it in later

\textsuperscript{17} Derouinian-Stodala, Women’s Indian Captivity Narratives, xi.
\textsuperscript{18} Derouinian-Stodala, Women’s Indian Captivity Narratives, 63.
\textsuperscript{19} Derouinian-Stodala, Women’s Indian Captivity Narratives, 65.
\textsuperscript{20} Derouinian-Stodala, Women’s Indian Captivity Narratives, 63.
editions. The later editions were subject to stylistic changes, which, as we will see, altered the initial depiction presented by Elizabeth Hanson. The initial edition shared commonalities to Rowlandson, in that she attributed the nearly all events within the account to the divine will of God. Hanson, however, abstained from employing the excessively dehumanizing discourse that Rowlandson used quite frequently. In certain instances Hanson explained to her reader various Indian customs, such as the idea of communal property and construction of a wigwam.\footnote{Derouinian-Stodala, Women’s Indian Captivity Narratives, 64.}

Having some Corn and Venison, and wild Fowl, or what they could catch by hunting in the Woods; and my Master having a large Family, being Fifteen in Number, we had Times of very short Commons, more especially when game was scarce.\footnote{Derouinian-Stodala, Women’s Indian Captivity Narratives, 71.}

But here our Lodging was still on the cold Ground in a poor Wigwam, (which is a kind of Shelter made with the Rinds of Trees and Mats for a Covering, something like a tent.) These are so easily set up and taken down, that they oft remove them from one place to another.\footnote{Derouinian-Stodala, Women’s Indian Captivity Narratives, 71.}

Her approach to the captivity narrative, far more objective than Rowlandson’s, facilitated the creation of a final product that was, at times, more similar to an ethnographical appraisal than a religiously based supremacist rant. Perhaps her religious beliefs influenced this perspective, as Quakers tended to be more egalitarian and pacifistic than the Puritans. Nonetheless, by disaggregating her account we see that Elizabeth Hanson attributed the salvation of herself and the rest of her family to the divine will of God, with the exception of her two children who were killed upon the initial siege.

In the first few pages of the narrative it is evident that Hanson’s perceptions of the Native Americans are somewhat less dehumanizing than Rowlandson’s. During their initial march towards Canada Elizabeth was extremely exhausted, “having lain-in but 14 days” since the birth
of her infant. Hanson wasted no time to note the actions taken by her Native American captors by the "Favour of God" to accommodate her in her weakened state.

We went up some very high mountains so steep, that I was forc'd to creep up on my Hands and Knees, under which Difficulty the Indian my Master, would mostly carry my Babe for me, which I took as a great Favour of God that his Heart was so tenderly inclined to assist me, tho' he had, as is said, a very heavy Burden of his own.24

In this passage Hanson uses interesting language which conveyed to her audience the notion that perhaps the Natives were not all inherently evil. Hanson noted "his heart was so tenderly inclined to assist me," insinuating that perhaps the Native Americans were humans, capable of acting upon feelings of compassion. Hanson did not go as far to declare that the action of the Native was without the will of God, who had somehow brokered this act of benevolence. Nonetheless, we see in her narrative an unprecedented allocation of something resembling a humanitarian approach to understanding the Native American's culture, which Rowlandson so vehemently condemned as that of "barbarous savages". Hanson went on to divulge further synthesis of the Abenaki's behavior.

He would lend me his Hand, or coming behind, would push me up before him: In all which, he shewed some Humanity and Civility more than I could have expected: For which Privilege I was secretly thankful to God as the moving Cause thereof.

The use of "humanity" and "civility" is of key importance in this passage. Ascribing such traits to Native Americans was extremely telling of the level of acceptance Hanson must have felt for her captors. Her ability to interpret the events of her captivity in light of the recent killing and scalping of her two children is highly peculiar and runs contrary to usual condemnation that Rowlandson and other captives would attribute to the Native Americans. Still Hanson does not go so far as to interpret this act of humanity without the intervention of God.

Beyond the discourse used by Hanson demonstrating her own interpretation of the Indians, this passage speaks to the preconceived notions of Native Americans in Colonial America.

24 Derouinian-Stodola, Women's Indian Captivity Narratives, 68.
Hanson notes that the “humanity” and “civility” “shewed”[sic] to her was indeed “more than I could have expected.” A question then immediately arises: How did Hanson expect to be treated by her Indian captors and what societal perceptions led to her misleading perceptions? If Hanson had heard the narrative of Rowlandson, or many of her contemporaries for that matter, her opinions may have been shaped by the writing of her predecessors. It is likely, given the widespread distribution of Rowlandson’s narrative and others like it, that Hanson was somehow influenced by the promulgation of fear and hatred toward Native Americans that pervaded literature during the early colonial period. This is not to say that her captivity was by any means leisurely or enjoyable. However her experience, as presented in her own words, was more accommodating than the wealth of captivity narratives which sought to categorize Native Americans as inhuman creatures who committed unimaginable atrocities against Puritan colonists would have predicted it to be.

Although there were a few excerpts in Hanson’s narrative which perhaps sought to demonstrate various acts of kindness bestowed upon her by the Native Americans, her account does contain accounts which would have promoted the type of fear that Rowlandson evoked so prolifically in her narrative. Towards the end of her captivity Hanson notes told of the events which she worried might result in the murdering of more of her children by the Abenakis.

Then his Father (the Native American boy), my Master, being provoked, catches up a Stick very sharp at one End, and with great Violence threw it from him, at my Son, and hit him on the Breast, with which my Child was much bruised, and the Pain, with the Surprize, made him turn as pale as Death; I entreat him not to cry, and the Boy tho’ but Six Years old, bore it with wonderful Patience, not so much as in the least complaining, so that the Child’s Patience asswaged[sic] the Barbarity of his hard Heart: who no Doubt, would have carried his Passion and Resentment higher, had the Child cryed, as always Complaining did aggravate his Passion, and his Anger grew hotter upon it... I expected my Children would be killed in this mad Fit, having no other Way but to cast my Care upon God, who had hitherto helped and cared for me and mine.25

25 Derouinian-Stodala, Women’s Indian Captivity Narratives. 75.
As it turned out, Hanson’s children were not killed by her Abenaki captor, whom she describes as an unpredictable and irate individual. She chose to depict the event in which her captor assaulted her son with a sharp stick for reasons that are not readily presented in the narrative. This excerpt comes with little caveat, leaving the reader with a contextual gap to overcome while interpreting the narrative. It is as though Hanson may have been influenced; perhaps by Bownas or someone else, to give prominence to sensationally graphic accounts with the intention of inciting fear within the reader. She concludes, “I Expected my children to be killed in this mad fit.” Her fear was arguably rational considering that two of her children were previously killed by Native Americans. It is the sensational quality of this excerpt that is most telling of the ways in which captivity narratives fueled the growing negative collective ideology towards Native Americans.

Hanson’s assessments of the Native Americans are, at times, clearly not in agreement. In describing her difficult climb up the mountain, Hanson says in regard to her captor, “his heart was so tenderly inclined to assist me”. Only a few weeks later, in this excerpt, Hanson declared of the same captor “… that the Child’s Patience asswaged [sic] the Barbarity of his hard Heart.” The two assessments were completely polar to one another. Not only did Hanson change her opinion from that of a “tender” heart to a “hard” one, but even went as far to mention the “Barbarity” of his actions. Perhaps a dramatic change ensued within Hanson’s mind during the course of narrating the account to Bownas. The importance of this passage is to assert that although Hanson seemed to show compassion towards the Native Americans that she too, even as a Quaker, promulgated dehumanizing fervor in her narrative, while continually citing the divine will of God for the causation of her captivity and release.
If we observe the commonalities between the accounts of Rowlandson and Hanson it immediately becomes evident that both of these female captives held the power and providence of God above everything in their lives. What disjoins the two narratives is Rowlandson’s evocation of religious indignation and sense of cultural superiority in contrast to the relative sense of humility and unpretentiousness seen in the narrative of Hanson. Hanson’s Quaker background, which afforded her a more humanitarian worldview than Rowlandson, was demonstrated through her approbating fervor towards Native Americans.

In light of some of the positive discourse we can assert that Hanson’s narrative was a rare breed. Most early colonial captivity narratives through their dehumanizing discourse abstain from granting Native Americans much legitimacy. Captivity narratives, which are characterized by their religious orientation in the 16th century, increasingly became vehicles for promulgating anti-Native American rhetoric. Additionally, the style of the captivity narrative changed from that of a religious confessional to that of a sensationally violent thriller.26

Samuel Bownas, who worked with the Society of Friends to publish Hanson’s account, saw how the style of the captivity narrative was changing. In comparing the original publication of 1728 with that of the 1760 publication, the changes in style made by Bownas are clearly evident. Although the story itself remains intact, the words with which it is told are indicative of a transition towards a demand for a more sensational narrative.27

1728:
As soon as they discovered themselves (having as we understood by their Discourse, be sculking in the Fields some Days watching their Opportunity when my dear Husband, with the rest of our Men, were gone out of the way) two of the barbarous Salvages came in upon us, next eleven more, all naked, with their Guns and Tomahawks came into the House in a great Fury upon us, and killed one Child immediately, as soon as they entered the Door, thinking thereby to strike in us the greater Terror, and to make us more fearful of them. Then in as great Fury the Captain came up to me; but at my

27 Roy Harvey Pearce, American Literature, 6.
Request, he gave me Quarter; there being with me our Servant, and Six of our Children, two of the little Ones being at Play about the Orchard, and my youngest Child but Fourteen Days old, whether in Cradle or Arms, I now mind not: Being in that Condition, I was very unfit for the Hardships I after met with, which are briefly contained in the following pages.  

The 1728 account was the base to which Bownas added minor interpolations which effectively transformed the original intended narrative provided by Hanson. The second portion of the account contained descriptive language that was presumably never orated or suggested by Hanson herself.

1760:
On the 27th of the Sixth Month, called August, 1725, my husband and all our men-servants being abroad, eleven Indians, armed with tomahawks and guns, who had some time been skulking about the fields, and watching an opportunity of our mens absence, came furiously into the house. No sooner had they entered, than they murdered one of my children on the spot; intending no doubt, by this act of cruelty. To strike the greater degree of terror into the minds of us who survived. After they had thus done, their captain came towards me, with all appearance of rage and fury it is possible to imagine; nevertheless, upon my earnest request for quarter, I prevailed with him to grant it. I had with me a servant-maid and six children, but two of my little ones were at that time playing in the orchard. My youngest child was but fourteen days old; and myself, of consequence, in a poor weak condition, and very unfit to endure the hardships I afterwards meet with, as by sequel will appear. 

The major difference between the introductions of the two editions published 32 years apart is the evocation of emotions that the reader feels. Most notably different is the passage in the 1760 edition: “their captain came towards me, with all the appearance of rage and fury it is possible to imagine”. The 1726 edition makes no mention of the “rage” and “fury” that Hanson felt during her encounter with the Native Americans. The second part of the sentence which states “it is possible to imagine” more effectively invites the reader to partake in the horror which Hanson must have felt. Samuel Bownas inserted interpolations in the later edition for the

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purpose of producing a more marketable version of the initial account that was more in line with
the trend of sensationalism, toward which captivity narratives were heading in the 18th century.\textsuperscript{30}

By evaluating the intent of Hanson in her original account we see the pertinence of the
captivity narrative in understanding the perceptions of Indians in the early colonial era. Hanson’s
narrative is understanding and, often times, even accepting of the Indians when compared to her
contemporary, Mary Rowlandson. Furthermore, Hanson’s narrative is valuable because it existed
in multiple editions, which were by no means identical. The fact that Samuel Bownas altered the
initial stylistic intent of Hanson is indicative of the greater trend toward sensationalist captivity
narratives.\textsuperscript{31} In Hanson’s original edition the perceptions she held concerning her captivity were
nonetheless attributable to the divine will of God. The thematic continuity of divine will is what
ultimately bonds early colonial captivity narratives together. From Hanson’s Quaker point of
view, the divine will of God manifested itself in a less indignant narrative than was characteristic
of Rowlandson’s Puritan narrative. Regardless, we cannot discredit the devotion to God that both
Rowlandson and Hanson demonstrate in their narratives, which is ultimately the common thread
that binds all early colonial captivity narratives.

The uncertainty that characterized the early colonial era was met with formidable and
direct action on behalf of the Puritan settlers to calcify their position as the primary inhabitants of
the New World. In an age when communication traveled at a snail’s pace, captivity narratives
effectively worked to establish common, religiously founded ideologies concerning the
barbarous savages who posed a continual threat. It was through the works of women like
Rowlandson and Hanson that colonists were able to glean the often horrific encounters that
became commonplace throughout the Massachusetts Bay Colony. The narratives of those women

\textsuperscript{30} Roy Harvey Pearce, \textit{American Literature}, 7.
\textsuperscript{31} Roy Harvey Pearce, \textit{American Literature}, 7.
were legitimized, published, distributed and even interpolated by men like Samuel Bownas and Increase Mather with the intent forming a negative collective ideology concerning Native Americans, fueled by a feeling of religious indignation which ultimately led to the demise of Native American society in New England.