

Captors and Captives: The 1704 French and Indian Raid on Deerfield. By EVAN HAEFELI and KEVIN SWEENEY. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003. 408 pages. \$29.95 (cloth).

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The field of intercultural colonial studies seems healthier than ever, at least in part because the effort to define frontier has in some quarters given way to a more instrumental use of the concept for purposes both grander and more intimate. Some scholars have adopted the lens of cultural exchange to locate complex individual and collective identities—exploring what might be called the middle ground of the soul. Others, meanwhile, have used the crucibles of frontier conflict to expose the normative assumptions of Euro- and Native Americans about gender ideologies, sexuality, consciousness, aesthetics, and performative culture. Yet another, and apparently increasingly popular, category may be characterized as the effort to illuminate whole imperial projects via the dynamic intercultural contacts among marginalized individuals or groups along the frontier's edges. It has been argued with increasing sophistication that settlers at the ambiguous peripheries of empire might nevertheless have succeeded in transmitting defining, if distorted, cultural signs and signals hinting at the nature of the imperial core and the connections that extended outward.

One of the most worthwhile examples of this latter approach is Linda Colley's *Captives: Britain, Empire, and the World, 1600–1850* (2002). Though Colley has dishearteningly harsh words for, to use her adjective, “provincial” American frontier historians whose pioneering methods she nonetheless relies on heavily, her book performs the useful task of linking Britain's Mediterranean, Atlantic, and East Indian frontiers through the common thread of captivity. One of Colley's ideas seems to be that there is an illuminating association between the large-scale assertion of empire and the small-scale, humiliating rebukes that naturally accompany the imperial (as opposed to colonial) process. Tales of captivity are handy indeed for illustrating these rebukes. One of the limits of this kind of approach to empire studies, however, has been its inherent one-sidedness. Colley, for example, says little about the French and Indians who held British American captives along their shared and porous frontier and whose cultures did so much to shape the cryptic narratives of compromised empire emitted by its vanguard. As for the other frontiers in question, Colley's book contains no Arabic or Hindi language sources whatsoever—sources that may have placed the captivity phenomenon in the additional contexts necessary to fully illuminate the imperial.

Now a new book has appeared that seems to adopt exactly this kind of multiple perspective. *Captors and Captives: The 1704 French and Indian Raid on Deerfield*, a painstakingly researched study by the intergenerational team of Evan Haefeli and Kevin Sweeney, certainly stands as the definitive treatment of that famous occurrence in the death throes of Puritan New England by virtue of having fully come to terms with the texts and contexts of the event. Including captors as well as captives in the title signals the manner in which the book reaches beyond Colley's focus on the latter, and manages to achieve a greater significance than the sum total of the innumerable details that make it up.

Yet those details are impressive enough. The introduction sets the tone for what is to follow by an arresting physical characterization of the “colonial empires” as having been “like diaphanous spider webs . . . based on networks of relationships that ran from London and Versailles into the interior of North America. Without them, officials in Europe could not project power and influence into places and onto peoples they often poorly understood. With them, colonists and Natives were able to strengthen communities that otherwise would have been destroyed in the turmoil unleashed by European imperialism. . . . at the edge of empire, solutions became problems and problems became possibilities” (4).

Part 1 lays out the contexts forming these opposing webs: “Frontier Town,” “New France,” and “Natives and Missions.” Part 2 is devoted to the raid itself. Part 3 delivers the most comprehensive and evocative treatment yet of the consequences of the Deerfield raid, as certain displaced Protestant residents of that town are dispersed among the Indians and French and begin to negotiate how much of their fate they are able to determine and how much will be determined for them. Throughout, the authors challenge the reader to reassess Deerfield in light of how the colonists’ goals met or failed to meet the imperial goals of their sponsors. Particularly strong here is the authors’ careful dissection of cultural and religious conversion with an eye to the pragmatic objectives manifest on all sides. These passages epitomize the authors’ predominant technique, allowing their portrait of empire to emerge along with the various fates of the Deerfield captives. But on occasion their narrative style and light, guiding touch becomes too light; they miss opportunities to drive home the significance of what they so exhaustively describe.

The book concludes in part 4 with a compelling meditation on memories of the Deerfield raid. The authors briefly reconstruct how the mischief at Deerfield only became a massacre a century after the attack, first characterized as such in 1804. They further show that the focus on the victimization of the captives was a later artifact of nationalistic, expansionist-minded local descendants prone to recast the story of invaded native peoples as “invader[s]” (273). That the European intruder-as-blameless-victim alchemy occurred at a considerable distance in time from 1704 is a lesson for those looking at colonial conditions and mentalities through the lens of nineteenth-century cultural assumptions (an all-too-common shortcoming in the scholarly literature on prerevolutionary captivity). It also serves as a sobering reminder to those who are exposed to built environments, historical sites, and even writing purporting to be in the colonial fashion. The physical or literary facades are, of course, too often just that: pure reflections of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century nationalism that created them. Historians, no less than tourists, should approach with caution.

Some readers may be disappointed to be denied the kind of intense middle ground of the soul look at individuals that John Demos, among others, has found along this frontier. This book is not *The Unredeemed Captive* writ large. Even amid such a rich body of evidence that has the potential to make topics such as a racial or sexual frontier problematic, the authors’ thematic approaches remain largely conventional. To take only one of several possible examples, the possibility that men and women adopted distinct consciousnesses as self-fashioned agents (or victims) of empire is not developed. Nevertheless, the authors’ particular regional perspective grants them a host of new insights on this most studied of colonial American frontiers. Their finding, for example, that returned Deerfield captives were apt to be more devout in their congregational communities challenges many previous conclusions that a brush with savagery left returned captives with a sense of lingering alienation from their home societies. This leads to the inescapable conclusion that, to a substantial degree, ex-captives internalized something along the lines of the Deerfield minister’s propagandistic message of *The Redeemed Captive Returning to Zion*—that the journey into and out of captivity had been by turns a test and a punishment for a people gone astray.

Captors and Captives clearly succeeds on many levels. For military historians and substantial numbers of genealogists, family descendants, and other enthusiasts of America’s northeastern frontier heritage, this book will become an indispensable almanac. For academic historians and their students, *Captors and Captives* is significant for what it asserts and for what it implies. It asserts a vision of something that might well be called the pragmatic frontier: a frontier where religious and cultural expressions were contingent on surprising events, a frontier of irreducible complexity, and a frontier replete with unpredictable historical actors imparting contradiction and paradox at every conceivable level. It is not that Haefeli and Sweeney amend or invert frontier stereotypes so much as render the whole idea of stereotypes absurd. What *Captors and Captives* implies are the hazards of

viewing the frontier exclusively on either a micro or macro level. Empires operate on many scales at once. Colley may be correct that the contingencies of captivity helped to shape (or at least help scholars to see) the ideologies of British empire building. Yet the pragmatism, fractiousness, and creation of culturally complex personas at points where European empires met Algonquian and Iroquoian cultures—and the collective memories that have created and re-created these contacts in innumerable conceptual forms—strongly suggest that whatever was created on this frontier was far more likely to be American than British.