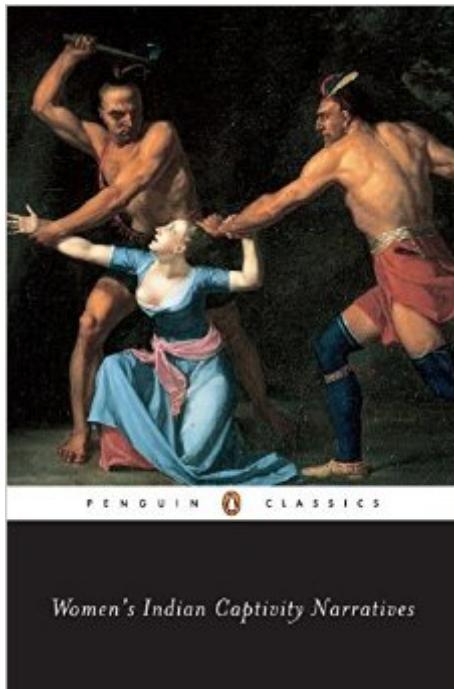


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Women's Indian Captivity Narratives (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

Enthralling generations of readers, the narrative of capture by Native Americans is arguably the first American literary form dominated by the experiences of women. The ten selections in this anthology span the early history of this country (1682-1892) and range in literary style from fact-based narrations to largely fictional, spellbinding adventure stories. The women are variously victimized, triumphant, or, in the case of Mary Jemison, permanently transculturated. This collection includes well known pieces such as Mary Rowlandson's "A True History" (1682), Cotton Mather's version of Hannah Dunstan's infamous captivity and escape (after scalping her captors!), and the "Panther Captivity", as well as lesser known texts. As Derounian-Stodola demonstrates in the introduction, the stories also raise questions about the motives of their (often male) narrators and promoters, who in many cases embellish melodrama to heighten anti-British and anti-Indian propaganda, shape the tales for ecclesiastical purposes, or romanticize them to exploit the growing popularity of sentimental fiction in order to boost sales. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

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Customer Reviews

Although I am in no particular agreement with the Editor's perspective, this particular anthology of tales is fascinating. Surely fear of capture and/or destruction by American-Natives was a peril that most settlers on the frontiers of the Americas had to deal with. Men were more likely to be killed immediately or tortured to death shortly thereafter. Women and children were also sometimes killed in horrific fashions but some of these, because they had assimilation potential, survived, so many of our captive stories come from these people. In a very real sense, we are dealing with a collision between two very different cultures. Many of the early accounts in this book are related to 'White Man' issues such as the French-English War, and later the War for American Independence. In both cases the various protagonists sought--and got--Indian allies who were turned loose against largely helpless frontier families. I'm sure the philosophy was that if troops had to be drawn off to protect the frontier, there were fewer regular troops to fight against your regulars. Therefore both the French and English frequently enlisted Indian allies. The problem was that Native traditions and practices were very different from European. Torture and mutilation were customary and, to the Indians, 'another day at the office.' To European settlers, however, this style of warfare was both horrific and illogical. The fact, as so many captives relate, that there was a terrible arbitrariness to Indian practices made them all the more weird. One woman recounts a practice that seemed to make little sense then or now. If a Native family had lost a family member, perhaps in combat, they would try to purchase a white captive. The fate of the captive depended entirely on mood and whim.

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