The Barbary Captivity Narrative in American Culture

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A photograph of a drinking fountain above which hangs a “whites only” sign is one of the enduring images of racial antagonism in the twentieth century. A similar image occurs in the 1655 narrative of Abraham Browne, a slave. The foreman overseeing Browne refuses to drink out of the same water pot—a water pot that Browne was forced to carry by yoke from a well. The twist, as you might have surmised, was that Browne is white, a captive in Morocco, and his boss a “negro.” “I was dispissed of ye most dispisest people in the world,” Browne wrote. He clearly knew of the horrors he might be forced to face. His own father, years earlier, had also been a captive in Algiers.

Browne would eventually settle in Boston a generation before Mary Rowlandson would travel there after her captivity in 1676. And it would be Rowlandson’s captivity narrative, not Browne’s, that would be published and republished. Indeed, the Indian captivity narrative has completely overshadowed the story of North African abduction. While the prevalence and influence of the Indian captivity narrative should not be denied, the less studied abduction tale, the Barbary captivity narrative, was also popular and important to American culture. The story of the white slave in Africa, which pre-dates the publication of Indian captivity narratives and American slave narratives, provides one of the defining contexts for comprehending the cultural exchange among Africa, America, and England.

The most popular Barbary captivity narrative in the United States was James Riley’s best-selling account of his capture by North African “wandering Arabs.” It came out in at least 28 editions, spawning a sequel and an illustrated children’s edition, and is still in print today. Selling nearly a million copies, the book detailed the extraordinary story of a group of white slaves in Africa. Even young Abraham Lincoln owned a copy of Riley’s Authentic Narrative, and it has been credited as one of the influ-
ences that shaped the future president’s opinion of slavery in the United States. But by the time Riley’s account first appeared in 1817, the story of Barbary captivity was already almost two centuries old in North America and even older in Europe. While not formally a Barbary captive, Captain John Smith in his 1603 capture by the Turks sets a pattern when he is sent to Constantinople as a slave to the Princess Charatza Tragabigzanda. Although she, like Pocahontas after her, spared Smith from cruel treatment, Smith nevertheless eventually killed the Princess’s brother in order to escape and sought passage through Barbary. A few decades later, as James Fenimore Cooper reported in his history of the U.S. Navy, Barbary rovers claimed two colonial American ships and escorted them into the Moroccan harbor at Sallee, where the crews were enslaved. Just five years after William Bradford landed in Plymouth, Moroccan corsairs ranged as near as Newfoundland, where they hijacked 40 ships. References to colonists who sailed the Atlantic and were captured by Barbary privateers abound, and their stories circulated orally in coastal towns. Often churches issued public subscriptions for ransom money (see Lydon). So well known was the Barbary captivity story that grifters preyed on generous benefactors, attempting to swindle well-meaning relatives of known captives in what became known as the “Algerian Prisoner Fraud.” The con gained such notoriety that George Washington eventually stepped in and warned families not to fall for the scam (see Wilson, “American Prisoners,” 41).

The earliest surviving North American Barbary captivity narratives are those by Abraham Browne and Joshua Gee. Browne was taken prisoner by Moroccan corsairs in 1655 and was held approximately three months, about the same duration as Mary Rowlandson. Paraded in the public slave markets and narrowly averting sale to “the most Crewelest man in Sally,” Browne was fortunate to find a kind master who gave him relatively easy chores. Like Rowlandson’s narrative, which would be written and published 27 years later, Browne’s is interlaced with biblical verse, and he prides himself on not converting to the “Mohumetan Religion.” He returned to Boston, where he eventually married the daughter of a wealthy merchant. Browne may still have been alive when Mary Rowlandson returned to Boston from her captivity and when Joshua Gee set sail in 1680. Gee’s fragmented narrative tells of the six years he spent in Algiers and his arduous voyages aboard several of the notorious slave galleys. The famous judge and diarist Samuel Sewall eventually helped to arrange for his ransom, and
Gee’s son went on to serve as minister alongside Cotton Mather in Boston’s North Church. Mather himself wrote at least two sermons on the evils of Barbary captivity, calling it “the most horrible Captivity in the world” (Glory 31).

Colonial America, and later the United States, inherited the centuries-old ideological schism between Christianity and Islam. The battle, which came to increasingly reflect an economic struggle over trade and shipping rights, had been framed in Europe as a fight between Christian knights and Islamic pirates in which both sides justified enslaving each other. John Blossingame estimates that between five hundred thousand and one million white slaves were held in North Africa. These imperfect numbers, however, do not include those who after their capture willingly converted to Islam and remained in their adopted country. Nor do the estimates include convicts who were not deemed worthy of ransom, the poor, and those kidnapped and sold by their own countrymen. This ancient struggle between cross and crescent, with its penchant for human prizes, had already crossed the Atlantic by 1625 when Moroccan rovers carried the two colonial vessels into Sallee. Numerous reports of seized ships and public solicitations for ransom funds suggest that Browne’s and Gee’s captures were hardly isolated occurrences in seventeenth-century America.

In a sermon written to commemorate the redemption of several Barbary captives, Cotton Mather, who had also helped disseminate Indian captivity narratives, included accounts of the captives’ plight in Africa:

The poor Christian Captives, that are taken by any of those Hellish Pirates, belonging to the Emperor of Morocco, are brought up to Macqueness [sic]; being kept at Hard work, from Day-light in the Morning till Night: carrying Earth on their Heads in great Baskets, driven to and fro, with barbarous Negroes by the Emperor’s Order; and when they are drove home by the Negroes at Night, to their Lodging, which is on the cold Ground, in a Vault or hollow place in the Earth, lade over with great Beams athwart, and iron Bars over them, they are hold in there, like Sheep, and out in the Morning; and if any be wanting, he quickly secures the Negroes, and sends out a parcel of his Guard, to look for them. (Glory 33)

By knitting into his text these eyewitness accounts of “Hellish Pirates,” “barbarous Negroes,” and the bestial conditions under which the colonists
suffered, Mather provided his listeners and readers with an official narrative of relations with Barbary. Like Indian captivity accounts, Barbary captivity narratives predictably emphasized the victimization of the Christian and the inhumanity of the non-Christian. In an earlier sermon addressed to the colonists while they languished in Morocco, Mather called the captors “the Monsters of Africa,” and associated them with “the Powers of Darkness” (Pastoral Letter 10). Mather’s demonization of Moroccans as satanic figures placed them in a separate metaphysical category from the colonists, suggesting a fundamental divide between the two continents as well as establishing boundaries between civilization and barbarity. To combat the forces of barbarity was to wage in the eternal battle against earthly confusion caused by the agents of Satan. Like many Puritan texts, Mather’s accounts emphasize the powerful role of community in this battle, both the captive community— noting how even as slaves the American colonists had created an orderly religious hierarchical structure with its own masters and assistants—and the pious New England colonists. According to Mather, the captive community inspired the world through its resistance to Islam and degeneration, and the community back in Boston offered daily prayer and collected money with which to buy back their brethren. What Mather did not report, and perhaps did not even realize, was that a great number of English, Irish, and other Europeans also sailed under North African colors, making a lucrative living and in the process divulging critical maritime technology that greatly enhanced the corsairs’ ability to take captives.

While the story of Barbary captivity—documented even earlier by Europeans—was certainly a well-known and feared possibility since the founding of the colonies, the majority of written captivity accounts appear in the colonies near the end of the American War of Independence when the vulnerable new nation lost its British naval protection. Benjamin Franklin himself was rumored to have been a Barbary captive during this time, and John Paul Jones died while sailing to combat North African sea powers. The Barbary conflict became part of the American public spectacle: wax museums exhibited Barbary scenes, circuses held benefit performances for ransomed captives, the “machinery in transparency” — an early form of American film — projected Barbary displays. In addition to the published historical accounts of slavery in North Africa, the Barbary captivity topos appeared in at least four early American novels, nine early
plays, ten dime novels, and almost a dozen Hollywood movies. The Barbary captivity scenario even provided adventures for Tom Swift and the sharp-shooting cowboy Tom Mix, as well as sailing into the modern romance novel under such titles as *Barbary Bride* and *Angelique in Barbary*. Barbary slave galleys were used to sell the Packard Custom Eight De Luxe automobile in the 1930s, and children could even play the “Pirates of the
Barbary Coast” board game. Despite the prevalence of the genre, however, the Barbary captivity narrative has been overlooked and its importance greatly underestimated.8 A closer examination of these narratives suggests a reciprocal influence between the representation of Indian and Barbary captivity in which Africans are viewed as Indians and natives of North and South America are pictured as Africans. The Barbary captivity narrative also invites a comparison between white slaves in Africa and black slaves.
“He threw himself between Decatur and the Tripolitan.” — Page 130

**Figure 3** From John De Morgan’s Taming the Barbary Pirates, 1933.
in America. It is through this reflection that the figure of the vengeful black master emerges and the threat of slave insurrection intensifies.

Scholars of American literature have often made the claim that the Indian captivity narrative represents this country’s first literary genre, perhaps because the violent clash between indigenous people and colonists created the unique context for the development of what would become the prevailing culture of this nation, one predicated on liberation and freedom even as it colonized and enslaved. Although I am not interested in a search for origins or in removing the Indian captivity narrative from its literary berth, the claim of such originality has obscured the way in which captivity narratives in general developed and native people have been represented.9 Certainly the captivity narrative genre owes a great deal to both spiritual
autobiography and the providence tale as early influences, but I am con-

FIGURE 5 A multinational slave insurrection in 1776, described by Charles 
Sumner in his 1853 anti-slavery tract White Slavery in the Barbary States. 

cerned with the larger historical context that would include not only the

traditional trope of conflict between Europe and the Americas but also an
even earlier and ongoing conflict with northern Africa. When Ferdinand

Braudel asserted that by the end of the sixteenth century the “heart of the
world now beat” on the Atlantic coasts, he clearly was not suggesting that
Africa would suddenly be forgotten or forever ignored (843).

In 1564, a few decades before the Roanoke landing, a memorandum

from Marseilles reported that the Algerian corsairs had been so successful
that “it [was] raining Christians in Algiers.” In the mid-1620s, at the time
William Bradford was struggling to get a foothold in Plymouth, there were
approximately 1,500 captives in Morocco alone. In 1625, Bradford himself
wrote of the abduction of one of the colony’s ships laden with “cor-fish”
and beaver by a “Turks man of warr” (435). But Barbary captives were not
the only players in this scenario. Christian renegades commanded two-
thirds of the seventeenth-century corsair flotilla. Many of them had served
in professional armies for France, England, or the United Netherlands be-
fore renouncing their religion and “taking the turban.”

Sailing out of Sallee, Dutch and English sailors comprised at least half of the Moroc-
FIGURE 6 From Kevin Matthews's 1955 adventure novel.
can rovers in the seventeenth century” (14). Western mariners sailed for profit and took their own countrymen captive on ships sanctioned by the North African regencies. More important, it becomes clear that as Britain began its conquest of North America and encountered resistance among the heathen “savages,” it had already struggled against and continued to battle with Islamic “barbarians.” The record of these struggles often took the form of captivity narratives.
By the time Mary Rowlandson wrote what most would consider the foundational Indian captivity narrative in North America, the Barbary captivity narrative had already been well established in Europe. Cervantes, himself a captive in Algiers for five years in 1575, had dramatized it in *Don Quixote*, “Life in Algiers,” and “Dungeons of Algiers.” St. Vincent de Paul had been carried into Tunis in 1605 and sold to an alchemist. Narratives in English by John Fox (1577), Richard Hasleton (1595), Nicholas Roberts (1621), John Rawlins (1621), and Francis Knight (1631) appeared in collections of travel narratives that included encounters with Native Americans. Also in 1631, two Algerian ships landed at the village of Baltimore in Ireland and abducted the entire hamlet. (The Irish poet Thomas Davis immortalized the event in “The Sack of Baltimore 1631” (1844): “The yell of Allah breaks above the prayer and shriek and roar / Oh! Blessed God, the Algerine is Lord of Baltimore.”) And in 1675, two years before Rowlandson returned from her removal with Metacom’s followers, William Okeley wrote an elaborate captivity narrative, what he called an *Eben-Ezer or a Small Monument of Great Mercy Appearing in the Miraculous Deliverance of John Anthony, William Okley, William Adams, John Jephs and John Carpenter*, that stylistically resembles Rowlandson’s account. The narrative, which includes a harrowing escape in a handmade collapsible canvas boat, would be stripped of all its biblical references and republished strictly as an adventure story 120 years later, mirroring the sensationalist evolution of many later Indian captivity narratives. A plaque still hangs in Trinity Church in Algiers, commemorating Okeley’s harrowing escape. Even before Quaker Elizabeth Hanson’s 1728 Indian captivity account, we have the remarkable 1680 tale of Thomas Lurting, *The Fighting Sailor turn’d Peaceable Christian*, in which Lurting, a converted Quaker, refuses to kill his captors when he regains control of his vessel and instead returns them to the shores of their native land. In short, the Barbary captivity narrative flourished in Europe at the same moment that the west began to colonize the Americas.

Given that Spain, Britain, and France had been enslaving and falling victim to North African corsairs for centuries, it is not surprising that when encountering indigenous Americans they would draw their descriptions from a repository of images developed in Barbary. When American mariners landed in North Africa, they similarly transposed images of American natives onto indigenous Africans. Nabil Matar argues that “by the
end of the seventeenth century the Muslim ‘savage’ and the Indian ‘savage’ became completely superimposable in English thought and ideology” (Turks 170). As partial evidence, Matar cites the fact that John Smith had named what would become Cape Ann “Cape Tragabigzanda,” a reference to Smith’s aforementioned savior, and a cluster of three islands off the coast of Cape Cod “the three Turkes heads,” after men he slew in battle. “Joseph d’Acosta,” Matar continues, “compared the nomadic life of the Central Plains Indians with the ‘wilde Moores of Barbarie called Alarbes,’ while de Coronado repeatedly allied the Indian with the Turk in his account of his expedition of 1541 and 1542” (Turks 98–99). When first encountering indigenous Americans, explorers relied on their already available descriptions of previous meetings with “wild men.”

Peter Hulme and Ludmilla Jordanova have noted that a fundamental methodology of the Enlightenment is the “comparative project” in which writers fashion cultural identity by comparing the known with the unfamiliar, and thus the image of the unfamiliar American native is partly defined by the familiar identity of the North African “other” (7–8). The savage becomes the barbarian, at least in part. During the late eighteenth century, the relationship becomes increasingly reciprocal as American Barbary captivity writers “rediscover” Africans and describe them in terms and images that were conceptually available, those of indigenous Americans. John Foss describes the Moors as a “spare set of people, not much inclining to fat, and of a very dark complexion, much like the Indians of North America” (47). Judah Paddock describes “these monsters” as “straight as an American Indian.” In relating a marriage ritual in Tripoli, Jonathan Cowdery writes of old women “who run through the streets, making a most hideous yelling, and frequently clapping their hands to their mouths, similar to American Indians in their pow wows” (33). Archibald Robbins describes an angry scene in which his captors “throw sand into the air... hooting somewhat like American savages” (61). Even Captain Riley, who eventually made an effort to humanize the description of his captors, at first originally envisions them as cannibals who have “a complexion between that of an American Indian and negro” (16). Just as the Moors, wandering Arabs, Turks, and Negroes provided a point of comparison to help readers imagine the new “American savages,” the demonized figure of the “American Indian” became a familiar lens through which to construct North Africans.

The influence of the North African/European struggle appears again
in nineteenth-century Argentine narratives involving Indian captivity. In his discussion of Esteban Echeverría’s romantic poem “La Cautiva” (1837), David Haberly notes that the main characters, Brian and María, reenact the crucifixion, and that the Argentine “Indians” are not the “noble savage” typical of the romantic period but “mindless, drunken beasts” who mistreat their captives. The conflict Echeverría dramatizes takes place just a few years after one of Juan Manuel de Rosas’s campaigns to eradicate the indigenous people of Argentina, a policy that was almost completely successful. Commenting on the vitriol of the battle, Haberly notes that it was not simply a fight between Indians and whites over land. He traces the struggle to the history of Spanish/African conflict. “It is,” he writes, “a contest of civilizations and, more particularly, of religions, as symbolic of whole cultural complexes. The whites are not los blancos or los argentinos, but los cristianos. The natives are not merely los indios or los salvajes or los bárbaros, but los infieles as well.”

The picture that emerges from the complex triangular interaction among North Africa, Europe, and America is that of a world turned upside down: of white slaves in Africa, of long-standing Christian enmity toward Islamic power transposed onto South and North American natives, of “Indian” stereotypes pasted onto Africans. The prevalence of the Barbary captivity narrative complicates our current understanding of how the Indian captivity narrative was formed and how it represents indigenous people. The construction of “barbarity” becomes particularly elaborate when we recall that many of the Barbary corsairs were enterprising Christians who “turned Turk” and enslaved their own. Only by studying Indian and Barbary narratives together will we fully understand the nature of these early encounters and appreciate the fuller context of western “exploration” and how the terms of the Christian/Islamic conflict were retooled for American colonization.

Thomas Jefferson once warned that Virginia was slowly metamorphosing into “the Barbary of the Union.” Noting Jefferson, the Massachusetts abolitionist Charles Sumner, in perhaps the first comprehensive examination of white slavery in North Africa, called the United States “the Barbary States of America.” In general, although the Barbary captivity narrative most frequently invokes the barbarity of Africans, casting them as demonic, amoral, and bestial, the figure of the white slave in Africa proved
a rhetorically supple and enduring image that inherently questioned the institution of slavery in the colonies and the new republic. The figure posed a perplexing question: How could a supposedly civilized country that was economically dependent upon black slave labor deride as immoral and “barbaric” those countries that had simply turned the tables and enslaved white Americans? If slavery was uncivilized in Barbary, was it not also barbaric in America?

In 1688, the year following Joshua Gee’s return from Algiers, the Germantown, Pennsylvania, Friends wrote the first protest against slavery and invoked the specter of being “sold for slaves into Turkey.” In defense of freeing the “negurs” in all Friends’ communities, they argued, “Now, tho they are black, we can not conceive there is more liberty to have them slaves, as it is to have other white ones. There is a saying, that we shall due to all men like as we will be done ourselves; making no difference of what generation, descent or colour they are” (“Germantown” 3). This invocation of the Golden Rule calls for the reader’s empathy and associates the readily admissible horror of white slavery with that of African slaves in Germantown. Judge Samuel Sewall, in the first antislavery tract published in New England, not only pointed to the hypocrisy of simultaneously holding slaves and “bemoaning the barbarous usage of our Friends and kinsfolk in Africa,” he quite practically points to the hidden costs of institutional slavery: “And it may be a question whether all the benefit received by Negro Slaves, will balance the Accompt of Cash laid out upon them; and for the Redemption of our own enslaved Friends out of Africa” (Sewall 12).

A congregational minister from Rhode Island, Samuel Hopkins, wrote of a different, more disturbing hidden cost. While making the same comparison between American and African slavery that many abolitionists made, Hopkins did not rely solely on his reader’s empathy but played upon their fear as Christian slaveholders: “And the Turks have a good right to all the Christian slaves they have among them; and to make as many more slaves of us and our children, as shall be in their power; and to hold them and their children in bondage to the latest posterity.” The Germantown Friends had rendered it more bluntly 90 years earlier:

If once these slaves (wch they say are so wicked and stubbern men) should joint themselves.—fight for their freedom.—and handel their masters and mastrisses as they did handel them before; will these mas-
ters and maastrisses take the sword at hand and warr against these poor slaves, licke, we are able to believe, some will not refuse to doe: or have these negers not as much right to fight for their freedom, as you have to keep them slaves? ("Germantown")

While the figure of the “white slave” perhaps received more attention than that of the “African master,” the two images evolved symbiotically, and the specter of a vengeful African overlord cast a menacing shadow over the slavery debate. David Brion Davis has argued that during the 1830s, abolitionists were loosely associated with a “vast conspiratorial brotherhood” that intended to wrest control of the federal government through the destruction of the slave system. Although the “Slave Power” thesis was certainly common political currency, its power was more rhetorical. Nevertheless, it arose at a time of increasing paranoia over slave revolts and collective resistance by fugitive slaves (17–19). From the start of the Haitian revolution in 1801 through the Civil War, southern fears of armed slave insurrection increased. Although armed bands were small—usually 10 to 20 escaped slaves—they existed in every southern state and were, as John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger have argued, “a constant source of fear and anxiety for whites” (86). The paranoia that fueled thoughts of conspiracy, as well as scattered pockets of actual black resistance, may have increased the imaginative power of the African master figure.

In the twentieth century, the yoked images of the African master and white slave were dramatized in Kenneth Roberts’s 1947 book-of-the-month-club novel _Lydia Bailey_. The historical romance quickly proceeds to a graphic representation of the violence of the Haitian revolution and ends in Tripoli during the time of the 1803–5 war, juxtaposing the dual images of black insurrection and Barbary captivity. Although it is difficult to trace the trope directly to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, suggestive evidence exists. For example, before his story was told in a full-length captivity narrative, the words of John Foss appeared in the _Salem Gazette_ on August 11, 1795. In a letter, Foss thanks his countrymen for sending the captives a small allowance, but he complains that the “Jews, Moors, or Turks” who actually act as purchasing agents for the Americans diminish the value of the funds by charging the Americans doubly for every item. (The full text of Foss’s account more fully encodes racial antagonisms, calling the Moors “monsters,” etc.) Directly adjacent to Foss’s letter
was a second letter, this from Wilmington, North Carolina. The author describes the murder of Jacob Lewis, a plantation overseer, by the leader of a group of runaway slaves and the eventual capture and public execution of the murderer, who named himself the “General of the Swamps.” Side-by-side, then, the Gazette printed stories concerning a militarized black slave insurrection and the sufferings of a white slave in Africa—tales of similar danger to Republican citizens who are partly bound together in their fear of black retribution. When Foss expresses his deepest hope that none of his fellow citizens falls into Algerine slavery, it might be asked whether this is equivalent to wishing that none of his readers suffers a fate similar to that of Jacob Lewis.

The Barbary captivity descriptions of the African masters are often predictable stereotypes of violent men or monsters who inflict countless cruelties on the captives, although, occasionally, as in the cases of Captain Riley and Ion Perdicaris, the master is depicted as surprisingly humane and the portrait more subtle and sympathetic. Perhaps the most disturbing images are not the personal descriptions of the captors that detail pointed beards, slashing scimitars, and razor teeth, but the manner in which African captivity mirrored the practices of slavery in the colonies and the United States. In his journal, Abraham Browne describes the process of his sale in the slave marketplace:

[W]ee weare Led abowe two or three att a tyme in the midst of a greate concors of people—both of the Towne and Cuntry—who having the full sige of you and if that will not sattisfye they come and feeleyour hand and Looke into your mouth to see whether you are sounde and in helth or to see by the hardness of yr hnd whether you have been a worker or noe. (40)

The relation between owner and commodity is clear, and though the existence of the narrative suggests the victory of the white authorial voice, the image of white flesh being bid upon and sold at market had to resonate with anyone who had seen or heard of a similar slave auction at home. That white Christians could be chattel in a Muslim country had to make the picture of domestic slave rebellion and reversal absolutely clear.

Though the situation of a white captive in Africa appears to demand reflection on the practice of holding African slaves in the United States, few
captive writers directly address this issue. William Ray notes in passing that sailors are “manacled, stripped, castigated, flayed, and mangled worse than the vilest Virginian slave,” but he does not dwell on the comparison or use his own situation to critique institutional slavery (19). Riley objects to slavery in principle, but only at the conclusion of the narrative and only, it seems, because he fears the bloodshed of a civil war or slave rebellion. The narrative of Judah Paddock, however, departs from this pattern, and despite ultimately treating the two black crewmen on his ship with indifference, Paddock records perhaps the strongest critique of American slaving practices that appears in any captivity narrative.

On January 8, 1800, Paddock and 12 others set sail across the Atlantic aboard the 260-ton Oswego with a cargo of flaxseed and staves. After stopping in Cork, the Oswego picked up a stowaway and pressed on to the Cape Verde islands. On the evening of April 3, the Oswego struck a reef, and all hands made for shore. After they had salvaged what they could from the stranded ship, Paddock attempted to lead the crew to St. Cruz, but most of the men grew weary and only three stayed with Paddock. Eventually, the entire crew was discovered by “a body of wild Arabs” who divided the men and boys into several smaller parties and carried them into bondage.

Though his captivity lasted less than seven weeks—a remarkably short time for Barbary captivity—Paddock experienced hardships every bit as difficult as the more famous Riley and Robbins:

Reader, pause a minute, and figure to yourself the appearance of ten of your poor unfortunate fellow-mortals, crawling over the face of the earth, feeding on half grown grain, by the side of a camel, and intermixed with eight wild Arabs, who, in all appearance, were dragging them into perpetual bondage, never to hear of, nor see any more, their dear friends and most beloved relations! Such as this, was the situation in which we were placed. (60)

On May 18, just 45 days after the Oswego stove and wrecked against the rocks, Paddock and two boys reached the British consul at Mogadore.

In many respects, Paddock’s account resembles those of the traditional captivity narrative, describing his captors in cannablistic and monstrous terms. In one episode, for instance, the crew of the Oswego discovered a deserted village and found a cask of human hair and a pile of human bones.
One of the party quickly declared the villagers to be man-eaters. A little while later, when Paddock encountered his captors for the first time, it comes as no surprise that he believed them to be vicious murderers:

As soon as they had come within a few yards, I held out my right hand in a token of friendship. Of that they took no notice, but passed by me as swift as it could be possible for men to run. My poor shipmates stood motionless; and when the monsters were come near enough to grab them, their attack began. While I was walking towards them, in a quick pace, I perceived my three companions were down on the ground, and the ferocious barbarians at work upon them with their daggers, which glittered in the sun. As they were passing by me I saw a dagger, or long knife, hung to each of their necks. While beholding the horrid sight of their attack, I could think of nothing else than that they were plunging their daggers to the hearts of my poor companions, whose groans and cries I distinctly heard. When I was come within thirty yards I stopt, and looked at them, with no other expectation but that my own turn would come next, after finishing the diabolical work they were then about. In that deplorable situation I remained for near a quarter of an hour, when, to my great surprise, they all arose on their feet; my men with their packs off, and half naked. (34)

Though Paddock’s account bears a great similarity to that of other captives in the manner that he demonizes his “monstrous” captors, his perhaps more than any other, remains strongly ambivalent about the roles of slaves and free blacks in the United States. In an early episode of this detailed narrative, Paddock bargains with a Muslim trader, Ahamed, who asks the captain what the Americans would give him over and beyond what the British consul would give if he were to buy Paddock. Paddock asks Ahamed to set a price for the entire lot of captives, including the two black crewmen, Jack and Sam, but Ahamed knows he cannot buy the men. He says:

“The mountaineers [who held Jack and Sam] will not sell the blacks at any price, for they are as good travellers as themselves; they are men that you christian dogs have taken from the Guinea country, a climate that suits them best, and you were going there to get more of them, and are worse that the Arabs, who enslave you only when it is God’s will to send you on our coast.” (67)
Paddock appears to be moved by Ahamed’s chastisement. “Never . . .,” he writes, “did I feel a reproach more sensibly” (67). Despite Ahamed’s remark, Paddock tried to deflect the criticism by arguing that the Oswego was not engaged in slave trading. Immediately, however, Jack, a young British boy whose ship, the Martin Hull, had wrecked on the coast the year before, claimed that his own vessel had been a slaver. Upon reaching Mogadore and meeting some of the crew of the Martin Hull, Paddock learned that the boy had been telling the truth.

Later in the account, after Ahamed had bought the captain and unsuccessfully attempted to bargain for Jack and Sam, Paddock arrived at a large dwelling on the way to Mogadore. While they were waiting for a message from the British consul to arrive, a number of Moors approached the captives. This scene is particularly important because it reverses a typical racial critique. Instead of the white narrator declaiming about the debased Africans, in this encounter, the white captives are the object of African disdain: “The object of the visit of these Moors was not, however, to buy us, for we were too far eastward for that; it was merely to see such a degraded race of human beings as we, in their opinion, were, and to make their remarks upon us” (137). Like Frederick Douglass and many other American slaves who wrote of being treated like animals, Paddock experiences the same humiliation and is reminded of how slaves in the United States are treated: “It brought fresh to my mind the situation I had seen the poor Africans in, in the West Indies, and also in some of our southern states, yarded up for sale, and the like observations made on them as on us—for instance, That is a stout fellow, this is a sickly looking creature, not worth much, he will soon die, and so on” (137).

Throughout his captivity, Paddock mentions that he and his crew were often the object of derision. His captors frequently gathered to speak of him and the other Americans and chide them as a “degraded race of mortals” who were “doomed to the everlasting punishment of hell fire after death” (83). In the following remarkable passage, Ahamed and his men turn the tables on the American captives completely, calling Paddock and his men lazy, poor, thievish, stupid, dependent, genetically inferior, immoral for trading slaves, and immoral for selling weapons. Reports Paddock,

Our country was so wretchedly poor, we were always looking out abroad for sustenance, and ourselves so base as to go to the Coast of Guinea
for slaves to cultivate our land, being not only too lazy to cultivate it ourselves, but too stupid to learn how to do it; and finally, that if all the Christians were obliged to live at home, their race would soon be extinct: that those belonging to Christian countries, being dependent on the other countries for almost every thing necessary to support nature with, they make for sale such things as guns, powder, knives, and so on, all which the world might do well enough without; and then they barter these things away to people abroad for the necessaries of life. (84)

In another exchange between captor and captive, Paddock argued that if Ahamed had been accidently shipwrecked on U.S. shores, he would be much better treated. Instead of being sold from trader to trader, Paddock assured Ahamed that he would be safely returned to his own country. Ahamed listens patiently to Paddock’s earnest discourse, and when the captive finishes, his master retorts, “There is no truth in you; if I were there, I should be doomed to perpetual slavery, and be put to the hardest labour, in tilling your ground; you are too lazy to work yourselves in your fields, and therefore send your ships to the negro coast, and in exchange for your useless trinkets with which you cheat the poor negroes, you take away ship-loads of them to your country, from which never one returns” (67). Paddock could no longer argue: “I felt the sting of this reproach of his, in a manner that I can never forget.” At the end of this episode, Paddock can no longer find words with which to bargain his case. He has been silenced:

The Arabs themselves make slaves of all the negroes that come within their power; but Jack had told them that we make slaves of every man of a dark skin, and whether negro or Arab we cared not. There was so much truth in the cutting reproach which Ahamed bestowed on Christians, so called, that prudence dictated silence on my part, at that time; and indeed at any other time I just have admitted that what he said was but too true. (100)

It is unclear how readers gauged Paddock’s conflicted stance on slavery and the subservience of African-Americans. While it might be argued that his narrative would be versatile enough to serve both the abolitionists and the pro-slavery cause, the publication numbers do not bear this out. The narrative itself had a short history, appearing in only three editions, and it was likely written primarily to support Riley’s narrative with another cap-
tivity example. But Paddock’s narrative twists the traditional representation of the African master. Although he first describes his captors as rapine plunderers who scrap for swag, Paddock’s reportage reveals his masters to be extremely well informed about American slaving practices. In this instance, the narrative is not simply a mirror of slavery in the United States, of whites being held as slaves in Africa; there is also a sense of African retribution, such that the plight of Paddock and his crew was made more difficult because of the ongoing practice of slavery in the United States.

As we begin to understand the adaptability of the Barbary captivity narrative, its evolution over centuries, and its rise in popularity just as the country began to define itself, we see a constellation of exciting questions begin to emerge. We need to ask to what degree was the xenophobia of the North African conflict translated onto North and South America? Since the Barbary captivity narrative co-evolved with, if not preceded, the Indian captivity narrative, how does our understanding of the later genre change? How do African American slave narratives, Indian captivity narratives, and Barbary captivity narratives mirror and distort each other? Commenting on the Indian captivity narrative by the slave Briton Hammon, John Sekora has suggested that the “eighteenth-century tale of Indian captivity is easily turned to the nineteenth-century story of southern bondage. One escape teaches another” (111). If this is true, that the early American slave narrative was influenced by the Indian captivity narrative and that these captivity narratives, in turn, were influenced by tales of Barbary slaves, then there must be a loose but intriguing connection between the black slave writer in America and the white captive narrator in Africa. In this context, the Barbary captivity narrative becomes nothing less than a missing textual link that strings together these formerly distinct genres. They must, in some instances, be read together and viewed as different facets of a related story of captors and captives.

Similarly, we are invited to ask what role the Barbary narratives play in American abolition debates, given such instances as former abolitionist Charles Sumner publishing his revised lectures on the history of white slavery in North Africa and Frederick Douglass referencing Barbary servitude in his novella *The Heroic Slave*. Other connections and questions arise: How did the menacing figure of the cruel black master in Barbary captivity narratives shape the fears of slave rebellion in the United States?
How was Islam used as a diabolical foil in a country at least partly predicated on religious freedom, and how did the Barbary captivity narrative help to mold these biases? Cotton Mather vilified Muslims, but James Riley’s treatment was far more measured, and Royall Tyler’s novel *The Algerine Captive* was severely criticized for its open-mindedness toward Islam. The Indian captivity narrative, American slave narrative, and Barbary captivity narrative form a nexus of highly charged texts that bear witness to a legacy of conquest, slavery, and religious intolerance, as well as the evolution of racial typology.

While examining the influence of early Barbary captivity narratives on eighteenth-century fiction, Joe Snader has argued that the “Oriental captivity plot enabled a variety of characterizations that remained important for the later English novel—the improvisational subject who masks an alien environment, the insular subject who defends his or her virtue, the divided subject who mediates internal conflicts and tensions, and the transgressive subject who crosses boundaries of nation, class, and gender” (298). These traces of early captivity narratives in the English novel suggest that the impact of the Barbary conflict may have been critical. In their work on the transatlantic cultural exchange between America and Britain, Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse use the Indian captivity narrative to forge a link between Benedict Anderson’s theory of “New World” nationalism and Michel Foucault’s description of European modernity. By compensating for Anderson’s neglect of Europe and for Foucault’s overt Eurocentrism, Armstrong and Tennenhouse are able to suggest that cultural traffic was fluid and transitive, that the New World was not merely shaped by the Old World but actually forged a new Old World through the Indian captivity narrative. Among other things, they posit that the origins of the English novel can be found in the North American Indian captivity narrative and that Richardson’s *Pamela*, for example, should be viewed as a captivity narrative. “The [Indian] captivity narrative,” they write, “described an experience that people of ‘the middling sort’ in England could not have imagined were it not for the colonial venture; it asked its readers to imagine being English in America.” The existence of the Barbary captivity narrative, which preceded the Indian captivity narrative, however, suggests a modification of their formula, that captivity narratives asked their readers to imagine being English in Africa or the Americas. But the situation in the British North American colonies and the United States was
of course fundamentally different, and we need to pay particular attention to the American captivity narratives to ascertain if they are significantly distinct. How might they represent a colonial subject and subjects of a vigorously growing nation in the early literature of the Americas?

Interestingly, even after over 400 years, the idea of Barbary captivity continues in film and romance novels just as the struggle between the west and various Islamic “rogue” states rages on. To what degree, we might ask, is the portrayal of the Muslim terrorist predicated on the Barbary pirate? How has the early American portrayal of Islam migrated to the Middle East, Indonesia, Bosnia, Pakistan, Afganistan, and back to the United States? As the United States formally enters into a war against terrorism, these questions become even more relevant. How we come to understand and define ourselves 200 years after the Tripolitan War is predicated in part upon our early encounters with Muslims in Africa. Clearly what we see in this long-neglected history is that the Barbary captivity narrative closely stitches together the textual representations of Africa, the Americas, and England and that their mutual influences were greater than we previously imagined.

NOTES

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1. See McMurtry. For a contemporary account of Riley’s trek, see *Skeletons on the Zahara*, in which King attempts to recreate and describe for a twenty-first-century reader the physical hardship of Riley’s march across the desert. This immensely popular account continues to be revived, relived, and repackaged.

2. Abraham Browne’s manuscript of *A Book of Remembrance of God’s Provydences towards me, A.B., throughout the cours of my Life*, written for my own medytacion in New Eng, resides at the Massachusetts Historical Society and has not yet been fully published. Unlike Gee’s manuscript, Browne’s remains intact and gives his autobiography leading up to and following captivity. A long excerpt of the narrative appears in Stephen T. Riley’s “Abraham Browne’s Captivity by the Barbary Pirates, 1655.”

3. Gee’s narrative survives only in fragments that are difficult to read. The surviving text, however, presents intriguing clues about the time he spent in Algiers. For instance, Gee’s carpentry skills save him from a more punishing captivity, but on a number of occasions he mentions narrowly averting death, “with God’s assis-
tance,” and, like Rowlandson and Browne, fills his pocket notebook with biblical references.

4. See Blassingame, ch. 2, and Matar, *Turks*, 90–91. The number of slaves in any one location and at any one time is even more difficult to estimate. John B. Wolf places the number of slaves in “Algiers around the 1630’s at 25,000 males and 2,000 females” (351). Braudel grants some credence to a Portuguese prisoner’s estimate of 20,000 total slaves in the year 1621 (see p. 887).

5. We know, for instance, that Levin Bufkin was abducted on his way to Virginia in approximately 1678. Upon his redemption by an international body of Quakers in 1680, Bufkin wrote: “I am Redeemed out of Captivity I suppose by order of thee and other friends, which Deliverance is never to bee forgotten by mee for which my soul hath Cause to bless the Lord who hath Delivered mee from the soard and from the pestelence and from the Rage of Cruell faithless and blodye minded men and hath been a presant helpe and a staye to mee in time of neede, blessed bee his name for Ever moare” (qtd. in Carroll 312).

6. In 1682 Admiral Arthur Herbert negotiated a peace treaty with Dey Baba Hassan that afforded British ships protection from Algerian corsairs. The treaty was extended in 1703 by Admiral George Byng to cover all ships built or fitted in the Anglo-American colonies. Sporadic abductions occurred even during this treaty, including the capture of a Quaker ship en route to America in 1722.

7. In “Swarthy Pirates and White Slaves,” Jennifer Margulis has performed valuable archival research in tracking down these public displays of fascination over the Barbary captives.

8. Although it has been long overlooked, there have been quite a few valuable attempts to examine the American and North African conflict. See Starr; Wil- son; Ben Rejeb, “Shores”; Lewis; Allison; Matar; Baepler, *White Slaves*; Margulis; Bekkaoui, Blum; and Rojas. There have also been three recent republications of drama involving captives in Barbary. See Bekkaoui; Margulis and Poremski; and Vitkus.

9. Michelle Burnham has partially traced this assumption and notes that the argument for exceptionality serves to cloak the larger “interstitial spaces” in which continuity and intertextual influences among continental literatures exist. See p. 5.

10. In his *True Travels*, John Smith suggested that once the English navy was contracted during the relatively peaceful reign of King James, unemployed English seamen “turned Pirats.” They traveled to Barbary, where they transferred their sailing expertise and knowledge to North African privateers. Thus, certainly the Barbary corsairs were first technologically empowered to raid western ships by the English and western powers. See pp. 238–41. See also Wolf 164.

11. Lurting’s narrative was widely published in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and appeared in a children’s book in the 1950s.

12. *Narrative of the shipwreck of the ship Oswego, on the coast of south barbary, and of the sufferings of the master and the crew while in bondage among the arabs; inter-
spersed with numerous remarks upon the country and its inhabitants, and concerning the peculiar perils of that coast, 48. Paddock’s narrative was published with Riley’s even though the events of the Oswego occurred 15 years prior to Riley’s shipwreck. This was likely an attempt to verify the events of Riley’s own captivity.

13. Haberly 11. Bonnie Frederick echoes Haberly: “[Spanish soldiers] described the Indian with the vocabulary previously used to describe the Moors infidel, and the American desert was transformed into hell” (87). She cites Francisco Nuñez de Piñeda y Bascuán’s “El cautiverio feliz” (1629) as cultivating the cristiano-infiel opposition. See 85–99.

14. Jonathan Cowdery’s entire account was first serialized before it was issued as a bound volume. Ion Perdicaris’s twentieth-century account provides a more extreme case of pre-publication. His manuscript was solicited by Leslie’s Magazine while he was still in captivity, so he knew exactly who his audience would be. Although Foss’s letter was addressed to his mother, he likely expected her to circulate the text to generate sympathy and ransom for the captives. For more on the Perdicaris captivity, see my “Rewriting the Barbary Captivity Narrative.”

15. Paddock 100. James Leander Cathcart made a similar argument to his captor, suggesting that no “Mussulmen” had ever been to America nor been treated poorly. His captor, Ibram Rais, fired back: “‘True,’ answered he, (curling his whiskers), ‘but you are Christians and if you have not injured Mussulmen it was not for the want of will, but for want of power’” (49).

16. Lotfi Ben Rejeb discusses the use of the Barbary slave situation within abolitionist rhetoric in “America’s Captive Freemen.” For a detailed discussion of how Frederick Douglass incorporated North Africa into his work, see Margulis, esp. pp. 157, 162.

17. For more on the reception of The Algerine Captive, see Davidson, esp. 208–9.

18. Armstrong and Tennenhouse 205; emphasis added. In another example, the authors contrast Mary Rowlandson and Robinson Crusoe. Coincidentally, before Crusoe even reaches his island, he is captured by Moroccan rovers and held as a Barbary captive for two years. See Defoe, Robinson Crusoe, 17.

19. The work of several scholars suggests the revision of Armstrong and Tennenhouse’s thesis. Ralph Bauer has recently pointed to the distinct “identity work” performed by South and North American Indian captivity narratives and the variance of the colonial encounter in Protestant British America and Catholic Spanish America, which further complicates Armstrong and Tennenhouse’s original argument. While it is unlikely that English subjects read South American captivity narratives, Bauer also points to Katherine Zabelle Derounian-Stodola’s important historiographic research on Mary Rowlandson’s account, which suggests that this early Indian captivity narrative—central to Armstrong and Tennenhouse’s argument—sold poorly in England and that the remaining copies were exported to the colonies. Examining fiction before Richardson, Joe Snader borrows from Edward Said in deploying what he calls the “Oriental” captivity narrative to discuss two English captivity novels that preceded Pamela, William
Rufus Chetwood’s *Adventures of Robert Boyle* (1726) and Penelope Aubin’s *The Noble Slave* (1722). In his postcolonial reading, Snader also suggests that Armstrong and Tennenhouse’s concentration on the American situation “obscures the wider frame of British expansion overseas and the potential of captivity narratives from a variety of locations for affecting the production of English fictions” (271).

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