The Captivity Narrative

The Captivity Narrative: Enduring Shackles and Emancipating Language of Subjectivity

Edited by

Benjamin Mark Allen
and Dahia Messara

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In Memoriam

Susan Rollins

Organizational Co-Founder of Southwest/
Texas Chapter of the Popular and
American Culture Association

1942 – 2011

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In April 2011, scholars and professionals from around the world convened in San Antonio, Texas to participate in several panels that examined the theme of captivity in its various forms and manners of expression. The focus groups were part of the larger complex of conferences hosted by the Southwest/Texas Popular Culture and American Culture Association (SWTXPCAC) at the 3rd Joint Conference. The editor wishes to thank the organizers of this conference and the directors of SWTXPCAC for their recognition of the captivity narrative genre and for the opportunity to bring national and international notoriety to the subject. It was, of course, the panelists and contributors who made this conference a success, and as regards the captivity narrative component, the editors are most appreciative to Anne Babson, Jennifer Curtis, Lanta Davis, Steven Gambrel, Anne Matthews, Alan Smith and Elisabeth Ziemba for their contributions, suggestions, and patience. They have demonstrated that the captivity narrative offers a rich source of historical, literary, and philosophical insight to the human condition. Dahia Messara expresses her gratitude for the financial support provided by the *Institut de recherche en langues et littératures européennes* and the *Ecole Doctorale "Humanités"* at the Université de Haute-Alsace (France). South Texas College in McAllen is also deserving of recognition for its support for Benjamin Allen's tenure as chair of the captivity narrative panel. Much praise and appreciation is also extended to Ms. Linda Parker, who helped to transcribe portions of the text, and to Ms. Norma Longoria, who exerts dexterous effort at keeping the paperwork in order. Despite the assistance, the editors and contributors alone are responsible for any errors. A word of gratitude should also be extended to Cambridge Scholars Publishing for its efforts in making available scholarly treatises such as this to a wider audience.

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INTRODUCTION

When speaking of the captivity narrative the tendency is to understand it in terms of the imprisonment of an individual or a group within a spatially confined space. Nevertheless, history has demonstrated that the phenomenon of captivity is multifaceted and of such complexity that the subject must be more broadly defined so that studies may consider not only the physical, but rather the psychological and cultural dimensions as well. Considering, this labyrinth often requires a multidisciplinary approach to the subject as this present work attests. Scholars from a multitude of academic and professional disciplines have attempted to probe the deepest meaning of captivity. What can scholars make of the various nuances and interpretations of captivities from the earliest mythologized histories passed down to us from the ancients to the more modern hostage dramas that are politically or culturally motivated? What unifying themes may be discerned from the famous Babylonian captivity, the Barbary Coast captivities over the course of the 16th and the 19th centuries, the Iranian hostage crisis, the captivity of the French Colombian Ingrid Betancourt among the FARC[1], and ever occurring news of hostages worldwide?

While an obvious theme is certainly the aforementioned idea that captivity is the act of physical imprisonment of individuals by a hostile group who may be motivated by various political, social, and religious reasons, another underlying common denominator is the tendency among former captives to record their unique and life-altering experience. The wish to document the ordeal has been shared by many freed captives throughout history—the more famous among them include Miguel Cervantes, Cabeza de Vaca and Mary Rowlandson. And where the captives did not undertake the task themselves, oftentimes they garnered support from ghostwriters and literary artists eager to assist for a variety of financial, political, and social purposes.

Captivity, in all of its different forms and manifestations, has been occasionally captured by text[2] throughout history. This textualization eventually gave birth to a distinctive literary genre characterized by Indian captivity narratives that flourished in North America from the 17th to the 19th century, and perhaps long before if we consider the Spanish narratives of those like Cabeza de Vaca. Although the phenomenon of captivity, per se, predates the specific experience of the white Christian settlers taken

captive by the Native Americans during the European conquest of the New World, it did not essentially emerge as a literary genre—or at least was conceptualized as such—until much later. According to Gary L. Ebersole, about two thousand English captivity narratives presented as factual accounts were published before 1880 in America.[3] Kathryn Zabelle went on to define three main chronological phases for the genre: Authentic religious accounts in the 17th century; propagandistic and stylistically embellished texts in the 18th century; outright works of fiction in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.[4]

Although classified by fact, fiction, or a little of both, several aspects intrinsically related to captivity have appeared to enhance the motif as well as the genre. This present work shows the various facets of captivity through the historiography of both the phenomenon and its literary forms. The deconstruction inherent in the title—*Enduring Shackles and the Emancipating Language of Subjectivity*—nicely summarizes the subtlety of this eclectic study on captivity. When dealing with captivity narratives, scholars tend to cross back and forth between actual physical captivity or imprisonment, which is here symbolized by shackles, and the various nuances and interpretations of the different aspects of that captivity as represented in the narratives. Once the story of the author's captivity has been put down in narrative form, what becomes of these shackles? To what extent does subjectivity play in reshaping the captivity narrative genre or in creating and recreating peripheral genres such as "social captivity" as explored in the last part of this work?

In order to address these questions, this study is organized both thematically and chronologically. However, the chronology in question here is not so much the chronological order of the different captivity experiences or their publication, but that of the bringing into being of a literary genre and the flourishing of different aspects of the genre, as well as the gradual appearance of closely related topics and nuances. Thus this work is organized into three parts. Part One is organized around various 16th-century captivities that occurred in North America where Europeans fell into the hands of Native Americans but lived to tell their story. Part Two moves beyond the more traditional white captivity amongst the Indians to also consider African American slavery and Indian captives among the Christians. The unifying theme is the legacies of captivity as portrayed by factual and fictional literature and documents. Part Three will consider the modern peripheral iteration stemming from perhaps the most common form of the captivity phenomenon—prison or, more generally, societal captivity.

The essays that comprise Part One flesh-out the key themes of those reality-based narratives. The contributors Benjamin Allen, Dahia Messara and Lanta Davis show how the former captive authors or protagonists of the narrative struggled physically, psychologically, and spiritually to survive their ordeals in what Europeans considered a savage wilderness. Allen discusses the captivity of the Talon children, who were members of the failed French colony established in Texas by La Salle and who fell into the hands of the Karankawa and Cenis Indians, then to the Spaniards. Allen claims that the assimilation of the children into the Indian society and the eventual crossing into Spanish control prompted the metamorphosis toward a new "American" entity—one that is no longer European or Native American, but rather a biological and/or cultural hybrid that resulted when the White Christians clashed and then mingled with the Native Americans. The cultural homogeneity found in Europe and the New World in 1491 evolved into an entirely new breed after 1492.

The remaining two studies also emphasize the role of identity as well as the different aspects and interpretations of that process of "going native" as portrayed by early Puritan captivity narrators. In many of these accounts, the familial theme is ever present, especially among the female captives. What did it mean to be a captive mother and how did these women cope with the motherly grief they went through as a part of the captivity ordeal? This concept of motherhood as related to the overall theme of trauma is addressed by both Dahia Messara and Lanta Davis. Messara discusses subjectivity as an interaction between the deliberate distortion or embellishment of facts and actual pathological factors such as trauma. The representation of the latter shifts from detailed descriptions of physical torture and mutilation suffered mainly by male captives such as Father Jogues to psychological and emotional disturbances, primarily as exemplified in the captivity narratives of women. Messara also detects the seeds of an attempt by the victims to overcome the trauma through a combination of emotional, religious, and psycho-social processes of recovery.

Lanta Davis continues to explore the issue of survival in the face of psychological trauma. She discusses how the captives' outpouring of grief by weeping and their captor's response to it can be seen as a form of recovery, or at least relief from trauma. She argues that the physiological symptom of shedding tears leads a way towards what the Puritans considered as spiritual values of reconciliation and redemption. Davis principally shows how, in some Puritan captivity narratives, Native American and French compassion and pity toward their captives' tears prods the authors to gradually view their captors not as merely the

demonic "other," but as human beings capable of human emotions and sympathy.

The second part of this book generally examines the legacies of captivity for individuals and as portrayed in fictional literature. In most instances, freed or escaped captives would never enjoy true emancipation either spatially or psychologically as may be demonstrated by the contributors, Jennifer Curtis, Anne Matthews and Elisabeth Ziemba. Curtis's study focuses on how captivity affected Catherine DuBois, who was abducted by the Indians in the area of New Amsterdam during the 17th century. Although there are few historical records, Curtis argues that the extraordinary influence that captivity may have had is indicated by the song she sang while in captivity and through her Last Will and Testament; therefore, by using peripheral literature to contextualize the event and its effects, Curtis bridges the gap between reality-based narratives and the semi-fictional or totally fictional works which appeared later in the 19th century.

Anne Matthews's analysis of the slave Wallace Turnage's Voyage to Freedom, and Elisabeth Ziemba's deconstruction of Ann S. Stephens's fictional book *Malaeska* move beyond the more traditional Indian captivity narrative. Here we find instances of a slave narrative and of the captivity of a Native America girl by the whites, respectively. Anne Matthews points out that, whereas white and Indian captives in America had the opportunity to return home once rescued, escaped slaves remained captives despite that they were no longer confined to the plantation. She argues that while the white captives can traverse the space between captivity and freedom, being fundamentally at liberty to go home, the black captive cannot, and thus must make the harrowing flight from captivity to the liminal—they must remain on the threshold of freedom without having the ability to cross over to realize the full potential. Matthews argues that the character Wallace Turnage resorts to passive resistance while always confronting the possibility of recapture and its potentially deadly consequences. He is at the same time retrospective and rhetorical, revealing his continued awareness of the role of the liminal in the lives of ex-slaves.

Turning to *Malaeska*, Ziemba argues that, as a piece of sensationalist and sentimental literature, Stephens's novel taps several traditions that appear in the factual captivity literature, but with a twist—Malaeska is an Indian girl who must assimilate into Christian society. Via this depiction of a young Native American woman who married a white man by whom she has a son, Stephens emphasizes the stigma of captivity and the fears of miscegenation that prevented society from accepting an individual as an

equal imbued with basic rights and dignity. In the final analysis, *Malaeska* is a testament to the lingering effects that the captivity narratives had on society and, specifically, the author.

The final series of essays dissects yet another genre of captivity tales, namely those that were inspired by or emanated from prison life. Analyses are offered by Anne Babson, Alan Smith and Steven Gambrel. In the first essay, "Words of Reprieve," Babson explores the early poetical works of Jimmy Santiago Baca. Having lived a life of crime in a poor Latino neighborhood in Los Angeles where he exerted power through violence, Baca eventually found himself incarcerated and powerless. Babson demonstrates, however, that this one-time street thug discovered a renewed power through the use of words. In doing so, he became a poet in his own right and garnered the attention of the literati. He found his own voice, ironically, in a prison system that often attempts to stamp out individuality by demanding conformity with the goal of rehabilitation.

Philosopher and journalist Alan Smith goes on to extrapolate the nature of the captivity narrative as a piece of storytelling. In "Prison Narratives, or Don't let the Truth Spoil a Good Story," Smith ponders just how much credibility scholars and lay readers should place in another's tale that is often tailored for the audience or the publisher. While most do not wish to be deceived, neither do they wish to be bored. Most prefer good drama even if the author must subvert the truth. Smith's insights reminds us that, although many captivity tales are based on factual experiences, the telling thereof is highly subjective; thus, we should always be mindful of the larger context and the pressures the narrators confront when telling their story.

In the last essay, "'If He was to be Heard, He had to be Killed:' Language from the Old Bailey to the Gallows," Gambrel attempts to examine 19th-century prison narratives from London's Old Bailey courthouse and Newgate Prison. The prisoner tales were never complete, however, and must be patched together through court testimony, prison records, and the final statements made at the gallows. He uses the three sources to resurrect the voices of the condemned, but always mindful that the accuracy is suspect because of mitigating factors that perhaps influenced the narrators, especially considering that legal proceedings often served as entertainment for society thus potentially profitable for the transcriptionists. The narrators understood, as Smith postulates in the previous essay, that truth should never be allowed to ruin a good story.

—Dahia Messara

Notes

1. Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Insurgent group in Columbia).
2. I borrowed the phrase “captured by text” from Gary L. Ebersole, *Captured by Texts: Puritan to Postmodern Image of Indian Captivity* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995).
3. Ibid., 9.
4. Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stadola, *Women’s Indian Captivity Narratives* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), xii.

PART ONE:

COLONIAL AMERICAN CAPTIVITY

CHAPTER ONE

THE TALONS: CAPTIVES, EMISSARIES AND THE FIRST AMERICANS

BENJAMIN M. ALLEN

During the latter 17th and early 18th centuries, competition between France and Spain intensified over their North American empires, and especially in the region of what would be known as Texas. This large and mostly non-colonized area of northeastern Nueva España (New Spain) attracted the most attention from the French in their attempts to dominate the potentially profitable regions surrounding the Mississippi River and its mouth, a vital trade route for French commerce. The first serious attempts at French incursions to Texas came in 1685 when René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, established a short-lived colony named Fort Saint Louis at Matagorda Bay just north of present day Corpus Christi. Following this disastrous effort, it required another two decades before the French revived their intentions. It then fell to Louis Juchereau de Saint-Denís, who between 1700 and 1720 made significant strides to settle Louisiana and encourage trade with the Spaniards and Indians in Texas. Assisting him were two brothers, Pierre and Robert Talon, who had come to intimately know the region and its inhabitants during their ordeal with La Salle and a period of captivity with the Tejas and Karankawa Indians.[1]

With the exception of the Native Americans, perhaps no persons or groups during the era of American colonization were as less celebrated as the Talons. Only recently were they rescued from obscurity by La Salle scholar Robert Weddle who, unlike the more politically focused researchers of previous generations, felt that their tale merited greater scrutiny.[2] The general neglect is regrettable but understandable. The Talons' social status placed them toward the bottom of political prominence during an age that considered the contributions of the aristocrats more valuable than that of the peasantry and/or other commoners. Furthermore,

contemporaries largely marginalized those who lived amongst the Indians given the stigma that captivity and acculturation brought with it. Those Europeans who, by accident or through warfare, were forced across the cultural threshold by the Indians discovered that life after rescue could prove as precarious as captivity. When held for considerable lengths of time, the Christian captives would usually emerge indistinguishable from their "savage" captors. Rather than being warmly received, the captives were often ostracized by their countrymen.[3] Having all the indelible markings (tattoos, scarifications, etc.) of their captors, appearance alone would certainly have set the Talons apart. Regardless, the French would use the Talon brothers to further the monarchy's objectives in Louisiana and Texas. French officials recognized the Talons' worth in that they could serve as guides, interpreters, and liaisons in an attempt to spread French imperial claims from the Mississippi Delta well into the northeastern expanses of Nueva España.

Historical hindsight, however, allows for the recognition that these brothers and their family were more than simple tools commandeered for political objectives. Their life as colonists in North America and the transformative ordeals that they suffered served as a rite of passage that transformed the Talon children into first-generation "Americans"—a new cultural entity that defied blood and cultural ties. Although born French, these children metamorphosed into cultural hybrids—acculturated beings that served as bridges between two disparate and conflicting worlds. And whereas the Talons may serve modern scholars for the cultural and socio-political insights their tale affords, we must always beware of the intensely personal emotional ordeals these real persons endured. Ultimately this was a family tragedy.[4] It is highly doubtful that the Talons or anyone of their generation understood the concept of "American" as opposed to a traditional European nationality, but we do know they understood and felt the sense of family and the bonds that result when, faced with tribulations and possible death, one realizes that family is all that remains.

The Talons' epic story is noteworthy for a variety of reasons. It has all of the elements of entertaining drama—murder, intrigue, mystery, betrayal, and tragedy, but it is astonishingly true and substantiated by archival sources. Unlike countless numbers of captives who returned from their frontier prisons but remained invisible, the Talons left behind a record that, albeit incomplete, at least provides a glimpse into their ordeal. Additionally, other French and Spanish witnesses offer collaborative documentation. Collectively, the records allow scholars to compose an accurate but piecemeal account. The Talons, to our knowledge, did not write a first-person narrative. Instead, they related a brief tale to French

officials who recorded it in formal interrogatories.[5] Unlike modern legal depositions that are recorded verbatim by a transcriptionist, the French interrogators took some liberties by interjecting commentary and shifting between first and third person narrative. To 17th-century bureaucrats, the Talons' importance extended only so far as they could assist French colonization efforts. Throughout the various sources, the Talons are peripheral objects to the larger politico-economic realities and, interestingly, there is little hint of sympathy for these young men and their sister who survived unimaginable brutality and heartache. Sensibilities then appear more calloused to modern observers, and historians must resort to what has been described as "exact imagining" in order to elevate the Talons' humanity to the focal point of the narrative.[6]

The Talon family first appears in the literature that emerges following La Salle's failed attempt to establish a French colony in the midst of Spanish dominions in North America. The youthful Pierre and Jean-Baptiste Talon, along with their siblings, had little choice other than to accompany La Salle considering their father, Lucien, had signed onto the venture just before La Salle sailed from France in late 1684. Lucien and his wife, Isabelle Planteau, had originally lived in the colony of Quebec and married there in 1671, then went on to establish a sizable family that would include Pierre, Jean-Baptiste, the younger Lucien, and two eldest daughters, Marie-Elizabeth and Marie-Magdelaine. During the transatlantic voyage from France to the Texas Gulf Coast in 1684, Isabelle gave birth to yet another son, Robert. From all accounts this was the largest family to have settled in the newly founded Fort Saint Louis of Tejas.[7]

Arguably, it is very difficult for the modern reader to thoroughly sympathize with the Talons' plight. "Childhood," as understood in modern parlance, would have been something quite different for 17th-century colonists. The rigors demanded the dedicated efforts of all family members who could work. The transatlantic voyages alone were exasperating for even the veteran sailors, much more for children and pregnant women. Furthermore, the Talons and other crew members faced Spanish piracy and the loss of most of their vessels.[8] These hazards would pale in comparison, however, to what they would endure at Fort Saint Louis.

In retrospect, it appears that the entire effort was cursed from start to finish. The evidence indicates that La Salle and his crew did not measure up to the task before them. It was reported that La Salle proved stubborn and arrogant, which caused constant conflict with colonists as well as the captain of the *Joly*, Taneguy le Gallios de Beaujeu, who immediately deserted La Salle and his colonists as soon as the group had disembarked

at Matagorda Bay. In fact, many colonists returned with the disgruntled captain, apparently preferring another Atlantic crossing to life under La Salle. Perhaps, too, those who returned feared the omens—even before weighing anchor, one ketch carrying the provisions ran aground and sank. Subsequent events would also attest to the wisdom of their decision considering that the one ship that remained with La Salle, the *Belle*, later sank in a storm, thus stranding the colonists and dooming them to their fate.[9]

Before arriving at Matagorda Bay in February 1685, it was apparent that La Salle's selection of colonists, as well as their leadership, was less than stellar. As one of La Salle's lieutenants, Henri Joutel, lamented, "Of the 130 men, only a few were able to do anything at all. . . .These were all men who had been taken by force or deceit."[10] The rancor among them was of such magnitude that they hurled blame toward one another for any and every mishap. Discipline was non-existent. Joutel wrote of drunken sentries and of several who flagrantly disobeyed orders. The presence of women and children did not help matters, either, and Joutel further describes how Isabelle Talon became embroiled in legal quarrels with another family.[11] La Salle's failure of leadership coupled with the loss of the ships, the dismal lack of preparation, and whimsical selection of the colonists all conspired against the explorer, who was murdered by one of his own in March 1687. Indications are that it was an act of vengeance on the part of one of La Salle's soldiers.

As La Salle's troubles mounted, so did those of the Talon clan. Sometime before October 1685 the father, Lucien, went mysteriously missing while on a hunting expedition miles from the fort. A few months afterwards the grieving family was again traumatized when eldest daughter, Marie-Elizabeth, contracted a severe illness and died during the winter of 1686. The grief-stricken mother, who agonizingly watched as the wilderness slowly consumed her husband and children, would again be forced to say goodbye to yet another when La Salle decided to journey overland to the other French outpost of Fort St. Louis of Illinois on the Mississippi River in hopes of securing provisions for his struggling colony.[12]

La Salle had planned to leave eldest son Pierre Talon with the Cenis (a tribe of the more peaceful Hasanai or Tejas Confederacy) in order that the boy would learn the language, secure an alliance, and become an interpreter for the Texas colony. The parting of Madame Talon and her son was undoubtedly a touching scene, but not as heart-wrenching as the following events. Soon after La Salle and his followers departed Fort Saint Louis in Texas the Karankawa Indians, who inhabited the coastal areas

around the colony, went on the offensive and massacred the colonists who remained behind, including Madame Talon.[13] According to the Talons, the massacre was another act of retribution for the wrongs committed by La Salle. Had it not been for the intervention of the Karankawa women "touched with compassion by their youth," undoubtedly the Talon children would have been slaughtered as well; however, Jean-Baptiste, Lucien, Robert and eldest sister, Marie-Magdelaine along with another relative, Eustache Bréman, were all spared and carried away into captivity.[14] Farther inland, their eldest brother, Pierre, along with another colonist would adopt the Cenís as their new family.

Like so many borderland inhabitants before and after them, the younger brothers and their sister entered captivity by way of unimaginable violence and brutality. Having witnessed the slaughter of their mother, their only comfort may have been the Karankawa women who "reared and loved" the Talons "as if they were their own children."[15] Despite the affection, however, survival required that the Talons become Karankawa by shedding their familiar French skin and assuming that of the Indian other, both literally and metaphorically. During the Talon's initiation, they were stripped naked, tattooed, and tanned by the sun. The Indians further required that the boys participate in war and, during the victory rituals, consume the flesh of the conquered.[16] When eventually discovered by the Spaniards, the Talons had become indistinguishable from their captors.

Such rapid acculturation proved unsettling to most European sensibilities despite that, by 1690, the phenomena was well known in borderland regions. English, French and Spanish colonists found it spiritually shocking that Christians could be abducted and assimilated by the "savages" to such a degree as to cause the captives to willingly "go native" even when given the opportunity to rejoin family and countrymen. Modern psychological and sociological theories may help explain this cultural transformation. Stockholm syndrome may offer the most rational explanation but the psycho-social models proposed by Arnold Van Gennep regarding rites of passage have merit, too.[17] Undeniably, the physical and linguistic manifestations indicate deep-rooted psychological metamorphoses. It would not be the last for the Talons.

Having accepted their new life among the Indians who "loved [the Talons] tenderly," the Talons confronted renewed anxieties when Spanish scouts appeared among the Cenis and Karankawa.[18] On learning of possible French incursions to the north, the Viceroy of Nueva España, Conde de Monclova (1686 – 1688), sent out expeditions in late 1686. After several attempts, one party led by Fray Damián Massanet and Alonso de León finally in 1689 happened across Pierre Talon and another

French captive living with the Cenís. By 1691 and after two more attempts, the remaining captives had been secured from the Karankawa with some difficulty. The Talon depositions are ambivalent regarding exactly the manner of which the Spaniards acquired the Talons from the Indians who "loved [these children] tenderly." At one point, the narrative suggests that the Talons asked to join the Spaniards, whereas other French captives had to be seized by force. Furthermore, the Talon narrator described how "reluctantly the savages allowed [the Talons] to go . . . [knowing] that the Spaniards [intended] to carry them away by force."[19] In return, the Spaniards gave the Indians horses and tobacco, but only after a skirmish that resulted in the death of a few Indians.

Given that the La Salle survivors could provide crucial intelligence, it is doubtful that the Spaniards would have allowed any to remain with the Indians. The Talons thus experienced another separation ordeal, albeit perhaps less traumatic than the first. For the Indians, however, it may have been emotionally devastating. According to Jean-Baptiste Talon, who was the last to depart sometime after his brothers and sisters, the Karankawa "wept bitterly . . . and they mourned . . . for a month afterwards."[20] Interestingly, the depositions offer no indication of the Talons' emotional disposition upon leaving "these savage people," who treated the siblings "with the greatest kindness in the world."[21]

According to the Talons the Spaniards, too, offered much kindness. By the time they arrived in Mexico City, Monclova had been replaced by Viceroy Conde de Galve (1688 – 1696), who warmly accepted the Talons into his residence. During the approximate five year stay, the Talons were thoroughly indoctrinated into the Spanish world and given citizenship. The viceroy first employed them as household servants and, when the eldest three brothers came of age, he ordered them into the service of the Spanish fleet that patrolled the Gulf. In an ironic turn of fate during their brief service, Pierre, Jean-Baptiste and Lucien came full circle when their Spanish flag-ship, the *Santo Cristo*, was seized and boarded by the crew of a French warship, the *Bon*, in January 1697.[22]

Indications are that the Talon brothers were not happy with this turn of events. Whereas one may suspect that they would have been overjoyed to be reunited with their countrymen, their actions suggests otherwise. According to French sources, the brothers' greatest concern was for their eldest sister, Marie-Magdelaine, and youngest brother, Robert.[23] Both had, in the meantime, sailed to Spain with the Conde de Galve and his wife. Having fallen into French hands, the likelihood of reunion grew ever quaint. Only when the French official promised to help reunify the family did the Talons agree to cooperate. It is their reaction to this crisis that

indicates the Talon's familial bonds seemingly transcended any loyalty to country. Indeed, this family had no country. Born on the fringes of French suzerainty in a world incomprehensible to most Europeans, these children only knew one home, the North American wilderness and, for a time, its aboriginal inhabitants. Perhaps French by birth, they went on to join the ranks of countless others who assumed a new American identity.[24]

This distinction may have been missed by French authorities, but more practical qualifications did not go unnoticed. In preparation for a renewed colonization effort on the Gulf coasts, Pierre Le Moyne, Sieur d'Iberville, fortuitously learned of the recent recruits who intimately knew the Gulf Coast regions and the inhabitants.[25] By October 1699 after having offered their deposition, Pierre and Jean-Baptiste accepted a new assignment with the Canadian detachments under the command of Louis Juchereau de Saint-Denís. Soon the Talon brothers were back on the Gulf Coast at Biloxi Bay.

The Talon's exact contributions to the French efforts in Louisiana are not entirely known. It is possible that, between January 1700 and spring 1702 when the Talons returned to France, they assisted Saint-Denís in his explorations and colonization attempts along the Mississippi and Red rivers. In 1702, French authorities allowed the brothers to return to France in hopes of locating their sister, Marie-Magdelaine. In the process, the brothers apparently landed in a Portuguese prison for reasons unknown. Jean-Baptiste disappeared from the record at this point, but Pierre resurfaced in 1714 when back in the service of Saint-Denís along with youngest brother, Robert. Pierre served as the guide for the Saint-Denís expedition from Natchitoches into Texas to the Rio Grande River in hopes of establishing trade relations with the Spaniards and Native Americans. By 1716, Pierre and Robert had returned to Mobile and basically faded to obscurity along with their siblings who by then were scattered across two continents.[26]

From a strictly geo-political perspective, the La Salle and Saint-Denís ventures into Texas were failures—neither successfully planted French colonists in Texas. Rather than securing French objectives, the incursions actually spurred the expansion of New Spain into its slumbering northern regions.[27] What progress that the French made into the Red River Valley and beyond was owed in part to the assistance of the Talon guides. Pierre's tattoos that served as indelible physical reminders of his captivity also provided Saint-Denís with, what one scholar described as, a "passport" through the Hasanai and Karankawa regions of Louisiana and Texas. Ironically, these were the same markings that the Spaniards attempted to scrub from the children's faces when rescued in 1791. [28]

Considering that their interrogations occurred before the Saint-Denís ventures, we are provided few clues regarding what the Talons experienced when again encountering their one-time surrogate family. Did they meet any familiar faces among the Cenís? What were the reactions of the Indians who once loved these folks more than their own children? We can only speculate. Those facial markings that both the French and Spaniards considered reprehensible would have been warmly greeted by the Indians. Whereas marginalized by their own countrymen, the Talons would have most likely been received as family by the Indians who cared less about blood relations and more about the individual's worth to the tribe.

Owing to the blossoming of cultural history, we are at last better able to peer beyond the political narrative and resurrect the memory of those like the Talons. This family's story, representative of countless others that spanned at least four centuries, provides clues to the genesis of that uniquely "American" character. Although of French lineage, the Talon children endured hardships and underwent cultural transformations that, in the end, altered their status as Europeans. First the Spaniards, then the French, and perhaps the Portuguese did not quite know what to make of these frontiersmen. The solution was to deny their freedom and maintain their captivity in some form—while with the Spaniards, they were placed into household servitude and then naval service; when back with the French, they were again conscripted and forced to serve royal prerogatives. Like so many "rescued" captives before them, the Talons perhaps discovered Indian "captivity" to offer more individual freedom than what the Europeans could bestoy.[29]

Perhaps we can deduce what the Talons' attitudes may have been in the face of their marginalization by the Spaniards and, eventually, the French. According to their depositions, the Talons resisted reunification with the French when the latter seized the Spanish vessel in the Gulf. The foremost concern was the ability to reunite with younger brother and older sister who remained in Mexico City.[30] Nowhere is it suggested that the Talon brothers showed any emotion having been rejoined with their countrymen. Nor is there any indication that they felt remorse for having been removed from Spanish custody. Instead, the brothers' concern was for family—a family no longer French and certainly not Spaniard, not even Indian; rather it was uniquely an "American" family—forged from the horrendous rigors few could understand.

The traumatic experiences these children endured perhaps cemented their ties to one another beyond the patriotism for God, King, and Country. Perhaps too, they learned the value of family during their sojourn with the Indians, who according to the brothers, "loved [the children] tenderly . . .

and treated them with all the kindness in the world."[31] As one scholar noted, the Talons never directed any criticism toward their captors, but were quick to blame La Salle for having provoked the Karankawa wrath and that of his own men. The Talons emphasized that, as regards the Indians, "nothing is easier than winning their friendship."[32]

The Talon's story may never be completed. They faded into the North American wilderness. Although overshadowed by the aristocrats and either buried in the official notes or simply ignored by peers, the Talons' role in the imperial rivalries and the longer history of North America is substantial. This family, like so many thousands of others who existed in the borderlands, brought about the entity today described as "America."

Notes

1. For information concerning the French in Louisiana and Texas, see Robert S. Weddle. *The French Thorn: Rival Explorers in the Spanish Sea, 1682 – 176*2 (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1991) and W.J. Eccles, *The French in North America, 1500 – 1783* (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 1998).
2. See Robert Weddle, *Wilderness Manhunt: The Spanish Search for La Salle* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1999), 252 – 262.
3. For greater analysis of Indian captivity, refer to works such as B. M. Allen, *Naked and Alone in a Strange New World: Early Modern Captivity and Its Mythos* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK: Camberidge Scholars Publishing, 2009), Fernando Operé, *Indian Captivity in Spanish America: Frontier Narratives*, trans. Gustavo Pellón (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), and Richard VanDerBeets, *The Indian Captivity Narrative: An American Genre* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc., 1984).
4. John Demos offers an excellent study of captivity and its long-term effects on family in *The Unredeemed Captive: A Family Story From Early America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).
5. Pierre and Jean-Baptiste Talon, "Voyage to the Mississippi through the Gulf of Mexico" in Robert S. Weddle, ed. *La Salle, the Mississippi, and the Gulf: Three Primary Document*, trans. Linda Bell (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1987), 225 – 258.
6. For a general discussion of imagination and historical narrative, see James Axtell, *Beyond 1492: Encounters in Colonial North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 3 – 22.
7. Robert Weddle must be credited with compiling the most extensive research into the Talon genealogy.
8. For a primary account of the transatlantic voyage, see Henri Joutel, *The La Salle Expedition to Texas: The Journal of Henrí Joutel, 1684 – 1687*, ed. By William C Foster and trans. by Johanna S. Warren (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1998), 49 – 80.

9. Ibid., 136 – 139.
10. Ibid., 85.
11. Ibid., 150.
12. Ibid., 153.
13. See the Talon interrogatories in Weddle, *La Salle, the Mississippi, and the Gulf*, 237.
14. Ibid. Also, for a general study of Karankawa society, see Robert A. Ricklis, *The Karankawa Indians of Texas: An Ecological Study of Cultural Tradition and Change* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996).
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., 238.
17. Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L Caffee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).
18. Talon interrogatories, Weddle, 239. See also Juan Bautista Chapa, *Texas and Northeastern Mexico, 1630 – 1690*, ed. by William C Foster and trans. Ned F Brierly (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), 168-9.
19. Ibid., 240 – 41.
20. Ibid., 242.
21. Ibid., 239.
22. Weddle, *La Salle, the Mississippi, and the Gulf*, 218.
23. Ibid.
24. Regarding the thesis that New World experiences of European colonists a new cultural entity, refer to Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Middletown, CT: University of New England Press, 1974).
25. Weddle, *La Salle, the Mississippi, and the Gulf*, 219.
26. Ibid., 223.
27. See Weddle, *Wilderness Manhunt.*
28. Weddle, *La Salle, the Mississippi, and the Gulf*, 221; Talon interrogatories, 238.
29. Possibilities such as this have been postulated by Frederick Turner, *Beyond Geography: The Western Spirit against the Wilderness* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1983; reprint, 1992).
30. Weddle, *La Salle, the Mississippi, and the Gulf*, 218.
31. Talon interrogatories in Weddle, 239.
32. Ibid., 251.