

Book Reviews

John Demos, *The Unredeemed Captive: A Family Story from Early America*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

John Demos' book *The Unredeemed Captive: A Family Story from Early America* attempted to paint a picture of colonial life in New England in the seventeenth century. Demos used the life of John Williams and his family to typify the struggles of Puritan New England as it came in contact with different peoples (French Canadian and Native Americans) as well as different belief systems (Catholicism and Native American religions). Demos also used Williams to illustrate New England's opinions on captivity, acculturation, and the various dichotomies that accompanied frontier life in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Demos claimed to use Williams and his changing relationship with his daughter Eunice to revise understanding of the early history of the European presence on the continent, specifically the English as well as exploring the changing definitions of redemption specifically looking at captivity by Native Americans. Throughout his book, Demos raised the question of "Who is the unredeemed captive?" The answer might surprise the reader.

Demos endeavored to use the life of John Williams and his family to illustrate the struggles of Puritan New England as it came in contact with different peoples and different belief systems. Williams and his daughter Eunice exemplified the two ways a Puritan reacted to such an encounter. While they both encountered Catholics and Native Americans in captivity, they responded in complete opposition of one another. Williams was able to return home and denounced the popery of the French Canadians as wrong (69). However, his daughter Eunice embraced the culture she was adopted into and was re-baptized in the Catholic faith. She eventually married a Mohawk man as well. Williams and Eunice represented two opposite ends of the spectrum as Demos intends. Total separation embodied Williams and total acculturation embodied in Eunice was what really drove home this particular point of Demos.

Demos employed other dichotomies like Christian and savage, captive and free, and nature and civilization to illuminate the opinions of New Englanders as they related to their Native American and French Canadian neighbors. Puritans from New England viewed all Native Americans, including the ones who claimed to be Christians, as savages and viewed the Catholic French Canadians as hardly any better. This directly translated into the concern for peoples, especially children, captured by the French and Native Americans because many Puritans viewed them as particularly susceptible to seduction by the popery. Not only did this threaten a person's temporary safety by living with the Native Americans, it also threatened a person's eternal safety according to the Puritans. Demos did an excellent job of displaying this general fear of Catholics in the specific fear of John Williams for his daughter Eunice's soul.

Demos strove to use Williams and his changing relationship with his daughter Eunice to explore his changing definition of redemption as it relates to Native American captivity. Williams' initial reaction to his redemption and return home was elation. However, as time went on and the

rest of what family that remained alive returns, he becomes increasingly preoccupied with the return and redemption of his daughter Eunice. As Demos' book continued, the observant reader began to question what his obsession is really about. While his fatherly concern was only natural, there seemed to be other elements lurking beneath the surface. Did Williams consider himself totally redeemed from captivity? It could be argued that he does not. While his daughter Eunice remained with the Mohawk tribe, Williams seemed to consider himself not totally returned to the land of the civilized. This problem was exacerbated through Eunice's total acculturation and unequivocal refusal to return to the land of her birth. As she assimilated into Mohawk culture, Eunice did not consider herself to be in need of redemption. This served only to increase her need for redemption in the eyes of her father. As her apparent need for redemption decreased, her father's need for her redemption increased. Perhaps Williams saw Eunice's redemption as the last crucial part of his own redemption but there is no way to definitively say.

Demos did an excellent job in revising understanding of the early history of the European presence on the continent, specifically the English through the exploration of captivity by Iroquoian tribes. While Demos alleged that he was telling the story of John Williams and his daughter Eunice, he did so much more. By weaving together a specific story with the general narrative of the time, Demos painted a sufficient picture of life in the colonies of New England as well as their interactions with Native Americans and French Canadians. Using the various dichotomies present in frontier life, Demos was able to explore these nuances and how they affected both domestic and foreign affairs in the New World.

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