

**History 4351F**  
**American Captivity Narratives**  
**Fall 2025**

Instructor: **Professor Aldona Sendzikas**

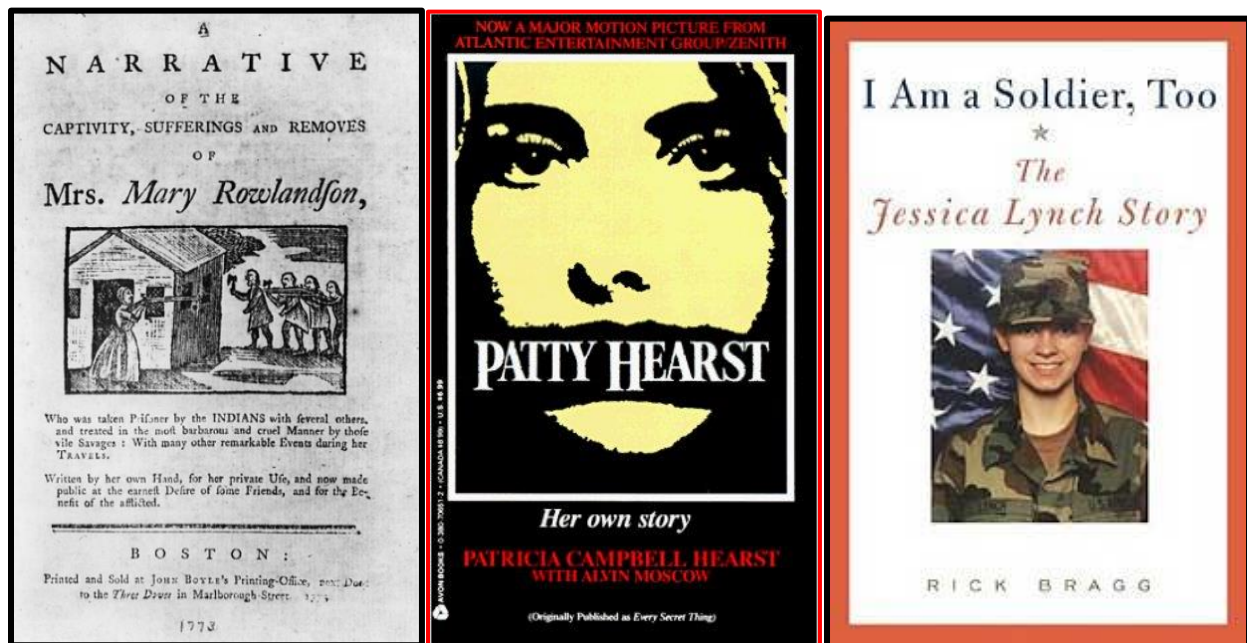
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This is a **draft** outline. Please see the course site on OWL Brightspace for a final version.

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Illustrations: The book covers of three famous American captivity narratives. (1) *A Narrative of the Captivity, Sufferings and Removes of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*. (2) *Patty Hearst: Her Own Story*. (3) *I Am a Soldier, Too: The Jessica Lynch Story*.

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## Course Description

In this course, we will explore American captivity narratives as an historiographical genre. Examples to be studied include colonial-era captivity accounts involving Indigenous peoples and white settlers, African American slave narratives, POW memoirs, prison writings, and modern captivity stories, including UFO abduction stories. What do these narratives reveal about ethnic, racial, and gender boundaries in America?

This is a draft outline. 2025-26 version. Please see the course site on OWL Brightspace for a final version.

**Prerequisite(s):** Registration in third year or above, any module.

## **Course Syllabus**

### ***Course Content and Objectives:***

Since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when American colonists who had survived abduction by Native American tribes published accounts of their experiences as captives, the “captivity narrative” has been an immensely popular, and significant, form of literature in American culture. In this course, we will examine the genre of “captivity narratives,” from Mary Rowlandson’s famous 1682 account of being held captive by the Narragansett tribe, to African American slave narratives, POW accounts from various American wars, and prison writings by notable American prison inmates, including Henry David Thoreau, Jack London, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Huey Newton. We will compare early American captivity accounts to more modern versions of captivity narratives, such as the story of the capture of Private Jessica Lynch during the Iraq War in 2003, heiress Patty Hearst’s account of her kidnapping by a domestic terrorist group in California in 1974, and Travis Walton’s book *Fire in the Sky*, one of the most famous accounts of alleged abduction by a UFO.

We will seek to answer the following questions: Why are captivity narratives such a popular and recurring form of American literature? How do captivity narratives stand up as historical documentation? What is their value as primary source material, and how have they been interpreted by historians? What did Americans learn from these widely read depictions of what often amounted to forced cross-cultural encounters? How were the captives’ stories used to meet societal, cultural, and political needs at different times in U.S. history? What do they teach us about ethnic, racial, and gender boundaries in America?

### ***Learning Outcomes:***

#### ***Depth and Breadth of Knowledge***

Upon successful completion of this course, the student will:

- Be familiar with the origins of the colonial era captivity narrative in American history;
- Be familiar with several such narratives;
- Be able to situate these narratives within the broader context of American history and historiography;
- Be able to identify recurring instances of the captivity narrative format in other periods of American history, and in a variety of forms;
- Be able to explain the significance, durability, and uses of captivity narratives in American culture.

#### ***Research and Scholarship***

Upon successful completion of this course, students will have demonstrated the ability to:

- Locate and use primary and secondary sources to interpret and analyze American captivity narratives;
- Assess differences between primary accounts written in the first person and those written in the third person in terms of their usefulness as historical sources;

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- Develop a research question and answer it in a written assignment, integrating both primary and secondary sources;
- Understand and adhere to scholarly conventions in research, writing, documentation, and sharing of research.

### ***Professional Capacity and Communication Skills***

Through the completion of this course, students will:

- Develop improved reading and essay writing skills;
- Practice and improve communication skills through weekly discussions as well as oral presentations.

## **Course Materials**

### ***Required texts:***

- Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola, ed., *Women's Indian Captivity Narratives* (NY: Penguin Books, 1998) (paperback).

This book is available for purchase for approximately \$30.00 at the campus bookstore, or at other book suppliers including Indigo/Chapters and Amazon.ca. (This book has been used in previous years, so keep an eye out for used copies!)

See: <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.ca/books/298266/womens-indian-captivity-narratives-by-various/9780140436716>

- Additional weekly readings, which will be made available online, on the OWL course website.

## **Methods of Evaluation**

### ***Assignments and marks distribution:***

- **2 short papers (3-4 pp. each)**  
(The first short paper will be due on Oct. 6<sup>th</sup>, 2025. The second will be based on one of the class readings, and the due date will depend on which reading the student chooses.) **20%**
- **Leading class discussion** (in conjunction with the reading chosen for the second short paper) **20%**
- **Essay proposal (1-2 pages)** (due Oct. 20<sup>th</sup>) **5%**
- **Research essay (10-12 pages)** (due Nov. 24<sup>th</sup>-Dec. 1<sup>st</sup>) **35%**
- **Weekly participation in class discussions** **20%**

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### ***Written assignments:***

Written assignments must be submitted at the specified time on the due date. Assignments are to be submitted in Word format to the submission link on the OWL course website. (By using the submission link on the course website, your paper will automatically be submitted to Turnitin.com.)

Further instructions regarding the above-listed assignments will be provided in class.

Please note that HIST 4351F is an essay course. According to Western's Academic Handbook, an essay course "...must be so structured that the student is required to demonstrate competence in essay writing to pass the course." In this course, that means that, in addition to receiving an overall passing grade in the course, students must complete and submit both short papers and the essay in order to pass the course, regardless of grades received for other assignments.

### ***Absences and late assignments:***

In the event you must miss a class, due to illness or other reason, please notify the instructor as soon as possible. Absence from class (without documentation from Academic Advising) will result in a grade of 0 for participation for that day. Partial participation marks can sometimes be made up by completing an additional assignment; please consult the instructor for this option.

Late assignments: a late penalty of 2% per day (including Saturdays and Sundays) will be incurred for all written work submitted after the due date and time. Papers submitted on the due date but after the due time (*i.e.*, 1:30 p.m.) will be considered late and will be penalized 2%.

A late penalty will not be waived unless the student has provided documentation from Academic Advising to the instructor. In that case, the student must contact the professor as soon as possible (*i.e.*, within 48 hours of the missed deadline) to discuss an alternate assignment and/or due date.

Late assignments will **not** be accepted more than 10 days after the due date of the assignment.

(Note that students may request, through the Student Absence Portal, academic consideration for one assignment/evaluation without supporting documentation, during the course. Undocumented absence consideration requests will not be accepted for the "leading class discussion" assignment.)

### ***Expectations:***

- Regular attendance.
- Completion of all assigned readings and active, informed participation in class discussion, based on those readings.
- Courtesy and respect towards all other members of the class.
- Be present: engage with the class, rather than with your cell phones and other electronic devices, during class time. Laptops may be used to take notes or to refer to online course

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readings. Use of laptops for other purposes in class may negatively affect your participation mark.

- Academic integrity.

Make-up tests, midterms, and exams can only be approved by Academic Advising. Please see [https://history.uwo.ca/undergraduate/program\\_module\\_information/policies.html](https://history.uwo.ca/undergraduate/program_module_information/policies.html) for department procedures and requirements involving make-up tests and exams.

## **Additional Statements**

### ***Communication policies:***

The best way to contact me is by e-mail. (Please write “HIST 4351” or “Captivity Narratives” as the subject of your e-mail.) I may not be able to answer your e-mail immediately, but I will do my utmost to respond within 48 hours. You are welcome to speak with me in person before or after class, or to drop by my office during my Office Hours. You can also e-mail me to request a meeting over Zoom.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have about the course and the assignments, review your assignments with you, help you find research sources, review footnoting format with you, *etc.*

### ***Use of electronic devices:***

Students may use laptops during class to access course readings and to take notes, but not for any other purposes, as they tend to distract from one’s engagement in the class discussion. The use of other electronic devices (cell phones, audio or video recording devices, *etc.*) is not permitted during class.

### ***Use of generative artificial intelligence (AI):***

The goals of this course include learning to think critically, to find and evaluate sources, to use your analysis of these sources to create, organize, and support an argument, and to communicate your argument clearly, in your own words. The use of AI bypasses these important learning activities.

Therefore, you may not make use of generative AI tools, such as ChatGPT, in this course, except for initial brainstorming to come up with a subject for your research essay. You may not use ChatGPT to create an outline for your assignments, to help you write your assignments, or as a research source. Any use of such tools for assignments in this course may be considered a form of academic misconduct and handled accordingly.

If AI use is suspected, the instructor will ask for research notes and/or drafts of assignments, outlines, and other material used in preparing your assignment. Students must keep all notes, outlines, and first drafts until after the release of final grades for the course.

### ***And finally...***

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Please review the Department of History's shared policies and statements for all undergraduate courses at: [https://history.uwo.ca/undergraduate/program\\_module\\_information/policies.html](https://history.uwo.ca/undergraduate/program_module_information/policies.html) for important information regarding accessibility options, make-up exams, medical accommodations, health and wellness, academic integrity, plagiarism, and more.

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