Captivity, Past and Present
In Memoriam

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INTRODUCTION

The Oxford English Dictionary defines the noun captive as “a person taken prisoner, in war, or by brigands or savages; one taken and held in confinement.” Given the conception of “prisoner” and “confinement,” one may assume that captivity is easily recognizable. We know, however, that it is not. Prison and confinement do not always require cages of impenetrable steel and concrete patrolled by uniformed agents of the state, although complexes of this nature incarcerate the largest numbers of modern captives. Historical and more recent examples indicate that culture and geography can also serve to confine both psychologically and spatially. Evidence also suggests that, far from static, the process of captivity is dynamic. A person may be abducted forcefully, but during the course of the ordeal s/he may find “captivity” more agreeable than what once was perceived as freedom. Many times, captives have confronted rescue and deliverance with ambivalence. Some have expressed only joy at rescue, yet they returned from their experience forever scarred regardless of their effort to resume a normal existence. Captivity—that process whereby a person is forcibly, sometimes very violently, removed from a familiar environment and subjugated to the will of another, often unfamiliar, human—is both a historical and modern phenomenon that transcends cultures and national boundaries. Although its ramifications extend to the larger societal complex, it ultimately is a very personal ordeal that affords insight into the human psyche. Over the centuries, captivity experiences have been related through first-person narratives as recorded in published and archival sources, oral histories, modern media, and through popular literature. This collection of treatises presents original narratives, interpretations, and analyses of the larger societal implications of captivity.

Because the captivity ordeal lays bare the spectrum of human emotion, endurance, and will to survive despite all odds, the study of captivity garners the interests of a diverse population—lay and scholar, amateur and professional; many are drawn to this very human condition that exposes the indomitable yet elusive spirit that resides in us all. This compilation attests that the study of captivity appeals to students from a multitude of disciplines—historians, literary scholars, philosophers, and journalists have contributed. All draw upon their extensive training in both the humanities and social sciences in attempts to probe the myriad complexity
of captivity and what it means. The interest is not limited to scholars. Many captivity narratives offer dramatic themes that have been interpreted for popular cinema, and include “The Searchers” (1956), “A Man Called Horse” (1972), and “Cabeza de Vaca” (1992). There has also been an explosion of docu-dramas focused on prison and prison culture.

Perhaps it all reminds that slavery in some form or another persists despite all efforts to eradicate it. In recent news, an American citizen living in south Texas on the Mexican border was convicted of sex trafficking by enslaving young Latina immigrants and forcing them into prostitution. On the other side of the globe, the United States government offered increasing assistance to Cambodia in that nation’s effort toward curtailing its sex slavery industry. Elsewhere, Ingrid Betancourt, the 2001 Colombian presidential hopeful, emerged from her jungle prison in 2008 to relate a harrowing tale of living for six years as a hostage to FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia), a peasant army formed in the 1940s out of the chaos of Colombia’s civil war. Her intimate revelations have since been published in a modern captivity narrative that rivals the historical precedents. Hundreds of more may emerge as remaining hostages are either freed by or escape from their FARC captors.

Betancourt’s South American saga and her eventual narration of it calls to mind various captivity tales of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spaniards and other Europeans who found themselves taken prisoner by South American Indians such as the Tupí of eastern Brazil, the Guarani of the Río de la Plata, and the Arauca of Chile. Although separated by centuries, the themes of Betancourt’s narrative bare remarkable similarities to the historical precedents. The captivity ritual is readily apparent—there is a journey to some borderlands region that separates the familiar from the other; this is followed by an often violent capture where the individual is forced across the threshold and must confront a terrific and inhospitable exotic world; during the ordeal that could span years, the captive seeks spiritual rectification, but then usually assimilates in varying degrees to the captor society; finally, when or if the captive is offered an opportunity to return, the individual usually greets rescue with ambivalence and may or may not accept it; if the person opts to return, s/he discovers they have undergone a psychological shift that prevents resumption of a normal life in the society to which they returned.

It is this ritual that prompts the comparison between captivity narratives and heroic literature. Mythologists have defined the archetypal pattern of the heroic journey where there is the separation from the familiar, an initiation into the other-worldly land and society, followed by a return or a refusal to return. This cyclical ordeal transforms the individual both
physically and mentally. It is a rite of passage, and its long-term consequences are often spiritual in nature and defy description. For this reason, the study of captivity often requires a multiplicity of methods in order to unlock the historical, literary, psychological, social, cultural, and political implications. The tendency toward greater specialization in the social sciences and humanities therefore requires a multidisciplinary approach. The present work stands as a testament.

Human captivity has occurred to some degree around the world for as long as there has been recorded history and certainly dates back into prehistory. This collection of essays and narratives, however, is limited geographically to the American continent and chronologically from the early modern era (c. 1500) to the present day. I have attempted to organize the studies both chronologically and thematically. Part One explores the earliest American captivity narratives produced during the Spanish conquests over the course of the sixteenth century and beyond. Part Two then considers the seventeenth-century New England Puritan narrative of Mary Rowlandson followed by Part Three that examines an eighteenth-century slave narrative and more modern prison tales.

The first two chapters, one contributed by the editor and the other by Joel Uribe and Alfonso Uribe, demonstrate the role that captivity had in defining identity and in contributing to borderland economies between the colonizers and the Native Americans. Benjamin Allen asserts that the authors crafted the Spanish captivity narratives as a type of heroic literature. They relate both physical and spiritual journeys that manifest psycho-social transformations. Regardless of the meaning that captivity had for the individual, the narrative had to be worded in such a manner that it supported and affirmed to some degree the overall goals of Spanish secular and ecclesiastical authorities. In reality, however, the captives proved instrumental in forging alliances and relationships between the Spaniards and Indians. Uribe’s tale would further support the argument advanced by James F. Brooks, a scholar of southwestern history, that captivity and slavery in the southwest borderlands created a complex exchange economy between Native Americans and their colonial competitors. In the process, captivity helped cement ties of kinship and community between once disparate peoples. The narrative further evidences the power of family and memory in Hispanic culture.

Unlike Catholic Spaniards who attempted to convert and assimilate Native Americans, the ultra-religious English Puritans long considered the Indians as little more than “red devils” that had to be kept at a distance. The goal was exclusion of everything non-English and non-Puritan, and Indians were to be utilized only when an alliance could economically or
militarily benefit the colonists. Attitudes such as this, as well as competition for limited natural resources and trade alliances, led to brutal wars between the Puritans and many Native American societies. The two major struggles—the Pequot War (1634 – 37) and King Philip’s War/Metacom’s War (1675 – 78)—proved blood baths that promoted the razing of whole communities of Indians and Puritans alike. Those Indians not killed were often sold into slavery by the Puritans and, similarly, those English not massacred by the Indians were carted off into captivity. Thanks to these conflicts, many Puritan captivity tales emerged over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and some scholars have posited that with these narratives came a new American identity. Few, however, have achieved the same degree of popularity as that of Mary Rowlandson’s tale that she presented in The Narrative of the Captivity and the Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson (1682).

Three contributors have offered interpretations of this American classic written by a survivor of captivity (c. 1675 – 76) among the Narragansett. Jaquelynn Kleist places Rowlandson’s narrative within the broader genre of travel literature, although some have argued that the two—captivity narrative and travel writing—are distinct forms. Kleist instead asserts that Rowlandson’s textual style exhibits qualities of both, and if studied as a type of travel literature, deeper meaning may be gleaned from the text, especially as relates to gender studies. Kleist argues that, as travel literature, Rowlandson’s tale is unique in that Puritan women were largely confined to the domestic sphere of Puritan life. Here for the first time a female offers a new perspective of traveling beyond the thresholds of what would have been acceptable for a Puritan woman. Franklin Hillson goes on to consider another theme that may be elicited from Rowlandson’s text, namely that of her devotion to family. Similar to Uribe’s Manuel, who longed to reconnect with loved ones, Rowlandson is driven by her motherly desire to be reunited with her children. Hillson posits that, although citing her faith in God and attributing her deliverance to divine fiat, perhaps Rowlandson’s true motivations for survival stemmed from her love for and hope in finding her family. Dahia Messara then takes an entirely different analytical approach by questioning the authenticity of the events as related by Rowlandson. As some have argued, the retrospective nature of the captivity writing (most narratives are penned long after the actual ordeal) and the problems of subjective memory skew the ability to offer reliable testimony. Messara adds to this skepticism by emphasizing how Rowlandson’s attitudes toward her Indian captors also affected her ability to accurately relate the events. For Messara, that which is missing
from the narrative is perhaps more important than what the author actually includes.

Jacob Massine cites similar textual analysis as employed by scholars who question the reliability of the claims proposed in *The Interesting Life of OLAUDAH EQUANO, or Gustavus Vassa, The African, Written by Himself*. It is among the very first (perhaps the first) African slave narratives. Massine points out, however, that scholars have persistently debated Equiano’s claims that he was born in Africa. At the center of this contention is the name itself—Olaudah Equano. The origins are hotly debated between various schools of linguistics and semiology, and Massine implies that scholarship regarding Equiano’s narrative is mired by it. Although African slavery as experienced by Equiano was abolished in the United States by Congress in 1865, Julia Metzger-Traber reminds that the Thirteenth Amendment, although forbidding chattel slavery, reaffirmed the institution of societal slavery—prison. The author is ultimately concerned with the plight of those African-American mothers who are often incarcerated for attempting to provide for their children by utilizing the only means available in poorer, underrepresented communities where a life of crime is often the norm. Through interviews, personal experiences, and correspondences, Metzger-Traber gives voice to the voiceless, and thereby demonstrates how incarcerated mothers maintain hope and preserve dignity despite their isolation from their most prized possessions, their children.

Metzger-Traber’s article drives home the realization that captivity remains a viable social institution despite such enlightened ideals as “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” It requires us to question the very function of captivity itself; obviously it serves some larger social purpose that prevents its total eradication in favor of individual liberty. At the cultural level, captives have provided captors with sacrificial bodies for religious rites, as a means to replenish a depleting population, as laborers, and as a mode of economic exchange. Politically, captives have served disaffected groups to advance some agenda or win concessions from the ruling elite. Individuals have been guilty of taking hostages for deep seated psychological purposes that often involve deranged sexual urges and an inner need to exert power. Modern societies condone “legalized” captivity as the only remedy for the maintenance of law and order. According to Emile Durkheim, crime serves to solidify societies by pitting the law-abiding against the law breakers. These social captives, then, represent and remind the majority of that which is reprehensible and how an individual must behave in order to remain an acceptable member. This dichotomous
relationship again suggests that captivity in all its various forms assists in defining identities for both the individual and society.  

Ultimately, though, captivity is about power—the power of the state over the individual; the power of one culture over another; the power of one person over another. Captivity narratives in general, and especially those spotlighted within this treatise, demonstrate how individuals, who are removed from all of their support structures, confront and overcome their own powerlessness in the face of overwhelming oppression. The tales are often testaments to the indomitable human will; and through the captives’ ability to narrate, to define their captivity in their own words above and beyond the voice of the often muted captor, the captive is transformed as powerful—the triumphant hero returning from the Herculean struggles who writes the lessons learned and describes the captors in his or her own terms.  

—Benjamin M. Allen

Notes

PART ONE:

CAPTIVITY IN SPANISH AMERICA
FROM THE 16TH – 19TH CENTURIES
CHAPTER ONE

CONSTRUCTING IDENTITIES: THE IBERO-AMERICAN CAPTIVITY NARRATIVE

BENJAMIN M. ALLEN

Before the English ever appeared on the shores of North America, and long before the Puritan captivity narratives flourished in popular American literature, the phenomenon of captivity had already presented itself to Western audiences. When the Iberians began that long process of colonization and conversion (referred to by the Spaniards as la entrada) of Native America during the 16th century, the clash, in part, resulted in captive taking on both sides. Mostly, Native American voices remained silent or were silenced during this struggle for their survival. Without a literary tradition, the Indians proved historically mute. Those few Native American societies that did develop record keeping found their documents looted by the Spaniards and used to light camp fires. What we know of Indian attitudes, and especially of those captured by the Europeans and paraded as trophies throughout Old World societies, largely come to us from their captors’ perspective.

The same is not true, however, of those Spaniards who were captured by the Indians and then eventually returned to relate their tale. A handful of these Iberians, either by their own pen or someone else’s, left a record of their captivity experience that offered some insight to the exotic world of native America as it existed before total contamination by the Europeans. To contemporaries, these narratives proved fascinating entertainment at a time when travel literature soared in popularity. One chronicler of the day observed that when Jerónimo de Aguilar returned from his eight year captivity among the Maya (1519), fellow conquistadores relished in “the pleasure of [his] tale.” These stories, related either orally or via print, were in high demand by people mesmerized with the idea that the land and societies of the New World were perhaps those mentioned in the fantastic tales of medieval lore or Biblical sagas.
Those Spanish chroniclers attested that their American revelations’ were “true histories” (historias verdaderas), however fantastic they may have appeared. In fact, that some form of abduction/captivity/rescue occurred is often beyond dispute. What remains questionable is the authors’ objectivity and accuracy in relating the events of the actual captivity experience. The duration of many captivity sagas spanned several years and, once rescued, those who opted to record their experience often waited several years to do so. In some secondary narrations, decades elapsed. Faulty memories and subjective reflection conspired to render the narratives’ accuracy suspect. Also, some captives struggled to describe metaphysical transformations in an era when spirituality was defined and governed by the Church. The narrators had to be cognizant of their Catholic audience, and especially of Inquisitorial reviews. Censorship prevented publication of any work perceived as heretical. The writers thus crafted their tales as Christian odysseys that demonstrated God’s mercy and, implicitly, divine favor for colonial prerogatives.

Many captivity narratives exhibited dual purposes. First, there was the relation of the deeply personal and transformative saga. Perhaps the narration offered some sort of therapy. It certainly proved dramatic for an audience thirsting for news of New World adventures. Second, there were more practical social and political considerations on the part of some. After a long sojourn with what Christians considered savages, those individuals were suspected by their countrymen to be culturally tainted. For example, when offered rescue in 1519 by Hernán Cortés, conqueror of Mesoamerica, the captive-turned-Indian warrior Gonzalo Guerrero refused because he recognized that he would never again be accepted by Spanish society after having conformed to and adopted Maya culture. Perhaps for some who wanted to return, the narratives offered a method whereby the returning captive could attempt to regain acceptance by convincing the reader that he remained a pure and devout Christian despite the long cohabitation. Potential motivations such as these prompt scholars to remain skeptical of the narratives’ veracity; instead, they should be examined as cultural artifacts that provide a window into individual and societal mentalities of that day. Ultimately, they wield clues as to how these adventurers defined themselves in relation to Old and New World realities.

The captivity narratives of Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca and Juan Ortiz will help to demonstrate the premise. Both sagas occurred during a period when Spain and its European neighbors experienced a revolution of sorts in political, religious, and economic affairs. As the Spanish monarchs forged a nation-state in the midst of religious war (the Reconquista),
mercantilist pursuits led them to the American discoveries that prompted even more change in attitudes and beliefs. Columbus’s discoveries in 1492 shook the European intelligentsia to the core. Already questioning contemporary wisdom that held that knowledge stems from Biblical study, Renaissance Humanists considered America as further proof that knowledge must be discerned from the physical universe. When confronted with the New World, Europeans had to reject the medieval conception of the world where three continents revolved around the holy city of Jerusalem. It left the thinking European with an existential dilemma. More intellectual upheavals came soon after in 1517 when Martin Luther indicted the Church leaders for egregious corruption and thus launched the Protestant Reformation against an institution long considered beyond reproach. When the Spaniards and other Europeans shipped westward, they carried with them this insecurity that resulted from these larger trends of the day. The captivity narratives, in small part, evidence the authors’ attempts at reconciling two worlds in flux.

Despite the trends, Iberians clung to their medieval heritage. The Spanish Crown established institutions such as the Inquisition to police attitudes of faith and to rid its society of those considered spiritually impure, especially Jews and Muslims. There developed the ideal of limpieza de sangre (blood purity) that mandated societal cohesion and acceptance based on cultural purity. The shock must have been staggering when Europeans came to realize that fellow Christians could be captured and transformed into something resembling Indian savagery. Attitudes toward captivity had already developed in reaction to the long struggle against the North African Muslims. When Christians fell to the control of the Moors, every effort was made to free the captive from the clutches of the infidel. Captivity narratives had already garnered some notoriety before Spaniards ever landed in America, and none would prove more famous than those of Cervantes, who developed the modern novel (c. 1600) around his own captivity experience with the Muslims.

Aside from Cervante’s Don Quixote, perhaps no captivity narrative has enjoyed as much popularity over the last five centuries as that of Cabeza de Vaca, who authored and published his own tale in La relación (1542). Cabeza de Vaca was the treasurer of the Pánfilo de Narváez expedition that, in 1528, was to lay claim to the largely unexplored region of Florida (southeastern North America) originally claimed by Ponce de León. Narváez, who was to become the adelantado (governor) of the province, had a notorious reputation for his ambition and obstinacy that would prove fateful during the colonizing effort. According to Vaca’s account, once on shore somewhere near Tampa Bay, he and Narváez quarreled over the
routes that they should take and the manner in which to explore the area. The argument eventually led to a split and then ultimate disaster for all involved.

Narváez’s party found themselves lost in the Floridian swamps and separated from their ships, forced to confront hostile natives, hunger, and severe weather. In an effort to escape a bad situation, Cabeza de Vaca, along with several others, constructed crude rafts that afforded passage along the Gulf Coasts, past the mouth of the Mississippi River and that brought them to rest on a long narrow island (Malhado--Island of Misfortune; possibly Galveston Island) off the Texas coast sometime around November 1528. The majority of Vaca’s party, over time, succumbed to diseases that eventually reduced some eighty survivors to fifteen. These, including Cabeza de Vaca and his three closest companions, became enslaved by the Indians. As far as we know, only Cabeza de Vaca and the three others returned to Nueva España since they eventually gained a reputation as healers and medicine men that allowed greater freedom of travel. With this notoriety, the colonizers-turned-castaways-turned-captives-turned-shamans became successful traders among the natives for five years as they steadily journeyed westward. No one can be certain of the exact route and even Cabeza de Vaca admitted then that no one knew where they were. They did eventually make their way to New Galicia in northwestern Nueva España (Mexico) where they finally met up with a Spanish slaving party in 1536 (nearly 2000 miles from their original landfall in Florida).

Cabeza de Vaca returned to Spain and, in March 1540, Emperor Carlos V (King Carlos I of Spain) appointed him as Adelantado of the Province of the Rio de la Plata (River Plate) in South America. Partly because of his progressive Indian policies and his strict guidelines for Spanish-Indian relationships, Vaca angered many influential Spaniards in his colony. They convinced the Crown to order his arrest. Once back in Spain he confronted a tribunal, which then banished him to Africa where he died in 1557. We must imagine how he may have contemplated the irony of the situation—he escaped captivity amongst the Indians only to die a captive of his own people. Few could have misunderstood the lesson—Spaniards would not tolerate any policy that advocated treating non-Christians as equals. Las Castas (the Spanish caste system) would endure.

Latino revisionists have especially seized upon La relación’s sympathetic overtones toward the Indians and portrayed Vaca as a transitional character who, although pure-blood Spanish, became a mestizo psychologically (literally, a mestizo is one of mixed Spanish and Indian heritage). Mexican film-maker Nicolás Echevarría best expressed this idea
in 1992 when he directed a film based on an interpretation of Vaca’s narrative. Echevarría’s production responded to the resurgence of Mexican nationalism that intensified during the 1970s and was expressed as *mexicanidad*, or the rejection of Spanish heritage and an embracing of mestizo and Native American culture.7

Whether presented to a contemporary audience or a modern one, the heroic nature of Cabeza de Vaca’s tale is evident. For contemporaries, the term “hero” designated one favored by the gods and who evidenced superhuman feats of endurance and ability. Vaca’s odyssey demonstrated that the Christian god preserved the devout, thereby indirectly indicating divine blessing for the Spanish prerogatives. To twentieth-century readers, the tale instead demonstrated the transformative process that took Vaca from a Spaniard bent on colonization to an acculturated individual who came to better identify with the Indians and then rejected the policies of his countrymen. The lessons of Vaca’s odyssey have thus proven timeless.

Undoubtedly, Cabeza de Vaca’s progressive expressions of sympathy for the Indians came at a time when a majority of Spaniards sought only to exploit the New World. Vaca’s attitudes were best revealed at his point of return when, after eight years of wandering through the North American “wilderness,” he reunited with the Spaniards. Because of Vaca’s manner of dress (or lack thereof) and custom, his countrymen hardly recognized him as one of their own. The Indians also, according to Vaca, “could not be persuaded to believe that we were the same as the other Christians.”8

The Indian skepticism, however, stemmed less from physical appearance and more from attitudinal disposition. He described that

... the Indians believed very little or nothing of what they [the Spaniards] were saying.... they said instead that the Christians were lying, because we had come from the East and they had come from the west; that we healed the sick and they killed the healthy; that we were naked and barefooted and they were dressed and on horseback, with lances; that we coveted nothing but instead gave away everything... while the sole purpose of the others was to steal everything they found.9

This sympathetic tone resulted in conflict with the Spaniards. Vaca described how he “had many great quarrels with the Christians because they wanted to enslave the Indians” whereas he sought a conciliatory policy predicated on humane treatment.10

This psychological transformation makes Cabeza de Vaca’s journey as much a spiritual one as it was physical.11 He relates an inner awakening that results from cultural and geographical rites of passage connotative of a heroic journey. When compared to other narratives, certain imageries
reminiscent of the hero motif emerge. There is a definable separation-initiation-return pattern. This hero archetype has been defined by literary experts and mythologists alike, and some have argued that it imitates the reality of life’s progression from birth to death. It is certainly imitative of the popular works of that day, and suggests that the captivity narratives are something more than a straightforward tale of one man’s harrowing experience.

Undoubtedly, popular literature fueled Cabeza de Vaca’s imagination as it had so many of his contemporaries. At the very beginning of discovery and exploration, a larger number of literate Iberians gained inspiration from printed works such as the very popular heroic saga of *Amadís de Gaula* (*Amadis of Gaul*), a compilation of medieval fables published by the Spanish novelist Montalvo. That works like this had great influence amongst the conquistadores is beyond dispute. Throughout the Spanish chronicles, we find that the colonizers often contrasted New World sights with the popular fables. For example, Bernal Díaz del Castillo, chronicler of Cortés’s subjugation of Mexico, described the Aztec capital as “an enchanted vision from the tale of Amadís.” The experts of medieval and Golden Age Spanish literature have long argued that, within the Iberian psyche, fable and reality coalesced to the point where both were one and the same. Partly for this reason, the Iberians developed a unique worldview—a cultural mythos—that pervaded all of their endeavors, and especially influenced their literary pursuits. Factual history and fable/mythology fused. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the captivity narratives, all which evidence efforts to reconcile both the real with the imagined and the Old World with the new.

This effort is more readily apparent in the narration of another captivity saga. Not too long after Cabeza de Vaca’s misadventure began, the young Juan Ortiz (he was about 18) confronted his own life-altering ordeal in Florida. Although narrated by various chroniclers, the most popular account of Ortiz’s captivity was rendered by Garcilaso de la Vega, el Inca (1539 – 1616) in *La Florida del Inca* (1605) that chronicled Hernando De Soto’s journey through Florida and the lower Mississippi Valley in 1539. This author, who was a first-generation mestizo from the Peruvian province of Cuzco, indicated that he constructed this secondary account from conversations had with eye-witnesses of the De Soto expedition decades after the fact.

According to one narrative, when De Soto’s expedition first landed near present day Tampa Bay they spotted a “Christian, naked and sun-burnt, his arms tattooed after their [the Indians] manner, and he in no respect differing from them.” When reunited with the Spaniards, the long
lost Christian related an ordeal that stretched back to 1528. The Uzita Indians apparently captured Ortiz while he helped search for the lost Pánfilo de Narváez party (the same group that had included Cabeza de Vaca). Based on Garcilaso’s account, some Indians lured Ortiz and another man to shore using a letter supposedly left by Narváez. Once onshore, the Indians sprang their attack, thereby subduing and subjecting Ortiz and his companion to extreme tortures for retribution against earlier Spanish atrocities perpetrated against the Indians of that region. The brutality claimed the life of the companion, but when Ortiz was about to be roasted alive, the daughter of the Indian cacique (chief), Hirrihigua, intervened and convinced her father to spare the young Spaniard. While in captivity, Ortiz endured miserable hardships as Hirrihigua’s animosity grew. Eventually, the cacique marked the captive for sacrifice, but the daughter and her mother again intervened and helped Ortiz escape to another tribe whose cacique, Mucozo, proved more benevolent. During his initial confinement with Hirrihigua, Ortiz supposedly gained the reputation as a skillful hunter for single handedly killing a cougar with only a dart in the blackness of night. Garcilaso explained that the Indians considered this feat to be no less than miraculous; thus his prowess as a hunter soon became cause for praise and admiration.17

Mucozo purportedly facilitated Ortiz’s repatriation to the Spaniards following De Soto’s landfall in 1539. Various details of Ortiz’s attitudes conflict between accounts (Ortiz’s tale is also narrated by an anonymous chronicler of the De Soto adventure). In one account, Ortiz showed reluctance to return—“the captive, thinking himself jested with . . . told Mucozo that the Christians no longer came to his mind nor anything else than to serve [Mucozo].”18 Garcilaso, however, related only that Ortiz “rejoiced over this fortunate news.”19 To Garcilaso, any Christian showing reluctance to return to Christendom from the bowels of savage paganism should not be afforded the honorific distinction among his “heroicos caballeros” (heroic cavaliers) of which he wrote. Garcilaso certainly intended to cast Ortiz in a positive light for Spanish audiences. Like so many other freed captives, Ortiz begged De Soto to show mercy to his one-time captors. Garcilaso downplayed this, however, by indicating that Ortiz only made such appeal because Mucozo, his benevolent Indian master, requested the favor in return for Ortiz’s freedom. Ortiz’s reactions to his new Spanish master’s actions remain a mystery. As guide and interpreter, Ortiz witnessed much cruelty perpetrated against the Indians by De Soto and his men. As they trekked from Florida to the Mississippi River, De Soto enslaved, tortured, and killed countless Indians. If the attitudes of other rescued captives may be reliable indicators, then we may
assume Ortiz was at least saddened and horrified by the brutality. Garcilaso offered too few clues.

Some scholars have described Garcilaso as “De Soto’s Homer” whose subjective account of the expedition may be compared to The Odyssey or El Cid.20 He most likely had various reasons for detailing Ortiz’s captivity with such artistry. Perhaps Garcilaso personally identified with Ortiz. Garcilaso was born in 1539 at Cuzco, capital of the Inca state in Perú, to Sebastián Garcilaso de la Vega, a Spanish captain of noble lineage, and the Incan princess who would be baptized with the name, Isabel Suárez Chimpu Oclo. The Incan mother christened her son as Gómez Suárez de Figueroa and raised him in the language and traditions of the Incan nobility. At 21, Garcilaso sailed for Spain to claim an inheritance offered by his biological father, and although the Spanish courts refused to honor Garcilaso’s claims, he never returned to Perú.

Garcilaso came to personally know the discrimination faced by those of mixed ancestry. As a mestizo who relocated from Peru to Spain when about 21 years old, he existed on the margins of that caste-oriented society. Biographers recount that because of his mixed ancestry, he could never claim inheritance from his Spanish father. Out of frustration and perhaps to better legally associate with his father’s lineage, Garcilaso assumed his nom de plume and added the title, el Inca, as symbolic of his mother’s royal Indian ancestry. Also, it would help him differentiate with the earlier Spanish poet of the same name. As a virtual outcast, Garcilaso could understand Ortiz’s predicament. At one point, Garcilaso wrote how the Indians rebuked Ortiz as being “neither Spaniard nor [Indian] warrior.”21 Such ambiguity was not lost on an author who was neither entirely Spaniard nor Indian, but who longed to be accepted as both. Perhaps for this reason, Garcilaso seized upon and incorporated Juan Ortiz’s captivity into the larger history of Hernán De Sotó’s exploration of southeastern North America. Biographers have further pointed out that, thanks to his dual education, dual traditions, and dual bloodlines, he never felt either entirely Spanish or Incan. He lived astride two contradictory worlds. One can only imagine the extent of the frustration Garcilaso must have felt—a man of noble lineage from both parents but unable to fully claim either.

Undeniably, Garcilaso struggled with his identity. The act of changing his name manifested the psychological turmoil. Denied inheritance, he later sought honor through military service to the Crown, which offered some recognition and some legitimacy when the king promoted Garcilaso to the rank of captain. He even participated in Felipé II’s failed invasion of England (1588) that would alter the course of Spain’s domination of
America. Garcilaso, the historian never chronicled this failed endeavor although he witnessed it firsthand. Instead, he preferred to relate only those events that glorified Spain. Cognizant of his marginality, Garcilaso longed for acceptance by Spanish society, and what better way than to chronicle the remarkable history of its New World *entrada* that evidenced unsurpassed heroic deeds.

Garcilaso found in Ortiz a kindred spirit. Ortiz was taken captive in 1528 as a young man of about the same age as Garcilaso when he left his Incan relatives to seek a new life in Spain. The dualities are apparent—whereas it was the marginal Garcilaso, the Inca, in the land of Spaniards it was Juan Ortiz the Spaniard in the land of the Inca. Ortiz the outsider suffered injustice at the hands of his Indian captors because of his cultural associations much like what Garcilaso experienced in Spain. Garcilaso went so far as to draw a personal parallel. In describing how Ortiz forgot his native Spanish during his captivity, the author opined that

Ortiz had forgotten even so much as how to pronounce the name of his native land. But I shall be able to say the same of myself, for having no person in Spain with whom I may speak my mother tongue [used in Peru] . . . I have so forgotten it that I cannot construe a sentence of as many as six or seven words that will convey my meaning, and I cannot remember many of the Indian terms.

Through a narration of Ortiz’s saga, Garcilaso spotlighted his own status as a marginal character. Both men typified a new cultural entity that had evolved in the transatlantic zones of contact—acculturated figures neither entirely European nor entirely American. This proved advantageous since Ortiz would go on to serve the De Soto expedition as frontier interpreter and liaison. Similarly, El Inca would serve Spain as its historian with unique insight to write a “history . . . of heroic Spanish and Indian cavaliers.” This history, however, was also his own. It was later discovered that Garcilaso intended to include in this work his own genealogical record so as to prove his worthiness and identity as a legitimate Spaniard.

Ortiz, Cabeza de Vaca, and the other Spanish captives discovered that their Indian captors did not place the same importance on lineage, blood, faith, or religion. An individual’s worth was measured by the contribution a person could make toward the survival of the tribe. Adoption by Indian society depended on necessity rather than on heritage. As Garcilaso, el Inca, came to understand, regardless of individual merit, Spanish society could never welcome someone with tainted blood considering that it somehow equated to spiritual impurity.
Chapter One

Returning captives like Cabeza de Vaca must have also understood the dilemma. Rescue could prove as risky as captivity. As they had negotiated entry into Indian society, the captives now had to negotiate re-entry to Christendom and convince their compatriots of sincerity and faithfulness. A narrative that romanticized the ordeal in terms of Christian suffering and deliverance offered the most expedient solution to the problem. One scholar surmised of the sixteenth-century novelists in general, “It is through these writers imposed their orderly artistic solution on an existential quandary.”

Identity was the crux of the matter. Having been practically assimilated into the captor cultures, those captives who returned did so as psychologically marginal characters that were no longer entirely Spanish in their worldview. Modern studies of the Stockholm syndrome may help explain how and why the captives could so thoroughly conform to their Indian captors as to be unrecognizable as Westerners. When the captives reunited with Christendom, this identity change became seriously problematic given the societal imperative toward conformity to existing ideology. The captives and their chroniclers partly resolved the identity crisis through introduction of the narratives themselves. They romanticized the accounts to demonstrate that the Christian God preserved those servants who remained faithful despite their sojourn in the bowels of paganism, and as Christian heroes, they accounted as worthy of rejoining civilized society. We know that most did, and once repatriated, the former captives proved beneficial to Spain’s imperial goals. The Spanish captives went on to serve as frontier interpreters, intermediaries, guides and, in the case of Cabeza de Vaca, a colonial frontier governor. They also served to hasten colonization. The tales of the golden Seven Cities of Cíbola brought back by Cabeza de Vaca resulted in the northern expeditions of Fray Marcos de Niza and Francisco Coronado into present day New Mexico.

Cabeza de Vaca lamented to the Crown that his narrative was “the only thing that a man who returned naked could bring back.” Perhaps Garcilaso similarly contemplated that, as a marginalized character, his most valuable contribution was a tale of Spanish heroics. Both men detailed very personal ordeals of physical and spiritual proportions that resonated with their audience. Like the individual authors and captives struggling to come to terms with their life-altering experiences, sixteenth-century Spaniards and their European contemporaries struggled to make sense of American revelations of exotic lands and people that often contradicted medieval ideals. Intellectual traditions wavered in the face of these New World realities. The captivity narratives and other literature that emerged from that era evidenced a society astride two worlds—one old,