

# From little Big Man to Little Green Men: The Captivity Scenario in American Culture.

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Abstract:

*This paper seeks to link the seemingly diverse genres of the Indian captivity narrative and the alien abduction scenario. Both types it is argued share common narrative constructions and themes. Whilst the Indian captivity narrative is plainly derived from first hand accounts and can demonstrate a historical development based on the actuality of the experiences it describes, the alien abduction scenario though protesting its objective basis cannot. Rather than rejecting the validity of the alien abduction scenario on this account, the following attempts to account for the claims to reality of the alien abduction narrative by arguing that it exists in a historical continuum with the Indian captivity narrative. The Indian captivity narrative develops historically to provide a cultural text through which Americans understand their historical situation as colonial settlers of frontier territories. The narrative functions as part of a greater historical myth system in which national values of community safety and security, national progress and vitality and the preservation of core values against hostile enemies are central components. The emergence in the twentieth century of the alien abduction narrative re-imagines these core concerns and in the context of exploration of the new frontier of space provides for a re-energising of the traditional captivity narrative, one in which abductees are positioned as colonialists in perilous existence on the 'final frontier.'*

Introduction

The 1973 western film *Little Big Man*, directed by Arthur Penn and based on a 1966 novel by Thomas Berger, is a picaresque account of the abduction and captivity by Indians of its central character Jack Crabbe. When his small wagon train is intercepted on the open plain and attacked by Pawnee warriors Jack, along with his sister are fortunate to escape death whilst the rest of their westward bound party are brutally slaughtered. Later both are taken captive by the passing Cheyenne. The representation of captivity by Indians in Hollywood films draws on a long literary tradition in American culture. It is derived from actual first person accounts that are some of the earliest cultural products of the New World and which continued to provide stories based on the reality of events until the final years of the nineteenth century. Jack

Crabbe is a somewhat typical representation of the tens of thousands of abductees made captive during three centuries of the American frontier. He is travelling west as part of the great migration of the mid 1800's drawn principally from the ranks of the poor, the immigrant and the ordinary. An embodiment of the myth of Manifest Destiny, Jack is a coloniser of sorts. Exhorted by proclamations back East to "Go West!" his story of captivity provides for what Colley (2002, p4) describes in the context of British captivity narratives, as the 'underbelly' of Empire.

Recently, former Beirut hostage Brian Keenan has neatly summed up both the captive's dilemma and what I take to be the captivity narrative's central tragedy. When a captive, Keenan was he said, 'a tiny, insignificant pawn in a global game over which I had no control' (2002, p16). The captivity tradition thus forces to the front a sense of powerlessness and insignificance and an absence of agency that brings with it the terror of mortal dependence on often hostile foes. That it is also, and fundamentally, a narrative tradition located within a broader historical context of colonisation, has thereby provided for a politically meaningful text in which the sufferings of individual citizens are ideologically portrayed as the mythic trials of the entire community entity to establish the right of settlement and ultimately conquest. This paper argues that the captivity scenario represents a historically significant and remarkably flexible narrative that in a contemporary cultural outcome provides a means for locating and mapping the disturbing discourse of abduction and captivity by extraterrestrials.

## Captivity and Culture in the American Tradition

Catherine Scott (2000, p177-188) argues that it is precisely as a form of mythic narrative that the Indian captivity story retains its powerful hold on American culture in modern times. In analysing media responses to the 1979 Iranian hostage crisis she argues forcefully for a reading of these events as an updated captivity narrative and notes similarities of tropes and rhetoric with Vietnam POW stories and with hostage taking accounts in Iraq during the Gulf War. Scott draws principally on the work of Richard Slotkin (1973) who analyses the Indian captivity narrative as a part of a greater myth system that he locates in the experience of American continental settlement and conquest (1973, p94). For early colonists the Indian captivity narrative serves as an archetypal drama encapsulating in a single narrative strand the Puritan experience of re-location and settlement in the new world. It is suggestive also of a particular worldview, one of 'apocalyptic crisis, the prevalent sense that immanent horror lurked behind the facade of commonday existence' (1973, p117).

The captivity narrative was routinely used by Puritan ministers to capitalise upon a sense of anxiety and fear in Colonial frontier communities, as a jeremiad call for a re-affirmation of core spiritual and social values and for a community actioned response to the depredations of 'Red Indian Devils'. In the Puritan imaginary the individual captive in their suffering comes to represent the perilous existence of the whole community, an individual who stands in for a society in torment betwixt God and the Devil, on the cusp of civilisation and barbarity (1973, p94). That the Indian captivity narrative came to provide 'a symbolic vocabulary' (1973, p97) for American

identification of their experience is important Scott argues in media coverage of the Iranian hostage crisis (Scott, 2000). ‘When viewed as “patterns of story telling” media stories about the conflict with Iran, the tribulations of the hostages, and the call for heroic leadership can be read as a familiar narrative filled with themes about America’s experience of settlement, survival, and expansion across shifting frontiers’ (Scott, p179).

The Indian captivity narrative as a literary construct is based on the reality of the experience of America’s first white settlers to establish permanent settlements. These constituted the establishment of a frontier space beyond which was inhabited by a numerically superior and environmentally attuned native inhabitants. Both the land and the natives were constituted as alien. To Puritan New England European settlers were ‘in continual danger of the savage people, who are cruel, barbarous and most treacherous, being most furious in their rage and merciless where they overcome’ (1973, p38). Typically the Indian is imagined as a ‘beast’ lurking in the primeval forest beyond the knowledge of the tentative frontier settlements of the eastern seaboard. Cotton Mather, a leading colonial figure, Puritan minister and transcriber of captivity narratives invokes the rhetoric of apocalypse to describe the new world landscape and its ‘nations of wretches’. In this maelstrom of religious invective Slotkin suggests that the only intimate contact with Indians that colonial Europeans would accept was the experience of the captive (1973, p95). In Puritan New England to know the Indians was to experience ‘physical and spiritual catastrophe’ (Slotkin, 1973, p98). Published narratives of Indian captivity were ‘immensely, even phenomenally popular’ (1993, p14). Mary Rowlandson’s archetypal account, ‘The

Sovereignty and Goodness of God', was second in popularity among colonial New Englanders only to the bible (1993, p14).

Rowlandson's account of her abduction by Nipmuck Indians during generalised colonial Indian wars in the late seventeenth century became a best seller on publication and is considered to be among the most popular selling books in all American literature (1993, p14). 'The Sovereignty and Goodness of God' was the first captivity narrative to be published as a full length book and was extremely rare in being written by a Puritan woman. Rowlandson, a mother of three young children was captured from her home in Lancaster, New England. She describes it with a spare literary power in the opening line of her account. 'On the tenth of February, 1675, came the Indians with great numbers upon Lancaster' (1998, p12). The attack is sudden and swift. Rowlandson describes being attacked and injured and the violent distress she experiences as her children are taken from her and scattered. She is set on a forced march by her captors that it is estimated covers 150 miles before any significant rest (1993, p14). During an eleven week captivity till she is eventually freed on the ransom of £20, Rowlandson experiences a shattering ordeal such that she even considers suicide.

Rowlandson skilfully constructs her narrative to show that the experience provides an emotional and spiritual watershed in an otherwise unremarkable life. The sudden dawn attack on her home, her physical capture and the removal from her family features as a pivotal moment in which her existence hovers between the realm of her experience and the experience of another realm. She is forced in fear and mortal dependence to remove to the world of 'those barbarous creatures.. a lively

resemblance of hell' (1998, p14). Rowlandson's journey across the frontier figures as a removal from civilisation that with each mile draws her further into the heart of darkness. In order to describe this she employs an interesting literary device, which in her narrative she defines as a 'remove.' 'The Sovereignty and Goodness of God' has twenty such 'removes' in which 'time is marked not in temporal days but in ..spatial and spiritual movements away from civilised light into Indian darkness' (Slotkin, 1973, p109). Narratively each remove provides a point of spiritual reflection allowing Rowlandson to meditate on the contrasts between her past and her present. Slotkin suggests that 'this method of marking the passage of time reinforce(s) the impression of captivity as an all-environing experience, a world in microcosm, complete even to having its own peculiar time-space relationships' (1973, p109).

#### The Alien Abduction Scenario in Popular Culture.

Similar narrative themes and emotional responses are present too in a very different context described by Travis Walton in his autobiographical account of events, *Fire in the Sky* (1978). Working as part of a logging crew in the wooded mountains of northern Arizona in 1975, Walton and his colleagues are attracted by a bright light like a fire below them in the trees. Racing to the scene they are confronted not with the beginnings of a devastating forest blaze, but with a circular metallic craft glowing red and hovering above the tree line. In terror the crew disperses back in the direction of their arrival, to pick-up trucks waiting on a dirt road above. Walton though is inexplicably drawn to a white beam of light that has shot to the ground from the underside of the spacecraft. Stepping into it he is immobilised. His crew mates, running wildly for their means of escape, later recall being aware of Travis's capture

in the beam but of being too panic stricken themselves to look back or to help. Walton later recalls through the confirmation of polygraph testing, how he was literally 'beamed' aboard the spacecraft. He was confronted he said by humanoid alien beings who treated him with mechanical efficiency.

Walton describes that though initially he was able to physically fight off his captors the aliens were able to bend him to their will through mind coercion techniques located in their 'incredible eyes' that made him feel 'naked and exposed under their intense scrutiny' (Matheson, 1998, p111). A sense of utter helplessness and the evaluation of superiority in the captors' ability to subdue and counteract any effort to resist is prevalent too in Rowlandson's narrative. Rarely are captivity or abduction accounts stories of heroic defiance on the part of the captives themselves, most often they are accounts of 'physical, emotional and psychological trial' (Derounian & Lavernier, 1993, p98). Rowlandson too initially determines to resist her captors, 'but when it came to the trial my mind changed: their glittering weapons so daunted my spirit' (1998, p14). In Walton's account and the alien abduction scenario as a whole, brute physical intimidation is replaced by technological domination and terror.

In Walton's abduction account his sense of nakedness and exposure under the alien gaze amounts to a metaphorical disrobing of previous cultural normalcy that precedes in the Indian account either actual tortures, or tortuous ritual; and is analogous with incidents of quasi-medical procedures typically reported by alien abductees. In the 1993 film of the book *Fire in the Sky* (Robert Lieberman, USA), a scene in which Walton's character undergoes a violent medical procedure is especially memorable and discomfoting. The spectacle of the tortured and suffering body is iconic to the

captivity genre and recurs as a prime motif of both types discussed here. Linda Badley (1996, p151) comments that tortuous ritual trial through quasi medical procedures represents in the alien narrative the 'extreme possibilities' of what she terms 'bio-power'. In this fantastically technologised scenario, the body she points out has been made 'a display case of parts...a resource or commodity, alienating it from what is traditionally known as the self.' To this analysis might also be added Gary Ebersole's (1995, p165) observation of the Indian captivity narrative, that the tortured and suffering body functions in order to evoke the reader's sympathy for the captive and 'in doing so sought to exercise and cultivate the reader's moral imagination.'

The cultural forms taken by both Walton's *Fire in the Sky* and Berger's *Little Big Man* follow a pattern of development from written account to film, with each film being popular at the box office. The alien abduction narrative of Walton however purports to be a true account of an actual lived experience whilst Berger's is fictional. In claiming objectivity for his account the Walton narrative tapped into a burgeoning cultural phenomenon in the USA during the seventies, eighties and into the nineties, with its historical antecedents located in the 'contactee movement' of the 1950's. The popularity of alien abduction narratives became pervasive in myriad forms of popular cultural representation as well as films and books, and ranged from television chat shows and cable TV documentaries, to TV series, periodical magazines, symposiums and conventions. Millions of American citizens continue to claim to be victims of alien abduction (Bartholomew & Howard, 1998, p237). Support groups to counsel survivors are commonplace and can be easily contacted via their sites on the Internet or through the tens of thousands of related sites devoted to anomalous and paranormal

phenomena, UFO's and conspiracy theories. Walton's own personal web pages line up alongside these.

The first modern alien abduction account is considered to be that of Betty and Barney Hill in 1961 (Matheson, 1998, p21). Their experiences, written as a best selling book by John Fuller and later made into a TV film (1975, Richard A Colla, USA), both called *The Interrupted Journey*, is described as the 'paradigmatic UFO abduction' (Lavery, Hague and Cartwright, 1996, p8). The Hills were travelling home after a brief vacation on a clear night through remote New Hampshire (Picknett, 2001, p289-295). Later under hypnosis they recalled through Fuller how their attention was drawn to a bright light in the sky that appeared to be following them. After stopping their vehicle to take a better look, the object they said swooped towards them and at this point they got back into their vehicle and made a hasty exit. In the following weeks however both Betty and Barney claimed to be troubled by strange and unnerving dreams that they somehow felt to be related to the incident that night. In desperation they sought psychiatric counselling. Through hypnotic regression they recounted events in which 'they were subjected to a variety of medical procedures, including a gynaecological examination and a sperm extraction' (1996, p8). The nature of the medical intrusions themselves, relating to human reproduction, later becomes highly significant of the claims made by self-styled alien abduction researchers Budd Hopkins and David Jacobs (Luckhurst, 1998, p32). This is also the central theme of the 'master plot' of the *X-Files* 'where alien abductions may be cover stories for government sponsored genetic experiments, with or without the collaboration of extraterrestrials' (Badley, 1996, p150).

A significant point regarding the Hills abduction experience relates to the method of remembering through hypnotic regression. The Hills claimed to only recall their actual experiences through unconscious hypnotic regression having previously been troubled by strangely traumatic and unnerving dreams. This suggests, according to Roger Luckhurst (1998, p33-34) a disruption of the normal process of memory recall and is attributable to a modern crisis in what he terms 'memoro-politics'. The category memory he argues, 'can be divided into personal identity, the collective practices of commemoration, and the institutional disciplines which determine the means and meanings of recall' (Luckhurst, p32) This being the case, he further argues that in relation to certain features of twentieth century life, including the alien abduction scenario, that each of these has undergone destabilisation. Luckhurst locates memory within social practice and suggests that our sense of personal identity as it is constituted through continuous narratives, has undergone a transformation in which collective commemoration has been revolutionised by challenges to dominant forms of social discourse, and 'by the revolution in psychotherapies which have located identity in terms of discontinuity of memory resultant from trauma' (Luckhurst, p33).

As a result Luckhurst suggests that in modern America it is not ordinary remembering that is instructive of the reality of experiences but rather forgetting, 'a politics of the secret, of the forgotten event that can be turned, if only by strange flashbacks, into something monumental' (Luckhurst, p33). Notwithstanding a certain paranoid effect that seems present in this description ultimately of paranoia, Luckhurst's wider point appears to be relevant to many so called conspiracy theories and other strange narratives that command widespread appeal in American popular culture today (Fenster, 1998). In respect of the alien abduction scenario the 'forgotten event', given

its narrative and historical similarities and connections, may well be to that of the traumatic American memory of Indian captivity with its attendant themes of tortuous ritual trial, and its wider connotations of personal and community danger through hostile invasions.

The unfolding of the alien abduction scenario is generally considered to occur as an extension of the belief that Earth is subject to visitation by extraterrestrial spacecraft (Matheson, p15). The alien abduction narrative regards its own continuum as occurring through the UFO phenomenon which it believes to be of historical importance. Erich Goode (2000, p140-142) however, locates the origins of the phenomenon at the very end of the nineteenth century in the United States. In this revealing sentence he comments, 'In 1896 following the publication of an article in the *Sacramento Evening Bee* that reported an inventor would pilot his airship from New York to California, roughly 100,000 sightings were made of a cigar shaped aircraft in the sky' (2000, p140). Witnesses even came forward to claim encounters with occupants of the airship whom they described as 'hideous foreigners' including a Texas man who grabbed his Winchester rifle before leaving his house to investigate! (Picknett 2001, p10)

A couple of points are important here. Firstly, Goode makes a clear correlation between the press reporting of the (erroneous) airship flight and the subsequent public response. Secondly, the reported responses of witness claimants to interaction or sighting of alleged occupants of the craft suggests some public alarm and hostility. This appears significant of a further point, that the UFO sighting of 1896 should be understood not in its contemporary interpretation as an indication of extraterrestrial craft, but as a literally unidentified flying object. There is nothing to suggest that any

confabulation is made by 'witnesses' in respect of extraterrestrial origins of the flying craft, and by all accounts the phenomenon was understood entirely in terrestrial terms as a craft made on Earth and crewed by human, or foreign occupants. Goode, (2000, p140) suggests that it is only after 1947 that mass sightings of alleged extraterrestrial spacecraft are observed. The public and media fascination with inventors and their creations, airship UFO's and their strange occupants, clearly anticipates though not only a number of themes that will develop in the course of the UFO phenomenon itself, but the emerging popular genre of Science Fiction which describes the technological age.

The airship scares, which eventually spread around the globe and persisted until after the First World War became increasingly attributed to the dastardly designs of enemy powers. In the US the Germans, Japanese and later the Soviets were all implicated in 'airborne' panics (Goode, 2000, p 140). This is despite the fact, as Pfitzer notes (1995, p51), that 'as early as the first decade of the twentieth century, the United States government was actively involved in the development of technologies necessary for control of "lower space" and by the second decade of the century, American domination of the skies was credited as a major factor in the Allied victory in World War 1.' This phase in the acceleration of both America's technological capabilities and its imperialist momentum appears to reflect what Lauria and White (1995, p67) describe as an American determination to 'meet the threat and challenge of potential technological and military superiority by the 'other'.' The fear of invasion and subjugation by foreign powers, wherever they come from, is clearly evident both in this position and in the cultural responses to 'airship scares.' The airships, though said to be potential foreign invaders, were in fact illusory with none ever yielding physical

evidence (Goode, 2000, p140). In this context the cultural belief in airships and their occupants as foreign invaders may be seen as continuous in a period when domestic 'hostiles' no longer threaten, and when attention is instead turned to territories beyond domestic shores. Further, during the early airship scares, the fact that flying machines are reported and stories circulated to huge excitement in the mass media before any were commercially flown, appears indicative of a tremendous level of social anticipation of airborne craft in particular and of technological advancements generally.

What appears to be at work here are a complex set of responses to a number of prominent features of the contemporary social climate. The original UFO event of 1896 takes place in the historical moment of the end of American continental expansion and in the period that marks an acceleration of imperialist designs overseas. This period, according to the influential historian Frederick Jackson Turner (Turner, 1938) marks a watershed in American history between what he refers to as the culmination of the first phase of American history, referring to continental settlement which he declares concluded in 1890, and a new and unknown period marking the start of the twentieth century and the second phase of American history.

#### As One Frontier Closes....

At this juncture the American nation is experiencing rapid industrial transformation and the mass immigration of non Anglo-Saxon or non-Protestant, mainly poor peoples from Europe. The captivity narrative in this period of its development becomes increasingly fixated with lurid tales of miscegenation and the brutish sexuality of racialised others and appears to articulate wider cultural fears than those associated wholly with events on remote western frontiers. Slotkin argues persuasively (1982)

that the general cultural representation of Indians, and the wars for the Plains of recent memory, evoked wider national concerns and anxieties relating to the reconfiguration of the U.S as a racially diverse, urban and industrial nation. The meanings and cultural representations attached to racial diversification, industrial development and its attendant urbanism and national expansion speak fundamentally at this time to American 'futures'. As early as the mid nineteenth century the inevitability of U.S hegemony within its continental borders is tempered by uncertainty in relation to rapid industrial/technological development, social complexity and racial diversity. There is too a very real anxiety that relates both to the final settling of the continent and the fears of a loss of national dynamism and energy when this is ultimately achieved. Continental conquest, perceived by Turner through successive stages of frontier settlement, development and expansion is understood as a uniquely American experience and as one central to the energy and dynamism of the nation. The final settling of the continent and the elimination of frontiers through which America funnels its energies and reflects its meanings, achievements and anxieties, is thus seen paradoxically. Although at once a triumph for the values and meanings America attaches to itself, the elimination of frontiers through which these values are made apparent is seen as having the potential to throw the nation into stasis and progressive decline.

Concerns over the future direction of the American national enterprise after the effective elimination of continental obstacles after 1876, preoccupy American historians and are influential of American politics into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This is especially so in the formation and rationalisation of an imperialist foreign policy agenda after 1880 and the momentous national project after 1945 to explore outer

space. The progressive historical unfolding of the captivity narrative addresses itself to the cultural articulation of these questions. Linked as the inevitable accompaniments to themes of American future progress are socio-cultural anxieties with their roots in the formative experiences of American encounters with the new world, and here important themes are the cultural separation of space that is safe, civilised and culturally familiar, from space that is dangerous, savage and other, and culturally alien. Relatedly, anxiety surrounds a sense in which the violation of 'safe' space by the alien other is a very real condition of the experience of being an American, and that an omnipresent danger exists of abduction and captivity and even assimilation into an alien cultural realm.

The captivity genre thus highlights an important cultural paradox. On the one hand geographical space is prefigured socio-culturally and psychologically into spheres that are familiar and alien, with the omnipresent fear of violation of safe space through abduction and captivity. Yet it is in the very experience of successive frontier development, of the colonisation of 'alien' space that American national vitality is imagined to be generated. The perception of American uniqueness, residing in its progressive frontier expansion, is then itself the very site of some of America's deepest cultural anxieties. The association of American national progress with frontier settlement, migration and re-settlement, represented through narrative themes of the captivity genre, becomes at the point of final continental conquest a popular cultural product that is able to represent America's experience of its past development in terms both triumphant and cautionary. Whilst the redeemed captive represents regeneration through ritual trial, the triumph through adversity of the American character, she reminds them that by being American they occupy a perilous frontier space, one that

brings with it the anxiety of new trials and challenges to be faced in uncertain and unsettling futures.

As Scott (2000) has shown since, the taking captive of American citizens and thus the periodic re-energising of the captivity scenario as a mythic narrative, is an actual occurrence at various intervals throughout the twentieth century. In its early decades the captivity narrative was re-articulated and re-imagined in imperialist rather than colonialist contexts. Scott demonstrates that the mythic appeal of this narrative for a restatement of core values and ideals is coupled with an expectation and political necessity for decisive military action. In the historical development of the captivity tale, decisive action to redeem the captive may not simply denote rescue and the restoration of community security, but may also provide the justification for the effective elimination of perceived threat through violent aggression, and even domination in what is ideologically constructed as a contestation between civilisation and barbarity (2000, p179). This she argues is exemplified through the mythic situation of the captive who stands in for the whole community in her ordeal through ritual trial to avoid the 'temptations of the other, and so renounce her civilisation, her god or her country.'

The successful outcome of the captivity scenario provides redemption for the captive and community by extension, formally a regeneration of spiritual faith and according to Scott, contemporarily a renewal 'of efforts to secure an American identity over and against fundamental threats' (2000, p179). Taken as a whole then, this would suggest that to varying degrees of intensity the cultural presence of the captivity myth and the responses it provokes has been an almost ever present aspect of the American national

drama. The emergence of the alien abduction narrative, which dates in widespread circulation from around the 1950's but whose antecedents are some fifty years earlier, enters the popular imagination in a culture already predisposed to periods of heightened social anxiety through the immanent threat or actual occurrence of abduction and captivity. Of course, the alien abduction narrative is an entirely fictitious drama, though in keeping with traditional concerns of security and safety, one that appears to articulate real and apparent social anxieties and relates to fundamental questions of human futures.

### Crossing the New Frontier

At the start of the twentieth century the Indian captivity narrative and its larger myth system associated with American westward development was redundant as a representation of actual contemporary experience. Gregory Pfitzer (1995, p51-67) notes however that as a mythic narrative the Western Frontier was revitalised and re-contextualised 'by the discovery of new territories for the extension of mytho-poetic impulses this time not in geographic space but in outer space.' Popular fiction came increasingly to incorporate traditional generic features of the western myth with new ones associative of the novel generic development Science Fiction. 'Like so much prairie wilderness, the skies appeared to be at least a potentially viable place for the renewal of expansionary American impulses associated with Manifest Destiny (1995, p51).' For example (Pfitzer, 1995, p55), an Edgar Rice Burroughs serialisation, entitled John Carter Martian that appeared during World War 1, opens with its hero being chased across the Plains by Indians. On taking refuge in a cave he is magically teleported to Mars! This tale, Pfitzer observes 'evokes an entire series of associations

Comment [AP1]:

in the minds of his American readers about the place of marauding “tribes” of “red men” in hostile environments (1995, p56).’

Space exploration at a stage of pre-possibility, that is before the necessary technological means for space travel, is conceived through the lens of the frontier myth. In the era of possibility after World War 2, Lauria and White (1995, p65-87) argue that the success of President Kennedy’s address to Congress in 1961, announcing the centrality for his new administration of space travel, was too ‘grounded and formulated within a construct of mythic proportions.’ They highlight in particular three rhetorical devices used to underscore American priorities (1995, p65). Firstly, and against the background of the Soviet Union’s successful launch of Sputnik in 1957, Kennedy argued that space exploration was vital to ‘preserve freedom against tyranny.’ Secondly, the fear of technological domination was invoked and American intervention called for to ‘meet the threat and challenge of potential technological and military superiority by the “other”’ (1995, p67). Finally, Kennedy grounded the future of American progress firmly in the technological advances, which would be created through the national determination to explore new frontiers.

Each of these themes, used to galvanise national interest in space exploration is familiar in the national story of settlement and expansion. Whilst the invocation of the language of the frontier myth was used analogously with that of space exploration, Carol Auster (1987, p103-112) notes an important point of departure from the frontier myth in its practicable realisation. In F.J Turner’s (1938) mythic frontier historiography western exploration is carried out in successive stages through the rugged individualism of pioneers, remote from the control and influence of

metropolitan government. In comparing the western frontier with the New Frontier of space, Auster argues that the possibility of exploration of space is by contrast entirely dependent upon government control and corporate finance. 'As frontiers become seemingly more exotic and require more advanced forms of technology for exploration, the role of governments and other large organisations will increase' (1987, p109). Space exploration of necessity involves massive economies of scale with the consequent levels of official bureaucracy, research and training, commercial involvement and the inevitability of accompanying secrecy and security. Here the qualities of American individualism, celebrated in the original frontier story, become subordinate to the large scale efforts of a powerful and impersonal bureaucratic machinery. According to Timothy Melley (2000) this arrangement is implicated in what he argues is a pervasive 'agency panic' that is detectable in American culture since 1945.

Agency panic he argues (2000, p7), forms 'a pervasive set of anxieties about the way technologies, social organisations and communication systems may have reduced human autonomy and uniqueness.' Melley's analysis of generalised cultural anxieties in the twentieth century bears comparison with those described earlier by Slotkin as pervasive among the colonialists of early America. Indeed, Melley himself makes this link and argues 'this nightmare was never absent in earlier American moments and may indeed be traced to colonial traditions' (2000, p8). In the historical unfolding of the story of American development contained in the frontier myth the captivity narrative has served to provide both the representational experiences of individuals under conditions of perilous frontier existence, and been used as an ideological device by elite groups and powerful interests to narrate moments of national crisis. As we

have seen this has often served to legitimate a violent response in order to ‘preserve freedom against tyranny’ and represents a paranoid style in American political culture, that according to Melley ‘[is] all part of the paradox in which a supposedly individualist culture conserves its individualism by continually imagining it to be in imminent peril’ (2000, p6).

### Aliens R US

The emergence in twentieth century American popular culture of the UFO genre and its attendant encounters with the extraterrestrial alien other, realised ultimately through the alien abduction scenario, can be analysed in the contexts of the frontier theory of development in which geographical space is re-figured as outer space, but with the attendant national themes of progress through frontier expansion resonant of the original myth centrally intact. In this the America of the twentieth century may be imagined to stand on the brink of frontier progress, the exploration of realms that are alien and unknown. The entire American national entity itself would seem to symbolise the colonial community settled precariously on the frontier borderland between what is known and unknown. To employ this metaphor further, each American individual can imagine himself or herself as a part of a supra-frontier community. A community that exists in preparedness of necessary adventures into the unknown and which as a condition of this exists in a more or less permanent state of anxiety. The overwhelming national scale of this historic adventure, represented through the control and sponsorship of government, corporations and other institutions of national significance and influence provides for an important extra

dimension to which we may add a specific layer of social concerns, agency panic, the fear of a loss of individualism through technological bureaucratic domination.

In this respect the work of alien abduction writer and therapist David Jacobs (1998) is especially revealing. Jacobs, a History professor, wrote his PhD thesis on the UFO phenomena, which was later, published as *The UFO Controversy in America* (1975). Since then he has combined his work as a university professor with a developing involvement in the alien abduction phenomenon both as a writer of books and as a therapist claiming to have counselled over 700 abductees (1998, p22). Jacobs, entirely convinced of the reality of this discourse, puts forward the grim proposal that 'all the evidence seems to suggest that integration into human society is the aliens' ultimate goal' (1998, p251). This he argues is the logical outcome of an analysis of his abductees claims which reveals a four stage alien agenda that is 'logical, rational and goal oriented' (1998, p251). These are, chronologically, an abduction programme of selected human victims, a breeding programme in which sperm and eggs are collected and foetuses incubated in human hosts, a hybridisation programme in which genetic tampering continuously perfects the alien offspring and finally an integration programme in which hybrid aliens assume control of the world. As with most alien abduction accounts Jacobs' information is obtained largely through hypnotic regression. Bizarrely, and entirely supporting Luckhurst's point made earlier, Jacobs views this as a more accurate guide to the truth of experience, stating 'I have not derived my conclusions from human thought or endeavour in any way, save through the conduit of memory.' The alien abduction scenario appears able to be characterised at this point then as Luckhurst suggests, as a 'politics of the secret, of the forgotten

event that can be turned, if only by strange flashbacks, into something monumental' (1998, p255). Nevertheless, Jacobs contends that,

'With the use of superior technology, both physical and biological, they are engaging in the systematic and clandestine physiological exploitation, and perhaps alteration, of human beings for the purposes of passing on their genetic capabilities to progeny who will integrate into the human society and, without doubt, control it.'

(1998, p257)

Jacobs' revelations here clearly resemble the main features of the Indian captivity scenario as it has developed over time, fomented in neurotic social conditions in which 'invisible devils haunt the outskirts like Indians waiting for the chance to assault' (Slotkin, 1973, p97). It is little surprise then that the ultimate design of the aliens is nothing short of world domination and the catastrophe of human civilisation. David Jacobs thus resembles Cotton Mather as a narrator of captivity tales. A preacher of doom in desperate haste to be heard before it is too late. We have seen in the Puritan imaginary that the threat posed by Indians was understood to be the possession of the souls of frontier settlers. In the possession of bodies and 'selves' portended in Jacobs' nightmarish modern interpretation there is an obvious connection with this as well as with Badley's (1996) earlier recognition of the centrality to the narrative of body politics and bio-power, in which 'foetal surgery.. transforms women into maternal cyborgs for the maintenance of technofoetuses' (Casper, in Luckhurst, 1998).

Hybridisation and miscegenation and the cultural fear of it through abduction, are though hardly a novel departure of the alien captivity scenario. According to Colley (2002, p146) captivity of whites in a North American context, by virtue of their existence there as settler communities, were forced to confront the possibility that they, and significantly their children, 'might be coerced or coaxed into becoming else.' In John Ford's masterpiece of the captivity scenario, *The Searchers*, miscegenation is precisely the horror that drives racist Ethan Edwards in relentless pursuit of his young niece and Comanche captive Debbie. Meanwhile, Jacobs' abductees, believing they are containers for hybrid offspring appear afflicted with Melley's (2000) agency panic, offering an extreme representation of the perception of pervasive social domination exercised by powerful technologies and social organisations. 'The procedures aliens undertake.. are products of the intense technologization of medicine, especially reproduction, where scientific advances have outstripped medical ethics and lay understanding since the first test-tube baby' (Luckhurst, 1998, p39). Brigit Brown (2002) locates this cultural fear somewhat earlier in the 1960's where she argues mass circulation lifestyle magazines increasingly come to represent the innerspace of the body as another 'new' frontier. This discourse she argues '[tells] a story about the exploration and colonization of human bodies by science, and the implications of that project for the human future.' In the alien abduction scenario medical practices and procedures and especially technologies 'have become so complex and inhuman that they could make a mockery of the individual' (Nye, 1999, p254). Here an alliance is formed in the popular imagination between doctors, technology and foetuses that Brown argues is significant of the contemporary unfolding of the alien abduction account.

Ultimately the alien abduction story is a dire forecast of the future of American society. As the wider captivity drama shows this is entirely consistent with significant themes of its historical development. The fear of hostile invasion, abduction and captivity leading to a collapse of the values of civilisation and control by the other is imagined in the work of abduction gurus like Jacobs' as arriving through a systematic breeding programme. It is interesting here to note that Jacobs' abductees often tell him, contrary to his own assessment of the aliens desires for global takeover, that their hybrid offspring are required by alien kidnappers to replenish their own depleted population. This bears striking comparison with what Derounian and Levrnier (1993, p2-8) point out was a powerful reason for captive taking of settlers by Indians. They identify three major reasons for captive taking, revenge, ransom and 'to replace tribal numbers diminished by war and disease brought on by white colonisation' (1993, p5). Significantly each of these is related to the colonial imperative of European and former European invaders, the threat that *they* presented to the future of *Indian* existence. The practice of adoption of whites into Indian tribes was widespread and entirely necessary as the Indians saw it for the maintenance of their existence and their civilisation. 'Adoption into the tribe, rather than torture and death, was the fate that most captives could reasonably expect' (Derounian & Levrnier, 1993, p5) The Indians then practised abduction and captivity in significant part to maintain the viability of their existence in the teeth of an all too apparent hostile invasion by a technologically superior society.

This represents of course an almost exact reversal of the captivity scenario as it is represented through the culturally popular American myth. What captivity represents in a North American context in historical actuality appears then not to be the threat of

hostile takeover but rather the desperate means of defence against it. Fantastical narrative accounts of abduction by extraterrestrials would appear to bear this out. As we have seen, the alien abduction account reflects fears and concerns for the autonomy of the individual against the power of a technologised society and against the colonisation of the 'self'. Jacobs appears to have misinterpreted the meaning of the narratives he has been told, for rather than a threat of invasion and takeover being presented by the other, the alien captivity scenario would suggest what Badley concludes to be its point (1996), that in fact the 'aliens R us.' David Jacobs, as with Cotton Mather before him misinterprets the accounts of abduction and captivity through a prior narrative framework, for Mather the Judaic-Christian myth of the Fall (Slotkin, 1973), and for Jacobs himself the Indian captivity myth in its popular cultural formation.

Each is passionately convinced of the rightness, or more precisely the righteousness of their belief in the immanence of social catastrophe. However, unlike Cotton Mather whose Puritan faith was unbending, Jacobs confesses to his audience that his faith in the 'the primacy of reason and logic' is at an end - this because of the apocalyptic conclusions he has arrived at and which he acknowledges defy credibility (1998, p153-154). Given that it is precisely through a calculating logic that he suggests the aliens have used to put themselves on the brink of world takeover in the first place, one can only ask why this should be the case? In Jacobs' frighteningly technologised universe it simply doesn't make sense. What appears more to the point is Jacobs' own acute sense of agency panic in the face of an accelerated technologisation of the social. Of course this is what his abductees appear to have been telling him all along, though for Jacobs, stuck in the mythologised narrative account, he is unable to see

either the abductions or the aliens for what and who they are. If Badley is right, and she surely is, and the aliens indeed are 'us', this is based on the historical tendency towards expansion which is fundamental to an American identification of its needs for progress through relentless colonisation. The point Jacobs misses in his assessment of the captivity narrative is that the colonisers are imagined now to have turned on their own citizens.

### Conclusion

The captivity genre in American culture, from its origins in the reality of Indian captivity through to its fantastical fictionalisation in the alien abduction scenario is thus linked by themes that relate to cultural anxieties of personal invasion and community security, the meanings of progress and colonisation, the construction of identity in perilous environments and the identification of 'others'. Formative in the tradition of American popular culture the captivity genre is an historically and contemporaneously significant mythic narrative that is readily re-imagined in times of national drama and in periods of significant social changes and stress. As I have tried to show here the captivity narrative is an especially powerful and emotive cultural construct during periods in which America, as a national entity, positions itself as a coloniser of new frontiers and territories. Both the Indian narrative and the alien abduction one, it has been argued, emerge to describe the anxieties and fears of those imagined as existing in perilous frontier environments. The captivity narrative is culturally constructed as a siren voice for a community in danger and is narratively satisfying when the call is heard and the captive returned to safety. In the literalist alien abduction scenario, which addresses itself to significant contemporary concerns

about the diminution of the self in the face of rapid medical-technological advancements, this call is misinterpreted and indeed goes unacknowledged. Here the symbolic captive is left entirely adrift in the alien realm, without hope of redemption, and ‘vanished forever into the woods’ (Slotkin, 1973, p98).

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