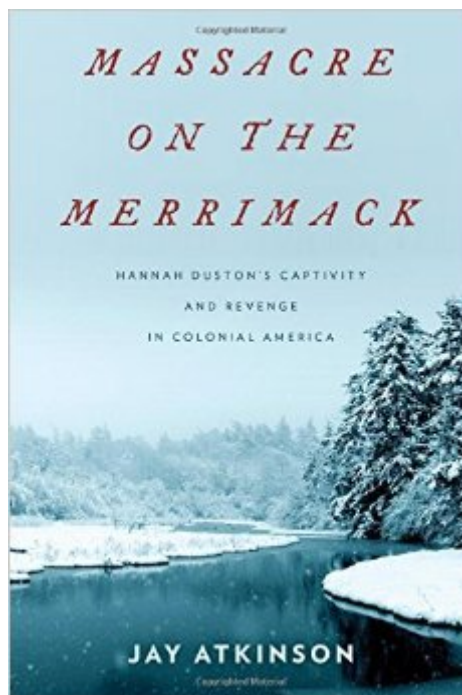


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Massacre On The Merrimack: Hannah Duston's Captivity And Revenge In Colonial America



Synopsis

Early on March 15, 1697, a band of Abenaki warriors in service to the French raided the English frontier village of Haverhill, Massachusetts. Striking swiftly, the Abenaki killed twenty-seven men, women, and children, and took thirteen captives, including thirty-nine-year-old Hannah Duston and her week-old daughter, Martha. A short distance from the village, one of the warriors murdered the squalling infant by dashing her head against a tree. After a forced march of nearly one hundred miles, Duston and two companions were transferred to a smaller band of Abenaki, who camped on a tiny island located at the junction of the Merrimack and Contoocook Rivers, several miles north of present day Concord, New Hampshire. This was the height of King William's War, both a war of terror and a religious contest, with English Protestantism vying for control of the New World with French Catholicism. After witnessing her infant's murder, Duston resolved to get even. Two weeks into their captivity, Duston and her companions, a fifty-one-year-old woman and a twelve-year-old boy, moved among the sleeping Abenaki with tomahawks and knives, killing two men, two women, and six children. After returning to the bloody scene alone to scalp their victims, Duston and the others escaped down the Merrimack River in a stolen canoe. They braved treacherous waters and the constant threat of attack and recapture, returning to tell their story and collect a bounty for the scalps. Was Hannah Duston the prototypical feminist avenger, or the harbinger of the Native American genocide? In this meticulously researched and riveting narrative, bestselling author Jay Atkinson sheds new light on the early struggle for North America.

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Customer Reviews

In *Massacre on the Merrimack*, author Jay Atkinson has created a gripping narrative of a time in colonial American history oft-forgotten, when early English settlers struggled to live sparsely on the land of New England, and only one hard winter or bad harvest separated them from disaster. In the period chronicled here (roughly, the 1680s until Hannah Duston's story in the spring of 1697), the colonists are part of a much bigger conflict between England and France, played out between colonies in New England and Quebec, with local Indians (already in steep decline due to disease and conflict with colonists) struggling to maintain their respective advantages, and siding with European powers when it suited them. The star of the book is Hannah Duston, of course, but some of the other narratives of Hannah's peers told in this book are just as gripping (and many much darker). Living on the frontier -- as Haverhill, Massachusetts, was in those days -- was risky business. *Massacre* opens with the harrowing, bloody raid that started Hannah on her journey and left close to 10% of Haverhill's population dead in a matter of minutes. As he draws the broader picture, Atkinson makes clear that this raid was hardly an isolated event; it was a fact of life for those early settlers. In the modern age, there's some controversy about the actions Hannah took to secure her freedom, and whether they were all justified. Atkinson doesn't opine on this, but he does make an effort, as far as the source material will allow, to tell the story with a more even-handed sensibility than earlier accounts may have had. Whatever your opinion on Hannah's actions, you'll find it hard not to be invested in her story as it unfolds and resolves in epic fashion.

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