CHOOSING SIDES
Loyalists in Revolutionary America
RUMA CHOPRA
Most eighteenth-century Euro-Americans began their life as Britons. The most influential imaginary community that anchored their social, political, and economic life was the British empire. They regarded Britain as their mother country, even if they were several generations removed from British birth. Although many never had any direct contact with Britain, they shared the same imperial myths and pride. Through their use of the English language, their faith in Protestant religious orders, and their adherence to British notions of liberty and justice, they celebrated their place as assimilated subjects of the British Atlantic community. They copied British fashions and books, trusted British constitutionalism, followed British politics, and along with fellow Protestant Britons in Europe, regarded England as the center of their cultural identity. During the twenty-year revolutionary struggle, half the colonies of British America and a substantial minority—20 percent—in the thirteen rebellious colonies remained loyal to Britain. This volume describes the context that led Euro-Americans in the British Atlantic to defend their society and their empire, and explores the circumstances that led most Native Americans and African Americans (slaves and free) in the thirteen mainland colonies to choose the British side. No sharp divide differentiated rebels from loyalists; a combination of principles, interests, location, and social attitudes influenced initial choices, the exigencies of war modified decisions, and losses sometimes reversed initial commitments.

The Americans who chose allegiance to the empire did not share character traits, patrons, or parishes. Those who remained loyal comprised the
nativex and foreign born, those in backcountry areas as much as in cities, and those who worshipped in Anglican churches as well as those who were Quakers and Congregationalists. The average loyalist might come from any walk of life: he may be a British merchant or an innkeeper or a cartman, a farmer who used the revolution to resist his rebel landlord, or a tenant who reacted against the rebel mandate for militia enlistment. He may be a recently immigrated Scot who imagined his future in an integrated empire. The loyalist may be an American-born slave or a Mohawk Indian. Many colonial women took sides that sustained their marital ties.

The dominant interpretation of the revolution has downplayed the diversity and potential of the loyalists. They are depicted as imperial place-men solely motivated by a desire to maintain position and fortune, or as backward-looking conservatives. In contrast to virtuous rebel farmers who bravely stood for liberty, the loyalists emerge as colonial aristocrats who selfishly pursue wealth and position. This reading misses the fact that both loyalist and rebel included constituents from the privileged circles and also people in the margins of colonial society. Of course, the well-educated, cosmopolitan, wealthy, and ambitious comprised the loyalist elite. But founding fathers such as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and John Adams were not inferior in social rank to prominent loyalists such as the royal governor of Massachusetts, Thomas Hutchinson; Pennsylvania assemblyman Joseph Galloway; or the Indian superintendent, Sir William Johnson. Indeed, the most disadvantaged in the colonies—the African-American slaves and the Native Americans—mostly sided with the British.

The character of the loyalists has endured deep scrutiny even as loyalist choices have been caricatured. The loyalists appear as hidebound conservatives or as political lackeys lacking ideological commitment, motivated by fear to maintain the status quo. When the loyalist choice has been acknowledged, the decision toward allegiance to the empire has been framed as an aberrant and individual one. Written more than thirty years ago, Bernard Bailyn’s intellectual biography of the royal governor of Massachusetts, Thomas Hutchinson, has defined the general understanding of loyalists. Bailyn portrayed Hutchinson as “political, not philosophical,” and described his arguments against patriots as “bland in content and blandly told.” Unlike John Adams, Hutchinson felt “no inner promptings” to “follow a wayward course.” Bailyn’s Hutchinson stands for the “losers,” one of many lone figures who could not understand the progressive passion of the revolutionaries.

But the loyal Americans were as passionate as their adversaries and resolutely defended their vision of liberty within the empire. A deep ideological commitment and a sentimental attachment to the empire determined the allegiance of this courageous minority. The loyalists continued to trust the British government, labeled the rebels as tyrants, and opposed what they repeatedly called the “unnatural rebellion.” They worried about an American future under the reign of power-hungry demagogues who conspired against the true freedoms of the British government. They assumed a grim picture of human nature, a greater concern with the consequences of a disordered society, and a deeper sense of indebtedness to Great Britain. They celebrated their birthright as Britons and fought hard to preserve their precious link to the empire. Like the rebels, the loyalist leaders struggled to rally the undecided and to create a winning coalition despite differences in opinions and strategies.

More than ideological commitments, the proximity of the British army and the threat of local coercion dramatically affected people’s choices. Protection from British troops could drive the waverers to embrace reunion, but evacuation of the same troops could lead the abandoned to accuse grievances against the empire. Likewise, patterns of violence affected the direction of political choices as much as heartfelt allegiance. When colonists refused or hesitated to choose rebellion, they risked physical harassment, social isolation, and legal ostracizing from local enforcement agencies, known as the Committees of Safety. These punishments stilled loyalists’ utterance of their political inclinations. Many chose sides to maintain the security of their kin and property, not necessarily out of deep political convictions.

As much a war of political independence between colony and empire as a civil war between Euro-Americans, the rebellion was a struggle by slaves for emancipation and a war by Indians for survival. Like Euro-Americans, slaves and Indians chose sides based on a mixture of local considerations and ideological commitments. Many plantation slaves answered the British administration’s desperate need for military manpower to find a path to freedom. A few urbanized northern slaves who served actively with the British military considered themselves British allies in a war that could end the rule of slave owners. Some felt the voice of God called upon them to end the rebellion. Most Indian communities, like others in the colonial population, tried to avoid choosing a side until the war actually touched their localities, and sometimes their very homes. Many communities distrusted the settlers’ yearning for Indian land and put their faith in the British government. Some such as the Mohawks who long benefited from a close bond with British agents and Anglican clergymen saw no reason to abandon the relationship. Internal disagreements divided Indian communities as they divided Euro-American neighbors.
In the turmoil of the rebellion, self-interest and idealism informed one another, and political allegiances did not stick firm. Some examples highlight the volatility of loyalties, even among the most prominent rebel ideologues. Recognized rebel politicians such as New York attorney John Jay remained undecided for years before choosing independence. Indeed, Jay was identified as a conservative in the First Continental Congress in September, 1774.

Of non-English stock, sometimes described as vain and snuffy, Jay hoped to raise his stature through securing land grants and to advance his legal career through connections to friends in London. Denied access to both land and a judgeship, Jay committed to the rebel side by marrying the daughter of William Livingston, a prominent rebel leader who became governor of New Jersey after the loyalist governor, William Franklin, was forced to give up his seat. As late as October 1775, Jay hoped to restore peace and prosperity in an "Empire now rent by unnatural convusions." But by 1776, Jay "inclined towards over resistance and transformed himself into a "hardline insurgent." Jay led a committee to root out loyalists; hung Thomas Hickey, accused of a plot against General George Washington; and threw the loyal mayor of New York City, David Mathews, into jail.7

New York merchant Isaac Low rejected rebellion for loyalty in 1775. His unwillingness to break with the empire was as sudden as John Jay's decision to support rebellion. Low headed many rebel committees during the late 1760s and early 1770s. One of the founders of the New York Chamber of Commerce in 1768, Low was also a member of the First Continental Congress and signed the Continental Association that promoted the boycott of British goods.8 In a meeting held on April 29, 1775, Low called George III a "Roman Catholic tyrant" who had "broken his coronation oath." But by the end of 1775, Low drew the line at the idea of independence. A merchant who enthusiastically supported imperial reform, Low advocated orderly and legal methods of protest; he drew the line at violent revolt against the empire. For his support, the British appointed Low president of the revived Chamber of Commerce in New York City in 1779. Four years later, when the state of New York passed anti-loyalist legislation that confiscated the property of inhabitants defined as traitors, Low confronted the monumental consequences of his allegiance. His earlier leadership of rebel committees cost him a second time. Having lost his colonial possessions, Low turned to the British for compensation for his losses on behalf of the empire. But, as questions arose about his late turn to loyalty, he received only a small fraction of the losses he claimed.9

Unlike Isaac Low, William Franklin steadfastly remained loyal to Britain. In 1762, at the age of thirty-two, William Franklin had sworn fidelity to the Crown when he became governor of New Jersey, and he did not deviate from his oath. Son of Benjamin Franklin, the politician who, after spending fourteen years in England, emerged belatedly as a spokesman for the American rebellion, Franklin's decision to side with the British was not a foregone conclusion. Born in the colonies, cultivated to be as much an American politician as an English gentleman, Franklin did not blindly follow imperial dictates. He understood colonial political reasoning, supported the rights of colonial assemblies, and denounced parliamentary taxation as unconstitutional. However, Franklin opposed a violent break with empire and regarded the instigators of rebellion with suspicion. He lamented that "principal demagogues oppose everything which may have been the remotest tendency to conciliate matters in an amicable way, & to omit nothing which may have any chance of widening the breach."10 In January 1775, Franklin hoped the New Jersey assembly would follow the right road, the middle path toward "peace, happiness, and the restoration of the public tranquility," and not the route to "anarchy, misery, and all the horrors of a civil war."11 Franklin never subscribed to the radical notion that England harbored some secret design to enslave the colonies.

The last royal governor of New Jersey, William Franklin spent—humiliatingly—the first three years of the war in a rebel prison. He lost full political authority in New Jersey by May 1775 as the rebel de facto government usurped his authority and raised troops in preparation for violent resistance (see document—Inflamed Rebels and Scattered Friends). A year later, Franklin was interrogated, arrested, and sent under guard to Connecticut until 1778, when he finally reached the British headquarters of New York City. Until 1782, Franklin hoped to gain the trust of British officials and lead the loyalist military opposition in the colonies. Ironically, the man who had earlier pledged to do everything to promote peace encouraged pillaging and murderous raids against nearby rebel strongholds. Like Isaac Low, William Franklin was treated skeptically by the British authorities. His pedigree—as Benjamin Franklin's son—never left him. When he petitioned the British government for compensation, he was obliged to produce witnesses to provide proof of active loyalty. A bitter exile in England after the war, Franklin remained permanently estranged from his home and his famous father.

Unlike William Franklin, Governor John Wentworth of New Hampshire received substantial recognition for his steadfast loyalty to the empire. Both men, experienced in colonial politics and attentive to the enduring role
of colonial assemblies, emphasized pragmatic solutions that would reduce conflict in the future. Neither was a hard-line advocate of British authority sometimes associated with the term "loyalist." In fact, neither imagined himself in the category of "loyalist" because each believed that reasonable policies and sound government would soon be restored in the colonies without violence. Wentworth regarded the crisis as temporary and short-sighted. Once Britain prevailed, he hoped the colonies could build a strong and integrated British Empire, "cemented by justice and reciprocation of interest with an evident attention to mutual rights."11

The Wentworths had already been in New Hampshire for a century and had deep—five generations deep—familial roots and mercantile ties in the colony. They had accumulated wealth through the timber trade and were long regarded as the elite in the province. Wentworth was of Anglican faith, and his family had long been connected to royal authority. His uncle, Benning Wentworth, had served as governor of New Hampshire for a quarter of a century, longer than any other governor in the history of the North American colonies. John Wentworth hoped the colonies would continue to play a vital role in the profitable and expanding empire.

In 1775, fearing the action of rebel mobs in New Hampshire, Wentworth fled to British New York City, hoping that the British would restore order and authority (see document—Hunting of the Tories). A group of trusted military recruits, "Wentworth's Volunteers," accompanied Wentworth. Only in 1778 when Wentworth realized the rebellion would not be easily suppressed did he sail for England. Unmarried by any earlier association with rebellion or rebels, Wentworth formed close-knit connections with British politicians; after the war, he earned an appointment as surveyor general of His Majesty's Woods for the reduced British Empire in North America. Nova Scotia served as a substitute, if not a replacement, for the home he had lost in New Hampshire. In 1791, Wentworth continued to believe that the revolution could have been avoided if only "true, wise and open measures had been embraced on both sides."12 His appointment as governor of Nova Scotia in 1792 underscored the political rewards available to a select few trustworthy subjects untainted by rebellion. No other revolutionary royal governor served again as head of another British North American colony.

Like William Franklin and John Wentworth, New York's lieutenant governor, Cadwallader Colden, did not waver in his support for the empire. Yet, Colden stands apart because loyalism was so firmly grounded in his experience that loyalist identity during the rebellion involved no agonizing decision. Born of a Presbyterian minister in southeastern Scotland, Colden arrived in New York in 1718 under the patronage of Governor Robert Hunter, converted to Anglicanism, and served in prominent political positions in New York for almost four decades. Until his death in September 1776, at the age of eighty, Colden served as the most royalist of Crown officeholders in New York. Unlike Franklin and Wentworth, Colden had neither sympathy nor tolerance for the plight of the colonists. Whereas the two governors understood colonial grievances and hoped for imperial reform whereby Parliament better represented the interests of the faraway colonies, Colden believed Parliament adequately represented the outlying Atlantic dominions as well as constituencies within Britain. Impatient with colonial protests, Colden lamented the weakness of the British government and advocated tighter and more centralized royal control of the colonies. Whereas Benjamin Franklin's son, William, defied him to support the empire, Cadwallader's son, David Colden, followed his father's faith and actively supported the British during the rebellion (see document—Seeking Refuge in Britain).

Loyal Britons

Loyalty to the mother country was the colonial norm. As Peter Marshall has observed, "A sense of being British was never the exclusive property of the peoples of the British Isles."13 Most eighteenth-century British colonists shared in the feeling of British patriotism, an alignment that emerged from the massive wars between 1689 and 1815, one that allowed diverse people to focus on what they had in common rather than on what divided them. During this time, seven different wars were fought with France, a country with a larger population, army, and landmass. In gaining victories over Catholic France, Britons across the Atlantic celebrated the Protestant culture they shared. The internal divisions within Protestantism were eclipsed by the pull of Protestant solidarity in the face of perceived Catholic threats from France. Protestantism, as Linda Colley observes, formed a "unifying and distinguishing bond" of British identity.14 Because the colonists associated Catholicism with superstition and arbitrary government, illiteracy and starvation, they reveled in their own literacy, freedoms, and prosperity.

By mid-century, commerce as well as migration led to increased opportunities for Britons to exchange political culture, Protestant literature, prestige goods, and visits within Atlantic communities. The Atlantic became a bridge that integrated the American colonies to the British empire, and local elites drew power from the unity of the English Atlantic. Sea travel became safer, faster, and more frequent with increased navigational knowledge and more sophisticated maps. Models of gentility, modes of religious revivalism, and habits in soil cultivation were shared across British Atlantic communi-
ties. Through the medium of British shipping, not only was there a mixing of commodities and messages, but also people. Merchants, planters, officeholders, and their families crossed the Atlantic to collect debts, visit relatives, seek office, or even recover their health. The American colonies became more multiracial and multicultural with the immigration of thousands of immigrants, voluntary and involuntary, European and African.

The more connected Atlantic also brought Britishness within reach of most colonists. A core group of glass, ceramic, and textile goods acquired a distinctive British identity, and their purchase further Anglicized American consumer cultures. Colonists from Halifax to Barbados enthusiastically adopted British candlesticks, cutlery, framed looking glasses, mechanical toys, and trawage. In contrast to French silk, velvet, or satin coats, English plain clothing exemplified natural dignity and refined taste. Brass buckles and brass furniture became highly coveted. Made on the latest cylinder printing machinery, upholsteries and window hangings transformed Indian and Chinese landscapes into recognizable English floral designs. Ironically, Britishness came to be defined by fabrics of Asian origin. Also imprinted in local newspapers, trade catalogs, and shipping orders, the British brand pointed to high status.

New habits, which demanded a variety of new consumer goods, further integrated Britons across the Atlantic. The ritual of drinking tea, common to European elites early in the eighteenth century, became an expected part of middle-class behavior for both Britons and non-British European immigrants in the British colonies. As tea drinking became a shared American experience, along with the teacups came a demand for ceramic teapots, silver spoons, sugar bowls, sugar tongs, tea strainers, and tea tables. In 1748, a foreign traveler commented that tea “is drank here in the morning and afternoon, especially by women, and is so common at present that there is hardly a farmer’s wife or a poor woman who does not drink tea in the morning.” Importantly, in the 1780s, when loyalist refugee women presented their claims to a British commission established to compensate them for property confiscated by the rebels, they recounted the loss of such beloved objects as “blue and white tea and Table China,” “silver tea pot,” and “Mahogany Dining Tables.” The loyalist women, much as the men, mourned for goods that had marked their social acceptance and prosperity in the British empire.

In addition to the religious and consumer connections that tied the Atlantic world, constitutional culture proved a crucial means of integration. The American colonists spoke a constitutional vernacular of Britain. Although legal authority traveled below from the Crown, in practice it was flexible, layered with compromise and local adjustments derived from many areas of the British Atlantic. The colonists cherished British political culture and the English liberties epitomized by the constitution such as trial by jury. They revered the “paper empire”—the mix of documents, political agreements, and traditions that made up the English constitution. Not merely a description of the institutions and principles of government, the constitution was a repository of ideals and duties that could be invoked to make sense of the imperial-colonial political landscape, a relationship that defined an Atlantic political community.

Until mid-eighteenth century, natural rights and English rights were interchangeable; and most colonists thought the English constitution embodied their natural rights. They believed they had inherited a flexible constitution that protected their cherished rights as Britons. The British political system, which balanced the power of the monarchy, the wisdom of the aristocracy, and the virtue of democracy, was the best means to secure the liberties of the people. Without proper checks, monarchy could become despotism, aristocracy could transform into oligarchy, and democracy would lead to anarchy and perpetual turbulence. Mixing the three regimes in one British system, they trusted, nullified the extreme tendencies of each one.

Colonists celebrated the British monarchy through feasts, illuminations, and toasts to mark royal birthdays as well as royal births. Throughout the eighteenth century, they regularly observed royal and ecclesiastical anniversaries that reminded them of their affection for the king and their special ties to one another. In addition to St. George’s Day (April 23), St. Patrick’s Day (March 17), and St. Andrew’s Day (November 30), the colonists celebrated the coronation and accession of George III. Ritualistic observances cemented imperial bonds. The deeply sentimental attachment to the king that most colonists felt persisted into the years of the crisis. Until the eve of independence, George III’s birthday continued to be celebrated with similar enthusiasm throughout the colonies.

Imperial Crisis

The expansion of the British empire at the close of the Seven Years’ War was unprecedented in scale. The British gained the whole of inland North America from the Appalachians to the Mississippi River, Canada, new West Indian Islands, a new colony in West Africa, and from 1765, effective control over Bengal, India. In addition to authority over ten to twenty million people in Bengal, George III inherited 75,000 French Canadians and 100,000 Native Americans as new subjects in the Atlantic.
The cultural diversity in the new Atlantic colonies brought a new sense of insecurity. It mandated political adjustments and new accommodations with non-British subjects to lower the risks as much as the costs involved in ruling over alien people. The British hoped to enforce rule over immense new territories with 10,000 soldiers (although only 4,500 arrived). The soldiers were intended to mitigate possible aggression from unknown subjects, not loom as a threat to colonial liberties.

To assimilate French Catholics in Quebec into the imperial structure required unprecedented policy shifts. Quebec posed a strategic anomaly because the large Catholic population already had established religious and civil institutions. The compromise chosen after ten years of uneasy rule antagonized English subjects in the British Isles and in North America. The 1774 Quebec Act extended the boundary of Quebec by putting the area from the Great Lakes to the Ohio River under Quebec, gave political rights to Catholics, and recognized non-British systems of government. Most problematically, the Quebec Act precluded governance through a representative assembly. The British attempt at integration flew in the face of existing tradition of Catholic exclusionism and led to outrage and disillusionment. Britons on both sides of the Atlantic held no sympathy for the claim that Catholicism was tolerable because it posed no threat to state security. Many American colonists viewed the Act as one in a legislative program meant to deprive them of their cherished liberties.

The British were not entirely sure how to incorporate large numbers of Native Americans into their empire. Linda Colley has observed that the British empire, paradoxically, shared similarities with the Native Americans in 1763. Both sides “worried about the ever-growing expansion and power of white colonists.” Given the condescension British military officers showed, many Indians suspected that the British would not be generous allies like the French. Clashing interpretations between British administrators and Indians generated a devastating Indian war, Pontiac’s Rebellion, which encompassed many more groups than those directly led by the Ottawa leader, Pontiac. Identifying colonist-Indian tension over land as a major cause of the war, the British hoped to pacify the frontier by establishing a boundary that forbade white settlement west of the Appalachian Mountains. The 1763 Proclamation Line, which brought the trans-Appalachian West Indian territory under the direct authority of Britain, also put the British government in an unusual position of being a relatively pro-Indian mediator. When the revolution broke out a decade later, the British had the upper hand with most Indians. Unable to control the ambitions of squatters and speculators despite the Proclamation Line, most Indians imagined more security in allying with the British.

Effective defense and commercial regulation of Britain’s newly acquired colonies required active and expensive oversight by the British Parliament. The government was also burdened by the tremendous debt incurred during the Seven Years’ War. Attempting to bring the colonies into tighter economic and political control, Parliament passed the Currency and Sugar Acts in 1764, the Stamp and Quartering Acts in 1765, the Townshend Acts in 1767, and the Tea Act in 1773. This presumption of Parliament’s power was in accordance with Parliament’s increasing confidence in its ability to regulate domestic affairs. The government did not have overarching designs for suppressing colonial liberties. The British perceived that many colonists made insufficient contributions to the war effort and smuggled extensively outside the imperial system. The government’s policies, hence, moved from a fluid economic environment, characterized by salutary neglect, to a much more structured and constraining environment.

Unforeseen by the British government, the extension of the bureaucratic state led to increased tensions in the American colonies. As the British established policies designed to rule over new subjects, manage new territories, and raise money, many colonists became disillusioned and felt that the empire had not lived up to its ideal, namely, that the colonists were not offered the true rights of Englishmen. These Americans wanted the British to treat the prerogatives of their assemblies as virtually equal to Parliament. Their rhetoric focused overwhelmingly on the unprecedented and “unconstitutonal” nature of parliamentary taxes. A new question had emerged: Could the Parliament represent colonial interests better than colonial assemblies?

The resistance of colonial assemblies to British legislation was less a progressive fight for democracy than a defense of long-accrued local privileges against a government perceived as interventionist. It arose from disillusionment and resentment rather than an abiding desire for separation. During the eighteenth century, the colonial assemblies grew in power and self-confidence. Through the assemblies, an emergent group of colonial leaders resisted imperial initiatives and integrated their own power within each colony. They claimed the right to frame revenue measures, and guarded their position from the intrusions and instructions of royal governors. Simultaneously, the colonial assemblies maintained reverence for Parliament and the British constitution, and upheld the Crown as a stabilizing symbol. The ambiguities of negotiating between the distant empire and the local realities did not produce great upheaval. The political elites understood themselves simultaneously as beneficiaries of the empire and as colonial leaders, as Englishmen and asmen.
The polarization between American rebels and the British administration happened only gradually, after a decade of ferocious debate. In 1763, the colonists celebrated British victory over the French and showed enthusiasm about their membership in the empire. Their excitement arose not only from greater expectations of profit, but from an attachment to the cultural heritage and outlook shared with the mother country. The celebratory sermons of New England churchmen testify to a belief in a shared spiritual mission. The Reverend Thomas Barnard rejoiced that the war had “served to fix liberty more firmly” so the children of New England should behold the triumph of George III who “gives peace to Half the world.” For many, this sense of belonging persisted well into the actual years of warfare; for others, the attachment never died.

Between 1765 and 1774, most colonists regarded the Parliament’s actions as excessive and arrogant, capricious and conspiratorial. Although they resented the arrogance that seemed to drive British measures, few colonists imagined permanently severing ties with the empire. By the mid-1770s, those who chose the rebellion interpreted British actions as a tyrannical ploy meant to subjugate the colonies, and those who stayed loyal interpreted the hard-line stance as a tragic miscalculation. Still, most colonists continued to work for a solution within, not outside, the empire. They wanted reform, not revolution. It was only in 1774 that the Intolerable Acts, which punished Boston and Massachusetts for the destruction of the taxed tea, alienated many Americans and led some to organize an aggressive and systematic resistance toward independence. Indeed, if the two sides had quickly and sharply distinguished themselves into competing sides, the revolution would have occurred in the mid-1760s instead of the mid-1770s.

Revolutionary affiliations cannot be projected backward upon the pre-revolutionary years. Early America was composed of rapidly expanding and highly diverse societies that did not share a single ideological worldview. Our knowledge that the United States would emerge from thirteen disunited and diverse colonies has flattened the political world of the late-eighteenth century. American colonists flourished in a contentious political world that debated the nature of society, the role of government, and the right of revolution. The colonists were also accustomed to occurrences of episodic violence—riots in seaports, tenant protests in rural districts, backcountry rebellions, and slave uprisings. Few imagined that these tensions would become the broader context for a colonial war of independence. As historian Ian Steele has noted, “Despite the well-known centrifugal tendencies that operated in this period, colonial fathers could die in 1740 without hearing a whisper of the coming of the American Revolution.” He cautions historians from making “colonial grandfathers into veterans of their grandsons’ revolution.”

A violent and unprecedented rebellion gave birth to the United States. Most rebels and loyalists experienced the collapse of imperial authority from 1774 to 1776 as sudden and traumatic. Those who remained loyal opposed the violent separation that mutinous colonists advocated and hoped to remain oriented within an imperial and constitutional order. They denied that the king’s actions had forfeited colonial loyalty. They also challenged the legitimacy of demanding allegiance and coerced loyalty from those who were unwilling participants in the struggle for independence.

In the absence of political compulsion, people had avoided choosing a single political side. But between 1774 and 1776, rebel neighborhoods ostracized loyal Americans and cast them as enemies of independence, as traitors, and as sycophants or puppets of empire. Overt pressure from hostile rebel neighbors and militia committees undermined the rights of individuals to make a free choice (see document—Guilty until Proven Innocent). Forced to endure the mortification of a public obloquy, colonists were forced to make a choice. Those “convicted” of disloyalty could repent by enlisting in the Continental Army. An unprecedented test oath became a qualifier for American citizenship, for voting, and for holding property. The rebel tactics of tarring and feathering, imprisonment, and banishment employed to suppress opposition forced people to abandon a neutral stance (see document—Confronting Mobs). The practice of confiscating the property of suspected loyalists kept the wavering in line, created revenue at the expense of those who refused support for the rebel cause, and dislodged and expelled committed loyalists (see document—Confronting Confiscation Laws). Together, the oaths, violence, and property confiscations eroded the middle ground between loyalty and rebellion.

Compelling the undecided to commit to a political side, the rebels challenged the concept of allegiance as natural and perpetual. Forced to choose sides in a world where loyalty had served as the norm, many colonists developed a hatred for the rebel cause. If the rebellious Americans imagined the British as enemies of their cherished rights as Englishmen, the loyal Americans dismissed the rebels as hypocritical schemers who practiced a greater infidelity to American liberty by resorting to violence to suppress political disagreement. In their eyes, the “spirit” of 1776 did not represent American liberty. It meant persecution, vindictiveness, and wantonness.

New York printer Hugh Gaine’s political decisions between September and November of 1776 provide a useful paradigm for conceptualizing the contingency of political allegiance during the war. Gaine’s maneuvering reflects a
strand of political decision making opened by the war, a process that cannot be understood outside the local military context. When historian Stephen Conway considers the moment in which the British government transformed its regard for the colonies, when Americans went from being fellow nationals to becoming foreigners, he observes “no smooth and uninterrupted transition in the way in which Britons from Britain looked on Americans.” He calls this change in British consciousness a “jagged broken and faltering movement—like a drunken lurching forward and then tottering back.”

In the same manner, no single defining moment determined political allegiance for most colonists. There were many stages in the process of choosing sides, and many quite different reasons for committing to the decision. The process was unplanned and reactive, sensitive to the changing local context and the proximity of military troops. As Peter Onuf has written, the colonists were not Americans on the inside, just waiting to shed their British identity to get out.

Hugh Gaine’s crossing—and re-crossing—of the Hudson in 1776 highlights how the proximity of the British army and British victories led to an initial “lurching” toward rebellion and then a turn to loyalism.

Hugh Gaine lived in New York City, a commercial port in which colonists faced eastward, where they had kinship and trading connections in Bristol, London, or Glasgow. Trade meant long-distance commerce across the Atlantic, not local exchange within communities. Conditions of legality and stability the empire provided were necessary for New Yorkers’ survival and growth. Their reliance on credit and loans could be defended in the courts and under a stable legal system. In the context of his status and his city, Hugh Gaine’s initial “lurching” toward rebellion was extraordinary.

Hugh Gaine found it impossible to remain politically neutral in the fall of 1776 when he, along with thousands of other New Yorkers, confronted the imminent threat of a British invasion. In September, Gaine sought to avoid military battle, to follow his rebel sympathies, and to preserve his hard-earned social position by moving to rebel-controlled Newark, New Jersey. Gaine had not fled New York City in panic. It had taken him too long—more than two decades—to establish himself as printer gentelman of New York province. Born into a working-class family in Ireland, he served a five-year apprenticeship in Belfast before landing in New York City in 1745 at the age of eighteen. He then served as journeyman for James Parker, official printer of New York province, for six years before establishing his own newspaper. The rewards of his hard work and ambition stood apparent in 1757 when Gaine moved his printing operations to prestigious Hanover Square: this east side location near the markets and wharves represented wealth and fashion in eighteenth-century New York. In 1768, Gaine became the official printer to the colony and city of New York.

When prerevolutionary tensions escalated between the colonies and the mother country, Gaine strictly avoided taking a partisan role. He strove to provide balanced accounts and keep his paper unbiased. Indeed, his focus on acquiring leadership roles and his measured land speculation consolidated his status in New York. He served as a vestryman of Trinity Church, joined the St. Andrews Society, and became the treasurer and vice president of the St. Patrick’s Society. In 1770, he purchased six thousand acres of land in Albany County; and in 1774, to prevent his dependence on paper supplies from England, he established a partnership at a paper mill in Long Island. Thus, in the fall of 1776, Gaine was not just a tradesman printer but a proprietor of a large printing establishment and a noted gentleman in the city.

From Newark, Gaine’s alternate newspaper put forth news favorable to the rebel side. Gaine’s rebel sympathies were apparent. Although the Newark paper did not explicitly criticize the British government in London or New York City, it contained news that supported rebel recruitment and rebel government. On September 28, the paper listed the number of battalions each colony needed to provide for the Continental Army and promised awards in order of military appointment: a colonel would receive 500 acres of land; a lieutenant colonel 450 acres, and a noncommissioned officer just 100 acres. Gaine’s political inclinations became explicit when he referred to the rebel Congress as the “Honorable Continental Congress,” and denigrated the British forces as “the piratical fleet.”

Yet, in the last months of 1776, Gaine was among thousands of other New Yorkers who chose loyalty by taking advantage of the British offer of amnesty. Gaine’s decision to return to New York City must be situated within a broader revolutionary context in which American colonists—even those as informed and enlightened as Gaine—doubted rebel victory over the British. Indeed, the military and ideological forces in support of reunion also appeared invincible to the British commanders. On December 22, the British commanders in chief would report the good news to London:

A very considerable number of persons who had been active in the rebellion, particularly in this province, and in that of the Jerseys, have already subscribed the declaration of allegiance. The whole of the Jerseys, except a very inconsiderable part which we think must of course, follow, has submitted; and of the province of Pennsylvania, which his majesty’s forces have not yet entered, several persons of property have subscribed the declaration.
Gaine’s physical crossing across the Hudson River, from New York City to Newark and back again, demonstrates the pragmatic considerations that shaped political calculations during the war. His flip-flopping highlights the limited role that ideological inclinations played in determining many colonists’ political choices: local on-the-ground realities exerted greater pressures than staunch convictions. Hence, the larger explanation for Gaine’s return to British-held New York City lies in the strength of the British-loyalist coalition in November 1776: the military defeat of George Washington’s Continental Army in New York and the growing ideological strength of the British-loyalist coalition in New York City during the first months of the war.

Gaine’s switch to loyalty, however, came too late. His absence during the first months of British occupation and his publication of the Newark paper had raised doubts about the authenticity of his allegiance. Valued for his printing skills, Gaine was permitted to return to New York City and to resume The New York Gazette and Weekly Mercury. But he did not regain his former eminence: James Rivington, who had stayed staunchly loyal, would receive appointment as King’s printer when he returned to the city in October 1777.

In contrast to loyalists such as Isaac Low, William Franklin, John Wentworth, and Cadwallader Colden, who made political choices with less consideration for the local military context, Gaine defines a different movement toward loyalty. Gaine’s maneuvering reflects a strand of political decision-making opened up by the civil war context of the colonies. His case illustrates the conflicted, inconsistent, and reluctant movement toward political identification in the mainland. He underscores the extent to which political choices were made and remade based on the proximity of military forces, and, particularly, on colonists’ faith in British military strength. His circumstantial “lurching” also cautions against a globalizing history of loyalty in the British Atlantic.

Loyal Colonies

There were twenty-six British colonies in North America in 1776. Aside from the rebellious thirteen colonies, the British managed the following administrative units: Nova Scotia, Quebec, and St. John (Prince Edward Island) in Canada; the Bahamas and Bermuda; East Florida and West Florida; and Jamaica, Barbados, the Leeward Islands, Grenada, St. Vincent, and Dominica. Staying loyal did not entail the same symbolic or practical experience for Britons in all the Atlantic colonies. In the case of the thirteen mainland colonies, we distinguished between two kinds of loyalty: a long-held form of allegiance to the empire many Britons shared in the North American colonies (epitomized by Franklin, Wentworth, and Colden); and a second form of loyalty, which emerged in the thirteen colonies during the traumatic moments between 1774 and 1776 (and during the military years of the war) when colonists felt compelled to make startling political choices, as seen with Hugh Gaine. The ideological polarization of Anglo-America after the Intolerable Acts in 1774 and the battles of Lexington and Concord in 1775 did not extend to the Caribbean, to Florida, or to the Canadian colonies.

The Caribbean colonies shared similar political developments and were closely associated with the mainland colonies through proximity and trade, but they did not rebel from the empire. The Caribbean elite wanted autonomy and self-government but within the British empire. Unlike the mainland elite who straddled an Atlantic world along with a vast continental interior, the planter elite depended on Britain for its political power, economic wealth, and military protection. Whatever the course of the war in the Caribbean, the islands could not maintain an independent existence and would remain colonies of one power or the other. As significantly, the islands were truncated societies that lacked many of the factors that made rebellion thinkable in the thirteen colonies. They were overseas extensions of the empire rather than mature societies they had no history of a dissenting religious tradition, had few Britons of middling stature who felt constriction by the political opportunities in the islands, and lacked a politically informed constituency who inquired about the political meanings of imperial measures in representative assemblies.

Members of the Jamaican assembly initially resisted the implications of British taxation and debated the need to resist conspiracy and protect liberty. But living in a colony with 94 percent slaves, the slaveholders did not dare to risk the disruption of a rebellion. They relied on British naval protection to defend themselves externally from foreign attack and internally from slave revolts. The very nature of their society had required a centralized government to provide slave-catching institutions and jails, but fewer schools, churches, or other cultural centers. Although many Jamaican planters were genuinely concerned about the constitutional implications of the new taxes, their fears did not lead to a frenzied attack on imperial policies. Their best future prospects, they believed, lay within the British empire.

The Leeward Islands, with a higher percentage of slaves and more dependence on salted fish and corn from the mainland colonies, reacted more stringently against the Stamp Act than Jamaica. Like the inhabitants in the mainland colonies, the colonists in St. Kitts and Nevis rioted in opposition: they led ceremonial processions, burned effigies, and destroyed stamps. More
than loss of constitutional status, these islanders feared mainland merchants would blacklist them if they supported the Stamp Act. But their resistance was short lived. No Caribbean-wide opposition formed to the Stamp Acts, and no printers produced bold essays debating the subject of imperial taxation. Significantly, after 1767, the island colonies were sometimes immune or exempted from the new imperial policies.44

Interestingly, the loyalty of the Caribbean colonies may have influenced Britain’s policy toward the thirteen colonies in the early stages of the rebellion. The lack of opposition by the Caribbean assemblies may have led Britain to underestimate the opposition from the mainland colonies. British interests in the Caribbean also played a part in the last years of the war. Colonies such as Jamaica were strategically, politically, and economically key to British interests. The subtropical products of the West Indies fit much better into British economy than the products of North American farms and fisheries. In 1778, Britain’s greater interest in protecting the sugar islands led to a diversion of military and naval resources from the mainland colonies and helped to seal the combined French and rebel victory at Yorktown, Virginia, in October 1781.

Unlike the rebels in the thirteen colonies who broke with tradition and launched a revolt against the mother country, East Florida followed the colonial norm and remained loyal to the mother country. Acquired from Spain after the Seven Years’ War, the colony of East Florida, like the Caribbean colonies, contained more blacks than whites. By the time of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, some loyalists from Georgia and South Carolina had already fled to East Florida. They predicted the rebel government would fail and hoped to take advantage of the restoration of British dominion on the edge of the frontier. Included in the loyalist immigrant stream were members of the council, attorneys, plantation owners and their slaves, and some poor farmers. The numbers of blacks increased sixfold, from two thousand in 1775 to more than twelve thousand in 1783. Slaves built plantation homes, worked as skilled artisans, operated sugarhouses and indigo vats, and boxed pine trees for turpentine collection. As they had served in South Carolina’s militia during its founding years in the late seventeenth century, they served in East Florida loyalist militias.45 They were armed and trained to defend the lands of their loyalist masters.

The rebellion was not compelling for the new territories the British had acquired in Acadia after the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 and in Quebec after the Seven Years’ War. The colonies of Quebec and Nova Scotia together stretched from the Mississippi River in the west to Cape Breton in the east.46 These northern-most British colonies—in today’s Canada—shared a harsh northern climate, minimal slavery, and a reliance on the metropolitan political culture. None of these colonies were founded as colonies of settlement. Instead, British sovereignty in these colonies came through conquest, commercial occupation, or diplomatic agreement with other Europeans. These territories were economically and strategically valuable but remained politically and demographically weak.47

By 1775, the Canadian territories had acquired a distinct political structure founded on strong executives and weak assemblies, and dependent on Crown funding for colonial development. Most famously, the Quebec Act of 1774 established imperial supervision and restricted representational government in a manner unknown to the southern colonies. Because these northernmost colonies developed under greater state control, the populations lacked the political expectations that fostered fears of Crown conspiracy in the rebellious colonies. They had a far greater tolerance for executive measures undertaken to integrate the Atlantic colonies to the imperial realm.48

The case of Nova Scotia is illustrative. Ceded to Britain by France, Nova Scotia—the first British colony after Pennsylvania in 1681—followed a different trajectory from the colonies founded in the seventeenth century.49 Founded in the eighteenth century, Nova Scotia did not benefit from the salutary neglect that had permitted the earlier colonies to develop autonomously. The British directly controlled the colony and buttressed it through providing military and civil expenditures. Indeed, Nova Scotia had more in common with Georgia than with Massachusetts or Barbados. Just as Georgia was formed to defend South Carolina from the Spanish in Florida, Nova Scotia was established to protect Massachusetts from France.50 Both colonies received infusions of British public spending to sustain them. Halifax, like Savannah, was built at the cost of British taxpayers. Nova Scotia and Cape Breton, in fact, would receive £152,300 sterling in the sixty years between 1756 and 1815.51 Nova Scotians depended on the state for rewards and promotion and for their revenues. Accustomed to the intervention of the state, the Nova Scotians did not resist the implications of taxation—the extension of a bureaucratic state—because they were newly born products of this state.52

More than seven thousand land-hungry New Englanders migrated to Nova Scotia during the 1750s; and two decades later, at the eve of the revolution, they comprised a majority of the population.53 Legally British since 1713, the Nova Scotian population in fact included mostly French and Indians until the early 1750s after the construction of Halifax in 1749 had drawn settlers from England and from New England.54 Significantly, despite their shared background, and their connections to kin and friends from the
rebellious colonies, the New England communities in Nova Scotia did not join the rebels in New England. Outside of Halifax, local settlements were isolated, scattered, and lacked autonomous merchant communities. As remote townships confronted American privateers who raidied less-defended areas looking more for spoils than bloodshed, the naval and economic power in Halifax made the benefits of imperial attachments all too apparent (see document—Rejecting Violence).

The North American colonies—Florida, Quebec, and Nova Scotia—were too dependent on British goods and defense, and too little developed politically to join the resistance. They lived in an economically marginal world, both commercially and militarily dependent on the empire. Choosing rebellion mandated risks not confronted by their kin in the rebellious colonies, and most would opt to remain neutral. Importantly, each region—at the rim of the empire, and dangerously dominated by large numbers of non-English settlers—was defended by British troops after the Seven Years’ War. Four British regiments were in the Floridas, four in Quebec, and three in Nova Scotia.30

Loyalist Convictions and Proposals

A broad cross-spectrum of colonists found greater stability in imagining a community within the empire. They continued to uphold the ideals of British patriotism established in the early eighteenth century. They associated Britain with Protestantism, commercial prosperity, naval power, and freedom; and saw themselves as heirs to a political tradition premised on constitutional rights such as trial by jury. These colonists believed that ties of kinship and common culture as much as commerce and protection bound the American colonies inextricably to Britain. Linking colonial success with empire, they saw no conflict between being loyal simultaneously to their local communities and to the empire.

The outbreak of war in 1775 was incomprehensible and shocking to thousands of common people in the rebellious colonies. Those who remained loyal resisted violence and separation. They wanted to preserve their prosperous world, their constitutional government, and their imperial liberties. They felt a deeper threat from rebel leaders who justified the legality of revolution than from the restrictive legislation the British ministry imposed. Like the rebels, they interpreted the revolutionary crisis as a conspiracy of self-interested men to destroy liberty. For the loyalists, however, the danger was internal, emanating from below rather than above. The loyal, in fact, regarded the rebellious Americans as traitors guilty of the ultimate crime, a breach of allegiance.

The loyalists differed in the strength of their convictions, in the timing of their loyalty, and in their methods of opposing the rebellion. However, they shared similar fears about the unleashing of violence that threatened to annihilate any sense of reason, about the blindness and provincialism of rebel leaders who awoke the passions of the mob on a utopian vision that had no historical backing, and about the appalling prospect of an unbalanced society. In short, they feared the rebellion would lead to the anguish and miseries associated with a state of nature, one in which might makes right. They preferred to be ruled by one tyrant three thousand miles away than be ruled by three thousand tyrants in their localities.

Like rebel leaders, loyalist spokesmen comprised a politicized minority in the thirteen colonies. They included royal governors, lieutenant governors, councilors, judges, and attorneys, men who were accustomed to elections, public gatherings, and debate. Men from the northern colonies—New England and the mid-Atlantic—most fully articulated loyalist opposition. These ideologues were moderates, cosmopolitan men who saw no reason to risk everything secure and constitutional in a violent insurrection. Frustrated at Parliament’s unwillingness to think creatively about colonial needs, they also wanted change but within, not outside the imperial state. These Americans did not equate imperial integration with imperial subordination. They wanted to find a way to share the benefits of Britain’s expanded trade and growing political reach. Whereas the rebels advocated a break with the empire, these Americans hoped for a long-lasting relationship within a reformed empire and revitalized colonial institutions. Foremost, the loyalists thought that strengthening the nonelective branches of colonial governments and establishing mechanisms for a larger colonial contribution to imperial decisions could solve the underlying imperial problems. They looked to Parliament to impose unity and order on colonial societies incapable of attaining harmony on their own. The liberty they sought necessitated protection from above.

Loyalist visionaries promoted arguments for preserving union with Britain in the highest government circles in England. Optimistic about the potential of the colonies, these moderates believed the colonies were and should remain integral parts of the British state. A long-established imperial government was more stable than rule by heterogeneous colonies with differing and conflicting interests. Ambitious schemers, they worried, would replace constitutional and orderly rule with anarchy. They proposed a legislative union (a Continental Parliament) that would unite the colonies and provide a way for Americans to shape and improve the empire. In their scheme, the
British Parliament would continue to provide the order and unity to ensure American stability and success.

Joseph Galloway held a seat in the Pennsylvania Assembly for almost ten years during the 1730s and 1760s, and served as speaker from 1766 to 1775. Galloway rejected radical measures and, in the First Continental Congress, proposed a revised constitution that would allow colonial autonomy within empire.66 Galloway's Plan of Union drew upon Benjamin Franklin's 1754 Albany Plan, proposed during the eve of the Seven Years' War between Britain and France (see document—Albany Plan). Inspired by the necessity of common defense against the French and Indians, the Albany Plan supported a union of contiguous colonies in a local confederation. Emanating from the directives of the Lords of Trade, the Albany Plan suggested the creation of an in-between authority that would mediate between the Crown and the colonies for the purpose of protecting the colonists against the Natives and the British against the French. A Crown-appointed president general and a grand council of delegates elected by the colonial assemblies could bridge the realities of the colony and the interests of the Crown. Far from the harbinger of an American national identity, the proponents of the Albany Plan envisaged a future in which Britain would establish a stable and secure system for long-term imperial governance in North America.

Most colonial assemblies refused to even consider the Albany Plan because they were unwilling to compromise their own autonomy. Too suspicious about the repercussions stemming from a unification of the colonies, the British government also tabled the plan. The failure of the plan on both sides of the Atlantic signified the colonies' disinterest in uniting under an independent coalition and the government's unwillingness to sanction an intercolonial legislature. In 1774, when Parliament tightened its jurisdiction over the colonies, moderates such as Galloway returned to the Albany Plan—a proposal that had proposed colonial union without challenging the sovereignty of the Parliament or the legitimacy of imperial governance in the colonies. But two decades after the Albany Plan, after the formation of an intercolonial radical organization in the form of the Continental Congress, the British government remained unwilling to consider an alternate political arrangement with the colonies. Galloway had hoped a vision based on loyal and constitutional principles would counter the radicalism of the Continental Congress. Foremost, he wished to avoid a violent collision that would sever the empire (see document—Joseph Galloway's Plan).

Along with local politicians such as Galloway, educated and middling Scottish immigrants—ministers, doctors, and merchants—participated in the opposition to American independence. Coming from a community that viewed sojourning and emigration as an extension of culture, Scots preserved and valued commercial and kin networks that crisscrossed the Atlantic. They were loyal to the empire that facilitated these networks. Deeply involved in colonial life and in the trans-Atlantic networks of culture, trade, and science, they believed in preserving ties with a powerful empire that promoted commercial expansion. They approached the question of allegiance pragmatically and anticipated that the colonies would continue to benefit from imperial connections. Moderates such as New York Councilor William Smith Jr. had close ties to these Scottish-American elite.67

At the eve of rebellion, Smith lived in style at 5 Broadway. A first-generation New Yorker and a graduate of Yale College, Smith was well established at the eve of the revolution. Although appointed New York councilor in 1767, Smith was by no means blindly subservient to the Crown or the Parliament. In the 1760s, he had launched a crusade against the appointment of an Anglican bishop because he supposed a bishop would unduly expand royal power and limit colonial authority in New York.

In the mid-1760s and early 1770s, Smith denied Parliament's right to tax the colonies but upheld its legislative supremacy. Driven by the upheaval in the mainland, Smith proposed to create a middle way that would maintain the political and economic system created by colonization during the previous two centuries. During the years of the revolution, Smith continued to correspond with decision makers in the British government, hoping to use his influence to reshape British policies in the colonies. The empire served as his focal point.

Between 1765 and 1775, Smith proposed the creation of a continental Parliament comprised of a Crown-appointed lord lieutenant and a bicameral legislature for the colonies as a whole (see document—William Smith Jr.'s Proposal). Smith's framework paralleled the contours of Galloway's proposal. The legislature would include a Council, comprised of twenty-four elites, who would hold offices for life, as well as a House of Commons that would be elected at regular intervals. The assemblies would choose the deputies for the Council and House of Commons. This American Parliament would stabilize and unify the colonies. It would assume jurisdiction over provincial matters and taxation while the British Parliament retained sovereign power. According to Smith, the imperial Parliament alone could impose the unity and order necessary to ensure a permanent establishment of the colonies with the mother country.

Importantly, the vision of federal empire that Smith and Galloway proposed did not die with the revolution but survived in British North America (in what became Canada). Jonathan Sewell, former attorney general of Massachusetts, was among another eight thousand loyalists who sought refuge
in England between 1775 and 1784. Sewell diagnosed the reasons for the unnatural rebellion. He observed that "nothing" contributed more to the war than the distance of the colonies from Great Britain. He noted that the replies from Britain had taken so long that small issues had turned into "real evils." Indeed, "local circumstances shifted so suddenly and violently between the giving information and receiving instructions how to act" that the government was powerless to avoid acting on "erroneous principles." When an immediate remedy was necessary to stop disorders, it could not be constitutionally procured in sufficient time. The "lapse," he thought, gave "full scope for such disorders to increase and rage so universally" as to "render the intended remedy ineffective." To guard against this in the future, Sewell proposed the appointment of a lord-lieutenant or governor general who would have authority, on any emergency, to make final decisions (see document—Joseph Sewell's Plan).99

In 1785, Sewell returned to loyalist-supported plans initially proposed in the 1750s and 1760s. He proposed "one general form of government for all natural born British subjects in His Majesty's colonies on the Continent of America." As Benjamin Franklin had offered suggestions for a unification of the colonies in 1754 in his "Short Hints towards a scheme for Uniting the Northern Colonies," Sewell offered "some general hints on the subject."100 Like Franklin in 1754, William Smith Jr. in 1767, and Galloway in 1774, Sewell proposed a Crown-appointed executive and a legislative council with the power to tax. The Albany Plan had proposed "one general government" for North America to guard against the French and their Indian allies; Sewell proposed one general act such as the Magma Carta for all the North American colonies to guard against encroachment from the United States.101 The creation of a new American republic made union of the British North American colonies—Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Upper Canada, and Lower Canada—necessary.

Significantly, forty years later, Sewell's son, the younger Jonathan Sewell, along with John Beverly Robinson, son of Virginia loyalist Christopher Robinson, also emphasized that the empire faced no threat from the union of the British North American provinces. In their 1824 proposal to the British government, they argued that union of the British North American colonies would lead neither to separation nor revolt. Somewhat sharply, the loyalist sons reminded the British that intercolonial union and rebellion had no connection. The late American revolt had not arisen because of the consolidation of the colonies. The colonies had separate governments at the time of the revolt and, in fact, the "violence of particular states would have been moderated by the more steady counsels of the whole united."102

Like the loyalists of the American war, Sewell and Robinson hoped that the territories of British North America would rise to become "parts rather than dependencies of Britain."103 Loyalist persuasions extended beyond British politicians in London. In addition to private proposals aimed at decision makers, loyalist spokesmen sought to sustain and build their coalition by circulating pro-British papers in British garrisons. During the course of the war, the British occupied in various periods and for varying lengths of time the six largest colonial cities: Boston, (1776), New York City (1776-1783), Newport (1776-1778), Philadelphia (1777-1778), Savannah (1778-1782), and Charleston (1780-1782). Loyalist newspapers included The Newport Gazette in Rhode Island from 1777 to 1779; The Pennsylvania Evening Post, Pennsylvania Ledger, and the Royal Pennsylvania Gazette in Philadelphia for varying parts of the British occupation of Philadelphia from October 1777 to May 1778. Papers also appeared in Charleston, Savannah, and Florida.104 The regular publication of James Rivington's Royal American Gazette and Hugh Gaine's The New York Gazette and Weekly Mercury ensured New York's refugee loyalists—the largest in any colonial city—regular coverage of the rebellion. Most importantly, the papers provided a forum for circulating loyalist arguments and promoting loyalist perceptions (see document—Loyalist Persuasions). Publicly offering their allegiance and military assistance, the loyalists pushed Britain to intensify its struggle against the rebels.105

In long essays published in loyalist newspapers, the loyalists articulated their sense of moral strangelament and described themselves as victims of a cruel, unnecessary, and unnatural rebellion. Like the revolutionaries, the loyalists perceived themselves as patriots who defended American colonists against the ambitions of a dangerous faction. If the rebels defended the colonies from the threat of British enslavement, the loyalists considered "American slavery and American independence" synonymous terms.106 The loyalists, in fact, mocked rebel claims for liberty by pointing to the institution of slavery. In an essay published in March 1777, "Integer" mocked the rebel assertion that "all men are created free." "If all men are created free, what about blacks?" the essayist asked. Do the colonies "justly expect to have, in little time, a Black Assembly, a black Council, a black Governor, and a black Commonwealth?" Such a policy, the essayist wrote, "would shine like a shoe."107

Loyalist essays defended British decisions and minimized British losses. In direct response to rebel accusations that the British tyrannically employed Hessian troops to subdue their own people, an anonymous writer asserted that the employment of German troops was a sign of "true wisdom and good policy" at this juncture, because the deluded colonies who are "running
wildly after the shadow of liberty have lost their substance." Other spokes-
men minimized the Trenton defeat in December 1776 as a mere "skirmish" and emphasized the "sickly" condition of Washington's soldiers, allegedly dy-
ing of smallpox in great numbers and facing the "scourge of famine." Ragged, hungry, and diseased, Washington's troops, they emphasized, posed no threat to the large numbers of well-equipped British troops.66

Loyalists praised the historical stability of the British constitution and faulted rebel leadership as unstable and violent. If the rebels associated tyranny with the king, the loyalists feared more the anarchy that would result from rebel greed and rebel power. Whereas the rebels painted a glorious repub-
clican future unshackled by imperial demands, the loyalists dwelled on the fearful consequences of a future ruled by the rebel congress. They imagined a "puny divided state," created in a "sea of blood," utterly without order or law. They argued that the threat to colonial freedom came not from external British tyranny or corruption but from the internal anarchy promoted by the selfish schemes of self-interested men who promoted the "unjust and precarious Cause." These "self-created bodies," they asserted, "violated all the sacred ties of civil society," including "personal liberty and freedom of speech." They contrasted the frenzy of the rebel leaders with the rationality and conservatism of the "British law, British protection and British union." Only the British constitution provided the perfect balance of liberty with order.67

Members of the Quaker faith, who shunned any form of extremism, shared the loyalist focus on moderation. Torn by their loyalties to the Crown, and to friends on both sides of the conflict, most Quakers hoped to remain loyal to their pacific principles and retain a neutral position during the war. In a public letter circulated in a New York City loyalist newspaper in February 1777, some Quakers declared their objection to rebel coercion: "Thus we may with Christian firmness and fortitude withstand and refuse to submit to the arbitrary injunctions and ordinances of men who assume to themselves the power of compelling others, either in person or by their assistance, to join in carrying on war and of prescribing modes of determining concerning our religious principle, by imposing tests nor warranted by the precepts of Christ, or the laws of the happy constitution under which we and others long en-
joyed tranquility and peace."68 As they witnessed the destruction of property, the silencing of dissent, and the displacement of hundreds of people, some Quakers felt alienated by the growing violence and experienced a moral crisis about toppling a legitimate government.69

In northern Virginia, some Quakers faced suspicion and incarceration because of their image as Indian sympathizers and antislavery proponents. As much as region and religion, timing influenced Quaker persecution. Sig-
ificantly, Quakers in northern Virginia endured the most scrutiny when the colony felt most vulnerable and the rebel cause appeared most fragile—dur-
ing 1777 when fighting in Pennsylvania threatened the Chesapeake area and again after 1780, when Virginians faced British invasion.70

Neither Anglican clergymen nor Anglican colonists were uniformly loyal to Britain during the rebellion. If the Church of England supplied more loyalist spokesmen than any other single denomination, it must also be observed that the signers of the Declaration of Independence included more men of Anglican faith than any other.71 Religious denominations, like colonial assemblies, flourished from the salutary neglect that characterized British attitude toward its seventeenth-century colonies. Although members from the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) were sent to the colonies in the early eighteenth century to promote Anglicanism, the British government was less interested in imposing Anglicanism than in expanding the colonial population and securing commercial gains; it hoped that loyalty would follow prosperity. Hence, by the time of the revolution, more than 75 percent of Americans were non-Anglicans in comparison with the English population where less than 10 percent were dissenters from the Church of England.72 The repercussions of the British focus on population and commerce were especially obvious in the southern colonies. During the eighteenth century, the British—along with the southern gentry—hoped to increase the white populace to serve as a buffer against the Indians, and to counterbalance the large slave population in the South. The incentive of inexpensive land drew thousands of settlers into the backcountry between the 1750s and 1770s. These immigrants shared a desire to acquire fertile land but were otherwise heterogeneous in nationality and religion. Few were Anglican. The arrival of diverse immigrants weakened an already weak Anglican presence in the southern colonies. Although the Church of England was the establishment in every colony in the South, the southern lathy and legislature had long curbed the authority of the Anglicans. Wealthy planters protected their po-
litical and economic interests by acting as vestrymen and keeping the power of the Church. The clergymen, in turn, saw their salaries and standing best protected by an alliance with the planters.73

Anglican ministers varied greatly in the intensity of their involvement with the war effort. Dependent on the British government for their livelihood, and loyal to the Church from which they derived their sense of mean-
ing, some Anglican clerics in the northern colonies associated loyalty to the Church as synonymous with loyalty to the empire. They equated the rebel argument for the natural rights of man with the state of nature and painted a picture of terrifying, unbridled, and unending social chaos. These loyalist
writers expressed fear, hatred, and a rising hysteria about the effects of rebellion. They feared not the loss of British constitutionalism but the disruption of the social fabric. The American rebellion represented disloyalty to the Crown and disobedience to God.

The active persecution of Anglicans did not play a central role in the revolution. Indeed, the reputation Anglican clergymen earned—their association with moderation—meant a general escape from revolutionary persecution. The Anglicans—both clergy and laity—who did not loudly and publicly assert their loyalty or participate actively in the cause of reunion were left unharmed. Others like Reverend Charles Inglis of New York City did not go unnoticed. Inglis described the rebellion as “one of the most causeless, unprovoked, and unnatural that ever disgraced any country... a rebellion marked with peculiarly aggravated circumstances of guilt and ingratitude.”

When Inglis responded to Thomas Paine’s Common Sense with The True Interest of America Impartially Stated, his pamphlet was seized from the printer and burned. The rebels also plundered his house. Addressing himself to the “passions of the populace,” Inglis warned that Paine’s “scheme” of a republican empire was “new as it is destructive.” It invited “uncommon phrenzy” and would prove ruinous to America. By rashly inviting the Continental Congress to move toward a “romantic and untried scheme,” argued Inglis, Paine furthered the breach between Great Britain and the colonies. Instead of proposing reconciliation with Britain on “solid constitutional principles,” the fanatical Paine proposed “cutting off a leg because the toe happened to ache.” Insisting that he belonged to no party and cared only about the welfare of America, Inglis pleaded for the avoidance of “blood and slaughter.”

(See document—Preaching to Loyalist Soldiers.)

Although Anglicans were reputed for their moderation, the revolutionary divide was not between evangelicals and anti-evangelicals. Evangelicals gave overwhelming support to the revolution, but anti-evangelicals were by no means a loyalist phalanx. They could be found all along the political spectrum of the era from Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson on the left to George Washington in the center, and to Joseph Galloway and Thomas Hutchinson on the right. Importantly, except in Connecticut and New Jersey, evangelicals seldom achieved positions of political leadership. Anti-evangelicals directed events on both sides of the revolutionary divide.

Loyalist Potential

The population of the thirteen rebellious colonies was about 2.5 million of all races, growing to about three million by the end of the war. The best estimate is that half a million Euro-Americans opposed the revolution, approximately 30,000 of them in arms. Another half million were African Americans with limited opportunities for military service on the rebel or loyalist side. There were approximately 100,000 Indians in eastern North America. Of the remaining fewer than two million rebellious whites, half were women, at least another half too old, too young, or incapable of serving. This left rebel manpower at roughly half a million.

Unlike previous wars, the British government had no foreign allies to share the burden of suppressing the American rebellion. Still, the British did not devise a formal policy for joining their three sources of potential strength: arming white loyalists, supporting powerful natives along the Appalachian border, and freeing the large African-American population along the southern coast. These loyalists would have strengthened the force of 30,000 Americans who served during the rebellion. For the most part, individual commanders and leaders acted independently, depending on local circumstances. No systematic attempt was made to assess loyalist military capacity, and no unified policy guided loyalist mobilization during the war. Still, approximately 19,000 men in forty-one loyalist regiments fought on the British side during the war.

The British army’s rootedness in European traditions influenced their unwillingness to recruit American loyalists (see document—Recruiting Loyalist Regiments). Like European officers, British officers promoted an aristocratic ethos associated with chivalry and honor, cultivated French manners, and attended foreign military academies. Qualities essential to command were understood to be the preserve of gentlemen. Like European troops, British regiments employed similar muskets, bayonets, and artillery pieces; organized their men in the familiar organizations of companies, battalions, and regiments for the infantry; and most importantly, shared military legal etiquette—convictions about upholding the laws of war derived from treaties, practice, and pronouncements of leading lawyers who established guides to military conduct, including principles of restraint.

Given the commonalities with European military traditions, the British preferred to depend on foreign troops instead of American-born loyalists. When additional military manpower was needed, the British commander in chief, Sir Henry Clinton, favored “drawing over from the Rebels the Europeans in their service.” But Clinton relied most upon Hessian troops. Hired from the princes of German principalities, the Hessians formed between one-quarter and one-third of the British army. Rented soldiers with no ideological commitment to His Majesty’s cause who faced a bleak future on their return home would pursue opportunities in colonies with abundant
land. Still, the British preferred the mercenaries to ideologically committed American loyalists who were too amenable to be regarded as a core part of the British effort. Some officers also worried that personal animosities drove loyalists to fight with their neighbors; these loyalists would not bend to British discipline. Always significant in the British effort to suppress the American rebellion, the Hessians made up 37 percent of the British army by 1781.

Drawing on their experience with Americans during the Seven Years’ War, British officers regarded loyalist soldiers as outside the European military fraternity and dismissed them as undisciplined and untrustworthy. High-ranking officers such as General Charles Cornwallis, head of British operations in the south, also worried that loyalists would switch sides and desert at the most crucial moment. Common British soldiers looked down on loyalist militiamen. The rebel poet Philip Freneau captured the British unwillingness to equip loyalist regiments in favor of using them as laborers. Freneau referred to the loyalists as Tories, a common epithet of the time.

Come, gentlemen Tories, firm, loyal and true,
Here are axes and shovels and something to do:
For the sake of our king,
Come labor and Sing.

In the early part of the war, British officers underestimated the potential strength of the rebels, and anticipated a quick and decisive war. Expecting to suppress the rebellion with a few well-chosen military blows, the British saw no reason to organize a systematic campaign to enlist and create a corps of formidable loyalist regiments. During the first three years of the war, when military battles concentrated in the North, the British commanders in chief did not focus on large-scale loyalist recruitment and did not consider that loyalist military capacity could affect the outcome of the war. Influenced by previous biases and narrow financial considerations—hoping to avoid unnecessary military expenses—they were unwilling to make the preparations required to train loyalist soldiers into an efficient and dependable army. Instead, the British offered ad hoc concessions to known elites.

Influential and wealthy gentlemen were granted warrants to raise loyalist regiments. The commanders who mustered enough men, were awarded a commission. The commanders of loyalist regiments were wealthy and influential men, not always with military experience, who recruited locally, bore all expenses, and drew full salaries only after their companies attained three-quarters strength. Led by New Jersey’s Brigadier General Cortlandt Skinner, attorney general under Governor William Franklin, the New Jersey Volun-
teers was the largest single loyalist regiment, consisting of six battalions and a total of 3,300 soldiers. Loyalist regiments were armed, paid, disciplined, and provisioned like the British army but were not initially eligible for half-pay, which British officers could draw for life. Loyalists were ranked junior to regular officers within each grade. Most of the loyalist corps conducted desultory raids against rebel-governed areas in New York, New Jersey, and along the New England coast. Only five loyalist regiments—Queen’s Rangers, Volunteers of Ireland, New York Volunteers, the King’s American Regiment, and the British Legion—were eventually raised to the level of the British establishment.

French alliance with the rebels in 1778 led the British to reconsider the military role of the loyalists. Beset by financial problems, threatened by France in Europe and in the West Indies, and lacking adequate troops to suppress the rebellion in the mainland colonies, the British anticipated a larger role for loyalist militia in the southern backcountry. Unlike loyalist regiments, which served when ordered, enlisted for long periods, and fought far from their neighborhoods, the militia would serve temporarily and locally, leaving British regulars free for military duty elsewhere. But rallying loyalists in the southern colonies, especially in the backcountry regions, proved difficult.

More than a million people lived in the backcountry regions, from the Shenandoah Valley in Virginia to the Savannah River in Georgia. There were 15,000–20,000 Catawba Indians, 80,000 African-American slaves. Of the 900,000 Euro-Americans, many had already been on the move for three or four generations. The contestations between the ethnic yeoman farmers—Highland Scots, Germans, and English—created a high level of social instability. Lacking a powerful and long-standing leadership, some regions in the backcountry engaged in intense rivalries and were more likely to follow local leaders than big causes. The bonds of social deference that fused long-standing communities in the Chesapeake tidewater regions were not easily carried to more recently settled backcountry regions. These transient communities were more dismissive about newspaper appeals or loyalty oaths, and did not share the same ideological fervor as northern colonists along the Hudson Valley. The communities’ principal tactics against militia service and the draft reveal their local orientation. Most commonly, they issued anonymous threats against leaders, stole livestock, and fired on houses at night. Only rarely did they respond with open and armed insurrection.

Winning and sustaining loyalty in the backcountry required a different kind of political mobilization than in the North. Gaining the “hearts and
minds" of the backcountry residents proved a formidable—indeed, impossible—task for the British. Jack Greene has suggested that the concept of loyalty implies "a degree of certainty and levels of long-term commitment" that do not apply to the southern backcountry. The "disaffected" people, those who resisted supporting either cause, bristled with local resentments and committed to a side based on personal and community vendettas rather than ideological convictions.60

In communities such as Kettle Creek, in northwest Georgia, a long-standing tension between colonial governments and backcountry families became mapped into political divisions. Southern frontier families who opposed the social power of the rebel coastal planters petitioned in favor of reunion with the empire. They also supported the king because they expected the British government to protect them from Indian attacks.61 In the North Carolina backcountry, the aftermath of the Regulator Rebellion in 1771 left farmers hostile to the eastern elite who had crushed the rebellion. Loyalist leaders such as North Carolina Governor Josiah Martin competed with rebel leaders for the allegiance of these disaffected farmers.

The consequences of guerrilla warfare in the backcountry regions of the South after 1778 reshaped allegiances among frontiersmen as much as the presence of formal naval and army officers had influenced choices in cities such as New York in 1776. Without a majority consensus or long-standing political elite who could mobilize the frontiersmen, coercion through force became the only mechanism for local regions to preserve their authority. The British soldiers and loyalist militia functioned as a scapegoat against which to focus otherwise centrifugal social energies of the backcountry. To control the rural interior, rebel militias isolated loyalists and punished them violently. The early zeal of some southern loyalists turned to cynicism and timidity while others drew strength from British support and retaliated viciously in kind, hoping to settle old scores. The bitterness of persecution helped to shape the allegiance of colonists who might otherwise have avoided choosing between the king and their neighbors. When militant committees and military battles touched lives, colonists made choices to preserve their safety, not to advance their ideals.

Loyalist Women

Some women openly and audaciously supported reconciliation with Britain. On September 15, 1776, women jubilantly welcomed British troops and administration into New York City, and asserted their heartfelt attachment to Britain. A newspaper reported:

The King’s Forces took Possession of the Place, incredible as it may seem, without the Loss of a Man. Nothing could equal the Expressions of Joy, shown by the Inhabitants, upon the arrival of the King’s officers among them. They even carried some of them upon their Shoulders about the Street, and behaved in all respects, Women as well as Men, like overjoyed Bedlamites. One thing is worth remarking: a Woman pulled down the Rebel Standard upon the Fort, and a Woman hoisted up in its stead His Majesty’s Flag, after trampling the other under Foot with the most contemptuous Indignation.62

Most women followed the political choices their husbands and fathers made, but saw the plight of their families in more personal terms. In contrast to the rebel committees, which instigated violence and coerced consent, the empire—even in military uniform—represented order and stability. Less concerned with constitutional issues around taxation and sovereignty, the prolonged rebellion probably spared many women’s enthusiasm not only for war, but for empire.

E. P. Thompson, in writing about eighteenth-century riots in Britain, noted that women "were proto-nothing: they were not bargains by notions of equality, in a competitive sense, since they were deeply habituated to the acceptance that men’s and women’s roles were different, and that neither was more nor the less for that." In turbulent circumstances, trusting the patriarchal order—honoring choices that husbands, fathers, and sons made—may have anchored many women. But, during this period of suspicion, a wife’s loyalty to her husband, once a private commitment, transformed into a political act. Loyalist wives became guilty by association. Determined to strike a blow against enemies who supported the British cause, every colony passed laws confiscating loyalist property. Indeed, the confiscation acts are testimony to the chronic loyalist problem. In 1779, the state of New York declared fifty-nine persons guilty of felony and ordered them to forfeit their property to the state. Included were three women, all wives of prominent loyalists. The Reverend Charles Inglis’s wife was listed. Given the limited autonomy of women in public life and their circumscribed role in church structure, it is surprising that any women were included. Although women participated in family worship and religious education, men dominated as church leaders (with the exception of women in the Quaker faith). Yet, during the rebellion, as Mrs. Inglis’s case illustrates, women became politicized through their association with loyalist husbands. Revolutionary statutes that defined treason spoke of "persons" instead of men alone (see document—Confronting Confiscation Laws).

Accompanying their loyalist husbands, some women fled to nearby British strongholds and lived as refugees during the war. Mothers pleaded to take
sons who were more than twelve years old, some rebel communities forbade this because older boys were considered capable of bearing arms against rebellion. Women who lacked a means of support when their husbands were drawn into service followed after them. They cared for their men, earning their subsistence as seamstresses, laundresses, nurses, and cooks. Cramped in garrisons with British troops, loyalist refugees, runaway slaves, and established residents, women struggled to keep their world intact. Burdened with large families but having no marketable skills led some to steal, sell alcohol, and commit fraud. Others undoubtedly attached themselves to loyalist regiments because they feared to lose track of men with whom they had developed relationships, or because they feared to stay on in a loyalist area after it had returned to rebel control. They sought to avoid the intensifying rebel hatred that compromised their troubled lives even further.

Some loyalist women from high-ranking families remained in their homes. They hoped their long-standing ties to the neighborhood would keep them safe. Other women stayed to preserve their husband’s estate for their children. They calculated that their presence would shield the property from confiscation or worse, total destruction. But as women managed farms, estates, and businesses, they faced suspicion from rebel neighbors who considered them surrogates for their offending husbands who had left to join the British. Considered traitors because they were married to loyalist men, they became victims of politicized communal outrage on the least provocation. Women were sometimes arrested and imprisoned for harboring or helping raiding parties, and for providing intelligence information to the British. Family prestige and even personal ties to rebel leaders did not always protect them.

Grace Galloway, wife of prominent loyalist Joseph Galloway, stayed in Philadelphia while her husband left to serve in the British administration. In 1778, Grace Galloway fell from her pinnacle as the wife of one of Philadelphia’s most influential politicians to the depths of powerlessness. After the First Continental Congress rejected her husband’s plan for reconciliation, he became a leading spokesman for the loyalists. Joseph Galloway joined the British in New York in December 1776 and returned to Philadelphia with them in September 1777. Galloway served as superintendent of police until June 1778 when the British evacuated Philadelphia. Four months later, he sailed for England. Joseph Galloway was deemed an attainted traitor, considered “civilly dead,” and his property confiscated.

Grace Galloway’s worst nightmare was confirmed. Unprepared for the traumatic reversals of a lifetime, the fall from status was unbearable for her. She felt publicly humiliated when her carriage was confiscated and she, a lady of great status and influence, was compelled to walk the streets of Philadelphia like a common laborer. Mrs. Galloway stayed to protect the land inheritance she had brought into the marriage as the daughter of a wealthy man. Due to property laws of the time, wives who fled with their husbands could not claim a dowry in confiscated property. Mrs. Galloway could have renounced her loyalty to the British and secured the safety of the estate. But the idea of rebellion against the familiar monarchy was reprehensible, and she refused to be a traitor to the empire (see document—A Mother’s Advice). Mrs. Galloway’s gamble proved successful. After the war, when she willed her property to her son-in-law, the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania upheld her claim.

Some women drew on their religious faith to draw judgments about the rebellion. Quaker women noted and condemned rebel violence against loyalist neighbors. In the midst of their discourse on fashion and tea ceremonies, on personal meditation and spiritual renewal, they dwelled on the injustices committed during the war. Hannah Griffiths celebrated women’s private space at the tea table and thought tea-drinking rituals promoted politeness in men and sociability in women: “Best Leaf whose aromatic Gales dispence... To Men, Politeness, & to Ladies Sense.” But Griffiths also wrote verses about the violence of the rebellion because she feared that moderate voices were being drowned out by hard-liners. In her poetry, she denounced Thomas Paine, the radical author of Common Sense, as a “Snake beneath the Grass” and an ensnaring “Serpent.” Although raised on the Quaker principles of his father, Paine called for violent resistance in ways abhorred by the pacifist Friends who instead sought to achieve their ends by personal example. Above all, many Friends avoided violating their principles of nonparticipation in militarism. Paine’s arguments against monarchy and the tyrannical king were specious, Griffiths countered, because “sixty as well as one can tyrannize.” Here, she referred to the violent acts of rebel committees against colonists who wished to remain neutral.

Griffiths expressed her sadness and anger at the “unnatural Contest” at Long Island in August 1776, the first sustained battle of the revolution, one in which the rebels lost. In a poem, she conveyed her horror at the execution of two Quakers, John Roberts and Abraham Carlisle, on November 4, 1778, hung by the rebels for their alleged collaboration with the British (see document—Mourning Loyalist Execution). Both Quakers had shown great zeal for reunion when the British army was in Philadelphia. As gatekeeper, Carlisle had issued passes to those entering or leaving the city; Roberts had recruited men and furnished supplies for the British. After British evacuation, both men faced rebel retribution. They were tried, then hung for
treason. More than four thousand Philadelphians attended the burial procession of the two men. Philadelphia loyalists worried that the two Quakers' execution, gone unpunished by the British, led to loyalist withdrawal and disappointment. They hoped the British would take the execution as an opportunity to turn people's wrath against tyrannical rebel leaders. But the British were not worried about the fate of two unknown Quakers.  

Benjamin Franklin's cousin, Kezia Folger Coffin of Nantucket, defied her Quaker faith and actively chose loyalty. With the outbreak of war in Lexington and Concord in 1775, Mrs. Coffin, like many Nantucketers, saw no reason to disrupt the imperial relationship. A well-connected businesswoman of means, Mrs. Coffin achieved success within the empire. She benefited tremendously from the rapid profitability of the Anglo-American whaling industry and spermaceti candle manufacturing in Nantucket. She also took advantage of connections established by her husband, John Coffin, a wealthy owner of whaling vessels, and her brothers, two of whom were whaling captains. When the Nantucket Society of Friends demanded stricter adherence and absolute neutrality, Mrs. Coffin rejected her Quaker faith and identified with the British cause. 

Mrs. Coffin's decisions were the logical extension of her success since the 1750s. Her loyalty was not born anew during the imperial crisis but persisted through the crisis. Unencumbered by heavy maternal responsibility (she had only one child), Mrs. Coffin operated confidently in the patronage-based culture that was still organized around "houses" instead of "firms" and hence allowed female participation in mercantile operations. Choosing the British side meant protecting the family whose interests she had carefully cultivated for the past two decades. As described by Jane Mecom, Benjamin Franklin's sister, she took the "wrong side & Exerted her Self by Every method she could devise Right or Wrong to Accomplish her Designs, & Favour the Britons, went in to Large Traid with them, & for them."  

A total of 3,225 loyalists filed claims for compensation from the British government after the revolution. Unfortunately, Kezia Coffin missed the deadline for requesting restitution. Most claims tended to come from propertyed, skilled, seafarers, and urban residents. More than one-third of the claims came from New Yorkers, half of the claims came from those born outside North America, and 468 of the claims were made by women. In petition after petition, women strategically emphasized their weakness and helplessness, and their need for British benevolence. The appeals concealed the resilience through which women survived their multiple displacements and kept their families and properties intact. Loyalist wives and daughters suffered alongside their husbands; the revolution meant a permanent exile in England, Canada, or the Caribbean. From Halifax, Nova Scotia, the daughter of a New England loyalist expressed her sadness in verse: "I am a young Exile from my native Shore. . . . Start at the Flash of Arms and dread the Roar." The diversity of the colonial experience makes it difficult to assess how the paternalism of British monarchy situated loyalist women in Canada in relation to the emerging ideal of republican motherhood in the United States. But the revolution did not inaugurate a golden age for women, rebel or loyalist. 

**Slaves**

Between 1775 and 1783, an estimated twenty thousand slaves escaped their masters, mostly from the southern colonies. Although the Church of England enjoyed a virtual monopoly on missionary work in the colonies, the Anglican establishment played a modest role in drawing blacks to the British side. Despite British racism and support for slavery, the British were regarded as allies and associated with slave emancipation. Slaves expressed faith in the empire through their actions: They took advantage of revolutionary upheaval not to flee to the wilderness and establish maroon communities but to join British troops (see document—Escaping to the British). When the rebel army evacuated New York City in 1776, a British soldier saw "black children of slaves hugging and kissing each other" with relief. One man who left rebel-governed New York for British Nova Scotia after the rebellion called himself "British Freedom," and in naming himself thus, revealed that he had greater faith that British monarchy rather than American republicanism would deliver African Americans from slavery. 

From 1775 onward, the British recruited rebel slaves as an expedient measure in an effort to weaken and fragment the rebel slaveholding community. British officers never authorized manumissions en masse; public opinion did not favor radical social equality, and the British did not wish to poison the American political context beyond recovery. As much as alienating the colonial populace, the British worried deeply about liberated slaves: Would they require relocation outside the empire? But local and immediate exigencies led British officers to consider slaves as important sources of manpower and slave emancipation as a valuable tactic against rebel slave owners. 

Curiously, the British proclamations issued to the blacks paralleled those issued to white loyalists during the rebellion. Through protections offered to wavering white colonists and rebel-owned slaves, the British sought to weaken and fragment the rebel coalition. Beginning in July 1776 and repeated periodically until 1781, the British commanders in chief offered
pardons to white colonists, "to all those who in the tumult and disorder of the times may have deviated from their just allegiance and who are willing by a speedy return to their duty to reap the benefits of his royal favour." In November 1775, the governor of Virginia, Lord Dunmore, encouraged able-bodied black men bonded to rebel slave owners to enter British lines. His recruitment represented the first of several desperate attempts to buttress British weakness in the South and to simultaneously challenge the power of the rebel slaveholders. Dunmore anticipated that slave-owning rebels would be deprived of their workers and compelled to return home to manage their properties instead of carrying arms against the British. As importantly, Dunmore hoped to supply himself with badly needed manpower. Almost four years later, in preparation for the southern campaign, British commander in chief Sir Henry Clinton not only echoed but expanded Dunmore's proclamation. In June 1779, Clinton encouraged "every Negro (not only armed men but also women and children) who shall desert the Rebel standard, fill security to follow within these lines any occupation which he shall think proper." Neither the British ministers in London nor British officers in the colonies intended the proclamations to function as a first step toward ending slavery. The interests of British slave traders and of sugar planters in the Caribbean islands, along with worries about alienating loyalist slave owners, conspired against slave emancipation.

Taking advantage of the route to manumission unavailable to black women, black men enlisted in British regiments. In 1775, one thousand were ready to serve on behalf of the empire and joined Lord Dunmore's Ethiopian Regiment. But their hopes for freedom and betterment—and perhaps honor and distinction—were short lived. Like many colonists, these blacks had no immunity to smallpox and suffered ghastly casualty rates. But unlike white Americans, they received neither inoculation nor hospitalization and perished in larger numbers. When Dunmore was forced to retreat from Virginia, the surviving black loyalists accompanied him to New York City. In the first battle fought between British regulars and the Continental Army on Long Island, New York, in August 1776, the Ethiopian Regiment fought alongside the British against the rebels.

From New Jersey's Monmouth County, 21-year-old Titus fled his owner, John Corlies, to fight with Dunmore's Ethiopian regiment. Despite his membership in the Society of Friends, Corlies did not perceive it was "his duty to give [the slaves] their freedom." Serving the British under the honorary title of Colonel Tye, Titus fought bravely with white loyalists against rebel forces in the Battle of Monmouth on June 28, 1778. His title did not represent a formal British commission but bestowed respect and acknowledged Titus's bravery and leadership. Soldiers who had served in the Caribbean oversaw his transformation from servant to warrior status. Taking advantage of his knowledge about the terrain around New York City, Colonel Tye led raids against rebels, kidnapped soldiers, and carried off cattle for British troops. Acting as "insurgent extensions of British power," his men exerted a destabilizing influence to protect the British hold over New York City. Until September 1778, when Tye died from a fatal wrist wound, his unit was employed for reconnaissance and quick raids to protect British-held New York City.

Although British military officers actively solicited black manpower, they tried to restrict black families from entering British lines. They did not want to waste precious resources on feeding and housing black women and children. When the exploits of Colonel Tye and interregional guerilla bands posted in ferry landings in New Jersey encouraged black families to flee to New York City, some British officials fumed. In May 1780, Major General James Patterson wrote Culver that "not only male but female Negroes with their children take advantage of your port in New Jersey to run away from masters and come into the city where they must become a burden to the town... Be so good as to prevent their passing the North [Hudson] River as far as it is in your power to do it." Some officers explicitly forbade black men to enter British lines with their families. On December 2, 1780, Lieutenant Colonel John Simcoe of the Queen's Rangers issued a proclamation from his station in Oyster Bay, Long Island. Addressing the "able-bodied men slaves to those who are in arms against his Majesty's government," he announced that they "would have their liberty & be protected by King George provided they come without their wives & children who cannot be received or protected at present." In exchange for their own freedom, Simcoe demanded that black men abandon their families to face the rage of rebel masters.

Colonel Tye was extraordinary. Few runaways served in a military capacity: The majority, recruited and deployed in a hurry, did strenuous and time-consuming work. They dug trenches, buried bodies, and served as orderlies in hospitals. Black women laundered and sewed, black pilots guided ships in and out of treacherous ports, black fiddlers provided entertainment for military officers, and black cooks and servants ensured the comfort of elite homes. Other slaves and free blacks cared for animals, hauled provisions, and chopped and collected firewood. The slaves who escaped from northern colonies were more cosmopolitan and sometimes more literate than southern slaves, and sought to use this to their advantage. Like Tye, these men acted as spies, or as an ancillary guerilla force, and raided rebel homes in concert with white loyalist refugees.
The experience of war was less farreaching for slaves in British New York City where the British administration's behavior toward blacks compelled hope, perhaps even trust. Some slaves who escaped to the city worshipped at the Anglican Church, got married, baptized their children, and worked for the British military administration. Surprisingly, in return for their labor, the blacks were sometimes treated legally as British subjects.

Two incidents illustrate British defense of invited black subjects in 1783. When a New York loyalist sought a quick profit by capturing and selling a black man who took refuge in the city, the British favored the black over the white loyalist. In May, Thomas Willis, employed in New York City's police department, captured Caesar, tied his hands behind his back, and forced him through the public streets of the city by beating him with a stick. Willis hoped to return the runaway Caesar to Elizabethtown, New Jersey, for a "piece of gold coin." HAVING evidence that Caesar entered the lines legally, the British sentenced Willis to receive five hundred lashes but then revoked the sentence for his display of "good character" and mandated his transport out of the city.

In July, when a slaveholder tried to reclaim his black property, the British used military law to override the owner's claims. In July, Jacob Duryee carried off Francis Griffin, a black loyalist under the protection of the British government in New York City. In his defense, Duryee insisted that as a citizen of the United States of America, he had a "right to his property whenever he could find it." He infuriated Deputy Judge Advocate Stephen P. Adye, who reminded Duryee that a "general commanding an army in a hostile country possesses powers beyond what even His Majesty himself enjoys." In these instances, British paternalism provided reason for New York's blacks to remain committed to the empire.

During the years of the American rebellion, some British officers and loyalist leaders recommended the creation of a large slave imperial army. Governor Dunmore and Joseph Galloway promoted black enlistment in the British military. Dunmore anticipated that a force of ten thousand blacks would be the "most efficacious, expeditious, cheapest and certain means of reducing this country to a proper sense of their duty." Galloway believed that drastic and emergency actions were required to suppress the rebellion. But the long-standing notion of slaves as agricultural and household laborers in the American colonies clashed with the idea of slaves as military labor. During the war, loyalist slave owners were intensely conscious of the value lost in runaway property. In December 1778, William Smith Jr. recorded that his black servant, Jack, had left him, to join a British privateering expedition. In his diary, he carefully recorded the amount he had lost in his runaway property. Yet by the 1790s, the British had learned that armed slaves, promised honor, distinction, and status, could be trusted to defend slavery. The lessons of the American experience led to new practices and policy. Ten years after the American war, in 1795, slaves in red coats served British forces during the Haitian Revolution and its aftermath. The British government purchased more than thirteen thousand Africans between 1797 and 1808 to man its Caribbean forces, to defend slavery in the Caribbean and in West Africa.

Indian Allies

The revolution escalated white-Indian land tensions of prerevolutionary colonial society. Frontier wars were fought in the Ohio River Valley, in Kentucky, and in the Mohawk Valley. Both British and rebel leaders advocated using friendly Indians to wage war against hostile ones. Caught between their economic dependence on trade goods and the manipulations of both rebels and loyalists who wanted Indian allies in strategic backcountry regions, neutrality was not an option. In 1775, many such as Assun coom, a Mohican Christian, wished the whites "would let the poor Indians alone, what have they to do with your Quarrels." Assun coom feared the violent consequences of siding with the losers.

In the end, most Indian communities allied with the British. These Indians hoped the British would continue to protect Indian country as they had most recently against the American settlers in the Proclamation of 1763. Others hoped to recoup some of the losses of past generations with British victory. One historian calls the scale of anti-rebel alliance during the revolution the "largest, most unified Native American effort the continent would ever see." However, the vicious warfare also generated division and confusion within Indian communities and created new fissures. In 1779, the Delawareans allied with the British, but individuals inside the community chose the opposing side. British-allied Shawnee communities along the Ohio Valley splintered and restructured as rebel invasions compelled migrations to Cherokee Creek territories in the South, and to residence with the Delawares. Along with forced migrations, the Shawnees dealt with the disruption caused by burned fields, the killing of noncombatants, and the wartime promotion of war chiefs at the expense of longtime village chiefs. The war that terminated in 1783 for the British did not end for the Shawnees until the mid-1790s when the chiefs finally sought accommodation with the victorious Americans.

As importantly, the revolution was a civil war for the Six Nations Confederacy just as it was for white colonists. The League of Six Nations—the
confederacy of Mohawks, Oneidas, Tuscaroras, Onondagas, Cayugas, and Senecas—had managed to maintain their pivotal position in upstate New York by preserving neutrality and unity. But the outbreak of war split the confederacy. Whereas most of the Oneidas and Tuscaroras sided with the rebels, the Senecas, Mohawks, Cayugas, and Onondagas sided with the British. Joseph Brant, the Mohawk leader who had already fought for the British during the Seven Years’ War, pulled four of the Iroquois nations to the British side (see document—Mohawks Side with the British). Undoubtedly, his sister’s twenty-two-year relationship with Sir William Johnson, northern superintendent of Indian affairs, contributed to the Mohawk attachment to Britain. Equally at home in an Indian war council or as the hostess of Johnson Hall, Mary Brant had great influence in the matrilineal Iroquois society (see mention of Mary Brant, housekeeper, in document—Relations with Indians). She provided intelligence information to the British and fostered ties of loyalty and self-interest that mobilized Indian warriors to support the cause.

For some Mohawks, membership in the Anglican Church may have led to alliance with the British. In March 1770, New York’s Rev. Charles Inglis voiced the implicit link between loyalty and religion. He explained that the most effective way of securing Iroquois loyalty was by “protestiriz[ing] them to Christianity, as professed by the Church of England.” If neglected, they would “naturally grow alienated from the Government.”

The Church signified a critical middle ground, and the Church’s continual presence represented the Iroquois’ successful negotiation in preserving their homeland from colonial squatters. Both Joseph and Mary Brant grew up in the home of the Indian superintendent, William Johnson, of Anglican faith. Brant’s faith may have been further reinforced under the missionary teachings of the Reverend John Stuart in the 1770s. Brant would translate the Book of Common Prayer and, in 1787, a doctrinal primer. Significantly, when Mary Brant died in 1796, the bell in the tower of the local Anglican Church at Cataracqui (Ontario) tolled for her. The extent to which Mary Brant’s loyalty was influenced by her faith in the Anglican Church is hard to determine: the Anglican Church however, clearly recognized her as an important ally.

Most colonial wars had included Indians on both sides. But by the end of the Seven Years’ War in 1763, white colonists were much less dependent on Indian aid than they had been in the preceding decades. A combination of prejudice, hatred, and a long history of frightful intercultural warfare transformed Indians from savages, uncivilized in English ways, to barbarians, bent on cruelty and undeserving of restraint (see document—Accusing Savages of Scalping Europeans). Worries about Indians’ elusiveness and treachery conditioned levels of violence unthinkable against white loyalists. Backcountry settlers took the law into their own hands, killing combatants and noncombatants alike; burning Indian crops, and destroying Indian villages. In 1779, George Washington’s policy against the Iroquois made it “essential to ruin their crops now in the ground and prevent them planting more.” Soldiers in the Continental Army destroyed easily accessible Iroquois homelands even as they eyed them as future possessions. Troops burned cornfields at the time of harvest and took Indian hostages as “security.” They marked their initials on landmarks, hoping to claim Indian land as private property after the war. Continental officers sometimes “chastened those [soldiers] who presumed to mark trees in the wood with initial letters and their names at large.”

Sadly, the Indians’ overwhelming allegiance to the British side did not protect them from white loyalists who regarded the Natives as military pawns in the larger war. Rebels and loyalists alike equated the security and stability of colonial society with entitlement to Native land. Initially, both sides sought to keep Natives outside the “family” rebellion. But Indians’ fear of losing land to rebel speculators denied them the neutrality they sought. Far from promoting a united loyalist union inclusive of the races, the white loyalists hoped that Indian terrorist tactics would intimidate rebels and move them toward neutrality or loyalty. In one particularly revealing letter written in December 1778, the loyalist governor of New York, William Tryon, urged the British to enlist the Indian Nations lying between Quebec and West Florida and “let [them] loose on the frontiers of the revolted colonies, unrestrained excepting to women and children.” Without normal subsistence and with unreliable access to trade goods, the Natives became increasingly dependent on their allies. By the end of the war, Indian country, from the Mohawk Valley to Florida, was a site of devastation and ruin.

The Peace Treaty and Its Aftermath

The warfare in Indian country was not decisive in shaping the outcome of the revolution; the outcome of the revolution, however, decisively affected the Indian world in North America. The Peace Treaty ceded to the United States all of the lands east of the Mississippi and south of the Great Lakes, and made no mention of the Indians who had fought and died on the empire’s behalf and who inhabited the territory that now belonged to the United States. The British neglect of their Native allies closed the disputed “middle ground” of the Natives, preserved tenaciously for almost two hundred years. One Iroquois called the Treaty an “Act of Cruelty and injustice
that Christians only were capable of doing.” The military raids as well as disease and malnutrition promoted by the war caused Iroquois numbers to fall by one-third after the revolution—from nine thousand to six thousand. Indians such as the Iroquois Nations who had tried to prolong porous borders eventually became confined—and divided—within the borders of consolidated regimes.

Territorial disputes between Americans and Indian nations in thinly populated regions within the United States would be decided not by treaties and litigation but by the reality of settler occupation. By the early nineteenth century, the Cherokees, who had survived better than the Iroquois and established themselves as an autonomous republic associated with the United States but not subordinate to it, could not counter the expansive claims of Georgia’s settlers. Frontier vendettas and backcountry violence continued unabated through the early nineteenth century. Facing east, toward Britain, the rebels had called themselves Sons of Liberty, but after the war, facing west, they declared themselves proprietors of a vast continent (see document—Indians as Beasts of Prey).

The terms of the Peace Treaty stunned white loyalists (see document—Dreadful Tidings). Those who had courageously fled their homes and their communities for British garrisons had faced neglect, suspicion, and derision; and competed for scarce wood, adequate shelter, and British patronage. Regarded as enemies and traitors, they had lived as refugees under the British military because they expected the imperial government to protect them and compensate them for their sacrifices. The preliminary treaty of November 1782 confirmed the loyalists’ worst fears; the Treaty made no mention of loyal white Americans outside of a meaningless clause in Article V that required the rebel Congress to “earnestly recommend” that each state legislature “provide for the restitution of all estates, rights, and properties which have been confiscated belonging to real British subjects” and promised that all noncombatant loyalists should have “free liberty to go to any part or parts of any of thirteen United States” without molestation as they endeavored to secure their confiscated properties (see document—Loyalists in the Peace Treaty).

Throughout the war, colonial governments had enacted laws confiscating the property of prominent loyalists (see document—Confronting Confiscation Laws). Because the states and not the Congress had seized the property, Congress had no power to deal with the question of loyalist reparations. It could not enforce the restoration of seized loyalist property or compel liberal treatment of returning loyalists. This meant, as both loyalists and the victorious rebels understood, that the loyalists would receive no mercy. In most states, the loyalists were proscribed as traitors, and local committees refused to allow them to return to their former homes. More than four decades after the war, Stephen Allen remembered the loyalist reaction to the peace treaty: “This was dreadful news for the loyalists in the city [New York] and their counties and expressions on the occasion betrayed the bitter and malignant passions working within them.” One commentator observed acidly that the peace treaty “licks the feet of Congress, and of their General, and only begs not to receive a kick.” If there were any compensation for loyalist losses, it would have to come from the empire and not from the American states.

Regarded as disloyal citizens of the new nation, the loyalists faced both the wrath of the state governments and the vengeance of former neighbors. In the short term, at least, colonists identified publicly as loyalists had little future in the revolutionary republic. When known loyalists tried to return to their homes in 1782 and 1783, they faced insults, threats, and banishment. In both the southern and northern colonies, loyalists were accused of massacring neighbors, desolating lands, and starting fires. In response to the demand for retributive justice, South Carolina’s new government legitimated its authority by employing disfranchisement, confiscation, and banishment against the loyalists. In New York, the Trespass Act permitted returning rebels to file a lawsuit against any person in British-ruled New York who had used the property they had left behind. The loyalist victims could not sue in return. Gradually, by 1788, the state governments rescinded the penalties on a case-by-case basis and gained support of the wider community.

Anti-loyalist activity went unpunished in local neighborhoods. Angry residents used every means in their power—intimidation, assault, tarring and feathering—to prevent the exiles from returning home. When the loyalist Joshua Booth tried to return to his home in Ulster County, New York, to visit his mother, a group pinnioned him and carried him six miles to a larger group. His head was tarred and feathered, his hair was shorn, and his eyebrows shaved with a penknife. A paper was affixed on his forehead with the inscription: “Look yo Tory Crew, and see what George your King can do.” He was pulled by a party on horseback about four miles with a drum beating and file playing before being delivered on a boat bound for New York City (see document—Retaliation from Rebels). The rising tide of violence by rebel committees in combination with the abandonment of British troops from garrisons left the loyalists repeatedly unprotected and vulnerable to rebel assault. For Booth and others like him, safety lay in exile.

Yet, despite fierce opposition, the majority of loyalists remained in the United States. A few loyalists such as the Reverend Henry Addison abandoned England for the United States after the rebellion (see document—Forsaking
Britain). Printer Hugh Gaine brought down the Crown from his shop sign and quietly went on with his printing business. No bloody reign of terror followed the rebellion. Some families undoubtedly moved to different localities to avoid the social stigma of loyalty. The "Black List," which preserved the names of the loyalists in Pennsylvania, still circulated in 1802 during an election dispute; the debate hinged on whether attained loyalists could vote if they had not been officially pardoned by the state. Loyalist assimilation happened gradually as the new republic framed political decision making as a protected individual right and not as a sinful betrayal of the larger virtuous community.  

The British government was more ready to recover slave property lost by loyalists than to retrieve landed property confiscated from loyalists. Loyalist-owned slaves had no chance of freedom because the government would not divest a British subject of his property without his consent. They comprised the largest departing group from the southern garrisons. Tragically, the same British officers who had offered slaves freedom during the rebellion now offered to protect the property of loyalists, including their right to their slave property. The former governor of New Hampshire, Sir John Wentworth, invested nineteen of his slaves in his cousin’s plantation in Dutch Guine. In his letter of February 24, 1784, Wentworth assured his cousin that the slaves “are all American born and well seasoned and all are perfectly stout, healthy, sober, industrious, and honest ... the Women are stout and able, and promise well to increase their number.”  

Approximately fifteen thousand blacks left the United States as the property of white loyalists.  

The empire did not fully abandon the loyalists who wished to remain Britons. The government provided transportation to scattered destinations throughout the empire—to Britain, Quebec and Nova Scotia, and the Caribbean. It issued provisions, tools, medicine, clothes, and seeds. It provided military protection. Most of all, it surveyed and granted land free of charge. Finally, it appointed a commission to assess loyalist suffering and awarded compensation to those who could demonstrate their sacrifices on behalf of the empire (see document—Claiming Losses in Income, Property, and Slaves). By 1788, the British government had spent about £7.5 million on the loyalists, twice the interest on the national debt in 1763.  

In the process of categorizing loyalists, the British commissioners underlined the volatility of choosing sides during the rebellion. They differentiated loyalists who bore arms in the service of Britain, and those who bore arms for the American states but later joined the British side; those who had remained uniform and zealous; and those who took oaths to the Americans but afterward joined the British.  

Of the 60,000 displaced loyalists, more than half dreamed of better lives in Nova Scotia and Quebec (divided into Upper and Lower Canada in 1791). Quebec received 6,000 loyalists and 500 Mohawks, and the Maritime provinces received the majority, more than 30,000 loyalists. Nova Scotia (which included the future New Brunswick) and its dependencies (Prince Edward Island, then known as the Island of St. John, and Cape Breton) proved especially attractive because the colony was thinly populated, and its capital, Halifax, was just six hundred miles from the loyalist haven of New York City.  

More than 1,400 loyalist heads of households—about 8,000 people—sought employment and position in England between 1775 and 1784. In London, a small number of talented and influential exiles worked behind the scenes to influence Britain’s policy toward the colonies. Pennsylvania’s Joseph Galloway struggled to establish himself as the resident expert on colonial affairs. But Galloway, along with other London exiles, did not receive serious political consideration from British government. As Thomas Hutchinson lamented in 1782, “We Americans are plenty here, and very cheap. . . . Some of us at first meeting are apt to think ourselves of importance, but other people do not think so, and few, if any of us are much consulted, or enquired after.”  

As many as 3,000 white loyalists and 8,000 slaves entered Jamaica after the British evacuated their southern garrisons in 1782, Savannah in July, and Charleston in December. Most of the southern loyalists migrated to the West Indies because plantation agriculture offered exiled slaveholders a chance to rebuild their fortunes using slave labor. Other loyalist families migrated to Dominica, St. Lucia, and other sugar islands, and to East Florida.  

The loyalist exodus from East Florida—2,500 white loyalists with their 4,000 slaves—doubled the white population and tripled the black population in the Bahamas. Their arrival promoted an economic transition in the Bahamas, from shipbuilding and other maritime activities to a plantation economy based on cotton plantations and slave labor. In April 1783, news of evacuation came as a shock to loyalists in East Florida who expected to remain within the British empire and who thought they had escaped the fate of other southern loyalists. By 1783, the influx of loyalists fleeing rebel control in the southern colonies had increased the population of East Florida to 12,000—5,000 whites and 7,200 blacks. In addition to loyalist families and their slaves, East Florida included British troops, loyalist soldiers, and Native Americans. The first East Florida newspaper, the East-Florida Gazette, was printed in February 1783. When the Peace Treaty returned East Florida to Spain, these loyalists confronted the same choices as those made earlier by Savannah’s and Charleston’s loyalists.  

Surprisingly, the British upheld the promises of freedom made to rebel-owned slaves. On paper, the British statesmen committed to return all property
the army had seized from the rebels. In Article VII of the Peace Treaty, Britain agreed to withdraw its land and naval forces "with all convenient speed, and without causing any destruction, or carrying away any Negroes or other property of the American inhabitants." But would slaves freed by British proclamation still be counted as rebel property? The British had followed no explicit policy regarding the status and treatment of slaves during the war years. But amid defeat and evacuations, decisions were made. An ex-slave in New York, Boston King, expressed the horror of those last months in 1783: "Many of the slaves had very cruel masters so that the thoughts of returning home with them embittered life for us. . . . For some days, we lost our appetite for food, and sleep departed from our eyes."166 (See document—Escaping to the British.)

Despite the hostility from colonists who hoped to recapture their slaves from British garrisons, the British commander in chief, Sir Guy Carleton, honored his predecessors' proclamations that had promised freedom to rebel slaves who entered British lines. Carleton, in fact, distinguished between slaves who fled to the British in response to the proclamations and those who sought refuge previous to the proclamations or subsequent to the cessation of hostilities. Sensing the acute situation, General Washington met Carleton in a conference in Orange town, New Jersey, in May 1783. Washington argued that the embarkations of blacks on British ships violated the stipulations of the Peace Treaty (see document—Negotiating Slave Return). Washington knew that some of his own slaves had escaped to British New York City and along with other rebel leaders such as Virginia's governor, Benjamin Harrison, hoped to find them. But Carleton did not think the clause applied to blacks in New York City for they were already free.167 In the end, 8,000 blacks left the United States as free people. Of these, 5,000 sailed to England and another 3,000 sought a new life in Nova Scotia.168 Of the 3,000 free blacks, 1,336 were men, 914 women, and 750 children. Notably, 40 percent were female (see document—Book of Negroes).169 Despite British officers' attempts to prevent black women and children from burdening British resources, they failed to dissuade slave families from escaping slavery.

Of the forty-seven free blacks who applied in England for compensation, only one was awarded anything for his property losses (see document—Black Petitions). Half the blacks were denied assistance altogether.170 The British officials thought the black men merited no entitlement because they were "very fortunate in being in a Country" where they can "never again be reduced to a state of slavery."171 In 1787, hundreds of blacks were encouraged to seek another home outside of England. Although initial schemes included considerations of the Bahamas where blacks would reintegrate into a slave society, and of New Brunswick where slaves would become hard-working laborers by converting forests into farmlands, Sierra Leone in West Africa was finally the chosen destination. By the early 1790s, the colony, poorly supported from Britain, vulnerable to the depredations of local slave catchers, and regarded with hostility by local chiefs, struggled to survive. Only the arrival of more than one thousand disillusioned black Nova Scotians in 1792 buttressed their numbers and gave the first settlers in Sierra Leone a second chance.

Refugees in the Maritimes

Many free black Nova Scotians were southern slaves who had earned their freedom by joining the British troops.172 For almost ten years, they endured mistreatment from British administrators and violent discrimination from loyalist exiles. The British administrators saw no gain in attending to the needs of emancipated and penniless blacks. Unlike white loyalists, they received no saws, hoes, hammers, or nails. Free blacks arrived only with a spot, an ax, some clothing and one pair of shoes, and received land with the poorest soil.173 Still, they established the largest settlement of free blacks in North America, in the segregated town of Birchtown, northwest of Shelburne. Unable to compete with white laborers and disband ed soldiers, they sank to the bottom as day laborers and indentured servants. Their attempts at establishing schools and churches met milit ant opposition. Boston King remembered the conditions that accompanied a dreadful famine in Nova Scotia in the late 1780s when "many of the poor people were compelled to sell their best gowns for five pounds of flour, in order to support life. When they had parted with all their clothes, even their blankets, several of them fell dead in the streets, thot' hunger. Some killed and eat [sic] their dog and cats, and poverty and distress prevailed on every side, so that to my great grief I was obliged to leave [Birchtown] because I could get no employment."174 Unlike many disappointed white loyalists who made their way back to familiar neighborhoods in the United States, returning to a life of re-enslavement in their masters' homes was not an option for black Nova Scotians. Moving to Sierra Leone represented a third desperate transition.

In a letter to his sister from Halifax in 1783, the Reverend Mather Byles lamented the fate of the loyalist refugees "in the howling wilderness, among a people who I believe are as conscientious as the first settlers of New England and who have been more cruelly persecuted."175 Impressions formed based on sources such as Byles's letter portray white loyalists as tragic exiles in the British peripheries, as trapped in an unknown and uncultivated forest. But
for the Micmac population, these loyalists were invaders. These Indians, who had held out against French settlement in the 1600s and 1700s and the settlement of Germans and New Englanders in the 1750s and 1760s, could not survive the large influx of the loyalists. Their influx ended the Aborigi-
nals’ ability to negotiate in Nova Scotia. Prior to 1782, the Aboriginals had lived with multiple groups of immigrants—Acadians, British, New Englanders—but colonization had remained confined to defined areas. Arriving with military experience and loyal credentials, the refugees eclipsed Aboriginal claims to land and trade. As historian John G. Reid has observed, the fur trade, so crucial to Aboriginal economy and autonomy, “became the preserve of poor loyalists not Aboriginal hunters and trappers.”160

Enslavers and imperialists in relation to blacks and Indians in Nova Scotia, the loyalists were true Britons in the eyes of empire. For a fortunate minority, government largesse included land, compensation for losses sus-
tained by the war, and important government offices. Providing benevolent compensation and position served not only imperial interests but protected Nova Scotia for Britain (see document—Envisioning British Nova Scotia). As the British officer Brock Watson expressed in 1783, “the province will be at last settled, and that with good People of Property carrying in their hearts, the most settled love to the Constitution of England, they will form a barrier against those of opposite principle, and become the envy of all their Neighbors.”161 The 1785 Nova Scotia charter described the colony as “the pole star . . . [that would] gratify the true loyalists by fixing them in as free and advantageous a situation as the nature of the government can admit.” The “ paternal goodness” of Britain would not only encourage the zeal and ambition of true subjects, but would “operate most forcibly on the revolted Americans by proving . . . what they might have enjoyed on a reunion with their careful and gracious Sovereign, and fellow-subjects.”162

In 1784, New England loyalist Edward Winslow procured the coveted position as secretary to Brigadier General Henry E. Fox in Nova Scotia. Winslow advocated the partitioning of Nova Scotia. He hoped a separate province on the north side of the Bay of Fundy would create new provincial offices for young and ambitious loyalist immigrants (see document—Loyalist Nova Scotia). In becoming an immigrant in a new land, Winslow did not leave behind his sense of privilege. There was no sense of sudden commonal-
ty with other loyalists who were also struggling to establish a foothold. He was equally contemptuous of the local inhabitants, the poor immigrants, and the black refugees. He saw the inhabitants as “languid wretches” who were not ready to be industrious unless induced through shame.163 In a letter to his wife, Winslow described “board day” in Halifax. From eight in the morning, the yard in front of his house crowded with the “most miserable objects that were ever beheld.” He called the poor arriving from the streets of London “miserable remnants . . . and such as are able to crawl are begging for a proportion of provisions at my door.” The African Americans he referred to as “Blackies begging for Christ’s sake that Masder would give ‘em a little provi-
sion if it’s only for one week.”164

In 1787, the Reverend Charles Inglis, former rector of Trinity Church in New York, was appointed bishop of Nova Scotia. Inglis hoped to link Anglo-
ican theology with British constitutionalism. After the rebellion, the British government did not favor political amalgamation of its remaining North America colonies. In 1784, New Brunswick and Cape Breton were separated from Nova Scotia, and each was given its own government. In 1791, Upper Canada as an English-speaking province was set apart from Lower Canada, which remained French. But the British reconsidered the role of region in creating people’s attachment to the state. Significantly, Inglis had jurisdic-
tion not only over Nova Scotia, but also Canada, Newfoundland, and New Brunswick. In April 1789, Inglis requested the establishment of a seminary so Nova Scotian children could be educated in “constitutional principles.”165 The Church would foster loyalty and prevent a second rebellion in North America.

The British government did not hesitate to provide provisions and land to ordinary white loyalists in North America. Indeed, the 30,000 exiles fit neatly into the larger project of British reconlocation of Nova Scotia in the eighteenth century.166 Loyalist settlers fulfilled the empire’s persistent need for trustworthy subjects in its northern-most Atlantic domain. The white loyalist influx significantly strengthened the British position in the Maritimes. In 1755, the population of Nova Scotia and Cape Breton was 25,000. By 1767, in spite of the New Englanders’ migration, the population was only 11,800; and in 1775, 20,000. The arrival of the loyalist refugees between 1775 and 1784 raised the population, so by 1791 the peninsula had 55,500 people (along with 1,500 more in Cape Breton); and by 1811, 70,000.

The loyalist exiles were the largest group who received British incentives to settle in the Maritimes. But they were not the first. Between 1750 and 1752, the British government—inspired by Pennsylvania’s earlier success-
ful example—directly encouraged the migration of 2,500 “foreign Prote-
stants”—German and Swiss immigrants—to balance the existing Acadian population in the Maritimes. Importantly, this was not done through a chartered company or other intermediaries but directly under the auspices of the government. These Germans settled in Lunenburg, just west of Halifax, in one of the more fertile lands on the Atlantic shore. Although intended
to be a long-term policy, the hostility from the Indians and the Acadians precluded further migration into the area. Some settlers deserted to the more secure and fertile colonies to the south. 189

During the Seven Years' War, as anxieties about the security of the Maritimes escalated, the local British government ordered the deportation of the Acadians. In the context of war, their long-term neutrality became associated with treason. By the 1760s, the British had removed most of the region's French inhabitants and overpowered much of the local Micmac population. In their stead, the government encouraged New Englanders to settle on lands previously inhabited by the Acadians—this was cheaper than recruiting, shipping, and settling foreign Protestants from Europe. More than 7,000 farmers and fishermen (about 2,400 families) from New England settled in the region; and by 1775, they comprised as much as two-thirds of the population of Nova Scotia. In 1782 and 1783, the British assumed the same connection between landholding and allegiance as they had during the settlement of "foreign Protestants" in the 1750s. Land and loyalty were intimately connected. Whereas the British promised land to Germans to create loyalty, they granted land to American loyalists to reward loyalty.

The British hoped that Halifax, with loyalist leadership, would serve as an "entrepot" for North Atlantic commerce. Although ranked below the British West Indies, the security of the Maritimes was associated with the control of the Newfoundland fisheries as well as the preservation of the West Indies. With its nontropical climate and its access to fisheries and lumber, Nova Scotia would provide provisions to the sugar colonies in the Caribbean. Battered with thousands of proven loyalists, it would serve a crucial geopolitical role in the reconfigured empire: as supplier to the valuable Caribbean Islands, as a check on the ambitions of the independent American states, and as a military and naval base in times of British warfare with the Caribbean. 190

But the foundations of British and loyalist optimism about loyalist Nova Scotia were fragile. The linkage of land to allegiance was weak in a region that lacked land for subsistence or competency. When the fertility of the newly cleared lands was exhausted and the bounty from the government ceased, the difficulties only grew. Already in 1784, a British proclamation reassured the loyalists that the government would continue rations, recognizing the "impracticability of the procuring subsistence from their lands until they are further cultivated..." 191 Some disappointed loyalists turned back to the United States to reestablish old connections. More avenues existed for the American loyalists than for the Germans in Lunenburg because of commercial, familial, and social networks created and nurtured in decades prior to the rebellion.

Overwhelmingly, the American loyalists were men and women of modest circumstances: tradesmen, laborers, carpenters, cordwainers. Their skills did not match the needs of the Nova Scotian landscape. Arriving from urban towns, many of the new immigrants to the Maritimes were inexperienced farmers. Some looked down on agricultural labor. Local consumption left little for export in the first years after the war. 192 Fishing remained more profitable than cultivating crops, and the high cost of growing grain could not compete with the lower cost and higher profits of raising cattle. In addition, the Nova Scotians found it easy to import provisions from the coastal towns in United States, just thirty miles south, where the flour was superior—and perhaps also cheaper because of the United States' reliance on slave labor. 193 Many loyalists drifted from county to county in search of work and led unhappy lives without community or security.

The exiles had chosen the empire for a multitude of reasons: some because they felt a sentimental attachment to the empire, others trusted the stability of British legal protection, and undoubtedly many because the British garrisons did not mandate military service and provided a better livelihood. Inconsequential in British political or military strategy, the loyalists had struggled to build and sustain a coalition during the war. Instead, the potential threat of a competing loyalist alliance may have worked to unite the rebels. In the Maritimes, however, the loyalists had a second chance. In the aftermath of the rebellion, the potential danger of an American invasion and British concerns about the volatility of the slave regime in the sugar islands led the predominantly white, English-speaking Maritime colonists to play a special role in the British Atlantic.

Notes

3. Ibid., 17.
4. Ibid., 23.
5. Ruma Chopra, Unnatural Rebellion: Loyalists in New York City during the Revolution (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2011).
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22. Quoted in Norton, Separated, 166.


29. Colley, Captives, quote from p. 202, population on p. 200; see also p. 164.


32. Nicole Eastman, Passion is the Gale: Emotion, Power, and the Coming of the American Revolution (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008). If the rebels began the war to stop the encroachment of power and to preserve virtue, they may have won the war by successfully transferring the authoritarian connotations associated with power to the passionate and sympathetic nuances associated with the patriot "spirit."


35. Hugh Gaine printed his last New York City paper on September 1776.


38. Lorenzo, Hugh Gaine, 76–82; Isaiah Thomas, The History of Printing in America, Volume II (New York: Bart Franklin, 1874; reprint 1964), 110. Thomas argues that Gaine desired to side with the successful side: I argue that his move from New York City to Newark and his return to New York City demonstrate his uncertainty about which side would eventually prevail.

39. The Newark paper was published weekly between September 21 and November 2, 1776. Gaine had issued the New York City paper on Mondays and issued the Newark paper on Saturdays.

40. Ford, Journals, Volume 1, 55.


46. In terms of present-day Canadian territory, the colony of Quebec covered the provinces of Ontario and Quebec, and the colony of Nova Scotia included the provinces of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia.


59. Jonathan Sewell, Plan of Union, 1785, in Anglo-American Union, 158. This plan has been misattributed to Galloway and was written by Sewell.


63. Sewell and Robinson, 1824 Plan of Union, 41.


68. New York Gazette and Weekly Mercury, January 13, 1777; October 7, 1776; February 3, 1777.


70. New York Gazette and Weekly Mercury, February 17, 1777.


76. Charles Inglis, October 31, 1776, in The Life and Letters of Charles Inglis: His Ministry in America and consecration as First Colonial Bishop, from 1759 to 1787, 159.


84. Sir Henry Clinton, March 8, 1776, Clinton Papers, Clements Library.


112. Schama, Rough Crossings, 5.


116. By the end of the revolution, smallpox took 130,000 American lives, mostly Indian. See Alan Taylor, Writing Early American History (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2005), 32.

117. Schama, Rough Crossings, 113, 112. Christopher Leslie Brown also suggests that the chance to bear arms in some instances meant an opportunity for enslaved men to assert control over women, both slave and free. See "The Arming of Slaves in Comparative Perspective," in Arming Slaves: From Classical Times to the Modern Age, ed. Christopher Leslie Brown and Philip D. Morgan (New Haven: Yale, 2006), 341.


121. Choplin, Unnatural Rebellion, 270.

122. Walker, "Blacks as American Loyalists," 56.

123. His Excellency Sir Guy Carleton’s Orders, May 11, 1783, in Carleton Papers.


125. His Excellency Sir Guy Carleton’s Orders, July 18, 1783, and July 22, 1783, in Carleton Papers.


137. Inglis, June 15, 1770, in The Life and Letters of Charles Inglis, 101.

138. Inglis, March 8, 1770, in The Life and Letters of Charles Inglis, 94.


141. Lee, Barbarians and Brothers, 215.

142. Lee, Barbarians and Brothers, 226.


145. Lee, Barbarians and Brothers, 221.

146. Lee, Barbarians and Brothers, 230.


151. Royal American Gazette, December 26, 1782.

152. Most states repealed laws against loyalists by 1788—New York was the last; see E. Wilder Spaulding, New York in the Critical Period, 1783–1789 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), 119.


160. John Earlely-Wilson, Historical View of the Commission for Enquiring into the Losses, Services, and Claims of the American Loyalists, at the Close of the War Between Great Britain and her Colonies, in 1783, ed. George Archam Billias (Boston: Gregg Press, 1972), 188.
166. Quoted in Mary Louise Clifford, From Slavery to Freetown: Black Loyalists After the American Revolution (Jefferson: McFarland, 1999), 33.
167. Quoted in Wilson, The Loyal Blacks, 56. In a letter written to Carleton in August 1783, Lord North explained that the “The removal of the Negroes whom you found in possession of their freedom upon your arrival at New York...is certainly an act of justice due to them from us, nor do I see, that the removal of those Negroes, who had been made free before the execution of the preliminaries of peace, can be deemed any infraction of the treaty.”
169. Hodges et al., Black Loyalist Directory, xix.
170. Mary Beth Norton, “The Fate of Some Black Loyalists of the American Revolution,” Journal of Negro History 56, no. 4 (1971): 404; Julian Gwyn, “Economic Fluctuations,” 69. 71. In 1755, Nova Scotia and Cape Breton had 25,000 inhabitants: of these, 14,000 were Acadians, fewer than 3,200 were English (including soldiers), 1,600 were Germans, and 2,000 were Micmacs.
175. Marther Dylse letter to his sisters, November 22, 1783, in MG 1, vol. 163, #1–7, PAC.