

Loyalists in the Thirteen Colonies

By July 4, 1776 the Patriots had gained control of virtually all territory in the 13 colonies, expelling all royal officials. No one was allowed to remain who openly proclaimed their loyalty to the king. For the moment Loyalists fled or kept quiet; some of those who remained later gave aid to invading British armies or joined uniformed Loyalist regiments that fought for the king.

The British had been forced out of Boston by March 17, 1776; but they returned to New York in August to convincingly defeat George Washington's army at Long Island and in doing so, captured New York City and its vicinity, where they remained until 1783. From time to time they also seized control of other cities such as Philadelphia (1777), Savannah (1778–83) and Charleston (1780–82), together with various slices of countryside. However, 90% of the colonial population lived outside the cities. The result was that the Congress always controlled 80–90% of the population. The British removed their governors from colonies where the Patriots were in control, but Loyalist civilian government was re-established in coastal Georgia (1779–82), although the Americans still controlled the northern part of the state. The British were only able to maintain power where they had a strong military presence.

Historian Robert Calhoun wrote concerning the proportion of loyalists and rebels:

Historians' best estimates put the proportion of adult white male loyalists somewhere between 15 and 20 percent. Approximately half the colonists of European ancestry tried to avoid involvement in the struggle — some of them deliberate pacifists, others recent emigrants, and many more simple apolitical folk. The patriots received active support from perhaps 40 to 45 percent of the white populace, and at most no more than a bare majority.^[1]

Earlier estimates were somewhat higher, reaching one-third of the population, but are no longer accepted by most scholars.^[2] Adams did indeed estimate in another letter, that year, that in the American Revolution, the Patriots had to struggle against approximately one-third of the population, while they themselves constituted about two-thirds of it. He did not mention neutrals.^[3] In the late 1960s Paul H. Smith arrived at the lower figure of 19.8% by statistical calculations based on the strength of the loyalist regiments fighting for the British.^[4]

Historian Robert Middlekauff summarizes scholarly research on who was a Loyalist as follows:

The largest number of loyalist were found in the middle colonies: many tenant farmers of New York supported the king, for example, as did many of the Dutch in the colony and in New Jersey. The Germans in Pennsylvania tried to stay out of the Revolution, just as many Quakers did, and when that failed, clung to the familiar connection rather than embrace the new. Highland Scots in the Carolinas, a fair number of Anglican clergy and their parishioners in Connecticut and New York, a few Presbyterians in the southern colonies, and a large number of the Iroquois Indians stayed loyal to the king.^[5]

New York City and Long Island (the British military and political base of operations in North America from 1776 to 1783) had a large concentration of Loyalists, many of whom were refugees from other states.^[6]

Calhoun (1973) shows that Loyalists tended to be older, more likely merchants and wealthier, but there were also many Loyalists of humble means. Many active Church of England members became Loyalists. Some recent arrivals from Britain, especially Scots, had a high Loyalist proportion. Loyalists in the southern colonies, however, were suppressed by the local Revolutionaries who controlled local and state government. Many people — such as some of the ex-Regulators in North Carolina — refused to join the Revolutionaries as they had earlier protested against corruption by the local authorities who

later became Revolutionary leaders. Such pre-Revolutionary War oppression by the local Whigs contributed to the reason that much of backcountry North Carolina tended to be loyalist.^[6]

In areas under rebel control— that is most of the country — Loyalists were subject to confiscation of property. Outspoken supporters of the king were threatened with public humiliation (such as tarring and feathering) or physical attack. It is not known how many Loyalist civilians were harassed by the Patriots, but the treatment was a warning to other Loyalists not to take up arms. Two Philadelphia residents were executed for actively aiding the British army when it occupied the city. In September 1775 William Drayton and Loyalist leader Colonel Thomas Fletchall signed a treaty of neutrality in the interior community of Ninety Six, South Carolina.^[7]

Military Service

The Loyalists rarely attempted any political organization. They were often passive unless regular British army units were in the area. The British, however, assumed a highly activist Loyalist community was ready to mobilize and planned much of their strategy around raising Loyalist regiments. The British provincial line, consisting of Americans enlisted on a regular army status, enrolled 19,000 loyalists (50 units and 312 companies). Another 10,000 served in loyalist militia or "associations." The maximum strength of the Loyalist provincial line was 9,700 in December 1780.^{[8][9]} In all about 50,000 at one time or another were soldiers or militia in British forces, including 15,000 from the main Loyalist stronghold of New York.^[10] The majority of Loyalists fought in the southern colonies and were not from the north. In addition, a large number of Americans served in the regular British army and in the Royal Navy.

Prominent Loyalists

- William Allen, wealthy merchant, Chief Justice of the Province of Pennsylvania and former mayor of Philadelphia
- Samuel Aikens, 02 JUN 1785 Land grant Guysborough, Nova Scotia Canada
- Benedict Arnold, Brigadier General, commissioned about close of 1780, originally a Revolutionary general
- John Askin, trader and land speculator at Detroit
- William Augustus Bowles
- Joseph Brant Thayendenegea, Mohawk war leader
- Thomas Brown, LTC commanding King's Rangers in Georgia
- Montford Browne, Brigadier General, commanding Prince of Wales American Regiment, 1777
- John Butler, Colonel commanding Butler's Rangers in the Mohawk Valley)
- Walter Butler (Capt. in Butler's Rangers and son of John Butler)
- Lt. Col. James Chalmers, Commander, First Battalion of Maryland Loyalists and author of anti-"Common Sense" pamphlet entitled "Plain Truth" in 1776
- Myles Cooper, president of King's College in New York City
- Robert Cunningham, Brigadier General, in 1780 in command of a garrison in South Carolina
- Oliver DeLancey, Brigadier General, commanding Delancey's Brigade 1776
- Abraham DePeyster, Officer of King's American Regiment
- Arent DePeyster, Officer of the 8th Regiment of Foot
- William Franklin, Governor of New Jersey, illegitimate son of Benjamin Franklin
- Joseph Galloway, Pennsylvania politician
- Simon Girty, served as a liaison between the British and their Native American allies during the American Revolution
- Reuben Hankinson, Ensign, First New Jersey Volunteers, September 1780
- John Howe, printer of the Massachusetts *Gazette* and Boston *Weekly News-Letter*
- Thomas Hutchinson, last royal Governor of Massachusetts
- Edward Jessup, Colonel of Jessup's Loyal Rangers near Albany, New York and his two brothers Ebenezer and Joseph.
- Sir John Johnson, commander of the King's Royal Regiment of New York)
- Thomas Jones, historian

- Elisha Leavitt, Hingham, Massachusetts merchant and landowner
- Daniel Leonard
- John Lovell, headmaster of the Boston Latin School
- Isaac Low, New York merchant
- Gabriel Ludlow, New York merchant
- George Ludlow, New York judge
- Flora MacDonald, Scottish Jacobite heroine
- Alexander McKee, liaison between the British and the Shawnees
- James Moody, Lieutenant, First New Jersey Volunteers, March 1781
- John Randolph, King's attorney for the Province of Virginia
- Beverley Robinson, Colonel, Loyal American Regiment
- Robert Rogers, commander of Rogers' Rangers/Queen's Rangers to 1777 (now The Queen's York Rangers (1st American Regiment) (RCAC)), innovator of ranging tactics
- Count Rumford (Benjamin Thompson), scientist
- Peggy Shippen, Philadelphia socialite and second wife of Benedict Arnold
- John Graves Simcoe, commander of Queen's Rangers from 1777 (now The Queen's York Rangers, 1st American Regiment), and founding Governor of the colony of Upper Canada (today: The Province of Ontario, Canada)
- Cortlandt Skinner, Brigadier General, commanding New Jersey Volunteers, Sept. 4, 1776
- William Stark, brother of General John Stark
- John Taylor, Captain, First New Jersey Volunteers, January 1781
- Col. Daniel Clary's Reg. Dutch Fork Militia, 96 Brigade. South Carolina 1773-1783
- Thomas Fairfax, 6th Lord Fairfax of Cameron

Notes

1. Robert M. Calhoon, in 'A companion to the American Revolution', (2000); p 235.
2. John Adams has sometimes been cited as having claimed, in a 1813 letter, that one-third of the American people supported the revolution and one-third were against. However, the passage in question actually refers to the French Revolution of 1789. See "Only 1/3rd of Americans Supported the American Revolution?", by William Marina. 6-28-2004.
3. See The American Revolution and the Minority Myth. January 1, 1975. By William Marina; "The Works of John Adams", Volume X, p. 63: To Thomas McKean, August 1813.
4. Lucas, Jeffery P. 2007 Cooling by Degrees: Reintegration of Loyalists in North Carolina, 1776-1790. M.A., NCSU. pp.3-4
5. Middlekauff, Robert. *The Glorious Cause: The American Revolution, 1763–1789* (1985), p 550.
6. Calhoon 1973
7. See NPS.gov
8. Smith 264–7.
9. Calhoon 502.
10. Van Tyne, pp. 182–3.

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