

Ideologically Driven Loyalists:

The Values that Defined Loyal Colonists in the American Revolution

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Regarding the American Revolution, there is a general knowledge of the opposing sides of the Revolutionaries and their “oppressors,” the British. Little is known about another party: the Loyalists. History is written by the victors, and the Loyalists were not the winning party of the Revolutionary War. This group of people had a unique experience compared to the other players because of their intermediate position. They resided in the same region as the Revolutionaries and experienced the same life (up until the Revolution). But, they had a different opinion of the British Empire. This group of people was set apart from the other players in the Revolution. They were men, and supporting women, who opposed the Revolution, unified by their politics and paternalistic values, which appealed to a wide array of people. Male loyalists were those who held politically moderate views before the Revolution. They believed that British law should be changed within constitutional means. Paternalism generated a vast range of other Loyalists, such as women and African Americans, because of their adherence to following the male authority, which in this case was the King.

Land-owning men were those allowed in politics. Their voices were heard, and so they were educated about where they stood in regards to political affiliation. Loyalism was attributed to those who believed in “British Empire liberal constitutionalism” while Revolutionaries developed their own “American democratic republicanism.”¹ Liberal constitutionalism meant that the Loyalists wanted to preserve their values, one of which was following the British constitution. Whether or not they liked the laws applied by government, these people believed that the constitution should not be questioned, and that if a law should

¹ Maya Jasanoff. *Liberty's Exiles: American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), 13.

be opposed by the people, it should be changed within the means of the constitution. The Revolutionaries affirmed their political opposition by not following the constitution and throwing it out in revolution. When taxation became an increasing issue within the royal colonies, the political differences intensified and led one party to revolt, while others wished to continue living within the constitution.

To the British North American subjects, the King was the head of their governmental household. "King above parliament, king as father, king as honest broker."² Prior to the Revolution, the colonies were under the influence of the British lifestyle of viewing the King as a father. "By 1740, colonials saw the king as a caring figure who expressed his affections to them in royal proclamations, in political rites, and in his behavior by the colonial newspapers."³ Within this polity, all institutional structures looked alike.⁴ Hierarchies resembled one another, especially the government to the family. There was a male at the top, who was the provider and caregiver.

The imperial emotional structure, like the social structure, looked like a wedding cake, with clear hierarchies. The social customs that expressed these affections made clear the ordering of society... The king's government provided treats on royal holidays, on days of legal or political ceremony, or after military victories.⁵

The government reinforced emotional ties to the king by positive reminders of the King as a provider. This triggered the cult of the monarchy. Celebrations of holidays like Pope's Day were governmentally recognized and celebrated to link their Protestant beliefs to the empire's

² Brendan McConville. *The King's Three Faces: The Rise & Fall of Royal America, 1688-1776.* (Williamsburg, Virginia: U of North Carolina, 2006), 255.

³ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 110.

central values.⁶ Royal approval and promotion were displayed on products, such as those for hygiene, to make sure the King was in colonists' everyday lives.⁷ Images of the monarchy were brought into the colonists' homes with the distribution of royal portraits.⁸ "The royalization of private life expressed a swelling loyalty, but it also allowed provincials to imagine the empire as a personal emotional relationship between individuals and their king."⁹

Because of the patriarchy, women were subordinate and dependent on men. Only men could participate in "loyalty, service, and sacrifice"¹⁰ making loyalty a male-dominated idea. Because of the patriarchal hierarchy, men led the family while women were expected to follow the beliefs of their husbands or closest male relative. "The decision as to whether or not to become a Loyalist was a political issue left to the male household head."¹¹ Living in a patriarchy, meant "the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in the society in general... Basic to the marriage contract was the notion that the man had the power to make the important decisions for the family unit."¹²

In the early eighteenth century, a debate began in the British colonies. After a legal battle over whether a slave was still legally bound to a master after entering a new country, England, the attorney general made a decision. In 1706, "Lord Chief Justice Holt had ruled that

⁶ Ibid., 62.

⁷ Ibid., 125.

⁸ Ibid., 131.

⁹ Ibid., 121.

¹⁰ Janice MacKinnon. *While the Women Only Wept: Loyalist Refugee Women in Eastern Ontario*. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 1993), 126.

¹¹ Ibid., 159.

¹² Ibid., 7.

'as soon as a Negro comes into England he becomes free'."¹³ The debate and legal decisions continued throughout the century, and the colonial slaves also got wind of the case. Great Britain saw many different cases with many different rulings regarding slaves' freedom over the decades. The "most authoritative word on English Common Law," William Blackstone's *Commentaries* of 1765, influenced colonial slaves toward revolution. The Vinerian Professor at Oxford stated that "the spirit of liberty is so deeply implicated in our constitution and rooted even in our very soil that a slave or negro, the moment he lands in England, falls under the protection of the laws and in regard to all natural rights becomes *eo instati* [from that moment] a free man."¹⁴ This sentiment toward British abolition continued to the Revolution.

Loyalists and Revolutionaries shared similar lives until the eve of the Revolution. The difference was their reaction to certain legislation, which depicted their underlying politics and values. The series of taxes imposed on the colonies by the British not only angered the Revolutionaries, but also sparked a debate. Those who believed that the taxes exceeded parliamentary authority and called for removal of the government were Revolutionaries in the making; on the other side, those who believed taxation was within the limits of parliament's authority or that compromise had to be made were Loyalists to the British government.¹⁵ But, that does not mean that everyone liked being taxed. Some Loyalists and Revolutionaries shared grievances over the high costs,¹⁶ but Loyalists considered adjustment to the law within the constitution, while Revolutionaries decided to revolt. In a changing world where division was

¹³ Simon Schama. *Rough Crossings: The Slaves, the British, and the American Revolution*. (New York: Harper, 2005), 31.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 31-32.

¹⁵ Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exiles*, 21.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

created between colonists and residents of Great Britain, a third faction was maintained because of Loyalists' distinct politics.

Loyalists were those who opposed the Revolution; living their daily lives as if they were not supporting a radical shift in government. This group of people had a "common desire to preserve their connection to their patrons and thereby to the British Empire."¹⁷ This is because of their desire to preserve the same political structure and uphold the British constitution that they had known and lived by throughout the colonies. The Loyalists wished for the governing body to remain the same. They enjoyed living under the British constitution. This stance resulted in the attack of many Loyalists. For example, when word that John Taylor was in support of upholding parliamentary policies, such as taxations, he was forced to ride a wooden horse by Revolutionaries. This bullying resulted in a "mortal wound on the private parts of his body of the length of six inches [and] the breadth of four inches,"¹⁸ showing how Loyalists were dying for their politics. Loyalists agreed that "arbitrary taxes levied by the distant Parliament violated their political liberties as British subjects... but the government did have the right to tax the colonies externally to regulate trade but not to tax them internally to raise revenue."¹⁹ Chief Justice of the Superior Court of the Province of Massachusetts Bay and Loyalist, Peter Oliver, agreed that he appreciated having the British rule.

But for a Colony, wch. had been nursed in its infancy, with the most tender Care & Attention; which had been indulged with every Gratification that the most forward Child could wish for; which had even bestowed upon it such Liberality, which its Infancy &

¹⁷ Ruma Chopra, *Unnatural Rebellion Loyalists in New York City during the Revolution*. (Charlottesville: U of Virginia, 2011), 67

¹⁸ Breen, *American Insurgents, American Patriots*, 15.

¹⁹ Chopra, *Unnatural Rebellion*, 28.

Youth could not think to ask for; which had been repeatedly saved from impending Destruction...²⁰

Although Oliver sees the colonists as children to their caring father, the king, his political ideologies challenged the law to change. “If they err, for err is human, & they err ignorantly, all just Allowances ought to be given to them, untill we can convince them, by Reason, of what is right.”²¹ He gave forgiveness to his “father”, the King, because he was simply human and could not understand what must be changed by the law. Many loyalists agreed that they must uphold the law, because of their moderate beliefs in upholding the constitution, but agreed that taxation was unfair and that it should be changed through legal action and compromise. For this reason, Loyalists never made a declaration, unlike the revolutionaries’. They believed it was illegal under British law.²²

A prominent Loyalist, Thomas Hutchinson, voiced his opinion, stating that “I see no prospect... of the government of this province [Massachusetts] being restored to its former state without the interposition of the authority in England.”²³ Hutchinson “stood by the full enforcement of the law”²⁴ which attracted negative responses from those who did not want to adhere to British law. Hutchinson agreed that a government of supreme authority, like that of the British, was an inevitable attribute of government and had to exist in any organized society. He believed that “if one understood the political nature of the British empire one would see how reasonable Parliament’s actions really were.”²⁵ Like Oliver, he did not agree with all of the

²⁰Peter Oliver. *Peter Oliver's Origin and Progress of the American Rebellion: A Tory View*. (Ed. Douglass Adair and John A. Schultz. [New ed.] Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1967), 3.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

²² Chopra, *Unnatural Rebellion*, 59.

²³ Breen, *American Insurgents, American Patriots*, 61.

²⁴ Bernard Bailyn. *The Ordeal of Thomas Hutchinson*. (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap of Harvard, 1974), 50.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 79.

legislation such as the Stamp or Townshend Acts, but would do his job of enforcing them if only he had an outright royal command.²⁶

Loyalists held the legal protection of property and liberty, civil government, and constitutional promises by the British in high regard.²⁷ Based on their experience with Revolutionaries and their committees that monitored Loyalist activities, the Loyalists believed that the revolutionary government presented a greater threat than that of the British government. Loyalists wanted to maintain the British rule because they believed that an optimum amount of rights and liberties remained with the British.

New York City was to be a “perfect stage to demonstrate the benefits of belonging to the British empire.”²⁸ The city, controlled by Loyalists, and later British, had a majority of Loyalists who wanted to display the greatness of their moderate politics and relationship to the British. “The city elite sought to assemble a political interest that would restore the imperial edifice that had promised them commercial and political benefits... [It] could demonstrate the freedom and prosperity possible under the orderly governance of conservative elites who remained loyal to the constitution.”²⁹ The politics that unified Loyalists were proudly displayed in New York City.

With taxation and different beliefs regarding the limit of British government, the colonists split between Loyalists and Revolutionaries. The Loyalists still had their embedded love for the King, while the Revolutionaries let go of their emotional ties. When it came time to

²⁶ Ibid., 172.

²⁷ Chopra, *Unnatural Rebellion*, 223.

²⁸ Ibid., 65.

²⁹ Ibid., 65.

join in the fight, Loyalists declared that they would “suffer any death rather than take up arms against [their] king.”³⁰ The Loyalists still clung to their paternalistic values, uniting them for the same cause.

Women in this era were characterized by “helplessness and inferiority,”³¹ but Loyalist women broke those barriers with their large role in the Revolution. With the men fighting for their beliefs, women were forced into “traditionally male-dominated worlds of politics and warfare.”³² With a lack of men at home, women had to leave behind the paternalistic institutions that had made them Loyalists for survival. Women took part in the warfare by becoming spies, which changed gender roles even more when statutes relating to treason changed language from male-only to gender neutral.³³ Women went to even greater lengths to survive by joining the work force to simply not starve. With the lack of men, women even took on political roles like petitioning authority about their harsh conditions.³⁴

African Americans continued to be adherents to paternalism, viewing the King as the leader in law. In 1775, Lord Dunmore issued a proclamation to free Patriot-owned slaves who joined the British military.³⁵ As a figurehead for British government, King George III became their liberator. As their liberator, the King’s enemy (the Revolutionaries) became the slaves’ enemy.³⁶ They looked to “Britain as their deliverer, to the point where they were ready to risk

³⁰ Breen, *American Insurgents, American Patriots*, 181.

³¹ MacKinnon, *While the Women Only Wept*, 8.

³² *Ibid.*, 44.

³³ *Ibid.*, 47.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 75.

³⁵ Jasanoff, *Liberty’s Exiles*, xiii.

³⁶ Schama, *Rough Crossings*, 5.

life and limb to reach the lines of the royal army.”³⁷ Of twenty thousand African American participants in the revolution,³⁸ the majority were fighting for the British. In cities like Cambridge and Philadelphia, slaves were banned from serving in the Continental army, while Washington and Congress worked to ban enlistment further. Ultimately, the ban was lifted with manpower needs,³⁹ with most slaves serving as a substitute for their master.⁴⁰

The Revolution also brought about a rift between Loyalist social classes. Wealthy, government officials who were Loyalists were being attacked and exiled, while local Loyalists were joining corps to add to the British cause, all while being harassed. Incentives were provided for Loyalist enlistment in the form of payment.⁴¹ On a petition in New York regarding oath of loyalty and plea for resumption of civil order, less than 2% were officeholders, making the remaining 98% of different classes. These people “expected royal power to protect... their liberty,”⁴² once again reiterating the idea of an authoritarian figure protecting the colonists, like a father protecting his child.

At the end of the war, Loyalists still were neither British nor part of the new United States. They were still the enemy of the self-declared winners of the war.⁴³ Without a true home, most Loyalists traveled to other British colonies, where they would be under the

³⁷ Ibid., 6.

³⁸ Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exiles*, 46.

³⁹ Schama, *Rough Crossings*, 83.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 101.

⁴¹ Chopra, *Unnatural Rebellion*, 117.

⁴² Ibid., 67-68.

⁴³ Allen, *Tories*, 327.

government and values that they had fought to protect. Many traveled to Jamaica, Florida, Canada, and around the globe with the hope to live in harmony rather than hostility.⁴⁴

During and after the Revolution, Loyalists sought to live in a British colony to fit their needs. "Loyalists now were aliens and, to the most vindictive winners, enemies."⁴⁵ Especially with a migration of Loyalists to colonies like Canada, this group still sought British constitutional structure. The majority of Loyalists living in Canada opposed revisions of government within the Quebec Act. With petitions and compromise, the Quebec Act was replaced with the Constitutional Act in 1792, meeting their political needs with "freehold tenure and an elected assembly." During this whole process, Loyalists still never rejected the king as their leader.⁴⁶ Even the War of 1812 reinforced the Canadian Loyalist history with "antipathy to republicanism and to the United States and their attachment to the British empire and conservative values."⁴⁷

While their husbands were joining Loyalist corps, many women took the opportunity to find asylum in Canada. "Loyalist women, by becoming refugees, experienced a dislocation uncommon to most Patriot women."⁴⁸ Even when women believed they were escaping the harsh reality of the Revolution to live in Quebec, they still faced devastation. On the journey there, many either lost their lives on sunken ships, or with disease and starvation aboard.⁴⁹ Paternalism brought women into a harsh world in which they had to take on dramatic new roles. Even after the Revolution, women were not able to return to their previous lives. Many

⁴⁴ Ibid., 326-327.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 327.

⁴⁶ MacKinnon, *While the Women Only Wept* 141-145.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 157.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 30.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 136.

Loyalists sought compensation for their lost property as a result of the Revolution through the Loyalist Claims Commission.⁵⁰ Many female Loyalists attempted to get government assistance, but because “few of them possess[ed] the legal documents sought by the commissioners, or could rehearse the particulars of livestock, merchandise, or land values in as great detail as their male peers,”⁵¹ the women were denied.

After the Revolution, slaves with Loyalist owners were returned to their masters. “The property rights of white Loyalists... took precedence over promises to blacks.”⁵² Most freed slaves of Revolutionaries, as promised by Dunmore and Clinton, who were lucky enough to move to the British colony in Canada, later sailed to Sierra Leone after an unsuccessful attempt at colonization.⁵³ There, Loyalist ideologies persisted within elections to choose who would control “legitimate authority to the elected.”⁵⁴ Although the colonists there were becoming rebellious with political disagreement, the black Loyalists still professed their love for the King and hoped that he would be the one to appoint their local authorities, trusting his caring leadership, a mirror of the previous revolution in the North American colonies.⁵⁵

One hundred thousand Loyalists evacuated to other British colonies following their defeat, a majority going to Canada.⁵⁶ “Most Loyalists were subsistence, tenant farmers, not men of property... They had proven their loyalty through military service, which had led to property losses and suffering... After 1783... petitioners described themselves as ‘persons of

⁵⁰ Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exiles*, 130-131.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁵² MacKinnon, *While the Women Only Wept*, 102.

⁵³ Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exiles*, 295.

⁵⁴ Schama, *Rough Crossings*, 374.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 377.

⁵⁶ Allen, *Tories*, 333.

property in the colonies.”⁵⁷ Trying to access financial and material gain from the Loyalist Claims Commission, many poor Loyalists lied about their social standing. With the revolutionary debate over taxation, Loyalists in Canada ironically “received ample grants of cheap land and paid virtually no taxes. In the United States, saddled with war debt, state governments charged far more for land, and demanded substantially higher taxes in turn.”⁵⁸

The Loyalists in the American Revolution faced brutal confrontation. They were not residents of Britain, and they were not fighting for the Revolution. They were in-betweeners whose differences created solidarity. Loyalists were abused and tortured for their beliefs and values. Wishing to remain under British rule with their moderate politics, and fighting for their beloved image of the King brought them together. In defense of their unifying ideologies, Loyalists composed a substantial group that is typically put into the background of the revolutionary narrative.

⁵⁷ MacKinnon, *While the Women Only Wept*, 148.

⁵⁸ Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exiles*, 207.

Allen, Thomas B. *Tories: Fighting for the King in America's First Civil War*. New York: Harper, 2010.

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