Book Reviews


Although the Atlantic focus has created a surge of interest in loyalists and loyalisms in British North America, understood to encompass today’s Canada and the Caribbean colonies as well as the “old thirteen,” the field remains fragmented compared to other Atlantic-influenced revisionist work. The collection of nine essays in *The Loyal Atlantic: Remaking the British Atlantic in the Revolutionary Era*, synthesizes some of the recent developments, offers research insights, and suggests future directions for the field. These essays were selected from the thirty papers presented at the inaugural loyalist conference in Orono, Maine in the summer of 2009.

An important and fact-filled map begins the edited volume. Titled, “The Loyal British Atlantic, ca. 1775-1795,” it highlights the international destinations of loyalist refugees during and following the American Revolution. The loyalist diaspora extended north to Canada and the Maritime colonies, south to East Florida and the Bahamas, and east to the British Isles. The map also circumscribes the loyalist world to two decades in the late eighteenth century. Yet, immediately following, the introductory essay, by Jerry Bannister and Liam Riordan, situates loyalism as a longer tradition rooted in the 1660s (with the Stuart Restoration), and extending to the 1840s, only ending with the 1837 rebellions in Upper and Lower Canada. Bannister and Riordan stress the continuity and the depth of loyalist intellectual thought, while at the same time calling for case studies and local analyses because “loyalism took place in specific experiential contexts” (23). They distinguish thoughtfully between active (military) and passive loyalism, conditional and unconditional loyalism, and revolutionary and long-term loyalism. Surprisingly, they reach for the Oxford English Dictionary to show the breadth of loyalism—its connections with legality, fidelity to lawful government, as well as to promises, oaths, and honor. This recurring tension—between the map and the introduction...
and between loyalists and the longer history of British loyalism—remains unresolved. Part of the confusion lies in the lack of clear distinction between the political category of loyalists and the intellectual persistence of devoted allegiance to a composite monarchy.

The remaining eight essays are divided into four parts. Part I is organized under the heading, “Interpretive Frameworks of Allegiance and Imperial Transition.” Keith Mason’s essay examines the problem of defining loyalism and loyalist identities in a heterogeneous Atlantic world, employing in part the case study approach advocated in the introduction. Mason focuses on the microhistory of Virginian loyalist, James Parker, to allow for a “more dynamic developmental approach to the issue of loyalist identity” (53). John G. Reid’s important essay on “imperial-aboriginal friendship” points to the centrality of migrations to loyalist studies. Reid argues that the revolution was less significant to the aboriginal population in Nova Scotia than the large-scale settlement of loyalist refugees. It was not the events of the revolution but the demographic shifts in the post-war period that left the aborigines without claims to British friendship.

The essays in Part II situate American loyalists as participants of a thriving printing culture and as carriers of this culture to new British Atlantic dominions after the Revolutionary war. Philip Gould analyzes the loyalists’ critique of *Common Sense* during the imperial crisis to show how they participated in larger debates about originality and authorship. By recasting Paine’s work as merely imitative, the loyalists claimed a “political high ground” (117): they equated the pamphlet’s lack of literary quality with low political credibility. Gwendolyn Davies examines the successful establishment of a printing press in the new colony of New Brunswick. By establishing a newspaper, which published sermons as well as legal documents, just eight months after migration to New Brunswick, loyalist printers established a basis for identity and accountability in the still unformed province.

Both essays in Part III examine the migration of southern loyalist exiles and their slaves to St. Augustine and to the Bahamas. Jennifer K. Snyder underscores that movement outside the thirteen colonies did not mean freedom for southern African-American slaves. For loyalist slaves compelled to move with their masters to St. Augustine during the revolutionary war, migration meant disrupted kinship networks and continued enslavement. In addition, Spanish and rebel raids left them vulnerable in the Florida-Georgia borderlands. Carole Waterson Troxler focuses on the southern loyalists’ use of the Bahamas as a strategic site for plantation set-