



LOYALISTS & PATRIOTS: THE COLONIES DIVIDED



During the American Revolution, the American colonists had to decide whether to support the War for Independence or remain loyal to the British ruled by King George III. Some Americans could not decide which side to choose and remained neutral during the war. Most American colonists, however, did choose sides. Those who supported independence from Britain were known as Patriots and colonists who opposed independence from Britain were known as Loyalists. Most Patriots supported independence because they felt that British laws imposed on the American Colonies violated their rights as British citizens (e.g. taxing without consent, quartering [housing] soldiers in citizens' homes, and denying colonists the right to a trial). Many Patriots lived in the Northern New England Colonies, especially Massachusetts. Most Loyalists who opposed

independence tended to be wealthy landowners, Anglican clergymen, or people with close business or political ties to Britain. There was a high concentration of Loyalists in New York City and in the Southern Colonies. Many

Loyalists agreed that the American colonists had suffered at the hands of the British, but they hoped that a peaceful reconciliation with British government was possible. During the Revolution taking a Loyalists stance was dangerous, especially in the Southern Colonies. Many Loyalists were brutally attacked and killed. Their property was destroyed or confiscated (taken away). Loyalists by thousands fled the American Colonies for their own safety. Some Loyalists moved to England and many more moved to nearby Canada.



PATRIOTS UNIFORM



LOYALISTS UNIFORM

Those living in the American colonies had various reasons for choosing their side. The Iroquois Confederation (a group of Native Americans that formed an alliance), except the Seneca Tribe, had a working relationship with British officials. The Confederation was angered by colonists encroaching (to advance beyond proper or former limits) into their territory so they naturally sided with British. Tenant farmers often chose their position on the Revolution based on which side their landowner supported. For example, if a Patriot landowner was cruel and always raised the rent, the tenant (occupant) would be a Loyalist, but if the Patriot landowner was kind and collected a fair rent, the tenant would be a Patriot. Non-English speaking colonists, especially those living in the frontier, often kept to themselves and viewed the conflict between the British government and the Patriots as family quarrel (disagreement) among the English. Many chose to stay out of it, hoping to be left alone. Colonists who were in debt with British creditors often became Patriots since they hoped winning the Revolution could get them out of paying back their debt. The colonists had different points of view that would spark intense debates throughout the colonies. With Patriot influence, ultimately the colonists declared independence initiating the American Revolution.