

British Journal for Military History

Volume 11, Issue 2, August 2025

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ISSN: 2057-0422

Date of Publication: 26 August 2025

Citation: Robert S Davis, 'The British Southern Strategy in the American Revolution, 1775-1782', *British Journal for Military History*, 11.2 (2025), pp. 2-24.

www.bjmh.org.uk



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The British Southern Strategy in the American Revolution, 1775-1782

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ABSTRACT

The British southern strategy was not a side-show or afterthought in the world war that began as the American Revolution (1775-1783), but a part of the planning efforts from the earliest days of the war. Implementation of this strategy continued for more than two years after Cornwallis' famous surrender at Yorktown, which resulted from the failure of the southern strategy. This article argues for a new assessment of the war within this context, while examining the importance and ultimate failure of these campaigns.

'A great empire, like a great cake, is most easily diminished at the edges.'

Benjamin Franklin.¹

Introduction

The dark and bloody events of a British southern strategy were not a side-show to the better-remembered campaigns of the American Revolution. This persistent idea to defeat, or at least salvage something from, the rebellion began in the early months of the war. These campaigns continued for more than two years after they resulted in the famous Franco-American victory at Yorktown on 19 October 1781. General Nathanael Greene's subsequent campaign in the South led to Great Britain's withdrawal from Georgia and the Carolinas.²

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DOI: [10.25602/GOLD.bjmh.v11i2.1889](https://doi.org/10.25602/GOLD.bjmh.v11i2.1889)

¹William B. Willcox, ed., 'Rules by Which a Great Empire May Be Reduced to a Small One, 11 September 1773,' *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 20, January 1 through 31 December 1773, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976), pp. 389–399.

²For how the Southern Strategy was carried out, see Richard Sears Dukes, Jr., 'Anatomy of a Failure: British Military Policy in the Southern Campaign of the American Revolution, 1775-1781 (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of South Carolina, 1993); Alan

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This southern strategy, part of America's part of a still unnamed world war, would have significant consequences as that rebellion metamorphosed into a global conflict.³ The British Empire was severely challenged by relying on a southern strategy and continuing the American war after 1777. French armies fought beside American ones at Savannah and Yorktown.

The Spanish conquest of West Florida, today's Alabama, Mississippi, and western Florida, brought about Spain acquiring East and West Florida, expanding the Spanish Empire to its greatest extent, with the Louisiana Territory that it had previously acquired from France after the end of the Seven Years War in America, and after suppressing a two-year revolt by the residents. The Dutch and French captured valuable British possessions in the Caribbean and threatened to take others. Historian Piers Mackesy even argues that 'The American War had been largely fought and decided in the West Indies.'⁴

The British government, however, did not believe the war was lost but envisioned, at the least, retaining the southern colonies with popular local support. This would allow the Empire to contain the new United States from Canada, the Caribbean, and the

Pell Crawford, *The Fierce People: The Untold Story of America's Revolutionary War in the South*, (New York: Knopf, 2024); Brian W. Neil, *The Southern Campaign of the American Revolution: The American Insurgency from 1780 to 1782*, (Coppell, TX: Createspace, 2015); John S. Pancake, *This Destructive War: The British Campaign in the Carolinas 1780-1782*, (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1985); J. Pearson, *The Failure of the British Southern Strategy During the Southern Campaign of the American Revolution*, (Coppell, TX: Createspace, 2014); Donald Stoker, Kenneth J. Hagan, and Michael T. McMaster, eds., *Strategy in the American Revolution: A Global Approach*, (New York: Routledge, 2010), and David K. Wilson, *The Southern Strategy: Britain's Conquest of South Carolina, and Georgia, 1775-1780*, (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2005).

³See Walter Russell Mead, *God and Gold, Britain, America, and the Making of the Modern World*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007).

⁴Piers Mackesy, *The War for America, 1775-1783*, (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), p. 144, pp. 159-160, p. 166, p. 209, p. 397, p. 400, p. 416, pp. 436-439, pp. 444-518. See, among other works, Lorrie D. Ferreiro, *Brothers at Arms: American Independence and the Men of France and Spain who Saved It*, (New York: Knopf, 2016); Andrew O'Shaughnessy, *European Friends of the American Revolution*, (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2023); Gabriel Paquette and Gonzalo M. Quintero Sarava, *Spain and the American Revolution: New Approaches and Perspective*, (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2022); and James W. Rabb, *Spain, Britain and the American Revolution in Florida, 1763-1783*, (Jeffersonville, NC: McFarland, 2007).

southwest American provinces. They continued this southern strategy when they came to see defeat as the only alternative.⁵ Later attempts worldwide at thwarting populist insurrections reflected this failure in the American Revolution.

The coming two-hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary of this colonial war for independence is an appropriate time to review the realities of that conflict's composition, creation, and identity. British leaders believed that loyal subjects on the Carolina frontier could overcome the American Revolution by deciding for the King's cause.⁶ As late as 1780, Georgia's colonial Chief Justice James Simpson, in reviewing the Loyalist situation in Georgia and South Carolina, still argued that the majority of those living in the southern backcountry would oppose rebels from the coastal interests, who did not represent and often ignored the western settlements.⁷

Americans' opposition to coastal-oriented governments was real. On the eve of the Revolution, this dissent raged in the backcountry from Vermont to Georgia. During the North Carolina Regulator Rebellion of 1764 to 1771, as many as six thousand frontiersmen, three-quarters of the adult males on that frontier, revolted against corrupt local governments with connections to the coastal elite. The parallel South Carolina Regulator Rebellion organised vigilante action against frontier banditry, successfully forcing the province's government to establish the rule of law through courts and jails created outside of Charleston.⁸ Virginia had similar problems.

⁵John Shy, *A People Numerous and Armed: Reflections on the Military Struggle for American Independence*, (New York: Oxford, 1976), pp. 163-192; Michael A. McDonnell, 'The American War for Independence as a Revolutionary War,' *American History: Oxford Research Encyclopaedias* (7 July 2016), 2, 11-12, online: <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.013.1>. Accessed 2 February 2024. For a defence of British failure in the American Revolution, see Anne Midgley, 'First Empire Unravelling: Why the British Lost in the War of American Independence,' *Saber and Scroll Journal* 2 (Fall 2013): pp. 139-153.

⁶Jim Piecuch, *Three Peoples One King: Loyalists, Indians, and Slaves in the Revolutionary South 1775-1782*, (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2008), pp. 14-25, p. 36, pp. 37-40; 'Colonel Robert Gray's Observations on the War in Carolina,' *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine* 11 (July 1910): p. 153.

⁷Gordon B. Smith, *Morningstars of Liberty: The Revolutionary War in Georgia, 1775-1783*, (Milledgeville, GA: Boyd Publishing, 2006), pp. 183-184.

⁸See Woody Holton, *Forced Founders: Indians, Debtors, Slaves, and the Making of the American Revolution in Virginia*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999) and Robert S. Davis, William Bartram, Wrightsborough, and the Prospects for the Georgia Backcountry, 1765-1774, in Kathryn E. Holland Braund and Charlotte M. Potter, eds. *Fields of Vision: Essays on the Travels of William Bartram*, (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2010), pp. 15-32.

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Georgia's royal governor, Sir James Wright, had no use for regulators, but he avoided those troubles by giving the settlers on his frontier courts and other concessions.⁹

Frontiersmen, however, did not see these conflicts as reasons to rebel against their protector, Great Britain. In 1774, hundreds of backcountry Georgians signed petitions in support of royal rule. Royal Governor Josiah Martin of North Carolina arranged a similar successful petition drive in his colony. In South Carolina, thousands of frontiersmen who opposed the Revolution refused to sign the Continental Association.¹⁰

Aware of the situation, American rebels offered the frontier political power and self-determination, which the colonial system had denied them. British promises of restoring an old order would not influence people who had received little benefit from it. The rebels united the individual settlements through shared interests, such as land, security, and political power, using persecution, promotion, and propaganda. America's new currency often carried the image of a frontier rifleman.¹¹

The rebels could also make a case against British imperial policies. Having won its war against the French and their Indigenous allies in America, the King's government blocked western settlement across the Appalachian Mountains to avoid the expense of conflict with the Indigenous people and to encourage Anglo-American settlement

⁹Gary B. Nash, *The Unknown American Revolution: The Unruly Birth of Democracy and the Struggle to Create America*, (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), pp. 108-109; E. W. Caruthers, *Revolutionary Incidents and Sketches of Characters Chiefly of the Old North State*, (Philadelphia, PA: Hayes & Zell, 1854), p. 19, p. 37. See Woody Holton, *Forced Founders: Indians, Debtors, Slaves, and the Making of the American Revolution in Virginia*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999) and Robert S. Davis, 'William Bartram, Wrightsborough, and the Prospects for the Georgia Backcountry, 1765-1774', in Kathryn E. Holland Braund and Charlotte M. Potter, eds. *Fields of Vision: Essays on the Travels of William Bartram*, (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2010), pp. 15-32, and for the history of the North Carolina Regulators, see Marjoleine Kars, *Breaking Loose Together: The Regulator Rebellion in Pre-Revolutionary North Carolina*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); and for the South Carolina Regulators, see Richard M. Brown, *The South Carolina Regulators: The Story of the First American Vigilante Movement*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963).

¹⁰Carole Waterson Troxler, *The Migration of Carolina and Georgia Loyalists to Nova Scotia and New Brunswick*, (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1974), pp. 8-17.

¹¹See Philip L. Mossman, *Money of the American Colonies and Confederation*, (New York: American Numismatic Society, 2012).

in the newly acquired Canada and Florida. The King's Privy Council's order of 7 April 1773 ended the practice of granting free headright land in America, which became an American grievance listed in the Declaration of Independence. On the eve of the Revolution, a London court case initiated the process that would ultimately lead to the abolition of slavery in the Empire. The British government worked to discourage migration to America.

The British southern strategy to try to take advantage of this situation began in the rebellion's earliest days when North Carolina's Royal Governor Josiah Martin, driven by the rebellion to take refuge aboard a Royal Navy vessel, wrote to the British commander in America, General Thomas Gage, in the summer of 1775 about retaking his colony using loyal Americans. Gage promised gunpowder for this effort.¹²

Martin believed he could muster two to three thousand men, half of them well-armed, but Georgia Loyalist Thomas Brown in East Florida thought Martin could embody ten thousand men if they had sufficient weapons. By the end of 1775, Alexander Shaw, a friend of the governor, wrote to William Legge, the 2nd Earl of Dartmouth and the Secretary for the Colonies, that a successful uprising in North Carolina would embolden the Loyal Americans in neighboring South Carolina to guarantee the success of a British campaign to capture Charleston, South Carolina's and the South's all-important port.

Dartmouth ordered ten thousand stands of arms and six light field pieces for the effort. Further, in December 1775, General Sir William Howe, Gage's successor, planned to dispatch a fleet with two thousand British soldiers to North Carolina to implement Martin's plan and then move against Charleston.¹³

¹²Josiah Martin to Earl of Dartmouth, 28 August 1775, in K. G. Davies, ed., *Documents of The American Revolution, 1770-1783*, 19 vols., (Dublin, IE: Valentine Mitchell, 1973-1983), 11: pp. 88-92; Duane Meyer, *The Highland Scots of North Carolina*, (Raleigh, NC: North Carolina Archives, 1963), pp. 53-60; Edward A. Bator, *South Carolina 1775: A Crucible Year*, (Franklin, TN: American History Imprints/American History Press, 2009), p. 12, p. 35; Mackesy, *The War for America*, pp. 43-44. Also see Michael Cecere, *March to Independence: The American Revolution in the Southern Colonies, 1775-1776*, (Yardley, PA: Westholme, 2021).

¹³Thomas Brown to Governor Lord William Campbell, 18 October 1775; Martin to Lord George Germain, 21 March 1776; and 'Narrative of Proceedings of Loyalists in North Carolina,' 25 April 1776, in Davies, *Documents of The American Revolution*, 11: p. 149 & 12: pp. 85-90, pp. 112-117; Gerald Krieger, 'British Miscalculation and Loyalist support in the American Revolution,' March 19, 2024, *Journal of the American Revolution*, online <https://allthingsliberty.com/2024/03/british-miscalculation-of-loyalist-support-in-the-american-south-round-one/>. Accessed 21 March 2024; David K. Wilson, *The* www.bjmh.org.uk

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As Martin promoted his plan, a prosperous Virginia planter and captain in the Royal Militia, Moses Kirkland, arrived in St. Augustine, the capital of British East Florida, in late September 1775. He sought military support for the six thousand South Carolina backcountry Loyalist Americans he claimed to represent. He presented his request to Royal Governor Patrick Tonyn before setting sail to advocate to General Gage in Boston.¹⁴

Kirkland first arrived in Virginia, where he assisted colonial Governor John Murray, Lord Dunmore, in the capture of Norfolk. His Lordship had plans for his colony, like those of Martin in North Carolina. On 7 November 1775, he issued a proclamation encouraging enslaved men to escape from the plantations of Virginia, when the owners had supported the rebellion. Martin would enlist these Black Americans as soldiers, an idea that sparked fears of violence among the white population, regardless of politics. (Of the fifteen hundred enslaved who came forward, eventually one thousand died from disease and other conditions of their service.) From there Kirkland set out for Boston in late November, only for his ship to be captured by an American privateer.¹⁵

Through these events, a written copy of Kirkland's plans came into the hands of the revolutionary leadership, including proposals to arm Cherokee and Creek warriors, as well as the enslaved, which became of great propaganda value for the rebellion. In Charleston, on 18 August 1775, African American Thomas Jeremiah, likely the wealthiest person of his race in the colonies and a slave owner, died on the gallows on the charge that he intended to start a slave rebellion for the King's cause. At Lindley's Fort, South Carolina, on 15 July 1776, Loyalist white Americans fought beside

Southern Strategy: Britain's Conquest of South Carolina and Georgia, 1775-1780, (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2005), pp. 1-2; Ricardo A. Herrera, 'The King's Friends: Loyalists in British Strategy', in David Stoker, Kenneth J. Hagan, and Michael T. McMaster, eds., *Strategy in the American War of Independence*, (London: Routledge Cass Military Studies, 2010), p. 102.

¹⁴Robert S. Lambert, *South Carolina Loyalists in the American Revolution*, (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1987), pp. 40-41.

¹⁵Wayne Lynch, 'Moses Kirkland and the Southern Strategy, Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution 10' (2-3) (April 2015): pp. 1-13; Thomas B. Allen, *Tories: Fighting for the King in America's Civil War*, (New York: Harper, 2011), pp. 154-155; Alan Gilbert, *Black Patriots and Loyalists: Fighting for Emancipation in the War for Independence*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012), pp. 9-10; Woody Holton, *Forced Founders: Indians, Debtors, Slaves, and the Making of the American Revolution in Virginia*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), pp. 156-161.

Cherokees in an attack that newly arrived rebel militia repulsed, further igniting the fears of the frontier population of British-sponsored raids and uprisings.¹⁶

With violent revolutions, what often began as partisan political guerrillas frequently degenerate into apolitical bandits or worse. Patriots could be such terrorists, but the notoriety of the kind of men who followed John Bacon, Thomas Brown, William 'Bloody Bill' Cunningham, the Harpe brothers, Francis Hopkins, Daniel McGirt, the Doan Outlaws, and Joseph Coffel/Scophol gave Loyalists a negative reputation in general, even to the present. Those Americans were often foreign-born or connected with Indigenous people, further causing them to be viewed with disdain by the far greater native-born American population.¹⁷

In 1775-1776, Sir Henry Clinton led a mismanaged effort to reach both the Loyalists on the frontier and capture Charleston. The two thousand South Carolina backcountry men who came forward suffered defeat and dispersal at the Great Cane Brake on 22 December 1775, and North Carolina's Revolutionary militia defeated frontier Loyalists at the Battle of Moore's Creek Bridge on 27 February 1776, before Clinton's fleet could arrive. Far from a success, this uprising ultimately led to the North Carolina Provincial Congress agreeing to approve American independence.

Governor Martin assured Lord Dartmouth that twenty thousand Loyalists would mobilise in North Carolina, but only fourteen hundred men, largely former Regulators and Scottish immigrants, came forward. By the time of their defeat at Moore's Creek,

¹⁶Bator, *South Carolina 1775*, p. 131; Piecuch, *Three Peoples One King*, pp. 76-82; Harry M. Ward, *Between the Lines: Banditti of the American Revolution*, (Westport, CT: Meckler, 2002), p. 194; J. William Harris, *The Hanging of Thomas Jeremiah: A Free Black Man's Encounter with Liberty*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), pp. 119-135; Nash, *Unknown American Revolution*, p. 37, p. 38, pp. 392-394; Cecere, *March to Independence*, p. 61.

¹⁷The UK National Archives (hereinafter TNA) Patrick Tonyn to Sir William Howe, 1 May 1778, British Headquarters Papers, no. 1142, and Thomas Brown to Lord Cornwallis, 16 July 1780, Cornwallis Papers, 30/11/2, pp. 307-311, Ward, *Between the Lines*, p. 200; Timothy Compeau, *Dishonoured Americans: The Political Death of Loyalists in Revolutionary America*, (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2023), pp. 76-104; Edward J. Cashin, *The King's Ranger: Thomas Brown and The American Revolution on The Southern Frontier*, (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1989), pp. 73-74; 'An ADDRESS to any People that have been attacked, and may be attacked, that they may consider,' *Royal Georgia Gazette* (Savannah), 12 August 1779, p. 1 cc. 1-3; Leland J. Bellot, *William Knox: The Life and Thought of an Eighteenth-Century Imperialist*, (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1977), p. 142, p. 144.

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they numbered only eight hundred to a thousand men. They fought with broad swords and had only five hundred muskets.¹⁸

The King's cause suffered across the South as the Continental Congress prepared to declare Independence. Continental troops turned back Clinton's landing at Wilmington, North Carolina, in April and May and his fleet at Sullivan's Island near Charleston on 28 June 1776. A company from the Georgia frontier helped suppress Loyalist Americans in South Carolina, and frontier Georgians also helped to defend Savannah against a British fleet. At that same time, militias from the four rebelling Southern colonies destroyed the villages of the Cherokee in retaliation for raids on the frontier that were in response to white intrusions onto native lands.

America's revolutionaries, however, continued to fear that a successful uprising by Loyalists in the South could be fatal to the Revolution. Major General James Moore of North Carolina prepared to march from Wilmington, North Carolina, to defend Charleston, South Carolina, against a return of a British invasion force, and the new rebel provincial governments passed oppressive anti-Loyalist legislation.¹⁹

In the interim, Kirkland, having escaped from imprisonment in Philadelphia with the help of local Loyalists, finally presented his plans for a southern campaign to Howe in New York. In March 1777. The general sent him back to East Florida to work as a deputy superintendent for Indian affairs. In 1778, Kirkland wrote to Sir Henry Clinton and other British officials, continuing his call for the implementation of a southern strategy.²⁰

¹⁸Wilson, *The Southern Strategy*, pp. 2-3, pp. 26-34; Bobby Gilmer Moss, *The Snow Campaign, 1775: First Land Battle of the American Revolution in South Carolina*, (Blacksburg, SC: Scotia Hibernia Press, 2007), pp. 1-20; Ward, *Between the Lines*, pp. 191-193; Allen, *Tories: Fighting for the King*, pp. 141-153; Cecere, *March to Independence*, pp. 110-111; Herrera, *The King's Friends*, p. 110; James Kirby Martin, *Insurrection: The American Revolution and Its Meaning*, (Yardley, PA: Westholme, 2019), p. 99; Baikia Harvey to Thomas Baikia, 30 December 1775, D2/385, Orkney County Library, Kirkwall, UK.

¹⁹C. L. Bragg, *Crescent Moon Over Carolina: William Moultrie and American Liberty*, (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2013), pp. 51-58; Piecuch, *Three Peoples One King*, pp. 52-57, pp. 59-60. Also see David Lee Russell, *Victory on Sullivan's Island: The British Cape Fear/Charles Town Expedition of 1776*, (Conshohocken, PA: Infantry Publishing, 2002) and Nadia Dean, *A Demand for Blood: The Cherokee War of 1776*, (Cherokee, NC: Valley River Press, 2012).

²⁰Randal M. Miller, 'A Backcountry Loyalist Plan to Retake Georgia and the Carolinas', 1778, *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 75 (October 1975): pp. 207-214.

Efforts at Loyalist uprisings subsequently failed elsewhere. General Sir William Howe took command of the British forces in America and brought officer commissions for Loyalists willing to organize a counter-revolution. He supplemented his army with seven thousand Americans as provincial regiments in 1777-1778 from Philadelphia and the Middle Colonies, but only to use them as second-line garrison troops. A bloody civil war followed, with the Loyalists suppressed by their neighbors who had joined the rebellion.

Howe withdrew his various local garrisons from rebel attacks, an outcome the opposite of what was intended by creating the provincial troops. General Sir Henry Clinton, Howe's successor, withdrew the British army to New York to save it, and likely the British fleet, from destruction in the summer of 1778.²¹ The tension over the overall strategy of trying to 'Americanise' the British war effort, southern or otherwise, can be seen by New Jersey and South Carolina vying for the most battles.

New York's highlands divided New England, the primary source of soldiers and supplies for George Washington's army, from the mid-Atlantic colonies; the local population was politically divided. This route was so critical that one of the reasons for the 1775 American invasion of Canada was to prevent a British invasion by that route. The new state militias crushed Loyalist uprisings there, contributing to General John Burgoyne's surrender at Saratoga in 1777. In 1780, John Connolly proposed a plan for rallying landless white squatters on the Ohio frontier for the King's army, but that went nowhere.²² British planners did not learn from these mistakes and near

²¹T. Cole Jones, *Captives of Liberty: Prisoners of War and the Politics of Vengeance in the American Revolution*, (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), p. 113; George W. Kyte, 'Some Plans for a Loyalist Stronghold in the Middle Colonies', *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies*, 6 (July 1949): pp. 179-180, p. 183; Herrera, 'The King's Friends,' pp. 107-108; Andrew Jackson O'Shaughnessy, 'To Gain the Hearts and Subdue the Minds of America: General Sir Henry Clinton and the Conduct of the British War,' *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 158 (September 2014): pp. 199-208; Mackesy, *The War for America*, pp. 214-217; Julie Flavell, *The Howe Dynasty: The Untold Story of a Military Family and the Women Behind Britain's Wars for America*, (New York: W. W. Norton, 2021), p. 243. Also see Liam Riordam, *Many Identities, One Nation: The Revolution and Its Legacy in the Mid-Atlantic*, (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

²²Martin, *Insurrection*, p. 99; Michael E. Shay, *The Whites of Their Eyes: Revolutionary War Hero Israel Putnam from Roger's Rangers to Bunker Hill*, (Blue Ridge Summit, PA: Stackpole Books, 2023), p. 217; Shy, *People Numerous and Armed*, pp. 186-190; Richard A. Ketchum, *Saratoga: Turning Point of America's Revolutionary War*, (New York: Holt 1997), pp. 70-71, pp. 80-81, pp. 108-109, p. 111, p. 239, pp. 252-254, pp. 315-316.

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disasters, despite a history of failure with populist resistance, from the English Civil Wars in the 1640s to the occupation of Cuba and the Philippines in the 1760s.²³

A whole new military effort had to be made for a sustained war in America. Ships were captured in the already inadequate and expensive trans-Atlantic supply line by American, French, and other privateers at sea and as wrecks on the coast.²⁴ European soldiers, unaccustomed to America, died of disease at an appalling rate.²⁵

Most military and political leaders on either side never understood the Loyalists' limitations, motives, and potential.²⁶ Historian Ricardo A. Herrera wrote that American Loyalists had 'motives diverse and actions anything but united,' but generally only sought the protection of 'their liberties and individual freedoms' within the British Empire, not to fight and die as martyrs.²⁷

Of these Americans, other than the bandits, former colonial officials, and terrorists, wrote historian Anne Midgley: 'Some were staunchly devoted to the Crown, while others shifted their alliance with the vagaries of war. Many were better termed as neutrals and wished to be left alone.'²⁸ For example, a few hundred Loyalists from the South Carolina frontier, named by their neighbors as Scopholites after a notorious chicken thief, marched across Georgia to St. Augustine in East Florida in the spring of

²³For British failure in Cuba, see Elena A. Schneider, *The Occupation of Havana: War, Trade, and Slavery in the Atlantic World*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), and for the Philippines, see Shirley Fish, *When Britain Ruled the Philippines, 1762-1764: The Story of the 18th Century British Invasion of the Philippines during the Seven Years War*, (n. p.: S. Fish, 2003). Also see James M. Johnson, Christopher Pryslopski, and Andrew Villani, eds. *Key to the Northern Country: The Hudson River Valley in the American Revolution*, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2013).

²⁴Sam Willis, *The Struggle for Sea Power: A Naval History of the American Revolution*, (New York: W. W. Norton, 2015), pp. 93-95, pp. 99-100, p. 433, p. 434; Mackesy, *The War for America*, pp. 66-67, p. 68, pp. 118, pp. 223-224, pp. 367, p. 518. For privateers, see Eric Jay Dolin, *Rebels at Sea: Privateering in the American Revolution*, (New York: Liveright, 2022).

²⁵Shay, *The Whites of Their Eyes*, pp. 71-82; Midgley, 'First Empire Unravelling,' p. 146.

²⁶Leonard Woods Larabee, *Conservatism in Early American History*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1943), pp. 164-165.

²⁷Herrera, 'The King's Friends,' pp. 100-101.

²⁸Midgley, 'First Empire Unravelling,' p. 146; Leonard Woods Larabee, *Conservatism in Early American History*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1943), pp. 164-165.

1778. Many of their number, however, subsequently deserted and returned to South Carolina. Their units disappeared and were resurrected repeatedly.²⁹

Despite the surge in activity in the North, the southern strategy survived because it had influential supporters. So many Loyalists and officials wanted to believe it could still succeed that recriminations for the plan's eventual failures would hardly exist beyond the later famous pamphlet war between Sir Henry Clinton and Lord Charles Cornwallis.³⁰

Even after the British disaster at Saratoga in 1777, in places like Glasgow, Kingston, and occupied New York, Loyalists rallied to support the King's cause. Prominent New Yorker William Bayard, for example, wrote to Lord George Germain in the autumn of 1778 that half of America still supported the King's Cause and needed only to be encouraged by the arrival of British soldiers to carry muskets in overthrowing the American rebels.³¹

Excuses to justify continuing the southern strategy became desperate, such as answering the declining number of British troops by capturing enough American Continental soldiers to force an exchange for the King's soldiers surrendered at Saratoga, not abandoning the Loyalists, and thwarting French and Spanish ambitions to drive the British from the hugely financially important Caribbean. Among the King's subjects who were not ready to accept the Empire's defeat, it became an obsession, mainly because of what they saw as malicious American anarchy, even terrorism, in place of an orderly government.³²

²⁹Robert S. Davis, '1778: Loyalism and the Failure of the British Military in the Southern Colonies,' *Proceedings of the South Carolina Historical Association* (2018): pp. 67-68, p. 72.

³⁰See Benjamin F. Stevens, ed. and comp., *The Campaign in Virginia, 1781: An Exact Reprint of Six Rare Pamphlets on the Clinton-Cornwallis Controversy* 2 vols., (London: Malby and Sons, 1888-1889); Richard Middleton, 'The Clinton-Cornwallis Controversy and Responsibility for the British Surrender at Yorktown,' *History* (July 2013): pp. 370-389; and John E. Ferling, 'The Troubled Relationship Between Clinton and Cornwallis and Their "War" after the War,' *Journal of the American Revolution* (15 July 2021), online <https://allthingsliberty.com/2021/07/the-troubled-relationship-between-clinton-and-cornwallis-and-their-war-after-the-war/>. Accessed 1 July 2025.

³¹Brad A. Jones, *Resisting Independence: Popular Loyalism in the Revolutionary British Atlantic*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2021), pp. 159-160; William Bayard to Germain, [September 1778?], in Davies, *Documents of the American Revolution*, 13: p. 410.

³²Jones, *Captives of Liberty*, pp. 158-159, pp. 191-192; Roberts, *The Last King of America*, pp. 340-341, pp. 358-359; Herrera, 'The King's Friends,' p. 111; William B. Wilcox, 'British Strategy in America in 1778,' *Journal of Modern History* 19 (June 1947): p. 121.

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The American people proved an insurmountable obstacle to British hopes for the southern strategy. A crucial lesson to be learned from the southern strategy is that even if the American army had been defeated and the Continental Congress bankrupt, Britain's army of thirty thousand men still had to conquer more than a million Americans, many of whom were armed and hostile. Further, a Loyalist, by definition, seeks to continue as before, which few Americans, even British supporters, wanted.³³

Some observers saw the reality in America. Charles Carroll of Carrollton, a Maryland signer of the Declaration of Independence, correctly predicted at least as early as 29 March 1776 that the British army, however often victorious in formal battles, could only succeed in holding the ground where it stood, having not been defeated as much as rendered irrelevant by the hostility of the civilian population. He believed Great Britain must be 'an immense loser' in America because war fails as a lone weapon in subduing the human spirit.³⁴ Frederick Howard, the Fifth Earl of Carlisle, while heading an official peace commission sent by Parliament to the Americans, wrote similarly to his wife as early as 1778. He believed that Americans only gave the British army support when it was physically present and that the Loyalists, who consisted of refugees, were being protected at great government expense.³⁵

Other voices continued to call for an invasion of the Southern colonies, however. Former Royal Governors Sir James Wright of Georgia and Governor Lord William Campbell of South Carolina presented a memorandum to Lord George Germain, Secretary for the Colonies, in 1778, arguing for the restoration of their colonies to provide food for the population of British East Florida and the enslaved labour who worked in the immensely profitable sugar islands in the Caribbean. Wright also presented his ideas to the King.³⁶ By the winter of 1777-1778, William Knox, undersecretary to Germain, presented the first plan to invade Georgia to reach the frontier Loyalists of the Carolinas. He had served as provost in Georgia and still owned plantations there.³⁷

³³Ketchum, *Saratoga*, pp. 10-11.

³⁴McDonnell, 'The American War,' pp. 3-11.

³⁵Lord Carlisle to Lady Carlisle, 21 July 1778, in Historical Manuscripts Commission, comp., *The Manuscripts of The Earl of Carlisle Preserved at Castle Howard*, (London: H. M. Stationary Office, 1897), pp. 356-357.

³⁶Greg Brooking, *From Empire to Revolution: Sir James Wright and the Price of Loyalty in Georgia*, (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2024), p. 159; Robert S. Davis, comp., *Georgia Citizens and Soldiers of the American Revolution*, (Easley, SC: Southern Historical Press, 1979), pp. 11-19; Lynch, 'Moses Kirkland and the Southern Strategy,' 6-7.

³⁷Edward J. Cashin, *Governor Henry Ellis and the Transformation of British North America*
13 www.bjmh.org.uk

Germain made the final decisions in London regarding the British conduct of the war. He blamed the campaign's failure in the South in 1775-1776 on military incompetence, rather than on the flawed basic idea. Historian John Ferling wrote that the Secretary depended upon the advice of the most extreme Loyalists, men desperate to continue the war for various reasons, including self-interest.³⁸

On 8 March 1778, Germain sent General Sir Henry Clinton detailed instructions on conducting the operations of what had become a world war. As usual, the Secretary called for bold offensives even as British military resources declined. On his list of what historian William B. Wilcox described as 'a collection of strategic fossils,' he ordered Knox's plan for an invasion of Georgia to be implemented as the beginning of what he envisioned would restore America to the Crown at least as far north as Maryland.³⁹

Germain wanted much more, including an invasion of Honduras, which would have cut the Spanish Empire in half. Clinton was also ordered to send reinforcements to Jamaica and to dispatch five thousand men under Major General James Grant to invade the island of St. Lucia, and thirteen hundred reinforcements under Brigadier General John Campbell of Strachur to British Pensacola in West Florida in a scheme going back to at least 1771 to take Spanish New Orleans and the Lower Mississippi River. Spain provided the Americans with gunpowder and other significant support during the Revolution.⁴⁰

(Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1994), pp. 217-219; Leland J. Bellot, *William Knox: The Life and Thought of an Eighteenth-Century Imperialist* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1977), pp. 39-40, pp. 143-144, pp. 155-157, pp. 163-165.

³⁸John E. Ferling, *The Loyalist Mind: Joseph Galloway and the American Revolution*, (State College, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977), pp. 47-54; Bellot, *William Knox*, p. 142; Mackesy, *The War for America*, pp. 47-60.

³⁹Germain to Sir Henry Clinton, 8 March and 3 December 1778, in Davies, *Documents of the American Revolution*, 15: pp. 58-59, p. 279; Wilcox, 'British Strategy in America in 1778,' p. 121; Mackesy, *The War for America*, p. 225.

⁴⁰Germain to Clinton, 8 March 1778, in K. G. Davies, *Documents of the American Revolution*, 15: pp. 58-59; Germain to Clinton, 25 June 25 1779, Colonial Office Papers 5/97. For British ambitions to seize Spanish Louisiana, see William S. Coker and Robert R. Rea, eds., *Anglo-Spanish Confrontation on the Gulf Coast during the American Revolution*, (Pensacola, FL: Gulf Coast History and Humanities Conference, 1982); Michael J. Devine, 'Territorial Madness: Spain, Geopolitics, and the American Revolution', (Master's Thesis, College of William and Mary, 1994); J. Barton Stares, *Tories, Dons, and Rebels: The American Revolution in British West Florida*, (Gainesville, FL: University of

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Not the first choice for his position, and the fourth in a series of generals who failed in America, Clinton again unsuccessfully tried to resign. By 1778, he likely had given up hope that the British would win the war. In a characteristically blunt statement, he protested to Germain:

You have but one army. 'Tis a good one; it has never been affronted. You may want it. You ought to have kept it together, nursed it, cherished it. By the present arrangement, I wish one-half of it would not be underground by Christmas and the rest reduced to an ignominious fight to avoid still greater disgrace.⁴¹

A consistent sceptic of every idea, including his own, Clinton had opposed the southern strategy even before his campaign to the Carolinas failed in 1775-1776. He saw no value in encouraging Loyalist uprisings only to abandon these Americans, as had already happened at least three times. The general delayed carrying out the new southern effort, likely hoping it would be dropped. France's entry into the conflict postponed the start of the year's campaign until winter set in, as Clinton had to march to try to find and defeat Washington's army while defending his base in New York and returning six hundred marines to Halifax.⁴²

The general finally selected Lieutenant Colonel Archibald Campbell, a Scottish engineer without command or field experience, to lead the new expedition south in the worst weather of the year. He thus appointed an officer he could afford to lose to command British English, Highlander, Hessian, and Loyalist troops, whom he could most spare for a campaign to a place of which Campbell knew nothing and had no maps. Clinton also chose a man named Boyd, reportedly an Irish immigrant to the North Carolina frontier, so little known that his past remains a mystery, to embody the frontier Loyalists.⁴³

Florida Press, 1976); and J. Leitch Wright, *Anglo-Spanish Rivalry in North America*, (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1975).

⁴¹Sir Henry Clinton to H. F. C. Pelham-Clinton, Second Duke of Newcastle, 27 July 1778, Ne C 2648, Newcastle Collection, Manuscripts and Special Collections, University of Nottingham, UK.

⁴²Undated memos of Henry Clinton, vol. 15, folios 16, p. 28, p. 29, Clinton to Lord George Germain, 3 April 1779, enclosing Augustin Prévost to Clinton, 6 March 1779, vol. 55, folios 35-36, and Clinton to William Eden, 21 & 22 August 1779, vol. 66, folio 12, Henry Clinton Papers, William L. Clements Library; O'Shaughnessy, 'To Gain the Hearts and Subdue the Minds of America,' p. 202.

⁴³Robert S. Davis, 'The British Invasion of Georgia,' *Atlanta Historical Journal* 24 (winter 1980): pp. 1-8; Holgar Hooch, *Scars of Independence America's Violent Birth*, (New York:

Despite Clinton's misgivings, the military expedition to Georgia overcame many dangers and obstacles, including attacks by American privateers and winter storms on the dangerous coast of North Carolina. The invading army achieved a spectacular series of victories in formal battles in Georgia.⁴⁴

Campbell's superiors in New York, however, had assured him of a reinforcement of six thousand Carolina Loyalists, as well as significant numbers of Indigenous native allies. By the time he and his British troops had penetrated the backcountry and captured Augusta on 31 January 1779, he had lowered his expectations to only a thousand Americans coming to his standard. He never saw an Indigenous Cherokee or Creek warrior.

Although reports arrived in Georgia that thousands of Loyalists had gathered on the Saluda River in South Carolina, Boyd's uprising numbered, on its best day, only six hundred men, and they were of little value to meeting the King's army's expanding need for soldiers or to fulfilling the aspirations for winning the war. In Great Britain, a report arrived that this uprising had consisted of only three hundred and fifty men.

Many of the Loyalists who answered Boyd's call were from emigrant families that had benefited from privileges under British colonial rule and sought only protection from their native-born American neighbors. Some of these 'Tories' came because of threats to their lives and property by their more adamant Loyalist neighbors.⁴⁵

Crown, 2017), p. 58, p. 302, p. 309; Stephenson, *Patriot Battles*, p. 67; Archibald Campbell, *Journal of An Expedition against The Rebels of Georgia in North America*, ed. Colin Campbell, (Augusta, GA: Richmond County Historical Society, 1981), pp. x-xi, pp. 4-7, p. 103 Fn. 12.

⁴⁴Davis, 'The British Invasion of Georgia in 1778,' pp. 5-26; Martha Condray Searcy, '1779: First Year of the British Occupation of Georgia,' *Georgia Historical Quarterly* (Summer 1983): pp. 168-188.

⁴⁵ Campbell, *Journal*, 6, pp. 61-65, p. 76; Herrera, 'The King's Friends,' p. 100; Jack P. Greene, 'Independence, Improvement and Authority: Toward a Framework for Understanding the Histories of the Southern Backcountry during the Era of the American Revolution,' in Ronald Hoffman, Thad W. Tate, and Peter J. Albert, eds., *An Uncivil War: The Southern Backcountry during the American Revolution*, (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1985), pp. 17-20; 'Savannah Feb. 11,' *Royal Georgia Gazette* (Savannah), 11 February 1779, p. 4 c. 1; 'Case of the Loyalists,' *Political Magazine* 4 (April 1783): p. 266; Stephenson, *Patriot Battles*, pp. 67-68, pp. 130 Fn. 196. For a general discussion of frontier social conflict in the colonial period, see Eric Hinderaker and Peter C. Mancall, *At the Edge of Empire: The Backcountry in British North America*, (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2003) and William R. Nester,

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Only two hundred and seventy to three hundred and fifty of Boyd's survivors eventually reached the British army, and only after being defeated by an inferior number of Georgia and South Carolina militiamen, in some instances their neighbours, at the Battle of Kettle Creek. Boyd fell mortally wounded in this battle; his Lieutenant Colonel John Moore of North Carolina was lynched later in the war, and his Major, John Spurgeon of South Carolina, died in a battle at the end of March 1779. State courts tried many of these Loyalists, at least seven of whom consequently went to the gallows. Some of the patriot militia at Kettle Creek were North Carolinians who traveled hundreds of miles in inclement weather in pursuit of Boyd's Loyalists.⁴⁶

Brigadier General Augustin Prévost, the British commander in Georgia, did not consider Boyd's effort even large enough to be counted as an uprising and saw the southern strategy a failure. A British periodical summed up these men as 'being in a great measure composed of emigrants from North Britain' and only of military value when serving with the royal army.

Campbell, as military governor, restored Georgia's colonial militia before he left Georgia in March 1779; however, almost all of the fourteen hundred men who had taken his oath to the King disappeared or joined the enemy. The British army in Georgia became another isolated garrison that steadily declined due to malaria and smallpox.⁴⁷

Clinton acknowledged Campbell's success in Georgia without comment. He wrote that he likely would have given up on his subsequent expedition to South Carolina in 1780 if the American and French armies had forced the surrender of the British army in Georgia in the autumn of 1779. Awaiting news of the outcome of that siege held back Clinton's already delayed fleet in New York until the harbor almost froze over. His new invasion of South Carolina might have been delayed for months if not canceled, making Savannah one of the most significant battles of the Revolution.

The Frontier War for American Independence, (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2004).

⁴⁶Robert S. Davis, 'The Loyalist Trials at Ninety Six in 1779,' *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 80 (April 1979): pp. 172-181.

⁴⁷*The Annual Register or a View of the History, Politics, and Literature for the Year 1780*, (London, 1781), pp. 179-180; Prévost to Germain, 5 March 1778, in Davies, *Documents of The American Revolution*, 17: pp. 76-78; William B. Willcox, *Portrait of a General: Sir Henry Clinton in The War of Independence*, (New York: Knopf, 1964), pp. 320-322; Allen, *Tories: Fighting for the King*, p. 280; R. Arthur Bowler, *Logistics and the Failure of the British Army in America, 1775-1783*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 245.

Because of the winter weather, Clinton's fleet, instead of taking the usual ten-day voyage from New York to Savannah, was at sea for three weeks, risking destruction in storms along the coast of North Carolina. Cavalry horses died, and the ordnance ship floundered. Clinton's army, however, forced the surrender of Charleston after a six-week siege on 12 May 1780.⁴⁸

In 1780, the South Carolina campaign began as a great success but ultimately became a repetition of the failure in Georgia in 1779 on a larger scale, resulting in a deeper division and increased isolation of the British army in America. The King's forces overran South Carolina. Georgia became the only American state ever reduced to colony status. Many of the frontier militia surrendered but were allowed to live freely as prisoners of war on parole. They were required to take an oath of Loyalty to the King and were subject to conscription.⁴⁹

Lord Charles Cornwallis established a chain of interlocking outposts across the South Carolina frontier and ordered the recruitment of Loyalists for provincial units. British Major Patrick Ferguson formed a corps of provincials and colonial militia. He believed that the militiamen held great promise, especially the five thousand former members of patriot Brigadier General Andrew Williamson's frontier Ninety-Six [District] Brigade.⁵⁰

The British, however, again risked much at great expense, and ultimately gained less than nothing. Ferguson was killed, and his corps was destroyed at the Battle of King's Mountain on 7 October 1780, by a multi-state patriot militia that included men who had traveled hundreds of miles and had left their settlements vulnerable to attack by Cherokee and Creek warriors to fight in the campaign. After King's Mountain, support for the British cause steadily declined except amongst the most diehard Loyalists.⁵¹

⁴⁸For the British Siege of Charleston, see Carl P. Borick, *A Gallant Defense: The Siege of Charleston 1780*, (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2012).

⁴⁹Kenneth Coleman, 'Restored Colonial Georgia, 1779-1782,' *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 40 (March 1956): pp. 1-20; Stephenson, *Patriot Battles*, pp. xviii-xxi, p. 19, pp. 298; Herrera, 'The King's Friends,' pp. 113-114.

⁵⁰Scott Syfert, 'Ramsour's Mill, 20 June 1780: The End of Cornwallis' Loyalist Illusion,' *Journal of the American Revolution*, <https://allthingsliberty.com/2024/08/ramsours-mill-june-20-1780-the-end-of-cornwallis-loyalist-illusion/>. Accessed 2 July 2025; Robert S. Davis, 'Lord Montagu's Mission to Charleston in 1781: American POWs for the King's Cause in Jamaica', *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 84 (April 1983): pp. 89-109; Bobby Gilmer Moss, *Roster of the Loyalists in the Battle of King's Mountain*, (Blacksburg, SC: Scotia-Hibernia, 1998), pp. ix-xviii.

⁵¹Herrera, 'The King's Friends,' p. 114; Midgley, 'First Empire Unravelling,' pp. 145-147. Among the works on King's Mountain, see Phillip Thomas Tucker, *King's Mountain*:

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Guerrilla warfare killed British and Loyalist soldiers at Blackstock, Hammond's Store, Hanging Rock, Ramsour's Mill, and elsewhere while making legends of patriot partisans Elijah Clark, Francis Marion, Thomas Sumter, and others. A Loyalist wrote as early as 1780,

Most of these actions would in other wars be considered as skirmishes of little account, and scarcely worthy of a detailed narrative. But these small actions are as capable as any of displaying conduct. The operations of war are being spread over the vast continent. It is by such skirmishes that the fate of America must be decided. They are therefore as important as battles in which a hundred thousand men are drawn up on each side.⁵²

Americans did fight for and give their lives for the King's cause. Provincial units served with distinction as auxiliaries to the regulars but proved too few and improperly trained to succeed in a partisan war. Arguments about pay and leadership arose, and the officers of the Regulars often held these Americans in contempt as soldiers. Clinton ordered the exchange of British officers to have priority over Loyalists. The provincials declined in numbers due to battles, desertions, and disease.⁵³

South Carolina, in particular, represented the significance of the southern strategy to the American Revolution, with one-fifth of all battle deaths and one-third of the wounded for the entire war in 1780-1781 alone, primarily among Americans fighting Americans. They accounted for one-third of the total war casualties. Forty of their

Most Forgotten Battle That Changed the Course of the American Revolution, (New York: Skyhorse, 2024).

⁵²Herrera, 'The King's Friends,' p. 106, pp. 109-110; Compeau, *Dishonoured Americans*, pp. 55-56.

⁵³Quotation from *The Annual Register or a View of the History, Politics, and Literature for the Year 1781*, (London: James and Robert Dodsley, 1782): p. 83.

⁵³Herrera, 'The King's Friends,' p. 106, pp. 109-110; Compeau, *Dishonoured Americans*, pp. 55-56; Ward, *Between the Lines*, pp. 196-199; Robert W. Barnwell, 'Loyalism in South Carolina, 1765-1785,' (Ph.D. Dissertation, Duke University, 1941), pp. 322-325; Gregory Palmer, *Biographical Sketches of Loyalists of The American Revolution*, (Westport, CT: Meckler, 1984), p. 564; Wilbur Henry Siebert, *Loyalists in East Florida, 1774 to 1785*, 2 vols., (Deland, FL: Florida Historical Society, 1929), 1: pp 54-55, p. 75, pp. 77-78, pp. 85-87 & 2: pp. 333-335, p. 373; Cashin, *The King's Ranger*, p. 99, p. 109. For histories of the individual Loyalist provincial units, see Thomas B. Allen and Todd W. Braisted, *The Loyalist Corps: Americans in the Service of the King* (Takoma Park, MD: Fox Acre Press, 2011) and The On-Line Institute for Advanced Loyalist Studies: <http://www.royalprovincial.com/index.htm>. Accessed 2 July 2025.

battles were fought in the frontier Ninety Six Court District, where a visitor after the war reported twelve hundred widows created by the fighting.⁵⁴

Partisan murder became so common in the Deep South that cynics called killing unarmed prisoners the granting of a 'Georgia parole.'⁵⁵ Elsewhere, Americans called this crime 'lynching' from the executions of Loyalists by Colonel Charles Lynch of Virginia.⁵⁶ Ironically, men would return to the Revolution because of the British failure to protect them from their rebel neighbors. Clinton ordered no retribution against rebels for fear of retaliation against British officers being held as prisoners.⁵⁷

A Continental Army under Generals Nathanael Greene and Daniel Morgan, and their militia and partisan allies, mauled the British army in the South at such battles as Cowpens and Guilford Courthouse. Lord Cornwallis marched the remains of this field command from the Deep South to Virginia, the consequence of which would be surrendering his army at Yorktown.

⁵⁴Hooock, *Scars of Independence*, p. 308; Gary B. Nash, *The Unknown American Revolution: The Unruly Birth of Democracy and the Struggle to Create America*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), pp. 392-394; Ward, *Between the Lines*, p. 199; Midgley, 'First Empire Unravelling,' p. 146. For the guerilla war and civil violence in the South, see Ronald Hoffman, Thad W. Tate, and Peter J. Albert, eds., *An Uncivil War: The Southern Backcountry during the American Revolution*, (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1985); Dan L. Morrill, *Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution*, (Baltimore, MD: Aviation & Nautical Publishing, 1993); Patrick O'Kelley, 'Nothing but blood and slaughter': *Military Operations and Order of Battle of the Revolutionary War in the Carolinas*, 4 vols. (Bangor, ME: Booklocker, 2004); and David Lee Russell, *The American Revolution in the Southern Colonies*, (Jeffersonville, NC: McFarland, 2009).

⁵⁵William Moultrie, *Memoirs of the American Revolution, So Far as It Related to the States of North and South Carolina and Georgia*, 2 vols., (New York: D. Longworth, 1802), 2: p. 336; Dr. Thomas Taylor to Rev. John Wesley, 28 February 1782, Shelbourne Papers, William L. Clements Library, Ann Arbor; 'Savannah March 14,' *Royal Georgia Gazette* (Savannah), 14 March 1782, p. 3 column 1; E. W. Carruthers, *Revolutionary Incidents and Sketches of Characters Chiefly of the Old North State*, (Philadelphia, PA.: Hayes & Zell, 1854), p. 431.

⁵⁶Babits and Howard, *Long Obstinate, and Bloody*, p. 62.

⁵⁷Lawrence E. Babits, *A Devil of a Whipping: The Battle of Cowpens*, Revised Edition, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), p. 3; Searcy, '1779: First Year of the British Occupation of Georgia,' p. 175, p. 187; Davis, *Georgians in the Revolution*, p. 215, p. 224, and *Georgia Citizens and Soldiers of the American Revolution*, pp. 176-178.

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The 'King's friends' left behind found no protection beyond refuge in the overcrowded squalor of Charleston and Savannah garrison towns. Formerly enslaved Black people supplemented the garrison, partly to keep British and Hessian soldiers from deserting.⁵⁸

The British evacuated Georgia and South Carolina in the second half of 1782, which led to further changes. Four hundred thousand Loyalists, despite the war, chose to remain in the United States and contributed to the building of the new nation. Some African Americans, including those serving as soldiers for the King, also remained and even founded communities in the wilderness that would be destroyed by post-war white militia.

Tens of thousands of other Americans, but not all supporters of the British cause, and often only 'country people,' decided to leave the new United States, although sometimes to neighboring Canada and the Spanish Empire; many of them would even return to America. Loyalists established new homes and futures on six continents and in the South Pacific.⁵⁹

The evacuees included tens of thousands of enslaved and free African Americans. South Carolina had thirty thousand fewer enslaved people in 1783 than it had in 1775, and Georgia lost one-third of its number of chattel laborers. These evacuees included Reverend George Liele to Jamaica and Reverend David George and Henry Washington (formerly enslaved by George Washington) to Sierra Leone, carrying with

⁵⁸Samuel Kelly, *Samuel Kelly, an Eighteenth Century Seaman*, ed. Crosbie Garstin, (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1925), p. 51; David Ramsay, *The History of the Revolution of South-Carolina*, (Trenton, NJ: Isaac Collins, 1785), 1: p. 176; Sir James Wright to Sir Henry Clinton, 3 February 1780, Sir Henry Clinton Papers, vol. 84, item 9, William L. Clements Library, Ann Arbor, MI; Robert Biddulph to Thomas Harley, 12 March 1782, in 'Letters of Robert Biddulph, 1779-1783,' *The American Historical Review* 29 (October 1923): p. 106. For Cornwallis' decision to abandon the Deep South, see Ian Saberton, *The American Revolution in the south: Further Reflection from a British perspective in light of the Cornwallis Papers volume 2*, Revised Edition, (Tolworth, UK: Grosvenor House, 2022).

⁵⁹Kenneth Coleman, *The American Revolution in Georgia, 1763-1789*, (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1958), p. 167; Maya Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exiles: American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World*, (New York: Penguin, 2011), p. xii, p. 47, p. 50, pp. 70-71, pp. 249-250, p. 256, pp. 266-272, p. 276, p. 277, p. 280, p. 305, p. 306, p. 358; Compeau, *Dishonoured Americans*, pp. 137-172; Cashin, *The King's Ranger*, p. 156. Also see Jonathan Israel, *The Expanding Blaze: How the American Revolution Ignited the World, 1775-1848*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017) and Wallace Brown, *Victorious in Defeat: The American Loyalists in Exile*, (New York: Facts on File, 1984).

them the spirit of revolution that their followers would use in the worldwide overthrow of slavery.⁶⁰

The last battle of this world war was fought in India in June 1783, but the final fight in America, during the previous October, was also the concluding act of the southern strategy. Brigadier General Andrew Pickens and Lieutenant Colonel Elijah Clark, formerly patriot commanders at Kettle Creek, led their now veteran militia hundreds of miles through a wilderness to attack the Cherokee village of Long Swamp.

Pickens had played a significant role in the great American victory at Cowpens, South Carolina, and Clark is remembered as a great partisan leader across the South. This expedition principally sought English-born Colonel Thomas Waters, a Loyalist leader in Georgia and South Carolina from Kettle Creek to the war's end, who now led more than one thousand Cherokee against the Americans. Pickens subsequently defined, at Long Swamp, a new western boundary between Georgia and the lands occupied by the already refugee Cherokees. He sold the captured African Americans to pay Clark's soldiers.⁶¹

The southern strategy was doomed to fail. Even if three-fifths of Americans were neutral, that did not mean they could be persuaded to support a counter-revolution against their neighbors; not enough Americans were prepared to join the King's military to restore a colonial system recognised as needing reform, a revolution in itself. British policy changed, but the military and political leaders failed to adopt any practical means for winning the hearts and minds.⁶²

⁶⁰Simon Schama, *Rough Crossings: Britain, the Slaves, and the American Revolution*, (New York: Ecco, 2006), pp. 97-100; John W. Pulis, 'Bridging the Troubled Waters: Moses Baker, George Liele, and the African American Diaspora to Jamaica,' in John W. Pulis, ed., *Moving On: Black Loyalists in the Afro-Atlantic World*, (New York: Taylor and Francis, 1999), p. 183, pp. 189-192, pp. 199-203, p. Fn15. P. 35.

⁶¹Clyde R. Ferguson, 'General Andrew Pickens,' (Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1960), pp. 271-277; Andrew Pickens to Henry Lee, 28 August 1811, Thomas Sumter Papers, IVV107, Lyman C. Draper Collection, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison; Mary Bondurant Warren, comp., *Revolutionary Memoirs and Muster Rolls*, (Athens, GA: Heritage Papers, 1994), p. 146; Elijah Clark to John Martin, 3 November 1782, Joseph Valance Bevan Papers, Mss 71, Box 1, folder 9, Georgia Historical Society, Savannah; Robert S. Davis, 'Fighting in the Shadowlands: Loyalist Colonel Thomas Waters and the Southern Strategy,' *Journal of the American Revolution*, 11 June 2024: <https://allthingsliberty.com/2024/06/fighting-in-the-shadowlands-loyalist-colonel-thomas-waters-and-the-southern-strategy>. Accessed 2 July 2025.

⁶²McDonnell, 'The American War for Independence as a Revolutionary War,' 1.

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The southern strategy had become an excuse for not facing the reality of inevitable defeat, rather than a realistic plan for victory. America became for the British what would come to be called, in modern times, a garrison nation, where a foreign nation occupies a hostile land until it inevitably gives up and leaves. Operations were daunting, from transporting British troops through dangerous waters to Loyalists passing through enemy territory to protecting the civilian population.

Supporters of the King's cause would argue that the British army was not defeated, giving a false impression that military success was possible. The fate of a country ultimately falls to its people, rather than the temporary occupiers.⁶³

By 1778, even King George III could no longer see a path to military victory. The British Empire risked much by continuing the conflict. Generations of carefully crafted continental alliances were thrown away. Rich Caribbean sugar islands were at risk, arguing for an end to the war with the thirteen former mainland colonies to divert resources for taking French and Spanish possessions, possibly with American assistance. The capture of Gibraltar, Jamaica, or India would have threatened the British economy and its imperial military capabilities. France and Spain even attempted to mount an invasion of England.

Britain did suffer losses and near-disasters. Sugar Islands fell to France. The Spanish took Pensacola in May 1781 and the Bahamas in May 1782. A British naval victory at the Battle of the Saintes saved Jamaica from a joint invasion, but many ships were lost.⁶⁴ Clinton finally obtained an exchange for the Saratoga army, but only after Lord Charles Cornwallis' army left the Deep South, partially due to an unwillingness to fight the brutal partisan war in the Carolinas, and in the hope of finding Loyalists in Virginia.⁶⁵

Much could have been learned from the southern strategy and the American Revolution. Scholars during the Bicentennial of the United States observed that, contrary to conventional public history, America's war for independence shared many

⁶³Joseph J. Ellis, *The Cause: The American Revolution and Its Discontents, 1772-1783*, (New York: Liveright, 2021), pp. 237-238; Herrera, 'The King's Friends,' p. 100, p. 110.

⁶⁴Stone, *Our French Allies*, pp. 126-128; Thomas Schatmen, *How the French Saved America*, (Baltimore, MD: St. Martin's Press, 2017), p. 308; Willis, *The Struggle for Sea Power*, pp. 256-267, pp. 284-292, pp. 304-311. For Spain's campaigns, see Thomas E. Chavez, *Spain and the Independence of the United States: An Intrinsic Gift*, (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2003).

⁶⁵See Stanley D. M. Carpenter, *Southern Gambit: Cornwallis and the British March to Yorktown*, (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2019); and Richard Middleton, *Cornwallis: Soldier and Statesman in a Revolutionary World*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2022).

similarities with later revolutions. The experience of the conflict of 1775-1783 was repeated in such places as Afghanistan, Iraq, Vietnam, and elsewhere, and with similar results, argues for the American Revolution and its southern strategy as part of a greater human struggle for self-determination and independence, with all its consequences that continues to this day.⁶⁶

⁶⁶For comparisons of the American Revolution to Vietnam, see Michael Stephenson, *Patriot Battles: How the War of Independence was Fought*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), pp. xviii-xxi, pp. 19, p. 298; and Robert M. Calhoon, *Revolutionary America: An Interpretive Overview*, (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973), p. 108. Several works also compare Vietnam to Iraq after the Second Gulf War, including Kenneth J. Campbell, *A Tale of Two Quagmires: Iraq, Vietnam, and the Hard Lessons of War*, (New York: Routledge, 2007); Lloyd G. Gardner and Marilyn B. Young, eds., *Iraq and the Lessons of Vietnam*, (New York: The New Press, 2007); and John Dumbrell and David Ryan, eds., *Vietnam in Iraq*, (New York: Routledge, 2007).