Loyalists: A Profile of Loyalist Claims in 1781

There is a sometimes forgotten reality of Revolutionary America: the fact that the colonial population was deeply divided on the issue of a complete break with England. Also, that much Loyalist property was confiscated or destroyed by Patriot armies. By focusing on the impact of the Revolution on the Crown’s loyal subjects this document serves, first, as a reminder that revolutions are not and never have been polite disagreements among friends and, second, indicates who were likely to be Loyalists.

Questions to Consider

1. What occupational groups were more likely to support the cause of the Crown? What was the relationship among social class, economic standing, and Toryism?

2. Compare and contrast the socioeconomic profiles of the Revolutionaries and Loyalists.

3. Are there missing data or some other condition that would weaken a generalization based on this table? To what extent is generalization possible on the question of Loyalist identity? What precautions are necessary in analyzing the available social and economic data like that displayed in the table?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>No. of Claimants</th>
<th>% of Claimants</th>
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Farmers 1,368 49.1

Commerce

(a) Artisans 274 9.8
(b) Merchants and Shopkeepers 517 18.6
(c) Miscellaneous innkeepers, seamen, etc. 92 3.3

**Combined Commerce** 883 31.7

Professions

(a) Lawyers 55
(b) Teachers and professors 21
(c) Doctors 81
(d) Anglican clerics 63
(e) Other clerics 7
(f) Miscellaneous 26

**Combined professions** 253 9.1

Officeholders 282 10.1

2a. After the Seven Years’ War: The Promise of Expansion:

1b: The Overlapping Claims of States during the Critical Period:
2C: Jefferson’s Original Drawing of the Northwest Ordinance, 1784:

2d. The Framework for the Northwest Ordinance, 1787
3. A Little Rebellion Now and Then Is A Good Thing

A Letter From Thomas Jefferson To James Madison

Shays' Rebellion — a sometimes-violent uprising of farmers angry over conditions in Massachusetts in 1786 — prompted Thomas Jefferson to express the view that "a little rebellion now and then is a good thing" for America. Unlike other leaders of The Republic, Jefferson felt that the people had a right to express their grievances against the government, even if those grievances might take the form of violent action.

Jefferson airs his sentiments in a letter to James Madison on January 30, 1787, expressing justification for the series of protests led by Daniel Shay and a group of 1,200 farmers.

Jefferson also writes of his concern over John Jay's impending negotiations with Spain. Under consideration would be proposals to extend privileges in Spanish ports to American ships, while providing navigation rights on the Mississippi River to Spain.

In his letter to Madison, Jefferson expresses his belief that the agreement might be interpreted as opening up the Mississippi to Spanish rule, thus provoking a war between settlers in the west and Spain, and eventually, dividing the nation.

Paris, January 30th, 1787
Thomas Jefferson

Dear Sir,

My last to you was of the 16th of December; since which, I have received yours of November 25 and December 4, which afforded me, as your letters always do, a treat on matters public, individual, and economical. I am impatient to learn your sentiments on the late troubles in the Eastern states. So far as I have yet seen, they do not appear to threaten serious consequences. Those states have suffered by the stoppage of the channels of their commerce, which have not yet found other issues. This must render money scarce and make the people uneasy. This uneasiness has produced acts absolutely unjustifiable; but I hope they will provoke no severities from their governments. A consciousness of those in power that their administration of the public affairs has been honest may, perhaps, produce too great a degree of indignation; and those characters, wherein fear predominates over hope, may apprehend too much from these instances of irregularity. They may conclude too hastily that nature has formed man insusceptible of any other government than that of force, a conclusion not founded in truth or experience.

Societies exist under three forms, sufficiently distinguishable: (1) without government, as among our Indians; (2) under governments, wherein the will of everyone has a just influence, as is the case in England, in a slight degree, and in our states, in a great one; (3) under governments of force, as is the case in all other monarchies, and in most of the other republics.

To have an idea of the curse of existence under these last, they must be seen. It is a government of wolves over sheep. It is a problem, not clear in my mind, that the first condition is not the best. But I believe it to be inconsistent with any great degree of population. The second state has a great deal of good in it. The mass of mankind under that enjoys a precious degree of liberty and happiness. It has its evils, too, the principal of which is the turbulence to which it is subject. But weigh this against the oppressions of monarchy, and it becomes nothing. Malo periculosam libertatem quam quietam servitutem. Even this evil is productive of good. It prevents the degeneracy of government and nourishes a general attention to the public affairs.

I hold it that a little rebellion now and then is a good thing, and as necessary in the political world as storms in the physical. Unsuccessful rebellions, indeed, generally establish the encroachments on the rights of the people which have produced them. An observation of this truth should render honest republican governors so mild in their punishment of rebellions as not to discourage them too much. It is a medicine necessary for the sound health of government.

If these transactions give me no uneasiness, I feel very differently at another piece of intelligence, to wit, the possibility that the navigation of the Mississippi may be abandoned to Spain. I never had any interest westward of the Allegheny; and I will never have any. But I have had great opportunities of knowing the character of the people who inhabit that country; and I will venture to say that the act which abandons the navigation of the Mississippi is an act of separation between the Eastern and Western country. It is a relinquishment of five parts out of
eight of the territory of the United States; an abandonment of the fairest subject for the payment of our public debts, and the chaining those debts on our own necks, in perpetuum.

I have the utmost confidence in the honest intentions of those who concur in this measure; but I lament their want of acquaintance with the character and physical advantages of the people, who, right or wrong, will suppose their interests sacrificed on this occasion to the contrary interests of that part of the confederacy in possession of present power. If they declare themselves a separate people, we are incapable of a single effort to retain them. Our citizens can never be induced, either as militia or as soldiers, to go there to cut the throats of their own brothers and sons, or rather, to be themselves the subjects instead of the perpetrators of the parricide.

Nor would that country quit the cost of being retained against the will of its inhabitants, could it be done. But it cannot be done. They are able already to rescue the navigation of the Mississippi out of the hands of Spain, and to add New Orleans to their own territory. They will be joined by the inhabitants of Louisiana. This will bring on a war between them and Spain; and that will produce the question with us, whether it will not be worth our while to become parties with them in the war in order to reunite them with us and thus correct our error. And were I to permit my forebodings to go one step further, I should predict that the inhabitants of the United States would force their rulers to take the affirmative of that question. I wish I may be mistaken in all these opinions.

Yours affectionately,

Th. Jefferson

4. The Massachusetts Rebels and their Opponents, 1786-1787

A. "A Captain and One of Shays' Council": African Americans in Shays' Rebellion

When debt-ridden farmers led by the Revolutionary veteran, Captain Daniel Shays, arose in western Massachusetts during the winter of 1786-87, Prince Hall* in Boston pledged the support of his lodge of black Masons in the crushing of the rebellion. Whatever Hall's real reasons may have been, Governor Bowdoin rejected the offer. It is doubtful that more than a few black troops marched west to suppress this "little rebellion" that so alarmed the men of "wealth and talent" of the state. Were there Afro-Americans who stood with Shays? There is record of at least one black veteran of the Revolution who fought in the uprising and possibly served as an officer in a section of the guerilla army.

At the time of the uprising, Moses Sash of Worthington was thirty-two years old. Ten years earlier, like Shays, he had enlisted in the Continental Army and at the end of the war
trudged home from West Point to resume the old life. The documents describe him as farmer and laborer; five feet, eight inches high; complexion, black; hair, wool.

Among the records of the supreme judicial court of Massachusetts there is a crumbling packet of grand jury indictments, naming thirty-two traitorous rebels, variously denominated yeoman, husbandman, tanner, tradesman, laborer. Moses Sash is the only black man of the group, the only laborer, and the only rebel to have two indictments leveled against him.

The first of the indictments reads as follows:

The jurors of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts upon their oath present that Moses Sash of Worthington ... a negro man & labourer being a disorderly, riotous & seditious person & minding & contriving as much as in him lay unlawfully by force of arms to stir up promote incite & maintain riots mobs tumults insurrections in this Commonwealth & to disturb impede & prevent the Government of the same & the due administration of justice in the same, & to prevent the Courts of justice from sitting as by Law appointed for that purpose & to promote disquiets, uneasiness, jealousies, animosities & seditions in the minds of the Citizens of this Commonwealth on the twentieth day of January in the year of our Lord Seventeen hundred & eighty seven & on divers other days & times as well before as since that time at Worthington ... unlawfully & seditiously with force & arms did advise persuade invite incourage & procure divers persons . . . of this Commonwealth by force of arms to oppose this Commonwealth & the Government thereof & riotously to join themselves to a great number of riotous seditious persons with force & arms thus opposing this commonwealth & the Government thereof as aforesaid &c the due administration of justice in the same, and in pursuance of his wicked seditious purposes aforesaid unlawfully & seditiously, did procure guns, bayonets, pistols, swords, gunpowder, bullets, blankets & provisions & other warlike instruments offensive & defensive & other warlike supplies, & did cause & procure them to be carried & conveyed to the riotous & seditious persons as aforesaid in evil example to others to offend in like manner against the peace of the Commonwealth aforesaid & dignity of the same.

Thus, Moses Sash, in January 20, 1787, as a participant in an insurrectionary demonstration called by a rebel convention, had tried to stop the courts from foreclosing mortgages and jailing debtors in "the due administration of justice."

Five days later, in fact, he would flee with Shays after government mortars had scattered the rebels from Arsenal Hill in Springfield.

As Bowdoin's general pursued the insurgents through Chicopee and South Hadley, Shays rallied his band on two hills in Pelham, sending out parties to forage for food and guns. Thus, the second indictment against Sash, who on January 30, "fraudulently, unlawfully & feloniously two guns to the value of five pounds of certain persons to the jurors unknown with force and arms did steal away."

Eventually, the new governor, John Hancock, pardoned almost all the insurgents, leaders, and followers. On the back of the first indictment against Moses Sash are the words: "a Captain & one of Shaises Councill." It is the only indictment of the packet so endorsed. Thus far, the archives have not yielded any further data to account for the high place of this black private of the first Revolution in the second revolution of Daniel Shays.

4b.
Historians once characterized the 1780s as the “critical period” in American history, when the new nation, saddled with an inadequate system of government, suffered crippling economic, political, and foreign policy problems that threatened its independence. Although it is possible to exaggerate the country’s difficulties during the first years of independence, there can be no doubt that the country did face severe challenges.

One problem was the threat of government bankruptcy. The nation owed $160 million in war debts, Congress had no power to tax, and the states rarely sent in more than half of Congress’s requisitions. The national currency was worthless. To help pay the government’s debts, several members of Congress proposed the imposition of a 5 percent duty on imports. But because the Articles of Confederation required unanimous approval of legislation, a single state, Rhode Island, was able to block the measure.

The country also faced grave foreign policy problems. Spain closed the Mississippi River to American commerce in 1784 and secretly conspired with Westerners (including the famous frontiersman Daniel Boone) to acquire the area that would eventually become Kentucky and Tennessee. Britain retained military posts in the Northwest, in violation of the peace treaty ending the Revolution, and tried to persuade Vermont to become a Canadian province.

The economy also posed serious problems. The Revolution had a disruptive impact, especially on the South’s economy. Planters lost about sixty thousand slaves (including about twenty-five thousand slaves in South Carolina and five thousand in Georgia). New British trade regulations—the Orders in Council of 1783—prohibited the sale of many American agricultural products in the British West Indies, one of the country’s leading markets, and required commodities to be shipped on British vessels. Massachusetts shipbuilders, who had constructed about 125 ships a year before the war, built only 25 ships a year after the war. Merchants who had purchased large quantities of British goods after the war found it difficult to sell these commodities to hard-pressed Americans. States protected local interests by imposing tariffs on interstate commerce.

Yet for all these problems, it seems clear in retrospect that the 1780s marked a crucial period in the development of the American economy. Output by farmers increased sharply during the 1780s—a remarkable development given the absence of any new farm machinery. Farmers also significantly shifted their investment away from cattle and farm implements to more liquid forms of wealth, such as bonds and mortgages. Meanwhile, a growing number of farm households began to produce goods previously imported from Britain. At the same time, merchants, freed of British trade restrictions, had opened commerce with Asia. But to many Americans, the signs of economic recovery remained faint.

Economic conditions were particularly troubled in Massachusetts. The British Orders in Council of 1783 dealt a severe blow to the state’s agricultural, shipping, and shipbuilding trades. Making matters worse, the state legislature had voted to pay off the state’s Revolutionary War debt in three years. Between 1783 and 1786, taxes on land rose more than 60 percent.

Desperate farmers in western Massachusetts demanded cuts in property taxes and adoption of stay laws to postpone farm foreclosures. The lower house of the
Massachusetts legislature passed relief measures in 1786, but eastern creditors persuaded the upper house to reject the package.

Local courts started to seize the property, farm implements, and even the furniture and clothing of farmers such as Daniel Shays (1747–1825), a Revolutionary war veteran. In late August 1786, a thousand farmers in Northampton County shut down the county court. Frightened state leaders in Boston appealed for public support. Easterners raised £5000 to send an army led by the former Continental Army general Benjamin Lincoln to suppress the rebellion.

In January 1787 Shays and his followers attacked the federal arsenal at Springfield but were driven off. In early February the army routed the rebels. These setbacks, along with tax relief from the assembly and amnesty for the rebellion’s leaders, ended the uprising. Shays’ Rebellion, however, held broader significance. It convinced national leaders that only a strong central government could save the republic from chaos.

**Governor James Bowdoin, September 2, 1786, GLC 3538**

A Proclamation

Whereas information has been given to the Supreme Executive of this Commonwealth, that on Tuesday last, the 29th of August, being the day appointed by law for the sitting of the Court of Common Pleas and Court of General Sessions of the Peace, at Northampton...a large concourse of people, form several parts of that county, assembled at the Court-House...many of whom were armed with guns, swords, and other deadly weapons, and with drums beating and fifes playing, in contempt and open defiance of the authority of this Government, did, by their threats of violence and keeping possession of the Court-House until twelve o’clock on the night of the same day, prevent the sitting of the Court, and the orderly administration of justice in that county:

And whereas this high-handed offence is fraught with the most fatal and pernicious consequences, must tend to subvert all law and government, to dissolve our excellent Constitution, and introduce universal riot, anarchy, and confusion, which would probably terminate in absolute despotism, and consequently destroy the fairest prospects of political happiness, that any people was ever favoured with:

I have therefore thought fit, by and with the advice of the Council, to issue this Proclamation, calling upon all Judges, Justices, Sheriffs, Constables, and other officers, civil and military within this Commonwealth, to prevent and suppress all such violent and riotous proceedings....

And I do hereby, pursuant to the indispensable duty I owe to the good people of this Commonwealth, most solemnly call upon them, as they value the blessings of freedom and independence, which at the expense of so much blood and treasure they have purchased—as they regard their faith, which in the sight of God and the world, they pledged they would not disappoint the hopes, and thereby become contemptible in the eyes of other nations, in the view of whom they have risen to glory and empire—as they would not deprive themselves of the security derived from well-regulated Society, to their lives, liberties, and property; and as they would not devolve upon their children, instead of peace, freedom and safety, a state of anarchy, confusion and slavery....
"The proportion of debtors run high in this State"

Benjamin Lincoln (1733–1810), who would soon lead an army into the western part of Massachusetts to put down Shays’ Rebellion, assesses the causes and significance of upheaval to his former comrade-in-arms George Washington.

In his letter, Lincoln refers to Washington’s decision to resign his membership in the Society of Cincinnati. Many people condemned this organization as “unrepublican” because membership was limited to former Revolutionary War officers and their sons, which made it appear to be both hereditary and elitist.

Benjamin Lincoln, December 4, 1786, to George Washington, GLC 1478

I wish your Excellency had not in so decided a manner expressed your determination to retire from the head of the order of Cincinnati. I shall communicate your address to our delegates to the next general meeting and to our State Society.

I have made three trips into the eastern country this year, partly on public & partly on private business... It is a country which abounds with fish of almost every kind and the waters are covered with fowls. The land, will be friendly to the growth of wheat, rye, barley, oats, hemp & flax, but not much so to Indian corn. Indeed I am so pleased with the country that I frequently wish my self there where I might be free from the present noise and tumult but I cannot leave this part of the state at present, for notwithstanding the resolutions I had formed ever to decline entering again into public life I was persuaded by my friend to take the command of the first division of militia in this state. I am now busily employed in organizing it &c. This business which would at all times be a duty [is] especially so now, when the state is convulsed and the hands of government, in some parts of it, are cast off.

I cannot be surprised therefore to hear our Excellency inquire “are your people getting mad? Are we to have the goodly fabric that eight years were spent in rearing pulled over our heads? What is the cause of all the high commotions? When and how will they end?” Although I cannot pretend to give a full and complete answer to them yet I will make some observations which shall involve in them the best answers to the several questions in my power to give.

"Are your people getting mad?" Many of them appear to be absolutely so if an attempt to annihilate our present constitution and dissolved the present government can be considered as evidence of insanity.

"Are we to have the goodly fabric that eight years were spent in rearing pulled over our heads?" There is I think great danger that it will be unless the tottering system shall be supported by arms and even then a government which has no basis than the point of the bayonet, should one be suspended thereon, is so totally different from ye one established at least in ideal, by the different States that if we might have recourse to the sad experiment of arms it can hardly be said that we have supported “the goodly fabric,” in this view of the matter it may be “pulled over our heads” this probably will be the case for there doth not appear to be virtue enough among the people to preserve a perfect republican government.

"What is the cause of this commotion?" The causes are too many and too various for
me to pretend to trace...them out. I therefore shall only mention of them which appear to
be the principal ones among those I may rank the case with which property was acquired,
with which credit was obtained, and debts were discharged in the time of the war. Hence
people were diverted from their usual industry and economy, a luxurious mode of living
crept into vogue and soon that income, by which the expenses of all should as much as
possible be limited was no longer considered as having anything to do with the question
at what expense families ought to live, or rather which they ought not to have exceeded.
The moment the day arrived when all discovered that things were fast returning back into
their original channel, that the industrious were to reap the fruits of his own industry, and
that the indolent and improvident would soon experience the evils of their own idleness &
sloth, very many startled at the idea and instead of attempting to subject themselves to
such a line of conduct, which duty to the public, and a regard to their own happiness evidently
pointed out, they contemplated how they should evade the necessity of reforming
their system and of changing their exorbitant present mode of life. They just complained
of commutation, of the weight of the public taxes, of the insupportable debt of the union,
of the scarcity of money, and of the cruelty of suffering the private creditors to call for
their just dues. This catalogue of complaints was listened to by many. County conventions
were formed and the cry for paper money, subject to a depreciation as was declared by
some of their public resolves, was the clamour of the day. But notwithstanding instruc-
tions to members of the General Court and petitions from different quarters the majority
of that body were opposed to the measures. Failing of their point the disaffected attempt-
ed, and in many instances succeeded, to stop the courts of law and to suspend the opera-
tion of government until they could, by force, sap the foundations of our constitution and
bring into the legislature creatures of their own by which they would make a government
at pleasure and make it subservient to all their purposes and when an end should be put
thereby to public & private debts the agrarian law might follow with ease. In short the
want of industry, economy, & common honesty seem to be the causes of the present
commotions. It is impossible for me to determine “when and how they will end” as I see
little possibility that they will be brought to a period and the dignity of government sup-
ported without bloodshed. When a single drop is drawn the most prophetic Spirit will
not, in my opinion, be able to determine when it will cease flowing.

The proportion of debtors run high in this State. Too many of them are against the
government. The men of property, and the holders of the public securities are generally
abettors of our present constitution, but a few of them have been in the field, and it
remains quite problematical whether they will in time fully discover their own interests
as they shall be induced thereby to lend for a season out of their property for the security
of the remainder. If these classes of men should not turn out on a broad scale with spirit
and the insurgents should be in the field & keep it [then] our constitutions [will be]
overthrown and the federal government broken upon by loping off one branch essential
to the well being of the whole. This cannot be submitted to by the United States with
impunity. They must send force to our aid, when this shall be shall be collected they will
be equal to all purposes.

The insurgents have now every advantage if we move in force against them[.] We
move under the direction of the civil authority and we cannot act but by the direction of it, after the riot act has been read & one hour has elapsed. They may disperse if they think proper, the next day they assemble again in another place and so they may conduct themselves with perfect security from day to day until a favorable moment should offer, those well affected to government are worn out, for the insurgents to commence their attack. Had the last general court declared the disaffected counties in a state of rebellion they would have placed the conflict upon a different footing and the rebels might have been soon crushed. They did not do it, what they will do at their next session, which will be in February next, is quite uncertain. And much remain at present, with the time when & manner how these commotions are to end, concealed form me in the unturned pages of...futurity.

P.S., January 21, 1787
The above observations were made some time since as will appear by the date of them and would have been forwarded at the time had there not then appeared some disposition in the executive to call into example the power delegated for the support of the authority of the government. They have just determined upon the measure and have ordered out four thousand militia and have appointed me to command them and have given me powers to call for such future aid as I may think necessary to effect the objects of my commission. I am thus far on my march toward the disaffected counties, viz. Worcester, Hampshire & Berkshire. It has been given out that Shays would stop the court to be helden at Worcester on the 23rd. I think he will not be there tho it is said that he is assembling his troops at different places. If he should not be at Worcester I expect to march the troops to the county of Berkshire to take up the insurgents to give confidence to the well affected and to convince those of an other character how much they have been imposed on when they have been made to believe that no troops would turn out in favor of government.

The gentlemen of property and men of influence have come forth fully on this occasion and have loaned a considerable sum of money to government. I cannot but hope that we shall be able to crush the opposition & that the people will be disposed to submit to government and enjoy undisturbed in [the] future the blessings of it. When ever I mention military matters I feel a responsibility to your excellency and shall when any thing turns up of importance do my self the pleasure to communicate it.

13 / “There are combustibles in every State, which a spark might set fire to”
In a letter to his former Revolutionary war comrade General Henry Knox (1750–1806), Washington offers his view of Shays’ Rebellion. This letter epitomizes the perception that severe dangers—from corruption, British intrigue, and popular discontent—threatened all that had been won during the Revolution.

GEORGE WASHINGTON, December 26, 1786, GLC #2437.53.63
...Lamentable as the conduct of the Insurgents of Massachusetts is, I am exceedingly obliged to you for the advice respecting them;...I feel, my dear Genl. Knox, infinitely more than I can express to you, for the disorders which have arisen in these States. Good God! who besides a tory could have foreseen, or a Briton predicted them! were these peo-
5. Questions to accompany movie, “A Little Rebellion Now and Then”

History 319

Name: __________________

Prof. Cathy Matson

Questions for “A Little Rebellion Now and Then”

1. List at least two problems that arise during the 1780s under the Articles of Confederation:

   ____________________________________________________________
2. How many farmers in Massachusetts get taken to court for debt?

3. What other states have rebellions like the one developing in Massachusetts in 1786?

4. Who says “I never knew an insurrection without a cause”?

5. What state prints more paper money than the others, and makes it legal tender?

6. What kind of response do the powerful and ruling men of Boston make in 1787 to calm the rebels of Massachusetts?

7. How long does it take to put down (to end) Shays’ Rebellion?

8. Why do over 3,000 families migrate from Massachusetts to New York and Vermont?
9. Who say it is good to have “A Little Rebellion Now and Then”?

__________________________________________________________________

10. Name at least one part of the Constitution that was written because of the fears brought about during Shays’ Rebellion (there are four parts in the Constitution you could list – only one is necessary):

__________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________