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**Citation for published version:**

Dziennik, M 2011, 'Through an Imperial Prism: Land, Liberty, and Highland Loyalism in the War of American Independence' *Journal of British Studies*, vol 50, no. 02, pp. 332-358., 10.1086/658185

**Digital Object Identifier (DOI):**

[10.1086/658185](https://doi.org/10.1086/658185)

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Publisher final version (usually the publisher pdf)

**Published In:**

*Journal of British Studies*

**Publisher Rights Statement:**

Dziennik, M. (2011). Through an Imperial Prism: Land, Liberty, and Highland Loyalism in the War of American Independence. *Journal of British Studies*, 50(02), 332-358, doi: 10.1086/658185

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The Journal of British Studies / Volume 50 / Issue 02 / April 2011, pp 332 - 358

DOI: 10.1086/658185, Published online: 21 December 2012

**Link to this article:** [http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract\\_S0021937100000563](http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0021937100000563)

### How to cite this article:

Matthew P. Dziennik (2011). Through an Imperial Prism: Land, Liberty, and Highland Loyalism in the War of American Independence. The Journal of British Studies, 50, pp 332-358 doi:10.1086/658185

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# Through an Imperial Prism: Land, Liberty, and Highland Loyalism in the War of American Independence

*Matthew P. Dziennik*

As he toured the island of Coll in 1773, Samuel Johnson's concern was evident: "And all [Highlanders] that go may be considered as subjects lost to the British crown; for a nation scattered in the boundless regions of America resembles rays diverging from a focus. All the rays remain, but the heat is gone. Their power consisted in their concentration: when they are dispersed, they have no effect."<sup>1</sup> Emigration to America from the Highlands and islands of Scotland had become an "epidemical fury," which could only play into the hands of "our colonies in America [which] are daily growing in power." This anonymous commentator predicted that Gaelic emigrants would "make excellent partizans for the first enterprising genius that shall aspire to form an independent establishment."<sup>2</sup> Such fears were largely misplaced. Highland residents of the colonies (approximately 20,000 people, concentrated mainly around the Mohawk Valley in New York, the Cape Fear Valley in North Carolina, and Darien, Georgia) proved to be a significant part of the loyalist population.<sup>3</sup> Making up no more than 0.8 percent of the colonial population, Highlanders may have accounted for more than 10 percent of those who served in loyalist units during the Revolutionary War.<sup>4</sup> When the king's standard was raised at Cross Creek, North Carolina, in

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel Johnson, *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (London, 1775), 305.

<sup>2</sup> *The Present Conduct of the Chieftains and Proprietors of Lands in the Highlands of Scotland . . . Considered impartially by a Highlander* (Edinburgh, 1773), 7.

<sup>3</sup> These figures detail the arrivals post-1763, though there may have been several thousand more that arrived earlier as traders, political exiles, and soldiers. Emigration figures are difficult to detail in any precise sense given the lack of empirical data and the hyperbole of eighteenth-century emigration literature, but for the most detailed estimate, see Bernard Bailyn, *Voyagers to the West: A Passage in the Peopling of America on the Eve of the Revolution* (New York, 1986), 89–113.

<sup>4</sup> Estimates indicate that there were approximately 2.5 million British subjects in the colonies in

*Journal of British Studies* 50 (April 2011): 332–358

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February 1776, 1,200 Highlanders took up arms, representing 40 percent of the eligible Highland male population of the colony, a rate of mobilization probably not matched during the war.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, Highland Loyalty had an impact on British policy that far exceeded the military potential of Gaelic communities. It was the assertions of the governor of North Carolina, Josiah Martin, that the Highlanders would rise that prompted the dispatch from Cork of Henry Clinton's expeditionary force to that American colony, despite the reservations of the American secretary, William Legge, second earl of Dartmouth, and General William Howe in Boston. The defeat of the Highlanders at Moore's Creek, near Wilmington, North Carolina, in February 1776 undermined the already shaky resolve for the southern option and prevented Clinton's dispatch to Dunmore in Virginia, where he may have been more usefully employed.<sup>6</sup>

Given the extent of Highland loyalty, historians have been much less concerned than Johnson was about the loyalties of the emigrants. The widespread support of the Highlanders for the British crown has largely been understood as self-evident, derived from a number of ethnic paradigms, with the central theme the assertion that Highland loyalty can be understood through reference to traditional Highland social structures. Gaelic participation in the war, it has been argued, was motivated by monarchism and deference to community leaders and

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1776, of which around 2 million were white. Estimates of the loyalist population are 15–20 percent of the white population, making a white loyalist population of around 400,000. Paul H. Smith has estimated that 21,000 men served in the Provincial Corps, units raised from among the American population. The Royal Highland Emigrants enlisted over 1,700 men ca. 1776–83, although not all were ethnic Gaels. Significant numbers of Highlanders also served in Butler's Rangers and the King's Royal Regiment of New York. A unit of almost 100 North Carolinian Highlanders was also raised in 1780, and there was a similar unit of Highlanders in New York City in 1778. This indicates, in demographic and military terms, that Highlanders were massively disproportionately represented in the loyalist population. For the figures, see *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970*, 2 vols. (Washington, DC, 1975), 2:1168; Francis D. Cogliano, *Revolutionary America, 1763–1815: A Political History*, 2nd ed. (Abingdon, 2009), 32; Robert V. Wells, "Population and Family in Early America," in *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of the American Revolution*, ed. Jack P. Greene and J. R. Pole (Oxford, 1991), 41; Robert M. Calhoon, "Loyalty and Neutrality," in *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of the American Revolution*, 247; and Paul H. Smith, "The American Loyalists: Notes on Their Organisation and Numerical Strength," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 25, no. 2 (April 1968): 274; Smith's figures do not include those who were actively loyal in other ways, serving in loyalist militias or providing intelligence or supplies. According to the Loyalist Claims Commission, the number of those who were "uniformed and zealous" was twice the number of those who bore arms in formed regiments; see The National Archives (TNA), Kew, London, AO12/109, fol. 10.

<sup>5</sup> Governor Josiah Martin estimated a potential fighting strength of 3,000 Highland Scots, which when combined with population estimates and tax lists for North Carolina (unfortunately, unreliable) suggests an overall Highland population of 12,000. Allan MacDonald of Kingsburgh, husband of Flora MacDonald and a major in the loyalist force, gave the figures as 1,200 Highlanders and 300 Regulators present at Moore's Creek, while Martin reported 600 Highlanders and 100 Regulators. For these population and fighting estimates, see *Scots Magazine* (1772), xxxiv, 395, 515; Loyalist Claims Commission Testimony of Allan MacDonald, TNA, AO13/87, fol. 59; and Governor Josiah Martin to George Germain, 21 March 1776, Wilmington, NC, in *Documents of the American Revolution*, ed. K. G. Davies, 21 vols. (Dublin, 1979), 12:85–90.

<sup>6</sup> William Legge, second earl of Dartmouth, to General William Howe, 15 September 1775, London, TNA, CO5/92, fols. 491–94; Howe to Dartmouth, 15 January 1776, London, TNA, CO5/93, fol. 61.

conditioned by the inherent social hierarchy of the clan structure.<sup>7</sup> Duane Meyer's authoritative 1961 study of the Highland Scots in North Carolina was circumscribed by fundamental presumptions of Gaelic clannishness, an interpretation that seems to color even recent scholarship, regardless of the details uncovered in archival research.<sup>8</sup> Two factors explain the continuing survival of outdated interpretations of the Highland Scots in the New World. First, as incidental actors in wider historical narratives, historians are less concerned with the inner workings of eighteenth-century Highland society than with highlighting the conservative and marginal nature of loyalism, a model to which the Highland Scots seem perfectly suited. Second, and paradoxically, the success of Atlantic historiography has created interpretive difficulties; Atlantic historians rightly ask the academic profession to view continuity and change across a deeply interconnected region. When such a view relies on a misreading of Old World contexts, however, it fails to comprehend either continuity or change. Thus, one of the earliest and most significant assertions of the utility of an Atlantic model for understanding eighteenth-century Scotland, that of Eric Richards, was effective in detailing Scottish sophistication as a whole but rested on a conservative reading of the Scottish Gael. Change had been a root cause of emigration, and the Gaels' experience of such change shaped their reactions to the American War of Independence. Too often, historians advocating the continuity of Scottish emigrants with Britain assert simplistic notions of loyalty, conservatism, and deference in the Highland experience.<sup>9</sup> Historiography has imposed a paradigm of continuity on Highland emigration by grafting a generalized interpretation of the Scottish context onto emigrants' colonial experience. Falsely understood as a dispossessed minority, the Highland emigrants emerged in this paradigm as uniform and simplistic characters whose social experiences gave them little concept of the ideological underpinnings of the Revolutionary conflict.<sup>10</sup>

This essay asserts an alternative view: Highland loyalism was a highly sophisticated political action that reflected broadly positive views of the British Empire

<sup>7</sup> Eugene Fingerhut, "Assimilation of Immigrants on the Frontier of New York, 1764–1776" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1962), 232; Wallace Brown, *The King's Friends: The Composition of the American Loyalist Claimants* (Providence, RI, 1965), 206; Christopher Moore, *The Loyalists: Revolution, Exile, Settlement* (Toronto, 1984), 21; James Hunter, *A Dance Called America* (Edinburgh, 1994), 45; David Dobson, *Scottish Emigration to Colonial America, 1604–1785* (Athens, GA, 1994), 140; Jenni Calder, *Scots in the USA* (Edinburgh, 2006), 77. The most recent scholarship has been more sophisticated but still assumes certain ethnic factors in Highland loyalism; see Marianne McLean, *The People of Glengarry: Highlanders in Transition* (Montreal, 1991), 87–92; Michael Fry, *The Scottish Empire* (Edinburgh, 2001), 57–70; and T. M. Devine, *Scotland's Empire, 1600–1815* (London, 2003), 186.

<sup>8</sup> Duane Meyer, *The Highland Scots of North Carolina* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1961), 4; Hugh Dussek, "Pre-revolutionary History: Socio-religious Perspectives on the Scots-Irish and Highland Scots in the Backcountry of North Carolina" (PhD diss., Union Institute, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> Eric Richards, "Scotland and the Uses of the Atlantic World," in *Strangers within the Realm: Cultural Margins of the First British Empire*, ed. Bernard Bailyn and Philip D. Morgan (London, 1991), 67–114. For the best example of an accurate perception of change through emigration, see McLean, *The People of Glengarry*.

<sup>10</sup> David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (Oxford, 1989), 602; George Rawlyk, "Loyalist Military Settlement in Upper Canada," in *The Loyal Americans: The Military Role of the Loyalist Provincial Corps and their Settlement in British North America, 1775–1784*, ed. Robert S. Allen (Ottawa, 1983), 100.

and its ability to safeguard liberty in the New World. The Highland emigrants' loyalism was grounded in their experiences of a profound period of change in the Highlands, as the region came to terms with the defeat of Jacobitism, the rise of imperial hegemony, and the change from a mercantilist subsistence-based economy to a less people-oriented obsession with commercial enterprise.<sup>11</sup> Just as the American Revolution had its antecedents in the changing relationship between the mother country and her colonies, so Highland loyalism was forged in changing relationships. Many emigrants had previously attempted to test the commercial modernization of Gaelic society in Scotland, but they had found its limits an insufficient match for their aspirations. They arrived in America with credit, contacts, and a desire to free themselves from the strictures of authoritarian landlordism. The Revolution politicized these aspirations when it posed a threat to the established order of government in the colonies upon which the Highland emigrants had pinned their interests. Change in political and socioeconomic spheres, not cultural stasis, defined their loyalism.

In explaining the political actions of these people, it is necessary to establish their broad conceptions of imperial expansion and its relationship to the Gael in Scotland and America, which I undertake in the next section of this essay. Recent work has demonstrated that loyalism helped shape the contours of the post-1783 British Empire.<sup>12</sup> But perceptions of empire were just as important in the initial formation of loyalism. The third section of this essay asserts that Highland identity was increasingly immersed in a broader imperial culture, which recognized support for the empire as the most rational approach to the pursuit of private and familial interest. The fourth section of this essay outlines how that interest had been fashioned principally by access to land, which Highlanders associated with liberty and which was politicized through the imperial paradigm into loyalism. How Highland views of liberty and property were subsumed into imperial attempts to subdue the Jacobite rebellion proved to be the single most important factor in the development of Highland loyalism and is the focal point of this study.<sup>13</sup> The Highland emigrant was not motivated, however, by a single factor. As loyalism was predicated on political rather than ethnic affiliations, Highlanders possessed conflicting aims, which conformed to their various material situations. These experiences produced revolution and neutrality as well as loyalism.<sup>14</sup> The fifth and

<sup>11</sup> T. M. Devine, "A Conservative People? Scottish Gaeldom in the Age of Improvement," 225–36, esp. 233; Andrew MacKillop, "Highland Estate Change and Tenant Emigration," 237–58, esp. 253, both in *Eighteenth Century Scotland: New Perspectives*, ed. T. M. Devine and J. R. Young (East Linton, Scotland, 1999).

<sup>12</sup> Maya Jasanoff, "The Other Side of Revolution: Loyalists in the British Empire," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 65, no. 2 (April 2008): 205–32; Eliga H. Gould, "A Virtual Nation: Greater Britain and the Imperial Legacy of the American Revolution," *American Historical Review* 104, no. 2 (April 1999): 476–89.

<sup>13</sup> For liberty and property, see Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York, 1993), 11–95.

<sup>14</sup> For the political complexities of allegiance across the Atlantic region in this period, see Mary Beth Norton, *The British Americans: Loyalist Exiles in England* (Boston, 1972); Carol Berkin, *Jonathan Sewall: Odyssey of an American Loyalist* (London, 1974); John Ferling, *The Loyalist Mind: Joseph Galloway and the American Revolution* (London, 1977); Janice Potter, *The Liberty We Seek: Loyalist Ideology in Colonial New York and Massachusetts* (London, 1983); Ann Condon, "Marching to a Different Drummer: The Political Philosophy of the Loyalists," in *Red, White and True Blue: The Loyalists in the Revolution*, ed.

final section of this essay assesses how, as the Revolutionary War progressed, Highland loyalism fractured under the stress of fratricidal violence and the exposure of the imperial administration as less than indomitable. Nevertheless, the disproportionate loyalty of the Highland emigrants to the empire reveals the ability of the imperial state to stimulate politically rational allegiances among its subjects. The British state's ability to include potentially disaffected groups (when expediencies demanded a change in Westminster's thinking) reveals a dynamic, decentralized, and accommodating imperial administration. This, in turn, suggests a broader significance to the role of imperial loyalism in the revolutionary narrative.

### HIGHLAND POLITICAL THOUGHT, 1745–75

Highland identity within the British Empire was conflicted, but it needs to be understood as part of the contextual background of loyalism. As the epicenter of the last armed attempt to put a Stuart king back on the throne, the Highlands dealt with a complicated set of political affiliations. The defeat of the Jacobite movement at Culloden in 1746, and the brutal repression of the Highlands that followed it, may have given many Highlanders an axe to grind. The apparent paradox of Jacobites fighting for the Hanoverian government in America thirty years after their defeat in 1746 has been characterized as a manifestation of the Highlanders' own recognition of their pacified, conquered, and colonized status.<sup>15</sup> There is no reason, however, to believe that resistance to the Hanoverian settlement was a constant feature of the Highland experience. It is of course true that much of nascent British identity implicitly excluded the Highlanders; at its most Wilkite odiousness, it was explicitly anti-Scottish in nature.<sup>16</sup> Jacobitism had not, however, commanded the instinctive and widespread support of the Highlands. As many as three-fifths of the clans were divided, or neutral, or remained firmly attached to the government. Anti-Jacobitism in the Highlands can be traced as far back as

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Esmond Wright (New York, 1976), 1–18; John Sainsbury, *Disaffected Patriots: London Supporters of Revolutionary America, 1769–1782* (Kingston, ON, 1987); Eliga H. Gould, *Persistence of Empire: British Political Culture in the Age of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2000), 106–80; David Armitage, “Three Concepts of Atlantic History,” *The British Atlantic World, 1500–1800*, ed. David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick (Basingstoke, 2002), 11–30; Keith Mason, “The American Loyalist Diaspora and the Reconfiguration of the British Atlantic World,” in *Empire and Nation: The American Revolution in the Atlantic World*, ed. Eliga H. Gould and Peter Onuf (London, 2005), 239–57; Bradley Jones, “The American Revolution and Popular Loyalism in the British Atlantic World” (PhD diss., University of Glasgow, 2006); and Edward Larkin, “What Is a Loyalist? The American Revolution as Civil War,” *Common-Place* 8, no. 1 (2007), <http://www.common-place.org/vol-08/no-01/larkin>.

<sup>15</sup> Meyer, *Highland Scots*, 4; Eric Richards, “Scotland and the Uses of the Atlantic World,” 106–8.

<sup>16</sup> Commerce, the extension of empire, anti-French propaganda, and Protestantism have all been forwarded, though by no means uncritically received, as the key ingredients of an embryonic sense of Britishness; see Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation* (London, 1992). For a critique of Protestant identity in Britishness, see Tony Claydon and Ian McBride, introduction to *Protestantism and National Identity: Britain and Ireland, c. 1650–1850*, ed. Tony Claydon and Ian McBride (Cambridge, 1999), 3–52. The Highlands were partly rejected from this identity because much of what defined the French “other” in British identity was similarly applied to the Highlands; see Jonathan Hawkins, “Imperial ’45: The Jacobite Rebellions in Transatlantic Context,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 24, no. 1 (January 1996): 31–35; see also *The Chevaliers Market; or, Highland Fair* (London, 1745).

Campbell support for the Covenanting movement in the seventeenth century.<sup>17</sup> It is true that many former Jacobites were rehabilitated to fight for George III in America during the Revolution, but fascination with these particular individuals obscures the extent to which staunch Hanoverianism had long been an important political currency in the Highlands. Captain Alexander MacDonald, who had begun enlisting progovernment Highlanders in New York as early as 1774, had originally been commissioned into the earl of Loudon's independent companies to oppose the Jacobites in Scotland in 1745. Allan MacDonald of Kingsburgh, husband of the Jacobite heroine Flora MacDonald, had held a similar commission during the Jacobite rebellion of 1745.<sup>18</sup> Jacobitism, where it existed, was rarely anti-imperial.<sup>19</sup> This preexisting affiliation to Britain and the Hanoverian regime, while never static or one-sided, was the setting for Highland conceptions of Highland identity in the post-Culloden period.

Affiliation with Hanoverian Britain found expression in conscious assertions of identity that were both Gaelic and pro-British—and considerably more complex than might be assumed. Loyalty was not given solely to the crown but also to the powerful authority of the British state as expressed by the constitution and through the institution of Parliament. The British constitution was seen as the defender of the Gael. Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t-Saoir (1724–1812), one of the most brilliant Gaelic poets of the period, expressed a Gaelic understanding of the constitutional place of the king-in-Parliament: power emanated directly from the king, but it was the combined legislature that was invested with sovereignty, enabling that institution to secure peace and justice in the “four corners of the world.”<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Scotus Americanus was a pro-Revolutionary pamphleteer but, revealingly, drew upon the values of the British constitution to promote emigration among Highland Scots. In *Information Concerning the Province of North Carolina Addressed to Emigrants from the Highlands and Western Isles of Scotland* (1773), he outlined how America had inherited British values, free from the corrosive corruption of the metropolitan center, noting that “here [in North Carolina] they [the Highland emigrants] still

<sup>17</sup> Allan I. Macinnes, *Clanship, Commerce and the House of Stuart, 1603–1788* (East Linton, Scotland, 1996), 249; Bob Harris, *Politics and the Nation: Britain in the Mid-Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 2002), 150. It has also been shown that mismanagement of the Highlands, rather than any explicit hatred of the Hanoverian regime, was vital in creating the preconditions of rebellion; see Rosalind Mitchison, “The Government and the Highlands, 1707–1745,” in *Scotland in the Age of Improvement*, ed. N. T. Phillipson and Rosalind Mitchison (Edinburgh, 1970), 39; and Colin Kidd, *British Identities before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600–1800* (Cambridge, 1999), 135.

<sup>18</sup> Alexander MacDonald to Jeffrey Amherst, August 1777, Halifax, NS, in *The Letterbook of Captain Alexander MacDonald of the Royal Highland Emigrants, 1775–1779* (New York, 1883), 353–62. Allan MacDonald of Kingsburgh had commanded a detachment of government troops in the Inner and Outer Hebrides, in the very locality where his future wife would assist the prince in his famous escape; see memorandum of Flora MacDonald, National Library of Scotland (NLS), MS 2618 Misc., fols. 82–83.

<sup>19</sup> For concepts of Britain in the poetry of Jacobite Gaels, see Vincent Morely, “The Idea of Britain in Eighteenth Century Ireland and Scotland,” *Studia Hibernica* 33 (2004–5): 114–15.

<sup>20</sup> Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t-Saoir, “Oran do’n Rìgh,” in *Orain Dhomhchaidh Bhàin* [The songs of Duncan Ban Macintyre], ed. and trans. Aonghas Macleoid (Edinburgh, 1978), 31; Macleoid’s work provides the best translation of Mac an t-Saoir’s poetry, and I have used it here. And see James Macpherson, *The rights of Great Britain asserted against the claims of America: being an answer to the declaration of the General Congress* (London, 1776), 3–5; and “On Emigration from the Scottish Highlands and Isles,” Relig Papers, NLS, MS 9646, fol. 65.



belong to the British Empire, and are happy under the benign influence of its administration. Here, at ease, they may enjoy all those civil blessings which the noblest constitution under heaven was intended to communicate to all ranks belonging to it.”<sup>21</sup>

Loyalty was conditioned by an imperially situated reading of the Atlantic world. Gaelic adherence to such abstractions as “the empire” might be traced to the considerable diffusion of interest across the globe. Highland elites and merchants operated in large networks, often with interrelated interests in timber, land, plantations, and slaves, not all of which were located on the North American continent. The safeguarding of these economic interests necessitated a rejection of political separatism, particularly as the failed Jacobite rebellions had always precipitated forfeitures and confiscations.<sup>22</sup> Widespread economic interests prompted a fear of dismemberment of the polity in which those interests were contained. As John MacDonald of Glenalladale wrote, “He could not decline an example and exertion of loyalty especially required by His majesty when the dismemberment of the Empire was in question and especially the dismemberment of the part to which the petitioner now belongs [North America].” The fear that the loss of one constituent part was a threat to the whole had gained currency in debates on the empire.<sup>23</sup> Glenalladale even had the audacity to send to the American secretary in 1776 a forty-four-page memorandum on the future government of North America, to protect the empire from further disintegration.<sup>24</sup> For Highland loyalists, imperial government was the foundation of a peaceful political space, one that provided the conditions for socioeconomic stability. Thus when the Royal Standard was raised at Cross Creek in February 1776, Brigadier General Donald MacDonald, a loyalist, called on all subjects “to restore peace and tranquillity . . . to open again the glorious streams of commerce—to partake of the blessings inseparable from a regular administration of justice.”<sup>25</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Scotus Americanus, *Information Concerning the Province of North Carolina Addressed to Emigrants from the Highlands and Western Isles of Scotland* (Glasgow, 1773), 11, and see 7; Alexander Murdoch has highlighted that the views expressed in the tract closely resembled those of Alexander Campbell of Balole, a native of Islay who spent time in Jamaica, North Carolina, and the Highlands and maintained a reputation for possessing information regarding emigration on both sides of the Atlantic. It is possible that Balole and Scotus Americanus were one and the same; see Alexander Murdoch, “A Scottish Document concerning Emigration to North Carolina in 1772,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 67, no. 3 (July 1990): 444–45. For another work by Scotus Americanus (or, at least, an individual utilizing the same pseudonym) advocating Highland support for the Revolution, see “To the emigrants lately arrived from the Highlands of Scotland,” *Virginia Gazette*, no. 498 (23 November 1775), 1.

<sup>22</sup> Daniel Ross to Munro Ross, 28 September 1780, Antigua, West Indies, National Archives of Scotland (NAS), GD199/273; T. M. Devine, *Clearance and Improvement: Land, Power and People in Scotland, 1700–1900* (Edinburgh, 2006), 168; Bruce Lenman, “The Highland Aristocracy and North America, 1603–1784,” in *The Seventeenth Century in the Highlands*, ed. Lachlan Maclean (Inverness, 1986), 172–85.

<sup>23</sup> Allan M. MacDonald, “Captain John MacDonald ‘Glenalladale,’” *Canadian Catholic Historical Association Report* 31 (1964): 29; Jones, “The American Revolution and Popular Loyalism,” 114; H. V. Bowen, “British Conceptions of Global Empire, 1756–1783,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 26, no. 3 (July 1996): 1, 15.

<sup>24</sup> John Macdonald [of Glenalladale] to Lord Germain, 30 October 1776, Halifax, NS, TNA, CO217/53, fols. 67–112.

<sup>25</sup> John P. McLean, *An Historical Account of the Settlement of Scotch Highlanders in America prior to the Peace of 1783* (Glasgow, 1900), 126.

An enhanced feeling of racial superiority was also a sign of increased connection with the administration of empire. British officers dispatched to the Highlands as early as the 1730s had noted the racial and linguistic superiority expressed by Gaels toward their English counterparts, a contention borne out by subsequent Gaelic literature.<sup>26</sup> Within the empire, however, racial superiority was given new meaning, as Highlanders became increasingly exposed to other minorities. There was an assumption in the Highlands, as its inhabitants became fully fledged participants in the imperial project, that the region belonged to a morally superior polity. Writers increasingly made ethnically charged comments on the threat posed by the French and the perceived duplicity of other European powers.<sup>27</sup> This sense of superiority was particularly important in the formation of loyalism. Some Highland loyalists believed that the rebels were little more than “low lived rebellious rascals,” “bandittie,” and “scoundrels,” whose actions could only be described as “barbarous.” Indeed, Highland perceptions of the loyal colonists were often little better; the loyalist Highlander Alexander MacDonald had no wish to be compared with the “rascally provincials among whom are to be found Numbers of Villains & Thieves.”<sup>28</sup> James MacLagan, a Gaelic scholar who served as a chaplain in America during the war, saw in the “American character . . . a love of riches and pleasures . . . litigiousness, deceit . . . [and] the Demon of ambition.” MacLagan was engaging with British perceptions of the colonies and their peoples in a way that demonstrates how preexisting identities were conditioning Highland responses to the imperial crisis.<sup>29</sup> Earlier celebrations of Britain’s triumphs in the Seven Years’ War over “foolish” enemies had not gone unnoticed in the Highlands:

Bha Ban-rìgh Hungaraidh gòrach,  
 ’Nuair a thòisich i ri strì ruit;  
 ’S cha bu ghlice Rìgh na Spàinte,  
 Thòisich e gu dàna mìomhail:

<sup>26</sup> Edmund Burt, *Letters from a Gentleman in the North of Scotland to his Friend in London*, ed. Andrew Simmons, 2 vols. (London, 1754; Edinburgh, 1998), 2:182; Alexander Macdonald, *Ais-Eiridh na Sean-Chanoin Albannaich; no, An nuadh oranaiche Gaidhealach* (Edinburgh, 1751), 6–7.

<sup>27</sup> *Soldiering in India, 1764–1787: Extracts from Journals and Letters Left by Lt. Col. Allan Macpherson and Lt. Colonel John Macpherson of the East India Company’s Service*, ed. W. C. Macpherson (Edinburgh, 1928), 195–201; Robert Kirk, *The Memoirs and Adventures of Robert Kirk, Late of the Royal Highland Regiment* (Limerick, 1775), 68; “Report of John Macdonald on DeBarres Estate,” Joseph DeBarres Papers, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, MG23, F1(2), fols. 40–41; “Oran do na Gael a bah sa cuir do America, san bhliadna 1778,” in *Cochruinneacha taoghta de shaothair nam bard Gaelach* [A choice collection of the works of the Highland bards], ed. Alexander Stewart and Donald Stewart, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1804), 2:524–25. Much of the Gaelic poetry concerning North America upon which I draw is available in translation in Michael Newton, *We’re Indians Sure Enough: The Legacy of the Scottish Highlanders in the United States* (Richmond, VA, 2001).

<sup>28</sup> Alexander Campbell to Alexander Campbell of Barcaldine, 20 February 1776, Hampton Roads, VA, NAS, GD170/1595/13; Patrick Campbell to Sandy Campbell, 8 July 1778, Staten Island, NY, NAS, GD170/1711/17; Loyalist Claims Commission Testimony of Alexander Macdonald, TNA, AO12/24, fol. 49; John McAlpine, *Genuine Narratives and Concise Memoirs of some of the most interesting exploits and singular adventures of J. M’Alpine, a native Highlander* (Greenock, Scotland, 1780), 70–71; MacDonald to Lady MacDonald, 12 October 1777, Halifax, NS, and MacDonald to General Eyre Massey, 3 January 1777, both in *Letterbook of Captain Alexander MacDonald*, 372–73, 310.

<sup>29</sup> James MacLagan to Lord John Murray, 12 July 1777, New York, John Rylands Library, Manchester, BAG5/1/140.

Ged a bha an dithis ud làidir,  
 'S rìgh no dhà a bh'anns na h-Innsean,  
 Fhuair thu dhuibh gach cùis a dh'iarr thu,  
 'S tha na fiachan air an dìoladh.

[The Hungarian Queen [Maria Theresa] was foolish, / When she began to struggle against you; / No wiser was the king of Spain, / He boldly became unmannerly: / Although those two were strong, / As a king or two were in India, / You got for yourself each matter you demanded, / And the debts are all settled.]<sup>30</sup>

This poem in the medium of the Gaelic language reminds us, however, that Highland loyalists were not unexceptional loyalists; they had a unique historical experience of imperialism that provided distinct reasons for their support of the imperial enterprise. For Highlanders, imperial success was essential, for it allowed the Gael to celebrate military exploits, as they had traditionally done, in an environment in which Jacobitism could be ignored or molded to a new political expedient. Removed from the domestic context of the post-Culloden Highlands, Jacobitism could be represented as the prerequisite of the forging of the loyal Highlander, with former rebelliousness actually making him better prepared to undergo the hardships associated with imperial expansion. Michael Newton has shown that the Gaelic panegyric code remained largely consistent during the period and that the only substantial addition to poetic conventions when they were carried over into an imperial sphere was the need to emphasize atonement for previous displays of Jacobitism.<sup>31</sup> Throughout the eighteenth century, the Gaelic poet generally served as a focal point for the communities' ideals, and it was not until the nineteenth century that the individualism of the Gaelic author became a significant factor in poetry. Songs and poems were intended to be memorized, transmitted, and critiqued orally. What has survived comes largely from eighteenth-century publications in Gaelic, some of which had popular appeal, with print runs of over a thousand copies. In this light, poetry represents an effective, if not straightforward, source for gleaning Gaelic perceptions of political ideas.<sup>32</sup> Imperial military service reinforced a fundamental Gaelic assumption of martial superiority. British triumphs were articulated as proof of such assumptions:

'An *America* thuathach,  
 'Stric a tharraing è cruaidh-lann,  
 'S bha na *Friosalaich* chuannta,  
 'S iad fo' smachd mar bu duàllach,  
 Ealamh acuinneach ruanach,  
 'S iad a leanadh an ruaig gun bhi sgìth.

<sup>30</sup> Mac an t-Saoir, "Oran Do'n Rìgh," in *Orain Dhonnchaidh Bhàin*, 31, Macleoid's translation.

<sup>31</sup> Kenneth Mackenzie, *Orain Ghaidhealach agus Bearla air an eadar-theangacha* (Edinburgh, 1792), 37–42; Michael Newton, "Jacobite Past, Loyalist Present," *Journal of Interdisciplinary Celtic Studies* 5 (2003): 58.

<sup>32</sup> See Wilson McLeod, "Gaelic Poetry as Historical Source: Some Problems and Possibilities," in *Ireland (Ulster) Scotland; Concepts, Contexts, Comparisons*, ed. Edna Longley, Eamonn Hughes, and Des O'Riada (Belfast, 2003), 171–73.

[In North America, / Frequently did he draw heavy swords, / The Frasers [71st Foot] were of good conduct, / And under his control as was their custom, / Swift, well-equipped and fierce, / They would never tire of the pursuit.]<sup>33</sup>

The response of Gaelic poetry to the British Empire reveals a confidence entirely ignored by English-language scholars in favor of reductive presumptions of defeatism. This confidence was predicated on the violence-imbued celebration of martial strength. One poem from the era describes how soldiers in the Continental army, provided they fought in the open, would be left so that: “Chan fhaighte mac duin’ air aon tulaich gu feum, / Ach ’n càrnaibh air chomhnard a’ foghlum an èig” [No man on any hillock would be of use, / He would instead be lying in heaps of the dead].<sup>34</sup> Gaelic conceptions of the empire were operating on a more complex level, however, and were formulated well in advance of the American rebellion. James MacLagan implicitly suggested a kind of Pax Britannica as early as 1756. The defeat of the French in North America, he said, would usher in a wonderful peace:

’N sin gabhaidh croabh na sìth le freamh,  
Teann ghream do ’n doimhne thalmhainn;  
Is sinsidh geuga gu rig Nèamh,  
Gach àird le feamh-mheas ’s geal-bhath;  
Bithidh ceiler èibhinn eun na meaghlán,  
’S daoine le’n clainn ag fealbhachadh;  
Toradh is saoth’r an làmh gun mhaoin,  
Faoi dhubhar caomh a sgàilsi sgàilsin.

[Then the roots of the tree of peace will, / Take a hold of the earth’s depths; / And its branches will stretch to Heaven, / Every height with delicate fruits and white blossoms. / The melody of birds in its branches, / Families taking residence, / The produce of their hands unfailing, / Under the follicle’s proven splendor.]<sup>35</sup>

Thus, Gaelic imperatives remained central. By recognizing the imperial dominion and success of the empire, however, Gaels strengthened the contextual setting in which these interests flourished. This did not necessarily forge loyalism in an abstract form; it did create an association between Gaelic interest and imperial dominion. For these reasons, fear and marginality have been overstated as the reasons why Highlanders turned to loyalism.<sup>36</sup> Minorities such as the Gaels, French-

<sup>33</sup> “Oran do Choirneal Mac’Phearson,” in Mackenzie, *Orain Ghaidhealach agus Bearla*, 40, my translation; this song was for Duncan Macpherson, who commanded the 71st Foot at Yorktown in 1781 and who was known as Donnacha na h’Ath (Duncan of the Kiln), having been born in a kiln while his father, Ewan Macpherson of Cluny, was on the run from government forces after the 1745 Jacobite rebellion.

<sup>34</sup> Quoted from Duncan Kennedy, “A Song after the Revolution,” a contemporary poem, in Newton, *We’re Indians Sure Enough*, 159, Newton’s translation.

<sup>35</sup> James MacLagan, “Oran a rinneadh d’an chath bhuidhinn Rioghail Ghaidheallach nuair bha iad dol d’American san bhliadhna 1756,” in John Gillies, *Sean Dain agus Orain Ghaidhealach, do Reir Ordu’ Dhoin Uaisle a Raid an Gaeltachd Alba* (Perth, 1786), 115–16, my translation.

<sup>36</sup> William H. Nelson, *The American Tory* (Oxford, 1961), 86–90; Wallace Brown, *The Good Americans: The Loyalists in the American Revolution* (New York, 1969), 47; Potter, *The Liberty We Seek*, 12; Hunter, *Dance Called America*, 45; Devine, *Scotland’s Empire*, 183.

speaking Canadians, indigenous nations, and enslaved Africans all had something to fear from the loss of British control, as such a loss would leave them at the mercy of the less tolerant Revolutionary authorities. Significantly, it was a Highlander, Adam Ferguson (1725–1816), who explained that the psychological forces that bound communities consisted as much in opposition to an external “other” as in any internal affection.<sup>37</sup> Gaels could have been only too well aware that elements of colonial society were infected by an utter detestation of Scots. Colonial political consciousness was formed largely through English publications, which often held Scots in disdain and portrayed them as unabashed supporters of the royal prerogative. For colonial patriots, the Scots were “the contrivers and supporters of all measures against you [Congress]. Nor will they ever desist while the English have a penny to be plundered or a man sacrificed.”<sup>38</sup> Graphic satires, such as the single-sheet pictorial representation *The Scotch Butchery* (1775), conveyed to colonists the treatment that places such as Boston were likely to receive from Highland soldiers once they were deployed there, behavior so shocking that even English troops would be forced to avert their gaze. Colonists had little difficulty in seeing the Highlanders as “cannibals” and equating them with other “savages,” a category that included both Native Americans and enslaved Africans.<sup>39</sup>

Yet accepting fear alone as a reason for loyalism fails to account for regional variation in responses within the colonies. Anti-Scots sentiment was strong in Virginia, for example, where the Scots held a virtual monopoly of the tobacco trade and debt to Scottish merchants was a bitter undercurrent of revolution. By contrast, in sparsely populated colonies, where Highland loyalism was strongest, there had been encouraging signs for the Highland immigrants and broadly positive views of the potential for Highlanders to bring areas into civility and commerce. Tax exemptions and the voting of public funds to support Highland settlement had passed during the governorship of Gabriel Johnstone (1734–52) in North Carolina. Land grants of up to 640 acres were awarded to Highlanders in North Carolina’s Cumberland County in 691 instances between 1732 and 1775.<sup>40</sup> Highland settlements were not segregated communities, set apart from other colonists, but vibrant, commercial societies. By the 1770s, backcountry settlers could obtain most of their necessities from the Highland settlement of Cross Creek, reducing the need for travel to Charleston. Slaveholding was an active part of Highland settler life in the colonies and helped make Cross Creek a commercially vibrant settlement. It was also, largely as a result of its increasing role as a commercial hub, a politically dynamic community. In 1765, Cross Creek had been the site of anti-Stamp Acts protests, in which the town’s residents had burned an effigy of the stamp officer. During these troubles, Andrew Stewart, a Highland resident of Cross Creek, lost his commission as “His Majesty’s printer for this

<sup>37</sup> Adam Ferguson, *Essay on the History of Civil Society* (Edinburgh, 1767), 23–24.

<sup>38</sup> Arthur Lee to the Committee of Secret Correspondence, 3 June 1776, London, in *The Revolutionary Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States*, ed. Francis Wharton, 6 vols. (Washington, DC, 1889), 2:95–96; Michael Duffy, *The Englishman and the Foreigner* (Cambridge, 1986), esp. 19–20.

<sup>39</sup> *The Scotch Butchery* (London, 1775); “About the use of Savages Against the Americans,” in *State Records of North Carolina*, ed. Walter Clark, 16 vols. (Raleigh, NC, 1886–1914), 10:714; McAlpine, *Genuine Narratives*, 43.

<sup>40</sup> Jeffrey Amherst to Henry Bouquet, 7 August 1763, New York, British Library, London, Add. MS 21634, fol. 347; Meyer, *Highland Scots*, 89.

province” for printing an anonymous letter in the *North Carolina Gazette*, which had been advocating the use of force against the king’s forces.<sup>41</sup> In this tense political climate, allegiances were determined by political, social, and economic factors rather than by ethnicity. Highland Scots did not make up the majority of the population even in Cumberland County, but this seems to have played little part in the political discourse of Highland settlers. Instead, concerns about political representation or infrastructure tended to occupy the minds of Highland community leaders. It is not surprising, then, that contemporaries did not seem to take the alleged toryism of the Highlanders as a given. In August 1775, the Provincial Congress of North Carolina appointed a twelve-man committee, which included Highland members of the Provincial Congress, to explain to the recent arrivals “the Nature of Our Unhappy controversy with Great Britain.” The Continental Congress in Philadelphia soon followed suit. By October 1775, the loyalist governor of North Carolina, Josiah Martin, feared for his own position when he was informed that many had “declared themselves for neutrality.”<sup>42</sup>

The Mohawk Valley of New York was also in the process of political integration but with markedly different results. There had been early emigration from Argyllshire to the colony in 1739 and 1764, but the “Argyle Patent” was a considerable distance from the valley where, in 1773–74, some sixty-seven Highland families settled on lands owned by Sir William Johnson.<sup>43</sup> For these recent arrivals, integration necessitated a modicum of allegiance to Johnson, the most powerful landowner (and imperial presence) in the area. No attempt was made, however, to replicate semifeudal structures, and Johnson’s papers indicate that the emigrants were proactive in making the relationship an economic rather than a personal one. To Johnson’s frustration, they made stringent demands on him as a prerequisite of their settlement.<sup>44</sup> After William Johnston died, in July 1774, the Highlanders allied with his son, John Johnson, in order to safeguard the advantageous economic relationship. The embryonic nature of political institutions in upper New York had resulted in a relatively unsophisticated relationship between these new settlers and the Johnsons, although that relationship was a clear mark of the settlers’ determination to forge new colonial-based networks for material security.

Highlanders did not become loyalists simply because they were considered cultural outsiders in the colonies. Rather, their understanding of themselves as Britons within the British Empire ensured their resistance to arguments from the American Revolutionaries. If the Highlanders’ British and imperial identity had not been

<sup>41</sup> Meyer, *Highland Scots*, 108–11, 133–34.

<sup>42</sup> “The Journal of the Proceedings of the Provincial Congress of North Carolina, held at Hillsborough 20th August A.D. 1775,” in Clark, *State Records of North Carolina*, 10:173–74; Martin to the earl of Dartmouth, 16 October 1775, on board a sloop of war in the Cape Fear River, *ibid.*, 10:266. For evidence of good relations between Highland settlers and revolutionary governments, see “Proceedings of Virginia Convention at Williamsburg in the matter of certain Scotch immigrants en route to North Carolina,” *ibid.*, 10:346; Thomas Burke to the General Assembly of North Carolina,” 16 April 1782, Halifax, NS, *ibid.*, 16:13; and MacDonald to Mr Walter, 4 November 1775, Halifax, NS, in *Letterbook of Captain Alexander MacDonald*.

<sup>43</sup> Robert McGeachy, “Captain Lauchlin Campbell and Early Argyllshire Emigration to New York,” *Northern Scotland* 19 (1999): 21–46; Governor Tyron to the second earl of Dartmouth, 2 November 1773, New York, TNA, CO5/1078, fols. 15–16.

<sup>44</sup> James Sullivan, ed., *The Papers of Sir William Johnson*, 14 vols. (Albany, NY, 1921–30), 8:915–17, 12:1111–12.

firmly fixed by that time, they would not have been able to articulate their objections to Revolutionary authority.

## LOYALISM AND INTEREST

With the prerequisites of the post-Culloden Highlanders in place, let us now examine how Highland interest was politicized into loyalism. The origins of this process lay in the exploitation of empire for material and social gain. The second half of the eighteenth century saw the widespread co-option of the fiscal-military state, and its public revenue, by interested groups and individuals. These people—in the Highland case, mostly army officers—benefited from the burgeoning commitments of empire and from the public purse that funded it. While these benefits could be inconsistent, some Highlanders accrued enormous wealth and privilege to satisfy their personal and familial interests.<sup>45</sup> The global extent of these benefits is revealed by the range of imperial posts and positions, which underpinned British expansion taken up by Highland Scots. Lachlan McGillivray (1718–99) was a successful fur trader and planter in Georgia who, through marriage into a mixed French/Creek elite of the Coushatta Clan, became the father of a son, Alexander (1750–93). After the death of Chief Emistigo during a raid in 1782, Alexander led the Upper Creek Nation during the late Revolutionary and early Republican eras. John Campbell, fourth earl of Loudon (1705–82), took command of British forces in North America from William Shirley in 1756. James Macpherson (1736–96), author of the controversial Ossian poems, served briefly as a secretary to Governor George Johnston of Florida and wrote several tracts in defense of Lord North's ministry. In 1780, Macpherson became an MP for Camelford, his wide imperial connections most obvious in his appointment to the post of London agent to the Nabob of Arcot. Recent scholarship has shown the extent to which East India Company patronage was used for the political management of Scottish elites, including active and potential Jacobites. There is little doubt of the increasing influence of Highland Scots in the corridors of power in Georgian Britain. Men with vested interests in the Highlands were beginning to coalesce into an influential group of lobbyists, culminating in the formation of the Highland Society of London in 1778.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>45</sup> P. J. Marshall, "Empire and Opportunity in Britain, 1763–75," 1995 Prothero Lecture, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th ser., 5 (1995): 128; Andrew Mackillop, "The Highlands and the Returning Nabob: Sir Hector Munro of Novar, 1760–1807," in *Emigrant Homecomings: The Return Movement of Emigrants, 1600–2000*, ed. Marjory Harper (Manchester, 2005), 233–61. For opportunity through empire, see Bob Harris, "'American Idols': Empire, War and the Middling Ranks in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Britain," *Past and Present*, no. 150 (February 1996), 115–18; C. A. Bayly, "The First Age of Global Imperialism, 1760–1830," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 26, no. 2 (April 1996): 43; P. J. Marshall, *The Making and Unmaking of Empires: Britain, India, and America*, c. 1750–1783 (Oxford, 2005), 158–206.

<sup>46</sup> Edward J. Cashin, *Lachlan McGillivray, Indian Trader: The Shaping of the Southern Colonial Frontier* (Athens, GA, 1992); J. Russell Snapp, *John Stuart and the Struggle for Empire on the Southern Frontier* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1996); James Noel MacKenzie MacLean of Glensanda, "The Early Political Careers of James 'Fingal' Macpherson and Sir John Macpherson, Bart." (PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 1967); James Macpherson, *The Rights of Great Britain asserted Against the Claims of America* (London, 1776); James Macpherson, *The History and Management of the East-India Company from its origin in 1600 to the Present Times* (London, 1779); George K. McGilvary, *East India Patronage*

It was in the military that Highlanders achieved their greatest imperial and global importance. During the Seven Years' War, as well as in the years immediately following, Highlanders in the king's service were exposed to a massive territorial empire, with profound effect. Nine battalions of infantry had been raised in the Highlands during the Seven Years' War; four of those battalions were deployed to North America, two to Germany, and three to India or as home deployments. Sir Archibald Campbell, made famous by his command of British forces in Georgia colony in 1778–79, had experience of a global empire, having fought in the West Indies during the Seven Years' War and in India in the 1760s and early 1770s. Allan McLean of Torloisk, colonel of the loyalist regiment the Royal Highland Emigrants, had spent much of the 1760s and 1770s recruiting for the East India Company.<sup>47</sup> The preponderance of Highlanders in the army was exceptional. Between 1756 and 1783, at least nineteen regular Highland battalions were raised, in addition to several loyalist regiments and units for home defense. A conservative estimate based on these figures would suggest that one in eight members of the eligible male population of the Highlands served in the army at some time during the period. This ratio is comparable to available data for the British Isles as a whole between 1775 and 1783; those figures, however, include naval enlistments (larger than the army by one-third), as well as volunteer and militia units, which were more numerous, and more accepted in England and Ireland, than in Scotland. If we were to compare enlistment in the regular army alone, we would find that during the American War of Independence, around one in twenty-eight eligible males in the British Isles served; the figure for the Highlanders' enlistment during both imperial wars was at least one in eight.<sup>48</sup> Such was the extent of Highland elite involvement in the military that lack of diversification in the employment of some families proved utterly ruinous of their finances.<sup>49</sup>

The explanation for the Highlanders' disproportionate enlistment lay in the structural foundations of Highland military emigration and the ideological im-

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*and the British State: The Scottish Elite and Politics in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 2008); Donald McNicol to James McLagan, 3 March 1779, Limoges, Dundee City Archives, GD/We/5/13; Sir John Sinclair, *An Account of the Highland Society of London, from its establishment in May 1778, to the commencement of the year 1813* (London, 1813), 1–12.

<sup>47</sup> *Journal of An Expedition against the Rebels of Georgia in North America Under the Orders of Archibald Campbell Esquire Lieut. Colol. Of His Majesty's 71st Regimt., 1778*, ed. Colin Campbell (Darien, GA., 1981), i–v.

<sup>48</sup> These figures are based on a Highland population of 275,000, of which one-quarter were eligible males, increasing by three percent per annum as males came of military age. This would have yielded an eligible male population of 148,000, of which a conservative 16,000 would have been required to raise nineteen battalions, allowing for understrength battalions and transfers between battalions, as occurred at the end of the Seven Years' War. The true number of Highlanders in regular battalions, additional companies, reinforcements, and non-Scottish units might have been as many as 25,000, rather than 16,000, but I have chosen a conservative approach until more quantitative research is completed. The higher estimate would yield one in six Highland males serving in the regular army during the period. The figures for the British Isles as a whole are 136,000 regular soldiers, from an eligible male population of 3.8 million, and are based on figures from Stephen Conway, "British Mobilization in the War of American Independence," *Historical Research* 72 (February 1999): 65–66. In summer 1757, of the non-Highland battalions deployed to America, Scots amounted to between 4 percent and 56 percent of those battalions; see Stephen Brumwell, *Redcoats: The British Soldier and War in the Americas, 1755–1763* (Cambridge, 2002), 318.

<sup>49</sup> Stana Nenadic, *Lairds and Luxury: The Highland Gentry in Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2007), 90–106.



peratives of Highland military service. Military emigration had been a major facet of the political economy of the Highlands since at least the Middle Ages, and service in foreign armies remained important until the 1750s.<sup>50</sup> Unique, however, was the centrality of military service to private economic security. Prior to the collapse of clanship in the Highlands, men had pledged their military service to a chief in return for economic security and protection from famine and starvation. The end of clanship as a viable form of communal organization did not sever the connection between military service and familial security. This was reinforced in the post-Culloden Highlands as landed elites invested increasing energies into military recruitment, underpinning the role of the army as a logical guarantor of private interest. Army officers recruiting in the Highlands did experience problems in meeting quotas for enlistment. Such problems arose not from Highlanders' resistance to military service but, rather, from their desire to safeguard their own private interests and, given the landed elites' need for men to fill the ranks, negotiate a higher price for their military labor.<sup>51</sup>

Land was a vital measure of the value of military service. Land was invested with huge importance in the rural economy of the Highlands: it was the main form of property and thus central to the Highlanders' economic security.<sup>52</sup> In the aftermath of the Seven Years' War, local elites and the imperial state intensified the attractiveness of military service and security by promising land upon enlistment and by settling demobilized soldiers on land grants in Quebec and New York under the auspices of the King's Proclamation of 7 October 1763. Around 170 Highland veterans of the 78th Foot alone were settled in the colonies, including over 70 percent of the regiment's cadre of noncommissioned officers.<sup>53</sup> By 1775, a link had been forged between imperial political ends and preestablished ideas among Highland males of how to achieve economic security through military service in the army. How this was reinforced in the initial stages of the American Revolution may be seen in a recruitment poster for the 71st Foot from 1776:

They [the 71st] are to go to *America*, and by his *Majesty's* royal and *most gracious proclamation*, they will be entitled to a *full discharge* at the end of *three years*, that is in 1779 or of the present American rebellion[.] . . . It cannot in all human probability, fail to be entirely quelled, next summer. Then, *gentlemen* will be your *harvest*, and the best one you ever *cropt*. You will each of you, by visiting this *New World* become the *founders of families*. The lands of the *rebels* will be divided amongst you, and everyone of you become lairds.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Stephen Conway, "Scots, Britons and Europeans: Scottish Military Service, c. 1739–1783," *Historical Research* 82 (February 2009): 114–30; John Marsden, *Galloglas: Hebridean and West Highland Mercenary Warrior Kindreds in Medieval Ireland* (East Linton, Scotland, 2003).

<sup>51</sup> For bounty money offered, see Sir James Grant to George Mackenzie, 28 September 1778, Edinburgh, NAS, GD248/277/37; Lawrence Leith to James Ross, 3 January 1776, Northern Argyll, Scotland, NAS, GD170/415; and Recruiting Accounts, 1776, Maxwell and Francis Skelly's companies, 71st Foot, Fochabers, Scotland, NAS, GD44/47/1/49.

<sup>52</sup> Andrew Mackillop, *More Fruitful than the Soil: Army, Empire, and the Scottish Highlands, 1715–1815* (East Linton, Scotland, 2000), 139–67.

<sup>53</sup> Ian Macpherson McCulloch, *Sons of the Mountains: The Highland Regiments in the French and Indian War, 1756–1767*, 2 vols. (New York, 2006), 2:173–78.

<sup>54</sup> Recruitment poster, 8 January 1776, National Museum of Scotland (NMS), National War Museum, Edinburgh Castle, Edinburgh, M.1982.97; italics in original.

This should not suggest, however, that Highland military service was confined to a traditional localist model; rather, it was increasingly immersed in a broader imperial culture as soldiers recognized the potential for economic security through land grants in colonial North America. Writing about the Highland soldiers who had fought in North America in the 1760s, Scotus Americanus commented, “It would seem as if they had made such important conquests in that quarter of the globe, in order to secure for themselves, and their countrymen, an agreeable and happy retreat, and a large fertile field for them . . . to flourish in.”<sup>55</sup> This was important, as access to colonial land increased at a time when the economic plight of Highland tenants in Scotland was severely deteriorating. But this was not a simplistic story of increased rents, enforced on a languid and unified tenantry by villainous landlords. Greater economic opportunities and rising rents promoted dissension between tenant groups, the upper tenantry extending their economic hold over the lower orders as it passed rents on down the social ladder. Paradoxically, it was middling tenants who had responded best to these changes—by becoming leaders in the cattle trade—but who then were forced to emigrate when prices fell in the 1770s.<sup>56</sup>

Rising rents and the renters’ inability fully to pursue commercial possibilities within the strictures of Highland society made imperial settlement opportunities through the offer of colonial land in exchange for military service increasingly inviting. For middling Highlanders affected by financial instability, the colonies became part of an aspirational ideal. Rural Highlanders conceptualized North America as a land of liberty because it was associated with freedom from the arbitrary power of landowners. Direct ownership of land would, it was thought, safeguard families from any future inability to meet rising rents. The equation of land and liberty was widespread in the British Atlantic world, but the precise meaning of this notion depended on the particular historical experiences of those who held it. The deterioration of political and economic conditions in the Highlands led Gaels to understand liberty primarily in terms of the ownership of property. These emigrants did not have the experience of English common law in which property was explicitly understood as a bulwark against tyranny; however, the frustrations of rack-renting—in some areas, rents rose 300–400 percent between 1750 and 1800—convinced upwardly mobile Highlanders of the benefits of full ownership of property. In 1772, Alexander McAllister wrote from North Carolina that in that colony, “we breathe the air of liberty, we have no rents.” For McAllister, America was a door opened by God for the poor of the Highlands. One observer noted how Highland emigrants leaving Scotland “launched out into a new world breathing a spirit of liberty and a desire of every individual becoming a proprietor.” Duncan Lothian considered these issues in “A Song for America,” published in 1780:

<sup>55</sup> Scotus Americanus, *Information Concerning the Province of North Carolina*, 10.

<sup>56</sup> Malcolm Gray, *The Highland Economy, 1750–1850* (Edinburgh, 1957), 23; T. M. Devine, *Clanship to Crofters’ War* (Manchester, 1994), 32–52; James Hunter, *The Making of the Crofting Community* (Edinburgh, 2000), 37–48; Devine, *Clearance and Improvement*, 126–56; Mackillop, “Highland Estate Change and Tenant Emigration,” 237–58.

Tha h-uile neach chaidh null;  
 Toirt cunntas math nas leor air;  
 On gheibh iad fearann soar ann;  
 Chan fhan ach daoine gorach.

[Every person who has gone over yonder; / Gives a favorable report of it; / Since they can get cheap land there; / No one but fools will stay here.]<sup>57</sup>

This change in the significance of land reinforced Highland loyalism by prompting a political redefinition of property. In their equation of liberty with freedom from the tyranny of landowning elites, Highlanders' conceptions of liberty were necessarily negative ones, if we divide notions of liberty by the polarity suggested by Isaiah Berlin in the 1950s: Highland emigrants demanded the absence of constraint and the freedom to be left in relative peace.<sup>58</sup> Free land provided the physical space in which sociopolitical and economic constraint could not materialize. Land was therefore perfectly suited to negative conceptions of liberty and, as such, reinforced an imperial reading of the Revolutionary conflict. As most Highlanders sought negative liberties, they did not claim rights as Englishmen, a positive approach to liberty favored by American Whigs. Instead, they expressed their rights by seeking the free ownership of land. In this reading, an imperial balance was maintained between government and individuals, and between periphery and center, in which all were protected from tyranny and arbitrary authority. By demanding positive self-mastery and rational control over their political destinies, the Revolutionaries launched a direct attack upon this assumed uniformity of their rights as Englishmen; they also undermined the constitutional order that had created this balance. Adherence to negative conceptions of liberty necessarily brought the Highlanders into more direct conflict with Revolutionary authorities, who demanded more concrete expressions of obligation through the administering of patriotic oaths or forcible enlistment in patriot militias. These impositions, so contrary to negative freedoms, were later cited by loyalists as a major cause of their resistance. Helen Macdonnell, the wife of the prominent New York loyalist Allan Macdonnell of Collachie, summed up Highland imperatives when she assured patriot commanders that although aggression would be met with equal violence, her fellow Highlanders had "not done anything against the country, nor intend to, if let alone."<sup>59</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Mackillop, "The Highlands and the Returning Nabob," 250; Angus McCuiag to Alexander McAllister, August 1770; Alexander McAllister to John Boyd, November 1770; James McAllister to Alexander McAllister, October 1771; Alexander McAllister to Mary McAllister (undated [1772?]), all written between Cross Creek and Argyllshire, Scotland—no specific locations given, all in McAllister Papers, North Carolina State Archives (NCSA), Raleigh, NC; Commissioners of Customs, Fort William, to the Treasury in London, 18 July 1785, Treasury Papers, TNA, T1/624, fols. 107–9; Duncan Lothian, "Oran America" [A song for America], in *A Collection of Gaelic and English Songs* (Aberdeen, 1780), 22, my translation; and see "Observes or Remarks upon the lands and islands which compose the barony called Harris," Lee Papers, NLS, MS 3431, fol. 80.

<sup>58</sup> For definitions of positive and negative liberty, see Isaiah Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty: An Inaugural Lecture Delivered before the University of Oxford on 31 October 1958* (Oxford, 1958); see also J. C. D. Clark, "Liberty and Religion: The End of U.S. Exceptionalism?" *Orbis* 49, no. 1 (2005): 21–35.

<sup>59</sup> Loyalist Claims Commission Testimony of Donald Morrison, TNA, AO12/34, fol. 357; McLean, *An Historical Account*, 211.

Highland loyalism was relatively strong in the initial phase of the Revolutionary War because previous military service in the Seven Years' War had secured land for Highland soldiers, and there was every reason to assume in 1775 that this outcome would be repeated. For recently arrived Highlanders entirely receptive to the view that the imperial state was unconquerable and that it was only through imperial dominion that they had "been enabled to visit this western region," the idea of defeat was incomprehensible. Recruiting officers deliberately cultivated the idea that the new war would soon be won, and they placed definitive restrictions on the period of service in Highland and Highland loyalist regiments; few Highlanders believed they would be required to serve more than three years before being entitled to land. As late as 1777, Highland officers were still making plans to bring their families to the colonies, presuming the "rebellion" would soon be over. The idea that the "Yankies [*sic*]" would soon give up the rebellion and that "the Congress and leaders of rebellion will be sent home to take their fate at Tyburn" was a common one. It took one Highland loyalist officer until late 1777 to realize that the landed rewards might never be forthcoming. Even then, he still placed his faith in a negotiated settlement that would allow him to return to his Staten Island farm.<sup>60</sup> For a colonial region with decades of reciprocal relations with the imperial state and, indeed, for individuals with personal experience of the material benefits of service, the idea that Revolutionary authorities could satisfy Highland interests could not possibly have developed in the short years between the Highlanders' arrival in the colonies and the mobilization of Revolutionary militias against Highland settlements in North Carolina and New York in early 1776. As Donnchadh Ban Mac an t-Saoir had expressed as early as 1767:

Bidh sinn uil' aig Rìgh Deòrsa;  
 'S cha ghòraiche dhuinn;  
 O's ann aige tha 'n stòras;  
 Is còir air a' Chrùn;  
 Bheir e 'm pàigheadh 'nar dòrn duinn.

[We will all serve King George; / And we are not foolish for it; / For he is the one with the provisions; / And right to the Crown; / He will give payment to us.]<sup>61</sup>

## LAND AND THE REVOLUTIONARY CONFLICT

The concern over land underpinned Highland support for imperial vitality during the Revolutionary War, demonstrating the considerable linkage between individual private interest and political allegiance. This link, however, was particular to the North American colonies in the 1770s. Land, for example, was rarely, if ever, used

<sup>60</sup> General Donald Macdonald to James Moore, 20 February 1776, Camp at Rockfish, NC, in Clark, *State Records of North Carolina*, 11:278–79; 8 January 1776, NMS, M.1982.97; MacDonald to J. Ogilvie, 24 April 1775, Halifax, NS, and MacDonald to [addressee unknown], 21 August 1777, Halifax, NS, both in *Letterbook of Captain Alexander MacDonald*, 159, 321; John Grant to Sir James Grant of Grant, 26 June 1777, New York, NAS, GD248/54/4/60.

<sup>61</sup> Mac an t-Saoir, "Oran Do Thailbeart," in *Orain Dhonnchaidh Bhàin*, 23, Macleoid's translation.

in other constituent parts of the British Empire in securing the attachment of people to the crown. In India, no land settlement policy was initiated, and it was not until 1779 that land began to be offered to sepoys in return for their service; it had, incidentally, very few takers among the Indian troops. But in India, high levels of taxation, surplus populations, and a belief in the suitability of Indians as cultivators of the soil indicated that there was little need for a change to the status quo. North America was different. A sparse population of European emigrants, vulnerable frontiers, and limited returns on uncultivated land led directly to the provision of lands to secure economic and political stability.<sup>62</sup>

British policy during the Revolutionary War gave credence to the established notion that colonial discord provided opportunities. Governor Martin of North Carolina was quick to realize that the provision of land attached Highland emigrants to the imperial government. A month before the outbreak of hostilities, he had informed the American secretary, the second earl of Dartmouth, that, despite attempts to prevent their doing so, recently arrived Highlanders had begun squatting on royal lands. As the crisis deepened, and in order to limit the numbers of colonists, the British administration took the decision to close the land offices, an act that prevented newly arrived emigrants' gaining access to land through official means. Martin also reported that those Highlanders who had fought against the Regulators, a movement of western settlers who staged an uprising against the corrupt North Carolina political establishment, at the Battle of Almanace in 1771, had been questioning him about whether the King's Proclamation of 1763, which had provided lands to veterans of the Seven Years' War, extended to their own military service.<sup>63</sup> By November 1776, Martin had grown in confidence and detailed how, in the absence of the land office, he had begun to implement a land policy for a group of Highlanders who had arrived on 21 October of that year:

I was induced to Grant their request [for land] on the Terms of their taking such lands in the proportions allowed by his majesty's royal instructions . . . thinking it more advisable to attach these people to government by granting as matter of favour and courtesy to them what I had not power to prevent than to leave them to possess themselves by violence . . . as it was not only the means of securing these people against the seditions of the rebels . . . I think my lord, with submission, that the expediency of making some rule of favour and indulgence in granting lands to these emigrants . . . may be worth his majesty's royal consideration.<sup>64</sup>

As Martin's correspondence reveals, Highlanders residing at Cross Creek had already used their service against the Regulators as a justification for providing themselves with the freedom that accompanied the possession of land. Martin clearly believed that these land grants were "the sure means of restoring and

<sup>62</sup> Channa Wickremesekera, *"Best Black Troops in the World": British Perceptions and the Making of the Sepoy, 1745–1805* (New Delhi, 2002), 129; Marshall, "Empire and Opportunity in Britain, 1763–75," 13, 20.

<sup>63</sup> Martin to Dartmouth, 10 March 1775, Wilmington, NC, in Davies, *Documents of the American Revolution*, 10:56.

<sup>64</sup> Martin to Dartmouth, 12 November 1776, on board a sloop of war in the Cape Fear River, in Clark, *State Records of North Carolina*, 10:324, and see 10:324–28.

establishing the good dispositions of the large body of their countrymen.”<sup>65</sup> He was not alone. On 10 August 1775, the *Quebec Gazette* had carried a notice that stated that enlistees in the new Royal Highland Emigrant Regiment would be rewarded with land, amounting to 200 acres for each private soldier. The size of these land grants was graded according to the rank of the soldier and rose to 5,000 acres for field officers. This compared favorably to the land settlements on which other provincial units were being raised. Privates serving in the Royal Highland Emigrants could expect to receive double the land allowance granted to their fellow loyalists. This was also a better offer than had resulted from the King’s Proclamation of 1763, upon which Highland veterans had been settled at the conclusion of the Seven Years’ War. In addition to the obvious numerical differences, the terms granted to the soldiers of the Royal Highland Emigrants were unique in that they stipulated a very precise theater of operations and very precise terms of enlistment. Furthermore, their terms promised that those lands would be given to the soldiers before they had completed their military service; in effect, the limited obligations that were associated with this entitlement to land were stated explicitly.<sup>66</sup>

The importance of these inducements can be seen in the accounts of Highland loyalists. John McAlpine did not enlist in any loyalist regiment, but he wrote to General Carleton that “should my sovereign . . . be pleased to grant me some rebels farm at the conclusion of this war . . . we would accept it with gratitude.” Other Highland loyalists achieved similar objectives. Nile McLean, a piper in the Royal Highland Emigrants, informed his father that “I and my family enjoys a good state of Health” and that his cousin and brother had already been discharged and had settled near New York. A fellow piper in the 71st Foot noted that “I am as well as ever I was in my life . . . and I hope my fortune within two years will be as good that I will have 200 acres of free ground of my own in this country.”<sup>67</sup> Until almost the end of the war, Highland emigrants were plied with land settlements in return for enlistment. For instance, when Charles, Lord Cornwallis,

<sup>65</sup> Martin to Dartmouth, 16 October 1775, on board a sloop of war in the Cape Fear River, *ibid.*, 10:267–68, and see 264–79.

<sup>66</sup> George Patterson, “The 84th Foot or Royal Highland Emigrants,” in *More Studies in Nova Scotian History* (Halifax, NS, 1941), 12; MacDonald to William Howe, 30 November 1775, Halifax, NS, in *Letterbook of Captain Alexander MacDonald*, 224; “Brid. Gen. Allan Maclean,” app. 21, in *Hadden’s Journal and Orderly Books: A Journal Kept in Canada and upon Burgoyne’s Campaign in 1776 and 1777*, by Lieut. James M. Hadden, *Royal Artillery*, ed. Horatio Rogers (Boston, 1972), 549–50. The corresponding figure for other loyalists was 100 acres per private, with the difference between Emigrant officers’ and other loyalist officers’ land grants diverging at increased rates the higher the rank of the officer. The vast majority of loyalists would not receive this amount of land until 1788. The corresponding figure for the King’s Proclamation was 50 acres per private rising to 4,000 acres per field officer. It is probable that these numbers were inflated for the purposes of recruitment, for it was not until April 1777 that the king officially authorized Torloisk to grant lands but to do so on the basis of the 1763 Proclamation; see Paul H. Smith, *Loyalists and Redcoats: A Study in British Revolutionary Policy* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1964), 67.

<sup>67</sup> McAlpine, *Genuine Narratives*, 15, 45; Nile Mclean to his father, 2 September 1782, Halifax, NS, NAS, GD174/1348; William Mackenzie to Peter [surname unknown], 7 February 1778, New York, NAS, GD170/3158.

commanding British forces in the southern colonies, met with the Highlanders at Cross Creek in 1781, he offered land to induce them to enlist.<sup>68</sup>

Private William MacDonald fought in North America during the Seven Years' War and settled in Nova Scotia in 1763 under the provisions of the King's Proclamation. In 1777–78, he bought out nine other 50-acre grants that had been awarded to Highland veterans in the Shubenacadie River Valley. While awaiting confirmation of these purchases by Governor Charles Morris, MacDonald chose to enlist in the Royal Highland Emigrants. Service in the Revolutionary War provided him with a further 300 acres, which he received in 1783, giving MacDonald 800 acres of land. He then purchased sheep, cattle, and adjoining land and granted 400 acres to his sons James and Andrew. By 1794, on the basis of his military service in two wars, MacDonald had become a landowning entrepreneur, established an estate of 1,300 acres, and successfully manipulated the imperial system to establish his family's economic security. Such manipulation could bring in vast sums. The brother of an officer in the Royal Highland Emigrants estimated that officer's income to be £1,200 per annum, enough to sustain two properties in New York and provide his four-year-old son with a lieutenant's commission when he reached maturity. "All this," the officer's brother reported, "owing to his merited and spirited behaviour on Bunker's Hill."<sup>69</sup>

It is impossible to say with precision how many Highlanders owned land or benefited from imperial land grants throughout the Revolutionary period. Land grants to Highlanders in North Carolina numbered 691 prior to 1775, representing over 20 percent of the Highland male population of the colony but indicating that many still rented or labored on other people's lands. What was significant, however, was the aspiration to own land. The most common means of Highlanders' acquiring colonial land in this period was through land grants; technically, such grants did not involve ownership—but because they were awarded on the basis of limited quit rents and requirements that some of the land be cultivated within three years, land grants did not possess the potential for a return to rack-renting and thus satisfied the Highlanders' desire for property and liberty. Many Highlanders quickly used their grants to establish credit to purchase full ownership of surrounding lands, either land grants that were unoccupied or land on offer by local sellers. The economy of land was an active part of Highland settlements in the New World. The collective objective was simply to "live in a state of comfort and independence" afforded by the stable income of owned property. The strength of loyalism in Cross Creek might be explained by the desire to gain land ownership in an area where most were still not outright owners, or

<sup>68</sup> Charles, Lord Cornwallis, to Francis Edward, Lord Rawdon, April 1781, Cross Creek, NC, TNA, PRO30/11/79, fol. 2; see also Rawdon to Cornwallis, April 1781, Camden, SC, TNA, PRO30/11/101, fol. 8, in which Cornwallis allows the recruitment of a Highland Company in North Carolina on the basis of "grants of lands according to his majesty's Proclamation."

<sup>69</sup> William MacDonald Land Grant Papers, Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management, Halifax, NS, RG20, Series A, vol. 1; Donald B. Smith, "From Swords to Ploughshares: The Context for Highland Soldier Settlement in Nova Scotia, 1710–1775" (MA thesis, St. Mary's University, 2003), 107–42; Patrick Campbell to Duncan Campbell of Glenure, 1 March 1777, NAS, GD170/1065/3/1.

even possessors, of land.<sup>70</sup> These aspirations were reflected in the established loyalist regiments. Colonel John Small of the Royal Highland Emigrants stated in 1785 that almost 700 of his soldiers had settled in Nova Scotia alone. A minority of men recruited from the Highlands, certainly less than 40 percent, ever returned to Scotland but, instead, sought land in British North America.<sup>71</sup>

For the Mohawk Valley Highlanders there was a clear imperative to embrace loyalism. Fifty families settled on Sir William Johnson's lands, all of whom were given 50–200 acres of land at just £6 per 100 acres, with no rents to pay until the farms were established. With their available credit, some, such as the settler John Cameron, began buying more land and were invested, economically and emotionally, in their farms. Many had cleared an average of 2–8 acres when the Revolution began; this land not only had to be protected but might, through military service, be expanded up to four times the original allotment and on even better terms than Johnson had offered. Whereas the major leaders of the Highlanders chose loyalism, the rank-and-file were men of modest means, sometimes subrenters working on land rented by others from Johnson, suggesting that they land in the absence of credit.<sup>72</sup> For instance, Donald Cameron possessed no land and made his living from three cows he was permitted to graze on the 12 acres owned by Angus Cameron near Johnstown. Donald Cameron joined the King's Royal Regiment of New York in 1776 but transferred to the Royal Highland Emigrants, whose land grants were of greater value. His landlord did not join the loyalists until 1777.<sup>73</sup> When making postwar claims, Highland loyalists included the valuation of their lands, often at inflated rates. The result was modest Highlanders claiming over £100 sterling in compensation for their losses in the war. Some of the Mohawk Valley Highlanders who had arrived in 1773 were not in full possession of their land grants before the war broke out, and there was understandable support for the maintenance of the pre-1775 political order, to ensure that these lands were delivered to them.<sup>74</sup> The aspiration to landholding was the most important motivational factor in Highland loyalism. Given the number of loyalist claims from Highlanders that indicated they had rented from Johnson, and the number of men disarmed by Philip Schuyler in 1776—from 200 to 300 Highlanders in all, almost as many eligible Highland males as lived in the area—were

<sup>70</sup> Loyalist Claims Commission Testimony of Donald Morrison, TNA, AO12/34, fol. 357; "Observes or Remarks upon the lands and islands which compose the barony called Harris," Lee Papers, NLS, MS 3431, fol. 80.

<sup>71</sup> John Small to Charles Morris, 5 September 1785, Windsor, NS, NAS, GD174/2177/10; Regimental returns of 2/71st Foot, April 1783, TNA, WO12/7847.

<sup>72</sup> Loyalist Claims Commission Testimony of John Cameron, TNA, AO12/27, fol. 209; Loyalist Claims Commission Testimony of John Macdonnell, TNA, AO12/29, fol. 245; Loyalist Claims Commission Testimony of Donald Ross, TNA, AO12/29, fol. 54; Loyalist Claims Commission Testimony of Ranald MacDonald, TNA, AO12/27, fol. 157; Petition of Alexander Macdonnell, June 1776, TNA, WO28/9, fol. 159.

<sup>73</sup> Loyalist Claims Commission Testimony of Donald Cameron, TNA, AO12/29, fol. 210; Loyalist Claims Commission Testimony of Angus Cameron, TNA, AO12/29, fol. 250; it is not known if there was any familial relationship between the two men.

<sup>74</sup> Loyalist Claims Commission Testimony of Alexander Cameron, TNA, AO12/26, fol. 411; Loyalist Claims Commission Testimony of Alexander Cameron, TNA, AO12/29, fol. 203.



must conclude that the number of subtenant Gaels who served the loyalist cause was a significant majority.<sup>75</sup>

### THE SPECTRUM OF LOYALTIES

As a political stance, Highland loyalism was vulnerable to shifting contexts, and Highlanders displayed a spectrum of loyalist attitudes and actions based on their ever-changing experiences. The Highlanders were not uniformly loyal to the crown. This lack of unity developed not in spite of their common assumptions about land but, rather, because of them. Highlanders who supported the American Revolution also prioritized obtaining land and securing their liberty. Alexander McAllister was a supporter of American independence, and although he believed that the Quebec Act (1774) was an abomination, extending as it did the size of the province while also restoring French civil law and lifting the strictures on Catholics holding office, he was most concerned about the closure of the land offices in North Carolina, an event that he feared would prevent his fellow Highlanders' access to the colonies. Similar fears were voiced by Lachlan MacIntosh, an emigrant from Badenoch and a leading member of the independence movement in Georgia. Both McAllister and MacIntosh took the conspiratorial view that land office closures were a deliberate British policy to hinder emigration.<sup>76</sup>

What caused McAllister and MacIntosh to arrive at so different a conclusion from that of the loyalists? Utterly crucial to their respective conclusions was the amount of time these men had spent in the colonies. Highland loyalists were recent arrivals, the overwhelming majority having arrived after 1770. Estimates indicate that in the two years before the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, people from the Scottish Highlands and islands made up over 15 percent of all British emigrants to the colonies. Before the fall in cattle prices and the famine in Scotland in 1770–71, only isolated groups of Highlanders had arrived in the colonies, ensuring that most Highlanders, particularly those who became loyalists, were recent arrivals. Of the ninety-two Highlanders who fled from the Mohawk Valley to Canada along with Sir William Johnson's nephew, Guy Johnson, at the beginning of the war and later made loyalist claims, seventy-two had arrived in America after 1773. Land received by Highland immigrants in Cumberland County, North Carolina, in 1774–75 alone equaled all the land grants awarded between 1768 and 1774.<sup>77</sup> Recently arrived Highlanders depended on land grants, which would give them a base for economic expansion. By contrast, earlier arrivals from the Highlands were by that time deep into the process of expanding their interests through land purchase and thus were more convinced of their own ability to assert their in-

<sup>75</sup> Philip Schuyler to John Hancock, 19 January 1776, in *American Archives*, ed. Peter Force, 9 vols. (Washington, DC, 1837–53), 4:828; McLean, *The People of Glengarry*, 84–86.

<sup>76</sup> "St. Andrew's District Committee Resolves," December 1774, in *Lachlan MacIntosh Papers in the University of Georgia Libraries*, ed. Lilla Miles Hawes (Athens, GA, 1968), 8–12; Alexander McAllister to Hector McAllister, January 1774, and Alexander McAllister to John Boyd, January 1775, McAllister Papers, NCSA; Treasury Papers, TNA, T1/624, fols. 107–9; General James Moore to General Donald MacDonald, 20 February 1776, Camp at Rockfish, NC, in Clark, *State Records of North Carolina*, 11:277–78, and see 278–79.

<sup>77</sup> Bailyn, *Voyagers to the West*, 112; Fingerhut, "The Assimilation of Immigrants on the Frontier," 202; Brown, *The King's Friends*, 105; Meyer, *Highland Scots*, 91.

dependence through their own success. According to the Index of Land Grants for North Carolina, land grants frequently predated land purchases, indicating that new arrivals were rarely in a position for such assertions within the first few years of settlement. The higher percentage of loyalists in the Cross Creek community is reflected by the fact that, in 1774–75, Highlanders received 116 land grants, while purchases made by Highlanders amounted to just 46.<sup>78</sup> Claims presented to the commission established to compensate loyalists seem to confirm the view that Highland loyalists were more likely to have been recent arrivals. Of the over one hundred Highland loyalist claims that I have reviewed in detail, only two of those Highlanders had arrived before 1770 without having served in the Seven Years' War, and veterans had always been a minority in loyalists' regiments.<sup>79</sup>

American patriots Lachlan MacIntosh, Alexander McAllister, and the New Yorker Alexander McDougall had all resided in America since at least the 1740s—but what is significant is the nature of their social and economic integration. As a merchant, Alexander McDougall had concentrated on intercolonial rather than transatlantic trade, which gave him colonial contacts and outlooks. For Lachlan MacIntosh, integration was partly generational. He defined British tyranny as the same kind of oppression that “our fathers were not able to bear.” He had, moreover, colonial orientations in his commercial and personal contacts similar to McDougall's. MacIntosh had spent time in Bethesda Orphanage in Savannah, Georgia, under the care of George Whitefield and, at the age of twenty-one, met Henry Laurens, second president of the Second Continental Congress. Laurens served as MacIntosh's mentor and provided him with the necessary capital to secure 14,000 acres for rice cultivation. McAllister too had firm political contacts among separatists in North Carolina and represented Cumberland County in the Provincial Congress. McAllister's stance had been shaped by years of separation from “the mother country,” and by 1775 he had taken on a descriptive pronoun for all residents of the colonies: “us.”<sup>80</sup>

It was the ability of these men to integrate themselves into life in the New World that was vital. Recently arrived Highlanders had integrated themselves into an imperial worldview in pursuit of advantage; longer-term residents were equally as integrated, but their worldview was colonial, in pursuit of autonomy. The names of four Highlanders—all but one of whom would support the Revolution—had appeared on a petition in 1772 that requested an extension of the franchise in Cumberland County, for the election of a representative to the General Assembly of North Carolina. Only a sophisticated political environment could have produced the six resolves called for by Lachlan MacIntosh and the St. Andrews District Committee in 1774, which included support not only for Boston but also for local Georgian concerns as well as a call to end the “abhorrence of the unnatural practise

<sup>78</sup> Meyer, *Highland Scots*, 93.

<sup>79</sup> Paul Smith has claimed that most early loyalists were veterans of the Seven Years' War; see Smith, *Loyalists and Redcoats*, 67. This is not borne out by Wallace Brown's comprehensive study, in which he highlights that only sixty of the one thousand New York claims came from veterans; see Brown, *The King's Friends*, 90.

<sup>80</sup> Harvey Jackson, *Lachlan MacIntosh and the Politics of Revolutionary Georgia* (Athens, GA., 1979), 12–14; “St. Andrew's District Committee Resolves,” in Hawes, *Lachlan MacIntosh Papers*, 12; Alexander McAllister to Hector McAllister, 29 November 1770; Alexander McAllister to Hector McAllister, 6 December 1770; Alexander McAllister to John Boyd, January 1775, all in McAllister Papers, NCSA.

of slavery.” The established Highland communities of Cross Creek and Darien were divided by the Revolutionary War to an extent that was not apparent in the Mohawk Valley, where Highland settlements were less established. Accordingly, there was greater engagement with notions of positive liberty in these communities, as settlers asserted their rights through political representation and their individual ability to purchase land through their own success. This, and integration into colonial rather than imperial networks, was a vital determinant in allegiance.<sup>81</sup>

Loyalism began to disintegrate when it became evident that the Revolution was not the threat to Highland interests that their imperial view of the conflict had led the Highlanders to assume. After initially misjudging the desire of Highland emigrants to be left alone, Revolutionary authorities in North Carolina became adroit in their dealings with the Highland communities. Their neutrality was ensured by the Revolutionaries’ careful targeting of coercive measures against only the most recalcitrant. Revolutionary authorities in North Carolina established a committee to ensure the welfare of the families of exiled loyalists. Death sentences were rare, and less often still were they carried out. Following the debacle at Moore’s Creek in February 1776, only a minority of the 800 captured loyalists spent any significant time in custody; the rest were quickly released. Community leaders felt an acute sense of betrayal that the ordinary Highlanders had abandoned them and their loyalism, with Flora MacDonald in particular decrying their ingratitude. The Macdonnells in New York refused to join Allan Macdonnell of Collachie, the emigration leader, in his confinement in Albany and sought the assistance of local Revolutionary authorities to ensure that they would not be required to join him. As the war progressed, Highland emigrants came to realize that consistently supporting the British government was not essential to their pursuit of individual interest and that following landowning elites into loyalism was not the most efficient way of securing lands. John McAlpine, petitioner to General Carleton, received lands on Staten Island in 1778 and retired there, openly admitting later that he had resisted several attempts to induce him back into active opposition to the Revolution. That British agents contacted hundreds of Highlanders evinces the large numbers of potential loyalists who remained inactive within areas of Revolutionary control for significant periods during the war.<sup>82</sup>

Periodic forays by Revolutionary militias into Cross Creek were so successful that when Cornwallis arrived in North Carolina in April 1781, he confided, “They [the Highlanders] are not equal to my expectations.” Land confiscations by Revolutionary authorities were rare, and it would seem that only those emigrants utterly unwilling to have any dealings with Revolutionary authorities faced any

<sup>81</sup> “The Petition [to Josiah Martin] of the Freeholders and Inhabitants of and near Campbelton in Cumberland County,” 13 March 1772, in Clark, *State Records of North Carolina*, 9:79; “Journal of the Proceedings of the First Provincial Convention or Congress of North Carolina, held at New Bern on the 25 August, A.D. 1774,” *ibid.*, 9:1049; “St. Andrew’s District Committee Resolves,” December 1774, in Hawes, *Lachlan MacIntosh Papers*, 12, and see 3; Alexander McAllister to John Boyd, January 1775, McAllister Papers, NCSA.

<sup>82</sup> Memorandum of Flora MacDonald, NLS, MS 2618 Misc., fol. 82–3; McLean, *An Historical Account*, 206; McAlpine, *Genuine Narratives*, 15, 18, 48; John Ancrum, William Wilkinson, and Jona Dunbibin to Governor Richard Caswell, 24 February 1778, Wilmington, NC, in Clark, *State Records of North Carolina*, 13:57; Martin to Germain, 23 January 1778, New York, *ibid.*, 13:368; Hardy Sanders to Governor Thomas Burke, 16 August 1781, Wake Court House, NC, *ibid.*, 15:610.

long-term or fatal consequences in life, liberty, or property.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, even in New York, where broken terrain, proximity to Canada, and Burgoyne's ill-fated operation in summer 1777 made it a constant battleground, the motivation to continue the fight seemed to derive from deeply personal antagonisms, grounded in the sufferings the Revolutionaries had inflicted on Highland families in the absence of their loyalist husbands and fathers. Where these personal motivations were less powerful, Highland emigrants moved carefully toward neutrality and hope for peace.<sup>84</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

Highland loyalism was a political movement predicated on a rational reading of imperial concepts and the perceived strength of the British Empire, both in the Old World and in the New World. The political and cultural outlook of the Highland loyalists was truly transatlantic in scope and was shaped by events across a wide geographic space. Situating the emigrant Highlanders' relation to the American Revolution in this wider, imperial context provides a far more concrete understanding of Highland motivations than previous studies have offered. Highland loyalism itself could not have existed, in fact, if Highlanders had not invested their ambitions and ideals in that imperial polity. In this respect, Highland loyalism reflected and overlapped with loyalism more generally. Like other loyalists, the Highland loyalists saw in the imperial state the best guarantor of their material interests. The imperial state promoted loyalism through manipulating identity—by encouraging beliefs, offering benefits, co-opting military strength, and monitoring the favorable reception of these processes in certain groups on an ongoing basis. These groups, however, also had agency, and they, in turn, co-opted the imperial state. When the state was no longer able to provide the advantages of loyalty, loyalism disintegrated.

Parallels with the motivations of other imperial actors can be drawn, but Highland loyalism was underpinned by a particularly strong connection to the hegemonic discourses of imperialism. Most significant, many Highlanders gave land a primacy above other values. Their connection to land was so strong that some scholars have suggested that it could subsume or even negate concepts of

<sup>83</sup> For the militia forays, see "Report of Committee appointed to enquire into the conduct of insurgents and suspected persons," 20 April 1776, Halifax, NC, in Clark, *State Records of North Carolina*, 10:594–603; Governor Richard Caswell to C. Harnett, 2 September 1777, New Bern, NC, *ibid.*, 11:603; introductory note, *ibid.*, 14:iii; "House Journal of the State of North Carolina," 22 January 1779, New Bern, NC, *ibid.*, 13:633; and Cornwallis to Rawdon, April 1781, Cross Creek, NC, TNA, PRO30/11/79, fol. 2; Benjamin Franklin Stevens, ed., *The campaign in Virginia 1781: An Exact Reprint of Six Rare Pamphlets on the Clinton-Cornwallis* (London, 1888), 10; and Brown, *The King's Friends*, 197. For Highlanders who received mistreatment, see Loyalist Claims Commission Testimony of Donald MacDonald, TNA, AO12/34, fol. 409; see also Daniel Klaus to William Knox, 16 October 1777, Montreal, in Davies, *Documents of the American Revolution*, 14:219–24; and "Account of William Gipson," in *The Revolution Remembered: Eyewitness Accounts of the War for Independence*, ed. John C. Dann (Chicago, 1983), 188–89, and see 186–89.

<sup>84</sup> For these antagonisms, see McLean, *The People of Glengarry*, 96; for hopes of peace among Highland loyalists, see MacDonald to Mr Walter, 4 November 1775, Halifax, NS, in *Letterbook of Captain Alexander MacDonald*, 217; and Colin Shaw to Sally Shaw, 14 October 1778, Shaw Papers, NCSA.

identity.<sup>85</sup> The argument presented here suggests otherwise; land strengthened a sense of identity, because what the empire offered was a compelling alternative to the economic problems of the Highlands. Changing views of liberty and property in the Highlands were subsumed by the imperial administration to motivate and gain the loyalty of Highland emigrants to North America. They rejected the emerging United States not because they misunderstood the political context of the American Revolution but because their interests appeared to be better served by the British Empire.

Samuel Johnson had been wrong to worry about the loyalties of the Gaelic emigrant, but when he spoke of “rays diverging from a focus,” he had been right. Highland views passed through an imperial prism, creating a spectrum of loyalisms in pursuit of Highland interests; the further that spectrum emerged from the prism, the more divergent the kinds of loyalism became. Highland emigrants in North America could be relied upon only as long as those emigrants identified with the political prejudices of the imperial state. Ultimately, the Highlanders fought not for the king or the state, through fear or deference, but for their own ends: land, liberty, and the tangible, if debated, potential of a New World.

<sup>85</sup> Andrew Mackillop, “For King, Country and Regiment? Motive and Identity in Highland Soldierly, 1746–1815,” in *Fighting for Identity: Scottish Military Experience, c. 1500–1900*, ed. Steve Murdoch and Andrew Mackillop (Leiden, 2002), 191.