

## Communications

To the Editor:

I must take issue with some parts of Maya Jasanoff's April 2008 article, "The Other Side of Revolution: Loyalists in the British Empire."

To begin with, Professor Jasanoff attacks "bluntly patriotic portrayals" of the American Revolution. I must question that statement. I have been examining assorted textbooks for more than twenty-five years to check for remarks about loyalists, an interest of mine. In practically every case, I thought the coverage of loyalism to be both adequate and fair. In fact I have never even seen an American textbook that could be called patriotic (with one possible exception). Since she does not specify where this patriotism was expressed—except in a letter to the *New York Times*—the validity of her complaint cannot be determined.<sup>1</sup>

Given Professor Jasanoff's interest in things such as tarring and feathering, land confiscations, and loyalist settlement outside the United States, it is surprising that she does not mention my book on loyalism, which has a chapter on the treatment of Tories (along with assorted accounts of brutalities committed against them), the hostility of Tories to British taxation, and even a chapter on Canada. And it was written after all that patriotism of the bicentennial.<sup>2</sup>

I am curious about Rev. Jacob Bailey's remarks about his joy at reaching Halifax and seeing the British flag. When was the cited journal written—soon after or years later? The text and note are not clear on that point. His statement has the air of something written to inspire patriotism among his descendents. Most emigrating Tories were put off by Nova Scotia's forbidding coastline, and Halifax did not impress either. Three years before the reverend's arrival, one British officer declared: "Of all the Miserable places I ever saw Halifax is the Worst," which explains why most loyalists avoided that place.<sup>3</sup>

From the one sentence Professor Jasanoff devotes to Shelburne, Nova Scotia, a reader would not know the mess that developed there or the race riots that shattered that inclusive society. Overall she has one paragraph on the political problems in New Brunswick and part of a

<sup>1</sup> Maya Jasanoff, "The Other Side of Revolution: Loyalists in the British Empire," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 65, no. 2 (April 2008): 205–32 (quotation, 207), esp. 207 n. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Philip Ranlet, *The New York Loyalists*, 2d ed. (Lanham, Md., 2002). See esp. 44, 141–49, 153–55, 161–67.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 162–63 (quotation, 163); Jasanoff, *WMQ* 65: 205, 205 n. 1.

note mentions those in Nova Scotia. A section of the essay details the heroic struggle of the Johnston family, which found success in Nova Scotia. This approach is reminiscent of the sort of history pushed for many decades by the United Empire Loyalists (U.E.L.), an organization in Canada surprisingly similar to the Daughters of the American Revolution in the United States.

Regarding the Johnstons, Professor Jasanoff makes the incredible statement that they "unquestionably attained a degree of prominence in Nova Scotia they would not have had if they had remained in Britain or returned to the United States."<sup>4</sup> Though that may warm the cockles of the heart of the U.E.L., I do not see how that assertion can be proved without employing a crystal ball. What is the point of replacing republican chauvinism with Canadian chauvinism?

I look forward to reading Professor Jasanoff's forthcoming book where she will provide documentation for her estimates of the number of Tory exiles.<sup>5</sup> But I do hope that it will not be filled with U.E.L. propaganda. It would be appropriate to remember that loyalists were not all heroic victims. Some of these hardy Canadian pioneers were men who today would be called perpetrators of war crimes.

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<sup>4</sup> Jasanoff, *WMQ* 65: 231.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 208. See Ranlet, *New York Loyalists*, 179–80. In my assorted scholarly works, I have raised doubts about using enlistments in Tory regiments to estimate loyalist strength. See for example Philip Ranlet, "British Recruitment of Americans in New York during the American Revolution," *Military Affairs* 48, no. 1 (January 1984): 26–28; Ranlet, "The Fate of the *Washington*, 1775–1776: A Precedent for Future British Conduct," *American Neptune* 54, no. 3 (Summer 1994): 194–98; Ranlet, "In the Hands of the British: The Treatment of American POWs during the War of Independence," *Historian* 62, no. 4 (Summer 2000): 731–57; Ranlet, *New York Loyalists*, 95–103. For Professor Jasanoff's use of enlistments in Tory regiments, see Jasanoff, *WMQ* 65: 206 n. 2, 207, 207 n. 3.

Maya Jasanoff replies:

I am grateful for Dr. Ranlet's letter and hope that my book on the loyalist diaspora may respond more fully to some of his concerns. He will certainly find his own work cited therein, a valuable intervention in the rich literature on revolutionary New York by Robert Calhoon, Edward Countryman, Janice Potter, Joseph Tiedemann, and Judith Van Buskirk, among others.

Dr. Ranlet rightly observes that the date of Jacob Bailey's diary was not provided in the accompanying footnote, and I welcome the chance to amend that omission. The diary is dated 1779, the year of Bailey's emigration. Although Nova Scotia's rocky coastline appeared forbidding to loyalists like Bailey, approximately thirty thousand loyalists migrated to the province, making it far and away the largest single site of loyalist exodus.

I accept Dr. Ranlet's challenge to my use of the word "unquestionably" in characterizing the Johnston family's fortunes in Canada: historians should be cautious in wielding such sweeping terms. Given, however, that Elizabeth Johnston's husband, father, and father-in-law were all formally attainted by the state of Georgia, it seems hard to imagine her children ascending to the rank of governor, senator, or attorney general (the counterparts of their positions in Nova Scotia). Nor were these provincials rich or well-connected enough to squeeze plum appointments from Britain's congested networks of domestic patronage. Even the best-off loyalists counted themselves fortunate to place their sons in the army or civil service. For loyalist refugees, as for others on the margins of British metropolitan power, the British Empire offered greatest room for advancement.

I regret that Dr. Ranlet read my portrayal of the Johnston family's experiences as "heroic"; my sense is that loyalists have too often been viewed as victims by some, traitors by others. As studying the American Revolution—like any civil war—makes plain, one person's war crime can be another's version of justice. I continue to have faith that a global picture of the loyalist exodus offers a means of transcending nation-centered narratives of the revolution and that the value of comparison can trump old habits of taking sides.