

Chapter Title: FOREWORD TO THE REISSUE

Chapter Author(s): Andrew J. O'Shaughnessy

Book Title: The American Revolution in Georgia, 1763—1789

Book Author(s): KENNETH COLEMAN

Published by: University of Georgia Press. (1958)

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv21d63pr.4>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



This book is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0). To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>.



University of Georgia Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The American Revolution in Georgia, 1763—1789*

FOREWORD TO THE REISSUE

THERE are many reasons to welcome the reprinting of what remains the standard work on Georgia and the American Revolution. Georgia was one of the few colonies not to send delegates to the Stamp Act Congress (1765) and later to the First Continental Congress (1775). It was the last state to declare allegiance to Britain treasonous. In 1778 it became the only state that the British captured during the Revolutionary War. The British commander Lieutenant Colonel Archibald Campbell delighted in the prospect of taking “a stripe and star from the rebel flag of Congress” (122). Georgia alone retained civilian government under occupation in contrast to military government in other areas of occupation. In 1779 it was the scene of one of the major campaigns of the war when the Count d’Estaing attempted to besiege the British garrison in Savannah. The black troops from St. Domingue who participated in the attack included some of the later leaders of the revolution in Haiti, such as Toussaint Louverture. Studies of individual states and localities are vital for a better understanding of the causes, military events, and impact of the Revolution. Despite the increasing popularity of social history and history “from the bottom up,” Kenneth Coleman’s 1958 *The American Revolution in Georgia 1763–1789* remains worth reading.

It is tempting to assume that Georgia was essentially Loyalist. That would, after all, neatly explain its failure to send delegates to the Stamp Act Congress and the First Continental Congress. It would seem very logical given that it was the most recently established of the colonies, having been settled only forty years before the war. James Oglethorpe, the founder of the colony, was still alive during the American

Revolution. The majority of the white inhabitants were British-born immigrants. It received more financial help than most other colonies from Britain. Its royal governor, Sir James Wright, was relatively popular before the war and seemingly conscientious to the demands of his constituents. The colony was also very vulnerable to attacks by the neighboring Creeks and to a lesser extent the Cherokees—both of whom became allies of the British.

While acknowledging the predominance of the Loyalists, Kenneth Coleman offers a more complex picture of affiliations during the American Revolution. In 1765 the governor refused to allow the assembly to meet and to send delegates to the Stamp Act Congress. Nevertheless, sixteen of the twenty-five members sent word to the Massachusetts House of Representatives that they were concerned for the common welfare of the colonies and would support the Congress's resolutions. Indeed, Georgia joined the non-importation agreement against the Townshend Duties (1767), which levied duties on selected imports like glass and tea. At the time of the First Continental Congress, there was a party that strongly supported the rebels, but the colony was more divided than its sister colonies further north, with opposition to the non-importation and non-exportation agreement of the Continental Association. The initial failure of the colony to adopt the association caused the Second Continental Congress in May 1776 to ban other states from trading with Georgia. Nevertheless, the rebels in Georgia were active in attacking customs officers and tarring and feathering Loyalists. In Savannah, they seized the powder magazine in the wake of the bloodshed at Lexington and Concord.

By September 1775 Governor Wright thought that royal government had almost collapsed. The leading center of Revolutionary support in Georgia was in St John's Parish, which comprised the counties of Liberty and Evans. The rebels in Georgia formed a "committee of safety" and a provincial congress that took control of the militia. By February 1776 the royal governor had fled to the safety of a British battleship docked in Savannah harbor. He and the other southern governors played an important role in persuading the British government to send an expedition to the south that ended in defeat at Charleston (1776). In April, Georgia created its own

constitution known as the Rules and Regulations of 1776. While the rebels eventually managed to gain control, their hold was much more tenuous, so much so that they did not declare it treasonous to support Britain until 1778. Like those in South Carolina, the Loyalists in Georgia were convinced that the bitterest military clashes were those between fellow Americans such as the Battle of Kettle Creek in Georgia (1779). The difficulty for the rebels was greater thanks to the presence of a British garrison further south in St. Augustine, Britain's Indian allies, and Loyalist bands like that of Thomas Brown and his Florida Rangers. After the British conquest in 1778, rebels lost control of the state—except in Wilkes County and the upper part of Richmond.

Georgia is a case study in why the British ultimately failed in America. They were unlikely to succeed when they could not hold a colony with so many inhabitants who were sympathetic to the Revolutionary cause. They were unable to allocate sufficient troops there. After capturing Georgia, the produce of the state was insufficient to solve the problem of feeding the British army and supplying the slave plantations in the British Caribbean. However, with different military priorities, the British might have held on to East and West Florida and Georgia. By late 1781 the forces in the state consisted mainly of Loyalist militia and Hessians, with less than one-ninth of the force composed of British regulars. Some 4,500 to 5,000 whites and blacks evacuated the state with the retreat of the British.

After sixty years Kenneth Coleman's study inevitably reflects the priorities and views of its time. He says nothing about women in the state during the Revolutionary period. And while he does discuss the role of African Americans, that treatment is not as thorough as today's scholars would demand. He did, though, include more coverage of Native Americans than was fashionable at the time. When asking why Georgians ultimately supported the American Revolution, he responds, "Georgians considered themselves Americans" (278). Modern scholars, of course, still debate whether a sense of nationalism preceded or postdated the war. Yet it is still important for students of history to read the work of an earlier generation of historians like Coleman because while such books may reveal the limitation of earlier interpretations of the past, they also can be a corrective to our

own preoccupations and reveal the deficiencies of current historical writing. Serving as an officer in World War II, Coleman and many of the historians of his generation had broader experience than modern academics, and their histories tended to be less narrow.

Indeed, Coleman covers a wide chronological span that looks at the long revolution from the causes to the postwar years. He variously considers political, religious, economic, diplomatic, and military factors. The book consequently remains a classic.

ANDREW J. O'SHAUGHNESSY