

Taking Sides in Revolutionary New Jersey: Caught in the Crossfire**Maxine N. Lurie****New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2022****238 pages****ISBN: 9781978800175****DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14713/njs.v9i1.317>**

Maxine N. Lurie's new book addresses one of the fundamental questions—perhaps *the* fundamental question—of America's struggle for independence: Why did colonists choose the sides they did during the revolution? In *Taking Sides in Revolutionary New Jersey*, Lurie has offered a fresh, revealing, and frankly very interesting perspective on the actions and motives of those, as she puts it in her subtitle, "caught in the crossfire" of a civil, imperial, and international war. While Lurie does this in the context of one state, New Jersey nevertheless was a critical theater during the entire course of the war, and the state's fraught political allegiances reflected much of the discord that divided Americans throughout the rebellious provinces. Indeed, Lurie carefully situates her study in the wider literature of the War for Independence, including works focused on the roots of civil strife and political divisiveness. Thus *Taking Sides* deserves a readership well beyond those interested in New Jersey's revolutionary experience.

Lurie's approach to her subject is biographical. She has written vignettes—some long, some short—organized in six chapters and comprising the bulk of the volume. The carefully chosen individuals are representative of the revolutionary era's political spectrum; and they ranged from fiercely committed to reluctant patriots; "irreconcilable" loyalists to lukewarm royalists; staunchly pacifist Quakers and those "read out" of Meetings for taking active parts in the conflict; "straddlers, trimmers, and opportunists" with problematic attachments to any cause or who did their best to profit from the war; and others who, from conviction or circumstances, tried to remain neutral or just stay out of the way. And the motives behind such a diversity of loyalties and attachments? As Lurie explains, they were equally diverse. Some were obvious. Pious Quakers

largely clung to their pacific faith and remained aloof from the struggle, while republican ideology drove many New Jerseyans into patriot ranks. Royal officials and most Anglican clergy, unsurprisingly, clung to the royal standard. But economic factors, family and community connections, religious beliefs, and, as the war dragged on, the bitter impact of armed conflict on individuals, all figured in why state residents took the stances they did. By and large, there were no simple explanations.

The biographies personalize how these various motives could shape loyalties. A few examples must suffice here, but they demonstrate how Lurie uses the experience of particular individuals to shed light on much wider developments. Bernardus LaGrange was a lawyer in New Brunswick, in central New Jersey, and active in prewar social and political affairs. His political, economic, and social connections bound him to the Crown, and he never wavered in his support for George III. If his loyalism shocked no one, however, it drew the wrath of patriot neighbors. Faced with social ostracism, then with increasingly dire public threats, LaGrange very reasonably feared for his life. While Lurie doesn't use the words, the lawyer was a victim of rebel terrorism. No fool, he absconded to the protection of the British garrison in New York, an "irreconcilable" Tory never to return. William Franklin, New Jersey's last royal governor—and a reasonably popular one before independence—was another "irreconcilable." Arrested and then imprisoned in harsh conditions in Connecticut, after the exchange he struck back brutally at New Jersey patriots as head of the paramilitary Board of Associated Loyalists, whose members served not for pay but for booty. Not all of the wealthy were loyalists. William Livingston, a patrician and the state's first elected governor, was a committed republican—ideology counted—and risked his life and fortune in taking up the patriot cause. Originally a political moderate, he became a ferocious enemy of New Jersey's loyalists. The pattern emerging from the biographies was generally the same: With

the exception of the Quakers, violence begot violence in escalating cycles of revenge and retribution.

In fact, the sharp divide among those who took the most committed positions engendered an especially bitter and violent civil war. And if this point is well known to historians of the revolution generally (and it certainly is), Lurie emphasizes that this aspect of the revolutionary contest, with its dreadful toll of human suffering and property destruction, is too frequently overlooked in its New Jersey context. The war-torn state, as she correctly observes, was neither a safe nor pleasant place. In this, *Taking Sides* aligns with some of the most recent scholarship on the revolution, which has emphasized the often-overlooked violence and brutality of the struggle. The author's contribution in this regard is first-rate.

Lurie's writing is worth mentioning. While she has dealt with a subject of real complexity, at only 190 pages of actual text, *Taking Sides* is not an especially long volume. The author writes with precision and comes to the point; her prose has no excess verbiage and there is no jargon. In fact, the book is an easy and often engaging read with any number of new insights. All of this derives from a thorough and impressive archival research effort and a full command of the pertinent secondary literature. Lurie has missed nothing significant. *Taking Sides in Revolutionary New Jersey* is a genuinely significant contribution, and I am confident that scholars of the revolutionary struggle in New Jersey—and, indeed, of the American Revolution generally—will share my appreciation.

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