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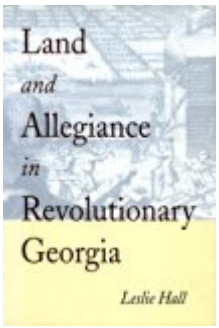
Leslie Hall. *Land and Allegiance in Revolutionary Georgia.* Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 2001. 231 pp. $45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8203-2262-9.



Reviewed by William L. Ramsey

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A Review of Leslie Hall's *Land and Allegiance in Revolutionary Georgia*

Georgia occupied an anomalous position with respect to other mainland British colonies during the American Revolution. Only a generation old, it was sparsely populated, underdeveloped, and relatively content with its royal governor and government. As a result, it responded sluggishly to republican rhetoric and was able to offer only token, disorganized support to the rebel war effort. In her new book, *Land and Allegiance in Revolutionary Georgia*, Leslie Hall explores Georgia's revolutionary ordeal and attempts to make sense of the colony's uniqueness.

She begins her study with a chapter on Georgia's early history, suggesting that the colony's responses to the pressures of Revolution were shaped by its prevailing circumstances. Among these, she cites the poverty of Georgia settlers, who could lay claim to nothing more than their land in many cases, the proximity of multiple frontiers that made life hazardous in the best of times, and a royal government unable to support itself through local revenues as key factors setting Georgia apart from other colonies. Subsequent chapters follow the unfolding drama of the Revolution in chronological order and in much greater detail, with most chapters devoted to a single year between 1776 and 1783. She concludes the book with a chapter on the post-war confusion and plundering that marked Georgia's independence.

Hall's central thesis, as indicated by the book's title, has to do with the relationship between the civil government's protection of property rights and the mercurial loyalties of Georgia settlers. Because Georgia was the only colony in which British civil authority was re-established during the war, Georgians were forced to declare their loyalties not once but as many as seven times in some areas. Both rebel and British civil authorities, she claims, recognized that security of property was a priority for settlers and used it as a means of courting or coercing allegiance throughout the conflict. In order to cope with this difficult situation, she suggests that many Georgians "transcended political ideology" and pursued a pragmatic course of "flexible loyalty" that allowed them to maintain control of their land.

Moreover, Hall argues that this flexibility "gave civilians some control over the power of government, control they did not have before or after the war" (pp. xi-xiv).

Hall successfully demonstrates that land was a major preoccupation for both American and British civil authorities. In the two years prior to the arrival of British troops in the South, Georgia's state government attempted to utilize public domain lands to encourage enlistment. It also attempted to force loyalists out of the state or into obedience by threatening to confiscate their property, as with the expulsion act of 1777. Once British authority had been re-established in Savannah in late 1778, Royal Governor James Wright also attempted to secure allegiance through guarantees of property rights. Wright's good intentions were often thwarted, however, by military priorities, especially with respect to runaway or confiscated slaves.

Hall deserves credit for exploring the revolutionary period in Georgia from a new perspective. As a demonstration of her main thesis, however, the book falls short. Hall's narrative tends to conflate two intertwined yet separate issues that influenced the behavior of Georgians: property rights on the one hand and military success or failure on the other. Much of her evidence supports the parallel argument that civilians practiced "flexible loyalty" simply because they were waiting to see which side would win. Security of property was undoubtedly a major component in this bandwagon mentality, but other issues such as group psychology, morale, kinship connections, and military leadership also contributed, as she concedes in certain passages.

Hall's focus on property security minimizes another issue of vital concern as well. Slaves, although considered a form of property, were also a major tactical consideration for both rebel and British armies in the South. British plans to mobilize slave support had a profound impact on southern loyalties, as Sylvia Frey demonstrated convincingly in her monograph ***Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age***. Frey proposed a "triangular" model for the war in the southern theater, consisting of rebels, loyalists, and African slaves, in which white southern loyalties turned on a complex set of fears about slaves and the institution of slavery itself. Property security was again a major component of that dynamic but hardly begins to fathom the real depth and influence that racial anxieties exerted over southerners. No modern monograph can hope to grapple adequately with the issues of southern loyalty and rebellion, even in Georgia, without some discussion at least of the Philipsburg Proclamation.

The research behind ***Land and Allegiance*** draws on numerous published primary sources. Most of these, however, were available to Kenneth Coleman when he published ***The American Revolution in Georgia*** in 1958. Hall has not utilized some of the major sources, moreover, that informed Coleman's account, most notably the three volumes of the ***Revolutionary Records of Georgia*** (except as a historiographical reference), published in the early 1900s or the Colonial Office records in the British Public Records Office, now generally available on microfilm. Her notes and bibliography include virtually no unpublished or archival sources. This reviewer was unable to locate any citations at all for state or local archives, including, remarkably, the Georgia state archives in Atlanta or the Georgia Historical Society collections in Savannah. Hall's principal contribution thus lies in her attempt to reassess Georgia's revolutionary experience from a new perspective. She has also performed a valuable service in synthesizing much of the secondary scholarship produced over the last few decades into an accessible narrative. Had she made use of archival resources or attempted to bring her discussion of Georgia to bear on the prevailing historiography about the revolutionary South in general, her work might have been more useful still.

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