Taking Sides

Loyalists, also known as Tories, were people who did not want independence from Great Britain because they had a good relationship with Great Britain. They made up about 15-20% of the white people in the colonies. Many loyalists were rich and happy with their lives- they didn't want anything to change that. Some Loyalists were rich landowners who were scared the Patriots would take or ruin their land and property. Others worked for the British government and liked their government. Still others were religious leaders who thought it was wrong to go against the king. Overall, there were only a small group of Loyalists in the colonies.

Patriots made up about 40-45% of the white colonists; they wanted independence from Great Britain. Many Patriots were well educated and had strong ideas about government and what was fair. Some Patriots were lawyers who fought against British laws they thought were unfair. Many farmers, merchants, and crafts people joined the cause as well. They thought independence would allow them to make more money and have freedom. Many people joined the Patriot cause because of persuasive letters and speeches.

Almost half of all the colonists were neutral. They were undecided about the issue of independence. Many of them didn't think that their daily life would change very much. Other people did not think violence was acceptable, so they did not want to go to war. Many other people in the servant and slave classes were not allowed to really say what they felt because they didn't have rights. Other times, families were split between ideas. Although there were many ideas around, half the colonists did not take a side about independence.

The Loyalists

Often, Loyalists who were from the ruling class thought they were "better" and morally and intellectually superior to the revolutionary colonists. By one Loyalist's account, the Revolutionaries were "lawless mobs and brutes". They didn't think that common people should control a government. Some thought that the king was wise, or even that his power came from God. Therefore, they thought regular people had no right being a part of the government.

Other Loyalists just considered themselves realists. They weren't willing to sacrifice for a war that was inevitably going to be won by the larger, more elite British military. Rather than fight the British military, they wanted to stay under its protection. Similarly, they thought that too many people would get hurt if they fought Great Britain, so it was pointless to fight at all.

There was many Loyalists that had too strong of connections with their Great Britain to revolt. They did trade with Great Britain and their businesses relied on it. They also had family in Britain or considered themselves part of Britain. Some thought that Britain didn't need to give the colonies many rights because they were all the way across the ocean. Still others just felt that you were a traitor if you disobeyed the King. These Loyalists felt very close to Great Britain.

There were also alternative reasons as to why some people became British Loyalists. For instance, some French, German, and Dutch settlers believed that the British would provide more religious freedom than the Americans. Several thousand African-Americans joined the British cause, hoping for freedom from slavery, since slavery was illegal in Great Britain, but not in America. There were many reasons for being a Loyalist.

The Patriots

Patriots were very upset because they thought Great Britain was not treating the colonists fairly. They were mad about taxation without representation. Great Britain was making laws taxing the colonists without the colonists being able to vote on the laws. Patriots thought this was unfair. They believed that people should have a say in the laws, and they didn't think that that would ever happen because the British government was so far away.

Other Patriots thought that the tax laws were unfair because colonist workers did not make very much money. Then, the taxes were very expensive and Britain required the colonists to buy British goods. This meant that many colonists were poor.

In addition, many colonists believed that common people should run the government, not a king. They thought that the people should get to vote on their leaders. These Patriots thought it was unfair for the king to decide who the governor was in each colony. The Patriots wanted to chose or vote for their own leaders.

Finally, the Patriots felt that instead of protecting them, the British military was actually causing problems. They saw the British soldiers, as causing violence like in the Boston Massacre. They called the soldiers "redcoats" or "lobster backs" to make fun of their red jackets. They did not want the British soldiers in their homes and communities.