Betrayal at Matthews Bluff

by

Harris Bailey

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BETRAYAL AT MATTHEWS BLUFF JANUARY 22, 1781- THE SEARCH FOR WILLIE

Who was Willie? History tells us that Willie led Lieutenant Kemp's platoon of Loyalist troops into an ambush by Patriot forces at Matthew Bluff in present-day Allendale County, South Carolina, on January 22, 1781. There are conflicting dates involved in the incident at Matthews Bluff. *Parker's Guide to the Revolutionary War in South Carolina* establishes the ambush as occurring on January 22, 1781. What would have motivated Willie to commit such a treacherous act against men entrusted to his care? Did he harbor some grievances against the Loyalists? Did he hold a genuine belief in the ideas of the Revolution? Who was Willie? Was he an Irish immigrant who hated the British? Was he a Patriot sympathizer who had lost family or property at the hands of Loyalists? Could Willie have been an enslaved person, a self-liberated formerly enslaved person, a Free Person of Color working in league with the Patriots, or an enslaved person acting as a double agent or spy for the Patriots? We have insufficient information to determine the racial heritage of Willie.

An exploration of Willie's racial identity may offer several possible reasons for his betrayal of Lieutenant Kemp and his men. Could his owner have taken Willie to the backcountry of South Carolina or Georgia or the Loyalists' haven in East Florida, thereby denying him the option of accepting the offer of freedom promised by the British? Was Willie a "faithful Negro servant" masquerading as a Loyalist to mislead and spy on them? Perhaps he had liberated himself from a plantation on the upper Savannah River and, with his family, traveled to Savannah after it fell to the British. In freedom, he may have watched his wife or child die in the deplorable refugee camps on Tybee Island. His betrayal of Kemp could have been an act of vengeance upon the Loyalists because of the death of his family.

Was Willie a White man familiar with the terrain, driven by an intense hatred of the occupation of his homeland? Had his family or neighbors been subjected to some atrocity by a Loyalist militia or a band of Loyalist sympathizers seeking revenge for an atrocity committed by Patriots? One must look at the events and people that influenced his decisions to understand who Willie may have been and what motivated him. In the following pages, several scenarios will investigate who Willie was.

Many People, Many Avenues to Explore

The question of Willie's identity is more than just a story about Willie. The tale of Willie is intertwined with numerous other individuals in the saga of the Revolutionary War across South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. It is a story of powerful men, such as Loyalist Thomas Brown, the Royal Governor of Georgia Sir James Wright, the Royal Governor of Virginia John Murray, Fourth Earl of Dunmore, and the British army commander Lt. Col. Archibald Campbell, who would impact the life of Willie. It is a story of many minor players in the war drama, such as Thomas Perryman, Daniel McGirtt, James McKay, Rannal McKay, Britton Williams, and the enslaved people Quamino and Samson. These individuals and many more, some famous and others obscure, made critical decisions, for good or bad, that impacted the lives of farmers, planters, enslaved people, free people of color, Native Americans, Patriots, and Loyalists in South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida.

The Loyalist Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Brown and the Patriot Captain James McKay were engaged in unconventional warfare, hit-and-run raids, and acts of terrorism against innocent bystanders who failed to adhere to the specific political agendas of the American Patriots or the American Loyalists. Many historians refer to the events in the Savannah River Valley and the backcountry of South Carolina and Georgia as America's first civil war. In many ways, the South Carolina Regulator Movement of the 1760s foreshadowed the Revolutionary War in the South Carolina backcountry. In the absence of law enforcement at the frontier, bands of frontiersmen formed vigilante groups to check lawlessness. "Gradually, they expanded their activities to include regulating household order. They whipped unruly women and forced the idle to work."[1] The movement also called attention to the conflict between the frontiersmen and the low county planters regarding equitable representation in the South Carolina House of Commons. Those old smoldering passions would reappear during the Revolution. In the span of the Revolutionary War in South Carolina and Georgia, many of the worst evils in American society were on full display. These included murder, rape, acts of vengeance, oaths taken, oaths broken, the wholesale destruction of property, thievery, the abduction of enslaved people and their resale into slavery, pilfering crops and livestock to feed one group and starve another group, acts of racial discrimination toward whites and non-whites, and British officials acting as "unreliable liberators" by failing to deliver on promises of freedom made to slave refugees.[2] Today we celebrate such pitched battles as Kettle Creek and Briar Creek, yet the skirmishes at Matthews Bluff and Wiggins Hill, as well as the events leading up to the actions at those locations, are much more reflective of the Revolutionary War in the regions beyond Charleston and Savannah.

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1   Rachel N. Klein, "Regulators, 1767-1769," in Walter Edgar, ed. *South Carolina Encyclopedia* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006), 784-785.

2   Russell F Weigley, *The Partisan War: The South Carolina Campaign of 1780-1782* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1975), 30.

Who Willie is also not just a story of Allendale County; it is a story influenced by events in Savannah, Georgia, in Charleston, South Carolina, in Augusta, Georgia, in St. Augustine, East Florida, and the length of the Savannah River as it stretched into the backcountry of South Carolina and Georgia. We may never know with certainty who Willie was or his racial identity. However, by examining the events that occurred at certain locations and the actions taken by those individuals, we can place Willie into a historical context. It also gives us insights into how the non-white population reacted to and interacted with white participants fighting in the Revolutionary War.

Situational Ethics

The war with Great Britain revealed many undercurrents of concern for the people of South Carolina and Georgia. It forced yeoman farmers and planters to decide if they would remain loyal to King George III or embrace the idea of independence from Britain promoted by the American Continental Congress. From the sidelines, enslaved populations in South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida watched as White Southerners fought for liberty and freedom for themselves. The enslaved looked on, realizing they were being denied the opportunity to obtain their own independence and freedom. The British promise of freedom to any enslaved person who deserted their owner's plantation and came to the support of the Crown created additional societal stresses in the South. The British strategy of utilizing enslaved individuals as soldiers or laborers or granting the enslaved freedom had to be carefully implemented. At its core, this policy threatened to unleash a servile war on the southern white population. In a letter to a friend in 1776, the Virginian James Madison wrote, "If America and Britain should come to a hostile rupture, I am afraid an insurrection among slaves may and will be promoted."[3] British officials had to strike a balance between freeing the slaves of American Patriots and leaving unimpacted the institution of slavery for American Loyalists.

Like the enslaved population, the Native American population watched from afar and pondered their role in the conflict. Should they join with the British Loyalists or the American Patriots? Or should they be neutral observers? Since the arrival of foreigners from the east, their populations had been devastated by diseases, and invasive animal species had overrun their fields. They observed that the Europeans manipulated one tribe against another tribe for the colonists' benefit. The Yamasee, the Waccamaw, the Westo, the Pedee, the Creek, the Catawba, the Cheraw, and the Cherokee watched as the British and Americans encroached upon and eventually pushed them off their traditional lands. Addressing the coming conflict, The British Superintendent of Indian Affairs

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3   Alan Gilbert, *Black Patriots and Loyalists: Fighting for Emancipation in the War for Independence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012, Kindle edition), 9.

for the Southern Department, John Stuart, informed the Creeks, "There is an unhappy dispute between the people of England and the white people of America, which can not affect you. Nothing is meant by it against you or any other nation of red people, but to decide a dispute amongst the white people themselves."[4]

The news of the 1775 proclamation of Lord Dunmore, the royal governor of Virginia, promising freedom to enslaved individuals who came to the aid of the Crown, quickly made its way from Virginia to the Carolinas and Georgia. John Adams recorded a conversation between two congressional representatives from Georgia on how information passed through slave communities. "The negroes have a wonderful art of communicating intelligence among themselves; it will run several hundreds of miles in a week or fortnight," they told him.[5] The thought of the emancipation of enslaved African Americans fueled fears of a regionwide slave insurrection in both Patriots and Loyalists. In the low country of South Carolina, the enslaved far outnumbered Whites. Lieutenant Governor William Bull estimated the 1769 population of the Colony as 45,000 Whites and 80,000 Slaves. The 1770 population of Charleston was estimated to be 5,031 Whites and 5,821 Blacks.[6] Between 1770 and 1775, 20,943 slaves were brought into colonial South Carolina. South Carolina imported 78 percent of the slaves brought into the British colonies during this period.[7]

Leading up to and after hostilities broke out between the American colonists and the British, there were conflicting opinions on South Carolina's relationship with the Crown. As historian David Duncan Wallace notes in *South Carolina: A Short History*, before the Revolutionary War began, "The province was loyally attached to the British Crown. It recognized the disadvantages imposed upon its commerce and industry by the laws of navigation and trade, but it frankly acknowledged the advantages derived from the protection and assistance of the great empire enlisting its affection and pride."[8] Tensions between the colony and the Royal government pushed the mother country and one of its most valuable colonies closer to war. As the storm clouds of war approached, American Patriot factions and American Loyalist factions lobbied the undecided public of the colony for support. There were times when gentle persuasion gave way to violent outbursts.

4   David Duncan Wallace, *South Carolina: A Short History, 1520-1948* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1969), 260.

5   John Adams, Diary, Sept. 23, 1775, "*Founders Online*" National Archives. https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/01-02-02-005-003-0013[Original source: *The Adams Papers, Diary and Autobiography of John Adams, Vol 2, 1771-1781*, ed., L H Butterfield (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961), 181-183](accessed September 20, 2023)

6   Wallace, *South Carolina: A Short History*, 247. According to *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1957*, the 1760 population of South Carolina was 36,074 Whites and 57,334 Blacks.

7   Table 5.60, "Slaves Imported from Overseas to the Thirteen Colonies, 1770-1775," in Thomas L Purvis ed., *Almanacs of American Life: Colonial America to 1763* (New York: Facts on File, 1999), 166.

8   Wallace, *South Carolina: A Short History*, 250.

The Absence of Cohesive Data

The lack of a population census for the southern British colonies before the start of the Revolutionary War made it challenging to determine the estimated Black population in South Carolina and Georgia. Various sources offer different estimates. William Gerard De Brahm, the Surveyor General for the Southern Division of North America, estimated that in the 1770s, there were 80,000 enslaved individuals in South Carolina and 13,000 in Georgia. Christoper Meyers and David Williams wrote in *Georgia: A Brief History* that Wright estimated that the Colony had 8,000 slaves, thirty-five percent of the total population. The Royal Governor of South Carolina, Lord William Campbell, estimated the enslaved people in 1775 as 104,000.[9] The focus on the enslaved population neglects an estimation of the population of Free People of Color in pre-Revolutionary War South Carolina and Georgia.

The Catawba Nation, which sided with the American Patriots, had the smallest population of the indigenous tribes in the colony. In "The Catawba and American Liberty," Alexia Jones Helsley wrote, "As late as 1760, the Catawba could still field 800 warriors, but the numbers continued to decline."[10] Shortly before the failed British attempt to capture Charleston in 1776, the Cherokees launched a series of bloody raids in the backcountry of South Carolina. The South Carolinian militia colonel Andrew Williamson gathered volunteers and joined a military coalition that included militia from Georgia, North Carolina, and Virginia and crushed the Cherokee uprising. Overwhelmed by Patriot forces, in May of 1777, the Cherokees signed the Treaty of DeWitts Corner, ceding their territory in northwestern South Carolina to the Patriots. The treaty neutralized the ability of the Cherokees to wage war against the South Carolinians.[11] Before the military campaign against the Cherokees, in the 1700s, they numbered between 12,000 and 14,000 thousand individuals.[12] Rachel Herrmann estimated that in the 1770s there were 14,000 Creek Indians in North America, centered in Georgia, Alabama, and Florida.[13]

9   Martha Condray Searcy, "The Introduction of African Slavery into the Creek Nation," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 66, no. 1 (1982): 21-32; (accessed January 24, 2023) Christoper C Meyers and David Williams, *Georgia: A Short History* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2021), 33.

10   Alexia Jones Helsley, "The Catawba and American Liberty," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 96, no. 3 (1995): 21-32.(accessed January 24, 2023)

11   Chapman J Milling, Red Carolinians (Columbia: The University of South Carolina Press, 1969) 319.

12   Jim Piecuch, Three People, One King: Loyalists, Indians, and Slaves in the Revolutionary South, (Columbia: The University of South Carolina Press, 2008) 54. Walter Edgar, *Partisans and Redcoats: The Southern Conflict That Turned the Tide of the American Revolution*, (New York: Perennial, 2003), 40.

13   Rachel B. Herrmann, *No Useless Mouth: Waging War and Fighting Hunger in the American Revolution* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2019), 67.

The Radicalization Of An Anglo-American

In 1774, Thomas Brown arrived in Savannah, Georgia, from North Yorkshire, England, aboard the *Marlborough*. With 75 indentured servants, he traveled up the Savannah River to the frontier town of Augusta, Georgia. From Augusta, he moved onto his 5,600-acre settlement northwest of Augusta on Kiokee and Greenbriar Creeks.[14] On his arrival in Savannah, he befriended James Habersham, Jr., and brothers Alexander Wylly and William Wylly. The twenty-four-year-old son of a prominent British businessman and industrialist, Brown planned to establish himself as a country gentleman on his plantation, Brownsborough. By 1775, Brown received an appointment as magistrate for St. Paul Parish from Governor Sir James Wright.[15] On the eve of the American Revolution, according to Maya Jasanoff, "Ten percent of the colonies' white population had immigrated within the last fifteen years."[16] Between 1770 and 1775, 65 percent of the new immigrants to the American colonies were from the British Isles. Over 28,000 came from Northern Ireland and Scotland.[17] As passions for independence grew, with his strong ties to England, Brown opposed the idea of boycotting trade with Britain and independence from the British empire. Across St. Paul Parish, the Sons of Liberty pressured individuals to sign the Continental Association, a pledge to support the Continental Congress and its boycott of British imports. As Brown's biographer Edward Cashin notes, in rejecting the Continental Association and "By taking the initiative and assuming the leadership of the loyal factions, Thomas Brown became a marked man in the Georgia backcountry."[18]

In August of 1775, an altercation erupted between Brown and members of the Sons of Liberty over his refusal to sign the Continental Association. During the fight, an assailant struck Brown in the head, resulting in a fractured skill. The gang of Patriots tied the unconscious Brown to a tree, partially scalped him, doused him in hot tar, and feathered his legs. A severe burn caused Brown to lose two toes on his foot. To further humiliate him and to send a firm message to other Loyalist sympathizers of what could happen to them by refusing to sign the Association, they paraded Brown from Brownsborough to Augusta. Held captive, he was forced under extreme duress to sign the Association, which he later recanted. With the aid of a sympathetic guard, Brown escaped captivity and made his way to South Carolina.[19] Following Brown's incident with the Sons of Liberty, the *Georgia Gazette* wrote, "The said Thomas Brown, that time having publicly forfeited his honor

14   Edward Cashin, "Thomas Brown," in *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, https://georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/Thomas-Brown-1750-1835. (accessed January 16, 2023)

15   Edward Cashin, *The King's Ranger: Thomas Brown and the American Revolution on the Southern Frontier* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1999), 14-17.

16   Cashin, *King's Ranger*,14-17.

17   Table 5.56, "Estimated Immigration to the Thirteen Colonies, 1700-1775," in Purvis ed., *Almanacs of American Life*, 164.

18   Cashin, *King's Ranger*, 26.

19   Maya Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exiles: American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2012), 53-54.

and violated his oath voluntarily taken as aforesaid, is therefore not to be considered for the future in the light of a gentleman."[20]

In the Ninety Six District of South Carolina, Brown took refuge with fellow Loyalists Thomas Fletchall, Moses Kirkland, and the Cunningham brothers, Robert and Patrick.[21] Recovering from his injuries, he became involved in the struggle between Loyalists and those wishing to resist British policy in the Carolina backcountry. Two weeks removed from the attack at Brownsborough, Brown called the Patriots savages.[22] To present the case for American opposition to Britain and recruit individuals to their cause, the Patriots' Provincial Congress dispatched William Henry Drayton and William Tennent to the Ninety Six District. During a meeting at King's Creek in August, Cunningham invited Drayton to debate the merits of the Loyalists and Patriots' causes. Brown participated in the debate by reading from Sir John Dalrymple's pro-British pamphlet, *Address of the People of Great Britain to the Inhabitants of America*, to the audience. Drayton would later claim that he rebutted all the arguments in Dalrymple's booklet but only obtained a small number of signers of the Continental Association.[23] Clandestinely, Brown "aided loyalists' efforts to retain the South Carolina backcountry for the British government."[24] Wanted by the Patriots as a traitor and terrorist in the backcountry of South Carolina and Georgia, Brown eventually slipped out of the backcountry and reached the Loyalists' sanctuary in the East Florida port city of St. Augustine.

The King's/Brown's Rangers

In St. Augustine, Thomas Brown became a vital advisor to the Royal Governor of East Florida, Patrick Tonyn. Based on the tactics he implemented in the backcountry of South Carolina and Georgia, Tonyn commissioned Brown a lieutenant colonel and he authorized him to raise a provincial regiment independent of the British regulars. Known as The East Florida Rangers, the King's Rangers or Brown's Rangers, the unit consisted of mounted troops and infantry volunteers, a few from Florida, but most recruited from Loyalist refugees who had left Georgia, and South Carolina. For this article, I will call the unit Brown's Rangers. Despite claims of neutrality by the Creek Nation, Lieutenant Colonel Brown successfully persuaded disaffected elements of the Creek Nation to join

20 Thomas L. Stokes, *The Savannah* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1979), 172.

21 Robert Stansbury Lambert, *South Carolina Loyalists in the American Revolution* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1987), 38

22 Edgar, *Partisans and Redcoats*, 31.

23 Edward McCrady, *The History of South Carolina in The Revolution, 1775-1780, Vol. I* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1969), 43-44. You can read Dalrymple's booklet at: https://archive.org/details/addressofpeople00dalruoft.

24 Gary D. Olson, "Thomas Brown, Loyalist Partisan, and the Revolutionary War in Georgia, 1777-1782, Part I," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (1970): 1-19. (accessed January 16, 2023)

the Rangers. Brown would also persuade elements of the Cherokee Nation and many Seminoles (nominally still part of the Creek Nation) to enter the ranks of his militia. According to George Kotlik, (*East Florida in the Revolutionary Era*), Brown also welcomed Black men into the Rangers.[25] As a prelude to the 1776 invasion of South Carolina by the British naval fleet at Charleston, Brown planned a diversionary expedition into the backcountry of Georgia and South Carolina, "using Indians from beyond the frontier and loyalists in the backcountry as a counterforce."[26] The British Indian agent for the Southern Department, John Stuart, reported to his superiors in England that "nothing can be more alarming to Carolinians than the idea of an attack by Indians and negroes."[27]

The British fleet's amphibious landing at Sullivan's Island failed miserably. In 1776, East Florida became a haven for loyalists. The influx of refugees placed a strain on food resources in St. Augustine. To address the crisis, Brown recommended to Governor Tonyn that the cattle herds of Patriots on the Georgia border be seized and moved into British-controlled Florida. By 1777, loyalists' raids would supply East Florida with thousands of head of cattle.[28]

Yet, from St. Augustine, Brown and his Rangers waged a relentless guerrilla war against Patriots, primarily in southern Georgia and South Carolina. The raids served three primary purposes. The raiders seized much-needed supplies for St. Augustine. Brown's raids in the vicinity of the Altamaha River and the capture of Fort McIntosh resulted in the rangers taking "all the cattle and supplies they could carry." [29]

A Call To Action

As tension rose between the British Parliament and the American opposition movement, the southern royal governments began to collapse. In South Carolina, the newly appointed royal governor, Lord William Campbell, arrived in Charleston in June of 1775 and fled the city in September of 1775 and took up residence on the British warship *HMS Tamar* until January of 1776, when he returned to England.[30] Georgia Patriot forces arrested Governor Sir James Wright in 1776. With

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25 George Kotlik, *East Florida in the Revolutionary Era, 1763-1785* (Athens, Georgia: New South Books, 2023), 37.

26 Cashin, "Thomas Brown," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*. (accessed January 16, 2023)

27 Gilbert, *Black Patriots and Loyalists*, 44.

28 Searcy, The Georgia-Florida Contest in the American Revolution, 1776-1778, 35.

29 Wayne Lynch, "Richard Winn at Fort McIntosh," Journal of the American Revolution, December 3, 2013, https:allthingsliverty.com/2013/12/Richard-wynn-fort-fort-mcintosh (accessed January 16, 2023).

30 Robert M. Weir, "Lord William Campbell, *South Carolina Encyclopedia*, University of South Carolina, Institute for Southern Studies,. https://www.scencyclopedia.org/sce/entries/campbell-lord-william. (accessed January 16, 2023). Lord Campbell returned to South Carolina in 1776 as commander of cannons on the *HMS Bristol*. During the Battle of Sullivan's Island, he received life threatening wounds that resulted in his death in 1778.

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the arrival of a British fleet at Savannah, Wright escaped to the *HMS Scarborough* and returned to England.[31] In Virginia, the Royal Governor, John Murray, the Fourth Earl of Dunmore, abandoned the colonial capital in Williamsburg, relocating for his safety to the *HMS William* in Chesapeake Bay. Besieged by Patriots, Lord Dunmore declared martial law in Virginia and issued a proclamation calling on "oppressed" individuals to take up arms in support of the Crown. He also authorized the formation of an African American regiment of enslaved people (the Ethiopian Regiment) commanded by White officers. The proclamation stated, "I do hereby further declare all indentured servants, Negroes, or others (appertaining to Rebels) free, that are able and willing to bear arms." Dunmore, who owned a plantation and slaves in York County, Virginia, did not free his slaves. Following the war, he would file a claim of £35,000 for personal losses.[32] While the provisions laid out in the proclamation only applied to Virginia, it profoundly impacted how southern slaveholders and the enslaved viewed the war. It galvanized support for the Patriot cause among southern slaveholders. The existence of an enslaved majority in South Carolina and Georgia generated a persistent fear of slave insurrections. The Dunmore Proclamation worsened those fears. For the enslaved population, the proclamation offered the hope of freedom. By word of mouth, the news of the proclamation spread through the slave communities of the Deep South.

A Balance Of Terror

Between 1775 and 1776, South Carolina economically benefited from the tensions between the New England colonies and Great Britain. As Walter Edgar writes in *Partisans and Redcoats*, "Charleston Harbor bustled with shipping. In the backcountry, many opted to farm and build up their holdings."[33] Despite its peaceful appearance, South Carolina was far from a tranquil kingdom. As the war raged in the northeast, instead of Continental and Royal armies waging war in the deep South, American Patriot and American Loyalist militias fought a proxy war on behalf of the British and American governments. In this proxy war, bands of insurgents rampaged through the Savannah River Valley and up and down the tributaries of the Savannah River, pillaging Patriot and Loyalist communities. Patriot and Loyalist militia engaged in hit-and-run skirmishes with innocent citizens caught in this cycle of horrible violence. During this period, acts of vengeance against families or communities often overshadowed struggles for an ideological cause. As families fled their homesteads for

31   Kenneth Coleman, ed., *A History of Georgia, Second Edition* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 72-73.

32   William Lowe & Dictionary of Virginia Biography, "John Murray, Fourth Earl of Dunmore," in *Encyclopedia Virginia*, https://encyclopedia.prg/entries/dunmore-john-murray-fourth-earl-of-ca-1730-1809; (accessed February 3, 2023); You can read the Dunmore Proclamation at https://gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/spotlight-primary-sources/lord-dunmore-proclamation-1775. (accessed February 3, 2023).

33   Edgar, *Partisans & Redcoats*, 40.

safety, unscrupulous Patriots and Loyalists seized their land and other property. The intensity of the violence forced many American Loyalists in the backcountry of South Carolina and Georgia to take refuge in the East Florida port city of St. Augustine. At the end of the Revolutionary War, 4,581 White and Black South Carolinians were living in St. Augustine.[34]

In the confusion of the proxy war, for enslaved persons, this and the hope of freedom promised in the Dunmore Proclamation provided them an opportunity to liberate themselves from bondage. In the low country of South Carolina and Georgia, Black men, women, and children surreptitiously fled their plantations for freedom aboard British ships anchored off the coast of South Carolina and Georgia. Hundreds of self-liberated slaves gathered on Sullivan's Island in South Carolina and Tybee Island in Georgia to await deliverance by the British Navy. Observing the developing exodus, James Laurens, the son of South Carolina Patriot leader Henry Laurens, wrote, "We have received certain information that every [British ship leaving Charlestown] carried off some of our Negroes, in the whole amounting to no inconsiderable number...This will be sufficient to alarm every Man in the Colony & put those on the Sea Coast & Riversides more particularly on their guard."[35]

The proxy war in the backcountry of South Carolina and Georgia ended in 1779. British forces captured Savannah in December 1778 and Charleston in May 1780. The fall of the largest cities in the Deep South spurred a second migration of enslaved people seeking the benefits of freedom. Timothy James Lockley notes in *Maroon Communities in South Carolina*, "It is clear from advertisements for fugitive slaves in the *Royal Georgia Gazette* between 1779-1782 that runaways during the American Revolution were significantly different from their predecessors. Nearly 85 percent of colonial runaways were male, and about two-thirds had fled alone. By contrast, more than a third of Revolutionary War runaways were women and children, and more than half fled in groups rather than alone. About a quarter of these ads sought slaves who had fled in family groups, consisting of husbands, wives, and young children."[36] Julie Hilvers writes in "Freedom Bound: Black Loyalists," that during the Revolution, "25,000 people escaped slavery in South Carolina, as did seventy-five percent of enslaved Georgians."[37] David George, an enslaved preacher on the plantation of George Galphin, east of Augusta, led 96 enslaved individuals from that plantation to freedom in Savannah.[38]

Benjamin Quarles and Watson Jennison best capture why enslaved Blacks fled the world they knew for the world they did not know. In *The Negro and the American Revolution*, Quarles wrote, "The

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34 Charles Loch Mowat, *East Florida as a British Province, 1763-1784* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1943), 137.

35 Gilbert, *Black Patriots and Loyalists*, 70-71.

36 Timothy James Lockley, ed., *Maroon Communities in South Carolina: A Documentary Record* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2009), 40.

37 Julie Hilvers, "Freedom Bound: Black Loyalists," *Freedom Chronicle*, Northern Kentucky University Institute for Freedom Studies, https://web.archive.org/web/20071123113113/www.nku.edu:80/-freedomchronicle. (accessed January 16, 2023).

38 Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exiles*, 86.

Negro's role in the Revolution can best be understood by realizing that his major loyalty was not to a place nor to a people, but to a principle."[39] Jennison wrote in *Cultivating Race: The Expansion of Slavery in Georgia, 1750-1860*, "Slaves in Georgia demonstrated that their desire for freedom was stronger than their attachment to their owners."[40] In June of 1779, General Sir Henry Clinton, the Commander-in-Chief of the British Army in America, issued the Philipsburg Proclamation. Unlike Dunmore's Proclamation, Clinton promised freedom to enslaved individuals who abandoned their owners without conditions. "I do promise to every negroe who shall desert the Rebel Standard, full security to follow within these lines, any occupation which he shall think proper."[41] Clinton's decree opened the door for thousands of enslaved individuals to liberate themselves and seek freedom in areas occupied by the British. Describing the activities of self-liberated slaves, Julie Hilvers wrote, "Loyalists built fortifications, cooked, mended uniforms, tended livestock, and served as messengers, spies and guides."[42]

The Conquest Of The Colonial South

In 1778, the British military initiated its "Southern Strategy." Its goal was to bring together American Loyalists and Native tribes in the South to aid the British in subduing the rebellion in the Carolinas, Georgia, and Virginia. With the South firmly under their control, the British could then end the war by isolating the northeastern colonies until they defeated the rebels in battle or forced them to sue for peace. The first objective of the Southern Strategy was capturing the port city of Savannah, Georgia. A task force led by Lieutenant Colonel Archibald Campbell landed on Tybee Island. From the outskirts of Savannah, Campbell contemplated a long siege of the highly fortified city. His plans to besiege the town changed as he received information from enslaved individuals who wished to help him capture the town. A slave named Peter provided Campbell with details on the strength of the Patriot force inside the city. Quamino "Quish" Dolly, described as an "aged negro" and a "confidential slave from Sir James Wright's Plantation," came forward and offered his assistance in helping Campbell find a passage into the city. Wright owned eight plantations and 532 enslaved people. Dolly and another slave named Samson agreed to lead a British detachment on a narrow trail through a swamp outflanking the American force defending the city and positioning British troops

39   Darlene Clark Hine, William Hine and Stanley Harrold, *The African American Odyssey, Combined Volume Special Edition* (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson, 2008), 91.

40   Watson W Jennison, *Cultivating Race: The Expansion of Slavery in Georgia, 1750-1860* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2012), 51.

41   "Sir Henry Clinton's Proclamation," *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* (Boston: John Wilson and Son, 1863), 219.

42   Hilvers, "Freedom Bound: Black Loyalists." (accessed January 16, 2023).

behind the Patriots' defenses.[43] With the help of Peter, Quamino Dolly, and Sampson, Campbell captured Savannah. The British captured 400 defenders outside Savannah. Loyalists and British forces killed 100 Americans in the action. British losses were 7 killed and 19 wounded. After the capture of Savannah, Sampson would continue to provide aid to the British as he guided them through Eastern Georgia into the Low Country of South Carolina.[44]

On January 31, 1779, Lieutenant Colonel Campbell occupied the town of Augusta. However, the approach of a substantial Patriot force from South Carolina forced Campbell to abandon the city on February 14. In September 1779, a French armada of 31 warships and troop transports arrived at Tybee Island and were soon joined by a large American force of Continentals and militia from South Carolina. Aboard the French fleet were 606 Free Black troops from San Domingo. In preparation for the American/French attack, British commander General Augustine Prevost employed Blacks who had previously escaped to the British army and conscripted enslaved individuals to build new fortifications and buttress old defenses.[45]

The British deployed 59 Black men as "Black Pioneers" and 218 Black men as "Negro Volunteers." The Second Battle of Savannah may have been the first time Black land troops from America faced Black foreign soldiers in battle. The joint task force failed to capture Savannah. Casualties included 58 Americans and 59 French killed in action. Fifty-nine Americans and 526 French troops were wounded.[46] The failure of the Patriots and their allies to retake Savannah opened a path for the British conquest of Charleston and their precarious control of South Carolina. However, the fall of Savannah and Charleston did not signal the collapse of the war in the South or the beginning of the end of the struggle between Britain and America.

The Occupation Of The Savannah River Valley

In June of 1780, Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Brown and the Rangers took command of the Augusta, Georgia garrison. He also received an appointment as Indian Agent to the Creeks and Cherokees in place of John Stuart, who had died the previous year. In this capacity, he forged strong relationships with the Creek Indian, Thomas Perryman (known as Kinarche) and with the Seminole leader, Cow Keeper. On his journey to Augusta from Savannah, he crossed the Savannah River and traveled

43 Meyers and Williams, *Georgia: A Brief History*, 33; David K. Wilson, *The Southern Strategy: Britain's Conquest of South Carolina and Georgia, 1775-1780* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2005), 75.

44 Jennison, *Cultivating Race*, p 48

45 Wilson, *Southern Strategy*, 138-143.

46 Wilson, *Southern Strategy*. 177-182.

upstream on the South Carolina side. All along the way he received individuals willing to take the "oath of loyalty" to receive protection from former Patriot rebels and militiamen who now offered their service to the British authorities. Brown did not accept the former Patriot militiamen into his service. He pledged protection to those who took the oath after surrendering as "prisoners of war and turned over their arms." He allowed them to return "home on a prole conditioned upon the promise to not again to take up arms against the Crown."[47] Augusta served as a supply hub for British outposts in the backcountry and western South Carolina. It also served as a staging area for expeditions into Patriot strongholds in the Georgia backcountry. Royal Governor Wright tasked Brown with maintaining peace in the region and keeping the supply line between Savannah and Augusta open. Brown's command consisted of 250 Rangers, 250 Creek warriors, and 50 Cherokee warriors.[48] It was also his duty to stamp out all pockets of resistance to British rule in that area. In a proclamation, Brown stated he would "hang without favor or distinction any person who presumed to plunder or otherwise disturb the peaceable inoffensive planters."[49]

Betrayal At Matthews Bluff

As the legal authority in Augusta, Brown welcomed American Patriots in Georgia and South Carolina to come to Augusta to take the oath of loyalty to the King and receive pardons for their past transgressions. Like many other families, the James McKay family petitioned Brown for a pardon, took the oath of loyalty, and promised not to take up arms against the British and their surrogates. Before the Revolutionary War, Captain James McKay commanded a Ranger company that protected settlers in the Creek Ceded Lands in northwest Georgia. Between 1774 and 1780, there is an informational gap in the activities of McKay. In 1780, Royal Governor Wright appointed him a road commissioner "from the other side of the Ogeechee Ferry to Midway, Newport and Sunbury." McKay eventually disavowed his loyalty oath and took to the field for unknown reasons. McKay recruited volunteers and formed an American Patriot militia that operated out of South Carolina's Orangeburg District and staged guerrilla raids on the South Carolina and Georgia sides of the Savannah River.[50] Governor Wright complained that the raiders consisted of "a party some say of 12 and others say twenty, with which he Robs on the Highways between [Savannah] & Augusta & goes Frequently into

47   Heard Robertson, "The Second British Occupation of Augusta, 1779-1781," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (1974): 422-46. (accessed January 16, 2023)

48   Hugh McCall, *The History of Georgia: Containing Brief Sketches of the Most Remarkable Events, Up to the Present Day (1784), Volumes I and II* (Atlanta, Georgia: A. B. Caldwell, 1909), 497.

49   McCall, *History of Georgia*, 428.

50   Wayne Lynch, "The McKay Family's Personal War on the Savannah River," *Journal of American Revolution*, September 26, 2016, https://allthingsliberty.com/2016/09/mckay-familys-personal-war-savannah-river/. (accessed January 16, 2023).

the Banks of the Savannah River and has Stop't Robbed and Plundered Several Boats."[51] In describing McKay's activities, the historian George White wrote in the *Historical Collections of Georgia* that McKay "robbed and murdered many of his majesty's peaceable and loyal subjects and attacked the guards of public boats navigating the Savannah River with provisions, ammunition, clothing, for the garrison in Ninety-six and Augusta."[52]

As McKay's raids grew from being bothersome to becoming dangerously close to cutting off the supply line between Savannah and Augusta, Brown found it necessary to take steps to halt the raids. For this task, he selected Lieutenant Colonel Daniel McGirtt. McGirtt, a South Carolinian and the son of a prominent Camden family, had a reputation as an excellent equestrian, hunter, and scout. At the beginning of the Revolutionary War, he served with the Patriot militia in South Carolina. McGirtt deserted the militia. Facing punishment for striking an officer after an argument over a horse, he fled the state. He eventually arrived in St. Augustine, where he joined the East Florida Rangers and obtained the rank of Lieutenant Colonel—attached to British Brigadier General Augustine Prevost's command. McGirtt conducted guerrilla raids across the low country of South Carolina. The *South Carolina Gazette* described McGirtt's raiders as "a large body of the most infamous banditti and horse thieves that perhaps ever were collected together anywhere, under the direction of McGirtt, a crop of Indians, with negro and white savages disguised like them, and about 1,500 of the most savage disaffected poor people seduced form the back settlements of the State and North Carolina."[53] Heard Robertson wrote in "The Second British Occupation of Augusta, 1779-1781," that in 1780, McGirtt's raiders seized 1,000 head of cattle and drove them to St Augustine.[54] McGirtt's expedition swept across the low country in search of McKay's raiders. In two days, the expeditionary force murdered seventeen civilians for not providing information on McKay's location.[55] Failing to elicit information from the locals on McKay's whereabouts or engage with the Patriot troops, McGirtt returned to Augusta with plunder taken during the expedition. McGirtt raided the home of James McKay and tortured his wife for information. Unable to obtain information from Mrs. McKay, McGirtt looted her house and carried away "family valuables."[56]

McKay's raids on shipping coming upstream from Savannah continued unabated. The disruptions to the supply line were having a dire impact on the Augusta and Ninety Six outposts. Brown authorized a second expedition to locate McKay and bring him and his men into custody. For this expedition,

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51 Robertson, "Second British Occupation of Augusta," 429. (accessed January 16, 2023)

52 George White, *Historical Collections of Georgia* (New York: Pudney & Russell, 1855), 616.

53 J. D. Lewis, "Lt. Colonel Daniel McGirtt,"https://www.carolana.com/SC/Revolution/loyalist_leaders_sc_daniel_mcgirtt.html. (accessed January 16, 2023)

54 Robertson, "Second British Occupation of Augusta," 429. (accessed January 16, 2023)

55 McCall, *History of Georgia*, 482.

56 Linda K. Williams, "East Florida as a Loyalist Haven," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (1976): 465-78. (accessed January 16, 2023)

Brown placed Lieutenant Kemp in command of a detachment consisting to ten Provincial troops and twenty American Loyalist militiamen. We do not know the given name of Kemp. He may have been related to George Kemp, a refugee from South Carolina in St. Augustine who served as a delegate in the East Florida House of Commons.[57] He held the rank of lieutenant in either Brown's Rangers, the Provincial Militia, or the British regulars. Some sources indicate Thomas Brown selected the guide for the expedition. Other sources suggest that Lieutenant Kemp chose the guide. Whoever made the final decision on the guide, they wanted someone familiar with McKay's area of operation in the Orangeburg District. They chose Willie, also called Wylley or William, to guide the expedition. Edward McCrady states in *The History of South Carolina in the Revolution, 1780-1783*, that Georgia historian Hugh McCall identified Wylley as a British officer. The historians George White (*Historical Collections of Georgia*), McCall, and Thomas Brown stated that Willie/Wylley "had taken an oath of allegiance and received protection."[58] Evidently, Willie implied that he knew the location of McKay's camp.

At some point in the journey from Augusta to the Orangeburg District, Willie sent word to McKay that a detachment of 25 Rangers and 20 Loyalist militiamen were approaching his position. McCrady indicated that the force consisted of ten Rangers and twenty Loyalist militia. Brown would tell the historian David Ramsay that there were ten Rangers in Kemp's detachment.[59] Upon arriving at Matthews Bluff, Kemp's force walked into an ambush. The Loyalist militia ran away from the fighting in the skirmish. Kemp and his surviving men surrendered. McKay invited Kemp and his men to join his Patriot militia. Upon their refusal, McKay ordered all but one of Kemp's troops executed. That one Ranger took the oath to Congress and the state government and agreed to join the Patriot militia. Under the cover of darkness, he escaped McKay's camp and returned to Augusta with the news of Kemp's death. He reported to Brown that McKay's seventeen-year-old son, Rannal McKay, had forced Kemp to strip, tortured him, and finally fired the shot that killed Lieutenant Kemp.[60] Was Willie one of the Loyalist militiamen who fled from the fighting? Whoever Willie was, he was with Colonel William Harden's force that faced Brown's American Loyalists at Wiggins Hill.

57   Gary D. Olson, "Thomas Brown, Loyalist Partisan, and the Revolutionary War in Georgia, 1777-1782, Part II," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 54, no.2 (1970): 183-208. (accessed January 16, 2023)

58   McCrady, *History of South Carolina in the Revolution, Vol. I*, 259.

59   Gary D. Olson, "Dr. David Ramsay and Lt. Colonel Thomas Brown: Patriot Historian and Loyalist Critic," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 77, no. 4 (October 1976): 261. (accessed January 16, 2023)

60   John Parker, Jr., *Parker's Guide to the Revolutionary War in South Carolina, Second Edition* (West Conshohocken, Pennsylvania: Infinity Publishing, 2013), 16; Cashin, *King's Ranger*, 126; McCrady, *History of South Carolina in The Revolution, 1775-1780*, I:259.

The Clash At Wiggins Hill — January 23, 1781

The failure of McGirtt to apprehend McKay and the murder of Lieutenant Kemp and his detachment further endangered the British control of Augusta. Brown may have also been frustrated by the uncertain loyalty of people who took the oath to the Crown and his inability to suppress the rebel insurgency in the South Carolina and Georgia region along the Savannah River. McKay remained at large and emboldened by his actions at Matthews Bluff. Brown turned to his friend, Alexander C. Wylly, a captain in Brown's Rangers, to locate McKay. Wylly departed from Augusta with 40 Rangers and 30 Indians. He soon discovered that McKay had joined forces with Colonel William Harden, and a large detachment of Patriots were en route to Augusta.[61] Harden had viewed the fall of Charleston from within the city. Sir Henry Clinton and Admiral Mariot Arbuthnot issued him a parole and exiled him to his plantation in Beaufort, South Carolina. Not long after the fall of Charleston, Harden decided to follow in the footsteps of Francis Marion and Thomas Sumter. Very quietly, he began recruiting soldiers for a guerrilla militia to operate out of the swamps along the Savannah River on the South Carolina and George sides of the river.

One of Harden's primary operatives in the area was James McKay. Wylly notified Brown of Harden amassing a large force to lay siege to Augusta. Spurred into action, Brown mobilized 100 American Loyalist militiamen, two companies of Provincial Regulars, 200 Rangers and 179 Creek, Chickasaw, and Cherokee warriors.[62] At the head of his detachment, Brown led his men downstream to meet Harden and McKay. Brown and his men traveled sixty miles to Wiggins Hill in present-day Allendale County in two days. Brown sent out detachments on search-and-destroy missions across the region to reclaim stolen supplies hidden in American Patriots' homes and pressure locals to reveal the location of McKay and his guerrillas. Captain Wylly suspected that Harden and McKay were nearby and warned Brown that the camp was in a dangerous spot. He also expressed his concerns that Brown had decided to "retire to a house a few hundred yards distant from his camp." Weeks before, during the attack on Augusta in September of 1780 by Patriot forces led by the Georgian, Colonel Elijah Clark, Brown sustained wounds in both legs, which still troubled him when he left for Wiggins Hill.[63]

Shortly after midnight, Harden's forces attacked Brown's camp. In the opening shots of the battle, many of the Loyalist militia ran from the field of fighting. The Rangers formed a skirmish line, and Harden withdrew his troops from Wiggins Hill. After sunrise, Harden renewed the attack on Brown's camp. In the initial assault, the Loyalist militiamen who had not deserted melted away from the

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61   Cashin, *King's Ranger*, 126.

62   White, *Historical Collections of Georgia*, 616.

63   Edward Cashin, "Revolutionary War in Georgia," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*. https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/artices/history-archaeology/revolutionary-war-in-georgia. (accessed January 16, 2023).

fighting. Some surrendered to Harden and offered their service to the Patriot force. Brown's Rangers, the Provincial Regulars, and the Indians held the line, and a cavalry charge forced Harden's men to fall back in a disorganized retreat. The Loyalists killed seven Patriots in action, and eleven were wounded.[64] Eleven of Harden's men were captured, including Rannal McKay and Willie. From the interrogation of the prisoners, Rannal McKay, Britton Williams, George Smith, George Reed, and an unnamed Frenchman were found to be complicit in the murder of Lieutenant Kemp and his platoon. Brown sentenced them to death. Brown felt justified in executing the prisoners based on a directive issued by General Charles, Earl Cornwallis after the Battle of Camden, stating, "I have ordered in the positive manner that every militiaman who has borne arms with us and afterward joined the enemy shall be immediately hung."[65] Someone identified Willie as responsible for leading Lieutenant Kemp into the ambush at Matthews Bluff. Angered by the murder of his friend Kemp, one of the Indian warriors murdered Willie with a blow from a tomahawk.[66]

James McKay's wife learned that Rannal had been captured and traveled to Brown's camp to petition for leniency and a pardon for her son. She also brought Brown a meal. Mrs. McKay promised Brown if he freed her son, he would not take up arms against the British again. The Loyalists confined McKay, Williams, Smith, Reed, and the Frenchman in a stockade and the following day hanged them. Another source claims the Loyalists hanged all their prisoners.[67] An American Patriot narrative claims that Brown turned the remains over to his Native allies, who scalped and mutilated the bodies of the dead. In a letter to the South Carolina historian of the Revolution, David Ramsay, Brown refuted these allegations.[68] Before returning to Augusta, the Loyalists searched a thirty-mile radius from Wiggins Hill looking for captured supplies and burned the homes of anyone found to be concealing stolen supplies.[69] Brown's defeat of Harden at Wiggins Hill had severely weakened the American Patriot militias operating along the Savannah River and their effort to impede the flow of supplies to Augusta from Savannah. Yet, Brown's triumphant victory lasted only briefly.

In 134 days, Brown surrendered Augusta to the Patriots commanded by Colonel Henry "Lighthorse Harry" Lee, General Andrew Pickens, and Colonel Elijah Clark.[70] As Gary Olson writes, "Brown's attempt to discourage Whig insurrections by force had succeeded only in arousing intense hatred against himself and his men." Brown was transported down the Savannah River on heavily armed

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64 Parker, *Parker's Guide*, 17.

65 McCrady, *History of South Carolina in The Revolution*, I:210.

66 Gary D Olson, "David Ramsey and Lt. Colonel Thomas Brown: Patriot Historian and Loyalist Critic," *South Carolina Historical Magazine*, 282 (accessed January 18, 2023).

67 Lynch, "McKay Family's Personal War." (accessed January 16, 2023)

68 Olson, "Ramsay and Brown," 261. (accessed January 16, 2023)

69 Cashin, *King's Ranger*, 127.

70 Cashin, "Revolutionary War in Georgia. (accessed January 16, 2023)

boats to Savannah. Under the terms of surrender, Brown accepted parole, allowing him to return to Savannah. From Savannah, he traveled to St. Augustine.[71] After the war, Spain would take possession of Florida from the British. Brown would return to England before settling in the Caribbean on various islands. In 1825, Brown, the owner of over 600 enslaved men, women, and children, died at his Grand Sable Plantation on St. Vincent.[72]

Speaking To The Silencing

The Revolutionary War led to the first great migration of Black people in America. This migration differed from the western exodus to Kansas and Arkansas, the trek to the midwestern states of Ohio and Illinois, or the flight from the deep South to Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and New York. Enslaved people silently slipped from plantation slave quarters, tiny hamlets, towns, and cities, fleeing east and southeast to Charleston, Savannah, and St. Augustine and the promise of freedom behind the British lines. The Patriots' statement that all men were created equal rang hollow in enslaved people's ears compared to the British promise of freedom and land if they would abandon their slaveholders and join with the British.

"Freedom and Farms" came with an asterisk. Freedom did not always mean freedom. Enslaved individuals who liberated themselves faced an uncertain future. Some formerly enslaved persons lost their freedom when they were given as bounty to British officials and resold into slavery. British officers required self-liberated enslaved people to return to the fields of plantations confiscated from American rebels. In British-controlled Charleston, Savannah, and St. Augustine, freedmen embraced many entrepreneurial opportunities, such as working as washerwomen, seamstresses, domestic workers, cooks, body servants, artisans, bricklayers, blacksmiths, ironworkers, and pottery makers. The self-liberated enslaved people and the slaves of American Loyalists and American Patriots also engaged in dangerous occupations. They served as laborers on fortifications and were spies embedded in the enemy's camps. They carried messages between bases and armies, fully aware that any slaves or freedmen captured taking messages to the enemy faced the death penalty. There needs to be an accurate record of how many plantations, slaveholders, and enslaved people were in the districts of Beaufort, Orangeburg, and Ninety Six during the Revolutionary War era. The war's end would substantially impact the agricultural labor pool in those regions of the colony. Carter G. Woodson, the African American historian, estimated in *The Negro in Our History* that 25,000 enslaved individuals left South Carolina with the British after the end of the Revolutionary War.[73]

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71   Olson, "Thomas Brown, Loyalist Partisan, Part II," 183-208. (accessed January 16, 2023)

72   "Thomas Brown (loyalist)," Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Brown_(loyalist). (accessed September 29, 2023)

73   Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996) Kindle Edition, xvii.

Final Thoughts

We may never with any certainty know the racial identity of Willie the treacherous guide. We may never know with any certainty the tribulations of the lives of the thousands of enslaved individuals who lived and died in the colonial districts of Beaufort, Orangeburg, and Ninety Six. There is a silence that engulfs their lives and aspirations. In these pages, I have attempted to construct a historical framework that describes what these silent individuals may have experienced. The only certainty in this historical period is that Black and White, free and enslaved persons, American Patriots, and American Loyalists lived in an echo chamber of fierce rhetoric that fueled horrible acts of violence. History involves collecting facts, archiving the sources, and finally, creating a narrative that fits the facts and sources and the writer's agenda. Following the Revolution, the American Patriots developed narratives that silenced the voices of the American Loyalists, the enslaved, the free people of color, and the Native Americans. History is also the accumulated memories of people. We carry the memory of a relative separated by generations who died for the glorious cause of the American Revolution. We hold onto the ancestral memory of an American Loyalist immigrant who suffered pain and humiliation at the hands of American Patriots. We bitterly cling to the memory of atrocities that scarred the history of a family. Memory can keep alive a story that an officially sanctioned historical narrative has silenced. Memories help us create alternative narratives that fill in gaps and give voice to those who were excluded from official narratives.

Who Was Willie?

This study began with a question. Who was Willie? Was he an enslaved Black man? Why did Willie lead Lieutenant Kemp and his platoon to death at Matthews Bluff? Some scholars and non-scholars assume that he must have been Black because Willie did not have a surname. Without the assistance of a "time machine" to travel back to 1781, it would be impossible to definitively identify Wille as either Black or White, freedman or enslaved person or possibly Native American

Could Willie have been Native American? Lieutenant Kemp's mission to Matthews Bluff was to apprehend Captain James McKay and his raiders, recover stolen goods and restore the safe flow of supplies on the Savannah River from Savannah to Augusta. The expectation was that guide Willie was familiar with the Orangeburg and Beaufort areas and the general location of McKay's headquarters. There is a possibility that Willie could have been a Creek or Cherokee warrior. Brown welcomed Creek and Cherokee Natives into the ranks of his rangers. With Brown and other Loyalists, they had conducted raids across the Low Country of Georgia and South Carolina. Given Brown's trust and loyalty with the Native peoples in his command, he would have had no doubts

about entrusting a Native guide with this mission. It is slightly possible that Willie might have been Native, but unlikely. Thomas Brown, David Ramsay, Edward McCrady, Hugh McCall or Edward Cashin never mentioned Willie's ethnic identity. Given the American Patriots's animosity toward the Creeks and Cherokees, would McKay have trusted that a Native guide would not betray them to Lieutenant Kemp? In addition, the historian Edward McDrady states in his History of the South Carolina in the Revolution that Willie had taken "the oath of allegiance." Would a Native American Willie have taken the oath? It seems unlikely that Willie was Native American. Given the racial bias of the time, if a Native guide had led Lieutenant Kemp and his men into a deadly trap, it is very likely Brown, and others would have demonized the treachery of an unfaithful Indian guide named Willie.

There is substantial evidence to indicate that Willie was White. In *The History of Georgia*, Hugh McCall indicated that Willie had been a former British officer known as Captain Wylle. Edward McCrady repeats this allegation in *The History of South Carolina in the Revolution*. McCall and McCrady are incorrect. Captain William Wylly and his brother, Captain Alexander Wylly were members of Brown's Rangers. The Wylly family and Brown had been friends since his arrival in Georgia in 1774. Alexander Wylly had led an expeditionary force into the low country searching for the Patriot raider James McKay and had commanded troops at Wiggins Hill. In a rebuttal of claims published in David Ramsay's *History of the Revolution of South Carolina*, Brown wrote that after becoming commander of the garrison at Augusta, Willie came forward to take the oath of loyalty to King George III.

Being a seasoned battlefield commander, one would assume that for Lieutenant Kemp's expedition, Brown would have selected a guide he trusted and who had a familiarity with McKay's area of operation. Brown would not willingly endanger the life of a relative of a potential benefactor in the East Florida legislative assembly or the lives of the troops under his command. Scholars and novices cannot assume Willie was Black because he had no surname. There are many accounts of enslaved individuals and White men working as guides for the American Loyalists and the American Patriots. The Loyalists and the Patriots used White men as guides and scouts with only a Christian name. So, why does Willie not have a surname? Time and history may have erased Willie's surname because of the horrendous act of betrayal he committed.

Several practical reasons point to Willie not being Black. Given the restrictions placed on the movement of enslaved people and of free people of color, would an enslaved person from the South Carolina or Georgia back country be familiar with the Orangeburg area? It is not very likely that an enslaved person would be required to take an oath of loyalty to the Crown. Given the level of societal disarray in the Savannah River Valley and the proximity of Savannah or Charleston, it is very likely an able-bodied enslaved man would find the prospect of freedom more alluring than serving as a guide on a very dangerous mission. The available evidence points strongly to Willie being a disgruntled White man and not an enslaved person or a free person of color.