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America's 250 in Woodbridge: 2026 Woodbridge Historical Essay Contest

The American War for Independence divided the thirteen colonies as colonists began picking sides on who to support and try to have others support their cause as well. New Jersey is no stranger to this division, as towns like Perth Amboy, Princeton, and Woodbridge become centers of disagreement for colonists. "Normal" life seemed impossible with constant debates and heated disagreements between colonists, as well as both the Patriot and British armies passing through the Garden State. Much like today, despite our political spectrum being mostly left versus right instead of Patriot versus Loyalist, politics soon divided entire towns, cities, and states into two political camps: one Patriot, one Loyalist. Even though many colonists in Woodbridge chose to support the Patriots due to unfair taxes and resentment towards the British crown, others still chose to remain loyal to Britain, fearing their own safety. This divide between two opposing sides led to an atmosphere of fear, instability, and violence in Woodbridge.

In the American colonies, about ten to twenty percent of the colonists remained loyal to the British crown. These Loyalists, sometimes referred to as Tories, believed that the British government was providing the colonies with stability, protection, leadership, and secure trade. Many Loyalists believed that the British government would offer protection and they feared that American independence would consequently destroy the colonial economy. Tories didn't remain loyal to the British government because they were forced to, but rather because they feared for their own safety. In a town like Woodbridge, these Loyalist beliefs met with immense resistance from the Patriots, dividing the town into two camps and splitting families and friends apart.

In contrast, the other side of the American Revolution were Patriots, were those who believed that the British had been mistreating the colonies and that independence was the

only way to escape the mistreatment. The British began placing immense amounts of taxes on the colonies to pay back their debts from the French and Indian War without consulting the colonies at all. Moreover, the British Parliament began requiring colonists to house their soldiers and closed Boston Harbor, causing even more distrust between the colonies and Great Britain. The phrase “No taxation without representation” became a rallying cry for the colonists demanding representation and self-government. In towns like Woodbridge, which were divided into two camps, this meant that neighbors, families, and friends soon became divided over who to support in the war, causing violence and an atmosphere of fear as colonists raced to protect their homes, farms, and businesses from attacks. In addition, both the Continental and British Armies crossed New Jersey regularly to reach either New York and Philadelphia, causing even more disruptions to daily life.

Being the “crossroads of the Revolutionary War,” New Jersey experienced multiple clashes between the Continental and British Armies, as well as both armies traversing through the state to reach the two crucial cities of New York and Philadelphia. Woodbridge was particularly hit hard during the Revolution, as soldiers from both sides traversed through the town and demanded food and supplies along the way. Furthermore, due to the Quartering Act of 1765, colonists were required to give redcoats proper housing, food, and supplies, deepening further uncertainty and instability in towns like Woodbridge. Also, disagreements between Patriots and Loyalists divided communities like Woodbridge into two camps over which side to support. These disagreements eventually led to friends, neighbors, and family members to go against each other.

In conclusion, throughout the Revolutionary War, many colonists had to pick sides on who to support. Many colonists supported the Patriot cause because they believed that independence was the only option to end British taxes and quartering laws, but on the other side many stayed loyal to the British crown, believing that independence was a risky move that could destroy their livelihoods. Because of these disagreements, alongside other factors like soldiers crossing towns, daily life was regularly disrupted, either through the presence of soldiers or the division between colonists over which side to support. If I lived in Woodbridge Township 250 years ago, during the American Revolution, I would have supported the Patriot cause. In the years preceding and throughout the Revolutionary War, the British forced ordinary civilians to house their soldiers (Quartering Act), denied the colonists basic rights (Navigation and

Intolerable Acts), and the Parliament passed taxes on colonial products without the consultation of the colonists (Sugar, Stamp, Townshend, and Tea Acts). The Declaration of Independence clearly states “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive to these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.” Do we want to live in a nation where a government that infringes on the most basic human rights, or a nation where a government protects them for all people?