

Thomas Brown: Tortured to Tactician

A look into the mind of a key figure in Florida history

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Introduction

Drive and motivation are some of the most infallible aspects of human character and existence. Everyone has their own drives and ambition that gives their character complexity and depth. These motivations drive our every action, and even though there is a modern understanding that people are complex, that complexity is often not given to those in the past. Leaving people with a one-dimensional lens of historical figures. Thomas Brown is an example of a historical figure that has been reduced to this one-dimensionality, with even historians often making his character seem simple. The goal of this research is to show how historical figures can be as complex as people of today by examining possible the possible motivations Thomas Brown had in his life.

Brief Biography

- Moves from England to Georgia to start a farm.
- Is attacked and tortured by the sons of liberty for not pledging his allegiance to the Patriot cause in 1775.
- Supports Loyalist causes in South Carolina by helping strategize attacks against the patriots.
- Flees to Florida and forms a powerful militia named the East Florida Rangers in 1776.
- Worked extensively with Native American tribes as commander of the East Florida Rangers.
- After the end of the Revolution he continued to serve the British as an ambassador for southern Native American tribes (Wright, 1975).

My Conclusions

Thomas Brown is often seen as a man of revenge and hatred, with his actions being driven by the hatred he acquired towards the patriots for the torture the sons of liberty put him through. While a very reasonable and possible factor, my research has led me to find other possible factors that drove Brown throughout his life. These conclusions were found through examining a letter that Brown wrote himself to Governor Patrick Tonyn of East Florida.

- The first of these possibilities is that Brown wanted to maintain a strong and honorable character. Honor was seen as a much more important aspect of human character in the past compared to modern day. Maintaining a strong and honorable character is typically what people looked for when looking for what a good person is. Trying to maintain this reputation would be a fair assumption for a person in the 1700s.
- Another motivation for Brown could have been his desire for a unified country. Brown expresses in his letter to Tonyn that the rebellion is his top priority and should be the top priority for all British officers. The rebellion actively disturbed the peace that existed within the colonies, of which Brown travelled to so that he could set up a plantation in Georgia. After dealing with the fighting of the revolution for so long, Brown wanting things to finally return back to normal is a sentiment that is common among many during times of war.
- There is good reason to believe that Brown wanted to create present a character of intelligence and wisdom. In the second excerpt of the letter provided here, Brown writes a supposed French Maxim, which would imply he is well educated and knows French. However, when analyzing the French grammar, it becomes clear that Brown isn't fluent in the language as there are numerous mistakes. So, Brown is probably attempting to sound more educated than he actually is in this.

Letter Written by Brown

As I stand in relation to your Excellency by my present Commission it is necessary I should be justified. Self vindication however disagreeable a task, yet when silence might be thought a tacit acknowledgement of a conscious error, modesty forbids me not to speak.

Il est commun, and approved maxim, que lorsque nous avons été unfoi placés un sang nous ne devons rien faire no souffrir qui fesse voir qui vous nous tenons inférieur à un sang même.

With a sincere wish that his Majesty, your Excellency, and the Province may find a more faithful Servant.

Transcription

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References

