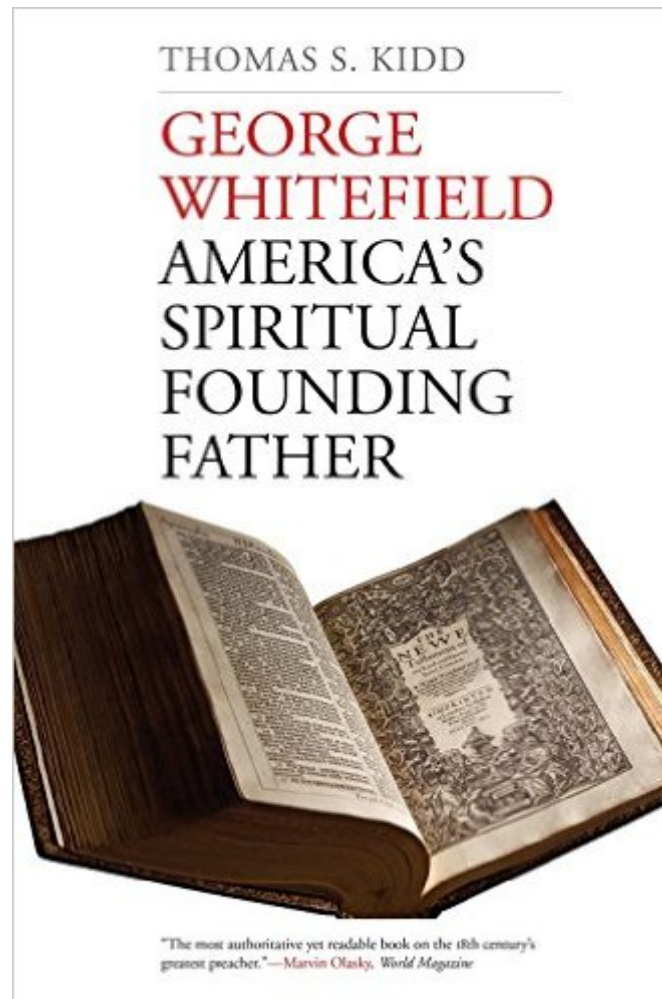


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George Whitefield: America's Spiritual Founding Father



Synopsis

An engaging, balanced, and penetrating narrative biography of the charismatic eighteenth-century American evangelist. In the years prior to the American Revolution, George Whitefield was the most famous man in the colonies. Thomas Kidd's fascinating new biography explores the extraordinary career of the most influential figure in the first generation of Anglo-American evangelical Christianity, examining his sometimes troubling stands on the pressing issues of the day, both secular and spiritual, and his relationships with such famous contemporaries as Benjamin Franklin, Jonathan Edwards, and John Wesley. Based on the author's comprehensive studies of Whitefield's original sermons, journals, and letters, this excellent history chronicles the phenomenal rise of the trailblazer of the Great Awakening. Whitefield's leadership role among the new evangelicals of the eighteenth century and his many religious disputes are meticulously covered, as are his major legacies and the permanent marks he left on evangelical Christian faith. It is arguably the most balanced biography to date of a controversial religious leader who, though relatively unknown three hundred years after his birth, was a true giant in his day and remains an important figure in America's history.

Book Information

Paperback: 344 pages

Publisher: Yale University Press (August 9, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0300223587

ISBN-13: 978-0300223583

Product Dimensions: 6.1 x 0.9 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 15.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars See all reviews (47 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #169,511 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #181 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > United States > American Revolution #422 in Books > History > Americas > United States > Revolution & Founding #1243 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Leaders & Notable People > Religious

Customer Reviews

I have come to value the historical writings of Thomas Kidd very highly over the past several years. I am a PhD student studying the Great Awakening era, and have found all of his works - The Great Awakening, God of Liberty, Patrick Henry, etc. - to be well-researched, skillfully-written, and

genuinely enjoyable to read. George Whitefield is one of my favorite figures of American and church history, so I was very eager to read Kidd's latest work. I was not disappointed. His thesis is clear and simple: "The argument of this biography is straightforward: George Whitefield was the key figure in the first generation of Anglo-American evangelical Christianity. Whitefield and legions of other evangelical pastors and laypeople helped establish a new interdenominational religious movement in the eighteenth century, one committed to the gospel of conversion, the new birth, the work of the Holy Spirit, and the preaching of revival across Europe and America (3)." In the brisk (only 263 pages) and compelling narrative that follows, I believe Kidd establishes Whitefield's primacy in the founding generation of evangelicalism. Kidd has written the new standard, academic study of this titanic figure. What I appreciate most about Kidd is his honesty about his presuppositions, laid out so well in the introduction: "Writing biographies, and writing religious biographies in particular, presents significant challenges. The temptation to write hagiography - the biography of a pristine saint - is ever present. In placing Whitefield within the new evangelical world, I am not offering an unsullied picture of a sanctified man, nor is my primary aim to edify readers spiritually. Yet historians today know that no one of us is fully objective - personal perspectives matter."

George Whitefield is not well known by Americans today, including American evangelical Christians, his spiritual heirs. In the eighteenth century, however, Whitefield was well known not only in America, but also in his native England - "well known, well loved, and widely criticized. Thomas S. Kidd outlines the life of this influential evangelist in *George Whitefield: America's Spiritual Founding Father*. Whitefield was born in a Gloucester inn on December 16, 1714, to hardworking though not particularly religious parents. He secured a work-scholarship to Oxford University, where he fell under the spiritual influence of John and Charles Wesley and entered ministry in the Church of England. Together with the Wesley brothers, Whitefield led the trans-Atlantic evangelical revival that came to be known as the Great Awakening through ceaseless itinerant evangelism, innovative use of print media, and development of personal and institutional relationships across denominations. "[Whitefield's] colleague and frequent rival John Wesley left a greater organizational legacy," Kidd writes, "and his ally Jonathan Edwards made a more significant theological contribution. But Whitefield was the key figure in the first generation of evangelical Christianity." Kidd concludes: "Whitefield was the first great preacher in a modern evangelical movement that has seen many. Perhaps he was the greatest evangelical preacher the world has ever seen." Reading Kidd's biography of Whitefield "which will be the standard work for years to come" I was struck by several similarities with contemporary American evangelicalism that are

worth noting, both positive and negative. The first is Whitefield's blend of principle and pragmatism.

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