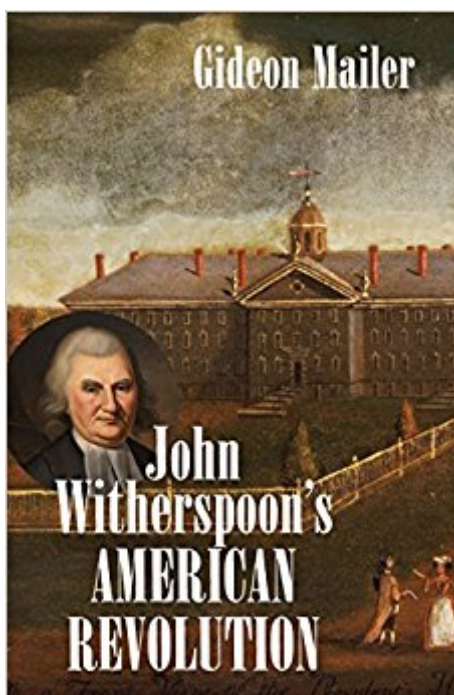


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John Witherspoon's American Revolution: Enlightenment And Religion From The Creation Of Britain To The Founding Of The United States (Published By The ... And The University Of North Carolina Press)



Synopsis

In 1768, John Witherspoon, Presbyterian leader of the evangelical Popular party faction in the Scottish Kirk, became the College of New Jersey's sixth president. At Princeton, he mentored constitutional architect James Madison; as a New Jersey delegate to the Continental Congress, he was the only clergyman to sign the Declaration of Independence. Although Witherspoon is often thought to be the chief conduit of moral sense philosophy in America, Mailer's comprehensive analysis of this founding father's writings demonstrates the resilience of his evangelical beliefs. Witherspoon's Presbyterian evangelicalism competed with, combined with, and even superseded the civic influence of Scottish Enlightenment thought in the British Atlantic world. John Witherspoon's American Revolution examines the connection between patriot discourse and long-standing debates--already central to the 1707 Act of Union--about the relationship among piety, moral philosophy, and political unionism. In Witherspoon's mind, Americans became different from other British subjects because more of them had been awakened to the sin they shared with all people. Paradoxically, acute consciousness of their moral depravity legitimized their move to independence by making it a concerted moral action urged by the Holy Spirit. Mailer's exploration of Witherspoon's thought and influence suggests that, for the founders in his circle, civic virtue rested on personal religious awakening.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This thoroughly researched work is best suited for scholars of Enlightenment history and the American Revolution.--Library Journal

In this fresh biography of John Witherspoon, Mailer explores the rich philosophical origins of the Revolutionary War, American education, and the United States's distinctive civil religion. Mailer skillfully integrates intellectual and religious narratives to demonstrate how evangelicalism, presbyterianism, and Scottish history formed the new American Republic. This work transforms our understanding of the only minister to sign the Declaration of Independence and his most influential student, James Madison."--Kate Carte Engel, Southern Methodist University
A valuable and ambitious work on the life, thought, and career of the minister, educator, and Revolutionary political leader John Witherspoon. Mailer revises portrayals of Witherspoon's principal significance as that of purveyor of Enlightenment philosophy rather than religious leader and uncovers a specifically Scots Presbyterian dimension to the political and moral culture of Revolutionary America.--Ned Landsman, Stony Brook University
Mailer's tour de force of research has produced a cornucopia of insights into a key but underappreciated leader of the eighteenth-century Atlantic world. With careful probing of Witherspoon's Scottish career and painstaking examination of his central role in the colonial break from Britain, Mailer corrects what other historians, including myself, have written about this influential minister, educator, and public servant. A special contribution is Mailer's demonstration that Witherspoon, although with some ambiguity, sustained foundational evangelical convictions in his career on both sides of the Atlantic."--Mark A. Noll, University of Notre Dame

Dr. Gideon Mailer, an acquaintance of mine, has done a masterful job on John Witherspoon's life and contribution to our nation. I would like to provide a more detailed review of this outstanding book at a later time, when I am free to do so.

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