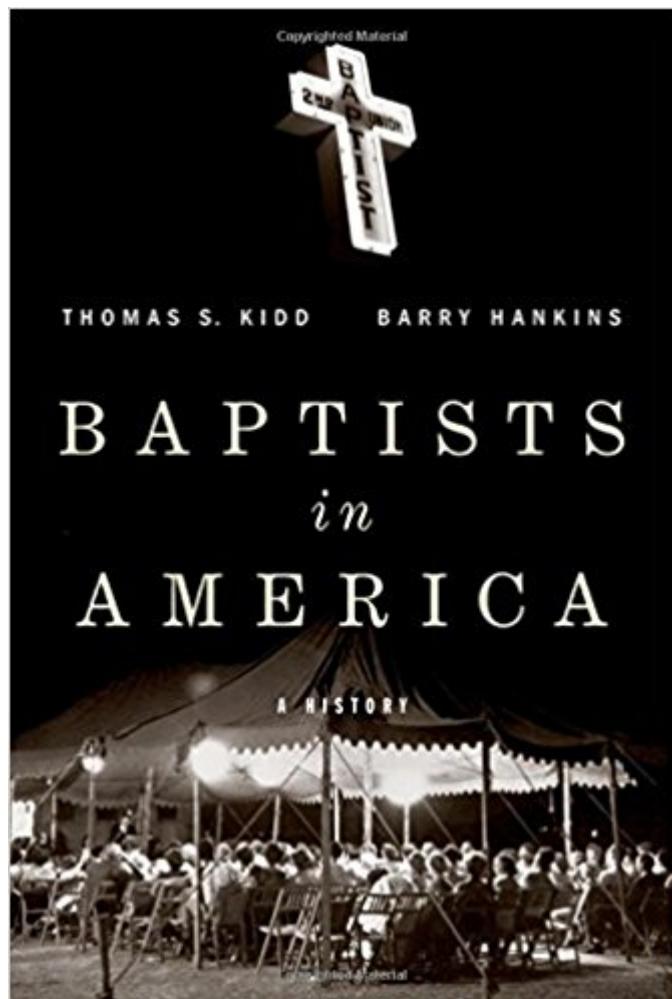


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# Baptists In America: A History



## Synopsis

The Puritans called Baptists "the troublers of churches in all places" and hounded them out of Massachusetts Bay Colony. Four hundred years later, Baptists are the second-largest religious group in America, and their influence matches their numbers. They have built strong institutions, from megachurches to publishing houses to charities to mission organizations, and have firmly established themselves in the mainstream of American culture. Yet the historical legacy of outsider status lingers, and the inherently fractured nature of their faith makes Baptists ever wary of threats from within as well as without. In *Baptists in America*, Thomas S. Kidd and Barry Hankins explore the long-running tensions between church, state, and culture that Baptists have shaped and navigated. Despite the moment of unity that their early persecution provided, their history has been marked by internal battles and schisms that were microcosms of national events, from the conflict over slavery that divided North from South to the conservative revolution of the 1970s and 80s. Baptists have made an indelible impact on American religious and cultural history, from their early insistence that America should have no established church to their place in the modern-day culture wars, where they frequently advocate greater religious involvement in politics. Yet the more mainstream they have become, the more they have been pressured to conform to the mainstream, a paradox that defines--and is essential to understanding--the Baptist experience in America. Kidd and Hankins, both practicing Baptists, weave the threads of Baptist history alongside those of American history. *Baptists in America* is a remarkable story of how one religious denomination was transformed from persecuted minority into a leading actor on the national stage, with profound implications for American society and culture.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 352 pages

Publisher: Oxford University Press; 1 edition (June 1, 2015)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0199977534

ISBN-13: 978-0199977536

Product Dimensions: 9.2 x 1.2 x 6.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.3 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 23 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #149,812 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #17 in Christian Books & Bibles > Christian Denominations & Sects > Protestantism > Baptist #72 in Books > Textbooks >

## Customer Reviews

"In this engaging survey, the authors focus on a number of major themes: struggles for religious liberty, revivalism, race and slavery, liberal-fundamentalist disputes, the civil rights movement, and the religious Right...overall this is a very good book." --CHOICE

Thomas Kidd and Barry Hankins are two of the most respectable church historians in the academy today. Their work is always incisive and illuminating--as in reading this book you will soon discover." --R. Albert Mohler, Jr., President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

"Baptists,' the authors say, 'are notorious for two things--evangelism and schism.' Baptist successes as evangelists since the colonial era are the basis for their immense influence in American life. Their proneness to schism makes for good stories and is a reason why we need a clear and engaging account such as this. Baptists in America is both readable and fascinating." --George M. Marsden, author of *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*

"In clear and compelling prose, filled with enlightening anecdotes, this book tells the amazing story of how a persecuted minority of Christians, who rejected infant baptism and state control of the church, grew into the largest denomination in the United States with culture-shaping consequences. An important contribution to American Religious History, this book should be widely read by anyone interested in the history and present state of religion in U.S. culture and politics." --Albert J. Raboteau, Henry W. Putnam Professor of Religion, Princeton University

"Some books on Baptists in America sprinkle the reader with superficial simplicity, focusing on only one tribe or one aspect of the Baptist experience. Others drown the reader in historical narrative, but with no clear connection as to why non-Baptists ought to care. This book is different. This history offers a full immersion in the Baptist story, in every stream and fork of the Baptist river. This volume connects the Baptist experience to larger trends in American culture, politics, and theology in a way that informs both insiders and outsiders. This book is, without doubt, the definitive work on Baptists in America for this generation." --Russell D. Moore, President, Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission

"A thoroughgoing study of Baptists, radicalized by persecution and honed by internal schism. ... The authors usefully trace the Baptists' shift from outsiders to consummate insiders, all the way to the White House. An instructive work that allows for a fuller understanding of an important religious element in America." --Kirkus Reviews

"This fascinating piece of cultural history dynamically examines religious tensions between church, state, and evolving U.S. cultural norms." --Library Journal

"Baptists have been one of the most influential groups of any kind in American history... This

book covers that remarkable past with a nice mix of readability and reliability... Highly recommended..." --Booklist"...Thomas Kidd and Barry Hankins, both history professors at Baylor University, a Baptist institution in Texas, wrestle capably with the oddly difficult question of what defines Baptists." --The Economist "Kidd and Hankins know their stuff... the two have crafted an engaging read." --Arkansas Democrat-Gazette"There are few historians I have more respect for than Tommy Kidd and Barry Hankins... In their capable hands, Baptist history will be both lively and engaging." --The Gospel Coalition"With such awareness of the personal and political dimensions of writing history, especially to be read by other Baptists, they offer an insightful short history of the Baptist movement."-- Rev. Jerrod Hugenot, Journal of the Academy of Parish Clergy "Kidd and Hankins have produced a helpful and well-written study that offers non-Baptists a sense of who Baptists were and are, while helping to ground Baptists themselves in a sense of identity that might well prepare them for the next inevitable controversy." --Christian Century"Kidd and Hankins have provided Baptists and non-Baptists with a nuanced and generally balanced introduction to many of the decisive moments in the history of this vast and diverse Baptist tradition. Weaving together memorable anecdotes, examples, and observations about what 'Baptist' has meant, Baptists in America promises to be an enjoyable and trustworthy read for novice and expert alike."--Fides et Historia

Thomas S. Kidd is Professor of History at Baylor University and Senior Fellow at Baylor's Institute for Studies of Religion. He co-directs Baylor's Program in Historical Studies of Religion. He is the author of several books, including George Whitefield: America's Spiritual Founding Father and God of Liberty: A Religious History of the American Revolution. Barry Hankins is Professor of History, graduate program director in the history department, and Resident Scholar at the Institute for Studies of Religion at Baylor University. He is the author of *Uneasy in Babylon: Southern Baptist Conservatives and American Culture* and, most recently, *Jesus and Gin: Evangelicalism, the Roaring Twenties and Today's Culture Wars*.

From seed form in the first colonies, to peak-Baptist in the late 1980s, for better or for worse, the Baptist influence in America cannot be denied. Surprisingly, following the Baptist thread of American history provides an amazingly instructive perspective for understanding the development of America, from its initial stage consisting of multiple officially Christian British colonies to its present stage of consolidated power and avowed religious neutrality. From Roger Williams' encounter with the fledgling Massachusetts Bay Colony in the early 1600s, to Russell Moore in

2015, "Baptists in America" engagingly covers it all. Especially refreshing and enlightening is the bold commentary generously interjected by the authors, which keeps the history relevant and alive from beginning to end. I thoroughly tested the highlighting limits of my Kindle app! Baptists in America is a highly rewarding read.

Baptists are not the most homogenous group. This could make writing readable histories about them a significant challenge. In this volume, Kidd and Hankins provide a quality, readable, and engaging story. If you have read David Bebbington's *Baptists through the Centuries: a History of a Global People*, you will find this volume fits with it like a puzzle, providing the American "zoom in" that was not possible in Bebbington's broader work. If you are looking for a book to bolster your personal Baptist polemics, this is not that book. It is even and thorough, a quality telling of the Baptist story. If you are a Baptist in America (whatever flavor), you will find your own history in the pages of this book.

I am particularly interested in the history of Christianity in America. I've written quite a bit and lectured extensively on this topic over the past few years. So, I was very excited to see that one of my favorite historians, Thomas Kidd, had a new work titled *Baptists in America*. I was less familiar with Barry Hankins (the book's co-author), but he and Kidd made an excellent team. I intend to read more from Hankins in the coming months. I love that Kidd and Hankins take great care to attach important moments in baptist history to historically noteworthy instances in American history. This is very helpful in aiding the reader to situate baptist history in its larger, contextual, setting. I commend the authors for being (in my opinion) very fair in the appraisal of controversial moments in baptist history. I would note that their handling of the conservative resurgence was well-written and gracious. One feature of the book that is especially timely is the discussion of the baptist emphasis on religious liberty. I think most readers will find this segment of the book quite useful. As debates over the role of religion continue in our country, it is a nice reminder that baptists have always stood for religious liberty. *Baptists in America* is an excellent text. I would strongly encourage all baptists, history buffs, church historians, and general readers alike to add this book to your summer reading list. Great work by Thomas Kidd and Barry Hankins.

Excellent! Learned so much about my denomination. Great information and a lot of detail. Despite all the ups and downs, still glad to be a Baptist in America! Great collaboration by both of our Baylor Professors.

A very thorough comprehensive history of the arrival and survival of the Baptist Church here in America. It is more comprehensive than many histories of the denomination in its inclusiveness of both the rise, development of the Black Baptists and other minorities within this communion. All too many would seem to forget that even now this denomination tends to be non-inclusive in so many areas. The discussion of the contribution of Baptists to the political landscape of our country should be read by all. The challenges faced as Baptists settle here, the struggles to simply survive in such a hostile environment tends to be missing from some of the discussion of American history. As should be expected of such a study, there are comprehensive reference notes. Here is a valuable addition for the study of the history of this denomination and America.

I enjoyed this book a great deal. Having just joined a Baptist church, I had a lot of questions, such as "why is there no official creed or ordinances? Why is the denomination so loosely held to other churches? Why do African Americans have their own sub denominations? And why is there such a close link to Reformed and Calvinist denominations, but yet still distinct from them?" Kidd tackles all of those questions and more and the book explained a great deal to me about the how certain things came to be in this large American denomination. He explains the nuances, with all the warts, and places things in context with respectfulness and a skill of a wonderful historian. The chapter on the civil rights era is compelling in explaining the wide variety and points of view on the issue. The writing is well done and very smooth. If you wish to understand how Baptists have changed from the 17th century to the end of the 20th, this book will answer those questions well.

While it's hard to cover everything that defined Baptists in the over 300 years of their history in America, this book does a great job explaining all the major things that determine who American Baptists are today. Having been a Baptist most of my life, and having been raised in Baptist churches before that, the term 'Baptist' covers lots of theological and social territory. And this book mentions them all. A good and enlightening read.

A well told narrative of baptist development. Along the way, author points out essentials of what it means to be a Baptist. Highly recommended read for anyone interested in American or Church history.

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