



## The First Great Awakening

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### Activity #1: Jonathan Edwards

**Directions:** Read the following paragraphs as an introduction to the First Great Awakening and the role of Jonathan Edwards in that religious movement.

Excerpts from "Religion in 18<sup>th</sup> Century America": <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel02.html>

Evangelicalism is difficult to date and to define. In 1531, at the beginning of the Reformation, Sir Thomas More referred to religious adversaries as "Evaungelicalles." Scholars have argued that, as a self-conscious movement, evangelicalism did not arise until the mid-seventeenth century, perhaps not until the Great Awakening itself. The fundamental premise of evangelicalism is the conversion of individuals from a state of sin to a "new birth" through preaching of the Word.

The first generation of New England Puritans required that church members undergo a conversion experience that they could describe publicly. Their successors were not as successful in reaping harvests of redeemed souls. During the first decades of the eighteenth century in the Connecticut River Valley a series of local "awakenings" began. By the 1730s they had spread into what was interpreted as a general outpouring of the Spirit that bathed the American colonies, England, Wales, and Scotland. In mass open-air revivals powerful preachers like George Whitefield brought thousands of souls to the new birth. The Great Awakening, which had spent its force in New England by the mid-1740s, split the Congregational and Presbyterian Churches into supporters--called "New Lights" and "New Side"--and opponents--the "Old Lights" and "Old Side." Many New England New Lights became Separate Baptists. Together with New Side Presbyterians (eventually reunited on their own terms with the Old Side) they carried the Great Awakening into the southern colonies, igniting a series of the revivals that lasted well into the nineteenth century....

Jonathan Edwards (1703-17) was the most important American preacher during the Great Awakening. A revival in his church in Northampton, Massachusetts, 1734-1735, was considered a harbinger of the Awakening which unfolded a few years later. Edwards was more than an effective evangelical preacher, however. He was the principal intellectual interpreter of, and apologist for, the Awakening. He wrote analytical descriptions of the revival, placing it in a larger theological context. Edwards was a world-class theologian, writing some of the most original and important treatises ever produced by an American. He died of smallpox in 1758, shortly after becoming president of Princeton.