

IN FOCUS

RIGHT WING WATCH



Barton, Inc: Hack “Historian” Hits the Big Time in Tea Party America



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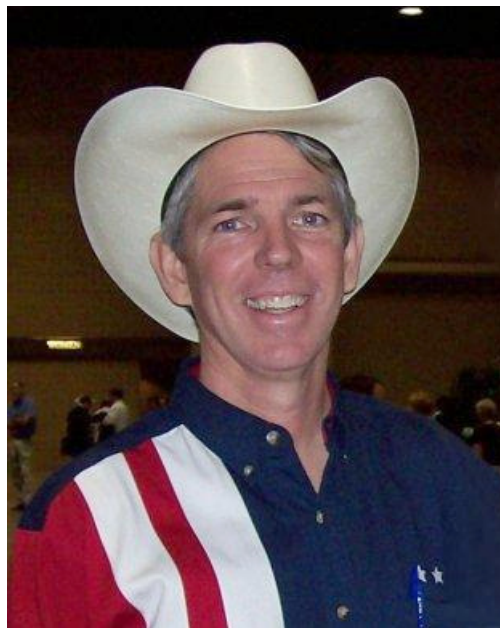
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Introduction

When Congressional Tea Party Caucus chair Rep. Michelle Bachmann began planning her classes on the U.S. Constitution for members of Congress, she announced that Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia would be among the teachers, as would GOP operative David Barton, the Religious Right's favorite self-proclaimed historian. Scalia was a high-ranking, not to mention eyebrow-raising, get for Bachmann, but he's not the guy Glenn Beck calls "the most important man in America." That would be Barton, who is helping Beck and Bachmann miseducate millions of Americans about U.S. history and the Constitution. Bachmann herself is a regular on Barton's "Spiritual Heritage" tours of the U.S. Capitol and calls him "a treasure for our nation."

Who is this national treasure who will be teaching members of Congress about the U.S. Constitution alongside a Supreme Court justice? He's a prolific author who has been profitably peddling a distorted "Christian nation" view of American history for the past two decades. His books and videos denouncing church-state separation have been repeatedly debunked by respected historians, but they have made Barton a folk hero for many in the Religious Right. And his eagerness to use his message to help elect Republicans has won him gratitude and support from national as well as state and local GOP leaders. Indeed, *Time Magazine* named him one of the nation's 25 most influential evangelical Christians in 2005.

But the fast-talking Texan got an even bigger break – and a much bigger audience – when Fox News' Glenn Beck became a fan. Last year Beck invited Barton to appear regularly on his "Founders' Friday" broadcasts. And when Beck brought his messianic road show to Washington, D.C. in August 2010, Barton shared the stage with him. At "America's Divine Destiny," the kick-off event on the eve of Beck's Lincoln Memorial rally, Barton waved copies of old books and sermons and argued that the nation's founding documents were essentially cribbed from colonial-era sermons.



Barton is using his expanded visibility to branch out. He's still best known for his claims about the intent of the nation's founders to create a Christian nation, and he pushes predictable Religious Right positions on abortion, gay rights, and the judiciary, often explicitly in the cause of electing Republicans to political office. But he is also lending his name to Religious Right attacks on environmentalists concerned about climate change. And he's making a big play for fame and fortune in Tea Party America, promoting what he says is the biblical basis for the Tea Party's anti-government, anti-tax agenda. According to Barton, Jesus is opposed to progressive taxation, minimum wage laws, collective bargaining, and "socialist union kind of stuff."

Beck and Bachmann are not the only Barton fans among right-wing political leaders. GOP presidential hopeful Mike Huckabee told *CNS News* that in his opinion, Barton is "maybe the greatest living historian on the spiritual nature of America's early days" and "a person who I wish was writing the curriculum" in the country's schools. He later asserted that Barton was the "single best historian in America today."

Another presidential hopeful, Newt Gingrich, has headlined events for two of Barton's groups, Nevada Restoration Project and the Virginia Renewal Project, to help organize conservative activists and pastors to vote before key elections; in turn Barton joined Gingrich and Jim Garlow, who heads Gingrich's Renewing American Leadership organization, on a November conference call with pastors to gloat about the outcome of the 2010 elections.

Sam Brownback, now the Governor of Kansas, has said that Barton is "rediscovering the spiritual roots of this nation. His research provides the philosophical underpinning for a lot of the Republican effort in the country today –bringing God back into the public square."

Barton, who also works with state legislators through the ProFamily Legislative Network, has also been invited to share his "wisdom" with state legislators this year, including those in Arkansas and Minnesota.

DAVID BARTON:

A SELF-PROCLAIMED AND SELF-TAUGHT "HISTORIAN" WHO HAS BEEN PROFITABLY PEDDLING A BADLY DISTORTED "CHRISTIAN NATION" VIEW OF AMERICAN HISTORY FOR THE PAST TWO DECADES

Why Barton Matters

Barton's growing media visibility and influence with members of Congress and other Republican Party officials is troubling for many reasons. Barton aggressively promotes a distorted Christian-nation view of American history. Scholars have criticized Barton for presenting facts out of context or in misleading ways, but that hasn't stopped him from promoting his theories through books, television, and the textbooks that will teach the next generation of Americans.



GLENN BECK CALLED DAVID BARTON "THE MOST IMPORTANT MAN IN AMERICA."

Barton's work is not just an academic exercise. It is meant to have a political impact. For Barton, "documenting" the divine origins of his interpretations of the Constitution gives him and his political allies a potent weapon. Opponents who disagree about tax policy or the powers of Congress are not only wrong, they are un-American and anti-religious, enemies of America and of God. And with Glenn Beck's help, Barton promotes conspiracy theories about elites hiding the truth from average Americans in order to undermine the nation from within. Last summer, he declared that liberal and media attacks on the Tea Party were just like attacks on Jesus.

Those are the kind of accusations long favored by the Religious Right, and they are toxic. Claims that political opponents are evil and are actively trying to destroy Americans' freedoms poison the public arena, make constructive civic discourse nearly impossible, and have the potential to incite acts of violence.

Having elected officials endorse and promote Barton's "scholarship" gives his claims more credibility than they deserve. He in turn gives cover and a veneer of legitimacy to right-wing politicians interested in putting their notions of a nation created by and for Christians into public policy.

Barton 101

Barton is a largely self-educated historian whose academic credentials are a Bachelor of Arts degree from Oral Roberts

University and an Honorary Doctorate of Letters from Pensacola Christian College. His WallBuilders empire, through which he publishes books and videos and travels the country to promote his ideas and campaign for Republican officials, includes both nonprofit and for-profit arms.

WallBuilders, which promotes the belief that the Founding Fathers were evangelical Christians who wanted the country ruled according to biblical precepts, organizes religious leaders to get involved in politics, and pushes to enact education policies and laws that reflect Religious Right values and priorities. WallBuilders describes its mission as: "(1) educating the nation concerning the Godly foundation of our country; (2) providing information to federal, state, and local officials as they develop public policies which reflect biblical values; and (3) encouraging Christians to be involved in the civic arena." A 2005 profile of Barton in the Fort Worth Star-Telegram concisely summarized his goals: "Barton is working toward an America where students invoke the name of Jesus in morning prayers, where the Ten Commandments occupy a place on state Capitol grounds, where so-called activist judges are impeached for their decisions."

Barton says the Christian America he wants to create is not a theocracy, but it would clearly be an America in which religious minorities would have to settle for schools and other governmental institutions promoting Barton's version of Christianity in every realm of life. As Barton has told Focus on the Family:



WALLBUILDERS PROMOTES THE BELIEF THAT THE FOUNDING FATHERS WERE EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS WHO WANTED THE COUNTRY RULED ACCORDING TO BIBLICAL PRECEPTS.

The Bible clearly teaches that the way people view their own history affects the way they behave. God wants us to know our history and learn its lessons. At WallBuilders, we present American history, and we do so with a Providential perspective. In short, history not only shows God's workings and plans but it also demonstrates the effectiveness of biblical principles when applied to church, education, government, economics, family, entertainment, military or any other aspect of life.

Barton argues that the Bible and 150 years of sermons by colonial preachers inspired the nation's founders. The constitutional form of government, he says, was based on a biblical model: early Hebrew government was a "federative republic," with God having identified the three branches of government, and with councils of elders functioning like the Senate. Barton quotes Jesus telling his followers to "occupy till I come." Although that quote comes from a parable, it's a favorite of dominionist speakers who believe it affirms their belief that Christians are meant to be running the nation and the world.

Barton serves on the board of the dominionist Providence Foundation, which claims to have trained tens of thousands of leaders on behalf of its mission, which is "to spread liberty, justice, and prosperity among the nations by instructing individuals in a Biblical worldview." The foundation says that the notion of Divine Providence "expressed a basic link in the Founder's thinking between God and history," and gives this definition:

"Providence" is defined as the preservation, government, guidance, and direction which God exercises over all creation, including the civil affairs of men and women. The Scriptures contain a theology of the family, the church, and the state. Principles in God's written Word that relate to civil government, politics, economics, and education are timeless and universally useful for the benefit of any culture on earth today.

Barton has been deeply involved in recent battles over the content of textbooks in Texas and throughout the nation. The Texas Board of Education notoriously redesigned the state's social studies curriculum in 2010 to have it conform more closely to a right-wing view of American history, even though some changes sought by Religious Right activists like Barton were inaccurate and dismissive of the civil rights movement. The Religious Right activist who until recently chaired the board of education named Barton an "expert" and backed efforts by Barton and preacher Peter Marshall to purge figures like Martin Luther King Jr. and Cesar Chavez from the curriculum. Barton's involvement with the textbook controversy also provided evidence of the naked partisanship behind much of Barton's work: he demanded that because the founders hated and feared democracy, and created a republic instead, that textbooks should not refer to "democratic values" but "republican" ones.

Sloppy Scholarship

The online version of this report links to a number of in-depth reports and articles refuting many of Barton's claims about the nation's founders and the separation of church and state. Credible historians, writers, and even religious groups have denounced Barton's shoddy, misleading, and politically-motivated "scholarship," which misquotes and misleadingly portrays historical figures and documents. Here is a sampling of Barton's critics:

- Derek Davis, director of the J.M. Dawson Institute on Church-State Studies at Baylor University, said Barton "can be very convincing to an uninitiated audience. He's intelligent. He's well-spoken. But a lot of what he presents is a distortion of the truth."
- John Fea, a history professor at Messiah College in Pennsylvania, has criticized Barton and Peter Marshall, who worked with Barton to influence Texas textbooks: "I'm an evangelical Christian, and I think David Barton and Peter Marshall are completely out to lunch. They are not experts on social studies and history. Neither of them are trained in history. They are preachers who use the past and history as a means of promoting a political agenda in the present."

CREDIBLE HISTORIANS, WRITERS, AND EVEN RELIGIOUS GROUPS HAVE DENOUNCED **BARTON'S** SHODDY, MISLEADING, AND POLITICALLY-MOTIVATED "SCHOLARSHIP."

- J. Brent Walker, Executive Director of the Baptist Joint Committee, argues in a critique of Barton's teachings on church-state issues that Barton's work is "laced with exaggerations, half-truths and misstatements of fact. As more individuals, congregations and elected officials are influenced by Barton's claims, the threat of his campaign becomes more real." Baptist blogger Don Byrd said, "Having Barton lecture the House of Representatives on religious liberty issues and the Constitution is a bit like having the fox lecture the hens on proper coop construction."
- Former U.S. Sen. Arlen Specter wrote in the Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy that Barton's "pseudoscholarship would hardly be worth discussing, let alone disproving, were it not for the

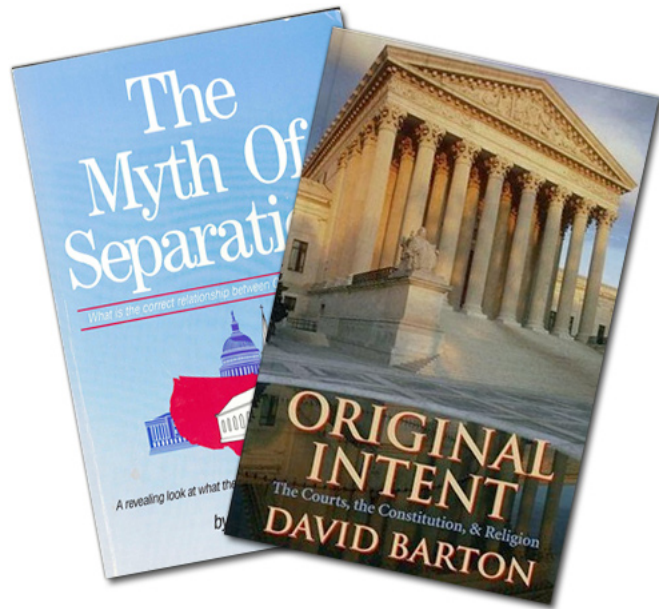
fact that it is taken so very seriously by so many people.”

- Mark Lilla, a scholar who has taught at the University of Chicago and Columbia University, has publicly criticized the “schlock history written by religious propagandists like David Barton, the author of the bizarre pastiche *The Myth of Separation*, who use selective quotations out of context to suggest that the framers were inspired believers who thought they were founding a Christian nation.”
- The Anti-Defamation League found that Barton’s “ostensible scholarship functions in fact as an assault on scholarship: in the manner of other recent phony revisionisms, the history it supports is little more than a compendium of anecdotes divorced from their original context, linked harum-scarum and laced with factual errors and distorted innuendo. Barton’s ‘scholarship,’ like that of Holocaust denial and Atlantic slave trade conspiracy-mongering is rigged to arrive at predetermined conclusions, not history.”
- Historian Richard V. Pierard of Indiana State University has called Barton’s claims that the Founding Fathers were mostly evangelical Christians “ridiculous” since the term was not used at the time, contending that “to try to take a later definition and impose it on these people is a historical anachronism.”

Barton is undeterred by such criticism. Instead, he insists that he is revealing to Americans the inspiring truth about their country that has been hidden by academic and media elites, who have conspired to keep Americans in the dark about the religious intentions of the nation’s founders. No wonder he gets along so well with Glenn Beck.

In interviews and television appearances, Barton talks fast, like a man who has so many stories to tell he doesn’t know where to start or stop. Unfortunately, a lot of the stories Barton has told about the founders and American history simply aren’t true.

Chris Rodda of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation has effectively refuted one of Barton’s favorite claims — that Congress printed an official Bible for use in schools in 1782. (Barton makes the claim on one of his Capitol tours here). Barton’s version of the history is not accurate, reports Rodda. The Bible publisher’s requests to have Congress make a large purchase of his product were turned down. Congress did, at the publisher’s request, ask its chaplains to vouch for the Bible’s accuracy in translation and printing. Barton excitedly told his



BARTON HAS HAD TO EDIT AND RENAME ONE OF HIS BOOKS AFTER CRITICS POINTED OUT FALSE MATERIAL.

inflated version on the Glenn Beck show, as if it demonstrated an important fact about our notions of church-state separation. But his misrepresentations say more about Barton’s misuse of historical documents to make political points.

Barton and his son Tim appeared recently on Kirk Cameron’s show on the Trinity Broadcasting Network. In that interview, the younger Barton inaccurately described the correspondence in which Thomas Jefferson used the phrase “wall of separation” between church and state. Tim Barton said Jefferson told the recipients of his letter (the Danbury Baptists) to “imagine” that there was such a wall; in fact Jefferson wrote, “I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should ‘make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,’ thus building a wall of separation between Church and State.” David Barton has also mischaracterized that letter, claiming (falsely) that Jefferson described a “one-way” concept of church-state separation more to Barton’s liking. Like father, like son.

Barton has not been able to simply ignore all evidence of his errors and misstatements. He edited and renamed one book (*The Myth of Separation* became *Original Intent*) after critics pointed out false material. He has publicly admitted that a dozen supposed quotations about the nation’s origin and purpose that he and others have attributed to founding fathers

simply can't be verified. But those quotations continue to be used by others.

Good Timing for Bad History

Barton's long years of promoting a vision of a non-secular America created by and for Christians prepared him well for the current political moment, in which Glenn Beck, leaders of the Tea Party movement, and increasingly, the Republican Party, are turning the idea of a divinely ordained "American exceptionalism" into a political weapon against President Barack Obama, the Democratic Party, and liberals in general.

In the hands of Barton and Beck, American exceptionalism is more than the idea that America plays a unique role in the world. They insist on an American exceptionalism that is grounded in divine inspiration of the founders and a divine blessing on the country. Barton says America's founding documents were basically lifted from colonial era sermons. America's unique



DAVID BARTON SAYS THE U.S. CONSTITUTION IS A RELIGIOUS DOCUMENT THAT REQUIRES A NATIONAL ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF GOD'S HAND IN OUR FOUNDING, HISTORY, AND PROSPERITY.

commitment to individual liberty is grounded in colonial pastors' belief in individual salvation, he says. If it weren't for that divine origin, America would be more collectivist, like France. That's also why he and Beck say that "social justice" and the notion of a collective form of salvation (which they attribute to President Obama) is not only wrong in their eyes but un-American and downright evil.

Barton also insists that the U.S. Constitution was not meant to be a secular document. It is true, of course, that the First Amendment prohibits an establishment of religion and the Constitution includes an explicit ban on religious tests for public office, and its authors did not include any implication of divine origin or blessing, but Barton has a theory. At the end of the text of the Constitution, its authors write that the Constitution's crafting was "Done in Convention by the Unanimous Consent of the States present the Seventeenth Day of September in the Year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and Eighty seven and of the Independence of the United States of America the Twelfth." Barton claims that this passing reference to the Declaration of Independence incorporates that document and its reference to rights endowed by a Creator into the U.S. Constitution, making the Constitution a religious document that reflects and requires a national acknowledgment of God's hand in our founding, history, and prosperity.

Barton's Bible = Tea Party Platform

Barton is one of many Religious Right figures who are challenging socially libertarian strains within the Tea Party movement and arguing that one cannot legitimately be an economic conservative without also being a social conservative. And he is working hard to give the Tea Party movement, its view of the Constitution, and its anti-tax and anti-welfare economic policies a divine stamp of approval.

On a conference call with pastors in the wake of the November 2010 elections, Barton asserted that the Bible "absolutely" condemns the estate tax as "most immoral," and said Jesus taught against the capital gains tax and opposed the minimum wage. Barton went even further, declaring that taxation is theft and in particular that the Bible condemns progressive taxation, which he insists is "inherently un-biblical and unfair." He echoed those themes during a three-part broadcast on limited government in January 2011, saying, "Money does not belong to the government, it belongs to individuals, and to steal money from individuals through whatever government spending program is taking private property and you're not supposed to do that."

On "Making the Constitution Obsolete:

Understanding What is Happening to America's Economic and Cultural Heritage," a DVD marketed by the American Family Association, Barton repeats his claims of biblical opposition to progressive taxes. "Biblically, Jesus says the sun shines on the just, the unjust, the rain falls on the wicked, the righteous, God treats everybody exactly the same, whether you're rich or poor you pay a ten percent tithe...everyone's treated the same, so you don't have any kind of a class warfare, you have equality under the law." Says Barton, "The concept of justice goes out with the progressive income tax which is why the Bible is opposed to it."



DAVID BARTON IS AN UNABASHED PARTISAN.

Barton claims a biblical basis for other Tea Party notions such as the call for a return to the gold standard (floating exchange rates reflect moral relativism applied to economic policy) and opposition to welfare programs (he says the earliest American colonies survived only by enforcing the biblical injunction that if a man will not work he will not eat). The Federal Reserve System, he says, violates biblical principles of competition and transparency. He argues that the kind of government social programs undertaken by Franklin Delano Roosevelt were wrong from a biblical standpoint, because the Bible says taking care of the poor is the job of the church and individual, not the government.

And he promotes a Tea Partier's radical view of the Constitution, key constitutional amendments, and limitations on federal authority to address issues facing the nation. "Congress can do 18 things and that's all," he says. He decries the way that post-Civil War amendments have been used to alter the relationship between state and national governments. On the DVD "Making the Constitution Obsolete" he decries the "perversion of the 14th Amendment" by the courts, meaning their application of the amendment to any issue other than slavery. He says the south was wrong on slavery but right on

states' rights. He complains that the courts have "abused the process" and thus "completely revolutionized America."

Barton on Politics: GOP = God's Own Party

Barton is an unabashed partisan. He was vice-chair of the Texas Republican Party from 1997-2006 and is currently helping Texas Gov. Rick Perry, a Religious Right favorite, peddle his new book, *Fed Up! Our Fight to Save America from Washington*.

Barton tells pastors that the GOP is their "logical home if you're concerned about Biblical issues" since "it's very clear in the party platforms that one party does support traditional marriage and opposes abortion and supports school prayer--and the other opposes that."

Barton excoriates Christians who don't share his enthusiasm for politics, saying that Jesus' admonition to "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's" requires Christians to take responsibility for their government. And Barton warns that God will hold Christians accountable for choosing the wrong candidate, consistently telling voters that they will "answer to God" for their votes, saying "righteousness must be the issue."

On the other hand, Barton understands that in politics you don't often get perfect candidates. When it comes to elective politics, Barton argues for incrementalism rather than ideological purity or third party politics. He tells voters that it makes sense to support a candidate you agree with 70 percent of the time if the alternative is someone you agree with only 20 percent. Barton claims biblical authority for this principle by quoting God telling the Israelites in Deuteronomy that he will not give them the promised land all at once.

National GOP leaders have in increasingly tapped Barton's proven ability to excite conservative evangelical voters with his attacks on church-state separation, liberal judges, and the like. In 2004, Barton traveled across the nation to help George W. Bush's re-election bid. The *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* reported:

"He could take a crowd that wasn't particularly political, that didn't understand how they could make a difference, that didn't understand how the issues that mattered to them played a part in politics, and motivate them to go out and work in their communities," said Blaise Hazelwood, who served as the Republican National Committee's political director during the campaign. "He's incredibly talented at doing that."

Barton also campaigned for the McCain/Palin ticket in 2008.

That year, he cited four factors he considers when deciding how to vote in presidential elections:

1. What are you going to do on judges?
2. What are you going to do on right to life?
3. Where are they on homosexuality – do they understand absolute moral rights and wrongs or put the Bible on the back shelf?
4. Acknowledgement of God. If we keep religion at church and out of the public arena we're going to miss blessings that come from the acknowledgment of God.

Because Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama had voted wrongly in Barton's eyes on all those factors, and McCain had voted correctly, Barton said he wasn't bothering to listen to any speeches because he knew who to vote for.

Before the 2010 elections, Barton said: "If we stand before God and He says 'why did you vote for a leader who's attempting to redefine my institution of marriage and who kills the unborn children that I knew before they were in the womb?' If He asks us that and our answer is 'Because that leader was good on jobs and the economy,' He's not going to accept that." After the many conservative victories in the 2010 elections, Barton praised the number of Americans involved in Religious Right-organized prayer and fasting efforts leading up to the elections. "Historically it's irrefutable" that those efforts had an impact on the election, he said. "There's no way from a biblical or historical standpoint you can do that and not see God intervene or move."

Barton's use of political data is no more reliable than his interpretation of historical documents. Right Wing Watch's Kyle Mantyla, in a piece aptly titled "David Barton's Utter Disregard for Fact and Accuracy," exposes and debunks Barton's deceptive manipulation of polling data to make literally unbelievable claims about the 2010 elections, including the easily refuted claim that the number of voters who considered marriage an important issue jumped from one percent in 2008 to 53 percent in 2010.

Environmentalism = Evil

Barton is closely associated with a movement among conservative evangelicals to resist the rise of environmental activism in church communities and to portray the environmental movement as not only un-Christian but

actively anti-Christian. He is among the many Religious Right leaders who signed the 2009 "Evangelical Declaration on Global Warming," which asserts:

We believe Earth and its ecosystems—created by God's intelligent design and infinite power and sustained by His faithful providence—are robust, resilient, self-regulating, and self-correcting, admirably suited for human flourishing, and displaying His glory.



DAVID BARTON IS ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN THE "RESISTING THE GREEN DRAGON" PROJECT, WHICH ATTACKS ENVIRONMENTAL EFFORTS TO MITIGATE THE EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE.

The declaration claims that efforts to reduce carbon dioxide would be economically devastating, particularly to poorer nations, and that such policies therefore fail to "comply with the Biblical requirement of protecting the poor from harm and oppression."

Barton was invited to testify before the U.S. Senate Environment and Public Works Committee in 2007. In that testimony, he promoted the Cornwall Alliance, a Religious Right group opposing action on climate change. An excerpt from the "Cornwall Declaration" follows:

And while science is still debating the causes of Global Warming and trying to decide where the ocean waves will end up, religious conservatives rest in the many promises of the Scriptures. For example, in Genesis 8:21-22, God promised that the natural cycles would continue ("While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease"); and Psalm 104:9 declares: "You set a boundary that they [the waters] may not pass over, so that they will not return to cover the earth"; and in Jeremiah 5:22, God asks: "Will you not tremble at My presence, Who have placed the sand as the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree that it [the sea] cannot pass beyond it? And

though its waves toss to and fro, yet they cannot prevail." To date, neither science nor experience has disproved the promises of those Scriptures.

But Cornwall and Barton go well beyond criticizing the science of man-caused climate change. Barton is actively involved in the "Resisting the Green Dragon" project, which attacks efforts to mitigate the effects of climate change, and which portrays environmentalism as "deadly to human prosperity, deadly to human life, deadly to human freedom, and deadly to the gospel of Jesus Christ."

Barton appeared on Glenn Beck's October 15, 2010 television show along with Cornwall Alliance founder and spokesman Calvin Beisner. The show was largely devoted to attacking "And Let There Be ... Stuff?", a pro-environment curriculum meant for religious congregations. Beck asserted that "environmentalists are now worshipping the ancient god of Babylon, the god of weather." And Barton took to the blackboard to demonstrate visually his claim that, while the traditional religious view places mankind as the pinnacle of creation, the "secular religious view" actually places mankind at the bottom, as less important than plants and animals. He complained that environmentalists are therefore willing to "inconvenience man" in order to save other animal species.

On Beck's show, Beisner and Barton agreed with Beck that the environmental movement is "anti-human" and that the environmental curriculum designed for use in churches was more evidence that "the progressive left is coming for the kill on religion."

Muslims and other Religious Minorities

Barton has also helped to inflame anti-Muslim sentiments. When Rep. Keith Ellison was elected to the House of Representatives from Minnesota in 2006, Ellison—the first Muslim in Congress—chose to use a Koran once owned by Thomas Jefferson for his private swearing-in ceremony (the actual swearing-in takes place on the floor of the House of Representatives in a group). Some conservative Christians reacted with anger to that decision; Barton defended those reactions by citing 19th-century history as a reason Americans are right to be worried about a Muslim in Congress.

In January 2007, Barton penned "An Historical Perspective on a Muslim Being Sworn into Congress on the Koran," which generously quoted two of Ellison's most vocal critics. Radio show host Dennis Prager said the use of the Koran "undermined American civilization" and said, "Insofar as a member of Congress taking an oath to serve America and uphold its values is concerned, America is interested in only one book: the Bible. If you are incapable of taking an oath on that book, don't serve in Congress." Barton also approvingly quoted Rep. Virgil Goode of Virginia, who said Ellison's election was evidence of the need to restrict immigration.

In the article, Barton argues that the U.S. conflict with the Barbary pirates in the early 1800s provides "useful background in addressing the issue of a Muslim being



DAVID BARTON SAID THAT REP. KEITH ELLISON "SHOULD NOT BE SURPRISED THAT THERE IS WIDESPREAD CONCERN OVER HIS DECISION TO PUBLICLY FLAUNT AMERICAN TRADITION AND VALUES AND REPLACE THEM WITH ISLAMIC ONES."

sworn into Congress." Barton refers to the Barbary pirates as "Muslim terrorists." He wrote that Ellison's use of a Koran owned by Thomas Jefferson was "perhaps not as noble" as Ellison portrayed, saying the reason Jefferson owned the Koran was to "learn the beliefs of the enemies he was fighting."

Ellison may not have the same beliefs as the Muslims who openly decry and even attack America; nevertheless, their behavior reflects on him. It is therefore understandable that citizens outside his district are highly concerned. This concern was heightened by the fact that Ellison himself publicly flaunted his abrogation of American precedent by making his swearing-in on the Koran a national issue.

After a litany of historical examples of human rights abuses by Muslim leaders, Barton concludes:

Keith Ellison may be the one to break this pattern and start something new with Islam, but in the meantime, he should not be surprised that there is widespread concern over his decision to publicly



DAVID BARTON SAID THAT FEISEL ABDUL RAUF, THE IMAM PROMOTING THE CULTURAL CENTER IN NEW YORK, IS “TRYING TO PROVOKE A NUCLEAR INCIDENT WITH ISRAEL AND WITH IRAN.”

flaunt American tradition and values and replace them with Islamic ones.

In the article, Barton also promotes the work of Robert Spencer, a right-wing author whose vehemently anti-Muslim books have been criticized by scholars of religion and civil rights advocates.

In September 2010, Barton devoted several WallBuilders Live broadcasts to critics of the Islamic cultural center in lower Manhattan that opponents describe inaccurately as the “Ground Zero Mosque.” Barton criticized media coverage of the issue, saying, “When they’re claiming it’s a freedom of religion issue, and that’s all they’re talking about, that’s great proof that’s not the issue.”

Debra Burlingame, the sister of a pilot killed in the 9-11 attacks, was a guest one day. She said promoters of the cultural center want to build a Muslim presence at a site of conquest that would “be seen in the Muslim world as the hand of Allah basically ratifying what happened on 9-11.” She called it “an overt and audacious history grab.” Barton co-host Rick Green agreed that it would be “a beachhead for Sharia law.” Barton referred to Feisel Abdul Rauf, the imam promoting the cultural center, as “this nut” and argued that he is “trying to provoke a nuclear incident with Israel and with Iran.”

The next day, WallBuilders continued the conversation with Walid Shoebat, a self-described former PLO terrorist and convert to evangelical Christianity, who said that Rauf wants to do the same thing Osama bin Laden wants to do, which is to see America subjugated to Sharia law. Shoebat said that liberals are supporting the project because “liberals always agree with Muslims,” an “insight” that Rick Green called “brilliant.” Barton and Green agreed that the worldviews of liberals and Islamicists “fit together.”

Barton also complained when a Hindu priest was invited to give an invocation before Congress that “the prayer will be completely outside the American paradigm, flying in the face of the American motto ‘One Nation Under God.’”

And he is seemingly unconcerned about the impact on religious minorities of his efforts to re-install Christian prayers in public school classrooms. From the *Star-Telegram*:

Barton’s views on school prayer illustrate one of the tenets of his belief system: an abiding faith in majority rule.

Students of all religions should be able to pray in the classroom, during graduation or at football games if the majority of a community wants it, Barton argues.

“I fully understand if New York City doesn’t want prayer in schools, but Pampa, Texas, may,” he said.

Barton says other faiths should be able to pray, too, but only according to their representation in a given community. Christian prayers, then, would dominate in most places.

Smaller faiths are owed no more by the majority, he believes. Above all else, Barton believes that America was founded on Christianity.

He has written and spoken approvingly of early state constitutions that required officeholders to profess “faith in God the Father, and in Jesus Christ His only Son.”

But secularists still top the list of Barton’s enemies. For all his criticism of Islam, and his defense of those concerned about the election of Muslim public officials, Barton says nonreligious public officials would be even worse:

SECULARISTS TOP THE LIST OF DAVID BARTON’S ENEMIES.

From a societal standpoint, there should be more concern over elected officials who are secularists and will swear an oath on no religious book, than for Muslims who swear on the Koran. After all, secularism presents a greater threat to American traditions and values than does Islam.

Immigration

Barton brings his trademark style – claiming God’s blessing for all the Religious Right’s political positions,-- to the issue of immigration as well. Last summer, Barton argued against immigration reform, saying,

...it is God and not man who establishes the borders of nations. National boundaries are set by God. If God didn’t want boundaries, he would have put everyone in the same world and there would have been no nations; we would have all been living together as one group and one people. That didn’t happen. From the Tower of Babel, he sent them out with different languages, different cultures. God’s the one who drew up the lines for the nations, so to say open borders is to say ‘God, you goofed it all up and when you had borders, you shouldn’t have done it’ ... And so, from a Christian standpoint, you cannot do that. God’s the one who establishes the boundaries of nations.

Barton and “WallBuilders Live” co-host Rick Green have featured William Gheen of Americans for Legal Immigration PAC. Right Wight Watch has described Gheen as “the viciously anti-immigrant activist who

“GOD’S THE ONE WHO DREW UP THE LINES FOR THE NATIONS, SO TO SAY OPEN BORDERS IS TO SAY ‘GOD, YOU GOOFED IT ALL UP.’ ”

-DAVID BARTON

made news a few months back when he demanded that Sen. Lindsey Graham admit that he is gay, saying that his refusal to do so was allowing President Obama and others to blackmail him into supporting immigration reform.” Gheen said of the Department of Homeland Security, “they don’t care about the death and suffering illegal immigration is causing the American public” and called immigrants’ advocates enemies of America.

Racial History

As part of his tireless efforts to promote the Republican Party, Barton has peddled a one-sided “documentary” called “Setting the Record Straight: American History in Black & White,” which is designed to help the GOP reach out to black voters by blaming the Democratic Party for

slavery, lynching, and Jim Crow. That documentary was a focus of People For the American Way Foundation’s 2006 report on Barton, “Propaganda Masquerading as History.” Barton’s film credits the GOP with the passage of civil rights legislation in the 1960s. Not so surprisingly, his history stops there, ignoring the decades of GOP power-building in the south based on fanning racial resentment among conservative white voters. Barton is continuing

ONE OF DAVID BARTON’S DOCUMENTARIES HELPS THE GOP REACH OUT TO BLACK VOTERS BY BLAMING THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY FOR SLAVERY, LYNCHING, AND JIM CROW.

to promote his ideologically blinkered history of race in America, devoting his WallBuilders Live radio show in the first week of March 2011 to a recap of “Setting the Record Straight.”

Barton is also teaming up with Glenn Beck to offer a revisionist take on the history of slavery in America, which among other things portrays the Constitution’s treatment of slaves as three-fifths of a person as evidence of the Christian founders’ anti-slavery sentiments. “Barton accuses historians of hiding the truth about slavery and racism from the American people, a charge that fits the larger conspiracy-oriented worldview of Beck and other leading conservatives,” says Julie Ingersoll, an associate professor of religious studies at the University of North Florida, who notes that Barton’s revisionist view is now showing up in Tea Partiers’ talking points.

Ingersoll summarizes Barton’s strategic revisionism:

David Barton, Glenn Beck’s favorite history “professor,” is the creator and purveyor of a revisionist history of race in America that is rapidly gaining traction in conservative and Tea Party circles. That history, drawn in part from the writings of Christian Reconstructionists, recasts modern-day Republicans as the racially inclusive party, and modern-day Democrats as the racists supportive of slavery and post-Emancipation racist policies.

Barton frames the details for maximum impact on contemporary politics, to an increasingly growing audience. Like Barton’s larger revisionist effort to develop and perpetuate the narrative that America

is a “Christian nation,” the “Republicans-are-really-the-party-of-racial-equality” narrative is not entirely fictive. Some historical points Barton makes are true; but he and his star pupil Beck manipulate those points along with false historical claims in order to promote their political agenda.

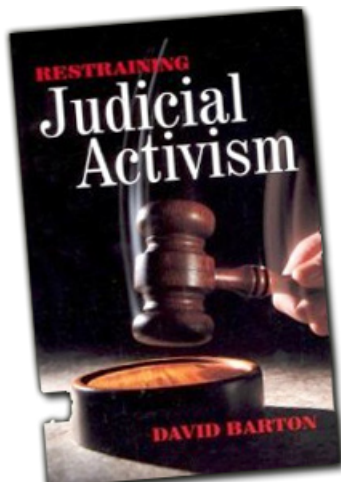
Barton’s involvement in recent controversies over the treatment of American history in Texas textbooks were another outlet for his efforts to shape the next generation’s understanding of American History. As Mariah Blake of the *Washington Monthly* wrote of Barton and Marshall:

They have since resorted to a more subtle tack; while they concede that people like Martin Luther King Jr. deserve a place in history, they argue that they shouldn’t be given credit for advancing the rights of minorities. As Barton put it, “Only majorities can expand political rights in America’s constitutional society.” Ergo, any rights people of color have were handed to them by whites—in his view, mostly white Republican men.

The Courts

Barton has been an active participant in the long-running Religious Right campaign to impose ideological domination on the federal judiciary. He has published *Restraining Judicial Activism*, a book calling for the impeachment of federal judges who don’t interpret the Constitution the same way he does. And he has argued that members of Congress should use the threat of impeachment as a way to intimidate federal judges into falling in line. Barton has celebrated Iowa voters’ rejection of pro-equality state Supreme Court justices last November as a signal to the U.S. Supreme Court.

In fact, Barton says judges are his number one voting issue when it comes to electing a president, citing the prophet Isaiah saying that the righteousness of a land will be based



DAVID BARTON PUBLISHED *RESTRAINING JUDICIAL ACTIVISM*, A BOOK CALLING FOR THE IMPEACHMENT OF FEDERAL JUDGES WHO DON'T INTERPRET THE CONSTITUTION THE SAME WAY HE DOES.

on its judges. Before the 2008 election, he praised the progress that conservatives had made with Justices John Roberts and Samuel Alito on the Supreme Court and urged people to “just think what we could do with all aspects of the culture war” if the Right got a fifth or sixth justice. Looking ahead to 2012, the appointment of Justices Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan is a powerful motivator for Barton.

Gay Equality

Barton believes the government should regulate gay sex, relying on false claims about gay people to make his case, such as “homosexuals die decades earlier than heterosexuals.” Barton has also maintained that countries which “rejected sexual regulation” inevitably collapse and argued that “if there’s a group in America that is hypersensitive, it is homosexuals. I mean, they got a short fuse on everything.” Unsurprisingly, Barton opposes marriage equality and has campaigned for state restrictions on legal equality.

In an article defending exclusion of gay servicemembers from the military, Barton happily cites a litany of harsh condemnations of homosexual sodomy from the 18th and 19th centuries, including state laws calling for the death penalty. Among those he cites is an author who in 1814 “outlined why homosexuality must be more strenuously addressed and much less tolerated than virtually any other moral vice in society.” Barton’s quotes include this section:

If we reflect on the dreadful consequences of sodomy to a state, and on the extent to which this abominable vice may be secretly carried on and spread, we cannot, on the principles of sound policy, consider the punishment as too severe.... Whoever, therefore, wishes to ruin a nation, has only to get this vice introduced; for it is extremely difficult to extirpate it where it has once taken root because it can be propagated with much more secrecy . . . and when we perceive that it has

once got a footing in any country, however powerful and flourishing, we may venture as politicians to predict that the foundation of its future decline is laid and that after some hundred years it will no longer be the same . . . powerful country it is at

present.

Barton also made inaccurate statements about the *Hide/Seek* exhibit at the National Portrait Gallery that aroused the ire of Religious Right groups. On his radio show Barton falsely suggested that *Hide/Seek*, which examined through portraiture the visibility of gay and



DAVID BARTON BELIEVES THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD REGULATE GAY SEX.

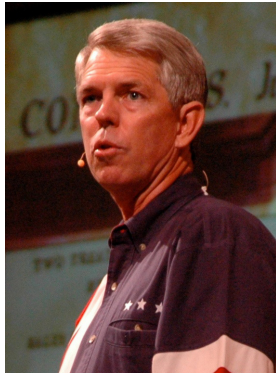
lesbian Americans and their impact on modern art, was actually a “Christmas exhibit” designed to lure children into seeing shocking images. Barton and his co-host Rick Green wrongly maintained that the exhibit was “taxpayer funded,” even though *Hide/Seek* only used private funds and did not receive any taxpayer money.

Conclusion

David Barton is in many ways emblematic of politics in Fox News-Tea Party America, in which facts are distorted in service of a right-wing ideological agenda, and in which political opponents are denigrated as enemies of faith and freedom. Barton’s work has repeatedly been debunked by serious historians and scholars, yet conservative political leaders and pundits continue to promote his manipulations in order to help Republicans get elected and in order to advance the Religious Right’s – and now the Tea Party’s – political agenda. It is urgently important for scholars, public officials, and responsible media outlets to vigorously challenge efforts by Barton, Glenn Beck, and the movements they represent to miseducate current and future generations of Americans on the Constitution and the abiding American values of religious liberty, equal opportunity, and equality under the law. ■

Enlisting Jesus in the War on Unions

Religious Right historian David Barton, a frequent guest of demagogue Glenn Beck, is using his newly enlarged audience to promote his versions of American exceptionalism (America was created by its divinely inspired founders as a country of, by, and for evangelical Christians) and Biblical capitalism (Jesus and the Bible oppose progressive taxes, capital gains taxes, estate taxes, and minimum wage laws). Claiming divine backing is a long-standing Religious Right technique with a powerful political edge: if God supports radically limited government, then progressive policies are not only wrong



**DAVID BARTON
ASSERTS A BIBLICAL
UNDERPINNING
FOR FAR-RIGHT
ECONOMIC
POLICIES.**

but evil, and liberals are not only political opponents but enemies of God.

On a conference call with pastors to celebrate conservative victories in the November, 2010 elections, Barton asserted a biblical underpinning for far-right economic policies: Taxation and deficit spending amount to theft, a violation of the Ten Commandments. The estate tax is “absolutely condemned” by the Bible as the “most immoral” of taxes. Jesus had “teachings” condemning the capital gains tax and the minimum wage.

Barton also enlists Jesus in the war against unions and collective bargaining. According to Barton, a parable from the 20th chapter of the book of Matthew about the owner of a vineyard making different arrangements with workers was about “the right of private contract” – in other words, the right of employers to come to individual agreements with each employee. Jesus’ parable, he said, is “anti-minimum wage” and “anti-socialist-union kind of stuff.”



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