Barton’s Bunk: Hack “Historian” Hits the Big Time in Tea Party America
Introduction

Newt Gingrich promises to seek his advice and counsel for the 2012 presidential campaign. Mike Huckabee calls him America's greatest historian, says he should be writing the curriculum for American students, and in fact suggested that all Americans should be forced at gunpoint to listen to his broadcasts. Michelle Bachmann calls him “a treasure for our nation” and invited him to teach one of her Tea Party Caucus classes on the Constitution for members of Congress. State legislators from around the country invite him to share his “wisdom” with them. Glenn Beck calls him “the most important man in America.” Who is this guy?

This guy is David Barton, a Republican Party activist and a fast-talking, self-promoting, self-taught, self-proclaimed historian who is miseducating millions of Americans about U.S. history and the Constitution.

Barton has been profitably peddling a distorted “Christian nation” version of American history to conservative religious audiences for the past two decades. His books and videos denouncing church-state separation have been repeatedly debunked by respected historians, but that hasn’t kept Barton from becoming a folk hero for many in the Religious Right. His eagerness to help elect Republicans has won him gratitude and support from national as well as state and local GOP leaders. Former senator Sam Brownback, now the governor of Kansas, has said that Barton’s research “provides the philosophical underpinning for a lot of the Republican effort in the country today— bringing God back into the public square.” Indeed, Time Magazine named him one of the nation’s 25 most influential evangelical Christians in 2005.

Barton broadened his audience when Fox News’ Glenn Beck became a fan. Last year Beck invited Barton to appear regularly on his “Founders’ Fridays” broadcasts, sending Barton’s books up the bestseller lists. 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.

While Barton is best known for his claims about the religious intentions of the nation’s founders, he has become a full-service pundit for the far-right in Tea Party America. He pushes predictable positions on abortion, gay rights, and the judiciary. But he is also attacking environmentalists working to combat climate change. And he is a key figure for conservative strategists who would love to forge an even stronger political merger between the Tea Party and Religious Right movements between now and the 2012 elections. Barton’s contribution: claiming that a radically limited role for the federal government was God’s idea, and that Jesus and the Bible are opposed to progressive taxation, minimum wage laws, collective bargaining, and “socialist union kind of stuff.”

Why Barton Matters

Barton’s growing visibility and influence with members of Congress and other Republican Party officials is troubling for many reasons: he distorts history and the Constitution for political purposes; he encourages religious divisiveness and unequal treatment for religious minorities; and he feeds a toxic political climate in which one’s political opponents are not just wrong, but evil and anti-God.

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, yes, the textbooks that will teach the next generation of Americans. He 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. In February, Barton spoke at

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

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the Connect 2011 Pastors Conference, where he said that Christians needed to control the culture and media so that “guys that have a secular viewpoint cannot survive.” Said Barton, “If the press lacks moral discrimination, it’s because we haven’t been pushing our people to chop that kind of news off.”

**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. Barton promotes a false reality in which anyone who opposes any element of his political agenda stands in opposition to both the Founding Fathers and to God. He believes that everything in our society – government, the judiciary, the economy, the family – should be governed according to the Bible, and he promotes a view of the Bible and Jesus that many Christians would not recognize. Opponents, even Christians, who disagree with Barton 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.

President Obama is a particularly frequent target of Barton’s. In January, one of his WallBuilders Live radio shows was titled “Why is Obama Trying to Remove God from the United States?” In March, right-wing “news” service WND quoted Barton accusing Obama (falsely of course) of being “engaged in a pattern of ‘willfully, deliberately’ repudiating America’s Christian heritage.”

Those are the kind of accusations long favored by the Religious Right, and they are destructive. 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.

Elected officials who endorse Barton give his claims credibility they do not 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. Both Barton and his backers are undermining understanding of, and respect for, vital American values and constitutional principles like separation of church and state and equal treatment under the law.

**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 enterprise, 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 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 this way: “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.”

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

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:

> 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, like other Religious Right leaders, has been increasingly embracing Seven Mountains Dominionism, which teaches that certain kinds of Christians are meant by God to dominate every sphere of society. 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 Founders’ 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 the nation. The Texas State Board of Education notoriously redesigned the state’s social studies curriculum 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 had 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 his 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**

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.”

- 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.”

**CREDIBLE HISTORIANS, WRITERS, AND EVEN RELIGIOUS GROUPS HAVE DENOUNCED BARTON’S SHODDY, MISLEADING, AND POLITICALLY-MOTIVATED “SCHOLARSHIP.”**
• 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.

In his 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.

One of those stories is about Peter Muhlenberg, a colonial-era pastor who supposedly ended a sermon in early 1776 by shucking off his robe to reveal a military uniform and challenging the men in his congregation to join him in the fight for freedom. As noted by Rob Boston in Church & State, German American history expert Friderike Baer called the story “an invention” on a broadcast of PBS’s “History Detectives” show. Boston also cites research by Chris Rodda of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation refuting one of Barton’s favorite claims — that Congress printed an official Bible for use in schools in 1782 (you can see Barton making that claim on one of his Capitol tours in the online version of this report) and that Jefferson added the phrase “in the Year of our Lord Christ” to official documents.

Rodda has produced a number of articles and videos tackling Barton’s claims by checking Barton’s descriptions of historical documents. (Barton has a massive collection of original documents from the founding era, which he uses to give a veneer of historical accuracy and drama to his presentations.) One of the most damning fact-checks concerns a letter from John Adams to Benjamin Rush from 1809. Barton cites a long section of the letter in which Adams says, in part, “There is no authority, civil or religious — there can be no legitimate government - but what is administered by this Holy Ghost. There can be no salvation without it — all without it is rebellion and perdition, or, in more orthodox words, damnation.” But Barton does not include the sentence which immediately follows, which is “Although this is all Artifice and Cunning in the secret original in the heart, yet they all believe it so sincerely that they would lay down their Lives under the Ax or the fiery Fagot for it. Alas the poor weak ignorant Dupe human Nature.” In other words, Adams was mocking the very point that Barton claims he was making.

Barton and his son Tim appeared last December 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 (wrongly) that Jefferson described a “one-way” concept of church-state separation more to Barton's liking. Like father, like son.

While Barton is seemingly undeterred by the evidence he knows most of his supporters will never see, Barton has not been able to simply ignore all questioning 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 American government created by and for Christians prepared him well for the current political moment, in which right-wing pundits, 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 his ideological compatriots, American exceptionalism is more than the idea that America plays a unique role in the world. They insist on a version of American exceptionalism that is grounded in divine inspiration of the founders and a divine blessing on the country. Barton says America's unique commitment to individual rights is grounded in colonial pastors' belief in individual salvation. If it weren't for that divine origin, America would be more collectivist, like France, he argues.

Barton also insists that the U.S. Constitution was not meant to be a secular document. 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 assertion 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.”

In *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 for 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.”

Barton claims a biblical basis for other Tea Party notions such
as a 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 the 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 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 has recently helped
Texas Gov. Rick Perry, a Religious Right favorite, peddle his

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 under
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 them
accountable for choosing the wrong candidate, consistently
telling voters that they will “answer to God” for their votes,
saying “righteousness must be the issue.” In 2006, he told
conservatives at a political rally in Ohio, “Take your Sunday
school class to vote, and you’ve got to start breaking fingers if
they don’t.”

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
would not give them the Promised Land all at once.

National GOP leaders have in increasingly tapped his
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:

“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

DAVID BARTON IS AN UNABASHED PARTISAN.

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in a Fire Away Friday conversation sold by the American Family Association as a DVD entitled Christianity and Politics: Do they Mix?:

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 wills 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 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.

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 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 criticism of the science on 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 designed for use by 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. 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.”

Barton on Religious Minorities

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 ceremonial swearing-in (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 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.”

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.”

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

In the article Barton also promotes the books 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 cultural center 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.”

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.”

Barton also complained when a Hindu priest was invited to give the 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.’”

Not surprisingly, Barton is seemingly unconcerned about the impact on religious minorities of his efforts to re-install Christian prayers in public school classrooms. The Star-Telegram writes:

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.

SECULARISTS TOP THE LIST OF DAVID BARTON’S ENEMIES.

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:

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 also featured William Gheen of Americans for Legal Immigration PAC, whom Right Wight Watch has described as “the viciously anti-immigrant activist” who made news 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 continues 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 also offers 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 religion scholar 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...
Barton's involvement in recent controversies over the treatment of American history in Texas textbooks was 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 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 they got a fifth or sixth justice. Looking ahead to 2012, Justices Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan are a powerful motivator for Barton.

### Gay Equality

Barton believes the government should regulate gay sex, relying on bogus claims about gay people to make his case, such as “homosexuals die decades earlier than heterosexuals.” Barton has also maintained that countries that “rejected sexual regulation” have inevitably collapsed. He has griped that “if there's a group in America that is hypersensitive, it is homosexuals. I mean, they got a short fuse on everything.” Not surprisingly, Barton opposes marriage equality and has campaigned for state restrictions on legal equality.

In an article defending exclusion of gay service members 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, which 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 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 the 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 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, his supporters, 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 activist David Barton promotes his version 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 but evil, and liberals are not only political opponents but enemies of God.

On a conference call with pastors two days after the November 2010 elections to celebrate conservative victories, 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 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.”