

## **Errors in the Capitol Tour video – Summary**

In the Youtube video titled “U.S. Capitol Tour with David Barton,”<sup>1</sup> David Barton makes historical claims which do not hold up to objective scrutiny. This summary begins with the most problematic claims and then addresses less troublesome claims in light of the entire video presentation. For the reasons below, we ask that you consider removing the video from YouTube, and consider another means of providing information regarding the nation’s founding to your constituents.

### **Aitken Bible**

*Barton says Congress printed the first English Bible printed in America and that it was done for the use of schools. FRC’s caption on the screen says “1<sup>st</sup> Bible printed in America by U.S. Congress for public schools.”*

This is completely false. Robert Aitken printed the Bible in question and nearly had completed this job when he petitioned Congress to become the official Bible printer of the United States. In Aitken’s petition, he said the Bible he had printed was a “neat edition of the Holy Scriptures for the use of schools.” However, Congress did not include that phrase in any of their descriptions of Aitken’s Bible. The chaplains of Congress read through the Bible and commended Aitken for his accuracy and then Congress offered this resolution:

*Resolved: That the United States in Congress assembled, highly approve the pious and laudable undertaking of Mr. Aitken, as subservient to the interest of religion as well as an instance of the progress of the arts in this country, and being satisfied from the above report, of his care and accuracy in the execution of the work they recommend this edition of the Bible to the inhabitants of the United States and hereby authorize him to publish this recommendation in the manner he shall think proper (p. 574, Journals of Congress, September 12, 1782).*

There is no slant on this resolution that can be construed to mean “1<sup>st</sup> Bible printed in America by U.S. Congress for public schools.”

### **The signers of the Declaration**

*Barton says out of the 56 signers of the Declaration of Independence, 29 had bible school or seminary degrees. No further explanation is given on this video.*

Barton has not provided any evidence for this claim that we can find. Elsewhere, he puts the number of signers having seminary or Bible school degrees at 24.<sup>2</sup> In fact, 29 signers had been to college but the first theological seminary in the United States was founded in 1807 at Andover, MA, long after the Declaration of Independence was signed. Webster’s 1828 edition of the dictionary defines seminary as “a place of education; any school, academy, college or university, in which young persons are instructed in the several branches of learning which may qualify them for future employments.”<sup>3</sup> Note that there was no distinctly religious connotation to the term at that time. While the most prominent colleges were founded by church denominations, by the time the founders attended, they also had other courses of study (e.g., law, merchants) and were not known as “Bible schools.” Of the 56 signers, only John

Witherspoon was a minister. Three others had some ministry training but for one reason or another did not enter or remain in ministry. This claim is a seriously misleading statement which leads people to believe 29 of the signers were trained as ministers, apparently taking advantage of the fact that most people don't know what seminary meant during the founding era.

*About Jefferson and the Kaskaskia Indians, Barton says "Most people have no clue that Thomas Jefferson in 1803 negotiated a treaty with the Kaskaskia Indians in which Jefferson put federal funds to pay for missionaries to go evangelize the Indians and gave federal funds so that after they were converted we'd build them a church in which they could worship."*

This description is misleading in that most listeners would assume that Jefferson decided to use federal funds to initiate a clearly religious activity. However, in fact, the Kaskaskia traded most of central Illinois to get temporary funding to help pay their existing priest and build them a new church. The Kaskaskia requested the funding because they were already attached to the Catholic Church. Barton's narrative sets up a misleading sequence of events. First, according to Barton's narrative, Jefferson paid missionaries to evangelize the Indians. Then, after they converted to Christianity, funds were made available to build them a church. However, here is what really happened: The Kaskaskia had land to trade and they wanted help to maintain their loyalties to the Catholic Church as one component of the transaction. Jefferson, having authorized trading houses to get the Indians in debt, readily agreed to the land deal.

### **Jefferson and church in the Capitol**

*Barton says the Capitol was used as a church and at 6:50 into the clip adds, "Most people have no clue that Jefferson started a church in the Capitol that went for a century."*

While it is true that the Capitol was used by the chaplains to hold divine services, there was no recorded involvement of Jefferson or the Senate to bring this about. Jefferson was vice-president at the time but he had no role in starting the practice of holding services. On December 4, 1800, the chaplains asked the House members if they had objection, and since no objection was recorded, the chaplains proceeded with their plans. Although he did attend the services at times, Jefferson had no part in establishing the church services.

*Barton says Jefferson ordered the Marine Band to play for the services.*

The Marine Band did play at times at the Capitol but there is no record that Jefferson ordered them to do so. The chaplains were in charge and may have asked them to play. However, the playing was not generally well received and the practice was discontinued.

### **Other misleading elements of the video.**

The following concerns relate to Barton's statements and descriptions which contain truth but are spun in such a way as to be misleading of the meaning of the events.

*Barton says in 1830 Congress wanted the Christian history told via paintings in the Capitol Rotunda.*

We know of no record of Congress declaring the paintings to depict Christian history. Rather, Congress requested paintings of several important events in the nation's founding. The paintings are as described by Barton but there are other paintings in the Rotunda of a non-religious nature. One, the Apotheosis of George Washington depicts Greek and Roman gods along with Washington who is depicted in a god-like fashion.

While the paintings obviously depict certain events, Barton's narrative glosses over the complexity of those events. Depicting them as a Bible study, Baptism and a prayer meeting does not convey the history accurately. When Columbus landed in San Salvador, he may have prayed, but then he also enslaved the natives in the name of Christianity. Pocahontas was being held hostage by the English when she converted and was baptized. Any honest religious and historical interpretation of these events will take account of these complexities.

*Barton says there is nothing secular about the Capitol building.*

The name Capitol comes from the Roman Capitulum which was a place of worship for the Roman gods. The structure of the building is a mix of classical architecture. The Senate was borrowed from Rome. We mentioned the Apotheosis of George Washington which clearly was influenced by the classics. While these are not necessarily secular, they are not Christian. Barton's presentation in general paints a picture of a thoroughly evangelical (in today's understanding of that term) group of men who established a thoroughly Christian government. However, many of the founders were influenced by classical training and writers which carried over into the architecture and founding documents of the nation.

### **Other concerns in the context of the entire video**

While the concerns we have here may seem minor, in the context of the other problems, they point to a general tendency to misinform listeners.

*Barton says President Garfield was a minister during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Great Awakening and that one-fourth of the statues were ministers.*

There are eleven statues/busts in the Rotunda, if you count Garfield, and add Martin Luther King, there are two of eleven who were ministers. Counting Garfield is certainly debatable. Although he was ordained to be a minister in the Disciples church, Garfield chose to study law and pursue politics while a young man. This decision was especially significant because his church disapproved of his selected profession, which they viewed as "carnal activity." Furthermore, Garfield believed he should not mix politics and religion and refrained from religious activity when he entered political life.

Garfield's military and presidential careers have not been overemphasized to neglect his ministerial pursuits; his life has simply been portrayed according to the amount of time he devoted to various endeavors and achievements. While it is true that most people would consider Garfield a president or a military commander over a minister, this is simply because he devoted the better portion of his life to these offices. It is hardly unreasonable to refer to someone by their most significant, historical

achievements. Calling Garfield's ministerial stint "a typical presidential activity" does not follow in light of Garfield's short ministerial but long political careers.

Furthermore, it is misleading for Barton to say that Garfield was a minister during the Second Great Awakening. Garfield engaged in ministry in his twenties from 1856 to 1861. Most historians peg the end of the Second Great Awakening as being during the 1840s when Garfield was still a youth (b. 1831).

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, for the reasons cited, we urge the Family Research Council to remove the YouTube video titled, "U.S. Capitol Tour with David Barton." The 4 million views represent many people who have been misinformed and are now ill-prepared to engage in debate to defend religious liberty and the Christian faith.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dlfEdJNn15E> retrieved April 2, 2013

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.wallbuilders.com/libissuesarticles.asp?id=100> retrieved April 2, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> <http://machaut.uchicago.edu/?resource=Webster%27s&word=seminary&use1828=on> retrieved on April 2, 2013.