



2022-2023 annual report



John C. Danforth Center on
RELIGION AND POLITICS

 Washington University in St. Louis



Leigh Schmidt discusses the history of American holidays and civic rituals in his fall seminar.

ABOUT THE COVER: Author, legal scholar, and social justice activist Michelle Alexander spoke with Fannie Bialek in front of a full house at Graham Chapel.



John C. Danforth Center on
RELIGION AND POLITICS

MISSION:

**The Center serves as an open venue for
fostering rigorous scholarship and informing
broad academic and public communities about
the intersections of religion and U.S. politics.**

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LETTER FROM THE

Chancellor

It is with gratitude and pride that I reflect on another year of scholarship and education at the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics. Throughout the year, the Center has served as a vibrant hub of intellectual exploration, nurturing an environment where scholars, students, and experts come together to examine the intricate relationship between religion and politics. Through rigorous research, critical analysis, and open dialogue, the Center has propelled us toward a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics at play in our society.

In an increasingly interconnected world, where leaders must navigate the complexities of diverse worldviews, the Center's work has become more crucial than ever. It has empowered our students to recognize the shared values that underpin humanity's rich tapestry and has encouraged them to approach societal issues with integrity, empathy, and a deep appreciation for the inherent dignity of all individuals.

Our scholars and researchers continue to produce groundbreaking work that contributes to the broader academic community. Through publications, classroom teaching, and public events, the Center has forged

connections that transcend institutional boundaries and fostered a spirit of collaboration and innovation.

None of these achievements would have been possible without the dedication and leadership of Center Director Marie Griffith, whose work has been instrumental in shaping the Center's vision and success. We anticipate a seamless transition and a bright future for both Marie in her full-time faculty role and for the Center and its people.

I also extend my deepest gratitude to all our friends, supporters, and partners who have contributed to the success of the Center. It is through your generosity and belief in our mission that we can continue to inspire positive change and foster a more inclusive and harmonious society.

ANDREW D. MARTIN

Chancellor



LETTER FROM THE

Center Director

Greetings once more from all of us at the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics. It's been an exciting year here, filled with major public events featuring Michelle Alexander, Peter Wehner, Laura Levitt, David Kertzer, and many more. Many of these events were collaborations with partner organizations both on campus and in the wider St. Louis region. Our undergraduate and postdoctoral fellowship programs are flourishing, and we published the second five-year anthology of top hits from our award-winning journal, *Religion & Politics*. Throughout these endeavors, we have enhanced public dialogue on the rich history and contemporary urgency of religion's impact on politics in a global context.

As many of you know, after twelve years as Center Director, I will be stepping down and returning to full-time faculty status at the end of June. It's a bittersweet move for me, as I have loved my job and feel very proud of what our faculty and staff have accomplished together in these years. But I have missed being able to teach more than one course per year and am greatly looking forward to more time in the classroom with the brilliant students at Washington University in St. Louis. I'm proud of what all of us have


accomplished together in my twelve years as Director, and it is good to pass the baton when the Center is healthy and growing!

I want to thank all of my colleagues here at the Center for their support over these years. My greatest debt is to Debra Kennard, who joined the Center the same month I did, July 2011. She has been a crucial planner, sounding board, and facilitator of every one of the Center's ventures during this period, and her unflagging work ethic, good cheer, and excellent contributions to an infinite variety of matters have been an invaluable part of the Center's success. Thanks to her and to everyone else on our outstanding staff and faculty, and thanks to all of you readers and audience members who have made these years such rewarding ones for me.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "R. Marie Griffith".

R. MARIE GRIFFITH

Center Director



Research and Teaching

Advancing exceptional research and scholarship is central to the academic mission of the Center. So too is the promotion of outstanding teaching in the classroom. The objective in both areas is to provide critical context and careful reflection on the intersections of religion and politics in the U.S., past and present. We attend closely to the conflicts produced by religion and politics as well as the actions they inspire in our citizenry, and we hope our readers and students gain a deeper comprehension of these perennial influences in American life.



Marie Griffith opens her fall course with an overview of media coverage on the day's topic.



Naomi Jackson prepares to join the class discussion.

RESEARCH AND TEACHING

Courses

Coursework in the Center provides a foundation and structure for students to engage in critical reflection, research and scholarship, and analytic writing.

Courses cover a wide spectrum of topics related to the intersections of American religion and politics, ranging from economics and politics in the British colonies to enduring and contemporary issues such as nationalism and globalization, gender, race, and religious freedom. The collective focus of the curriculum is the cultivation of research and interpretive skills necessary for analyzing and responding to important issues that shape society and culture in the United States.



The minor has challenged me to think about issues from an interdisciplinary perspective, exploring the complex interaction of our personal belief systems with larger political phenomena.

HANNAH HIRSCH, CLASS OF 2023

FALL 2022 COURSES

Religious Freedom in America

**PROFS. JOHN INAZU
AND MARK VALERI**

This “Beyond Boundaries” course for first-year students explores the intersection of religion and law in American society.

Religion, Health, and Wellness in Modern America

DR. CODY MUSSELMAN

This course investigates changing conceptions of health and wellness in America from the late nineteenth century to the present.

Islamophobia and U.S. Politics

PROF. TAZEEN ALI

This course examines the phenomenon of Islamophobia as a form of anti-Muslim racism that parallels hostility towards other religious and racial minorities in the U.S.

American Holidays: Civic and Religious Celebrations in American Culture

PROF. LEIGH ERIC SCHMIDT

This seminar explores a variety of religious holidays and civic rituals in American history and culture to broach a wide range of questions about history and tradition, gender and race, public memory and consumer culture, religion and nationalism.

Islam, Gender, Sexuality

PROF. TAZEEN ALI

This course examines major themes and debates around gender and sexuality in Islamic contexts.

The Abuse Crisis in Modern Christianity

PROF. MARIE GRIFFITH

This course investigates how accounts of abusive clergy in the U.S. have illuminated church bureaucrats who have consistently protected abusers and subverted the efforts of victims and their families to seek justice.

Sabbath Politics: Rest and Refusal in Religion and Politics

PROF. FANNIE BIALEK

This course considers the ways that 20th and 21st century American Jews have practiced Shabbat and thought about its significance in political life.



SPRING 2023 COURSES

Modern Political Thought: Text and Traditions

PROF. FANNIE BIALEK

This course pursues two major lines of inquiry in modern Western political thought: the relation between the individual and the state, and the means of holding state power accountable.

Religion and Politics in American History

DR. ARAM SARKISIAN

This course traces how conceptions of “religion” and “the state” changed in the United States from the turn of the twentieth century to the dawn of a new millennium.

Love and Reason

PROF. FANNIE BIALEK

This course offers an introduction to modern Christian thought and Western philosophy through themes of love and reason.



The Religion and Politics minor was the most wonderful and enriching addition to my experience at WashU. The minor allowed me to explore a newfound interest and improve my writing skills that I will apply to my future anticipated career as a physician.

WALKER FERRY, CLASS OF 2023

IMAGES: Francesca Frkonja challenges another student's assertion. Kyran English works in a small group discussion in the Islamophobia & U.S. Politics class.

**Catholicism Confronts
Modernity**

DR. SUSANNA DE STRADIS

This course explores the creative tension between Catholicism and “modernity,” in the U.S. and beyond, from the French Revolution to the present.

**Catholicism and Contemporary
American Politics**

FR. MATT MALONE

This course considers the complex role of Roman Catholics in American politics, looking at how Catholics have shaped American history and political life and how American history and politics have shaped Catholicism.

Law, Religion, and Politics

PROF. JOHN INAZU

This course explores the role of religious argument in politics and law through the work of legal scholars, theologians, and political theorists.

Spiritual but Not Religious

PROF. LEIGH ERIC SCHMIDT

This seminar focuses on the formation of “spirituality” in American culture from the Transcendentalist world of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman on through more recent expressions of the “spiritual-but-not-religious” sensibility.



RESEARCH AND TEACHING

Undergraduate Minor

The Religion and Politics minor provides an opportunity for sustained exploration of the ways in which religion and politics have intersected in American culture, in both historical and contemporary terms. As part of the minor program, students may examine any number of issues, including church-state relations, religion's role in shaping gender and sexuality debates, religion and electoral politics, public conflicts over the nexus of religion and science, and religion's entwining with reform movements of diverse kinds. The Center's minor attracts students from many disciplines, including natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities; whether pre-med, pre-law, or pursuing futures in education, business, or the arts, they report their studies are enriched by our curriculum.

The minor requires fifteen units (i.e., five courses), including enrollment in one of the Center's introductory gateway courses and at least three courses at the 300 level or higher. Students with our minor have gone on to a variety of successful careers, including law, medicine, academia, business, and non-profit organizations.

IMAGES: Marcus Ding reacts to an article shared with the "Religion, Health, and Wellness in Modern America" class. Varnika Kailash enjoys the class discussion. Lojain Elkhidir takes notes during a guest speaker's presentation.



Tatyana Tolliver-Hughes offers a reflection on the text being discussed.



No academic organization on campus has been as supportive and perspective-changing as the Danforth Center over these past four years. Being a student during the lows of COVID showed me how much the Center and all its faculty care for its students, and now being able to enjoy the full benefits of its amazing programming has made me confident that minoring in Religion and Politics is easily the best academic decision I made at WashU.

DANIELLE HAZAN, CLASS OF 2023

RESEARCH AND TEACHING

Colloquium

The John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics sponsors an ongoing colloquium to foster discussion of new scholarship in the broad domains of American religion, politics, and culture. It is a research-oriented workshop that aims to build a multidisciplinary community among students, fellows, and faculty, all drawn to the intellectual questions that animate the Center's work.

SEPTEMBER 8, 2022

Cody Musselman,

Danforth Center on Religion and Politics

“Our Product Is People: The Economy of Charisma at SoulCycle”

SEPTEMBER 29, 2022

Mark Valeri,

Danforth Center on Religion and Politics

“Eighteenth-Century Missionary Conceptions of Indian Conversions”

OCTOBER 6, 2022

Esra Tunc,

Danforth Center on Religion and Politics

“Debating Muslim Giving in Islamic Investment and Financialized Philanthropy”

OCTOBER 27, 2022

Tazeen Ali,

Danforth Center on Religion and Politics

“Muslims on TV: Politics, Sex, and American Islam in Popular Culture”

NOVEMBER 10, 2022

Susanna De Stradis,

Danforth Center on Religion and Politics

“The Catholic Argument for the ‘Nation Under God,’ 1939-1965”

DECEMBER 1, 2022

Fannie Bialek,

Danforth Center on Religion and Politics

“Promises and Obligations”

JANUARY 26, 2023

Aram Sarkisian,

Danforth Center on Religion and Politics

“What are you going to do about it?” Towards
Orthodox Christian Histories of North America”

FEBRUARY 9, 2023

Joanna Dee Das,

Performing Arts Department

“For God and Country: Branson Entertainment
and the Religious Right”

APRIL 13, 2023

Marie Griffith,

Danforth Center on Religion and Politics

“Religion and Politics in the Clergy Abuse
Crises of the U.S. Catholic Church and
the Southern Baptist Convention”

APRIL 27, 2023

John Inazu,

**Danforth Center on Religion
and Politics/WU Law**

“Assembly, Pluralism, and Identity”



As a postdoctoral fellow, Cody Musselman
teaches a class and participates in the
Center's colloquium series.



Public Engagement

Engaging a wide range of citizens beyond the university has been one of the Center's manifest aims since its founding in 2010. Public events have offered an important way to meet our commitment to disseminate the work of scholars and thinkers, at the Center and beyond, that explores the intersections of religion and politics and fosters civil debate and robust discussion among persons holding diverse and even divergent viewpoints. Communicating scholarly ideas through more popular writing is another of the ways we've sought to have a public impact.



David Kertzer visited WashU for a lecture and discussion with Marie Griffith that filled Graham Chapel and reached many more via virtual livestream.



IMAGES: Rauch addresses the issue of an epistemic crisis. Harder suggests books clubs as a way to strengthen the skills used in a body politic. Griffith asks the panelists what ordinary people can do to improve our politics.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The Assault on Truth — And What to Do About It

OCTOBER 19, 2022

Americans on all sides of today's religious and political divides are calling on their leaders to stop telling lies and to tell the truth about the state of our nation.

Yet what some deem the truth about democracy, others believe are lies manufactured and spread for power and profit. What damage is this fragmentation doing to us and to our social, religious, and civic institutions? Is it irreversible? Most importantly, what can we do to end the assault on truth?

Center director Marie Griffith explored these questions with Cherie Harder, Jonathan Rauch, and Peter Wehner. Harder serves as President of the Trinity Forum. Prior to joining the Trinity Forum in 2008, Harder served in the White House as Special Assistant to the President and Director of Policy and Projects for First Lady Laura Bush. Jonathan Rauch is one of the country's most versatile and

original writers on government, public policy, and gay marriage, among other subjects. A senior fellow of the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C. and contributing writer for *The Atlantic*, he is the author of eight books and many articles and has received the magazine industry's two leading prizes — the National Magazine Award (the industry's equivalent of the Pulitzer Prize) and the National Headliner Award. Peter Wehner is a Senior Fellow at the Trinity Forum, a contributing opinion writer for *The New York Times*, and a contributing editor for *The Atlantic*. He served in the Reagan, George H.W. Bush, and George W. Bush administrations.



Wehner shares an anecdote to illustrate the importance of being heard.



John C.
RELIGION

Hamid expresses some of the
benefits institutions offer society.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Why Institutions Matter: Religious Perspectives on Building and Sustaining Institutions in a Fractured Society

JANUARY 19, 2023

This dialogue between some of the nation's foremost thinkers on institutions and religious pluralism focused on the challenges and opportunities of building and sustaining civic institutions in a polarized society.

John Inazu, who holds a joint appointment with the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics and the Washington University School of Law, moderated the discussion with Richard Garnett (Notre Dame Law School), Shadi Hamid (Brookings Institution), Kristen Deede Johnson (Western Seminary), and Yuval Levin (American Enterprise Institute).

Richard W. Garnett is the Paul J. Schierl/Fort Howard Corporation Professor of Law at University of Notre Dame Law School and he is the founding director of Notre Dame Law School's Program on Church, State, and Society, an interdisciplinary project that focuses

on the role of religious institutions, communities, and authorities in the social order. Shadi Hamid is a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution and an assistant research professor of Islamic studies at Fuller Seminary. Kristen Deede Johnson is the G.W. and Edna Haworth Professor of Educational Ministries and Leadership and the Dean and Vice President of Academic Affairs at Western Theological Seminary. Yuval Levin is the director of Social, Cultural, and Constitutional Studies at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), where he also holds the Beth and Ravenel Curry Chair in Public Policy.

IMAGES: Garnett and Inazu prepare to join the audience at the reception after the discussion. Levin suggests people think of institutional engagement not as a burden, but as an opportunity.





IMAGES: Alexander signs a guest's copy of *The New Jim Crow*. Alexander shares a formative early career experience. Religion and Politics minors attend the lecture.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

In Conversation with Michelle Alexander

FEBRUARY 28, 2023

The John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics was honored to host Professor Michelle Alexander for a public conversation on the state of legal and social movements against mass incarceration.

Since the publication in 2010 of Alexander's sea-changing book *The New Jim Crow*, millions more Americans have been incarcerated in prisons and jails, sometimes held for years without a trial. But American conversations about incarceration have changed, with growing abolitionist movements as well as state and federal initiatives for carceral reform. Alexander's work has done much to bring these issues to light. Center professor Fannie Bialek asked Alexander about the state of legal and social movements for carceral reform and prison abolition and their invigoration of religious activism for social change.

Michelle Alexander, a legal scholar, social justice advocate, columnist at *The New York Times* and visiting professor at Union Theological Seminary, explores the myths surrounding our criminal justice system from a racial and ethical standpoint and offers solutions for combating this epidemic. Delivering an emphatic wake-up call from the "colorblind slumber" that our country has fallen under, she leaves audiences with a new perspective on the challenges facing the civil rights community and a rousing call-to-action for a multi-racial, multi-ethnic human rights movement for justice in America.



Alexander answers Bialek's opening question about the impact today of her 2010 book *The New Jim Crow*.



Levitt shares a personal connection to her scholarship.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The Objects That Remain: Criminal Evidence, Holocaust Artifacts, and Work of Doing Justice

MARCH 6, 2023

Building from her book, *The Objects That Remain*, Laura Levitt considered the ways in which the material remains of violent crimes inform our experience of, and thinking about, trauma and loss.

She did this by focusing on artifacts in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and evidence in police storage facilities across the United States. What might it mean to do justice to violent pasts outside the juridical system or through historical empiricism, the dominant ways in which we think about evidence from violent crimes and other highly traumatic events? What do the objects that remain and the stories that surround them

enable, and what forms of intimacy are possible in our lives after? What possessions do we let go of and which ones do we keep?

Laura Levitt is Professor of Religion, Jewish Studies, and Gender at Temple University. This event was sponsored with the Department of Jewish, Islamic, and Middle Eastern Studies.

IMAGES: Levitt answers a guest's question after her lecture. The audience enjoys the images illustrating Levitt's talk. Students approach Levitt with questions regarding their coursework at WashU.



PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The Pope at War: The Secret History of Pius XII, Mussolini, and Hitler

MARCH 27, 2023

The John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics is proud to have sponsored this event with the Michael and Barbara Newmark Institute for Human Relations at the Jewish Community Relations Council of St. Louis, St. Louis Kaplan Feldman Holocaust Museum, St. Louis Jewish Book Festival, the Office of Peace & Justice of the Archdiocese of St. Louis, St. Louis County Library, and St. Louis University Division of Mission and Identity.

Pulitzer Prize-winning author David Kertzer discussed his new book *The Pope at War: The Secret History of Pius XII, Mussolini, and Hitler* with Center director Marie Griffith.

When Pope Pius XII died in 1958, his papers were sealed in the Vatican Secret Archives, leaving unanswered questions about what he knew and did during World War II. Those questions have only grown and festered, making Pius XII

one of the most controversial popes in Church history, especially now as the Vatican prepares to canonize him. In 2020, Pius XII's archives were finally opened, and David Kertzer—widely recognized as one of the world's leading Vatican scholars—has been mining this new material ever since, revealing how the pope came to set aside moral leadership in order to preserve his church's power.

IMAGES: Monsignor Michael Witt, Maharat Rori Picker-Neiss, Kertzer, Griffith, Dr. Frances Levine, and Rabbi Elizabeth Hersh represent the collaboration sponsoring the lecture. Kertzer responds to Griffith's question about his access to records.





Kertzer shares the experience of studying newly unsealed Vatican documents.



Esra Tunc meets a fellow
from a previous cohort.



IMAGES: Candace Lukasik, Andrew Walker-Cornetta, Christina Davidson, and Alexia Williams reunite for the first time since their fellowship during the pandemic. A group of past fellows pose with the books they published after their support at the Center.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Fellows Reunion

MAY 12, 2023

The Center welcomed its first postdoctoral research associate in 2012 and to date has supported 30 early career scholars from 17 different institutions, working in several fields and disciplines on the intersections of religion and politics.

We hosted our first reunion of this group to reflect on their time in residence at the Center and to highlight their current academic pursuits. The Center awards postdoctoral fellowships for one year, renewable for the subsequent year. Fellows pursue research and writing on their own projects in addition to teaching and participating in the Center's biweekly interdisciplinary seminar.



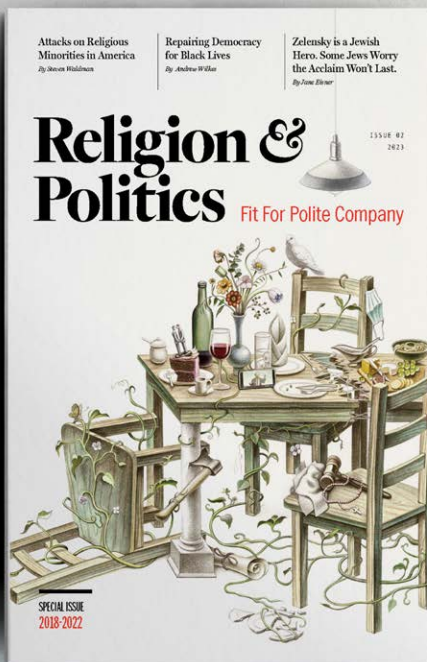
The biggest benefit that I appreciate even more now is the time. The time I got here at WashU to sit, to think, to write, to revise, to be in conversation with so many people without a ton of pressure. That's something that's precious and we don't get a lot of necessarily in this profession.

RONIT STAHL, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, UC-BERKELEY

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Online Journal

Religion & Politics is an online journal dedicated to the public dissemination of information about religion and politics in the U.S. Founded in 2012 and carrying the tagline “fit for polite company,” it is an important project of the Center and a core component of the Center’s public educational mission.



Religion & Politics

Fit For Polite Company

SPECIAL PRINT EDITION

We commemorated the second five years of *Religion & Politics* with a special print anthology highlighting some of the best pieces from 2018-2022. The work of 22 contributors is presented with a beautiful design complemented by original artwork and new photography.

2018

The NRA's Assault on Christian Faith and Practice

By Charles Marsh

Evangelicals of Color in the Trump Era

By Melani McAlister

Ahmadi Muslims Have an Overlooked American Legacy

By Aysha Khan

The Politicization of the Catholic Clergy Abuse Crisis

By John Gehring



*Illustration by
Nate Kitch*

White Evangelicals and the New American Exceptionalism of Donald Trump

By Abram Van Engen

Justice Ginsburg on Religious Freedom

By Ronit Y. Stahl

Will Catholic Voters Decide the Election?

By Elena Trueba

2019



*Illustration by
Palesa Monareng*

The Womanist Theology of Katie Geneva Cannon Lives On

By Angela D. Sims

Dangerous Logic at the Border

By Elizabeth Shakman Hurd

The Rise of #Exvangelical

By Bradley Onishi

Attacks on Religious Minorities in America

By Steven Waldman

2020

Religious Responses to the Coronavirus Pandemic

By Sarah Ngu

The Prophetic Witness of the *Christianity Today* Editorial

By Richard Mouw

Repairing Democracy for Black Lives

By Andrew Wilkes

Amy Coney Barrett and the Christian Legal Movement

By Daniel Bennett

2021



*Illustration by
Ellen Weinstein*

Scholars of Religion and Politics Respond to the Capitol Insurrection

By The Editors

Amanda Gorman's "City on a Hill"

By Nichole Renée Phillips

Social Media and Orthodox Jewish Women's Rights

By Avital Chizhik-Goldschmidt

The Eugenics Roots of Evangelical Family Values

By Audrey Clare Farley

The 20-Year Media Spectacle of Saving Afghan Women

By Tazeen M. Ali

2022



*Illustration by
Ellen Weinstein*

Zelensky is a Jewish Hero. Some Jews Worry the Acclaim Won't Last.

By Jane Eisner

American Christians "Backing the Blue": On Faith and Policing

By Aaron Griffith

A photograph of two hands reaching upwards towards a vertical blue light beam. The hands are positioned in the upper half of the frame, with fingers spread. The background is a plain, light grey wall. The lighting is soft, highlighting the texture of the skin and the veins on the hands. The blue light beam is a vertical strip of light on the left side of the image.

People

A group of outstanding scholars and teachers, academic associates, trusted advisors, and talented staff guides the Center's work toward its goals. Our faculty represent some of the foremost scholars in their fields, and our postdoctoral fellowship program supports exceptionally promising early career scholars who teach and pursue major research projects while in residence. The Center is enriched by fostering intellectual and collaborative opportunities among Center faculty and fellows, as well as across the wider university and beyond.



Professors Mark Valeri and John Inazu
co-teach "Religious Freedom in America."

PEOPLE

Faculty



Tazeen M. Ali

Assistant Professor of Religion and Politics

Professor Ali's research and teaching focus on Islam in America, women's religious authority, and Islam, gender, and race. Her first book *The Women's Mosque of America: Authority & Community in US Islam* was published by NYU Press in November 2022. It analyzes how American Muslim women negotiate the Islamic tradition to cultivate religious authority and build gender-equitable worship communities.

Ali earned her Ph.D. in Religious Studies from Boston University in 2019. She was a visiting postgraduate student in Islamic Studies at the University of Edinburgh from 2017 to 2018. Prior to that she earned a graduate certificate in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies from Boston University, as well as a master's degree in Islamic Studies from Washington University in St. Louis. She earned her bachelor's degree with honors in both religion and biology from Lehigh University. Competitive fellowships and grants from The Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, the Boston University Center for the Humanities, and the Institute for the Study of Muslim Societies and Civilizations at Boston University have supported her writing and research.

PEOPLE

Faculty



Fannie Bialek

Assistant Professor of Religion and Politics

Professor Bialek's research and teaching focus on contemporary religious ethics and political theory with an emphasis on feminist thought, Christian ethics, and modern forms of power critique. Her first book project, *Love in Time*, argues for a consideration of love as a relationship to uncertainty, instructive for the vulnerabilities of interpersonal relationships and political life.

Bialek earned the Ph.D. in Religious Studies from Brown University in 2016. She earned a bachelor's degree in religion, *summa cum laude*, from Princeton University. Competitive fellowships from the American Association of University Women, the Cogut Center for the Humanities at Brown, and the Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women at Brown have offered support for her research. Her appointment with the Danforth Center on Religion and Politics follows her position as Lecturer with the Religious Studies program at Washington University in St. Louis for the 2016-2017 academic year. She was Visiting Assistant Professor in Religious Studies at Brown in 2015-2016. Bialek is co-editor of the *Feminist Religion* website.



The Center has fostered my curiosity and desire to learn for the last four years with its incredible faculty and unique set of topics. I can truly say I've never taken a class I didn't love with the Danforth Center.

CARLY ABRAMOWITZ, CLASS OF 2023

PEOPLE

Faculty



R. Marie Griffith

John C. Danforth Distinguished Professor in the Humanities

Professor Griffith is the director of the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics and the editor of the Center's journal, *Religion & Politics*. Her research focuses on American Christianity, including the changing profile of American evangelicals and ongoing conflicts over gender, sexuality, and marriage.

Griffith obtained her undergraduate degree at the University of Virginia in Political and Social Thought and her Ph.D. in the study of religion from Harvard University. Before moving to Washington University in 2011, she served as professor of religion and director of the women and gender studies program at Princeton University, where she was awarded the President's Award for Distinguished Teaching; and later as the John A. Bartlett Professor of New England Church History at Harvard. In 2015 she was appointed a Distinguished Lecturer for the Organization of American Historians.

Griffith is the author or editor of seven books. Her first, *God's Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission* (University of California Press, 1997), examines the practices and perceptions of contemporary evangelical women. Her next book, *Born Again Bodies: Flesh and Spirit in American Christianity* (University of California Press, 2004), explores the history of Christian-influenced attitudes and practices related to embodiment in modern America; while *Moral Combat: How Sex Divided American Christians and Fractured American Politics* (Basic Books, 2017) traces conflicts over sexual morality, feminism, and gender in American religion and politics. Her latest book, *Making the World Over: Confronting Racism, Misogyny, and Xenophobia in U.S. History* (UVA Press, 2021), urges a re-reading of the nation's history that opens up greater complexity than our stock narratives. These books, along with her three edited volumes—*Women and Religion in the African Diaspora: Knowledge, Power, and Performance* (co-edited with Barbara Dianne Savage, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), *Religion and Politics in the Contemporary United States* (co-edited with Melani McAlister, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), and *American Religions: A Documentary History* (Oxford University Press, 2007)—exhibit Griffith's varied research interests. In addition to her books, Professor Griffith has published numerous scholarly articles, book chapters, and essays, and is a frequent media commentator and public speaker on current issues pertaining to religion and politics.

PEOPLE

Faculty



John Inazu

**Sally D. Danforth Distinguished Professor of Law and Religion
and Professor of Political Science (by courtesy)**

Professor Inazu holds a joint appointment in the Washington University Law School and the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics.

Inazu's scholarship focuses on the First Amendment freedoms of speech, assembly, and religion, and related questions of legal and political theory. He is the author of *Liberty's Refuge: The Forgotten Freedom of Assembly* (Yale University Press, 2012) and *Confident Pluralism: Surviving and Thriving Through Deep Difference* (University of Chicago Press, 2016), and co-editor (with Tim Keller) of *Uncommon Ground: Living Faithfully in a World of Difference* (Thomas Nelson, 2020). His next book, "Learning to Disagree: The Surprising Path to Navigating Differences with Empathy and Respect," will be published by Zondervan in Spring 2024. Inazu is special editor of a volume on law and theology published in *Law and Contemporary Problems*, and his articles have appeared in a number of law reviews and specialty journals. He has written broadly for mainstream audiences in publications including *USA Today*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *The Washington Post*.

Inazu earned his Ph.D. at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, and his J.D. and B.S.E. at Duke University. He clerked for Judge Roger L. Wollman of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit and served for four years as an associate general counsel with the Department of the Air Force at the Pentagon. From 2014-2015, he was a senior fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture at the University of Virginia. He is currently a Senior Fellow with Interfaith America.

PEOPLE

Faculty



Laurie Maffly-Kipp

Archer Alexander Distinguished Professor

Professor Maffly-Kipp's research and teaching focus on African American religions, Mormonism, religion on the Pacific borderlands of the Americas, and issues of intercultural contact. Her publications are many and include: *Religion and Society in Frontier California* (Yale University Press, 1994), where she explored the nature of Protestant spiritual practices in Gold Rush California; articles on Mormon-Protestant conflicts in the Pacific Islands, African-Americans in Haiti and Africa, and Protestant outreach to Chinese immigrants in California; a recent volume of essays entitled *Practicing Protestants: Histories of Christian Life in America, 1630-1965* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006) with Leigh Schmidt and Mark Valeri; a co-edited collection of essays about Mormonism in the Pacific World, *Proclamation to the People: Nineteenth-Century Mormonism and the Pacific Basin Frontier* (University of Utah Press, 2008); *Setting Down the Sacred Past: African-American Race Histories* (Harvard University Press, 2010); *American Scriptures*, a Penguin Classics anthology of sacred texts (Penguin, 2010); and *Women's Work*, a co-edited collection of writings by African-American women historians (Oxford University Press, 2010). Currently she is working on a global history of Mormonism that will be published by Basic Books.

Prior to joining the Center, Maffly-Kipp taught at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in Religious Studies and American Studies. She earned her B.A. from Amherst College in English and Religion, *summa cum laude*, and completed the Ph.D. in American History at Yale University with distinction (1990). She is the recipient of numerous fellowships and grants, including a grant for a collaborative project on the History of Christian Practice from the Lilly Endowment, Inc., fellowships at the National Humanities Center, and an NEH Fellowship for University Professors. Her work in African American religion was honored with the James W.C. Pennington Award from the University of Heidelberg in 2014. Maffly-Kipp is a past president of both the American Society of Church History and the Mormon History Association.

PEOPLE

Faculty



Leigh Eric Schmidt

Edward C. Mallinckrodt Distinguished University Professor

From 2009 to 2011, Professor Schmidt was the Charles Warren Professor of the History of Religion in America at Harvard University; from 1995 to 2009, he taught at Princeton University where he was the Agate Brown and George L. Collord Professor of Religion and served as chair of the Department of Religion; and, from 1989 to 1995, he taught in the Theological and Graduate Schools of Drew University. He has held research fellowships at Stanford, Princeton, and the University of Michigan and also through the National Endowment for the Humanities, the American Council of Learned Societies, the American Philosophical Society, and the Guggenheim Foundation.

Schmidt is the author of *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment* (Harvard, 2000), which won the American Academy of Religion Award for Excellence in Historical Studies and the John Hope Franklin Prize of the American Studies Association; *Heaven's Bride: The Unprintable Life of Ida C. Craddock, American Mystic, Scholar, Sexologist, Martyr, and Madwoman* (Basic, 2010); *Restless Souls: The Making of American Spirituality* (HarperOne, 2005), which appeared in an updated edition from the University of California Press in 2012; *Consumer Rites: The Buying and Selling of American Holidays* (Princeton, 1995); and *Holy Fairs: Scottish Communion and American Revivals in the Early Modern Period* (Princeton, 1989), which received the Brewer Prize from the American Society of Church History. In addition, Schmidt was co-editor with Sally Promey of *American Religious Liberalism* (Indiana University Press, 2012), co-editor with Laurie Maffly-Kipp and Mark Valeri of *Practicing Protestants: Histories of the Christian Life in America* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), and co-author with Edwin Scott Gaustad of *The Religious History of America* (HarperOne, 2002). His two most recent books have examined how atheists, freethinkers, and humanists have fared in American public life: *Village Atheists: How America's Unbelievers Made Their Way in a Godly Nation* (Princeton University Press, 2016) and *The Church of Saint Thomas Paine: A Religious History of American Secularism* (Princeton University Press, 2021).

Schmidt earned his undergraduate degree in history and religious studies from the University of California, Riverside, in 1983 and his Ph.D. in religion from Princeton in 1987.

PEOPLE

Faculty



Mark Valeri

Reverend Priscilla Wood Neaves Distinguished Professor of Religion and Politics

Professor Valeri's areas of specialization include religion and social thought, especially economics, in America; Puritanism; and eighteenth century American religion. Valeri came to Washington University from Union Presbyterian Seminary in Richmond, Virginia, where he served as the Ernest Trice Thompson Professor of Church History beginning in 1996. His prior appointment was in the Religious Studies department at Lewis and Clark College.

His latest book, *The Opening of the Protestant Mind: How Anglo-American Protestants Embraced Religious Liberty*, was published in July 2023 by Oxford University Press. His book entitled *Heavenly Merchandize: How Religion Shaped Commerce in Puritan America*, (Princeton University Press, 2010), received the 2011 Philip Schaff Prize from the American Society of Church History. It was also shortlisted for the 2011 American Academy of Religion Award for Excellence in the Historical Study of Religion and selected as one of Choice magazine's Outstanding Academic Titles for 2010. Previous publications include *Law and Providence in Joseph Bellamy's New England: The Origins of the New Divinity in Revolutionary America* (Oxford University Press, 1994), which won the Mackemie Prize from the Presbyterian Historical Society; *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 17: Sermons and Discourses, 1730-1733* (Yale University Press, 1999); *Practicing Protestants: Histories of Christian Life in America, 1630-1965* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), co-edited with Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp and Leigh E. Schmidt; and the co-edited *Global Neighbors: Christian Faith and Moral Obligation in Today's Economy* (Eerdmans, 2008). His publication list includes many book chapters, journal articles, and essays.

Valeri has received several fellowships, including an Andrew W. Mellon fellowship, a National Endowment for the Humanities fellowship, an American Council of Learned Societies grant, a Lilly Endowment faculty fellowship, as well as the 2017-2018 *Los Angeles Times* Distinguished Fellowship in the History and Culture of the Americas at The Huntington Library in Pasadena, California.

Valeri earned the Ph.D. from Princeton University, his M.Div. from Yale Divinity School, and his B.A. from Whitworth College.

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Courtesy Appointments



Cassie Adcock

Associate Professor, Department of History; Associate Professor of Religion and Politics (by courtesy)



Abram Van Engen

Chair and Professor of English;
Associate Professor of Religion and Politics (by courtesy)

Visiting Research Fellow



Matt Malone, S.J.

Father Malone is the former President and Editor in Chief of America Media. Prior to religious life, he served as special assistant and speechwriter to U.S. Representative Martin T. Meehan (D-MA), as the founding deputy director of MassINC, an independent political think tank, and co-publisher of *CommonWealth*. He is the author of *Catholiques Sans Etiquette*, a book concerning the church and the political. Malone earned his undergraduate degree from the University of Massachusetts Amherst, a M.A. from Fordham University, a Bachelor of Divinity from the University of London, and a Baccalaureate in Theology from the Catholic University of Louvain.

PEOPLE

Postdoctoral Fellows



Susanna De Stradis

Susanna De Stradis earned her Ph.D. in history from University of Notre Dame in 2022. After earning a B.A., an M.A., and a Licenza from the Scuola Normale Superiore and the University of Pisa, Italy, Susanna moved to the U.S. to further specialize in twentieth-century American Catholicism and its cultural and institutional relationship with Rome. Her dissertation, “Making Religion Safe for Democracy: The Catholic Argument for the ‘Nation Under God’ (1939-1965),” investigates the U.S. Catholic reflection on religious freedom and church-state relations in a period characterized by constitutional change and lively debate on the place of religion and religious actors in democratic regimes on both sides of the Atlantic.



Cody Musselman

Cody Musselman earned a Ph.D. in Religious studies from Yale University in 2022. She is an ethnographer of contemporary American religion, focusing on the intersections of religion, capitalism, the body, and health. Her book manuscript, “Spiritual Exercises: Fitness and Religion in Modern America,” observes how the structuring logics of American Christianity operate in the consumerist landscape of health, wellness, and fitness to understand how religion is enlisted in the politicized work of reforming the body. Cody earned master’s degrees at Yale University, an M.T.S. in Religions of the Americas from Harvard Divinity School, and her B.A. from Kalamazoo College.



Aram Sarkisian

Aram G. Sarkisian is a historian of religion, immigration, and labor in the twentieth-century United States, with a research focus on Orthodox Christianity. His current book project is titled “A Helper and Protector: Russian Orthodox Christianity in the United States, 1893-1924,” and probes how a transnational immigrant church built to help Orthodox Christians succeed in the American industrial economy struggled to maintain its dense network of social, spiritual, and material aid after the rise of Bolshevism in 1917. Aram holds a B.A. from the University of Michigan and an A.M. from the University of Chicago. He received his Ph.D. in history from Northwestern University in 2019.



Esra Tunc

Esra Tunc is an ethnographer of religion and economic practices, and her work is invested in imagining socialities based on care and solidarity amid economic and technological structures. Her book project “Islam, Justice, and Innovating Capital in the United States” examines the intersection of investment and philanthropy in financial settings within American Muslim contexts. Bringing religion and capital into conversation with feminist and the Black radical tradition perspectives, her project contributes to scholarly work on capital’s intersections with religion, justice, and technology. She earned her Ph.D. from University of California, Santa Barbara in 2022 and her M.A. from New York University in 2017, both in Religious Studies.

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Staff



Emily Cosgrove
Faculty Assistant

Emily Cosgrove offers teaching and research assistance to the faculty. Emily earned a Master of Theological Studies from Harvard Divinity School in 2022 and her B.A. from Washington University in St. Louis in 2019.



Hannah Pierce
Event Specialist

Hannah Pierce joined the Center in April 2023 and brings extensive event management experience to her role. She earned her B.A. in Mass Communication and Psychology from Texas State University.



Debra Kennard
Assistant Director

Debra Kennard has primary responsibility for Center communications, events, donor relationship support, and also manages all staff operations. She earned her B.A. in journalism from Indiana University and her M.A. in nonprofit management from Washington University in St. Louis.



Tiffany Stanley
Managing Editor, *Religion & Politics* (through March 2023)

Tiffany Stanley has experience in the journalism and publishing worlds, as well as in religion and politics. She holds a B.A. in journalism and a B.A. in English from the University of Georgia, as well as a Master of Divinity from Harvard University.



Sheri Peña
Administrative Coordinator

Sheri Peña coordinates the Center's financial operations, office administration, curriculum, and a variety of other support functions. She earned her A.A. at Washington University in St. Louis and is currently pursuing her B.A.

**Molly Harris, Administrative Assistant
(through February 2023)**

Student Assistants (2022-2023)

Francesca Frkonja, Emma Hammerschmidt, Princess Offei-Dua, Kai Radford, Emma Ryckman, Sophie Schiff, Sarai Steinberg, and Elijah Wiesman-*Religion & Politics* intern.

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National Advisory Board

Since the Center's founding, we have benefitted from an advisory board of nationally prominent leaders from the fields of American religion, politics, education, law, journalism, and business.

The board meets every few years and is also available for consultation between meetings. It is not a governing board but one that offers many fine ideas about our courses and programming, a number of which we have adopted over the years. The national reach of this board helps the Center have a wider impact on current discussions relating to religion's long role in U.S. politics.

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The Danforth Foundation

The John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics owes its existence to the tremendous generosity of the Danforth Foundation, founded in 1927 by Mr. and Mrs. William H. Danforth. The Foundation's commitment to funding St. Louis-based initiatives is well known, and in 2009 it announced a major gift of \$30 million to Washington University to establish the Center. John C. Danforth, former Senator from Missouri and U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, was particularly engaged in the Center's founding and remains a member of its national advisory board. This gift reflects Sen. Danforth's specific interest in religion and politics, as well as his dedication to his city, state, and nation. Center Director Marie Griffith holds the John C. Danforth Distinguished University Professorship that was established as a part of this generous founding gift.



Sen. John C. Danforth and Mrs. Sally D. Danforth

Sen. Danforth established in 2016 a distinguished professorship to honor his wife, Sally Dobson Danforth, and the important role she has played in his life and the lives of their children. Sen. Danforth is a retired politician and Episcopal priest, a partner with Dowd Bennett LLP in St. Louis, and an active member of the Center's national advisory board. John Inazu was installed in September 2016 as the inaugural holder of this professorship, which is a joint appointment between the Washington University Law School and the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics.



Dr. William B. Neaves and the Rev. Priscilla Wood Neaves

In the fall of 2012, William B. Neaves, an emeritus trustee at Washington University in St. Louis, established a professorship in the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics in honor of his wife, Priscilla Wood Neaves (1945-2019). The Rev. Mrs. Neaves was a former Methodist minister with a personal interest in the role of gender in religion and politics. In addition to this generous gift to the Danforth Center, the couple donated Wood Neaves's library containing books on gender and religion to Washington University's Olin Library.

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Looking Forward

First-year students enrolled in WashU's Beyond Boundaries program enjoy small seminars like the Center's "Religious Freedom in America."

FALL 2023 COURSES

Religion and American Society

PROF. LAURIE MAFFLY-KIPP

Religions of the American Midwest

DR. ARAM SARKISIAN

Puritans, Native Americans,
and Revolutionaries: Empire
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The Politics of Play and Protest:
Religion and Sports in America

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Mormon History in Global Context

PROF. LAURIE MAFFLY-KIPP

American Unbelief from the
Enlightenment to the Present

PROF. LEIGH ERIC SCHMIDT

2023-2025 Postdoctoral Fellows



Michael Baysa earned his Ph.D. from the department of religion at Princeton University. He specializes in the intersecting histories of religion and media technologies in the U.S.



Judah Isseroff is a Ph.D. candidate in the department of religion at Princeton University. His research interests have spanned constructive Jewish theology as well as American Judaism and the politics of race.



Eric Stephen is completing his J.D. at Yale Law School and Ph.D. in the study of religion at Harvard University. His work explores the dynamic relationship between judicial and popular understandings of religious liberty in both historical and contemporary contexts.



IMAGES (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT): Carly Abramowitz poses before commencement. Sofie Adams takes a turn stepping on the seal outside Brookings Hall. Leigh Schmidt offers congratulations to Julian McCall upon his graduation. Leigh Schmidt, Walker Ferry, and Marie Griffith pause for well wishes after the commencement ceremony. Leigh Schmidt, Talia Koltun-Fromm, Danielle Hazan, and Marie Griffith remember several classes while the students were religion and politics minors.



In hindsight, I don't think I could've chosen a field of study that is more relevant to the issues of our contemporary time. The intersection between religion and politics is truly at the center of seemingly everything; the overturning of Roe v. Wade, the rise of Christian nationalism, and the controversies surrounding drag queens and gender-affirming care. I know that the lessons I learned as a religion and politics minor are ones that I will carry with me long into the future.

SERENA CHAN, CLASS OF 2023

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