Our 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.

The 2020-2021 academic year marks the tenth year of the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics. In 2010, Washington University leaders determined there was a need for a national academic center focused on the enormously consequential relationship between religion and politics in America over its history, a relationship acknowledged by our national founders to be both a significant advantage to a democratic republic and a challenge to a society committed to individual rights of conscience and belief.

Reflecting the deep legacy of U.S. Senator John C. Danforth and the vision articulated by scholars and professional leaders across the U.S. who helped create it, the Center would be a bridge between different perspectives, help shape conversations and understanding through research and critical analysis, and model robust discourse while addressing issues of the greatest national importance and public contention. Since its founding, the Center’s work has complemented and reflected Washington University’s desire to encourage and support an ethos of wide-ranging exploration to enhance the lives and livelihoods of students, the people of the greater St. Louis community, the country, and the world. Our unique impact emerges from our explicit investment educating both students and the broader public. Metrics of our success include robust enrollment in courses, vigorous attendance at public events, a strong following of our online journal and social media outlets, inquiries from journalists, educators, and activists interested in our ideas, gifts from alumni and other donors, and supportive comments from constituents. The Center has built tremendous momentum in all of these areas over the past ten years, and we are committed to increasing our impact still further in the future.
“Few issues are more critical to the well-being of a democracy than how religious beliefs—or the denial of such beliefs—coexist with civic virtue and of how the ‘truths’ of the one are made compatible with the toleration and good will required by the other.”

—SENATOR JOHN C. DANFORTH

The Center is founded with a gift directed by former U.S. Senator John C. Danforth from The Danforth Foundation to Washington University in St. Louis.
The past year has been a somber one for us all. The World Health Organization has counted close to four million deaths from COVID-19. Many have lost loved ones to the disease while many others have lost jobs, housing, and food security. Any number of other crises have also plagued us. Racism, anti-Semitism, and Islamophobia continue to bedevil communities throughout the United States. Politically fueled fury such as we witnessed during the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol on January 6 is producing deeply destructive consequences. Religion and politics have clashed in ways that affect all of our everyday lives. In times such as these, even the most optimistic among us have felt overwhelmed and desolate.

At the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics, it is our mission to confront the gravest problems facing us all and to offer thoughtful ideas about how to remedy them and work for a better world. We analyze both the worst and the best that religious and political attachments rouse in people, while creating teaching spaces that model how to engage these issues despite differences. I hope you see in the pages of this report our mission in action: our efforts with students in the classroom, the virtual lectures and conversations we’ve sponsored this year, and the writings we have produced in our Religion & Politics journal and other venues.

Through it all, we have practiced the discipline of hope: a hope that inspires us to labor for, and believe in, a post-pandemic future that is better than the past. We are deeply mindful that some of our readers have suffered this year in ways we may not know, and we send you our heartfelt sympathy and commiseration. Thank you for the many ways you support our work and inspire confidence in the time to come.

R. MARIE GRIFFITH
Center Director

As Chancellor of Washington University, I am delighted to celebrate the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics’ 10th anniversary and another year of incredible accomplishments, especially at a time that feels extraordinarily complicated. This year has made abundantly clear that the intersections of religion and politics are steeped in our United States culture, as it also is in many places around the world. From ongoing religious conversations about vaccines to dialogue around race and xenophobia to still others around the role the church should play in social action, political elections, and more—the many intersections are all around us, which is why the Danforth Center on Religion and Politics is exceedingly important as we bring people together to engage in thoughtful and respectful dialogue about these and other issues and as we prepare the next generation of leaders who are poised to address the challenges facing this world.

“As we approach the weeks and months ahead, I hope we can find ways to continue to name and address the challenges we face while simultaneously finding joy in the things that fulfill and sustain us.”

ANDREW MARTIN
Chancellor

This annual report offers just some of the highlights of that paramount work. Though it has been a challenging year in the midst of the pandemic and other matters of international importance, I am grateful that the Center persevered, leaning in to its commitment “to confront the gravest problems facing us all and to offer thoughtful ideas about how to remedy them and work for a better world.”

This year the Center has done just that by promoting research, teaching, and public engagement. For example, I’m pleased that we currently have 32 undergraduate students with a declared major in religion and politics, and this year the Center offered 14 undergraduate courses with more than 400 students enrolled. In addition, the Center welcomed four postdoctoral fellows into its midst. Meanwhile, the Center hosted several thought provoking virtual events and published weekly to its journal.

Through this report, I hope you will learn more about some of these and many other of the Center’s exceptional initiatives, and I look forward to celebrating many more decades of the Danforth Center on Religion and Politics’ significance and success.

“I hope we remember some of the lessons of the past year, especially what we want not to take for granted and how to stay connected to one another.”

R. MARIE GRIFFITH
Center Director

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Center Director
Fostering exceptional research and scholarship is central to the academic mission of the Center. The objective is to provide critical context and careful reflection on the intensely trafficked intersections of religion and politics in both the nation’s past and present and to maximize its reach among academics, students, journalists, policy makers, and fellow citizens.
FALL 2020

Religious Freedom in America
John Ianzu and Mark Valeri
The intersection of religion and law in American society has sparked some of the fiercest cultural engagements in recent memory: Should a for-profit religious corporation have a right not to fund birth control for its employees? Can a public college expel campus religious groups whose membership is not open to all students? May a Muslim grow a beard for religious reasons in prison? Should a cake baker or florist be permitted to refuse services for a gay wedding? Can a church hire and fire its ministers for any reason? These current debates and the issues that frame them are interwoven in the American story. This course introduces students to the major texts and historical arguments underlying that story. Drawing from the respective expertise of the instructors, it exposes students to a variety of scholarly methods related to the issue: legal history and case law, intellectual history and canonical texts, social history and narrative accounts, and political philosophy and contemporary analyses. This course is for first-year (non-transfer) students only.

Islamophobia and U.S. Politics
Tazeen Ali
The presence of Muslim minorities in the West is increasingly divisive across the U.S. and Europe as political leaders appeal to voters’ fear of the “Other” to promote Islamophobic agendas that reshape immigration and asylum policies and redefine Western identity as Christian. In this course we examine the phenomenon of Islamophobia as a form of anti-Muslim racism. We explore how while the post-9/11 context gave way to an increase in incidents of anti-Muslim violence, contemporary manifestations of Islamophobia are deeply rooted in state level anti-black racism from the early twentieth century. We also analyze public U.S. debates on the boundaries of freedom of speech and freedom of religion.

Virtues, Vices, Values: Regulating Morality in Modern America
Marie Griffith
This course takes morality and the question of “what’s right” seriously as a lens through which to understand and assess modern American history. “Morality,” is, of course, a devilishly flexible rhetoric, a language invoked to tell people how to act and how to be good, or, conversely, to criticize and to shame. When the state or a community wants its citizens or members to be “good,”

“...This was an amazing course that I would recommend to any student. I’ve walked away from the course with so much more knowledge, and the course has helped me to think critically about the histories we know.”

STUDENT IN VIRTUES, VICES, VALUES: REGULATING MORALITY IN MODERN AMERICA COURSE

“I don’t think people realize how religion and politics apply to so many things—policy, law, medicine—until they dive into the intersections. Even as a pre-med student, I found it to inform so much of my study and what I want to do with my future.”

DENYI MICKENS, CLASS OF 2021
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 (from abolition to environmentalism). The Center’s interdisciplinary 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. Minors are invited to the Center’s colloquium series and to special engagements with guests and visiting scholars throughout the academic year.

REQUIREMENTS

One of the following gateway courses:
LS7 RelPol 201: Religion and American Society
(3 units)
LS7 RelPol 210: The Good Life between Religion and Politics
(3 units)
LS7 RelPol 225: Religion and Politics in American History
I60 BB 120: Religious Freedom in America

12 additional units, nine of which must be taught by Center faculty.

Attendance at five events sponsored by the Center on Religion and Politics (lectures, colloquia, lunch discussions, film screenings).

it crafts laws and creates customs to encourage or inhibit behaviors. This class examines how state and non-state actors have attempted to regulate the lived experiences of Americans and the conflicts that emerge over what, exactly, is correct, or right, or good for individuals, society, and the state.

The FBI and Religion

Lerone Martin

This seminar examines the relationship between the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and religion (i.e., faith communities, clerics, and religious professionals) as a way to study and understand twentieth century religion and politics. The course will investigate the history of the FBI as well as the various ways in which the FBI and religious groups have interacted. The course will pay particular attention to what the professor calls the four interrelated “modes” of FBI-religious engagement: Counter-Intelligence and Surveillance, Coordination and Cooperation, Censorship and Publicity, and Consultation. It interrogates what values the state imposes upon its citizens and what values citizens want the state to uphold.

Islam, Gender, Sexuality

Tazeen Ali

The return of White nationalism and misogyny to the public sphere since the 2016 election has reinvigorated the trope of the subjugated Muslim woman as backwards and subservient to her male counterparts. Rather than devote our time to dispel stereotypes, in this course, we address the extent to which Western theories of feminism are useful to account for Muslim women’s experiences across historical period and geographical region. By examining discourses of gender, sexuality, the ideals of the feminine and masculine in Islamic scriptures and jurisprudence, and subsequent encounters with Western imperialism, we investigate how gender informs social, political, religious, and family life in Islamic cultures. We employ a chronological approach to these topics, beginning with the status of women in seventh century Arabia, to the period of Islamic expansion across Asia, North Africa, and the Iberian Peninsula, to the colonial period ending with the contemporary post 9/11 and past 2016 U.S. contexts, wherein debates over the status of Muslim women in society emerge with renewed vigor.

Pilgrims and Seekers: American Spirituality from Transcendentalism to the Present

Leigh Schmidt

The seminar focuses on the formation of “spirituality” in American culture from the Transcendentalist world of Ralph Waldo Emerson on through more recent expressions of the “spiritual but not religious” sensibility. How did “spirituality” come to be seen as something positively distinct from “organized religion”? What are the main contours of spiritual seeking in American culture, especially among those who claim no specific religious affiliation? The course also explores the social, political, and cultural consequences of this turn to the spiritual over the religious: for example, the consecration of liberal individualism, the relationship of religious exploration to both environmentalism and consumerism, the politics of cultural appropriation, the negotiation of religious pluralism, and the pursuit of the spiritual in art.

“I appreciate the effort the Center put into its students—treating us as a cohort and the enduring Zoom gatherings this year. It stood out in comparison to my other programs.”

ANDREW CELLI, CLASS OF 2021

“I tell younger students to take the Center’s classes because the professors do an amazing job at making the Center feel like home, where you are appreciated and valued on an academic level. It instilled a lot of confidence in me.”

EMILY FDL, CLASS OF 2021

Due to the pandemic, PROFESSOR LAURIE MAFFLY-KIPP taught her spring 2021 course using a hybrid model with some students in the classroom and some students online at the same time.
SPRING 2021

Religion and American Society
Laurie Mofﬁ-Kipp

This course explores religious life in the United States. We will focus our study on groups and movements that highlight distinctive ways of being both “religious” and “American,” including the Americanization of global religions in the U.S. context. Major themes will include religious encounter and conﬂict; secularization, resurgent tradition, and new religious establishments; experimentalism, eclecticism, and so-called “spiritual” countercultures; the relationship between religious change and broader social and political currents (including clashes over race, class, gender, and sexuality); and the challenges of religious multiplicity in the US.

Religion and Music in American Culture
Alexis Williams

In this course, students will examine public discourse on popular music as a way of understanding questions of religious identity and political others who are backwards, threatening, and inherently prone to violence. This pattern has long been replicated in ﬁlms where Muslims serve as static and dehumanized perpetrators of violence and/or as symbols of a backwards and depraved culture, antithetical to U.S. values and interests. In recent years, however, Muslims have become increasingly visible in the entertainment industry, as protagonists and producers of their own media, including G. Willow Wilson’s Ms. Marvel, Hulu’s Ramy, and Netflix’s The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel. We will be viewing ﬁlms, television shows, music, and comics with scholarship on Islam and religion in the media, analyzing Muslim representation and storytelling in contemporary popular culture. We will evaluate these works on their own terms, noting the ways in which gender and racial hierarchies dictate who gets to represent American Muslims, while also assessing how these new media both disrupt and further reify Muslims’ construction as religious and political outsiders.

Between Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr.: Race, Religion, and the Politics of Freedom
Tazeen Ali and Lerone Martin

This course focuses on the political and spiritual lives of Martin and Malcolm. We will examine their personal biographies, speeches, writings, representations, FBI ﬁles, and legacies as a way to better understand how the intersections of religion, race, and politics continue to bear upon the freedom struggles of people of color in the U.S. and abroad. The course also takes seriously the evolutions in both Martin and Malcolm’s political approaches and intellectual development, focusing especially on the last years of their respective lives. We will also examine the critical literature that takes on the leadership styles and political philosophies of these communal leaders, as well as the very real opposition and surveillance they faced from state and law enforcement. In this course, we will discuss the subtleties of their political analyses, pinpointing the key differences and similarities of their philosophies, approaches, and legacies, and we will apply these debates of the mid-twentieth century to contemporary events and social movements in terms of how their legacies are articulated and what we can learn from them in struggles for justice and recognition in twenty-ﬁrst century America and beyond.

Global Circuits: Religion, Race, Empire
Cordore Lukasik

This seminar explores how American entanglements of race and religion shape and are part of larger global processes. Over the course of the semester, we will investigate these entanglements through conceptual, historical, and ethnographic questions and insights on the remapping of religious traditions and communal experiences onto imperial terrain.

Religion and the Origins of Capitalism
Mark Voelker

This course explores the economic, cultural, and social history of the origins of Anglo-American capitalism from 1500 to 1800. Throughout we will discuss the worldviews and day-to-day business decisions of the merchants who created England’s transatlantic market order and empire. Rather than treat early capitalism only in terms of material or purely economic dynamics, it probes the intellectual constructs that combined with commercial innovations to form capitalism into a social system.
“Although we were unable to meet in person, the colloquium helped build a sense of intellectual community. I enjoyed the bimonthly discussions and looked forward to contributing and learning from my colleagues each time.”

CHRISTINA DAVIDSON, POSTDOCTORAL FELLOW

The Center 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.

2020-2021 COLLOQUIUM PRESENTATIONS

- **Lerone Martin, John C. Danforth**
  Center on Religion and Politics
  The FBI and Christianity Today

- **Candace Lukasik, John C. Danforth**
  Center on Religion and Politics
  Economy of Blood: The Persecuted Church and the Racialization of American Copts

- **Alexia Williams, John C. Danforth**
  Center on Religion and Politics
  Venerable Henriette Delille: A Colloquial Hagiography

- **Christina Davidsonson, John C. Danforth**
  Center on Religion and Politics
  Converting Hispaniola: Religious Race-Making in the Dominican Americas

- **Joe Bartzel, John C. Danforth**
  Center on Religion and Politics
  Racial Justice, Transition, and Uncertainty in the U.S.

- **Elena Kravchenko, Washington University**
  in St. Louis Religious Studies Program
  Making Children Orthodox: Parental Disciplines and Desires

- **Amy Gais, John C. Danforth**
  Center on Religion and Politics
  A New Kind of Politics?

- **Andrew Walker-Cornetta, John C. Danforth**
  Center on Religion and Politics
  Bad Devotion: Mothers, Mental Deficiency Professionals, and the Profligacy of Care

- **Laurie Maffly-Kipp, John C. Danforth**
  Center on Religion and Politics
  ‘This is our time’: Mormons in West Africa

- **Tazeen Ali, John C. Danforth**
  Center on Religion and Politics
  Interfaith and Intrafaith Solidarities at the Women’s Mosque of America

- **Valerie Elvert-on-Dixon, Independent Scholar**
  The Christology of Jeremiah Wright, Jr.

- **Marie Griffith, John C. Danforth**
  Center on Religion and Politics
  Women’s Varied Roles in the History of Clergy Sex Abuse within the U.S. Catholic Church

- **Mark Valeri, John C. Danforth**
  Center on Religion and Politics
  Choosing Religion: Protestantism, Other Religions, and Conversion in Britain and New England
One extension of the Center’s educational mission is to inform members of the broader St. Louis, national, and international communities through our events and publications, while modeling discussion and debate that value each person’s humanity as the cornerstone of a productive democracy.

PUBLI C ENGAGEMENT

Learn more on our website: RAP.WUSTL.EDU/EVENTS
People of faith in the U.S. today are as politically polarized as other Americans, prompting painful breakdowns in personal relationships and communities. What would it take to accept responsibility for actively healing these political and religious divisions, activating solutions rather than continuing assaults? Senator John C. Danforth and Father Matt Malone, two priests from different Christian churches and political parties, joined Center director Marie Griffith for a conversation about bridge building, accountability, and reconciliation.

John C. Danforth is an ordained Episcopal priest and a former U.S. Senator from Missouri. Following his elected service, Senator Danforth held appointments in both Republican and Democratic Administrations as U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations and later, special envoy to Sudan. He is also an author, most recently of *The Relevance of Religion* (2015). Matt Malone is the President and Editor in Chief of America Media. Father Malone began his tenure on October 1, 2012. Previously, he served for two years as an associate editor, from 2007-2009, when he covered foreign policy and domestic politics. Father Malone entered the Society of Jesus in 2002 and was ordained a priest on June 9, 2012, by Edward Cardinal Egan, late Archbishop of New York.

133 COMMUNITY MEMBERS joined this virtual conversation with many more watching the recording on the Center’s website.

The Qur’an is one of the most iconic objects in American debates about racial and religious tolerance. Is the Qur’an a “good book”? Is it like the Bible and other scriptures? Or is its message more violent, more misogynistic, more intolerant? Or is the danger in the power readers ascribe to the book? Tracking the Qur’an’s social life as an American culture-object, anthropologist Zareena Grewal provides a window into today’s culture wars and the racialization of Islam. After her prepared remarks, Grewal engaged in a conversation with Center professor Tazeen Ali, who also moderated audience Q&A.

Zareena A. Grewal is an Associate Professor of American Studies, Religious Studies, Anthropology, and Ethnicity, Race, and Migration at Yale University. Her first book, *Islam is a Foreign Country: American Muslims and the Global Crisis of Authority* (NYU 2013), is a historical ethnography of transnational Muslim intellectual networks that link U.S. mosques to Islamic movements in post-colonial Middle East through debates about the reform of Islam, based on fieldwork in Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. She is currently working on a social life of the Qur’an as a racialized text-object at the center of the culture wars in the U.S. Her writing also appears in the *Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, and other such venues. She is also a documentary filmmaker with films including *By the Dawn’s Early Light: Chris Jackson’s Journey to Islam* and the forthcoming “Muslims in America.”
Americans today are deeply divided. As the American Academy of Arts & Sciences Commission on the Practice of Democratic Citizenship recently noted, “When Americans are asked what unites us across our differences, the increasingly common answer is nothing.” Nowhere has this seemed more true than when it comes to religion. Religion has played a crucial role in promoting conflict and polarization, yet religious communities are an essential part of bridging current social and political divides. This panel discussion of religious leaders and experts intended to foster thinking about ways that religious communities might become spaces that bridge divides, rather than make them deeper—bridge building that is located in a larger sense of civic engagement and community. The panel was inspired by the recent report published by the Commission, “Our Common Purpose: Reinventing American Democracy for the 21st Century.”

Panelists included the Rev. Traci Blackmon, Executive Minister of Justice & Witness Ministries, United Church of Christ; Prof. David Campbell, Packey J. Dee Professor of American Democracy at the University of Notre Dame; Sr. Simone Campbell, Former Executive Director NETWORK Lobby for Social Catholic Justice; Rabbi Rolando Matalon, Senior Rabbi at B’nai Jeshurun; Imam Eldin SUSA, St. Louis Islamic Center NUR; and the Rev. Dr. Serene Jones, President of Union Theological Seminary, who moderated the conversation.
Religion & Politics is an online news journal dedicated to the two topics thought unfit for polite company. The journal, founded in 2012, is an important project of the Center and is a core component of the Center’s public educational mission.

We feature articles from scholars and journalists who proceed from a single premise: that for better and for worse, religion and politics converge, clash, and shape public life. These intersections happen everywhere, from our homes to our courts, from the statehouse to the schoolhouse, in the lab and on the battlefield. We strive to publish a range of views, rather than promote a specific political perspective. We honor frank and respectful debate. We inform these discussions by taking the long view, providing historical context, critical analysis, and thorough research with compelling writing. In all of these ways, the journal embodies the vision and values that animate all of the Center’s varied undertakings.

Readers can easily access the journal’s content on mobile devices.

WWW.RELIGIONANDPOLITICS.ORG
January 6, 2021, is a day that will live in infamy. A sitting president, abetted by congressional leaders, incited a violent mob of his supporters, who sieged the United State Capitol in an attempted coup, the scope of which we are still uncovering. All along the route from Trump’s rally on the Ellipse to the Capital, there was no shortage of religious imagery. Some of the rioters carried crosses, or spoke of the “end times,” or brandished images of Trump as Jesus. They waved Christian flags and Confederate flags. They wore markers of racism and neo-Nazi loyalty.

We at Religion & Politics and the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics condemn the Capital siege in no uncertain terms. It may be impossible to make sense of the actions of violent extremists, but there are lessons to be learned from what happened. Some of these pertain to the variety of ways rioters and their supporters, like many before them, have weaponized religion for political ends. In light of these appalling events, we invited the faculty of the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics to share their initial thoughts, bringing their expertise in history, ethics, and religious studies to bear on this fraught moment in U.S. politics.

MARIE GRIFFITH, Director and John C. Danforth Distinguished Professor in the Humanities

The terrible events of January 6, 2021, elicited a variety of reactions from Center faculty, and we published our reflections in Religion & Politics. The pieces range widely in focus but make a powerful collective whole.
women claiming to wear God’s armor as patriot soldiers protecting the soul of an exceptionalist nation. Josh Hawley, a Christian nationalist senator who egged on their false belief that the recent presidential election was stolen from Donald Trump, was seen raising his fist in solidarity with those gathered. The blood of Jesus was said to be “covering this place,” as prayers rang out pleading that “the evil of Congress be brought to an end.” Members of Christian militias that spread lies about Muslims were in abundance, as were marks of anti-Black racism, anti-Semitism, and Holocaust nostalgia. It was a menagerie of Trumpian evangelicalism, as far from what many other Christians see as the gospel of Jesus as it seems possible to be.

Some Christian critics saw more of the occult than the orthodox in the QAnon conspiracies fueling the rioters’ aspirations to be knight liberators, to be sure, it’s hard to tell the difference between evangelicalism and occultism these days, and the lines are so blurred that the terminology hardly matters anymore. From multiple origins, a conglomeration of superhero narratives have converged, luring anymore. From multiple origins, a conglomeration of superhero narratives have converged, luring... among those who see life as a cosmic war between good and evil, self-righteously certain of just who is evil and who shall be victorious, is the great test of our time.

How to live among those who see life as a cosmic war between good and evil, self-righteously certain of just who is evil and who shall be victorious, is the great test of our time.

MARK VALERI, Reverend Priscilla Wood

Neaves Distinguished Professor of Religion and Politics

From the American Revolution to the Civil War, the Civil Rights movement, and 9/11, Americans have relied on religious language to assert the importance of momentous events. January 6, 2021, was no different. Insurrectionists, observers, and critics alike deployed the rhetoric of the sacred to describe what happened as a cataclysm, a tragedy.

The sight of the symbols of religion carried by participants in the storming astounded and saddened me. Supporters brandished flags with the name of Jesus, held large bibles, conducted prayer circles, and marched around blowing shofars to signal divine punishment on the government— an imitation of the story of the fall of the walls of Jericho in the book of Joshua. One could interpret these gestures as parody, more frivolous than reverent. One could also interpret them as literal and deadly serious.

The commentary of much of the media and of politicians on January 6 depended on a different set of tropes, derived from America’s tradition of sacred words and imagery. Pelosi reminded observers, and critics alike deployed the rhetoric of the sacred to describe what happened as a cataclysm, a tragedy.

The commentary of much of the media and of politicians on January 6 depended on a different set of tropes, derived from America’s tradition of sacred words and imagery. Pelosi reminded... as Josh Hawley of Missouri to reckon with Jesus’ admonition against selling one’s soul for the sake of worldly gain. Pelosi and Kaine are self-identified Roman Catholics. During times of crisis, Americans have used religious language because that language conveys a sense of judgment and justice, of pleading and hope, that frames tumultuous events. Our references to the sacred help us to interpret our current situation in relation to transcendent realities and ideals, the disregard for which was all too evident by those who stormed the Capitol and their advocates in the ranks of Congress itself.

TAZEEN M. ALI, Assistant Professor of Religion and Politics

Much of the country watched in horror as a mob of white supremacists attempted to overturn the 2020 election results by storming the U.S. Capitol last Wednesday. Acting at Trump’s behest, these domestic terrorists...
sought to interrupt the process of certifying Joe Biden’s victory, which they declared had been fraudulent. Throughout the week, many Americans repeatedly expressed different configurations of disbelief and outrage that a coup could be attempted in the United States. Others shared in the sentiments of horror, but not the shock, rightly pointing out that this event was anything but surprising. In the months leading up to the November election, Trump and his key supporters had continuously cast doubt over the integrity of the process and repeated that the only way he could lose the election is if it was stolen from him. In no uncertain terms, he vowed that he would never concede the election. And Trump has stayed true to his word. Last Wednesday’s events follow dozens of post-election lawsuits contesting Biden’s victory, focusing in particular on predominantly Black cities like Philadelphia, Detroit, and Milwaukee, insisting that only “legitimate” (barely veiled code for white) votes should count.

While Trump’s status as a serial liar is well-documented, it behooves us to take seriously the shock and understand exactly how this situation came to be, let alone considering the last four centuries of American history and the enduring legacies of slavery. This was no random angry mob, but a group led and incited by elected officials, further evidenced by Trump’s affectionate words towards them. Moreover, even as Republican Senators Ted Cruz and Josh Hawley “condemned” the mob violence, they still went on to contest the certification of the election results. In other words, we should not focus on their lies, and instead take seriously when they speak their truths. Trump and his allies have been clear and consistent in their commitment to white supremacy, and we should take them at their word.

We should not understand the resignations of members of Trump’s cabinet, or the institutions that are suddenly distancing themselves from him at this chaotic eleventh hour, as anything more than a facade. We should also not linger on the discrepancy between police attitudes towards peaceful BLM protestors and violent white supremacists. To do so fundamentally misunderstands the history of law enforcement that was established to uphold the racist status quo. This long history will not be undone with the advent of a new administration. But in the meantime, Trump and his enablers should be held to account beyond the end of their terms in office, in order to prevent the possibility that the next coup attempt will be successful.

LEIGH ERIC SCHMIDT, Edward C. Mallinckrodt Distinguished University Professor in the Humanities

In 1973 the acclaimed historian of early modern France, Natalie Zemon Davis, published one of her most enduring essays, “The Rites of Violence,” on the bloody religious riots that recurrently stained Europe’s post-Reformation landscape. A harbinger of the shift toward a cultural history deeply inflected by cultural anthropology, Davis’s essay exhume the ritualistic patterns that governed otherwise chaotic mobs and fevered rallies bent on destruction and desecration. Contemporary descriptions of sixteenth-century religious notors—Protestant and Catholic—commonly depicted them as disordered, hair-raised crowds driven by the inordinate hunger to overturn the altars.

We will be facing the challenges raised by the religion-saturated rioting of January 6 for years to come—not only as academics, but also as citizens of a democracy made vulnerable by these intersecting legacies of violence.

We might well start with the religion of the Lost Cause, the huge debt the rioters owe to its piously tended Southern “heritage” and white supremacy for well over a century. We might well start with the religion of the Lost Cause, the huge debt the rioters owe to its piously tended Southern “heritage” and white supremacy for well over a century.
The ashes of destruction that remain at the Capitol are not the result of a sudden fire.

As we confront the aftermath of January 6, there is much blame to go around: President Trump, the legion of violent insurrectionists, Senators Josh Hawley and Ted Cruz, and the list goes on. They have most certainly sown lies and violence, causing us all to reap the same.

Yet, my attention, however, turns to you: the white evangelical moderate who aided and abetted the violence at the Capitol. I do not mean the violent white Christian nationalists; they already stand condemned. Nor do I refer to the white evangelicals who consistently stood for justice and equality. No, I am writing to you, who with loud voices proclaimed from the mountain tops of social media your disgust with Trump, Hawley, and Cruz this past week, but who remained silent during the violence of the past four years.

Your support and silence helped create the insurrection. The ashes of destruction that remain at the Capitol are not the result of a sudden fire. Wednesday was no spontaneous combustion. It was a slow burn, a flame that was fanned by white evangelical affirmations and the even louder silences during the Trump years. Perhaps you feel my criticism is too harsh. But with political power comes moral responsibility. Simply put: to whom much is given, much is required. White evangelical moderates counted the political cost and chose not to bear their cross. In exchange you received your political salvation: lower corporate taxes, pro-life judges, and a renewed sense of cultural power and relevance.

To you I ask: What does it profit a body of believers to gain political appointments and lose its own soul?

As we approach MLK Day, I paraphrase what he said to white Christian moderates in 1963. I have looked at your churches and colleges and asked: “What kind of people worship here? Who is their God? Where were their voices when the lips of President Trump dripped with words of interposition and nullification? Where were they when President Trump gave a clarion call for defiance and hatred? Where were their voices of support when bruised and weary (black) men and women decided to rise... to the bright hills of creative protest” against police brutality. Your silences have spoken volumes, permitting four years of deception. You allowed the sin of bearing false witness to simply become “alternative facts.” You blessed the fount of lies from which sprang “stop the steal.” And any white evangelical who said otherwise was excommunicated, cast into the outer darkness of treason.

Now that the nation’s Capitol lies desecrated, if I have said anything in this letter that overstates the truth, I ask your forgiveness. If I have said anything that understates the truth, I beg God to forgive me.

Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp, Archer Alexander Distinguished Professor & Interim Dean and Vice Provost for Graduate Education

One of the casualties of the economic downturn spurred by the pandemic has been cutbacks in the academic study of history and society. Numerous colleges and universities, feeling the multiple pressures of parental focus on “practical” training, the rise of majors in the STEM fields, and the need to reduce their budgets, have cut programs in the liberal arts, including foreign languages, history, politics, and religion.

Leron A. Martin, Associate Professor of Religion and Politics
They are the bones and sweets of our body politic that allow our democratic society to exist.

The liberal arts are not the optional desserts consumed by a privileged elite; they are the bones and sweets of our body politic that allow our democratic society to exist.

FANNIE BIALEK, Assistant Professor of Religion and Politics

What does it mean to feel, and to say, that the insurrection at the Capitol on January 6 was “not surprising”? From around the time footage of the attack began appearing on television, Twitter was full of people claiming their lack of surprise, citing historical precedents in white supremacist violence and fascist movements as well as Trump’s tweets, for weeks, advocating increasingly extra-procedural measures to “stop the steal.” By the evening, the unsurprise had reached mainstream media and I watched even my local news anchors comment that the day was “shocking, but not surprising.” In the days that have followed, reasons not to be surprised have been piling up: historical reasons and proximate reasons, including the explicit announcements of the action by many participants and political leaders, and their transparent preparations for violence.

The attack was not a surprise. It was planned in the open, it was promoted by the president, and it followed decades of right-wing extremist violence that included in only the last few months an effort to kidnap a sitting governor. To be surprised admits of not having paid attention, or not having understood. It might indicate an overinvestment in fantasies of American exceptionalism, or a privileged and myopic position in a society that has long shown many of its members the possibility of this kind of harm.

The problem with not being surprised—the pain of it—is that surprise would allow us to forgive some failures to have prepared for it, or prevented it. At the beginning of the pandemic, I often felt some failures to have prepared for it, or prevented it. At the beginning of the pandemic, I often felt a version of this relief. The coronavirus was novel, as its name reminds us; the disruptions were not our fault, the lack of a treatment was not our failure. The work required was to care for each other now and start fighting the threat expeditiously, for the days ahead. As the failures in this country to be prepared for such a pandemic became more obvious, any sense of relief from responsibility-vanished this virus was novel, but the possibility of a pandemic wasn’t. And the mismanagement of the pandemic, from those precious early days, squandered whatever blamelessness novelty might afford.

It is comforting to find horrors surprising because it suggests that you couldn’t have done anything to stop them, since you didn’t even know they could happen. It is also comforting, in some strange sense of comfort, to be surprised because you had done everything you could to prevent them, and their defeat of those efforts is what presents the surprise. The pain of the insurrection on January 6 is compounded by finding little about it surprising, and knowing from that lack of surprise that there was so much that could have been done to keep things from getting to this point.

The right response to this pain cannot be to hope the perpetrators have all learned their lessons, the ones that we who are not surprised already knew. The problem is not what was known and not known—that’s what being unsurprised should teach us. The problem is what was done: the many incidents of domestic terrorism that have been implicitly sanctioned by a lack of response; the repeated incitements to violence by a president and other political leaders that meet with little if any consequence. The proliferation of guns and militia groups and open domestic terrorist activity that is so rarely addressed by more than a show of force. Genuine accountability for this attack is necessary. To move on, even to some supposed prevention of future violence, would sanction such violence irremediably. If justice is not done here, the next attack will not be surprising again.

We must build a society through accountability and repair in which we can again be surprised.
A cohort 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.
Tazeen M. Ali

Tazeen M. Ali is Assistant Professor of Religion and Politics. Her research and teaching focus on Islam in America, women’s religious authority, and Islam, gender, and race. Her book-in-progress, Authorizing Women: Islamic Authority at the Women’s Mosque of America analyzes how American Muslim women negotiate the Islamic tradition to cultivate religious authority and build gender-equitable worship communities.

All 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.

“As the first Islamic studies faculty member at the Center, I think it’s been a privilege to be part of the broader effort in academia and also broader public discourse on helping to shape our understanding of Islam as a legitimate American religion.”

Anna F. Bialek

Fannie Bialek is Assistant Professor of Religion and Politics. Her research and teaching focus on contemporary religious ethics and political theory with an emphasis on feminist thought, Christian theology, 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. She teaches the gateway lecture course for the religion and politics minor, The Good Life between Religion and Politics, among other courses in religious ethics and political thought.

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 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.

Bialek is co-editor of Feminist Religion. The website serves as a venue for feminist, womanist, mujerista, queer, trans, and intersectional theorists, theologians, and ethicists in religious studies to coordinate and collaborate.

Professor Bialek was on research leave for the 2020-2021 academic year.

“There’s something exciting in teaching people to become critical thinkers about their own experiences and questions, and to think about the way they ask questions about how they want to live.”
R. Marie Griffith


Griffith is a frequent media commentator and public speaker on current issues pertaining to religion and politics.

“I like to think about the study of religion and politics as being applicable professionally to physicians, to lawyers, to teachers, and, of course, to clergy and other caregivers. Like it or not, the relationship between religion and politics shapes all our lives and affects people across countless vocations.”

John Inazu

Inazu earned his Ph.D. at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, and his J.D. and B.S.E. at Duke University. Prior to teaching, 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. In addition to his academic positions, Inazu is the founder and executive director of The Carver Project (carverstl.org).

“WashU is a campus where people take interdisciplinary work seriously and where relationships and conversations happen between people in different disciplines. For me, that’s a huge draw of this place that I think is distinctive from a lot of institutions.”

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


Laurie Maffly-Kipp is the Archer Alexander Distinguished Professor at the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics and is the Director of the Center on Religion and Politics at the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics. As of July 1, 2020, she also serves as the interim dean of the graduate school and vice provost for graduate education at Washington University in St. Louis.

Maffly-Kipp’s research and teaching focus on African American religions, Mormonism, religion on the Pacific borderslands 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, 2010) 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


Prior to joining the Center, Maffly-Kipp taught for twenty-four years 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.

“In support of his research, Martin has received a number of nationally recognized fellowships and grants, including the National Endowment for the Humanities, The American Council of Learned Societies, The Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, Templeton Religion Trust, and the Louisville Institute for the Study of American Religion. Most recently, he was awarded a $1 million grant from the Henry Luce Foundation as Co-Director of “The Crossroads Project,” to advance public understanding of the history, politics, and cultures of African American religions. He also received a $350,000 grant from The Teagle Foundation to implement an intensive three-week summer humanities seminar for promising, underserved high school students from the St. Louis region enrolled in the university’s College Prep Program.

Martin has also been recognized for his teaching, receiving grants and fellowships from the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion. In 2019 he received the WashU Dean of Arts and Sciences Distinguished Teaching Award, while the students in the College of Arts and Sciences awarded him their Excellence in Teaching Award in Humanities.


He is currently writing a book on the relationship between the FBI and white evangelical conservatism. The book is set to be published by Princeton University Press.

“Let’s get students comfortable talking about things and not necessarily debating them, while really being curious about other people’s points of view, is what I see as the sweet spot of our classes.”

“We need to have a generation of folks who understand the intersection of religion and politics and who are willing to talk about these things across disagreements.”

Laurie Maffly-Kipp

Lerone A. Martin is Associate Professor in Religion and Politics at the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics. He also serves as Director of the American Culture Studies program 2020-2023.

Martin is the author of the award-winning Preaching on Wax: The Phonograph and the Making of Modern African American Religion (New York University Press, 2014), which tracks the role of the phonograph in the shaping of African American religion, culture, and politics during the first half of the twentieth century. The book was the 2015 recipient of the best first book award by the American Society of Church History.

In support of his research, Martin has received a number of nationally recognized fellowships and grants, including the National Endowment for the Humanities, The American Council of Learned Societies, The Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, Templeton Religion Trust, and the Louisville Institute for the Study of American Religion. Most recently, he was awarded a $1 million grant from the Henry Luce Foundation as Co-Director of “The Crossroads Project,” to advance public understanding of the history, politics, and cultures of African American religions. He also received a $350,000 grant from The Teagle Foundation to implement an intensive three-week summer humanities seminar for promising, underserved high school students from the St. Louis region enrolled in the university’s College Prep Program.

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He is currently writing a book on the relationship between the FBI and white evangelical conservatism. The book is set to be published by Princeton University Press.
Leigh Eric Schmidt is the Edward C. Mallinsrodt Distinguished University Professor in the Humanities at Washington University in St. Louis. He joined the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics in 2011.

From 2009 to 2011, 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. Callord Professor of Religion and served as chair of the Department of Religion; and, from 1989 to 1995, he taught at Drew University. He has held research fellowships at Stanford and Princeton and also through the National Endowment for the Humanities, the American Council of Learned Societies, the American Philosophical Society, and the Guggenheim Foundation.


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.

Mark Valeri is the Reverend Priscilla Wood Neaves Distinguished Professor of Religion and Politics with the Center.

Valeri’s areas of specialization include religion and social thought, especially economics, in America; Reformation theology and the political history of Calvinism; Puritanism; and enlightenment moral philosophy. 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.


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., summa cum laude, from Whitworth College.

He is currently working on religious persuasion, evangelicalism, and secularism in the eighteenth century.
CASSIE ADCOCK
Associate Professor of History and South Asian Studies; Associate Professor of Religion and Politics (by courtesy)

ABRAM C. VAN ENGEN
Associate Professor of English; Director of English Graduate Studies; Associate Professor of Religion and Politics (by courtesy); Dean’s Fellow for Educational Innovations and Initiatives

Udolpho Hall on the Danforth Campus is the home of the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics.

2020-2021 RESEARCH FELLOWS

AMY GAI$ Lecturer in the Department of Political Science and the Interdisciplinary Project in the Humanities at Washington University in St. Louis

JOE BARTZEL
Religion, Spirituality, and Democratic Renewal Fellow with the Social Science Research Council
CHRISTINA DAVIDSON is an interdisciplinary historian with specializations in Latin American and Caribbean history, African American Studies, and religious history. Her book manuscript, “Converting Hispaniola: Religious Race-Making in the Dominican Americas,” explores diplomatic and cultural relations between the Dominican Republic and the United States in the late nineteenth century. Davidson comes to the Center following a postdoctoral fellowship at the Charles Warren Center for Studies in American History at Harvard University. She earned her Ph.D. and master’s degree in History from Duke University and a B.A. from Yale University in Latin American Studies and International Studies.

Davidson will teach the course African-American Religions in fall 2021. She will join the Department of History at the University of Southern California in 2022.

CANDACE LUKASIK is an anthropologist of religion and migration, with a focus on Middle Eastern Christianity, U.S. geopolitics, and Muslim-Christian relations. She earned her Ph.D. in Sociocultural Anthropology from the University of California, Berkeley in 2020. Her book manuscript, “Economy of Blood: Coptic Christianity and the Persecution Politics of U.S. Empire,” examines how American politicization of Middle Eastern Christians has impacted inter-communal solidarities and religious alliances, both in the Middle East and in diaspora. Based on twenty months of fieldwork between Egypt and the United States, the book investigates the transformative effects of U.S. empire on a Middle Eastern Christian community in migration and in diaspora by examining the transnational circulation and commingling of American and Coptic political subjectivities and religious practices.

Lukasik taught the course Global Circuits: Religion, Race, Empire in spring 2021. She will join the faculty of the Department of Religious Studies at Georgia State University as Assistant Professor in August 2021.

ANDREW WALKER-CORNETTA is a scholar of American religion whose research focuses on the making and maintenance of human difference. He earned his Ph.D. from the Department of Religion at Princeton University with a Certificate in Gender and Sexuality Studies in 2020. His first book project, “Spiritual Rehabilitation: Religion and Cognitive Disability in Postwar America,” examines the moral construction of cognitive impairment and its relationship to broader questions about social reproduction, kinship, and what it means to be human.

Walker-Cornetta taught the course Religion, Health, and Race in America in spring 2021. He will join the faculty of the Department of Religious Studies at Georgia State University as Assistant Professor in August 2021.

ALEXIA WILLIAMS is an interdisciplinary scholar of religion and racial identity in the hemispheric Americas. She received her Ph.D. in American Studies and African American Studies from Yale University. Her book manuscript, “Black Revolutionary Saints: Roman Catholicism and the U.S. Racial Imagination” examines Black discursive and aesthetic practices of sainthood to understand how a Catholic imaginary of race materializes for public display and consumption in American culture. Inspired by the genre “lives of saints” writing, Williams analyzes how stories about African American candidates for sainthood are told, and the local histories of race, gender, and migration that emerge from them.

Williams taught the course Religion and Music in American Culture in spring 2021. She will join the faculty of the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign as an Assistant Professor of Religion and African American Studies, beginning in fall 2021.
The Center has a superb staff of outstanding professionals who make the Center’s public programming, undergraduate teaching, communications, and day-to-day administration function at a very high level of efficiency and excellence.

PROF. LEIGH SCHMIDT


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 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.

THE DANFORTH FOUNDATION

“I’m very grateful to Senator Danforth and also to the late William Danforth for their vision in creating the Center with funding from the Danforth Foundation. It was a very cogent vision of trying to educate students and the broader public about the relationship between religion and politics in a deep historical as well as a contemporary way.”

MARIE GRIFFITH

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. 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.
SUPPORTERS donations as of 06/30/20 Gifts given in the 2020-2021 academic year are indicated in bold.
Looking Forward

We at the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics look forward to another year of deepened learning about religion and public life in the U.S. through welcoming new students, colleagues, and community members.

FALL 2021 COURSES

Scriptures and Cultural Traditions: Texts and Traditions
Laure Maffly-Kipp and Mark Valeri
This course will work to define the concept of “Scriptures” and their treatment in U.S. society and culture.

The Good Life between Religion and Politics
Fannie Bialek
This course considers the way religious and political thought has shaped considerations of the classical ethical question of how we should live.

African-American Religions
Christina Davidson
This course is an introduction to African-American religions.

American Religion, Gender, and Sexuality
Marie Griffith
This course explores the centrality of gender debates to religion and politics in the U.S.

Conscience and Religion in American Politics
Amy Gais
By considering what conscience means and what vision of politics it implies, we will reflect on what it means to be American.

Law, Religion, and Politics
John Inazu
This course will explore the role of religious argument in politics and law through the work of legal scholars, theologians, and political theorists.

Spiritual but Not Religious: The Politics of American Spirituality
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.
The reason I’m a minor in religion and politics is because once I started, I wanted to keep taking the Center’s classes! The professors are kind, the classes are fantastic, and it became without a doubt one of the best parts of my WashU experience.

LYDIA NICKELS, CLASS OF 2021