Article

The Politics of Religion at Home and Abroad

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> ***As with other aspects of American exceptionalism, religion—American style—has a curious inside/outside dynamic based in assumptions about ourselves and the other which contributes to its stability across many different constituencies, left, right, and center. That dynamic is enabled by a productive hierarchical ambiguity about what counts as "religion" at home and abroad, helping to maintain the gulf many Americans experience between themselves and others. Religion at home is assumed to be both tamed and free in a way not yet achieved by religion elsewhere.***
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> ***—-"Introduction," Politics of Religion at Home and Abroad***

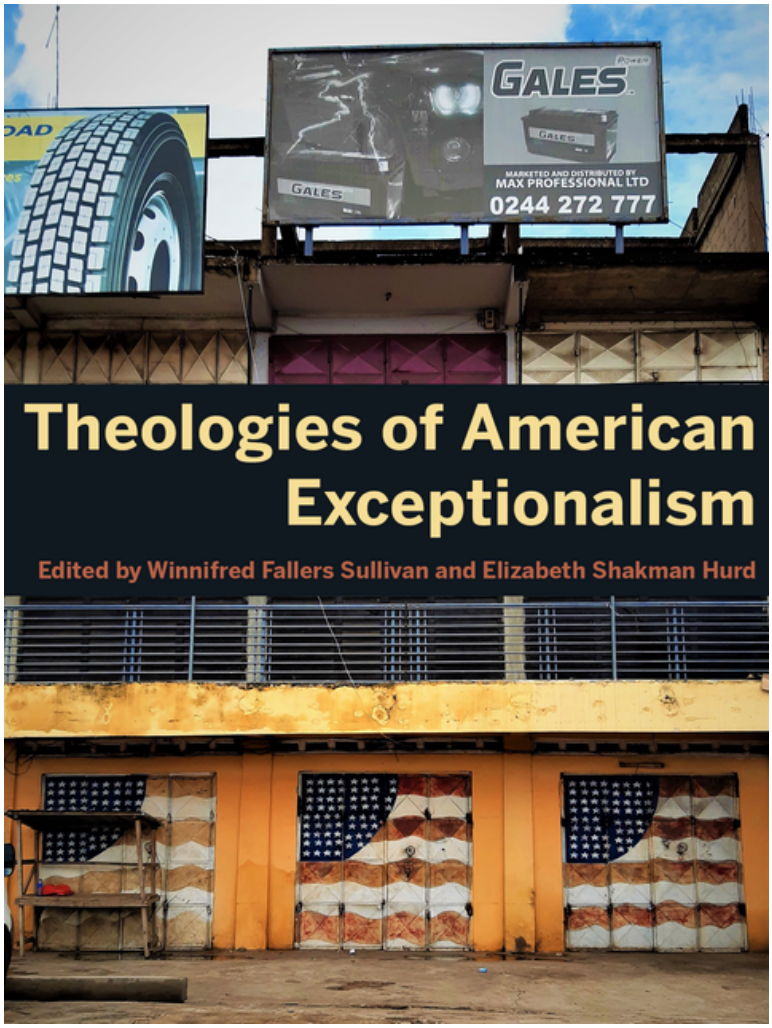
From 2016 to 2019, the Politics of Religion at Home and Abroad research project examined the complex interplay between religion, law, and politics, domestically and internationally.

Amid increased scrutiny of religion's political influence and reassessment of the role of the nation-state, the project "aimed to better understand the phenomenology of this hybrid political/legal/religious space and the symbiotic relation between US domestic and foreign policy, past and present, with regard to religion and religious governance."

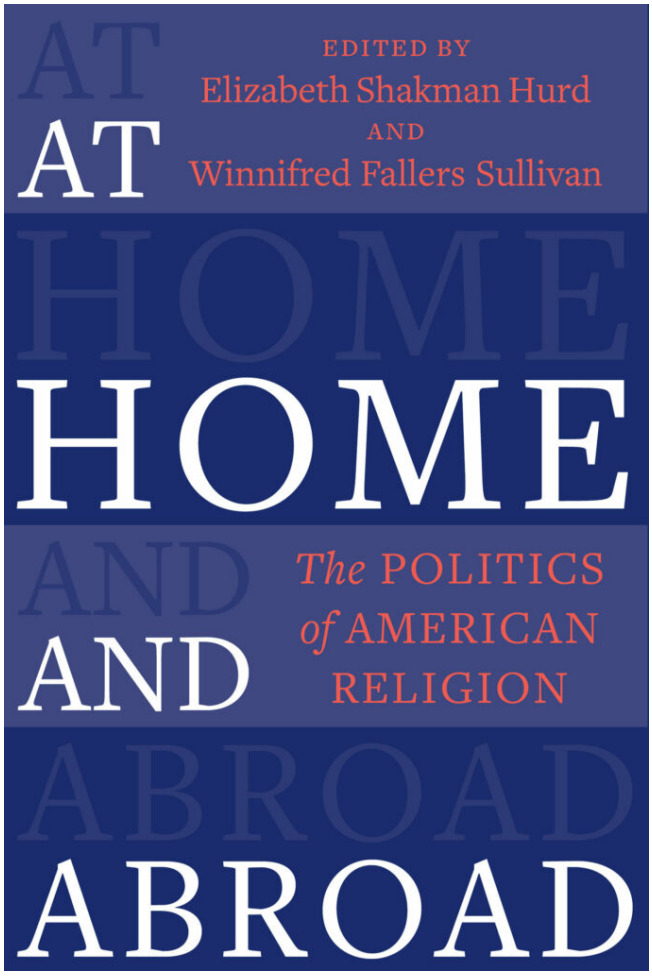
The initial phase of the project aimed to elucidate the productive ambiguity surrounding the definition of "religion" domestically and internationally. The second phase delved into the theological aspects of U.S. exceptionalism. Finally, the third phase analyzed the implications of the inside/outside framework on jurisdictions outside the United States. The project included a research program as well as pedagogical and public outreach elements.

The principal investigators of the Politics of Religion at Home and Abroad are Winnifred Fallers Sullivan (Indiana University-Bloomington) and Elizabeth Shakman Hurd (Northwestern). This project picks up on unexplored themes that emerged in the course of Hurd and Sullivan's other collaborative work on the **Politics of Religious Freedom** project.

Publications



Two key publications (both co-edited by Fallers Sullivan and Hurd) emerged out of the Politics of Religion at Home and Abroad project. *Theologies of American Exceptionalism* (Indiana University Press, 2021) comprises fifteen interconnected essays examining the complexities of exceptionalist narratives within and concerning the United States. This collection, characterized by its exploratory and thought-provoking nature, unites diverse historical and contemporary perspectives—both well-known and obscure—to inspire fresh insights about America. This volume is the first in a book series titled “Religion and the Human” hosted by the IU Center for Religion and the Human.



At Home and Abroad: The Politics of American Religion (Columbia University Press, 2021) offers a new approach to theorizing the politics of religion in the context of the American nation-state. It bridges the divide in the study of American religion, law, and politics between the domestic and international, bringing together diverse and distinguished authors from religious studies, law, American studies, sociology, history, and political science to explore interrelations across conceptual and political boundaries. Contributors examine the interplay across conceptual and political boundaries, challenging the traditional categories of domestic and foreign. They investigate how these distinctions intersect with other forms of discrimination, posing critical questions: Who and what are

defined as “home” or “abroad,” by whom are these boundaries drawn, and what are the implications of these classifications?

Click here to listen to Fallers Sullivan speak on Religious Due Process.

Click here to listen to a podcast by the editors of At Home and Abroad.

Teaching Law and Religion

Source: Moren Hsu via Unsplash

When the admissions policy of Jews Free School in the United Kingdom was challenged on the grounds of racial discrimination, the legal battle (*R(E) v The Governing Body of JFS*) delved deep into the complexities of religious identity and anti-discrimination laws. The case questioned how religious institutions can navigate legal frameworks while preserving their religious identity. This scenario is one of many meticulously detailed in the Teaching Law and Religion Case Study Archive that forms an important pedagogical component of the Politics of Religion at Home and Abroad.

Designed for teachers, students, scholars, researchers, and policy-makers, the archive offers a rich collection of case studies that dissect the multifaceted relationship between law and religion. Scholars, students, and practitioners are provided with invaluable resources to explore real-world scenarios where legal frameworks and religious practices collide. In the words of the organizers, the aim is to provide a series of templates/ teaching modules for “thinking creatively and comparatively about law, religion, culture and politics—and their complex intersections—in a variety of distinctive contexts.”

For instance, the “Whose Cathedral?” case study explores the legal arguments and societal

implications surrounding the preservation of St. Paul's Cathedral in Rhode Island, highlighting the tension between historical preservation and property rights. The case quickly turned into a complex legal battle, questioning not just ownership but the intricate intersections of law, religion, and public policy.

Similarly, the "Contesting Sacred Peaks" case study delves into the contentious issue of land rights and religious freedom, focusing on Native American tribes' battle to protect the San Francisco Peaks, sacred to them, from development. This case highlights the conflict between Indigenous religious practices and federal land use policies, raising questions about religious accommodations and environmental conservation.

Each case study in the archive is meticulously researched and presented, encompassing a wide range of issues such as religious freedom, discrimination, and the role of religion in public life. By presenting these nuanced case studies, the Archive stands as an essential resource for those looking to navigate and understand the complex landscape of law and religion.

The Teaching Law and Religion Case Study Archive was curated by Fallers Sullivan and Hurd, building on and expanding their work with Peter Danchin and Saba Mahmood in the "Politics of Religious Freedom" project. Luce postdoctoral fellow Sarah Dees and project assistant Jeff Wheatley also provided design and editorial assistance.

Click here to read more about the archive