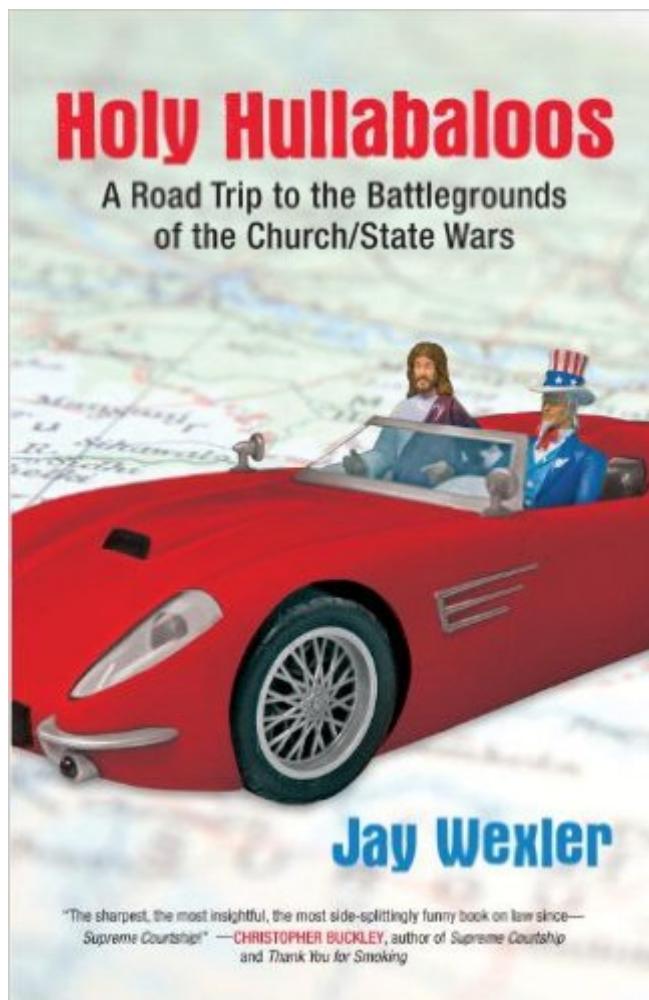


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# Holy Hullabaloos: A Road Trip To The Battlegrounds Of The Church/State Wars



## **Synopsis**

After ten years spent riddling over the intricacies of church/state law from the ivory tower, law professor Jay Wexler decided it was high time to hit the road to learn what really happened in some of the most controversial Supreme Court cases involving this hot-button issue. In *Holy Hullabaloos*, he takes us along for the ride, crossing the country to meet the people and visit the places responsible for landmark decisions in recent judicial history, from a high school football field where fans once recited prayers before kickoff to a Santeria church notorious for animal sacrifice, from a publicly funded Muslim school to a creationist museum. Wexler's no-holds-barred approach to investigating famous church/state brouhahas is as funny as it is informative.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Over a decade ago, I was fortunate enough to take constitutional law from two legal titans, Gerald Gunther and Kathleen Sullivan (who richly deserves her spot on many shortlists for a SCT appointment). Jay Wexler was a classmate then and he remains a good friend today. So discount this review all you want. But I learned as much First Amendment law from reading *Holy Hullabaloos* as I did in law school from the best the legal academy has to offer. And, better yet, I busted out in laughter every few pages. What a feat! Reading *Holy Hullabaloos* is like exercising on a treadmill while watching a great sitcom -- you don't even notice that you have bettered yourself for taking it on. Wexler, whose hilarious short stories have been published everywhere from *McSweeney's* to *Monkeybicycle*, is a brilliant, insightful and self-effacing writer who teaches without preaching. He may well convince you of his view of the proper interpretation and scope of the religion clauses. But

I doubt that's his principal aim. By delving deeper into the facts of these cases and the religious and cultural communities in which they arose, Wexler forces you to challenge your own assumptions about the proper role of religion and government in our society. That, and he makes you laugh. But regardless of his intent, you won't forget these travel stories or the cases he recounts in the process. So read *Holy Hullabaloos*. You really won't regret it.

I'm intimidated by the other two reviews, as they are very well-written. I went to BU Law, where Prof. Wexler teaches, and in fact I work there now. But I never took any of his classes (sorry!) so you don't really have to discount this review. *Holy Hullabaloos* really does manage to combine humor with wonderfully clear analyses of some Really Important Supreme Court cases. In law school, I took no more con law than was required, so I really don't have much of a background in the area, but I came away from reading the book feeling very well-informed. Wexler discusses these cases in a really thought-provoking way. To echo another review, I found his point about teaching about religion in schools to be a really good one. The book was much more thoughtful than I expected. That is, it wasn't just a series of jokes about law and religion cases. Rather, Wexler combines legal analysis and humor to both educate the reader and to make this larger point about the way we treat and think about religion. Having gone to Catholic school myself, but one where we actually did have a world religions class at some point and where dissent was tolerated, if not encouraged, the idea that we need to be respectful of others' religious beliefs, or lack thereof, really resonated with me. Also, I really did laugh out loud. Once on the train. It was very embarrassing.

As the saying goes, man should see neither law nor sausage made. And if civil laws are the sausage, then judge-made law must be that offal that's left behind. So, congratulations to Jay Wexler for making something tasty out of it. Beware all ye academics, this book is not for you. It is far too clear and well reasoned for the purists. "Where are the footnotes?" you will ask. Wexler's writing style is accessible and uproariously funny, but he does not sacrifice the complexity of what he is writing about. He manages to clearly explain a number of Supreme Court decisions that follow no logical progression, violate rules that the justices themselves created, and basically make a huge sticky mess out of both the Establishment and Free Exercise clause. The best part of the book is actually the sub-text and here is where Wexler's evil genius truly shows. This is not, in fact, a book about the First Amendment. It is a lesson in religious tolerance, one that needs teaching, but rarely gets brought into the classroom. As Wexler makes clear, the best way to respect our First Amendment freedoms is not to let the Supreme Court anywhere near them. If Americans don't bring

the crazy cases, then the Court can't mess them up. A simple, yet diabolical plan.

Is it possible to learn and laugh at the same time? Clearly Jay Wexler has answered that question with a resounding - YES. *Holy Hullabaloos* is an uproarious adventure through the questions and answers that typically feel too stodgy and convoluted to ponder. While reading this book, it feels as if you are riding shotgun along with Jay on his wild and wacky journey. Disclosure: I am a former student in Jay's Law and Religion seminar at BU Law and constantly recommend his class and writings (and paintings) to anyone with a sense of humor and a bit of intellectual curiosity.

The book is about various church-state separation legal cases and he makes them surprisingly interesting and entertaining reading. He traveled to the various places associated with the cases and spoke with people involved.

This funny little book is a great overview of contemporary issues in church-state law. Wexler is clear about his biases as a law professor who was raised Jewish, admired some Eastern religions while in college, but has ultimately settled quite comfortably into an atheist life. In this book, he identifies a variety of concerns, from school vouchers to the Senate chaplain to prayer before football games, and each chapter weaves a brief travelogue into his academic discussion of the topics. I didn't find the personal travel observations to be all that enlightening or funny (except for the tour through the creation museum), but they didn't detract from the rest of the work, and they give Wexler a nice hook to sell the book as a whole. The book as a whole, by the way, is very good, with biased but fair and reasonable observations and accurate summaries of different cases that really help explain his points. I'm a lawyer, and a Christian, and I get in more than my share of frustrating conversations with people who want me to confirm that the Supreme Court has taken prayer out of schools - if I had the guts, I would refuse to have those conversations unless those people could promise me they had read this book. It's that accessible and it's that accurate.

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