

Uniforms: Intersection of Religion, Identity, and Institutional Policy in the US Armed Forces

Faegheh Shirazi

Dept. of Middle East Studies, The University of Texas at Austin

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100600686>

Received: 17 May 2026; Accepted: 22 May 2026; Published: 02 July 2026

ABSTRACT

This article examines how U.S. military and law-enforcement institutions have revised uniform and appearance policies in the twenty-first century to accommodate religious expression. It argues that these changes reflect broader negotiations among institutional authority, constitutional protections, recruitment pressures, and the public visibility of religious identity. Although norms of modesty and bodily presentation have long shaped many religious traditions, their incorporation into official uniforms has historically encountered resistance. Recent accommodations—often limited, conditional, and subject to institutional review—therefore reveal changing understandings of inclusion within highly regulated state organizations.

Drawing on DoD Instruction 1300.17(Religious Liberty in the Military Service), and Symbolic Interaction Theory, the article analyzes uniforms as visible sites where identity, power, and belonging are negotiated. It focuses on cases involving Muslim, Sikh, Jewish, Hindu, Rastafari, and Native American service members to show how religious symbols and grooming practices become contested markers of legitimacy, accommodation, and institutional recognition. The analysis demonstrates that uniform policy is not merely administrative; it is also a cultural and legal arena in which the boundaries of citizenship, professionalism, and religious liberty are actively defined.

Keywords: Symbolic Interaction Theory, U.S. military, religious accommodation, uniform policy, religious expression, identity, law enforcement, hijab, turban, kippah, Sikhism, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Rastafari, Native American religions, hair and facial hair.

INTRODUCTION: SIGNIFICANCE OF CLOTHING AND APPAREL IN HUMAN LIFE

Textiles and clothing have long been central to human life, serving practical, social, and symbolic functions. Archaeological evidence from the Near East demonstrates the deep historical roots of textile production, including fiber remains dating back several millennia in the Jordan Valley.¹ Clothing and textiles reflect the materials, technologies, and social values of the societies that produce them. As an interdisciplinary field, dress studies draw on anthropology, sociology, history, material culture, and religious studies to examine how clothing communicates meaning in everyday life. Scholars such as Roach-Higgins, Damhorst, Littrell, Kaiser, Hamilton, Weiner, Schneider, and Burns have shown that dress is not merely decorative; it is deeply implicated in identity, status, embodiment, and social interaction. As Linda B. Arthur observes, “The body provides a basic theme for all symbolism.”² In addition to specific clothing studies as a general subject, there are several other scholarships focusing on military uniforms. Authors such as

Mickey R. Dansby, James B. Stewart, Schuyler C. Webb (edited volume), and Ender, Rohall (edited volume) have contributed to religious accommodation within the US. Military Forces.

For this reason, clothing is relevant across a wide range of disciplines, including cultural and religious studies, politics, gender studies, military history, psychology, medicine, and environmental research. Because dress is both material and symbolic, it offers a particularly useful lens for examining how institutions regulate bodies, identities, and public visibility.

This article focuses on changes to dress and appearance policies in the U.S. military during the twenty-first century. Two developments make this topic especially significant: the scale of the U.S. armed forces and the growing diversity of those who serve. As of March 2025, the U.S. military remained one of the largest active military forces in the world, while demographic shifts have produced a force that is more racially, ethnically, and religiously diverse, with more women in leadership roles. This diversity includes not only race and ethnicity but also religion, including members of major world faiths as well as those with no religious affiliation. The Department of Defense's recognition of more than 200 faith groups underscores the institutional need to address religious accommodation within military service.

As societies become more diverse, dress increasingly functions as a site of negotiation over belonging, recognition, and institutional acceptance. Military uniforms therefore provide a particularly revealing context for examining how religious diversity is managed within organizations built on discipline, hierarchy, and visual uniformity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The scholarship relevant to this article spans several overlapping fields: dress studies, sociology of religion, legal scholarship on religious liberty, and research on military institutions. Studies of dress and material culture have long shown that clothing is a social language through which bodies become legible in terms of identity, rank, gender, power, and belonging. Work by Linda B. Arthur, Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins, Joanne Eicher, Susan Kaiser, and Jennifer Craik is especially important because it demonstrates that dress is never merely decorative; it is implicated in social control, symbolic communication, and the organization of public life.

A second body of literature addresses religion and public visibility, especially in relation to veiling, the body, and the politics of recognition. Scholars such as Massimo Leone, Mohja Kahf, Faegheh Shirazi, and Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones have shown that items like veils, head coverings, and bodily markings carry meanings that are historically contingent and politically contested. These works are useful for the present study because they help explain why religious symbols in uniform are not interpreted neutrally, but are read through wider narratives of morality, gender, nationalism, and threat.

A third strand of scholarship concerns uniforms, military regulation, and the law of religious accommodation. Work by Toni Pfanner and Sharon Peoples helps situate uniforms within broader debates about discipline, embodiment, and state authority, while legal scholarship and policy commentary on *Goldman v. Weinberger*, the First Amendment, The Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA), and Department of Defense policy illuminate the changing institutional framework through which accommodation claims are evaluated. Existing literature has tended to focus on single traditions or single controversies.

This article contributes by placing multiple traditions in comparative perspective and by using Symbolic Interaction Theory to show how accommodation debates turn on the interpretation of visible symbols within institutional settings.

Additional scholarship in the bibliography further supports this framework. Linda B. Arthur's edited volume *Religion, Dress and the Body* and Beth Graybill's work on the social regulation of women's bodies underscore the extent to which clothing can function as a mechanism of discipline, modesty, and communal boundary-making. Penny Storm's work on the functions of dress likewise reinforces the argument that clothing is both cultural and individual, operating simultaneously as a tool of self-expression and social control. In relation to the Middle East, the edited volume by Nikki R. Keddie and Beth Baron helps situate gender, veiling, and public roles within longer historical debates about sex, status, and visibility. Finally, Arthur C. Zeidman's policy commentary on military accommodation helps connect this broader scholarship to the specific institutional and legal changes addressed in the present study. Together, these works deepen the article's comparative perspective and strengthen its claim that religious dress in military contexts must be understood not only as personal belief, but as socially interpreted symbolism within systems of power.

This article's original contribution lies in its comparative analysis of multiple religious accommodations across U.S. military and law-enforcement contexts. Rather than examining a single faith tradition or a single legal controversy, it places Muslim, Sikh, Jewish, Hindu, Rastafari, and Native American cases within a shared analytical framework. In doing so, it shows how Symbolic Interaction Theory helps explain the social meanings attached to religious symbols in uniform and the broader institutional struggle over visibility, legitimacy, and belonging.

Theoretical Perspectives:

This article draws on Symbolic Interaction Theory to analyze requests for religious accommodation in military and law-enforcement uniforms. The theory is especially useful because it understands meaning as socially produced: symbols do not carry fixed significance on their own, but acquire meaning through interpretation, interaction, and institutional context. In this framework, uniforms are not merely functional garments. They are visible symbols of authority, discipline, belonging, and state power. Religious items such as hijabs, turbans, kippahs, beards, facial markings, or long hair similarly communicate forms of identity, devotion, and community affiliation that may either align with or challenge institutional expectations.

From this perspective, dress codes do more than regulate appearance; they function as mechanisms of social control. Uniforms standardize the body, minimize visible difference, and reinforce organizational hierarchy. In military settings in particular, uniformity communicates discipline, obedience, and collective identity, while deviations from established appearance norms can be interpreted as disorder, nonconformity, or resistance. The symbolic power of the uniform therefore lies not only in what it displays, but also in what it excludes.

Seen through a symbolic interactionist lens, conflicts over religious accommodation are ultimately conflicts over meaning: who has the authority to define what counts as professionalism, neutrality, discipline, loyalty, or legitimate service. Each case study in this article demonstrates that religious symbols are never read as purely private expressions of belief. Rather, they are interpreted by institutions, superiors, peers, and the public as signs that can either affirm or disrupt dominant understandings of military identity. This framework is therefore central to the analysis of Muslim, Sikh, Jewish, Hindu, Rastafari, and Native American accommodations, because it shows how policy debates over uniforms are also struggles over recognition, belonging, and the boundaries of citizenship.”

METHODOLOGY

This article uses a qualitative, interpretive methodology to examine how religious accommodation is negotiated within military and law-enforcement uniform policy. The analysis draws on a combination of legal materials, military regulations, policy statements, journalism, advocacy documents, and selected scholarly studies on dress, symbolism, religion, and institutional power. Rather than treating uniforms as merely functional garments, this approach reads them as cultural objects through which organizations regulate visibility, identity, and belonging.

The case studies were selected because they represent distinct forms of accommodation across multiple religious traditions, including head coverings, facial hair, hair length, and bodily markings. Together, these examples make it possible to compare how institutions respond to different embodied religious practices while remaining within the shared framework of uniform regulation. The article does not claim to provide an exhaustive survey of all accommodations; instead, it offers analytically chosen cases that illustrate broader tensions among constitutional rights, institutional discipline, recruitment needs, safety concerns, and public perceptions of legitimacy.

Analytically, the article uses Symbolic Interaction Theory to interpret how uniforms and religious symbols acquire meaning through social interaction and institutional judgment. Each case is read not only in terms of policy change, but also in terms of what the accommodation signifies: who is recognized as a legitimate service member, what forms of visible difference are tolerated, and how concepts such as professionalism, neutrality, cohesion, and equality are defined. This method allows the article to move beyond description toward

a more sustained analysis of how religion, identity, and state authority intersect in debates over military appearance standards.

The inclusion of documented cases and images of actual service members wearing religiously accommodated uniforms is also analytically significant. These visual materials are not merely illustrative; they demonstrate how accommodation becomes publicly visible and socially legible, making clear that debates over uniform policy are not only legal or administrative, but also symbolic struggles over who can appear as a legitimate representative of the state.

Armed Forces Uniforms

Military uniforms have a long history across nations and armed forces. From antiquity to the modern era, they have changed in response to technology, comfort, functionality, and shifting ideas about discipline and identity. Uniforms identify national affiliation, distinguish friend from foe, and signify allegiance. Early American military uniforms, for example, were strongly influenced by British and French models. This historical background matters because it shows that uniforms are never merely practical garments; they are also symbolic systems that communicate authority, belonging, and institutional values.

Toni Pfanner emphasizes the importance of uniforms in military life. At their most basic level, uniforms standardize appearance and help create visual cohesion within military units. Military uniforms are designed to minimize visible difference and to create a sense of collective identity and cohesion within otherwise diverse groups.

In recent history, religious symbols have functioned much like other symbolic elements in dress: they communicate belief without requiring speech. Their meaning, however, is not inherent in the object itself but is produced through social interpretation and nonverbal communication. The same is true of military uniforms. A uniform communicates meaning both to the wearer and to those who see it, and the act of wearing it properly becomes part of that communicative process. Adding a religious symbol to the uniform therefore does more than alter appearance; it changes how the wearer is read within the institutional setting.

In the U.S. military, appearance standards also regulate head hair, facial hair, and other visible markers of identity. At the same time, anti-discrimination law and constitutional protections limit the extent to which employers may restrict religious expression. Military and law-enforcement institutions must therefore balance organizational image, safety, and uniformity with legal obligations to accommodate religious belief, medical need, and cultural difference. This broader shift toward accommodation provides the context for the case studies that follow.

When studying uniforms we note a dual characteristic: uniforms bring rewards but also punishment for transgression. “Punishment can take many forms: loss of privileges, repeating uniform practice until perfect, humiliation, and physical or psychological discipline.”³ This means that although we see uniforms as a force for order, control, conformity, and discipline, they also contain other characteristics “...such as subversion, transgressing, punishment, and shame. It is this double character of uniforms that makes them so intriguing.”⁴

Uniforms: Symbolic Fashion Influencer

A large body of published articles discuss different aspects of uniforms, their development, and their influence on fashion as legacy, particularly in men’s jackets and later in women’s fashion. Srishti Jain’s article describes how military uniforms generated a profound influence on fashion styles in every era in history influencing both men and women’s styles. Jain also writes that men’s military uniforms constituted a statement of power regardless of historical time or epoch, giving as example:

...the well-structured, bulky coats, the combat trousers with a manly attitude and those subdued caps worn during World War II. Modern military attire combines, or, as we may say, fuses, practical uniforms with contemporary utilitarian and fashionable apparel.⁵

Craik argues that in addition to conveying the message of power, masculinity, and discipline, uniforms “...also invite symbols of eroticism and fetishism. And it is this hidden dimension that explains their pervasive appeal and appropriation in popular culture and particularly in fashion”⁶ For example, during the first World War, women’s fashion was inspired by the WWI military uniforms with their belts, shoulder straps, shoulder lapels, brass buttons, hats, and colors altogether incorporated into fashionable styles for women in the streets as well as fashion runways. Adaptation of military elements by various groups to demonstrate an anti-establishment attitude was also well known during the fashion styles during the 1970s-1980s, protesting the status quo, military, or fashion elite. In the contemporary era, we can detect other elements inspired by military appeal including combat boots, bomber jackets, pants in kaki and military olive-green colors, camouflage prints, and large multiple pockets outside on jackets and pants giving a rigid silhouette.⁷

For example, a very popular item in the clothing line is the bomber jacket created by the US Army Aviation Clothing Board (1917), also known as a “flight jacket” to keep the pilots warm during bombing raids where the pilots are in open cockpits. They were originally made of pure leather or seal skin and lined with fur to keep the wearer warm and comfortable.⁸ These are just a few examples of the continued use of military-inspired clothing in the fashion world.

Toni Pfanner studied the history of uniforms from the earliest historical perspective, which revealed the purpose of uniforms not only in the general military but in combat fields and the agreed upon rules of engagement relating to civilians:

In international armed conflicts, members of the armed forces can lawfully take part in combat on the battlefield. Conversely, they can lawfully be attacked. The absence of a military uniform usually indicates that a person is a civilian, is therefore not allowed to perform military functions, and must not be attacked.⁹

Xurong Kong examined the effect of the Chinese Cultural Revolution on the popularization of military uniforms as fashion markers. Kong believes that the revolution-minded youth liked the superior materials (fabric) and the colors along with the ideology that stood behind such uniforms. The Chinese Cultural Revolution was launched by Mao Zedong¹⁰ in 1966 and lasted until 1976. The ideologies behind the fashion that resembled the military uniform were, firstly, anti-individualistic and, secondly, rooted in equality for all. However, after the massacre that occurred on “...Tian’anmen [Square] in 1989, the military uniform ceased to be fashionable. Gone with the military uniform is not only the chaos of those years but also a certain zeal to reform Chinese society.”¹¹ Sharon Peoples studied how it is “...difficult to disentangle masculinity from military uniform.” Peoples argues that the military uniform influenced and contributed to what is now called the “hegemonic shape of the modern male body.”¹²

The following section examines how recruitment pressures, diversity debates, and legal accommodation have shaped recent changes in U.S. military uniform policy.

U.S. Military Recruitment Issues

Recent reporting and policy commentary suggest that recruitment pressures have been an important backdrop to changes in U.S. military appearance standards. For several years, the armed forces struggled to meet recruitment targets because of a shrinking pool of eligible applicants, lower interest in military service, and competition from the civilian labor market. In 2025, however, recruitment numbers improved across several branches, prompting the Department of Defense to establish a recruitment task force aimed at sustaining this momentum and addressing remaining barriers to enlistment.

These pressures have encouraged the services to reconsider some long-standing restrictions on appearance and eligibility. Recent adjustments have included more flexible policies on tattoos, broader use of preparatory programs and waivers, and renewed attention to how institutional culture affects recruitment and retention. At the same time, critics and supporters disagree about the relationship between diversity policy and military effectiveness.¹³ Some argue that inclusion measures strengthen legitimacy, morale, and access to a broader talent pool, while others contend that they may conflict with traditional conceptions of military discipline

or cohesion. This debate forms part of the broader context in which religious accommodation has become more visible and more contested.

Within this changing recruitment environment, accommodation of religious symbols and grooming practices can be understood as one form of institutional adaptation. Allowing head coverings, beards, long hair, or other faith-based markers does not eliminate the military's emphasis on uniformity; rather, it modifies that emphasis by recognizing that inclusion and discipline must be negotiated together. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, these accommodations are especially significant because they reshape how visible difference is interpreted within institutional life.

The following case studies show how specific religious symbols become contested signs of professionalism, loyalty, and belonging.

Wearing Religious Symbolism with the Uniforms: United States Armed Forces

The following sections examine forms of religious symbolism that have been approved for incorporation into U.S. military uniforms and grooming practices. Each case illustrates that accommodation is negotiated through institutional review rather than granted automatically, and each reveal how religious obligation, legal protection, and organizational control intersect. Taken together, these examples show that such accommodations are not isolated exceptions, but part of broader changes in the relationship between religion and state institutions in the United States.

The Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) provides an important legal framework for these accommodations. Under RFRA, the government may not substantially burden a person's religious exercise unless it can demonstrate a compelling interest and show that the burden is imposed through the least restrictive means.¹⁴ In practice, however, accommodation often requires lengthy vetting, case-by-case approval, and negotiation within particular units and chains of command. These processes are shaped not only by formal policy but also by institutional culture, public attitudes, and political context. In periods of heightened suspicion or stigma, requests for accommodation may encounter greater resistance. The history of Muslim service members after September 11, 2001, illustrates this dynamic especially clearly, as visible markers such as the hijab, beard, and mustache were often read through the lens of fear, securitization, and exclusion rather than ordinary religious practice.

Hijab and Veiling: Historical Background

The history of veiling predates Islam. Head coverings have appeared in many societies and have taken a wide variety of forms. In contemporary usage, the Arabic term *hijab* often refers to a cloth covering worn over the hair, neck, and chest while leaving the face visible. As Massimo Leone's work on the semiotics of veiling suggests, veils should be understood not simply as items of dress but as culturally charged symbols whose meanings shift across historical and social contexts:

One of the main purposes of the “cultures of invisibility” project is to develop a phenomenological, semiotic, and anthropological understanding of the veil, so as to demonstrate that most of the dramatic oppositions of values evoked by contemporary media around the Islamic veil reveal not only stereotypical conception of Islamic visual culture, but also, what is worse, a deep ignorance of the historical roots of both Greek Latin and Christian visual culture. Even a cursory exploration of the history of the ancient Mediterranean cultures, indeed from Jewish to Roman visual culture, passing through Greek visual culture,

shows that they all consider the veil as a central semiotic device, used in order to articulate a complex pattern of visibility and invisibility around the presence of the body in the visual structure of a society.¹⁵

For example, veils were used effectively to announce the marital status of women. Snoods (fitted net material worn to gather hair neatly) were worn by unmarried women in the Middle Ages in Scotland and parts of England. “In the ancient world of Greek and Roman civilizations, several different veil styles existed across place and time. *Pharos*, *himation*, and *peplos* were varying veiling styles available to Greek women, each consisting of a separate fabric draped around the shoulders or torso.”¹⁶

Our earliest recorded document about the veil goes back to the Assyrian legal text of the 13th Century BCE.¹⁷ According to the legal text document, veiling was reserved for honorable, respectable women and was forbidden for prostitutes to wear. In the Assyrian, Greco-Roman, Byzantine empires as well as pre-Islamic Iran (in Zoroastrian society), veiling and seclusion were marks of prestige and symbols of status.¹⁸ The veiling and seclusion meant that the veiled woman belonged to an elite class who was not engaged in laborious activities and was well provided for. Slaves and women who labored in the field were not required to veil.

Wearing hijab in US Armed Forces

A few police departments in the United States allow the hijab, turban, and other religious symbolism to become part of the altered uniform. The New York City Police Department (NYPD) allows Sikh officers to wear turbans and female Muslim officers to wear hijabs.

The Newark, New Jersey, Police Department allows Muslim officers to wear hijabs and Sikh officers to wear turbans. The Nashville, Tennessee, Police Department also updated its uniform policy to permit religious head coverings. In 2021, female Muslim officers in Newark were granted permission to wear hijabs with their uniforms after the city revised its policy to promote inclusivity and to strengthen ties with the community.

In 2003, a lawsuit was initiated by a female police officer employed by the city of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania when the officer’s request to wear a headscarf (hijab) with her uniform was denied due to the Department’s strictly enforced regulation for internal uniform policy. The female officer lodged a complaint of discrimination for the religious right to wear a headscarf. The complaint was lodged with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission as well as against the city of Philadelphia. The final judgement was that “...the court [federal district court] found that the city had shown that wearing a religious headscarf would impose an undue burden on the Department, and that the district court’s grant of summary judgment was proper.”¹⁹ Thus, the officer was not permitted to wear a hijab with her police uniform.

A comparison between Newark and Philadelphia shows that accommodation for religious dress is not applied uniformly. Decisions to revise or retain strict uniform policies vary not only from state to state but even from city to city within the same state. Some departments adapt to the demands of an increasingly diverse police force, while others continue to emphasize uniformity and institutional impartiality over accommodation. According to Islam Channal:

Under the revised Newark policy, hijabs must be blue to match the authorized police uniform shirt. For officer safety, the head covering must also be easily removable, using features such as Velcro or magnetic fastenings, and it must fit under department-regulated headwear.²⁰

The US Army decided to allow Muslim female soldiers to wear hijabs (scarfs), and other forms of religious head coverings or religious facial hair and dreadlocks.²¹ The *Army Times* reported that “Observant Sikhs and conservative Muslim women are now able to wear religious head coverings. Accepted head coverings still must match the uniform of the day which can include black, brown, green, tan, or navy colors. However,

the regulation states that “The material will be free of designs or markings, except that a Soldier wearing the Army Combat Uniform may wear a hijab in a camouflage pattern matching the uniform.”²²

US Army rules indicate that hijabs and turbans must be made from a subdued material in a color that closely resembles the assigned uniform or, if the soldier is wearing combat gear, camouflage material. Personnel can be ordered to use fire-resistant cloth. Wearing any approved religious head covering still requires brigade-level approval. The army hijab is provided by the US military and must be worn to cover the hair under the helmet and should not cover the ears (making sure the sound quality is not obstructed). Such rules are necessary for safety reasons. If a soldier were to take off his or her helmet in the middle of combat, the sex of that soldier must be indiscernible. The new and more liberal military regulations on religious head coverings constitute a positive decision that encourages more people to join the forces.

Another strict uniform regulation is that although the hijab may be worn with the Army Combat Uniform, it cannot cover any part of the headgear, which includes helmets and patrol caps. The hijab also must not interfere with equipment such as gas masks or weapon sights. Soldiers are allowed to wear religious apparel while traveling off post using commercial transportation when given authorization by their chain of command. The Army stated that “We believe in preserving the First Amendment right of free exercise of religion for those who want to serve in the U.S. Army.”²³ The First Amendment right of free exercise of religion was invoked by individuals who, in the court of law, challenged for the right of religious minorities to join and serve their nation as they could not before religious symbolism became part of the military uniform accommodations. Notably, without the challenge of religious minorities in the court of law, this “first Amendment right of free exercise of religion,” would have been ignored.

It is worth noting that not all Muslim-majority countries allow service members to wear religious symbols that visibly reflect their faith. One might assume that, because most military personnel in these countries are Muslim, such symbols would already be incorporated into official uniforms. In many cases, however, religious symbols were not permitted as part of military dress.



#2-A Muslim woman wearing her fatigue outfit with her military-approved hijab.

Source: <https://sociallogia.wordpress.com/2020/05/26/the-first-woman-to-wear-hijab-in-nigeria-security-agency-is-an-igbo-muslim-lady-from-enugu/>

The Sikh cases further illustrate this symbolic tension: the turban, beard, and unshorn hair are not read simply as personal choices, but as visible signs that institutions must decide whether to treat as compatible with military identity.

Wearing the Sikh Turban, dastar, or pug

Sikhs have a longstanding military tradition, particularly in South Asia, and Sikh service also has a substantial history in the United States. As one account notes, observant Sikhs have served in the U.S. military from at least World War I through the Vietnam War.²⁴ In India and several other countries, the turban is commonly incorporated into Sikh military dress, with the turban worn in place of standard military headgear. In Punjabi, *pug* refers to a man's turban, though the term is also used more generally for the Sikh turban. The same tradition is followed in the US military and armed forces.

Although the turban is most associated with Sikh men, Sikh women have traditionally covered their heads with garments such as the *chunni* or *dupatta*. In the Indian and Pakistani armed forces, Sikh personnel have long been permitted to observe these practices. In the U.S. context, Sikh women in uniform must still comply with general grooming regulations: uncut hair must be kept neat and secured at the back of the neck, rather than on the crown of the head, so that it does not interfere with military headgear.

U.S. military policy also permits Sikh service members to maintain beards as part of religious accommodation.²⁵ For Sikh men in uniform, these accommodations remain subject to grooming standards governing hair, beards, and mustaches. Beards may be kept only to an approved length, and mustaches may extend past the corners of the mouth so long as they are trimmed and do not cover the upper lip. In 2010, the U.S. military formally allowed Sikhs to retain both the turban and unshorn hair while serving in uniform.

Religious Symbolism in Sikhism

According to the Sikh *Rehat Maryada* (code of conduct), the turban is obligatory for men, while the code does not explicitly require women to wear one. Both Sikh men and women, however, are expected to maintain uncut body and head hair. Although the *dastar* or *pug* is not mandatory for women, Sikh women have increasingly adopted the turban as a visible expression of religious identity, including in diaspora communities. This development is reflected in policing as well as military contexts. In New York City, for example, male officers were first permitted to wear turbans in 2016, and in 2018 Gursoch Kaur became the first turban-wearing Sikh woman to graduate from the New York Police Department academy.

For many observant Sikh women, wearing the turban has become a clear visual affirmation of religious identity and equality within the tradition. In this sense, the accommodation of Sikh women's turbans in uniformed institutions reflects not only policy change, but also broader shifts in the visibility and recognition of Sikh women in public service.



#3-Deputy Sheriff Harinder Kaur Khalsa. In 2013, the Alameda County Sheriff's Office complied with state workplace-discrimination law by allowing Deputy Sheriff Khalsa to wear her turban with her uniform and to serve in all uniformed assignments. Permission courtesy of the Sikh Coalition.

Source: <https://www.thecut.com/2016/09/sikh-americans-embrace-their-individual-turban-style.html>

Photo credit: Amit and Naroop, via the Sikh Coalition.



#4-Major Simratpal "Simmer" Singh – Photo permission: Graham West permission by graham@sikhcoalition.org Photo Credit: Amit and Naroop via the Sikh Coalition permission.



#5-Lieutenant Colonel Dr. Kamaljeet Singh Kalsi. Photo permission: Graham West. graham@sikhcoalition.org Photo credit: Amit and Naroop, via the Sikh Coalition.



#6-Sikh officers of the New York Police Department.

Source:

https://www.reddit.com/r/pics/comments/5kwojj/sikh_nypd_officers_now_have_the_uniform_option_of/

The Jewish case highlights the same dynamic in a different form: the kippah is modest in size, yet symbolically powerful because it makes religious identity visible within a space structured by rules of sameness.

Jewish Yarmulke/Kippah/Kippot

Wearing a *kippah* can reflect religious obligation, cultural identity, modesty, or communal affiliation. Although often associated with Jewish men, its meaning varies across denominations and levels of observance.

Recent scholarship on the *kippah* examines its social, religious, anthropological, and political significance as a visible marker of Jewish identity in public life. Rabbinic views differ on whether wearing a *kippah* is a strict obligation, especially outside the synagogue, and practice varies across Jewish traditions. Even so, for many observant Jews—particularly within Orthodox communities—the *kippah* functions as an important sign of humility, devotion, and belonging. Its significance therefore lies not only in religious practice, but also in how Jewish identity is made publicly legible.

As one 2020 commentary observed, religious expression in the military has shifted from reluctant accommodation toward a more affirmative understanding of liberty. From that perspective, the repudiation of *Goldman v. Weinberger*, 475 U.S. 503 (1986), marked a significant turning point in how the armed forces interpret visible religious practice in uniform.²⁶

*Under current U.S. military regulations, a religious item may be worn if it is modest in size, contains no visible script, and does not interfere with military equipment or headgear.*²⁷ Within this framework, “modest” *kippot* are defined as those whose colors match or are compatible with the uniform and whose size does not disrupt the required appearance standard. This policy illustrates how accommodation is granted not by abandoning uniformity, but by redefining it to allow limited controlled forms of visible religious difference.



#7-Jewish fatigue-matching kippah worn by an officer. Source: <https://alephmilitary.org/a-kippah-in-uniform-religious-accommodation-in-the-military/> Permission: Rabbi Eli Estrin, Military Personnel Liaison and Executive Assistant to the Endorser, Editor of *The Jewish-American Warrior*, Military Department, The Aleph Institute, 9540 Collins Avenue, Surfside, FL 33154.

The Hindu case expands the analysis by showing that not all accommodations concern clothing or hair; bodily markings can also become sites of negotiation over visibility, legitimacy, and institutional recognition.

Hindu Marking of Tilak Chandlo

The *Tilak Chandlo* is a religious marking worn on the forehead, chest, or arms in the Swaminarayan tradition, where it signifies devotion to God, particularly to Lord Swaminarayan.²⁸ As a branch of Hinduism

founded in northern India at the end of the eighteenth century, the Swaminarayan tradition places strong emphasis on visible devotional practice. In the context of military accommodation, this case is especially notable because it appears to be the only documented example the article was able to identify of an approved request to wear the **Tilak Chandlo in U.S. military uniform.**

In 2022, a Hindu airman in the U.S. Air Force was granted permission to wear marking of the *Tilak Chandlo* while in uniform. The symbol, drawn in red and white on the forehead, is a visible expression of religious identity and devotion. Senior Airman Darshan Shah waited nearly two years for approval and described the accommodation as the result of sustained effort and persistence.²⁹ The case illustrates both the possibility of accommodation and the lengthy administrative process that may be required before a service member can openly display a religious practice in uniform.

A useful comparison comes from India, where a recent report noted that “Tilak/Vibhuti and other religious symbols are not allowed on the [Indian armed forces] uniform.”³⁰ At the same time, Sikh personnel in the Indian armed forces continue to receive accommodation for visible religious articles such as the Sikh turban, beard, and mustache. This contrast suggests that accommodation is not applied evenly across religious traditions and that historical patterns of military service may shape which practices are recognized as legitimate within uniformed institutions.



#8-Senior Airman Darshan Shah, an aerospace medical technician, received a waiver to wear a religious symbol while in uniform after a nearly two-year approval process. Source: <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2022/03/24/hindu-airman-who-waited-nearly-2-years-gets-waiver-wear-religious-symbol-while-uniform.html>

The next sections show that accommodation is shaped not only by religion, but also by how institutions classify risk: facial hair and dreadlocks are judged through the additional lenses of safety, protective equipment, and operational readiness.

United States Armed Forces: General Rules on Beards and Mustaches

Current U.S. military policy permits beards in limited circumstances, including approved religious accommodations, but such permission remains subject to safety and operational requirements. One important restriction is that service members who receive a religious accommodation for a beard may not attend Army schools required for entry into chemical-warfare-related career fields, where protective equipment and safety standards take priority.³¹

Mustaches are also regulated, though less restrictively. Under current policy, they may extend past the corners of the mouth so long as they are trimmed and do not cover the upper lip. These rules illustrate that accommodation within military appearance standards is never absolute: it is always balanced against the institutional demands of safety, uniformity, and mission readiness.

Rastafari Background: Wearing Dreadlocks in the U.S. Armed Forces

Compared with some other religious groups discussed in this article, Rastafari service members appear less frequently in public reporting on military accommodation. Rastafari communities in the United States grew in part through Caribbean migration, especially from Jamaica, during the 1960s and 1970s. One of the most visible markers of Rastafari religious identity is dreadlocked hair, which carries spiritual, cultural, and historical significance. In military settings, accommodation for dreadlocks is permitted only insofar as the hairstyle does not interfere with the proper wear or functioning of protective clothing and equipment. As in other cases examined here, accommodation is therefore granted within the continuing framework of regulation, safety, and uniformity.

In 2017, *Army Times* reported on the military's acceptance of dreadlocks for both women and men in uniform. For Rastafari service members, this policy change is especially significant because it enables compliance with religious commitments while remaining within official appearance standards. Under the directive, service members may wear dreadlocks in uniform so long as the style remains neat and complies with grooming standards. As the regulation states, "For the first time, Army Regulation 670-1 allows women to wear their hair in long, twisted 'locks' if the strands are less than 1/8-inch wide, the scalp is in a uniform grid and, when gathered, the hair fits into the required bun size of 3-1/2 inches wide by 2 inches deep."³² This accommodation demonstrates once again that religious and cultural expression in military dress is permitted only when it can be reconciled with institutional standards of safety, discipline, and visual order.



#8-Dreadlocks worn by women in the United States military.

Source: <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2017/01/30/soldiers-cheer-army-s-decision-to-authorize-dreadlocks-in-uniform/>

The Native American cases bring these issues into especially sharp focus because they show how the military must address forms of spiritual and cultural expression that do not always fit neatly into conventional categories of religion, grooming, or uniform policy.

Indigenous Native Americans in the Armed Forces

In many Indigenous Native American traditions, long hair carries spiritual, cultural, and relational significance. It may be understood as an extension of the self, a sign of connection to ancestors and community, or a marker of mourning, identity, and ceremonial responsibility. Because these meanings are not always widely understood outside Indigenous communities, military grooming rules have often conflicted with Native American religious and cultural practice.

Alaska Natives and American Indians have served in every major U.S. conflict, from the Revolutionary War to the present, including the well-known example of the Navajo Code Talkers during the Second World War.³³ Public reporting has also noted that Native Americans serve in the U.S. military at disproportionately high rates, underscoring the long and complex relationship between Indigenous communities and military service.³⁴

Native Americans- also called American Indians- have remained steadfast in their defense of the United States as members of the Armed Forces for centuries. While Native Americans have a long and complicated history of serving in the U.S. military, it is also a proud one.³⁵

The following pages examine two recent cases involving Indigenous service members—one Oglala Sioux and one Mohawk (Kanien'kehá:ka)—who received accommodation to maintain long hair while serving in U.S. military uniform. In both cases, hair is not treated as a matter of style alone; it is tied to spiritual belief, cultural continuity, and personal identity. These examples therefore illustrate how Native American accommodation claims challenge military institutions to recognize forms of religious and cultural expression that do not always fit neatly within conventional categories of appearance policy.

These beliefs are especially clear in the first case, which concerns Moses Brave Heart,

who grew up on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota and is a member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe. As a member of the National Guard, Brave Heart sought accommodation to maintain long hair in accordance with his beliefs and cultural tradition. Explaining the significance of hair, he stated: “We view it [hair] as an extension of our spirit... The only time we would cut it off is if we lose someone close to us. It would be part of the grieving process to cut it off. And what we do with it is either to burn it or burial.”³⁶

Brave Heart's accommodation was approved, but it remains subject to Army grooming standards regarding length, neatness, and secure styling. His hair must be tied back and properly gathered, with no loose strands. He is also permitted to wear traditional Sioux head adornments, including an eagle feather, for Army portraits rather than for everyday duty wear. In Sioux tradition, feathers may mark significant life events; Brave Heart received his first eagle feather at his high school graduation. This case demonstrates that recognition of Native practice within military institutions often takes the form of limited accommodation rather than unrestricted acceptance.



#9-Spec. Moses Brave Heart of the South Dakota National Guard received a religious accommodation to maintain long hair in accordance with his Oglala Sioux heritage. Courtesy of the South Dakota National Guard.

Source: <https://taskandpurpose.com/news/soldier-long-hair-native-heritage/> (November 2, 2024).

The second case involves Senior Airman Connor Crawn, who received a religious accommodation to wear his long hair in a distinctive braid while serving in the U.S. Air Force. Crawn explained in a TikTok video that he believed he was the first Native American in the U.S.³⁷ military to secure the right to wear long hair in a braid as a visible expression of his Indigenous heritage and faith.³⁸ Crawn is Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk), a people

whose homelands span what is now New York and parts of Canada. After receiving approval in October 2022, he reported that numerous Native men in the Air Force, Army, and Marine Corps contacted him for mentorship. Like Brave Heart, Crawn must still comply with military grooming rules: his hair must be worn in a braid or ponytail that conforms to the standards otherwise applied to long hair in uniform.



#10-Senior Airman Connor Crawn received a religious accommodation to wear long hair in a braid in accordance with his Kanien'kehá:ka faith. U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Elora J. McCutcheon. Source: <https://taskandpurpose.com/news/indigenous-hair-exemption-air-force/> (November 9, 2023)

As described in this article's sources, Kanien'kehá:ka spiritual life reflects a combination of Indigenous traditions centered on the Creator, the land, and ancestral teachings alongside forms of Christianity, especially Catholicism.³⁹ In this context, St. Kateri Tekakwitha—often called the “Lily of the Mohawks”—serves as a particularly important symbol of the intertwining of Indigenous identity and Catholic devotion.⁴⁰

Counterarguments and Limitations

A balanced assessment of religious accommodation must also consider the main counterarguments raised by military institutions and their defenders. One recurring concern is unit cohesion: critics argue that visible deviations from standard appearance may weaken solidarity, blur hierarchy, or undermine the shared discipline that uniforms are meant to cultivate. A related concern involves neutrality and public image, especially in police and military organizations that rely on public trust and on the projection of institutional impartiality. From this perspective, accommodation may be seen as risking fragmentation or the perception that personal identity has been placed above organizational standards.

Safety and mission readiness also present serious practical concerns. Many of the accommodations discussed in this article are approved only under conditions that ensure compatibility with helmets, gas masks, protective equipment, and grooming regulations. These limits are not trivial. They show that accommodation in military settings cannot be understood simply as symbolic recognition; it must also be negotiated in relation to operational effectiveness. In this sense, concerns about facial hair, long hair, head coverings, and bodily markers are often shaped as much by risk classification and equipment requirements as by ideology alone.

This article relies primarily on publicly available legal materials, policy documents, journalism, advocacy sources, and selected scholarship rather than on interviews with service members or internal institutional records. The case studies are therefore illustrative rather than exhaustive, and they do not capture the full range of accommodations that may exist across all branches or units. Nor do they fully reveal how accommodations are experienced in everyday military life after formal approval has been granted. These limitations do not undermine the analysis, but they do suggest the need for future research on implementation, informal resistance, and the long-term effects of accommodation on institutional culture.

CONCLUSION

Taken together, the cases examined in this article show that religious accommodation in U.S. military uniform policy is not a peripheral issue of dress alone. It is a central site where questions of identity, authority, belonging, and constitutional liberty are negotiated. Across the cases of Muslim, Sikh, Jewish, Hindu, Rastafari, and Native American service members, visible religious symbols and grooming practices become socially legible signs that are interpreted by commanders, institutions, peers, and the public. For this reason, the meaning of a hijab, turban, kippah, tilak, dreadlocks, or long hair does not reside solely in the item itself; it emerges through social interaction, institutional judgment, and broader political context.

This is precisely why Symbolic Interaction Theory is useful for understanding all of the case studies in this article. In each instance, the conflict is not simply over whether a service member may wear a particular religious article or hairstyle. Rather, the conflict concerns how institutions define professionalism, discipline, neutrality, cohesion, and legitimate service. Military uniforms function as symbols of collective identity and state authority, while religious symbols function as signs of devotion, cultural continuity, and personal conviction. Accommodation therefore reveals an ongoing process of negotiation in which visible religious difference is not eliminated but incorporated under regulated conditions that preserve the military's institutional order.

The constitutional and legal significance of these accommodations is substantial. The First Amendment's Free Exercise Clause protects the right to practice religion without unjustified government interference, while the Religious Freedom Restoration Act requires the federal government to avoid substantially burdening religious exercise unless it can show a compelling interest pursued through the least restrictive means. These principles do not eliminate military regulation, but they do require that religious liberty be taken seriously even within highly disciplined institutions. In this sense, the accommodations discussed in this article represent not a departure from constitutional order, but an effort to bring military practice into closer alignment with the legal commitments of the United States.

At the same time, the case studies also show that accommodation is neither automatic nor uncontested. Approval is typically granted case by case, often after lengthy review, and remains limited by concerns such as mission readiness, safety, protective equipment, and unit discipline. Some service members also continue to face skepticism, stigma, or ridicule from colleagues or veterans' communities. Yet these tensions do not demonstrate the failure of accommodation; rather, they reveal the continuing struggle over how religious diversity is recognized within state institutions built on standardization and visual uniformity. What emerges from all of the cases is a broader conclusion: service members should not be forced to choose between faithful religious practice and service to the nation. The expansion of accommodation in U.S. military uniforms therefore represents both a constitutional development and a symbolic redefinition of who can fully belong within the armed forces.

A comprehensive conclusion from these cases is that religious accommodation works best when institutions treat visible religious difference not as a threat to military order, but as a reality that can be managed through principled, consistent policy. Future policy should therefore emphasize transparent review procedures, consistent standards across branches, and continued attention to the balance between religious liberty, safety, and operational effectiveness. In this respect, the U.S. military's evolving approach to religious symbolism in uniform offers an important example of how constitutional democracy can respond to pluralism: not by erasing difference, but by regulating it in ways that preserve both institutional integrity and the free exercise of religion. More broadly, these cases illuminate how modern democratic institutions respond to religious pluralism in contexts where equality, public authority, and visible difference must coexist.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Booley, Ashraf. "South African National Defence Force (SANDF) Drops Charges Against Hijab-Wearing Officer: Case in Point South Africa." *Jurnal Syariah* 29, no. 2 (2021). <https://ejournal.um.edu.my/index.php/JS/article/view/32081/13486>.
2. Craik, Jennifer. "The Cultural Politics of the Uniform." *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 7, no. 2 (2003). <https://doi.org/10.2752/136270403778052140>.

3. Dansby, M.R. Stewart, James B. Webb, Schuyler C. *Managing Diversity in the Military: Research Perspectives from the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2001
4. Graybill, Beth, and Linda B. Arthur. "The Social Control of Women's Bodies in Two Mennonite Communities." In *Religion, Dress and the Body*, edited by Linda B. Arthur. Oxford: Berg, 1999.
5. Jain, Srishti. "The Influence of Military Uniforms on Fashion." *Fashion & Law Journal*, 2023. <https://fashionlawjournal.com/the-influence-of-military-uniforms-on-fashion/>.
6. Kahf, Mohja. "From Her Royal Body the Robe Was Removed: The Blessings of the Veil and the Trauma of Forced Unveiling in the Middle East." In *The Veil: Women Writers on Its History, Lore, and Politics*, edited by Jennifer Heath. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.
7. Kaiser, Susan B. *The Social Psychology of Clothing: Symbolic Appearances in Context*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1990.
8. Keddie, Nikki R., and Beth Baron, eds. *Women in Middle Eastern History: Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gender*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991.
9. Kong, Xurong. "Military Uniform as a Fashion during the Cultural Revolution." *Intercultural Communication Studies* 17, no. 2 (2008).
10. Leone, Massimo. "Cultures of Invisibility: The Semiotics of the Veil in Early Christianity." *Gramma: Journal of Theory and Criticism* 20 (2012).
11. Llewellyn-Jones, Lloyd. *Aphrodite's Tortoise: The Veiled Women of Ancient Greece*. Swansea, Wales: The Classical Press of Wales, 2003.
12. Myers, Meghann. "New Army Policy OKs Soldiers to Wear Hijabs, Turbans and Religious Beards." *Army Times*, (2017). <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2017/01/05/new-army-policy-oks-soldiers-to-wear-hijabs-turbans-and-religious-beards/>.
13. Peoples, Sharon. "Embodying the Military: Uniforms." *Critical Studies in Men's Fashion* 1, no. 1 (2014). https://www.academia.edu/20973751/Embodying_the_military_Uniforms.
14. Pfanner Toni, "Military Uniforms and the law of war." *International Review of Red Cross*. Cambridge: University Press. Vol.86. No.853. (2004), 94.
15. Pew Research Center. America's Changing religious landscape. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/> 2015
16. Roach-Higgins, Mary Ellen, Joanne B. Eicher, and Kim P. Johnson, eds. *Dress and Identity*. New York: Fairchild Books, 1995.
17. Rohall D. E., Edner, M.G., Dansby, Mathews, M.D., and *Inclusion in the American Military: A Force of Diversity*. Maryland: Lexington publisher. 2017.
18. Shirazi, Faegheh. *Islamicate Textiles: Fashion, Fabric, and Ritual*. London: Bloomsbury, 2023.
19. Shirazi, Faegheh. *The Veil Unveiled: Hijab in Modern Culture*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001.
20. Storm, Penny. *Functions of Dress: Tool of Culture and the Individual*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1987.
21. Zeidman, Arthur C. "New Policy of Religious Accommodation in the Military." 2022. <https://alephmilitary.org/new-policy-of-religious-accommodation-in-the-military/>.
22. Ziabari, Kourosh. "The Islamic Republic Spends Untold Millions Enforcing Women's Use of the Head Covering despite Grueling Economic Sanctions." *New Lines Magazine*, 2023. <https://newlinesmag.com/spotlight/irans-hijab-industrial-complex/>.

¹ "World Oldest Cloth," *World Archeology*. 2010
<https://www.world-archaeology.com/world/europe/georgia/worlds-oldest-cloth/>

² The quote, "The body provides a basic theme for all symbolism," famously originated from anthropologist and sociologist Mary Douglas in her foundational 1966 work, *Purity and Danger*.

³ Jennifer Craik, "The Cultural Politics of the Uniform," *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 7, no. 2 (2003): 128.

⁴ Jennifer Craik, "The Cultural Politics of the Uniform,"

⁵ Srishti Jain, "The Influence of Military Uniforms on Fashion," *Fashion & Law Journal*, 2023, accessed April 10, 2025, <https://fashionlawjournal.com/the-influence-of-military-uniforms-on-fashion/>

⁶ Linda B. Arthur (edited) *Religion, Dress, and the Body*. Oxford: Berg Publisher (1999), 10

⁷ Fashion Institute of Technology, "1970–1979," *Fashion History Timeline*, accessed April 10, 2025, <https://fashionhistory.fitnyc.edu/1970-1979/>

⁸ Michael Andrews Bespoke, "A Brief History of the Bomber Jacket," <https://www.michaelandrews.com/the-history-of-the-bomber-jacket/?srsltid=AfmBOopF2d23HrNGX923U2Ks0CxLi1Wz4Lya97hDTBSj3ijSW1TaM61q>.

⁹ Toni Pfanner, "Military Uniforms and the law of war." *International Review of Red Cross*. Cambridge: University Press. Vol.86. No.853. (2004), 94.

¹⁰ Xurong Kong, "Military Uniform as a Fashion during the Cultural Revolution," *Intercultural Communication Studies* 17, no. 2 (2008): 287.

¹¹ Xurong Kong, "Military Uniform as a Fashion during the Cultural Revolution," *Intercultural Communication Studies* 17, no. 2 (2008): 287.

¹² Sharon peoples, "Embodying the military: Uniforms." *Critical Studies in Men's Fashion*, Vol. 1, No.1. (2014) https://www.academia.edu/20973751/Embodying_the_military_Uniforms

¹³ Cameron Arcand, "DEI efforts in US Armed Forces ineffective, run 'opposite of the military ethos' *New York Post*. July 1, (2024) https://nypost.com/2024/07/01/us-news/dei-efforts-in-us-armed-forces-ineffective-run-opposite-of-the-military-ethos-study/?utm_

¹⁴ The Beckett Foundation for Religious Liberty, is a prominent, non-profit public-interest law firm based in Washington, D.C. Beckett law firm champions the free expression of all faiths [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beckett_\(law_firm\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beckett_(law_firm))

¹⁵ Massimo Leone, "Cultures of Invisibility: The Semiotics of the Veil in Early Christianity," *Gramma: Journal of Theory and Criticism* 20 (2012): 274.

¹⁶ Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones, *Aphrodite's Tortoise: The Veiled Women of Ancient Greece* (Swansea, Wales: The Classical Press of Wales, 2003), 56.

¹⁷ Mohja Kahf, "From Her Royal Body the Robe Was Removed: The Blessings of the Veil and the Trauma of Forced Unveiling in the Middle East," in *The Veil: Women Writers on Its History, Lore, and Politics*, ed. Jennifer Heath (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); Nikki R. Keddie and Beth Baron, eds., *Women in Middle Eastern History: Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gender* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

¹⁸ Faegheh Shirazi. *The Veil Unveiled: Hijab in Modern Culture*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001.

¹⁹ Ogletree Deakins, "Third Circuit Rejects Religious Discrimination Claim Where No Accommodation Could Be Made Without Undue Burden," 2009, <https://ogletree.com/insights-resources/blog-posts/third-circuit-rejects-religious-discrimination-claim-where-no-accommodation-could-be-made-without-undue-burden/>

²⁰ "US police officers can now wear hijab on duty." 2021, <https://www.islamchannel.tv/blog-posts/female-police-officers-can-wear-hijab-on-duty>

²¹ Meghann Myers, "New Army Policy OKs Soldiers to Wear Hijabs, Turbans and Religious Beards," *Army Times*, 2017, <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2017/01/05/new-army-policy-oks-soldiers-to-wear-hijabs-turbans-and-religious-beards/>

²² Myers, "New Army Policy OKs Soldiers."

²³ Myers, "New Army Policy OKs Soldiers."

²⁴ Myers, "New Army Policy OKs Soldiers."

²⁵ Myers, "New Army Policy OKs Soldiers."

²⁶ "Goldman verses Weinberger, 475US.503 (1986)." *Justia US Supreme Court*. Vol. 475. 1986, <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/475/503/>

²⁷ *Justia US Supreme Court*. Vol. 475. 1986,

²⁸ The Swaminarayan religion is a prominent, monotheistic sect of Vaishnava Hinduism founded by Bhagwan Swaminarayan (1781–1830) in late 18th-century Northern India. It emphasizes strict moral discipline, pure devotion (*bhakti*), social welfare, and non-violence, with adherents across millions of followers globally.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swaminarayan_Sampradaya

²⁹ Thomas Novelty. “Hindu Airman Who Waited Nearly 2 Years Gets Waiver to Wear Religious Symbol While in Uniform.”

Military Daily News. March 24, 2022,

<https://www.military.com/daily-news/2022/03/24/hindu-airman-who-waited-nearly-2-years-gets-waiver-wear-religious-symbol-while-uniform.html>

³⁰ “Indian Army Dress Code.” Tilak and Vibhuti marking (sacred ash, "glory," or "manifestation of divine power", or other religious symbols are prohibited while in uniform.

<https://currentaffairs.chinmayaias.com/indian-army-dress-code/>

³¹ “Exception to Policy for Facial Hair Grooming Standards.”

Secretary of the Army Washington *Department of Army*

July 7, 2025.

³² Myers, “New Army Policy OKs Soldiers.”

³³ National Indian Council on Aging (NICOA), Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and National Congress of American Indians (NCAI)

<https://www.nicoa.org/>

<https://www.ncai.org/>

³⁴ Danielle DeSimone, “A History of Military Service: Native Americans in the U.S. Military Yesterday and Today” 2021,

<https://www.uso.org/stories/2914-a-history-of-military-service-native-americans-in-the-u-s-military-yesterday-and-today>

³⁵ DeSimone, “A History of Military Service: Native Americans in the U.S. Military Yesterday and Today”

³⁶ Matt White, Native American soldier gets OK to wear long hair, father to honor heritage.” *Task & Purpose: Military Branches*, *National Guard*. 2024, <https://taskandpurpose.com/news/soldier-long-hair-native-heritage/>

³⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/MalmstromAirForceBase/posts/p-r-o-g-r-e-s-s-one-year-after-receiving-a-religious-accommodation-that-authorize/658119489835334/>

³⁸ **THOMAS NOVELLY, “INDIGENOUS AIRMAN CELEBRATES RELIGIOUS APPROVAL TO HAVE LONG HAIR IN UNIFORM.”**

<https://www.military.com/daily-news/2022/11/15/indigenous-airman-celebrates-religious-approval-have-long-hair-uniform.html>

³⁹ St. Kateri Tekakwitha, known as the "Lily of the Mohawks," was a 17th-century Algonquin-Mohawk woman. She is the first Native American canonized by the Catholic Church and remains a profound symbol of the integration of Indigenous identity and Catholic devotion.

⁴⁰ “St. Kateri Tekakwitha: Lily of the Mohawks,” July 9, 2020

<https://www.nationalshrine.org/blog/st-kateri-tekakwitha-the-lily-of-the-mohawks/>