HUMA 730: Seminar in the Humanities: Sacrifice
Mondays and Wednesdays 3:40-5:00
Huddleston Hall G10

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Office hours: Wednesday 1:30-3:30
and by appointment

The term "sacrifice" often occurs in discourse about religion, war, sports, politics and other important institutions. But what does this term actually mean? When we speak of "sacrifice" do we refer to the killing of animals or humans as offerings to the gods? Or are we speaking about a more philosophical issue of giving up certain comforts in the service of a higher good? Moreover, why are there so many stories about literal and figurative "sacrifice," and why has this act been so important for understanding culture and human behavior? In this course we will examine the portrayal of "sacrifice" in plays, movies, short stories, and religious texts along with theories of sacrifice from the perspectives of anthropology, sociology, theology, history, ritual criticism, literary criticism, and gender analysis. As a class we will attempt to define "sacrifice" and what it means.

Requirements
Class Participation: 20%. This class will not work if you do not come prepared by having read the material, having thought about it, and being ready to discuss it at length.

Midterm Writing Assignment: 30%.

Final Paper (10-15 pages): 50% on either one of the works from the semester, or an overarching theme from the semester, or a comparison of works. This will be due in multiple stages: first a thesis claim and outline, second a rough draft to be discussed in class and a final draft.

Readings
Euripides, “Iphigenia at Aulis” and “Iphigenia at Taurus”
Film “Iphigenia”
The Bible
The Quran
Jeffrey Carter ed., Understanding Religious Sacrifice: A Reader
Carol Delaney, “Abraham and the Seeds of Patriarchy”
Søren Kirkegaard, Fear and Trembling
Nancy Jay, ‘Throughout Your Generations Forever’: Sacrifice, Religion and Paternity
Shirley Jackson, “The Lottery”
Zev Garber and Bruce Zuckerman, “Why Do We Call the Holocaust ‘The Holocaust?’: An Inquiry into the Psychology of Labels”
Ivan Strenski, Contesting Sacrifice: Religion, Nationalism and Social Thought in France
Moshe Halbertal, On Sacrifice
René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*
Franklin D. Roosevelt, “A Call for Sacrifice”
Council of Trent, *Doctrine on the Sacrifice of the Mass*, *Canons on the Sacrifice of the Mass*
J. Z. Smith, “The Bare Facts of Ritual;” “The Domestication of Sacrifice”
Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*
Kalasha goat sacrifice
Supreme Court Ruling on Santeria Animal Sacrifices
Wesley J. Bergen, *Reading Ritual: Leviticus in Postmodern Culture*

**Tentative Course Schedule:**
The course is tentatively scheduled to cover four main topics: Stories of Human Sacrifice, Sacrifice as Ritual, Sacrifice and Gender, and Sacrifice as Ideology

**Sacrifice and Story**

**M. 1/27**  
Introduction to the Course; Shirley Jackson’s “The Lottery”

**W. 1/29**  
Rene Girard, selection from *Violence and the Sacred*

**M. 2/3**  
Euripides, “Iphigenia at Aulis”

**W. 2/5**  
The Story of Jephthah’s Daughter (Judges 11-12)

**M. 2/10**  
Euripodes “Iphigenia at Taurus”

**W. 2/12**  
NO CLASS. INSTRUCTOR OUT OF TOWN

**M. 2/17**  
Nancy Jay, “Sacrifice as Remedy for Having Been Born of a Woman”

**W. 2/19**  
The Binding of Isaac (Genesis 22) in the Bible, in Islam and Christianity

**M. 2/24**  
Søren Kirkegaard, selection from *Fear and Trembling*

**W. 2/26**  
Carol Delaney, “Abraham and the Seeds of Patriarchy”

**M. 3/3**  
The Gospel of Mark

*Midterm Paper Due*

**W. 3/5**  
The Gospel of Mark, Continued

**M. 3/10**  
NO CLASS SPRING BREAK

**W. 3/12**  
NO CLASS SPRING BREAK
SACRIFICE AS RITUAL

M. 3/17  Catherine Bell, Selection from *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*; Jonathan Z. Smith, “The Bare Facts of Ritual;” [Kalasha goat sacrifice](#) and [Supreme Court Ruling on Santeria Animal Sacrifices](#)

W. 3/19  Biblical Rituals of Sacrifice: Exodus 22:29-31, 23:14-19; Leviticus 1-7, 12-17; Numbers 19; Selection from James W. Watts, *Leviticus: From Sacrifice to Scripture*


W. 3/26  Aztec Sacrifice, reading TBD


SACRIFICE AS IDEOLOGY

W. 4/2  Elie Wiesel, *Night*

M. 4/7  *Night*

*Thesis Claim and Outline Due*

W. 4/9  Zev Garber and Bruce Zuckerman, “Why Do We Call the Holocaust ‘The Holocaust’?: An Inquiry Into the Psychology of Labels”

M. 4/14  Ivan Strenski, Selection from *Contesting Sacrifice*

W. 4/16  Strenski, continued

M. 4/21  Moshe Halbertal, Selection from *On Sacrifice*

W. 4/23  Halbertal, Continued

M. 4/28  Selection from Bergen, *Reading Ritual: Leviticus in Post-Modern Culture*

*Paper draft due*

W. 4/30  Discussion and presentation of papers
Review and Revelry!

*FINAL PAPER DUE BY THE END OF EXAM PERIOD*