

Martyrdom & Meaning
Georgetown University
Summer 2020

Instructor: Rosanne Morici

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Office Hours: Fridays 11:00-1:00 and by appointment

**Students are encouraged to contact the instructor throughout the course of the session if they experience difficulties of any kind.*

"It's really important to get somehow into the mind and make it move somewhere it has never moved before. That happens partly because the material is mysterious or unknown but mostly because of the way you push the material around from word to word in a sentence.... Given whatever material we're going to talk about, and we all know what it is, how can we move within it in a way we've never moved before, mentally? That seems like the most exciting thing to do with your head."

- Anne Carson

Description

The term “martyrdom” appears widely in contemporary religious and political cultures. While it is such a recognizable facet of Western discourse, it is also a concept whose precise definition and appropriate deployment feel impossible to pin down. Martyrdom is never simply a single act, but a cultural system forming and being formed by an audience or community of interpreters. This course examines the development and use of martyrdom as both a theological and political discourse for generating meaning out of suffering.

Requirements

Regular Zoom Attendance & Participation 10%: This class is interactive and collaborative. We need each other to show up on Zoom and Canvas Discussion. If you are experiencing difficulty attending our class sessions because of emergency, illness, technological issues, or whatever else, please let me know ASAP. Students are expected to complete assigned readings for the beginning of the class period listed on the course syllabus and have the assigned readings accessible to reference during class discussion.

5 Weekly Canvas Discussion Posts (250-500 words each) 40%

1 Final Essay (6-8 pages) 50%

Books

Bible with Apocrypha (RSV or NRSV) (available online)

+ Margaret Cormack, *Sacrificing the Self: Perspectives on Martyrdom and Religion* (available online through Georgetown University Library)

* Canvas Readings

Schedule of Readings

Week 1: Martyrdom & Audience

Monday 6/1: +Introduction of *Sacrificing the Self*

Tuesday 6/2: *Elizabeth Castelli, "Religion as a Chain of Memory: Cassie Bernall of Columbine High and the American Legacy of Early Christian Martyrdom" and "Epilogue"

Wednesday 6/3: *Death of Socrates, various sources

Thursday 6/4: Canvas Discussion

Week 2: Sacrifice & Struggle

Monday 6/8: Genesis 22 (Bible)

*David G. Roskies, ed., "The Ten Harugei Malkhut," *The Literature of Destruction: Jewish Responses to Catastrophe*, 60-69

Tuesday 6/9: Romans 3:21-25; Philippians 2:5-1; Hebrews 9:24-28 (Bible)

*Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Romans*

*Martin Luther King, Jr., *Letter from Birmingham Jail* and other selections

Wednesday 6/10: *David Cook, "Sectarian Islam: Sunni, Shi'ite and Sufi Martyrdom," *Martyrdom in Islam*, 45-73

*Rudolph Peters, *Jihad in Classical and Modern Islam, A Reader* (Excerpts 1-45)

+S. Dennis Hudson, "Self-Sacrifice as Truth in India"

Thursday 6/11: Canvas Discussion

Week 3: Resistance & Narrative

Monday 6/15: Daniel 1-6; I Maccabees 1-6, 2 Maccabees 6 and 7 (Bible)

+Marc Brettler, "Is There Martyrdom in the Hebrew Bible?"

Tuesday 6/16: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31; 2 Corinthians 4:7-18; 5:1-8; 6:3-10; 12:1-10 (Bible)

The Gospel of Mark; The Gospel of Matthew 5, 10:16-33 (Bible)

*Vincent Wimbush, "'...Not of This World...': Early Christianities as Rhetorical and Social Formation," in *Reimagining Christian Origins: A Colloquium Honoring Burton L. Mack*, ed. Elizabeth Castelli and Hal Taussig (1996), 23-36

*John Dear, *Peace Behind Bar: A Peacemaking Priest's Journal from Jail*, 141-151

Wednesday 6/17: +Daniel Brown, "Martyrdom in Sunni Revivalist Thought"

*Quintan Wiktorowicz and John Kaltner, "Killing in the Name of Islam: Al-Qaeda's Justification for September 11," *Middle East Policy* X.2 (Summer 2003): 76-92

*James Benn, "Fire and the Sword: Some Connections between Self-Immolation and Religious Persecution in the History of Chinese Buddhism," *The Buddhist Dead: Practices, Discourses, Representations*, 234-265

Thursday 6/18: Canvas Discussion

Week 4: Agency & Intention

Monday 6/22: *Excerpts from Thucydides, Herodotus, and Tacitus

+Carlin Barton: "Honor and Sacredness in the Roman and Christian Worlds"

Tuesday 6/23: *The Martyrdom of Polycarp

*Tertullian, *To the Martyrs*

+Carole Straw, "A Very Special Death?: Christian Martyrdom in Its Classical Context"

Wednesday 6/24: +Keith Lewinstein, "The Revaluation of Martyrdom in Early Islam"

+Lawrence Fine, "Contemplative Death in Jewish Mystical Tradition"

*David Roskies, ed., "Ghetto Preachers," *The Literature of Destruction: Jewish Responses to Catastrophe*, 503-509

Thursday 6/25: Canvas Discussion

Week 5: Gender & Transgression

Monday 6/29: *Sophocles, *Antigone*

Tuesday 6/30: *The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas

Judith Perkins, "Death as a Happy Ending" and "Suffering and Power"

*Brent D. Shaw, "Body/Power/Identity: Passions of the Martyrs," *J ECS* 4 (1996): 296-312

Wednesday 7/1: *Acts of Paul and Thekla (NTA 239-246)

*Martyrs of Lyons, Eusebius, *Eccles. Hist.* 5:1ff

+Lindsey Harlan, "Truth and Sacrifice: Sati Immolations in India"

Thursday 7/2: Canvas Discussion

***Final essay due Friday 7/3 by 11:59pm via email**