



Empire of Sacrifice: The Religious Origins of American Violence

Jon Pahl

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It is widely recognized that American culture is both exceptionally religious and exceptionally violent. Americans participate in religious communities in high numbers, yet American citizens also own guns at rates far beyond those of citizens in other industrialized nations. Since 9/11, United States scholars have understandably discussed religious violence in terms of terrorist acts, a focus that follows United States policy. Yet, according to Jon Pahl, to identify religious violence only with terrorism fails to address the long history of American violence rooted in religion throughout the country's history. In essence, Americans have found ways to consider blessed some very brutal attitudes and behaviors both domestically and globally.

In **Empire of Sacrifice**, Pahl explains how both of these distinctive features of American culture work together by exploring how constructions along the lines of age, race, and gender have operated to centralize cultural power across American civil or cultural religions in ways that don't always appear to be "religious" at all. Pahl traces the development of these forms of systemic violence throughout American history, using evidence from popular culture, including movies such as *Rebel without a Cause* and *Reefer Madness* and works of literature such as *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* and *The Handmaid's Tale*, to illuminate historical events. Throughout, Pahl focuses an intense light on the complex and durable interactions between religion and violence in American history, from Puritan Boston to George W. Bush's Baghdad.

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