

## The Bartman Ball and Sacrifice

### Ambiguity in an American Ritual

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#### Abstract

Although the power of rituals to provide societal meaning and structure has been on the decline for sometime in the U.S., on February 26, 2004 at a popular Chicago restaurant, an infamous baseball was ceremoniously destroyed in the fashion of a classic sacrifice ritual. Lacking the kind of surrounding society that traditionally produces such rituals, this event seems anomalous. Yet, I will argue, with the aid of certain ritual sacrifice theories, that this event performed a classic sacrificial function – that of reestablishing the proper relationship between the Cubs' fans and its players – and thus is continuous with certain sacrifice rituals of pre-modern societies. At the same time, an underlying intention of those staging the ritual, to receive publicity for their restaurant, served to circumscribe the power of the ritual thus impressing a “modern” stamp on it thereby distinguishing this sacrifice from its predecessors.

#### Introduction

[1] A quick glance at the literature in ritual studies over the last century provides one with the undeniable impression of an overwhelming focus on non-Western, traditional cultures. Societies operating under a fully integrated cosmology that binds the community to a deity and to one another have tended to generate vivid rituals that help to maintain social cohesion, hence the focus. Therefore, the neglect of ritual analysis of post-industrialized societies can be attributed, in part, to a lack of conspicuous rituals such as initiation rites and sacrifices. Victor Turner attributes this scarcity to a unique feature of the industrialized society that is fractured, individualist, and “torn from (an) original connection in ritual” (1985: 237). According to Turner, meaningful rituals either rarely occur in industrial or post-industrial nations because societies within them are unable to generate them or, if surfacing at times, are comparatively ineffective.

[2] On February 26, 2004, a baseball was destroyed at a Chicago restaurant in the fashion of a ritual sacrifice. The destruction of the ball, dubbed the Bartman ball for the unfortunate Chicago Cubs' fan who reached for it during a playoff game, was believed by many Cubs' fans to lift a curse or at least temporarily placate the baseball gods controlling the curse that has kept their team from winning the title for 95 years. If we grant Turner his contention, this event, at best, may have enough ritual character to draw on some superficial qualities of sacrifice rituals of old for a limited effect. At worst, this event exploits a conception of the kind of sacrifice used as an indispensable tribal ritual and hence a sham. In this paper, I will utilize Turner's ritual interpretation to analyze the destruction of the Bartman ball, giving special attention to the ambiguity of an event such as this.

[3] Though a certain “tongue-in-cheek” element of the ball's destruction ceremony was noticeable, this event possesses many of the distinguishing features found in many sacrifice rituals preceding it. I will locate this event in the long lineage of sacrifice rituals by particularly highlighting its primary effect – that of restoring the proper hierarchical relationship between the

Cubs' fans and their team. Yet other implicit effects of the ball's destruction, namely publicity for the restaurant holding the event, served to undermine the power of the ritual to effect social cohesion. Along with Turner, I will contend that this ritual was created "by named individuals" and hence, arose neither organically nor collectively from a unified Cubs' fan base. Hence, it is also largely discontinuous with the kinds of sacrifice rituals with which it shares analogous trappings thus contributing to its ambiguity.

### **The Event**

[4] The streak of disappointing seasons for Cubs' fans everywhere nearly ended during the playoffs of the 2003 season. The team made it to the National League Championship Series and needed a mere five outs to advance to their first World Series in almost sixty years. The Cubs were up 3-0 on the Florida Marlins in game six when the Marlins' Luis Castillo fouled off a ball towards on the third base line. Cubs' left fielder Moises Alou ran towards the wall and reached into the stands to catch the ball for out number two, when a fan also reached, deflecting the ball from Alou's glove. Alou immediately accosted the fan, Steve Bartman, for interfering on the play. The continuation of Castillo's at-bat resulted in a wild pitch that put him on base. Eight Marlins' runs later, the Cubs left the field down 8-3. They lost the game, the subsequent game, and their shot at the Yankees in the World Series.

[5] Even though the Cubs made costly mistakes that let the Marlins back in the game, and other fans besides Bartman reached for the ball, most of the blame was placed squarely on Bartman by the fans and media. He became a scapegoat for the team's failures and an easy one at that. Of course, Bartman did not commit a crime, but he certainly seemed to have violated some sort fan code. How could Bartman, an avowed Cubs' fan, meddle in a play that could cost his team a valuable out? Dusty Baker, the Cubs' manager later quipped, "(t)he only words I have is that maybe he was a Marlins' fan. If you are for your team, you have to give your players every chance to catch that ball" (*Chicago Sun-Times* online). Perhaps the violation is a sign of Bartman's break in solidarity with other Cubs' fans. Or more to the point, by questioning Bartman's real fanship, Baker seems to accuse him of disloyalty – an act akin to treason in political terms.

[6] In a statement, Bartman expressed apologetically that he got, "caught up in the moment." With his, "eyes glued on the approaching ball the whole time, (he) did not ever see Moises Alou, much less that he may have had a play" (*ESPN* online). Moreover, player after player for the Cubs immediately denied the role that Bartman played in the loss, wisely choosing to offer a collective *mea culpa*. But in spite of Bartman's honest pleadings and the players' forgiveness, many fans refused to let him off the hook. Unfortunately, a newspaper published his personal information leaving Bartman exposed to hate mail that included some death threats.

[7] Whether it be general disappointment over the entire situation or pointed vitriol towards Bartman, some kind of restitution was needed to soothe emotions. Of course, hurting or killing Bartman was out of the question for most, but Bartman's sincere apology did little to compensate for the action that contributed to the Cubs' loss. To make matters worse, Bartman's action was classified by some as evidence that the "Curse of the Billy Goat" is still haunting.<sup>1</sup> In addition to

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<sup>1</sup> The curse is believed to have been decreed by a fan that was turned away from the gates at Wrigley Field for game four of the 1945 World Series because he had a smelly goat with him. To retaliate, the fan cast a "goat curse" on the Cubs by saying, "Cubs, they not gonna win anymore." The Cubs lost the series to the Detroit Tigers and have not made it to a World Series since. Instilled with this, perhaps, subconscious belief, many Cubs' fans use this as an

his battles with fans in Chicago, Bartman now became a pawn in a cosmic battle for the Cubs' ultimate success.

[8] Grant DePorter, a managing partner of the Harry Caray's Restaurant chain in Chicago, offered a solution. Through the restaurant, he purchased the Bartman ball at an auction from the fan that eventually ended up with it in the stands. His group paid a whopping 113,824.00 dollars for the ball with the expressed intention of using it to somehow heal some of the wounds. Perhaps the annihilation of the object that symbolized the demise of the Cubs in the game could mitigate fan hostility towards Bartman, assuage some guilt that fans may have harbored about his maltreatment, and, at the same time, lift the Curse of the Billy Goat.

[9] The actual destruction was preceded by a highly ritualized treatment of the ball. As if it were headed for the electric chair, the ball was propped up on a pillow, driven past Wrigley Field, treated to a last meal of steak and lobster, than finally "given a massage" before heading to the restaurant. There, before camera crews, live music bands, and hundreds of people, the ball was exploded inside a transparent, bulletproof tank and reduced to shreds. The remnants are now on display at all three Harry Caray restaurants.

### **Symbolic Value of Sacrifice Rituals in General**

[10] In the late nineteenth century, William Robertson Smith broke with his positivist contemporaries by focusing on the *symbolic* meaning of ritual as opposed to the illusory beliefs of its participants that claim that rituals have the power to alter the cosmos. Classifying rituals as cultural texts permitted Smith, and later Durkheim, to locate their meaning in the social contexts in which they were performed without having to worry about supposed metaphysical efficaciousness of certain ritual activity. The primary symbolic function of sacrifice rituals, Smith asserted, was to create and maintain two kinds of relationships – between groups of people and between the sacrificers and their deity(s).

[11] Robert J. Daly has most clearly articulated this dual function of sacrifice in his studies of early Christian history. For him, successful sacrifice rituals operate on both vertical and horizontal planes. The vertical movement, usually upward towards the divine, is hoped to garner divine good will by propitiation. Additionally, the motivations to perform sacrifices and the expressed rationalizations given for the event typically proceed along vertical pathways. The horizontal function, which affects the strictly socio-political and economic realm of society, is operative implicitly, but nonetheless crucial for the success of the sacrifice ritual. I will return to these dual functions later when discussing the efficacy of the ritual at hand.

[12] Terms such as "vertical" and "horizontal," if taken literally, may make sense to a theologian, but are problematic to the social scientist. However, an emphasis on the symbolic value of such terms renders them useful for significant purposes without radically altering the meaning of the ideas. Moreover, the association of the function of a sacrifice with its meaning makes the reduction of the ritual to purely its functional qualities difficult (Bell: 61-62). Analysis can still center on the functions of a sacrifice within a particular context and expand out tentatively towards theorization. Whether these theories tend to be universal (Girard), descriptive (Valeri), critical devices (Jay), or instruments for societal change (Turner), most posit the

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explanation for the losses that tends to exonerate the players and coaching staff from culpability and place it squarely on some vague force.

specific role of sacrifice in advancing some perceived good by strengthening weak spots in the social structure.

[13] An answer to the question of “where are the weak spots?” hinges on the type of worldview of the society and, by extension, on the kind of political society that reflects the worldview. For those societies that rely on an explicit demarcation between social classes, a problem occurs when lines between classes become blurry. In more democratic societies, the problem may be that one group is beginning to distinguish itself in ways that could be dangerous to the ideals of equality. Hence, the instillation of the idea of sacrifice for individuals or small groups can ensure peaceful co-existence if a threat to the social structure is perceived. Either way, sacrifice is utilized in both types of societies for conservative purposes.

[14] Entrenched hierarchical societies have used sacrificial rituals (whether offered from below or from the top ranks) to maintain the status quo – a strictly horizontal function. For example, Nancy Jay has pointed out that after Vatican II, many priests reasserted the necessity of sacrificial rituals at Mass in order to remind Catholics of the priest/laity distinction. The priests, as the sole conductors of the Eucharist, used the meaning and power of the sacrifice of Christ to restore a “proper” distance between themselves and the laity (19-23).

[15] Victor Turner characterizes this kind of sacrifice as “prophylactic.” A cleansing of a societal stain or a repair of the damage caused by a rent in the social fabric may demand sacrifice for these societies. While the damage may be repaired by it, the societal structure remains intact. Sacrifice in these cases acts as a protection from threat – a prophylactic – rather than as a tool for revolution. In sum, with “the sacrifice of prophylaxis, structure is certainly cleansed, but left intact” (1977a: 212).

[16] I argue that the destruction of the Bartman ball is an example of a prophylactic sacrifice. Even though the United States is not ideologically a hierarchical society, the social structure that supports professional sports in America is undoubtedly hierarchical. It could even be argued that survival of pro sports depends on the rigid distinction between fan and player. This distinction, however, is not protected by laws or by political or religious institutions – perhaps it is intuitively known by both fan and player. What keeps the structure in place? Does the lack of legal or institutional sanction for this hierarchy translate into confusion at times as to the status of fan and player? I will now turn to the unique social structure in professional baseball, for some answers to these questions.

### **The Social Hierarchy of Professional Baseball**

[17] Interestingly, Bartman’s statement to the fans and players began with an apology for, “the relationship between my actions and the outcome of the game.” What is the nature of this relationship, not only between Bartman’s specific actions and the game but also between fan and player generally? From the way in which professional athletes are treated not only in American society, but also globally, it is clear that a very high barrier already stands in between the fan and the player. This may seem unfair to some, but lacking this barrier, professional sports would be without the necessary thick insulation from the fan. With little or no barrier, the fan’s imagination would not need to be called on to project him or herself onto the role of pro athlete. For instance, the imagination that is fueled by hero mythology is not required when it comes to relating with someone of equal or slightly higher status. Yet one of the most compelling aspects of the professional athlete or team is the fantastical nature of their place in the psyches of many. As the gap has widened both financially and culturally between athlete and fan, certainly new

problems have emerged from both camps.<sup>2</sup> Yet that said, some kind of separation is required that keeps fans at a permanent arm's length away while at the same time connecting fan to player by way of profound mythical imagery.

[18] Players are human beings, though, and fans can obviously see athletes in person by attending games. But even at the games, the division between fan and player is demonstrated clearly. Fans are to watch and cheer; players are to play. Any infringement of play on the field by a fan is harshly punished as evidenced by the seeming moral license given to players to use *excessive* force to disable any fan that runs onto the field. The territory "between the lines" is the exclusive domain of the team and strictly off limits for fans.

[19] Nevertheless, baseball is unlike football, basketball, and hockey in that there exists a transitional area inside the park where both player and fan possess the legal (within the rules) authority to exercise their respective rights. Depending on the park, this area can be anywhere from one to three or four rows back along the first and third base lines. Players can reach over or jump into the stands to catch the ball. Similarly, fans can legally reach up, but not out into the field, to catch the ball. Fan interference can be called if a fan extends out beyond the stands and interferes with play. But within the confines of the stands, the fan has as much right to the ball as the player. In fact, in the competition for a ball, a fan can actually touch the glove of the fielder with impunity, so long as the fan is only reaching for the ball.

[20] Therefore, in this space alone exists an indeterminate region where fan and player are legally coequal. Thus the social structure that normally dictates the kind of relationship that a fan is to have with players is unclear here. It is in this space that Bartman and Alou competed for the foul ball – neither violating any rule in their efforts. Even more to the point, if Bartman touched Alou's glove (which it appeared that he did), fan and player merge to an even larger degree.

[21] This commingling had disastrous results.<sup>3</sup> An actual fan was partly to blame for the loss. Even though Bartman's actions within this ambiguous space in the ballpark were perhaps, "what 40,000 other people would have done," in the same situation, the fact is that player and fan were dangerously intertwined. The fan made the mistake in this space resulting in confusion as to the nature of the fan/player relationship. To return to their rightful positions as spectators of the game, not participants, some kind of ritual was needed.

### **Stages of the Sacrifice Ritual**

[22] Most scholars of sacrificial rituals track their progression in three stages. The first involves some kind of perceived (or real) separation of the group offering the sacrifice from either the divine or the other in society or both. Whether the source of the separation is an ailing deity or king (Frazer), sin (Robertson Smith), a state of impurity (Hubert and Mauss), a rift in the clan (Durkheim), or a general sense of lack or disorder (Valeri), dissociation is linked to an explainable problem. Though the historical eras and social contexts of the societies studied vary greatly, remarkable similarities between the motivations for sacrifice exist. In each case, the

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<sup>2</sup> Witness the relatively recent emergence of the rogue athlete (Randy Moss, Michael Irvin, etc.) who has met with legal trouble outside the playing field with an "I'm above the law attitude." Similarly, the rash of fans brazenly running on the field to hurt players or challenging them in public places also speaks to some growing frustration over the athlete far exceeding the mindset and lifestyle of the average fan.

<sup>3</sup> Simple merging of fan and player may not result in a riot in the stands if, for example, it was a Marlins' player that Bartman disrupted.

existent chasm between order and disorder, sacred and profane, or the society and the divine is cosmic in nature. Because of this, action demanded of these detecting the predicament must be out of the ordinary and at times extreme. The sacrifice event has historically played this role.

[23] The second stage is the sacrifice event itself. The offering of an efficacious object up to a deity or to an analogous authority communicates not only an acknowledgment of a problem but also a willingness to rectify it in a meaningful way. Meaning is generated in two main ways: by the proceedings of the ritual itself and by the symbolic character of the object of sacrifice. According to Hubert and Mauss, both are connected inextricably. A consecration of the object or victim must take place in the ritual in order to lift it from the profane world yet still have the offering serve as a bridge to the sacred (9-18). On the other side, the object must satisfactorily represent something that can not only adequately receive such a burden, but also give the necessary propitiation by its destruction. For example, a ram satisfies God instead of Abraham's son Isaac. For Durkheim, the destruction of the clan totem (animal or plant) or even an object that exhibits the totemistic mark is sufficient for success of the ritual (207-41). And according to Catharine Bell, the result is a three part communion where "the offerer, the recipient, and the offering itself are understood to become together in some way, however briefly" (112). The harmony is brief because the divine or human analog to the divine is not supposed to commune with its subjects. Then the destruction of the intermediary, the offering, breaks the temporary bond but ideally yields a different, more salutary relationship than before.

[24] Restoration of the breached relationship, as the third and final stage of the ritual, is realized upon the completion of the sacrifice. If the object has been sacralized properly, then its liquidation or even consumption can bring the sacrificers into closer contact with the divine. Now whether the gods are *really* satisfied or people truly improve their relationship with supernatural beings is of less explanatory significance than the beneficial effects on the society. As Hubert and Mauss point out, the participants, "find in sacrifice the means of redressing the equilibriums that have been upset; by expiation they redeem themselves from social obloquy, the consequence of error, and re-enter the community... (t)he social norm is thus maintained without danger to themselves" (102-3).

[25] Though the social realm is where later scholars have looked for the effects of sacrifice, it is certainly true that these effects cannot be disconnected from the belief that a sacrifice actually modifies aspects of the transcendent realm. Otherwise, a sacrifice would come off as a particularly odd, and at times macabre, means of restoring social harmony. Therefore, sacrifice is religious in that it is predicated on the need for the restoration of a divine/human relationship. Yet, the social scientist can decipher coded meanings that have purely immanent importance.

### **Interpretation of the Sacrifice of the Bartman Ball**

[26] Both aspects of sacrifice rituals are valuable to understand further the destruction of the Bartman ball. In regard to the "separation" stage, Bartman's prevention of Alou from catching the foul ball not only triggers a symbolic separation between fan and player, but contributes to the belief that the Cubs are cursed. Despite the hope that the curse will be lifted, for many, Bartman's action revealed that the baseball gods are still angry. Grant DePorter compared the ball to the cursed ring in the *The Lord of the Rings*. Destroying it will hopefully, "get it over with."

[27] This and many other statements by Cubs' fans admit of a relationship between some unseen force and the Cubs. An operative myth of a curse speaks of a problem with this relationship

whereby an unseen force has placed a curse on the team and is refusing to lift it. The refusal, though, is not believed to be a capricious stance towards the Cubs, but is in some way deserved.

[28] Here we see the vertical dimensions of the sacrificial function. As expected, the expressed reason for destroying the ball is couched in “vertical” or ethereal terminology. “Maybe it will lift the curse,” and, “We are going to get rid of all that bad mojo,” were a couple of comments made by fans. Even the curator of the Chicago Historical Society remarked that the event’s importance is tied up with, “the fact that they are going to such lengths to break the curse” (*Chicago Sun-Times* online). These kinds of reactions constitute the crux of the reported justifications for the event. On one level, they support the claim that the sacrifice in Chicago has a vertical dimension – to appease some vague supernatural executor of the curse. Without a powerful and well-known curse myth infecting Chicago, it is difficult to say whether the impractical destruction of a very expensive baseball would be accepted by anyone in the city. In addition, for fans of teams that have no grand myth swirling around it, as is the case for my beloved Texas Rangers, the annihilation of a particularly fated baseball would seem absurd.

[29] Given that the sacrifice has explicit vertical significance, we turn our attention to its implicit horizontal function by recalling the three general stages of the sacrifice ritual. First, as stated earlier, a complication has arisen within the hierarchical “society” of Cubs’ fans and players. The unaccustomed ambiguity in the fan/player relationship resulted in an array of responses to the perpetrator that seemed to demand redress or at least a mitigation of the confusion.

[30] The second stage, the sacrifice itself, is kicked off by the offering of the ball. The ball serves as an inanimate representative of Bartman as well as a screen for the projections of a general angst felt by many Cubs’ fans. Yet, the consecration of the ball does not stop there. Its “sacred” status can only be conferred in ways that will resonate in a modern society. Therefore, consecration may be an inappropriate term here. Instead, modern consecration could be a synonym for the endowment of an object with majestic significance. Hence, it possesses the main mark of majesty in a capitalistic society – exorbitant financial value. Additionally, the ball is anthropomorphized via an elaborate series of treatments worthy of a future *human* victim of a lethal injection. The presence of the national media at the event with the ball taking center stage bestows upon it the significance that can only come with national recognition. In addition, the ball’s destruction was orchestrated and even produced by a Hollywood special effects guy. It was presented to the public in a transparent, highly lit glass box before being exploded to bits. The explosion itself was a spectacle, and a costly one at that, which further conveyed to the public the special status of this particular baseball. Finally, the ball’s remnants are now prominently displayed at the Harry Caray Restaurants as a *post facto* reminder of the ball’s role as a modern sacred object.

[31] The third state, restoration, again requires both vertical and horizontal channels to effect actualization. Vertically, the destruction of the ball is necessary as articulated by the sacrificiers, the fans, themselves. Fans offered other suggestions as to what to do with the ball: send the ball up in the space shuttle and then release it into orbit, drop it off the Sears Tower, or put it in a museum or the Hall of Fame. Clever as they may be, these proposals did not seem to the owners of the ball to reflect the amount of negative emotion already projected onto the ball that only destruction could mollify.

[32] More specifically, the seeming “return” of a material substance to its non-material (or at least material unrecognizability) or spiritual state helps with the execution of a vertical

restoration. The gods of the curse, immaterial as they are, can symbolically breathe the fumes of the destroyed ball as they rise up. If Bartman's interference was a sign that the gods were still angry, only an immaterial offering of profound significance could possibly appease them. Perhaps they will finally accept this token, even if their satisfaction is temporary, and if so, some modicum of divine/human harmony is restored. Though more than likely, vertical restoration occurs solely in the minds and hearts of the sacrificers. Thus, we must look at the possibility of horizontal restoration and what constitutes it in this case.

[33] In a prophylactic sacrifice such as this, restoration is conservative. What was restored? In part, the proper relationship between Cubs' fans and players was reestablished. The sacrifice was a symbolic action freely engaged in by a small group of fans and the partners in the restaurant that represented Cubs' fans in general. Though one of their own transgressed the code of fanship, fans needed to feel as if they were on solid footing with the team before the next season started. To this end, a reversal of the somewhat equal status of fan and player that Bartman and Alou enjoyed for a brief moment must take place. *Inequality* is the desired result of this restoration and only the fans can act as its agents.

[34] Interestingly, whether the privileged group, the players, cared about the fate of the Bartman ball or not is irrelevant. In fact, Alou, upon hearing of the grand event, remarked, "I don't care about the ball. That wasn't the reason why we lost." This statement reveals at once the expected rationalization from a player who internalizes the blame – an easier situation to cope with and more importantly for my purposes, the radical difference between fan and player. It is the fans who primarily believe in the curse in part because they are free to do so. If Cubs' players really believed it, then their own power to affect the outcome of the season would be an illusion and their labored efforts on the field would be for naught. For this reason, the restoration of social order is needed by the fans only, and the apathy over a sacrifice ritual expressed by players demonstrates the rigidity needed to hold court as the exalted class. If players expressed a real concern over the workings of the sacrifice, then they would be displaying "fan-like" behavior, and the hierarchy again would be in jeopardy.

### **Some Issues with an American Sacrifice Ritual**

[35] Did restoration really take place? Was the sacrifice ritual effective? Empirically, effectiveness is difficult to discern. Yet the mere existence of a sacrifice offered up voluntarily may suffice as evidence that fans acted in a way that adequately repaired some of the damage incurred by Bartman. Because the entire set of events outwardly mirrored typical sacrifice rituals, it is safe to say that some restorative effects were felt. That said, this ritual was anachronistic and conspicuously out of place. Therefore, to expect that Cubs' fans gained the same kind of benefits received by other kinds of societies would be unreasonable.

[36] Victor Turner articulates the causes and the features of the differing rituals found in pre- and post-industrialized societies. In pre-industrialized or tribal or agrarian societies in general, rituals emerge organically from a critical mass within the collective whole (1982: 29-30). As a result, rituals tend to be, "concerned with calendrical, biological and social structural cycles; they are integrated into the total social process; they reflect the collective experience of a community over time" (1977b: 50). Because the structure of these societies are inextricably linked to and even fully integrated into coherent cosmos, their rituals weave the threads of a society into a single cohesive whole.

[37] By contrast, the rituals emanating from a post-industrial and, to a lesser extent, an industrial society (if any are offered at all) do not necessarily have any ties with each other. This disconnect reflects the society which Turner describes as, “plural and fragmentary” and hence, more complex in nature. Without a unified source furnishing integrated rituals, modern rituals express individual need or problems at the, “interfaces of control and servicing institutions” (1977b: 51), – not of the collective. Accordingly, they can be birthed spontaneously and can be sustained independent of the society as a whole. So, for Turner, modern rituals or ritual-like expressions are idiosyncratic and can function strictly as entertainment (1977b: 51). As such, modern rituals are mere spectacles when they work and, perhaps, their success is measured only by the level of their popularity. Modern rituals resonate on a superficial level thus permitting the “participants” to move on to the next entertaining spectacle rather easily. Left in the wake is a disjointed society with little to cohere disparate groups aside from an appreciation for mass-produced, flashy presentations.

[38] This rather grim description of the modern ritual and its diminished effects has been challenged, most notably by Gregor Goethals. She grants that modern, secular rituals, specifically displayed through the medium of television, differ from primitive rituals in their effects. But, in contrast to Turner, Goethals asserts that certain televised rituals such as coronations, inaugurations, and grand sporting events, can surpass the role of a mere entertainment vehicle. A virtual, global unity can coalesce around separate TVs depending on the nature of the televised event and its quality of its production. Television can blur the lines between groups of differing nationalities and can bring the past into the present effectively – an alteration of experiential space and time that tradition rituals typically achieve. Close-ups on important figures, sweeping background music, and excision of peripheral and boring activities contribute to a sort of ritual experience not wholly dissimilar to that of witnesses to an ancient funeral rite (5-16).

[39] Goethals could certainly find support for her argument with the example of the destruction of the Bartman ball. Those Cubs fans not attending the event could watch it on the nightly news. People across the country tuned in to the “Today Show” that morning to hear about it. The sacrifice itself was designed for television and, no doubt, it delivered – if even for a fleeting moment. However, does Goethals’ analysis really call into question Turner’s claims about modern society?

[40] He softens Turner’s judgment of the relatively impotent modern ritual by dealing primarily with the phenomenon of ritual. Missing in Goethals’ analysis, however, is a description of the kind of society that now needs television to gain coherent meaning. She could ask, do the networks speak for the populace as a whole or are network executives self-motivated to produce televised presentations that resonate with many because this translates into profit? The Olympics may generate some vague sense of national or even global unity, but if it did not sell, would NBC still take on the project for purely altruistic purposes? Probably not. The connection that Turner makes between the qualities of a society and their rituals aids the analyst of modern rituals more than the phenomenal approach of Goethals.

### **Ritual or Ritualized Entertainment?**

[41] As has been pointed out, the motivations of the sacrificers are crucial to the success of the sacrifice. Those motivations which contribute to the restoration of the society as a whole, whether the effects are beneficial or really deleterious within a hierarchical society, gain a firmer

footing in the carrying out of the sacrifice ritual. It is here that we begin to question some of the motivations behind the destruction of the Bartman ball.

[42] Grant DePorter is a self-proclaimed Cubs' fan and as such, probably felt sick to his stomach after the notorious game. Yet, it would be a stretch to say that the alleviation of his distress by exploding the Bartman ball was not inextricably coupled with a desire to make a buck. He bought the ball with money from the Harry Caray restaurant company. This information alone communicates the difference between DePorter and a wealthy collector of sports memorabilia. The purchase was simply an investment. To get a return on the quite lofty investment, public awareness of the purchase needed to include the fact that the Harry Caray restaurants bought it, which in itself might possibly taint a public perception that the ball was purchased with only pure intentions in mind. Thus, the managing group "democratized" the situation by entertaining suggestions from the public regarding the fate of the ball. Nevertheless, the choice to destroy the ball, amongst 10,000 entries, lay solely in the control of the ones who bought it. Too much money was at stake to leave this important decision to Cubs' fans *en masse*.

[43] Therefore, while the appearance of a "we're all in this together" message was given, the underlying motive of a small, wealthy group of fans were really driving the bus. To demonstrate further the true lack of collectivity behind the ritual, several key facets must be noted. First, the restaurant was the final destination of the ball's ostentatious journey through the streets of Chicago and even past Wrigley Field. Questions as to the ball's destination could be answered with a viewing of the evening news. Thus, the parade of the ball served as a moving billboard for the restaurant. Second, the exploding tank was situated in front of a wall that prominently displayed the name of the restaurant, so that it would be impossible to ignore who or what put on the event. Third, instead of the remains of the ball being delivered to a museum or even dispersed over Lake Michigan, they were separated and are now on prominent display at all three restaurants – presumably as a lure rather than a public display.

### **Conclusion**

[44] Whether the efforts of DePorter and clan have been worth it financially is unknown. Despite the appearance of the event being propped by a unified front of Cubs' fans, some stood to benefit by it in radically divergent ways. This prompts several questions. Would the destruction of the ball in the form of a sacrifice ritual have even taken place without the motives and gumption of some shrewd business people? If not, then what of the ritual itself? Could the ball have been consecrated in a meaningful way that had little to do with its market value? Does the possibility exist of a public sacrifice ritual that can function effectively in America without it needing costly, eye-popping features and a camera crew to film it? And most importantly, if disparate motivations of people within a purported cohesive group, such as the Cubs' fans, are necessarily operative in any modern ritual, are American rituals such as this all bark and no bite?

[45] I want to answer "yes" and "no" to the last question. If restoration of a flawed human/divine or human/human relationship is the upshot of sacrifice rituals in general, then the fact that this ritual was used as a tool for profit by some and not by others divulges further separation, not restoration. By Turner's argument, this should not surprise us. A society made up of ideologically autonomous individuals who participate in an economic system that supports that ideology cannot be expected to produce rituals that cohere a society to the core. There is no essential core, and thus rituals on the scale of the destruction of the Bartman ball can only hope to inspire a group with the use of questionable tactics.

[46] Yet, the thorough analyst of this event must move beyond cynicism in order to treat it fairly. Of the 10,000 recommendations received, a destruction of the ball was chosen. In addition, the event exhibited all of the basic trappings of a classic sacrifice ritual. It did not arise in a vacuum. Therefore, some intuitive sense of the meaning of sacrifice, however vague, was a prerequisite for its actualization. This implies that the power of sacrifice rituals to effect some kind of desired result was not completely circumscribed by the surroundings. Herein lies the ambiguity of a ritual expression such as this in present-day America. It looked like, smelled like, and certainly sounded like a classic sacrifice ritual. But its phenomenal characteristics belied the fact that one small but powerful faction within the Cubs' ranks had its own separate set of expectations that tended to retard the progression of the three stages of the ritual. Granted, in the absence of this event, Cubs' fans would not have forgotten their status in the obstinate player/fan relationship. Rules of the game and the dictates of a persistent culture of professional sports prohibit revolutionary shake-ups.

[47] Putting social realities aside, I have shown that sacrifice, when interpreted symbolically, need not necessarily concern itself with altering political institutions. Moreover, the structural divisions between fan and player are not particularly repressive and are consequently not placed under serious scrutiny by either party. Nonetheless, a hierarchy exists unquestionably. It is made conspicuous at certain times and in certain places, most specifically when a player acts like a fan or a fan unwittingly crosses the line. When a sacrifice ritual is the expressed means of redressing a problem in the society of baseball, examination of it can yield much of the intricacies of the fans' relationship to their team. Although any such ritual appearing on a grand scale in the United States today must be interpreted with a hermeneutics of suspicion, it cannot be elevated to the status of a purely religious event, nor can it be reduced to a made-for-TV spectacle propped up by money-hungry opportunists.

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