



Washed in Blood: Male Sacrifice, Trauma, and the Cinema

Professor Claire Sisco King

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Will Smith in *I Am Legend*. Leonardo DiCaprio in *Titanic*. Charlton Heston in just about everything.

Viewers of Hollywood action films are no doubt familiar with the sacrificial victim-hero, the male protagonist who nobly gives up his life so that others may be saved. *Washed in Blood* argues that such sacrificial films are especially prominent in eras when the nation—and American manhood—is thought to be in crisis. The sacrificial victim-hero, continually imperiled and frequently exhibiting classic symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, thus bears the trauma of the nation.

Claire Sisco King offers an in-depth study of three prominent cycles of Hollywood films that follow the sacrificial narrative: the early-to-mid 1970s, the mid-to-late 1990s, and the mid-to-late 2000s. From Vietnam-era disaster movies to post-9/11 apocalyptic thrillers, she examines how each film represents traumatized American masculinity and national identity. What she uncovers is a cinematic tendency to position straight white men as America's most valuable citizens—and its noblest victims.

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