

# Home Family Future: Authenticity, the Frontier Myth, and *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes*

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## Abstract

This article explores the ways *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* utilizes the meanings of the American frontier and wilderness to get at questions of authenticity and renewal. The film's narrative is told through the eyes of nonhuman protagonists to allow for a reflection on humanity and those institutions grounded in traditional, conservative values: masculinity, family, and the natural world. While the use of nonhuman heroes may be at first destabilizing for audiences, the narrative cultivates an intense empathy with the apes of the film's title. Indeed, by placing audience empathy squarely with the nonhuman primates – presented as the more natural and authentic beings the imagined wilderness represents – the film is able to more clearly critique the human exploitation and greed that led to diegetic social catastrophe in the first place. The symbolic appeal of the frontier is ever present, with its promise of a translation of the self and society into something purer and more real.