

STUDY GUIDE



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MAN ON FIRE

ABOUT THE FILM



Grand Saline, Texas, a town east of Dallas, has a history of racism, a history the community doesn't talk about. This shroud of secrecy ended when Charles Moore, an elderly white preacher, self-immolated to protest the town's racism in 2014, shining a spotlight on the town's dark past. "Man on Fire" untangles the pieces of this protest and questions the racism in Grand Saline today.

This documentary encapsulates the racial climate in Grand Saline and chronicles Moore's life and death, presenting Grand Saline and Moore as two pillars of the film's narrative: one, a disjointed man seeking truth and communal repentance, and the other, a community whose present is inextricably tied to their past.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I first came across Charles Moore when I was beginning my third year of graduate school at the University of Texas, Austin. I connected with Dr. James Chase Sanchez (my producer), who is from Grand Saline and completed his dissertation on this incident, through a mutual friend. As we discussed Charles Moore and his self-immolation in more detail, I felt a gut punch to my stomach. At the time, I was pondering existential questions like, "What am I doing to better this world?" And then here comes Charles Moore, a man who not only gave his life for social justice but did it in the most horrific manner. I was immediately captivated by his death and wanted to learn more. As Dr. Sanchez and I dug deeper, it became apparent that Charles' story was much more nuanced. He was a complicated man, and many of the people in town argued that his stories weren't real. The heroic image I created of Charles disintegrated, but in its place came a more "human" man with multiple shortcomings. We decided to use Charles' act as a vehicle to explore the racism of Grand Saline. The journey became much less about the town's legacy of racism and more about contemporary issues of race in town. Meanwhile, for me, the process became more personal and reflexive. Overall, this film is an expose of this small town of Grand Saline. But, in another sense, Grand Saline could be "Any Town, USA." My hopes are that when people watch the film that they will question what racism and sacrifice look like in contemporary America, but, more importantly, they will look inward to better understand what racism and sacrifice mean to them personally.

MAN ON FIRE

WHO WAS CHARLES MOORE?



Moore was influenced by his faith at a very young age. Born on July 18, 1934 just outside of Grand Saline to a father who worked in the local salt mine and a mother who ran various clothing stores, he held an early affinity with the Christian faith. However, once he left Grand Saline for college, Moore's faith and views on racism were challenged. Many white people around the area didn't like his radical, anti-racist views of *Brown v. Board of Education* and his disgust of minstrel shows. Once Moore joined the SMU Perkins School of Theology, though, he found a way to practice his faith and social views via activism. Throughout his life, Moore travelled across the globe to promote civil rights: such as moving to Chicago to fight for full civil rights in the 1960s and India to fight against oppression in the 1970s. Even in the mid-1990s when Moore was back in Texas, he challenged the Methodist church's stance on homosexuality and the use of capital punishment in the state. After he retired from the ministry, Moore still wanted to have purpose in his life but struggled to find it with family and friends, becoming part of the catalyst for his final act of protest: the self-immolation in Grand Saline.

Perhaps the best way to describe Moore is to take a line out of one of his sermons, entitled "You Give Them Something to Eat," delivered on August 5, 1996. In this sermon, Moore discussed how people--especially Christians--dehumanize poor and oppressed peoples. He concludes his sermon, saying:

"Yet--in spite of all the demeaning of poor persons, the justifications for being well-off, the platitudes about self-help, the cynicism about government and even the protests over my preaching a sermon having to do with a great injustice happening in our political system--when all this is said and done, the spirit of Jesus, full of compassion and common sense, will constantly confront us, saying: You give them something to eat."

Moore is still feeding us today.

// The decision to sacrifice myself was not impulsive: I have struggled all my life with what it means to take Dietrich Bonhoeffer's insistence that 'Christ calls a person to come and die' seriously. //

- Rev. Charles Moore

MAN ON FIRE

SOME PEOPLE WE MEET - I



Wiley Garland & Wayne Sloan

Long time residents and members of the Old City Pharmacy Coffee Shop & Museum who brush off the racist stories as folklore.

B. R. Fite

Publisher of the *Grand Saline Sun* who questions the efficacy of self-immolation.



Emily McGaughy

Grew up in Grand Saline but later moved to Dallas. She reflects on the racism she witnessed in town as a kid.



Elvis Allen

Van Zandt County historian who declares there is no evidence to support the folklore.



Buddy Guy

A witness to the self-immolation.



Don Vickery

Childhood friend of Charles Moore.



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SOME PEOPLE WE MEET - II



Bill and Kathy Renfro

Kathy is the step daughter of Charles, and Bill was a long time friend and colleague who married Kathy.

Guy Moore

Son of Charles Moore.



Pastor Ira Jones

Pastor of Prairie Creek Episcopal Church near Grand Saline, who remembers racism in the area as a child.

Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood

Baptist Pastor, theologian and activist who was touched by Charles' self-immolation and believes Grand Saline needs to publicly reconcile their past.



Ruthie D. Young

Congregant of Prairie Creek Episcopal Church who has heard many racist stories of Grand Saline.

MAN ON FIRE

KEY ISSUES & DISCIPLINES



“Man on Fire” raises important questions about the efficacy of protest in America, the lingering effects of historical and contemporary racism, and the explicit and subtle language practices of racism. The film can engage with students from various racial backgrounds and creates a space to discuss what racism looks like--and how it has evolved--in the 21st century.

KEY ISSUES

Contemporary & Historical

Racism

Rhetoric

Rural America

Neoliberalism

Public Memory

Sacrifice & Protest

Self-Immolation

Christianity & Religion

Jim Crow South

East Texas

KEY DISCIPLINES

African-American Studies

Cultural Studies

History

Public Memory

Rhetoric

Sociology

Political Science



QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Does Grand Saline seem racist to you? Why or why not? What does it mean for entire town to be labelled as "racist?"
2. How do the people of Grand Saline justify their history and the lack of diversity in their hometown?
3. How might we see white supremacy pervading Grand Saline on a personal and institutional level? Where do you see white supremacy come to fruition in the film?
4. What does Charles Moore's life--and death--mean to you? Why did he die? Does his death make a difference?
5. How can we take the issues in Grand Saline and apply them to our local communities?

ACTIVITIES

1. In small groups, discuss racist incidents that you remember as a child. Were these incidents indicative of your community's culture? If so, what in the culture supported these values? Afterwards, get in a larger group and write on the board all of the "cultural ideas" that supported these values.
2. Close your eyes and imagine being in Charles Moore's shoes. Instead of focusing on his self-immolation, think about some of your deepest passions and causes you believe in. What are you doing to support these causes? What can you do to better support them?
3. In small groups, write down some quotes from the film about race and history that stood out to you. There is a lot of racial subtext in the film, meaning that people will say something about race that has an underlying, deeper meaning. Can you find any racial subtext in the quotes you wrote down? What are these quotes really saying about race in Grand Saline?

MAN ON FIRE GUIDE: IMPLICIT BIAS VIDEO - I



HOW TO DEFINE BIAS

- Bias on an explicit level: An idea or thought that consciously relies upon a form of discrimination or bigotry.
- Bias on an implicit level: An idea or thought that subconsciously relies these forms.

Examples:

- Calling someone an offensive term is explicit bias.
- Guessing someone's race or ethnicity based upon their dress or appearance is implicit bias.

WHAT DOES BUDDY'S INTERVIEW SHOW YOU?

- It is hard for individuals to see themselves as biased/racist.
- It is easy to see the problems from others without recognizing the problems with the self.

// *I had seen the car that I'd seen him walk from, and there was a high school diploma and then a note. It said something about he was tired of seeing the blacks treated like they was through the years in Grand Saline, Texas.* **//**

- Buddy Guy, Grand Saline resident

MAN ON FIRE GUIDE: IMPLICIT BIAS VIDEO -II



FIVE INTERVIEW CLIPS:

#1 What is wrong with BR's logic?

BR's implicit bias stems from two fallacies:

1. The idea that a Black President erases racism.
2. "The Modern Day Fallacy" --Idea that 2016 or 2019 is better than the 1960's so we don't have to worry about racism.

Reflexivity tip 1: Know that discrimination and bigotry still thrive today. Sexism, racism, homophobia, etc. all still exist and should be taken seriously, not as afterthoughts.

#2 How does Wayne position the community against being labeled racist?

When asked why no black people live in GS, Wayne comes up with two examples of people who live near GS as a defense for the town. He follows the "I have a black friend" fallacy defense.

Tip #2: Be open to critique. If someone calls you out for saying something biased, don't get defensive. Listen and learn.

#3 What is wrong with being a minority?

Don's words imply that being the minority is "bad" and that we can see how people feel about minorities in the "streets." Thus, he believes that people who are minorities have a tougher time in America and wants to preserve the majority status.

Tip #3: Be intersectional in thought. Think about the ways words and ideas affect multitudes of people from various backgrounds and identities.

MAN ON FIRE GUIDE: IMPLICIT BIAS VIDEO -III



FIVE INTERVIEW CLIPS:

#4 What seems odd about Lisa's framing?

1. Lisa suggests that ONLY if people look for problems there will be problems. This makes victims of racism to blame for their racism.
2. This stems from her not being a victim of racism.

Tip #4: Always think about putting yourself in someone's shoes. Take their pain as real.

#5 How does Terry characterize the mistreatment of people of color in the 1950s and 1960s?

The fallacies here are two fold:

1. Viewing racism as simple mistreatment erases the true violence against people of color. It erases reality.
2. Coming a "long way" is an excuse. We can all do better and should strive to do so. Don't just accept improvement as the problem being gone.

Tip #5: No one is perfect. Reflexivity takes practice. But it begins with understanding that you can do better and will try.

// *When I was growing up in high school, it seemed like every other school around us at least had, you know, a few black students, and Grand Saline, for some reason, didn't. So, it's like this big hole and then everybody else, like, life is existing around us.* **//**

- Gerardo De La Fuente, Grand Saline resident

MAN ON FIRE GUIDE: IMPLICIT BIAS VIDEO -IV



WHAT IS REFLEXIVITY?

Reflexivity is the process of turning an action or thought back on the self. Being able to critically examine the self in relation to bigotry as Emily does in her clip.

CONCLUSION

Nobody has all the answers. Know that implicit bias takes place when we don't challenge our misconceived perceptions. We must challenge ourselves to be better. Work on reflexivity as a skill and be honest with yourself.

// *"Now, what the guy did, the message he wants to bring out, that's honorable but guess what? We got it. We got a black president, dude. The country's got it. To come back here now and do this now, that's stupid.*

- B.R. Fite, Publisher of Grand Saline Sun

// *It's easy to stand on the sideline and do nothing when you know you should do something, but most folks don't want to get involved. They can handle it. I'll let them do it. Have mercy now. I'll pray for them but getting out there in the limelight doing it, that's a different story.*

- Pastor Ira Jones, Prairie Creek Episcopal Church

// *...wouldn't it be so freeing to be able to say we can talk to other people of different ethnic backgrounds and racists, and we don't have to harbor some sort of resentment toward them.*

- Rev. Jack Albright, Friend of Charles Moore

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RECOMMENDED READINGS

Man on Fire by Michael Hall
in *Texas Monthly*

Retired past saw 'destiny' in self-immolation by Sam Hodges
in *United Methodist News*

Sundown Towns by James Loewen

Blood Done Sign my Name by Timothy Tyson

Racism without Racists by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva

Critical Race Theory 3rd Edition by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic

Stamped from the Beginning by Ibram X. Kendi

White Fragility by Robin DiAngelo

// *You see the world can't change until we're willing to rub up against each other and have deep, difficult conversations. My concern with Grand Saline is that the easier thing to do is to try to move past it instead of sitting with it.* **//**

- Rev. Jeff Hood, Theologian and Activist

MAN ON FIRE

HOW TO BUY THE FILM



"Man on Fire" is distributed by New Day Films for educational use.

New Day Films

350 North Water Street Unit 1-12 Newburgh, NY 12550

Email: orders@newday.com or www.newday.com/film/man-fire

Phone: 888.367.9154

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Running time: 54 min.

ISBN # 978-1-57448-166-2

Director Joel Fendelman and Producer Dr. James Chase Sanchez are available for speaking and workshops.

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