

One town's history, One preacher's sacrifice

MAN ON FIRE



A FILM BY
Joel Fendelman

54 / USA / 2017 / HD

WORLD PREMIERE
Slamdance Film Festival 2018

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SYNOPSIS

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.

Overall, "Man on Fire" 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.



PRODUCTION

“Man on Fire” was Joel Fendelman’s thesis film for the completion of his MFA program at the University of Texas in Austin. The film went into production late May of 2016 and was completed late May of 2017. The crew took seven trips to the Van Zandt County area to film and compile interviews as well as a weekend of filming in Austin and one in Dallas. The recreations were filmed over three days in Austin, Texas. The documentary section was filmed on a Sony A7sII with Zeiss Contax photo lenses. The recreation portion was filmed using A Panasonic Varicam LT with Cooke Mini S4 lenses.

The film was inspired by James Chase Sanchez’s dissertation “Preaching Behind the Fiery Pulpit: Rhetoric, Public Memory, and Self-Immolation.” and the Texas Monthly article “Man on Fire” by Michael Hall.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

On one level, “Man on Fire” is an investigation into the human spirit. As Charles Moore said in his “suicide” letter, “Our human race is impressed most of all with innocent suffering, and is moved significantly by little else. It isn’t important that I be remembered, but that someone cared enough to give up everything for the sake of others.” These words hold truth for us as a society, yet I, and others, question why someone chose this extreme measure to get our attention. I believe everyone has a piece of Moore in them, whether they are aware of it or not. This yearning to do more, to help others, to sacrifice for the larger good, compels our humanity. So when someone like Moore comes around, at least on the surface, we find ourselves awestruck, riddled with contradicting emotions. On one hand, we see the goodness in Moore, the love of humanity that compelled his actions; yet, on the other hand, the pain of his death overwhelms us too. This complexity was compounded with questions that others were asking in and around Grand Saline: Why did he do it? Is racism still in Grand Saline? Did he actually change anything? These questions were the seeds we planted, and through the process of

filming, nurtured, in order to give some semblance of resolve for such an extreme act. Unfortunately (but also quite naturally), the answers to these questions are not so “black and white.” Thus, I hope this film inspires others to also ask these questions and sparks a real conversation on Moore’s death and the reality of racism. Inevitably, some people will write off Moore as crazy, using facts such as “we got a black president” (a quote from the film) to claim that racism doesn’t exist anymore. However, I believe the answers are more complicated than that.

“Man on Fire” uses Moore’s self-immolation as a vehicle to explore this small, mostly white town known for its racism. Moore’s death thus becomes the means to scratch beneath the surface of Grand Saline. The film captures the reality of small town Texas, illustrating Friday night football games, rodeos, homecoming parades, skating rinks, flea market sales, local businesses, and more. Nonetheless, the town of Grand Saline is just a microcosm for the rural south and inevitably America as a whole.



PRESS

SLUG MAGAZINE

Connor Lockie

“Still, the importance of this film is not its ability to vindicate and heroize Americans. Rather, its highest quality is its unabashed truthfulness. As one of the many interviewees puts it, ‘The easier thing to do is try to move past it, instead of sitting with it.’”

UNSEENFILMS

Steve Kopian

“Man on Fire haunts me. As any truly great film it has broken my defenses and forced me to ponder what it means. [...] This film demands to be seen, to be shared and discussed.”

POP THEOLOGY

Ryan Parker

“Man on Fire doesn’t posit any easy answers.... It is content to let us wrestle [...] and if you watch the film, you will—long after the film concludes.”

SCREENANARCHY

Christopher Bourne

“This is an illuminating, thought-provoking tale that illustrates one of the many tragic consequences of America’s failure to fully come to terms with, and to truly confront, the racism of its past, present, and its foreseeable future.”

REEL SPIRITUALITY

Andrew Neel

“Whether Moore’s act will achieve its desired impact remains to be seen, but the mere existence of this excellent film furthers his message and hope for healing and racial reconciliation.”



TEAM

JOEL FENDELMAN

Director, Producer, Editor, Cinematographer

Currently residing in New York City, Joel Fendelman has written, produced and directed a number of award-winning narrative and documentary films. His achievements include winning the IDA Documentary Award for “Man on Fire,” premiering his short film “Game Night” at the Tribeca Film Festival in 2016 and winning numerous awards for his first and second narrative feature films “Remittance” and “David,” including “Best Screenplay” at the Brooklyn Film Festival in 2016 and the prestigious “Ecumenical Prize” at the Montreal World Film Festival in 2011. Joel strives to embrace socially conscious stories that deal with religion, social class, minorities and communicates the underlying connection between us all. He holds a Masters in Fine Arts from the University of Texas, Austin.

@joelfendelman

JAMES CHASE SANCHEZ

Producer

James Chase Sanchez is an Assistant Professor of Writing and Rhetoric at Middlebury College. His research interests are in cultural and racial rhetorics, public memory, and writing assessment, and his research has appeared or is forthcoming in College Composition and Communication, Pedagogy, Journal of Contemporary Rhetoric, Present Tense, and Writing Program Administration. Sanchez has long been fascinated with the stories of his hometown, Grand Saline, TX, and will be completing an academic manuscript about his hometown in the next couple of years.

@JChaseSanchez



CREDITS

DIRECTOR, PRODUCER
CINEMATOGRAPHER,
EDITOR
Joel Fendelman

PRODUCER
James Chase Sanchez

PRODUCER OF
MARKETING
& DISTRIBUTION
Sandra Bertalanffy

ORIGINAL MUSIC
Gil Talmi

PRODUCTION SOUND
MIXER
Rodd Simonsen

ADDITIONAL SOUND
MIXERS
Ben Lieberman
Andrew Twenter
Matthew Kluchin

RECREATIONS UNIT

PRODUCER
Sullivan Rauzi
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
Garrett Forbes
CINEMATOGRAPHER
Caleb Kuntz
PRODUCTION DESIGNER
Joseph Bowman
PRODUCTION
COORDINATOR
Alicja Zapalska
MAKE-UP ARTIST
Elizabeth Van Sickle
HAIR STYLIST
Aly Piechocki
GAFFER
Michael Bakowski
BEST BOY
Eric Morton
GRIP
Tanner Nichols
1ST ASSISTANT CAMERA
Sarah Hicks
2ND ASSISTANT CAMERA
Dylan Tidmore
PRODUCTION ASSISTANT
Sarah Schnieder

SOUND DESIGN
Will Harrell
RE-RECORDING MIXER
Evan Dunivan
COLORIST & TITLES
Daniel Stuyck
POSTER DESIGN
Tanner Nichols
GRAPHIC DESIGN
Björn Goswin

PYRO TECNICS TEAM

BIG DOG PYRO
Adam Jorgensen
Carolina Moody Bear
Camille Palmour

CAST

CHARLES MOORE
Ron Blanton
GUY WITH SHIRT
Adam Jorgensen
GUY WITH FIRE
EXTINGUISHER
Eric Morton
POLICE OFFICER
Garrett Forbes
WIFE
Cynthia Rauzi

CAMERA CONSULTANT
Mark Johnson

ADVISORS
Paul Stekler
Anne Lewis
Tracy Dahlby
Michael Hall

SPECIAL THANKS
Texas Monthly and
article "Man on Fire"
by Michael Hall