



PREACHING BEHIND THE FIERY PULPIT: RHETORIC, PUBLIC MEMORY, AND  
SELF-IMMOLATION

by

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## Chapter 1: The Purity in Salt, Or the Making of a Self-Immolator

"He said, 'Bring me a new jar, and put salt in it.' So they brought it to him. He went out to the spring of water and threw salt in it and said, 'Thus says the Lord, 'I have purified these waters; there shall not be from there death or unfruitfulness any longer.'"

---2 Kings 2:20-21

"My Captain"

'The sparrow stood tall

Atop the wheelbarrow's bow

Chirping out his orders

Like an admiral at sea.

Would he dare pretend

More importance for himself

Than the oarsman aft

Who propels the weighty craft?'

---Charles Moore

There is purity in salt. Salt has often been used as a covenant for fidelity because of its symbolism of purity. Specifically, salt signifies a path towards purity, as the quotation from 2 Kings describes above: Elisha called for the city of Jericho to bring him salt so he could purify the spring water. Salt, to Elisha, to those of the Bible, represented purity, taking a tainted object and transforming it to something better, something

unadulterated. Even in contemporary terms salt still carries a positive message, especially for religious people. In Arabic countries, the phrase "there is a salt between us" is a way to designate friendship as a way to unify people against any harm or pain between them. While the symbolism of salt might have changed over the years (since we worry now in America about consuming *too much* salt), it has maintained its positive connotation for centuries.

In my hometown of Grand Saline, TX, approximately seventy miles east of Dallas, many still sense purity in salt, but it has evolved to mean something different. The city of Grand Saline, once known as Jordan's Saline (a community near the present-day location), has been digging for salt since the late-1800s when Native Americans resided in the area and wielded the resource from the local sand flats. While there were multiple salt mines in the town at the turn of the 20th century, Morton Salt eventually bought out all competing companies and took over production in the 1920s and was the only salt company in town by 1931 ("Grand Saline, TX"). While the town found some boom in the post-Reconstruction era, the Great Depression eventually left the town without an economy; the town never grew much past 3,000 residents. Still, Morton Salt employs the most town residents (around 200 employees as of 2015). In the present, the downtown area looks like most other East Texas towns: full of decaying buildings, abandoned businesses, and other symbols of the past. I attended middle school in Grand Saline for two years (from 2000-2002) before moving to the town during my high school years (2002-2006). I remember driving through the town on weekend nights when there was nothing else to do and would see reminders in the empty movie stores, salons, and restaurant that the downtown that once held a promise of growth, a chance of prosperity,



that was now lost.

Grand Saline may not have an abundance of wealth, but residents wrap themselves in their economic benefactor, dubbing the town "The Salt Capital of Texas." The salt that dominates the town's culture and namesake may not carry the same symbolic value as that of the Bible, or the symbol of unity as in Arab cultures, but it still exists. The purity in Grand Saline is within its people, or rather, what I came to understand as the *whiteness* of the town. I define the term whiteness here as "a socially constructed category that is normalized within a system of privilege so that it is taken for granted by those who benefit from it" (Applebaum 40). While many East Texas towns have fully integrated and better represent the racial makeup of the state as a whole, Grand Saline stands out as exceptionally white. The town does have a fairly proportionate Hispanic population, representing about twenty percent of the population, but it has less than a one percent black population, which is significantly less than all other towns in the area (Dean 5A).<sup>1</sup> Other towns in the area, including Van, Edgewood, Canton, and Mineola, all have notable black populations, and most of these black people have heard racist stories of Grand Saline.

While I will not go into all the public memories of racism in Grand Saline, I believe it is important to illustrate how Grand Saline's racial history is unique. Grand Saline is known historically as a sundown town, a town that had signs near its entrance that stated, "Nigger, don't let the sun set on your ass." They also are known for a bridge where white residents once lynched and hung black people over a bridge and for a

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<sup>1</sup> For comparison, the state of Texas as a whole has a 70% white population, a 37% Latino population (Latino not being a race here), and an 11% black population, according to the 2010 census. This shows how incredibly white the town of Grand Saline actually is.

meeting spot in the woods were the KKK supposedly gathered.<sup>2</sup> These stories are known by residents and the outside towns discussed above and arguably is the reason why no discernable black population resides in Grand Saline today. Many black people near the town still believe the stories they have heard about Grand Saline over the years reflect the town's thoughts on people of color today. Therefore, they choose not to associate with the town because of the fear of what might happen or the fear that these stories are true.

But it is not only public memories of racism that make Grand Saline unique to me; my own personal encounters of racism affect my understanding of whiteness in town as well. When I was growing up there, I remember being taught to hate black people. A coach once told the football team not to piss off black opponents on the field because they become better athletes when angry. In this instance, the black opponents were "others," separated from us biologically and culturally, an anomaly to the normal people of Grand Saline. I recall being taught that sagging pants was a sign of stupidity and rap music was culturally inferior to music of white people. I learned early on that "nigger" was an appropriate response to being mad at someone of color. I even remember standing in the gymnasium during pep rallies and yelling "We're alright 'cuz we're all white!" as our final slogan before ending the rallies. These memories haunt me because they show the deep-rooted systematic whiteness in the town. The pep rally chant was yelled in front of teachers, parents, coaches, and elders in the community, but none of them ever told us this slogan was wrong. That is what pains me now: not knowing that kids said racist words and made racist statements but that people who should know better never told us that we were wrong. Adolescents like me were taught that racism was okay and

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<sup>2</sup> I will discuss these memories in more detail in Chapter 5 of my project.

acceptable in Grand Saline, and this ultimately guides the town's culture and their perception of people of color (and, also, how people of color perceive the town as well).

I believe whiteness, the state of white culture, society, and/or policy controlling a community, is what keeps these stories alive and keeps these racial relations static. I believe whiteness is what keeps the sizeable Hispanic population on the south side of town (distant from their white brethren), many times forcing them to live literally on the wrong (south) side of the railroad tracks. I believe whiteness is what taught me at a young age to hate black people, as a way for a young Hispanic male to befriend his white peers. Just as the white salt purifies the water in Jericho, the salt of Grand Saline, its whiteness, keeps people of color from advancing and integrating. Rather, it forces much of the population to assimilate into the white culture.

I begin my dissertation by recalling these details because the racial stigma of my hometown is at the root of the self-immolation of Charles Moore, a white preacher who attempted to protest my hometown's racist legacy. Without this culture of whiteness, maybe Moore would not have self-immolated in an empty parking lot in town. Maybe without this culture I would have learned about the pain and power of racism instead of reinforcing it. Perhaps without this legacy the town's public memory would not exist as it does. Nevertheless, the white hegemony still lives and thrives within Grand Saline's city limits.

When Moore self-immolated on that fateful day, I am sure he had never thought about what effect he would have on me. Though we grew up in the same area, we did not know each other. Once I learned about him, I was instantly attracted to Moore because he reminded me so much of my grandfather, a white Baptist preacher who lived only twenty

miles north of Grand Saline. Both of them were known for their empathetic overtones in sermons and the way they could captivate a room no matter where they were. The love Moore displayed reminded me of the same love I and others felt from my grandfather, and I think this connection is what first made me think about Moore in a different light. While my grandfather was much more dismissive of Moore's death, theologically speaking, I knew they still shared a common adage as preachers: love one another and always be willing to forgive and be forgiven. Moore embodied this hope for forgiveness in his very death, and the years I spent in the front of the church listening to my granddaddy preach is what helped me see this. But as I soon learned what had truly happened, I was seemingly alone in my perspective on Moore.

Looking back now, I still see how the purity in salt still pervades my hometown, as its shelf life is forever and its purpose is ever known.

But Moore set out to change that.

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On top of a folder of letters and documents left for his wife on June 23, 2014, Moore juxtaposed two images on a single sheet of paper (see Image 1). The rest of the contents of his prepared folder were instructions for his wife on business she would need to take care of after his death, a meticulous list of bills that she needed to pay, people to inform, and a note saying he was sorry it had to end this way. But this single image stood out as being representative of what Moore set out to achieve. On the right, he printed the logo of the United Methodist Church, a symbol of “purification, sacrifice, and the Holy Spirit” (Hall). The United Methodist Church provided Moore with a voice for his life work, allowing him to integrate his love for God with his call for social justice, and

Moore chose this apt symbol to represent the sacrifice he would pursue that day. However, to its left, Moore pasted a graphic of image of the Thich Quang Duc, a Buddhist monk who famously self-immolated on the streets of South Vietnam in 1963. The black and white image was Malcolm Browne’s famous photograph—Duc on fire in the street, remaining peaceful, tranquil, yet dying.

When Moore drove away from his home in Allen, TX that morning, the path for his legacy, his memory, set in motion. All he had to do was die.



**Image 1: Moore’s cover page of his suicide folder**

## **I. Finding His Place**

This fact is stained into my memory: On June 23, 2014, Reverend Moore drove to a parking lot on the largest highway in Grand Saline, TX and self-immolated in front of the town—his hometown. However, for current residents of the town, the date, the matter, the event, the person might not be as clear. Moore ventured out on this particular date to leave a message to the population of Grand Saline, telling them of their past,

shocking them in their present, and hoping to lead them to their future. But now many months away from this act, I am not quite sure what is remembered and what is forgotten. In later chapters I will explore how I became entangled in his story and the story of Grand Saline because the narrative of Moore, his self-immolation, and the history of Grand Saline is not solely about one man; it is about the collective remembering of residents. Thus, this will not be a "standard narrative"; it will be something a bit different. However, before we look more closely at the rhetorical complexity of Moore's self-immolation and its repercussions on the community, we should first review Moore's personal history to better understand the agent behind the act.

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 a few various clothing stores, he held an early affinity with the Christian faith. As Michael Hall, the writer for *Texas Monthly* who first wrote the biography on Moore, understands it, Moore distinguished "himself in Sunday school with his knowledge of Scripture...He wanted to be a leader like his pastor, Brother Harold Fagan, and soon became president of the youth fellowship" (Hall). In a short 1991 autobiographical essay, Moore recalls at a young age wanting to "avenge my father's failures: illiteracy, clumsiness, unemployment. The cure would be education, and—that most respectable ladder-climbing out of poverty—'the ministry'" ("An Account"). Several descriptions of Moore's early life, and his own writings of his early memories, paint a picture of an adolescent boy wanting to find his place in the world, attempting to better himself through education and the Gospel. Much of his early life could be defined through this desire to make himself into an educated man of God.

But after leaving Grand Saline, Moore soon found conflict between his faith, church members, and his social beliefs. Once Moore graduated from high school, he obtained a job driving a bus in Tyler (forty miles south of town) for Tyler Junior College and earned enough to attend college there. During this time, he took on service in a small student church outside of the city that allowed him to finish his education and begin his career as a preacher. Moore notes his success, as he helped the church grow from “110 to 425 members in less than four years, with parallel financial growth” (“1988 Biography”). However, his success behind the pulpit came with critique of his interest in social justice. As he strived to become a minister, he wrapped himself around the pain of prejudice in Grand Saline, remembering the Sundown signs<sup>3</sup> at the edges of town and remembering a local man telling him how he recently hanged a black man on the Poletown Bridge. These memories molded Moore's theology and became intertwined with his biblical messages. At the first church he pastored, a church trustee invited him to eat one night after he preached about the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. The trustee asked him, “Would you ever have a nigger in your home to eat with you?” Charles answered "yes" and was thrown off the property. On a similar occasion behind the pulpit at the First Methodist Church in Grand Saline, Charles criticized the culture of his hometown. One childhood friend stated, “He attacked the prejudice in the community...He hurt some feelings with that that message, stunned a lot of people. He was told not to come back” (Hall).

However, it was Southern Methodist University (SMU) that soon gave Moore a

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<sup>3</sup> Sundown signs are infamous in parts of the Deep South. They were signs located at the edges of town that often said something like "Nigger, don't be caught here after sundown." A great book on this is James Loewen's *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism* (2006).

sense of purpose that united his faith and his fight for racial justice. He quickly fell in love with the campus and enrolled as an English major, commuting between Dallas and Grand Saline after marrying his first wife Patricia. Once he finished his degree, he enrolled at the SMU Perkins School of Theology, where he further complicated his theology and Christian dogma with the social unrest on the horizon in the late 1950s. Hall notes that “because Perkins was one of the first graduate schools to be integrated—it did so in 1952, though the university as a whole wouldn’t follow until 1962—Charles could discuss civil rights with students who were black.” Moore’s affection for racial justice and his education at Perkins propelled him back into East Texas in 1959, where he confronted the harsh differences of racial acceptance between the urban life of Dallas and the rural towns behind the Piney Curtain.

A central theme of Moore's life is that he never felt at ease in one place, especially in the years leading up to, and during, the 1960s. From the late-1950s until 1965, Moore served at three different churches in Texas, one in East Texas, the First Methodist Church in Carthage, and two in San Antonio, Jefferson Methodist Church and St. Matthew’s Methodist Church. The church in Carthage had similar conservative ideologies of race as the first church he pastored, which led to him moving away from San Antonio. By 1965, Moore decided to return to theology school and moved his family to Boston where he enrolled in postgraduate courses at Boston University and Harvard Divinity School. While in Boston, Moore encountered the Ecumenical Institute (EI), “a radical Christian collective,” that wanted to rebuild ghettos and further develop poorer, black communities (Hall). Moore’s passion for fighting racial justice matured during this time, and he soon wanted to move to Chicago, the headquarters for the EI, to take part in



the transformations happening in the slums of the west side. Though his wife feared for their family's safety the family picked up and moved to Chicago, one of the most active cities during the Vietnam era. Moore quickly grew in the ranks of the EI as the family worked all across the greater Chicago area for a period of four years, but still Moore searched for a deeper purpose.

Thus, in 1973, Moore and his wife took a risk and moved to India to set the framework for an EI mission abroad. The couple made the move knowing that their two sons would have to stay behind in the states. Both kids were early teenagers at the time and moved in with other EI families. While in India for two years, Moore's children grew distant from their father, ultimately placing a strain on their relationship and a strain on his relationship with Patricia too. This disconnect with his family led to a divorce in 1977 (after returning from India) that sent him drifting on the Texas coast throughout the late-1970s and 1980s. Moore continually moved around the state, going back to Grand Saline for a while to stay with his sick mother and preaching at various churches along the coast. He even joined the EI again and made a few trips abroad to Europe, Africa, and India. But once he was offered a position at Grace United Methodist Church in Austin in 1990, he finally felt a sense of purpose again.

With his new wife, Linda, Charles felt energized about his faith and community once again. In a quiet neighborhood on the south side of the Colorado River, he initiated repairs on the small church and opened its doors as an inclusive place for worship and community gatherings, ranging from gatherings of the Jewish Reconstructionist group to meetings for the Austin Rape Crisis Center. During this time, Moore befriended a young homosexual man, Andy Smith, who had a similar upbringing in East Texas. Smith began

attending Grace and soon invited his friends, providing Moore an exigence for preaching once again on inclusiveness. He also supplied room space for meetings for the Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays organization. In the early 1990s, the United Methodist Church (UMC) had an explicit stance against LGBTQ people, which marked Moore as a rebel within the church community. But this work gave him purpose, so much so that his tireless effort with such committees and organizations kept him occupied day and night, causing enough turmoil with his wife Linda that led them to split in 1993.

During his time at Grace, Moore first found a purpose in embodying both his faith and social awareness within one single act: a hunger strike protest. In 1996, the UMC convened a worldwide meeting of bishops in Austin, and Moore finally encountered an opportunity to protest its official stance on homosexuality. He found solace in a hunger strike and publicly called for the bishops to express “their concern about the mistreatment of gay people, especially by church officials” (“Methodist Minister”). Thirteen days into his strike, the *Austin American-Statesman* published a piece on Moore, who told the paper, “This issue is wracking every major denomination. It is not an issue that can be ignored...When people are suffering and ask for a hearing are refused, they have no alternative but to react in a rebellious way” (“Methodist Minister”). Two days after the story broke, fifteen days into his fast, the bishops drafted a resolution that “call[ed] upon all United Methodist congregations to welcome all people into ‘redemptive fellowship’ and to become centers of learning about the nature of homosexuality” (“Austin Minister”). The *Statesman* wrote another piece on Moore’s success the following day, describing the triumph of the hunger strike. Though the bishops did not and could not change Methodist dogma, their call for welcoming homosexuals seemed good enough for

Moore to end his fast. During this time in the spotlight, Moore attracted more and more members to the church after his strong, public stance.

Moore often employed a rhetoric of compassion when preaching from the pulpit; he desired to have his congregation love every single person as if they were all neighbors. When he retired from the church in 2000, he left behind a legacy of love and empathy among the friends, fans, and churchgoers that had witnessed him preach over his entire career. Andy Smith, mentioned above, found Moore's sermons “wanted to challenge us to think and explore our faith” (Hall). Another member, Rich Brotherton, recalled “Every sermon, you’d be humbled, moved, and inspired” (Hall). Since Moore read his sermons line-by-line from his notes, his archives host multitudes of his preachings verbatim. Reading through these sermons, one feels the compassion, intellectualism, and love for social justice that Moore embodied. In one well-known sermon, “Lazarus, Come out!,” he ponders in closing: “Is it not we who have bound gay and lesbian persons with graveclothes [*sic*] of hateful rules and sanctimonious customs, and tried to embalm them with sweet-odored salves of pious shibboleths, all the while singing exalted hymnodies about the immutable divine virtues of the traditional family?” Bill Renfro, Moore’s stepson-in-law, confided in me that the Lazarus sermon greatly impacted the churchgoers at Grace and reaffirmed for the congregation Moore’s social stance and love.

In another sermon delivered to Grace on August 4, 1996, Moore denounced the hatred for the impoverished across the country, especially from those calling themselves Christians. He concludes:

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. (“You Give Them Something to Eat”)

Here, Moore addresses not only his naysayers but pushes against the status quo in America and how our country treats the poor. His words, often poetic and beautifully scripted, fulfill his own theology: Moore used the love of the Gospel to promote a better society here on Earth, and his sermons exhibit this campaign. Without doubt, Charles’s sermons supply insight into the passions and drive behind his social justice initiatives.

Yet, even after retiring, Moore could not find peace within himself; he still searched for a purpose to accomplish before his death, and he became even more interested in the racial history of Grand Saline. During this period, he remarried for a third time, and though he loved his wife deeply, he could not find enough solace solely through her. In 2002, he moved to Sunnyvale, a suburb east of Dallas, where he tried his hand at writing. He often visited SMU for research and preached the occasional sermon. When Guy, one of Charles’s sons, had children in the mid-2000s, Moore moved to Allen, north of Dallas, to be closer to his grandchildren, attempting to make up for his early mistakes as a father. Yet, still dissatisfied with some aspect of his life, he returned to researching the history of race in Grand Saline. Moore's archives show that he kept clippings from local newspapers about the history of racism in Grand Saline from the 1980s and 1990s—clippings, we can assume, he collected throughout his life. Yet, at the turn of the new decade, we can see Moore take up a more proactive interest in his hometown; he began emailing historians about the legacy of racism that he remembered

as kid. The racism in his hometown that scarred Charles as a child in the early 1940s lingered within him even in the early 2010s. When a health scare in 2012 sent Moore spiraling into a pit of despair, he began hatching a plan to end life on his own terms, to die for the people he fought so hard for throughout his life.

And he eventually fulfilled that purpose.

## **II. The Effect of Charles Moore's Death**

The ripple effects of Moore's death—the misinterpretation of events, the public discussion of racism, the media narratives—commenced as soon as people rushed to him trying to save his life.

Moore arrived in Grand Saline and parked at the Bear Grounds, a small shopping center on the east side of town, before eleven on the morning of June 23. Angi McPherson, a receptionist at the Sophistikutz hair salon, observed Moore in the parking lot when she arrived and continued to watch him throughout the day. Her co-worker, Mallie Munn, watched him as well, noting that he moved “the car a few times to other parking spaces, but never too far away” (Hall). However, Moore seemed just a curiosity for the two women—a man doing something irregular on a slow Monday. In hindsight, Moore's actions reflect a man contemplating something important, perhaps his life.

After staying in the lot for over six hours, Moore decided to act right after 5:30 pm, when people in town were busy leaving work, travelling home from other cities, and completing their evening chores. He died directly in front of McPherson and Munn, their friends, and countless other people who were driving by on Highway 80, the most populated road in town. The only objects he left at the scene were his Volkswagen and a two page letter on the window of his car.

These events, especially the first moments of misinformation and secrecy that followed Moore's death, drew me into the case because it reminded me of how rhetoric, perception, and race still matter, even when many refer to the 21<sup>st</sup> century as “post-racial.”

We often find ourselves embroiled in events that matter us, much in the same we are drawn to tell stories, do research, and make knowledge. That is precisely what happened to me the day I heard about Moore's death and his reasons for dying. All the memories of racism that I happened to me as a kid, being called "Wetback" by my peers, a "Taco Roll" by my coach, and participating in the football team's slogan "we're alright, cuz we're all white" rushed back to me. Also, I remembered the traditions and public memories of racism that fueled much of the town's stories—the tales of lynchings and secret meeting places for the KKK. Though I now live roughly two hours away from Grand Saline, I heard about the self-immolation only minutes after it took place. Two Facebook friends of mine drove by the Bear Grounds, saw the event, and simply asked, “Did someone set themselves on fire at the Bear Grounds?” as their Facebook statuses. By that evening, the news was all over the Facebook feeds of my Grand Saline friends, and there was a major announcement: whoever the man was (he remained publicly unnamed until the *Tyler Morning Telegraph* posted an article a week later), he left behind a letter claiming that he was a former member of the KKK and was asking for forgiveness of his sins.

I was shocked. Over the past two years of my life in a doctoral program, my interests had slowly shifted away from literature into the realm of rhetorics, racial justice, and my hometown memories of racism, subjects I covered in many blog essays. And

then, on this hot summer day, a man set himself on fire because of his involvement with the KKK. I knew instantly that this was not just something important for the town but for my experience there too. When I reflected on my time in high school, I was often reminded of stories of implicit and explicit racism, stories that affected my relationship with my home and also my interpretation of it as well. I went to bed the night of June 23 stunned. I could not sleep. Racism in Grand Saline had been publicly announced because of a fiery death, and I was hopeful that the town would have to publicly address the message. The man's death had already affected me, and I tossed and turned thinking about the news.

By the next evening, nothing else popped up on my newsfeed about the self-immolation, so I decided to message a prominent member of the town (who wishes to remain anonymous). This person stated, "I will tell you though [*sic*] [the note] is not nearly as exciting as Facebook makes it out to be." I found that sentence odd, especially since people in Grand Saline claimed this man killed himself because of his ties with the KKK. This individual confirmed that the KKK story was wrong and then described the contents of Moore's letter (see Image 2). I was a bit shocked, perhaps naively, that this initial story could be as far from the truth. But I knew at least one truth, one that I had known for quite some time: the KKK story could not be plausible unless residents in town knew something about the lynchings that had taken place there decades ago. In other words, people in town could not jump to the conclusion that Moore was a KKK member unless it was known that the KKK existed in the area. The stories of the KKK that Moore knew were the same stories I remembered hearing, and it turned out that he

was not a part of the KKK.<sup>4</sup> Actually he killed himself in protest of such terrible organizations, and lynchings that occurred in the past in Grand Saline. This spoke to me more than the KKK story, simply because I was forced to ask myself why a man who had no involvement in the KKK would kill himself because of racial crimes committed in the past. (I'll return to this letter in more detail in Chapters 2 and 5.)

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<sup>4</sup> There are many rumors and legends about the KKK and public lynchings in Grand Saline that many residents have heard their entire lives. I will address these stories more thoroughly in Chapter 5.



O GRAND SALINE, REPENT OF YOUR RACISM

I was born in Grand Saline, Texas almost 80 years ago. As I grew up, I heard the usual racial slurs, but they didn't mean much to me. I don't remember even meeting an African-American person until I began driving a bus to Tyler Junior College and made friends with the mechanic who cared for the vehicles: I teased him about his skin-color, and he became very angry with me; that is one way I learned about the pain of discrimination.

During my second year as a college student, I was serving a small church in the country near Tyler, when the United States Supreme Court declared racial discrimination in schools illegal in 1954: when I let it be known that I agreed with the Court's ruling, I was cursed and rejected. When word about that got back to First Methodist Church in Grand Saline (which had joyfully recommended me for ministry—the first ever from the congregation), I was condemned and called a Communist; during the 60 years since then, I have never once been invited to participate in any activity at First Methodist (except family funerals), let alone to speak from its pulpit.

When I was about 10-years-old, some friends and I were walking down the road toward the creek to catch some fish, when a man called "Uncle Billy" stopped us and called us into his house for a drink of water—but his real purpose was to cheerily tell us about helping to kill "niggers" and put their heads up on a pole. A section of Grand Saline was (maybe still is) called "pole town," where the heads were displayed. It was years later before I knew what the name meant.

During World War II, when many soldiers came through town on the train, the citizens demanded that the shades in the passenger cars be pulled down if there were African-Americans aboard, so they wouldn't have to look at them.

The Ku Klux Klan was once very active in Grand Saline, and still probably has sympathizers in the town. Although it is illegal to discriminate against any race relative to housing, employment, etc., African-Americans who work in Grand Saline live elsewhere. It is sad to think that schools, churches, businesses, etc. have no racial diversity when it come to blacks.

My sense is that most Grand Saline residents just don't want black people among them, and so African-Americans don't want to live there and face rejection. This is a shame that has bothered me wherever I went in the world, and did not want to be identified with the town written up in the newspaper in 1993, but I have never raised my voice or written a word to contest the situation. I have owned my old family home at 1212 N. Spring St. for the last 15 years, but have never discussed the issue with my tenants.

Since we are currently celebrating the 50th anniversary of Freedom Summer in 1964, when people started working in the South to attain the right to vote for African-Americans along with other concerns. This past weekend was the anniversary of the murder of three young men (Goodman, Schwerner and Cheney) in Philadelphia, Mississippi, which gave great impetus to the Civil Rights Movement—since this historic time is being remembered, I find myself very concerned about the rise of racism across the country at the present time. Efforts are being made in many places to make voting more difficult for some people, especially African-Americans. Much of the opposition to President Obama is simply because he is black.

I will soon be eighty years old, and my heart is broken over this. America (and Grand Saline prominently) have never really repented for the atrocities of slavery and its aftermath. What my hometown needs to do is open its heart and its doors to black people, as a sign of the rejection of past sins.

**Image 2: A copy of Charles Moore's self-immolation letter**

From this confidential source, I learned that the Grand Saline Police Department was inactive in pursuing Moore's story and disclosed, which many, including my source, felt was indicative of more heinous motives. After all, they claimed, in the 1990s, a black

family was run out of the public housing in town due to the KKK passing propaganda around the area, and many in town thought the police department feared another event like this happening again. One theory circulating in town was that the police hid the news because they knew the history of Grand Saline and feared the spotlight would shine back on their small town again. This fear of public perception and stories they heard throughout their lives influenced the town's perceptions of Moore's self-immolation. The motivations this source described to me did not seem too implausible because it was a "truth" residents lived with for so long: race was not to be talked about and should be hidden under the rug whenever possible. Stories like these prompted my thinking about the role of local histories and how those remembered events live on and circulate. I take up these issues more fully in Chapter 5.

Two days away from the event, I was optimistic that another, bigger, news organization would publish something about the incident soon. The "truth" informing the public memories of Grand Saline came to fruition in the explicit and implicit rhetorical coverage in the local newspaper. Wendi Callaway, the editor for *The Grand Saline Sun*, posted an ambiguous story three days after Moore's death, keeping him nameless and not stating his intentions other than to say that he was not a member of the KKK and that he died for some "problems" that had happened historically in the town. Any outsider reading this story might not have thought twice about it because it did not give much detail about who Moore was or his motivations in self-immolating. But for anyone who understood Grand Saline and its perceptions, the issue was clear: Moore died protesting racism. There were no other stains on Grand Saline's reputation except for this racist legacy, and the coded language spoke directly to residents. Even if they thought Moore

was crazy, they understood his cause. But as I discuss in Chapter 5, despite their insider knowledge, it was still easy for many of them to dismiss his act rather than to see it as a valid attempt at reconciliation or dialogue. The ambiguity in Callaway's story offered readers a chance to see the realities of Moore's death if they dared to read between the lines; if not, they could casually pass over the text, dismiss the story, and disregard anything they heard about what actually took place.

I travelled home the weekend of the 27 to see my grandfather preach one last time before retiring from his church that upcoming Sunday. I was full of grief as I passed by the Bear Grounds. I stopped in the parking lot and tried to find any trace of Moore's death, but the charred lines of the parking spot strips were already painted over. Any physical traces of Moore's self-immolation were already erased. I left the scene and traveled to my mother's house, now ten miles outside of Grand Saline. (She moved away from town after I left for college.) I thought it would be great to see what she and my grandparents knew. I interrogated them. "Did anyone hear about the man on fire?" "Did it make news?" The answer was still no. As I drove back home to Fort Worth, I knew that I had to do something. An injustice weighed me down. I felt people in the town were trying to keep press away from this event, so I did the most responsible thing I could do: I emailed all the news organizations in the area who might be interested in the story.

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On Monday, June 30, I sent out about ten emails to various news organizations across Texas (and even sent one email to Melissa Harris-Perry, a former host of talk show on MSNBC). After a week of silence from the media, I was tired that Moore had not been mentioned, outside of the sole *Grand Saline Sun* publication, so I directed the emails to

three newspaper publications (the *Tyler Morning Telegraph*, *Dallas Morning News*, and *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*) and to all television stations in the DFW and Tyler areas (about seven stations).<sup>5</sup> To me, it just felt like the right thing to do: a way to create justice from the injustices I have felt since high school.

That Monday morning, I headed back to TCU to teach my summer class and received a call from Kenneth Dean, from the *Tyler Morning Telegraph*, later that afternoon. I spoke with Dean for nearly an hour about the self-immolation and about my own memories of racism in Grand Saline, and during this time I realized the implications of my interview: I was, to some residents, "disavowing" the town. After detailing my experiences with racism in town, I felt some relief in having my stories of racism being out in the open, but I feared what others would think. While I had blogged about my racist experiences in Grand Saline before, I felt like this was a different: it was a wider audience in a credible news publication. It was no longer me venting, it was a story that others besides a few friends on my Facebook would read. Dean published his first article on the *Tyler Morning Telegraph* website on Tuesday, July 1<sup>st</sup> and then headlined the paper the following morning with "MADMAN OR MARTYR?" In it, he questioned Grand Saline's racial history by situating its demographics in context with neighboring towns but did not dive too much into the history of Grand Saline and race. He set up Moore's death as a binary: either he was a martyr willing to die for racial injustice or he was a crazy person. There was no wiggle room in this article. I was quoted as saying the town still had problems they never addressed, and I received instant backlash in my social media circles. My high school friends, friends' parents, and teachers, stated how

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<sup>5</sup> I sent these emails out, being fascinated with the self-immolation, but at the same time without any sort of academic research project on my radar.

wrong I was and labelled me as a racial agitator. One high school friend even called me a “pseudo-academic, whose work has no value.” Overall, though Dean might have sensationalized Moore's death, I was happy to see the story finally caught some traction. I also received an email from the CBS station that same week. They asked me to do a sit-down interview with them on camera where they would talk about the scars of racism in Grand Saline. I mulled this over for a while and had to decline. I wanted the story to be about Moore, not myself.

Before the next set of regional articles were published, a *United Methodist Church News* story came out about Moore on July 2<sup>nd</sup> that recast his death as not being theologically wrong, discussing Moore’s death as protest, titled "Retired pastor saw ‘destiny’ in self-immolation." Author Sam Hodges provided a brief history of Moore’s activism and even acknowledged the denomination’s dogma on suicide in which they claim “that nothing, including suicide, separates us from the love of God." In other words, the UMC, at least implicitly, justified Moore's act (or allowed others to interpret this way). The UMC has often been categorized as one of the more liberal Christian denominations, and the blog they sponsored on Moore's death acknowledged their progressive views on "suicide." As a young boy raised in a Baptist church, I remember being taught that without doubt that "suicide" automatically sent you to hell because that went against God's plan. I never understood how something could be "outside" of an omniscient God's plan, but this was taught to me on the same regards as John 3:16. Where previous stories explicitly and sometimes implicitly labeled Moore as crazy, the UMC story battled that narrative with one of faith and love. By emphasizing the church's perspective on suicide, the church implicitly acknowledged that Moore's death was not in

vain. I felt appreciative seeing the UMC take Moore's side in social justice, something he fought against them for in the spotlight for a long time.

Another publication on July 3 recast self-immolation in global contexts for readers in the regional *Tyler Morning Telegraph*. Rebecca Hoeffner described the history of self-immolation and provided interviews with Moore's family, specifically Bill Renfro. On this same date, Wendi Callaway published an op-ed on the *Grand Saline Sun* Facebook page titled "Protesting Racism," where she recounted the history of Grand Saline's relationship with racism and called for people to pray over the town. Callaway labelled the histories of Grand Saline's racism as "truth," and received backlash from town members who claimed the stories about the town were folklore. The op-ed received thirty-nine shares, over seventy likes, and over 100 comments of people debating the town's racial history, making it one of the most talked about stories for the *Grand Saline Sun* in recent memory.

At the end of the July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend, Callaway published another article in the *Grand Saline Sun* situating Moore's death as being about more than just racism, providing more details about his self-immolation while interviewing a local Methodist minister about the act as well. The newspaper story did not add much to the media narrative, other than to say he also was upset about other issues, like homophobia (trying to deemphasize his stance on racial issues). But following another week of media silence, the first major paper to run the story, the *Dallas Morning News*, finally humanized Moore past the sensational headlines that had captivated local news coverage. Where other stories focused on racial differences and the history of self-immolation, Melissa Repko highlighted the humanity behind Moore's act, presenting more personal information and

showing more of Moore's biography than had first been released. Repko was the first to discuss Moore's lifelong struggle with social justice and his time as a minister/activist in Austin. While previous headlines had dramatized Moore, Repko humanized him, showing him as a caring man who desired nothing more to make change in the world around him. This article stood out from the first articles because it actually attempted to empathize with Moore. He was no longer a person without motive or possibly crazy; he was now a man who strived for hope. From this piece, the story acquired national attention via the *Huffington Post*, *New York Daily News*, and *Washington Post*, not adding anything to the narrative but certainly making the local story national. I never received a reply from any other news source during the first month after Moore's death, and while I do think some of the coverage accelerated due to the *Tyler Morning Telegraph* article, it seemed the media took too long to turn Moore's story into a national, trending story.

Back in Grand Saline, thirteen prominent citizens of the town (including the town dentist, a high school teacher, and a few store owners) grew upset with Callaway's discussion of the town's history in her op-ed and published a letter in the paper and on the *Grand Saline Sun* Facebook page titled, "Racism in Grand Saline? The Historical Truths." As a rhetorical strategy, these prominent residents in town intended to maintain the public memory of the town and make sure Callaway and others (myself included) did not have the only say in the racial narrative of Grand Saline. They wanted to push back against our claims. Of course, these prominent citizens had something to gain in writing this letter; many of them were business owners who benefited from the town's success and reputation. The letter attempts to debunk any stories about the town through

historical “facts” (though some of the facts were true, I could not corroborate many of them). Similar to the op-ed Callaway published, the story received many shares, likes, and comments from the townspeople, who mostly agreed with the facts being presented, though there were some debates in the Facebook thread. While the op-ed did use some historical sources, much of their evidence lacked citations and records, though they loosely claimed a few historical sources. For instance, in trying to discredit the history of lynchings at Poletown, the authors used claims of a local historian and the Freedman's Bureau to demonstrate how the area got its name and state that there were no known recollections of lynchings in town. However, this claim completely contradicts history in the Van Zandt County Genealogical (VZCG) database that documents reports that white men were killed in the area just for helping black people.<sup>6</sup>

The Moore story lost all steam after the week of July 15. During this time I began thinking about the effect of Moore's story on me and thought I could possibly include Moore as a case study in my research on sacrificial rhetorics. Before any of these events took place, I had already done some research on Cesar Chavez, Delores Huerta, and the rhetoric of sacrifice and realized Moore's story could be another case study in my analysis. "Or, Moore's story could be your entire dissertation," my advisor told me. For a while, I could not possibly imagine how to build an entire dissertation on one man's death that hardly made a beep on a radar. But, as you are reading this now, I soon realized that the impact of Moore's life ultimately altered my perception of rhetoric and acts of sacrifice. These rhetorical events have *real* consequences on local and global levels, and I believe studying the case of Moore will be instructive for the field at large.

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<sup>6</sup> A great story of this, supported from the VZCG, is Milda Mason's account of the KKK at Poletown hosted by the genealogical society at <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~txvzcg/vzgsun.htm>.



No major publications were produced on Moore until the December 2014 issue of the *Texas Monthly* featured Michael Hall's article "Man on Fire." Hall detailed the narrative of Moore's self-immolation along with a biography of Moore's life and activism—and the various successes and failures he had along the way with his ministry. Hall's article also shines light on Moore's troubled relationship with Grand Saline and the critiques he had toward their racial values throughout his life. Yet, his coverage demonstrates the aftermath of Moore's self-immolation and brought many important questions to light: was Grand Saline racist? Did Moore die in vain? Did he create change? I personally was asked all of these questions by residents and friends on social media when I was writing and blogging about Moore, and the town publicly dealt with these issues as well. However, as a rhetorician invested in his town's relationship with race, I became fascinated by Moore's self-immolation act, a sacrifice to some and a terrible act to others. I knew I had to explore it, not just to better understand Grand Saline but to see what we can learn about rhetoric, public memory, protest, and race see how people navigate the present and reconcile the past.

### **III. Scholarly Frameworks**

This dissertation explores the events that unfolded in Grand Saline as a rhetorical sequence: in the first half I analyze the precedents, motivations, and reception of Moore's self-immolation as an act of protest rhetoric. In this second half, I show how his death utilized local appeals of public memory that attempted to affect the racial attitudes of people in his hometown. I do this work for a couple of reasons: On one hand, one of the claims from my dissertation is that we need more unity between global and local analysis of protest acts because only doing one type or the other misses the bigger picture. Thus, I

begin with analysis of self-immolation on a global scale, placing Moore on a global stage, to show what that discourse tells us about Moore and what this analysis misses. By doing this, I create an exigence for the second half of my dissertation that calls for more local analysis in the form of public memory. Secondly, I feel that I cannot truly begin with the local discourse until I carve out a space in the global (where many scholars choose to do the opposite). We need to better understand Moore on a global stage, in relationship with other self-immolations around the world, before we uncover him on a local stage. Therefore, my dissertation parallels one of my larger arguments: that we need more merged analysis on protest acts, and to make this point, I begin with analysis on the global to show what we can ascertain from this perspective but with this lens misses as well.

The purpose of my study is to better understand the complex rhetorical situation of Moore's death, not only as it aligns with other self-immolations, but also as it opens a discourse on the legacy of racism in a small rural town. Primarily, I am asking a few related research questions: What exigencies lead to self-immolation as a protest act? How does self-immolation attempt to persuade audiences? What affect did Moore's self-immolation have on the subsequent dialogue and public memory in Grand Saline? How did memory and race play a role in the discourse? How can the events in Grand Saline lead us to a better understanding of rhetoric and our field as a whole? For the purposes of this study, I have narrowed the scope to focus on only these questions. This project stems from important research in our field, especially the areas of rhetorical protest, memory studies, and the rhetorics of race. In the sections that follow, I show how this work builds upon this scholarship before moving to articulate my methodology and preview my

chapters. These sections, 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3, illustrate why and how I integrate the rhetorics of protest, memory, and race into my project.

### **3.1 *The Rhetoric of Protest***

When Moore chose to self-immolate, he did so in an attempt to protest the racist culture in Grand Saline. When I learned he was not a part of the KKK, I suspected that he must have died for a reason. But many people did not so easily view his death as a protest. They weren't able to—as the saying goes—"know it when they saw it," which led me to some important questions about Moore's death and protest: What change did he hope he would create? How did he hope to appeal to his local audience through protest? Though not every town resident asked these questions, or viewed his death as protest, they still remain fundamental to understanding Moore's death. Studying Moore's death can illuminate how we differentiate between suicide and protest acts and demonstrate how a rhetoric of self-immolation draws on protest appeals similar to acts like hunger strikes, sit-ins, and other forms of confrontation, both nonviolent and violent. Together, this specific exploration can inform our thinking about protest rhetoric more generally.

My analysis shows how a singular act of self-immolation, because of its complex involvement in multiple discourses, can help us better understand rhetorical protest in the 21st century. No social movement is directly correlated with Moore's death, yet I believe his self-immolation should be understood as an individual protest act with social motives and aims. Some self-immolations are not considered protest because they have no social motivations, but I argue that most of the self-immolations that occur around the world are a form of protest because they typically embody one or more political exigencies. Considering this, some interesting questions come to light in relation

to the field of Rhetoric and Composition: 1) How have protest acts changed rhetorically over the past fifty years? 2) How does self-immolation in an Eastern sense differ from how we view it in a Western sense, do these differences say about protest rhetorically? I aim to show how Moore's self-immolation can change the way we view protest as a rhetorical act, as it relates to universal appeals of sacrifice, transcendence, and embodiment—and to underlying broader themes of violence, religion, and martyrdom.

Richard J. Jensen, whose work extensively investigates protest and social movements, states that the 1960s changed rhetorical scholarship because it forced rhetoricians to investigate dissent. Whereas most scholarship prior to the 1960s emphasized typical public discourse, such as major public speeches and dialogue from the establishment, the various social movements during this decade made researchers rethink how theories of rhetoric worked with large protest actions such as confrontation and obscenity (28-29). Various studies in the late 1960s and 1970s illustrate his point. For instance, Haig A. Bosmajian's "Obscenity and Protest" and *Dissent: Symbolic Behavior and Rhetorical Strategies* configured how the symbolic acts of protest, such as obscenity, flag burning, sit-ins, boycotts, and other means affected change during the 1960s. Other rhetoricians, such as Robert L. Scott and Donald K. Smith ("The Rhetoric of Confrontation") and Edward Corbett ("The Rhetoric of the Open Hand and the Rhetoric of the Closed Fist") analyzed what these counterculture movements and their forms of protest and dissent meant to rhetorical theory, establishing the way dissent emphasizes various tactics, nonverbal actions, and use of violence to promote change. These initial conversations are vital to seeing how protest entered the fray of public discourse, and they set the stage for seeing protest differently, expanding its appeals as a counterculture

and its scope. My project looks at one of the most extreme acts of protests, self-immolation, as an act that has unique roots to the 1960s.

The field eventually moved from solely looking at the movements of the 1960s to focusing on ethnic and racial protest in relation to cultural traditions. In the 1980s, scholars produced little in-depth research on protest, though a few major textbooks, such as Charles J. Stewart, Craig Allen Smith, Robert E. Denton, Jr.'s *Persuasion and Social Movements*, were produced. Jensen notes that the 1980s "have often been described as a time when there was little dissent in the country, and this lack of dissent resulted in few articles" (30). Nonetheless, the early rhetorical analyses in the 1960s and 1970s eventually did pave the path for future articles and books on protest in the 1990s through the present. While there were new protest movements taking place in America in the 1990s, such as the Los Angeles Rodney King riots, in this decade scholars began reconfiguring the rhetorical aspects of the 1960 protests. For example, John Hammerback and Jensen argued that the Plan for Delano, for Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers, has to be understood in a broader context of Mexican-American rhetorics, their ideologies and symbols ("Ethnic Heritage as Rhetorical Legacy"). Their work calls for other scholars to look at ethnic and racial protest in terms of cultural traditions, something that had been missing from previous analyses. Likewise, Bonnie J. Dow's rhetorical reconstruction of the news coverage of the 1970 women's strike for equality ("Spectacle, Spectatorship, and Gender Anxiety") and Todd McDorman's investigation into black responses of *Scott v. Sanford*<sup>7</sup> ("Challenging Constitutional Authority") both offer examples of reconfiguring previous protests during the 1990s. Where Dow

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<sup>7</sup> The *Scott v. Sanford* Supreme Court case argued that people who are slaves in one state are slaves in every state; they could not change their status as property.

illustrates how feminist figures existed and fought against the caricature representations of them on the news during a major strike, McDorman shows how African-Americans rebelled against the social control attempted by enacting in the *Scott v Sanford* decision. These are just a few examples of work concerned with not only recovering the tactics and movements of old but also reshaping them within cultural domains outside of the typical white, heteronormative society. My project aims to focus on racial/ethnic elements and implications of protest, not just by extending the scope of challenging the white, normative structure but by investigating borders between those cultural domains and other complex spaces.

Furthermore, my project embraces our current, techno-global life, especially the ways technology has aided social movements across the world. Technology has changed the ways that people can protest and organize and has also opened new ways for groups to hack institutions that oppress them. From the 2000s to the present, research has widened on protest to focus on two important features (1) global dissent and (2) the role of the internet, technology, and social media. With movements across the world, such as the Arab Spring, the global financial crisis protests, and major contemporary civil rights issues, the past seventeen years have given rhetorical scholars much to examine and to expand work on protest beyond typical American discourse. Scholars like Shui-yin Sharon Yam ("Grassroots Tactics and the Appropriation of State Nationalist Rhetoric") and Ronald Walter Greene and Kevin Douglas Kuswa ("From the Arab Spring to Athens, From Occupy Wall Street to Moscow") exhibit the field's push to look at the way different cultures partake in different protest rhetorics, as these scholars look at the way tools like embodiment, satire, power, and politics perform different functions across the

globe. Scholars have also invested in the way the internet has shaped the way protest works, illustrating how technology has changed accessibility in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. On a different end of the spectrum, Tim Jordan and Paul Taylor's *Hactivism and Cyberwars* and Wim van de Donk, Brian D. Loader, Paul G. Nixon, and Dieter Rucht's *Cyberprotest* explore how the internet, hacktivism, and other cyber tools affect social movements and protest. They articulate that hacktivism changes the way individuals can protest and take down institutions on a global scale (through groups like Anonymous, who hack organizations and people who harm poorer people). Taken together, these trends illustrate the way social movements and protests have molded to new technologies and how they have different effects and rhetorical strategies in various parts of the world. The computer has become the new medium of choice for many protest movements, and here, every individual has the agency to lead the charge through hacking and social media protests as well. Through Moore's case, we can explore how such protest media function in small town, rural America, and likewise see how global technology and cyber tools influence public discourse even for people not separated by distance.

In order to understand Moore's case as an act of protest, however, we need to distinguish it from an act of "mere" suicide that generates a media buzz. After all, how can the self-immolation act be perceived as protest to some but an "insane" act to others? There are certainly some instances when a person has engulfed him or herself in flames not in protest of the government or a culture, but rather as an act of arhetorical suicide. For instance, in Austin, TX, police officers attempted to talk to a man at a gas station in the early hours of a spring morning in 2015. When police approached him, he yelled he was going to set himself on fire and lit his car ablaze and attempted to kill himself

(Moodley). The police found no motivations for his self-immolation and believe he was attempting to commit suicide. In a case like this, the person attempting to kill himself by fire seems to have less political motivations and more personal ones, choosing not to convey any sort of message through or with death. Such a suicide does not align with a protest theme that typically accompanies self-immolations, giving an impetus to understanding self-immolation because of how audiences respond. If scholars can better comprehend how self-immolation and other atypical forms of protest attempt to persuade people, then we might see what draws people to act of extremism, using their bodies as tools for protest. In the case of Charles Moore, his act was very clearly one of agitation: he left a letter claiming he was dying to protest the town, and his history of social justice work and hunger strikes helps us align his personal death with other moments of his private and public life. Yet, not everyone who knew Moore viewed his act as one of defiance or dissent; many dismissed it. Thus, much of my dissertation concerns itself with how one attempted to influence people and how that attempt was perceived and negotiated.

To understand the rhetoric of self-immolation as a protest act, I break it down in the two preceding chapters of my dissertation. I separate these two chapters to first help my readers see why someone takes to self-immolation before then understanding how self-immolation aims to persuade others. Put simply, we need to see what motivates people to choose the act before we can understand how the act tries to motivate others. In Chapter 2, I study the general exigencies of self-immolation, exploring the historical and contemporary motivations for actors, while situating Moore's death in context with this global discourse. Here, I distinguish four different (but often) connected exigencies that



often lead people to self-immolate around the world, placing Moore's act on the global stage. I uniquely situate Moore within the exigencies, and then I analyze the general arguments and appeals that the self-immolator often mobilizes in Chapter 3. This chapter explains the major commonalities and themes that often are bound to the act and details Moore's death in the context of these arguments and appeals.

Overall, I argue that self-immolation aligns with other rhetorical forms of agitation, specifically other forms of "nonviolent resistance" like hunger strikes, though the end result of a self-immolation is typically much more deadly. While both of these acts are "violent" in that the actor inflicts pain upon his or her body, they are often seen as nonviolent acts. In their book *The Rhetoric of Agitation and Control*, John W. Bowers, Donovan J. Ochs, and Richard J. Jensen refer to this type of nonviolent protest as symbolic because people use "their bodies as symbols of their extremely strong convictions" (40). Also, nonviolent protesters often focus on persistence as a tool to create change. I will take up these issues of symbolism, of whether self-immolation is violent, or is possibly a form of martyrdom, or is a form of religious transcendence, in Chapter 3. Nonetheless, I believe the characteristics the authors in this section set forth on protest rhetoric contributes as much to self-immolations as they do to sit-ins and hunger strikes, even if the individual performing the act is not protesting the government but rather a culture.

### **3.2** *The Rhetoric of Memory*

The various dimensions of protest described above could be worthy enough for a detailed study just of Moore's self-immolation. However, if we want to access the full impact of such acts, we need to do more in terms of their reception, circulation, and

contestation, all acts using various forms of memory. Memory plays a vital role in how audiences perceived Moore's death and in understanding how Moore employed the local to make his argument. Both race and memory are inextricably tied to Grand Saline, together, and it is difficult to label one as more important than the other, but I will address memory here first because I feel analyzing this theme allows to us better understand the persistence and (mis)perceptions of race.

Moore's letter to Grand Saline brought up a few memories of racism that even I had experienced as a child. The letter begins with Moore expressing a painful memory of his childhood: a man named "Uncle Billy" once told a ten-year-old Moore that he had just hung a black man down at the Poletown Bridge. The memory scarred Moore as a boy because he could not imagine why someone would want to kill another just based upon skin color. Moore goes on to express he also remembered the KKK was once active in Grand Saline and was unsure if they still were. These memories, together, were similar to stories I heard as an adolescent in the early 2000s, over sixty years from when Moore was a child there. I too had heard stories about the KKK and hangings on the bridge and were told these stories as facts, though many in town question their reliability now. (No one ever gave me a first-hand experience of either of the stories; rather they were just told to me as legends of the town.) Nevertheless, I was fascinated by Moore's memories because they were related to my own, which led me to question the rhetorical fabric of racial memories in Grand Saline. Were people in town affected by these same memories? Did these memories influence their ideologies on race? How did Moore's death interrupt or change the memories of race in town if at all? These questions remain vital in comprehending not only town members' interpretation of Moore's death but also the

town's culture and influence as well.

These ideas specific to Moore's case relate to larger questions that have some major implications for our field. Mainly, 1) What does the rhetoric of memory tell us about the aims and reception of protest? 2) How does memory reshape, recast, and change our analysis of rhetorical situations? Through Moore's case, I show how memory rhetorics provide a framework to discover the local effects of the self-immolation in Grand Saline. Without memory rhetorics, I contend, we could not fully investigate how Grand Saline's racism affected him and how Moore aimed to persuade his audiences. Taking this type of investigation, we can see how a lens of public memory can be used to better understand how local memory dynamics alter exigencies and shape conversations in a range of other rhetorical environments.

The study of memory in rhetoric began as a way for orators to train their memories for public speeches and debates and has evolved into a wider area of study that includes how a range of public objects influence and shape people who interact, commemorate, and romanticize them. Rhetorical consideration of memory, starting with Cicero and Quintilian, mostly regarded recall for orators, but also situated memory as a rhetorical act, one utilized to train memory. However, by the 1990s the rhetorical study of memory transformed into a new area of inquiry, including public memory. This evolution stems from the study of mnemonics in Antiquity and investigates the ways communities come together to uniformly remember a person, place, or idea at a public site. I see this evolution extending from Bitzer's work on "public knowledge" in his chapter "Rhetoric and Public Knowledge." In this work, Bitzer claims that "public knowledge...can be regarded as that set of truths and values which would characterize a component public"

(83). His work thus situates how certain communities can represent a public, responding to exigencies that affect the community's well-being. In connection with public memory, Bitzer's work better illustrates how publics can fashion themselves and have the means for collective response (which is important for the analysis of Moore and the racial public memories of Grand Saline in Chapter 5).

21st century public memory scholars like Kendall Phillips, Stephen H. Browne, and Bradford Vivian have extended Bitzer's work and found a niche in their approaches to this new field, looking at the way material artifacts in public spaces, like monuments, memorials, and commemorations of sites of tragedy, construct identity for site attendees. They argue that we visit these sites to build our collective selves, to bridge our private identities with our public ones, and to feel a sense of community. For example, people visit the 9/11 memorial to share in the grief of our nation and to construct a collective sense of patriotism.

In Chapter 4, I demonstrate how a methodology of public memory is vital for understanding the complexities of what motivates a protest act and its reception. Not only was Moore's death influenced by his own personal and public memories of Grand Saline, the story of racist murders and the tales of the KKK, but the way people interacted with Moore's death was also influenced by public memory as well. Therefore, the rhetorical study of memory, especially public memory, plays a vital role in understanding the local appeals of Moore's death and the ripple effect of his self-immolation. I begin this chapter by understanding the history of memory and public memory studies in rhetoric and build a heuristic for understanding public memory on a local stage. I then analyze Moore from this heuristic lens to open up a public memory discourse that I further explore in Chapter

5.

### **3.3** *The Rhetoric of Race*

After reading Moore's note and knowing why he chose to kill himself, I was reminded of the issues of race in my hometown, many of which I had forgotten about or passed off as nonsense. For instance, I remembered after Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans, some black high schoolers moved to a nearby town, and my football teammates were afraid they were better athletes and would beat us in an upcoming game. We were taught that they were better athletes than us. My own personal memories of racism toward me, being called "Beaner," "Wetback," and "Sancho," stuck with me over the years. Why did I ever go along with these nicknames? How had this racism affected me after leaving the town? This racism struck a chord with me, and prompted some important questions on the systemic culture of racism in Grand Saline from a systemic and personal level: how does a culture remember or forget legacies of racism? How do they talk about past racism in the present? How does their perception of being racist affect their town? I know once I moved away from Grand Saline as an adult, I was often too embarrassed to tell people where I was from because many of them knew the town to be racist. These questions of race and racism are themes crucial to this dissertation because they further develop not only why Moore chose to die but what effect he had on the town.

Some related questions come to light as I connect these conversations on the rhetorics of race to the larger field. Specifically, 1) How does a better understanding of the conversations and memories of race/racism in a small town enhance inquiry in public writing and rhetoric? 2) How do white, rural peoples preserve their identities through

racist public memories? Although many Grand Saline residents consider themselves post-racial, they actually live within the constructs of a racist imaginary, multiple racist public memories, that pervade the town's perception. For the field, I believe my research adds a useful approach to study how non-academics talk about and remember race; it does so by demonstrating how race, memory making, and ideologies are all connected to one another, and I hope that my analysis reshapes how we think rural communities practice racist ideologies through the use of memory making.

The study of race in Rhetoric and Composition is a complicated one that deals with issues of culture, difference, literacy, and racism, and it begins with the discussions of non-standard English in the subfield of Literacy Studies. These discussions eventually birthed the fields of cultural rhetorics and the studies of cultural difference, race, and community in the 1990s that has flourished up to the present. While the early discussions on race primarily focused on lingual practices and racist understandings of the practices, newer research emphasizes differences within racial cultures, making the move to better understand how different races and ethnic groups comprise their own meaning and existence. This shift in research over the last forty years illustrates America's focus on multiculturalism, which demonstrates how racial rhetorics, or broadly cultural rhetorics, grew into a subfield of rhetorical studies.

Starting in 1977, Geneva Smitherman's pinnacle work *Talkin and Testifyin* situates Black English and Ebonics within cultural contexts of America, arguing that the rhetorical conventions of these dialects represent a distinctive African form. While many look down on these dialects, Smitherman illustrates how important these moves are for the Black community to make a linguistic and cultural space to call their own.

Smitherman's text opened the doors for more rhetorical explorations of racial communities, and it also brought forth other literacy narratives for people of color. For instance, Victor Villanueva's *Bootstraps* (1993) and Elaine Richardson's *Hip Hop Literacies* (2006) are important studies that stem from Smitherman's work, as they both expand on what it means to grow up in non-standard English communities and what these literacy differences, as rhetorical devices, say about our various racial cultures in America. Other important works such as Mike Rose's *Lives on the Boundaries* (1989), Keith Gilyard's *Voices of the Self* (1991), and Jacqueline Joyce Royster's *Traces of a Stream* (2000) exemplify the importance of understanding different language communities and how these groups create meaning among their collectives.

The work that Smitherman started in the 1970s evolved into the important racial subfield that exists within Rhetoric and Composition today. One of the first pieces that dives into this subfield actually was outside of the field itself. Henry Louis Gates' "*Race, Writing and Difference*" (1992) looks at the implications of race and difference within historical forms of writing. This book is not explicitly in the field of Rhetoric and Composition, as Gates is more known for his historical and literary criticism work, rather than analysis on writing. Yet, this book situates the deep roots of race within writing, claiming:

We must, I believe, analyze the ways in which writing relates to race, how attitudes toward racial differences generate and structure literary texts by us and about us. We must determine how critical methods can effectively disclose the traces of ethnic differences in literature. But we must also understand how certain forms of difference and the languages we employ to define those supposed

differences not only reinforce each other but tend to create and maintain each other. (15)

While Gates' work is not directly involved with our field, his foundational compilation focuses on the lingual differences and the ways that they shape knowledge of the self, racial attitudes, and the people who are doing writing. Gates' book illustrates the way people compose their writings matters in interpreting race, much like the way people speak helps interpret culture in Literacy Studies. Ultimately, we can view his book as an opening between the early Literacy Studies and the advancements of race in more composition and rhetoric texts in the past twenty-five years.

Other scholars explored this gap in research more directly in our field, leading to many texts that were produced in the late 1990s up to the present that I place into three distinct categories concerning race: 1) Racial identity rhetorics; 2) Colonial and border rhetorics; and 3) Technology and media rhetorics. First, texts in the 1990s, like Keith Gilyard's *Race, Rhetoric, and Composition* and Catherine Prendergast's "Race: The Absent Presence in Composition Studies," emphasized racial identity in broader understanding of rhetoric and in the composition classroom too.<sup>8</sup> Together, Gilyard and Prendergast argue that we need to better analyze race as a social construct that infiltrates much of our everyday rhetorical practices. In the 2000s, other texts, such as Gwendolyn Pough's *Check it While I Wreck it* and Cruz Medina's *Reclaiming Poch@ Pop*, focus more primarily on identities within more particular racial groups, like women in hip hop and the use of popular media in order for Latinos/as to resist "cultural traitor" status. These texts took the early work on broader racial culture and re-centered them on specific

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<sup>8</sup> Prendergast's essay eventually led to her important book, *Literacy and Racial Justice* (2003).



racial group practices. I employ these texts and others in my dissertation to understand how race is a rhetorical identity marker that shapes values and perceptions of reality. While the rhetoric of racial identity might be more of an implicit practice in contemporary terms, my research illustrates how people in Grand Saline use these terms in their memories and everyday practices.

Colonial and border rhetorics, especially from Latino/a scholars, help me situate the racial rhetorics in Grand Saline in terms of Eurocentrism and hierarchy. In the late-1990s, Victor Villanueva published his pivotal article, "On the Rhetorics and Precedence of Racism," which pushed against cultural normativity and Eurocentric logic. He ultimately suggests that Americans as a people still favor a colonial mindset, and our failure to consider the work of Latino/a scholars as serious, intellectual heavyweights undermines much of our work. This powerful essay, one of the most cited articles in cultural rhetorics even today, led the way for other vital work on colonial and border studies in our field. Two books in particular, Damian Baca and Victor Villanueva's *Rhetorics of the Americas* and Robert DeChaine's *Border Rhetorics*, investigate the politics of border and neocolonialism. Baca and Villanueva's collection pushes against the notion that early America peoples were inferior to Western culture, showing how the study of burial practices, visual art, and borders help us better understand indigenous peoples and colonization in North, South, and Central America. DeChaine's collection looks more concretely at borders as a decolonial method, emphasizing how people talk about borders, their political nature, and how they construct brownness. Taken together, this smaller field in racial rhetorics challenges much of our American predispositions and questions the constructions of borders, brownness, and inferiority in Latino/a culture

today and provides us with the terms to analyze how these embedded logic flaws dominates much of American culture from the largest metro areas to small, rural communities. Through Grand Saline, we can see such formations in the physical segregation of the town and figurative segregation of racial progress in comparison to the outside world.

Lastly, a final group of racial rhetorics has investigated the way technology and other media have budded with other racial practices and how people of color have used technology in following their rhetorical traditions. Two important books informing this dissertation are Adam Banks's *Race, Rhetoric and Technology* (2005) and *Digital Griots* (2011), which investigate the way African-Americans employ technologies and how their technology use parallels their rhetorical traditions. *Race, Rhetoric, and Technology* explores how the "digital divide" is a metonym for the racial divide and looks at ways that technology has perpetrated racism in accessibility, use, and design. *Digital Griots* imagines African American rhetoric within the griot tradition, thinking of it as DJing in 21<sup>st</sup> century terms. Banks argues that the tensions often associated with African American rhetoric, such as counternarratives and black theology, should be embraced through "mixing," or taking what we know (culturally speaking) to solve problems. Thus, we should apply the various lingual practices that we already know to the new literacy modes that we are just now becoming acquainted with. Combined with other work, such as Barbara Jean Monroe's *Crossing the Digital Divide*, this new research intersects the budding fields of race and technology, illustrating how much of the cultural practices engrained in our typical discursive forms can be found and reiterated through new technologies as well. I use this new research to illuminate the ways people discuss race in

terms of public memory and how ideological separations of race affect public memory in Chapter 5. In this chapter, I contend that racialized discourse can dominate a town's memories and imaginary and ultimately affects how outsiders perceive them through drawing upon many of these sources (especially the works that intertwine public memory and race).

My research on the rhetorics of race builds upon much of this contemporary research. Through exploring the ways that people in my hometown write about, remember, and construct race, my work directly contributes to our understanding of racial identity rhetorics. I am also extending the ways we think about hegemonic power and control in terms of colonial rhetorics, and I am also exploring how people create a space for people to critique, redefine, and defend their culture and identities. At base, I employ the rhetorics of protest and memory to get to the nitty-gritty of race in the everyday, to see how race affects people in Grand Saline in their daily lives, in their perceptions of others, and in their relationships with other towns in East Texas. To that end, recent work by Mark McPhail (*The Rhetoric of Racism*) and Kent Ono and Michael G. Lacy (*Critical Rhetorics of Race*) informs my work within crucial understandings of rhetoric and racism. These scholars analyze how mainstream culture and white people talk about race and racism, and I envision my own project as building upon these, and other, investigations. I believe my dissertation will not only expand the scope of these conversations but also add needed explorations of how white, rural cultures rhetorically position themselves in relation to memories of racism and people of color.

#### **IV. Methodological Approach**

I was raised in Grand Saline since I was twelve, so I have a personal investment

and direct involvement in Moore's story and in the memories of racism there as well. Much of the narrative I have already shared illustrates not only my agency in getting this story out in the open but also some of my interactions with people in town following the event. Thus, I believe my knowledge and memories of the town (my upbringing, time in school, and participation in racist traditions) make me important to the story and academic analysis of the rhetorical situation in Grand Saline. But, I also am an individual who can better understand the town's culture, its people, and its ideologies because I understand the culture, racisms, and public memories of the town (and try to do so while acknowledging my own biases). To properly situate my project within its cultural frames, I contend that using both ethnographic and autoethnographic methods are vital to my work. I define ethnography as a methodological approach to investigating people within one's own cultural environments and autoethnography as an approach of investigating one's self in relation to, and within, one's own cultural surroundings. Since the second half of my project is focused on studying the ways people interact with, remember, and talk about a protest act and racism, these qualitative methods remain integral to comprehending the rhetorical structures of the events in Grand Saline. As ethnographer and autoethnographer, I am looking at the racial culture of Grand Saline, the people who construct and maintain it, and my own involvement with it.

Specifically, I want to answer a few questions through these methods: 1) How did the self-immolation and the public discussion of racism in Grand Saline affect residents? 2) How do public memories of racism inform people in the area? 3) How did I have agency in exploring Moore's death and how did he alter my perception of my hometown? The answers to these questions give us a clearer picture of Grand Saline and Moore's

self-immolation as a rhetorical event, one that demonstrates the rhetorical viability of race, public memory, and agency. Employing both ethnographic and autoethnographic methods will guide me in answering these questions. My project is informed by personal relationships I have with people and organizations in the town, positioning me as an ethnographer *and* autoethnographer<sup>9</sup> in not only the self-immolation aftermath but the larger racial conversations that preceded and followed Moore's death. My connections with Grand Saline and people from the town are inextricable from my study because the basis of my analysis stems from this situated perspective. But before moving forward, I will articulate why ethnographic and autoethnographic methods are vital for this dissertation.

There are wonderful examples of ethnographic research from scholars in Rhetoric and Composition that focus on the cultural dimensions of the people they study on multiple levels. Each of these studies adds to the cultural complexity that frames my own project, in scope, practice, and analysis. In their classical text on empirical research, Janice M. Lauer and J. William Asher contend that "ethnographers observe many facets of writers in their writing environments over long periods of time in order to identify, operationally define, and interrelate variables of the writing act in its context" (39). Building off of this, Mary Sue MacNealy states that "the main area of interest in an ethnography is usually the relationships between inhabitants and between the environment and its inhabitants" (215). In the field of Rhetoric and Composition, many texts in cultural rhetorics are ethnographic in nature. Jennifer Trainor's text, *Rethinking*

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<sup>9</sup> Ethnographer, in the sense that I have lived and participated in this culture with others and am studying the culture broadly (sometimes through my own memories), and autoethnographer in that I am studying my own positionality too.

*Racism* (2008), follows her year in an all-white high school to better understand how students talk about racism. Her book changes the conversations on race and rhetoric through the complex method of observing students in a single classroom in Laurel Canyon, California. Another text, *A Place to Stand* by Julie Lindquist (2002), investigates the way patrons of a bar fashion themselves politically through rhetorical conversations about ideology, identity, and solidarity. Tracking the lingual practices of bar patrons, Lindquist uses her ethnographic methodology of space, environment, and culture within a bar to inform her arguments on class, politics, and identity.

While ethnographic methods are important in my understanding of Grand Saline as a distinct culture, I also employ autoethnographic methods in my research to situate and explain my own racial consciousness and agency in the events that unfolded in town. Moore's death and the aftermath affected me personally, and I want to explore through my own experiences how local, rhetorical events like this can impact individuals even a hundred miles away. In *Rhetoric and Composition*, autoethnography has been similarly used as a method in literacy studies. In his "A Post(modern)script" from *Bootstraps*, Victor Villanueva describes the various ideological genres that he believes his text fits within, labelling it as postmodern, Foucauldian, and possibly even Derridian. However, when narrowing down the heart of his book, which is largely autoethnographic in nature, Villanueva writes, "The compression of space, time, and motion is the postmodern condition....[Yet,] I can only really know and tell about one man of color's conditions" (142). Though Villanueva's book is basically an academic literacy narrative, how a poor Puerto Rican boy from New York found success in academia, it is also "an autobiography with political, theoretical, pedagogical consideration...This is the personal made public

and the public personalized, not for self-glory nor to point fingers, but to suggest how, maybe, to make the exception the rule" (xviii). Villanueva's book employs autoethnography to explore his own literacy narrative; I use a similar method to explore the own cultural frameworks that have shaped my relationship with my hometown.

Other Rhetoric and Composition texts, such as Gloria Anzaldua's *Borderlands* (1987), Charlotte Hogg's *From the Garden Club* (2006), and Ralph Cintron's *Angels Town* (1997) use methods of autoethnography to investigate subjects from women's literacy practices in the rural Heartland to how people living on the fringe of society, like the borderlands, create their own languages and meanings. Here, too, these authors emphasize autoethnography as a means to explore literacy in some capacity. My work profits from such autoethnographies because they provide me the tools and lenses to explore my own situated perspective. Autoethnographic texts on literacy interrogate individual narratives on issues such as race, class, and gender, and I too use autoethnography to investigate rhetoric and issues of persuasion and change on personal, individual levels in correlation with Grand Saline, racism, and memory. I define my autoethnography as a *type* of a literacy narrative because I am using it as a way to explore my own racial consciousness as a member of Grand Saline. In some ways, this could be considered a study of racial literacy. But I also extrapolate much of my personal experiences to better understand how Moore's death affected me personally, how it caused me to gain agency in spreading his story, and how my memories affected my interpretation of Grand Saline in researching and writing this project. Hence, my autoethnographic method follows the paths of other literacy texts that have made substantial contributions in the discipline but asks different questions about agency to

illustrate different outcome. These issues, like how Moore's death prompted me to speak out against my town and how my agency as a scholar of color influences others, are crucial to my research.

My own relationship to Moore, my hometown, and the town's culture affords me the chance to pursue this inquiry through an autoethnographic orientation. In their text, *Critical Autoethnography* (2015), editors Robin M. Boylorn and Mark P. Orbe (both Communication scholars) define autoethnography as "both the method and product of researching and writing about personal lived experiences and their relationship to culture" (16-17). These authors, in the simplest terms, label autoethnography as the relationship between the individual author and culture, in which the author writes and describes his or her experiences. In another context, Carolyn S. Ellis and Arthur Bochner define autoethnography as "autobiographies that self-consciously explore the interplay of the introspective, personally engaged self with cultural descriptions mediated through language, history, and ethnographic explanation" (742). Here, they situate autoethnography as a self-reflexive method that unites the personal with the cultural. Looking at these different interpretations of autoethnography together, we gain a better sense of it as a method. But the definition that best informs my approach, however, comes from Heewon Chang's *Autoethnography as Method* (2009). Chang, an Anthropologist, believes autoethnography "should be ethnographic in its methodological orientation, cultural in its interpretative orientation, and autobiographical in its content orientation" (48). This definition explains autoethnography as a three-prong orientation. First, it should situate the individual within the cultural and contextual environments of which he/she resides (an ethnographic methodological orientation). Second, it should



explain and analyze the individual experiences within these contexts (a cultural interpretative orientation). Lastly, it should use the individual author, and his or her experiences, as the primary subject of inquiry (an autobiographical content orientation).

My own use of autoethnography stems from Chang's definition. In chapters that follow, I situate myself in the cultural and contextual environments within Grand Saline. I write about my experiences there as a child, my racial memories extending from my peers and elders in town, and the context of neighboring towns' perceptions of Grand Saline's racism problem. These are environments because they shaped me as an individual, molding what and how I learned which greatly shifted when I left this culture. This situates my **methodological orientation as ethnographic**. Next, I interpret these occurrences, experiences, and environments as they are related to the specific culture of Grand Saline. I investigate how these racial memories affected me as an adolescent and as adult, eventually asking if these led me to being more open to empathizing with Moore's death. This then labels my **interpretative orientation as cultural**. Lastly, since I am focusing on my own narrative, the ways I, personally, interacted in this environment and its effect on me, I would define my **content orientation as autobiographical**. These three different orientations taken together ultimately comprise my autoethnographic method and position many subsequent sections of my project.

Along with my auto/ethnographic approach, I also use various forms of textual analysis, first interrogating the self-immolation act as a text itself, one which is embedded with written arguments, contexts, and appeals meant to be read. By doing this, I am opening a path to view self-immolation as a rhetoric, and through investigating primary sources of self-immolation historically and through secondary analysis, I will be able to

better critique and understand Moore's death. In a sense, this analysis is still embedded with ethnographic orientation because I am viewing the self-immolation as a text within the various racial, cultural, and political constraints of Grand Saline I inhabit. I also reveal intertextual connections among social media sections, interviews, and other commentary to explain how these disparate texts respond to one another and better shape the responses to Moore's act. The social media statements I use were posted on Facebook, with most of the material from the *Grand Saline Sun's* Facebook page, and informs much of my analysis of the public memories and racial attitudes of the town. Also, I analyze various personal writings by Moore compiled by his family: letters, sermon notes, poems, journal entries, and his final suicide note. The family graciously provided me access and permission to use his collected works, and to ensure a deep context for Moore's life, I draw from these letters, sermons, and notes to better understand him and his motivations to be a rhetorical agent for change. While I draw from traditional approaches in understanding these texts, overall, I believe that each of them—the self-immolation, the news and social media discourse, and Moore's letters—impact the ethnographic landscape of my research, and the way I position them in my chapters will reinforce this idea as well.

Lastly, my study will also use material from the Van Zandt County Genealogical Society Library (VZCL) and Dolph Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin (DBC). The VZCL provides historical documents about Grand Saline that inform my understanding of the town's history and public memories. The DBC is where much of Moore's archives are housed now. Though I had initial access through the family, they have since donated many of his materials to the DBC, and this is

how I will identify and curate Moore's writing in the pages that follow.

### **Chapter Outline**

I have organized this dissertation into five chapters and a conclusion. Chapter 2 and 3 cover the protest act, the second two trace the impact and reception. Throughout these chapters, I position my inquiry in terms of my auto/ethnographic orientation as well. First, Chapter 2 discusses the exigencies of self-immolation as a rhetorical, protest act. In this chapter, I first examine how my interest in self-immolation made me an agent in the story of Moore, looking back at my interactions with other protests and popular images of self-immolation throughout my life. I explain why self-immolation is a timely topic for analysis, as it has dominated areas of Eastern culture over the past few years. The rest of the chapter explores the four prominent exigencies that self-immolation account for: acts of last effort, acts of solidarity, acts of spousal love, and acts of awakening. In the end, I make the case that Moore's self-immolation stemmed from three of these exigencies (all except spousal love) which then sets the conditions for analysis of the rhetoric of self-immolation in the following chapter. Understanding the exigencies allows us to better understand the motives and rationale behind the act.

Chapter 3 focuses more intently on the rhetorical aims of self-immolation. I begin by first defining rhetoric using Bitzer's terms of "altering reality" and situate my analysis as a way to not only see how Moore attempted to persuade audiences in Grand Saline but also as a way to see how it appeals to the way a community feels, accepts, and rejects this act. This chapter ultimately suggests self-immolation relies upon three key rhetorical themes, encompassed by three specific appeals: themes of violence (embodied appeals), themes of religion (transcendent appeals), and themes of martyrdom (sacrificial appeals).

I analyze these three themes using contemporary rhetorical scholarship and demonstrate through Duc's self-immolation how they were utilized to gain a wider comprehension of self-immolation's rhetorical capabilities. Also, I explore how the specific appeals of embodiment, transcendence, and sacrifice bring these themes to the forefront of the self-immolation act. In the end, I use these themes and appeals to show how Moore attempted to persuade the Grand Saline community and briefly note his successes and failures in these universal appeals.

The second half of my dissertation then analyzes impact and reception. In Chapter 4, I argue that we cannot solely rely on “universal” arguments of self-immolation as a marker of success or failure because the act is just a catalyst for the persuasion that rises and occurs within the actor's target audience. In the case of Moore, he used more localized appeals in his death, specifically an argument of public memory. To better assess his self-immolation, we must employ the terms of public memory. To that end, I present a new framework for considering the rhetoric of self-immolation in accordance with methods of public memory, drawing on the historical study of memory and public memory from Cicero to contemporary scholarship. Finally, I make the case that combining these methodologies can give us a better picture of not only Moore's self-immolation and its rhetorical effects but also the rhetorical situation that existed in Grand Saline prior to Moore's death. Calling for a method of public memory to be intertwined with the analysis of self-immolation reframes how scholars should approach similar acts of extremism and their outcomes.

My fifth chapter looks at the aftermath of Moore's death in Grand Saline and explores how he not only affected citizens but also the public memory of the town. I

argue here that better understanding Grand Saline's public memories of racism helps us see why they failed to respond to Moore in a more meaningful way. By situating people as “insiders” and “outsiders,” I begin by exploring the public memories of the town and how my own memories of them provide insight into the racial culture of Grand Saline. Then I explore how these public memories affected Moore enough to influence his self-immolation and how his own death employed public memory arguments in order to appeal to local residents. Overall, this analysis will not only demonstrate why a local analysis is vital to my project but also how Moore both existed on a global and local stage when he chose to die on that fateful day.

Finally in my conclusion, I look to what future analysis of similar situations could accomplish. Specifically, I point to the memories and perceptions of a community as an important lens, a way that we can better understand our culture through better analyzing how individuals choose to remember and forget in regards to race. While I speculate about how my mixed methodologies can illuminate new areas of analysis, I also want us to think about a bigger question: how, rhetorically speaking, can people better accept haunting public memories that alter their identities today? Thus, I end the dissertation with a call for moving toward a rhetoric of reconciliation, a way that people can harmonize their pasts with their present.

## **Conclusion**

My dissertation takes a unique approach to a rhetorical event: instead of solely looking at what caused Moore to self-immolate, I also investigate how his death impacted and utilized the public memories of Grand Saline. This moves my scholarship from solely looking at the *why* but also at the *how*: suggesting local appeals are just as important as

universal ones when investigating self-immolation. As rhetoricians, we should take more time to value the *how* in our work, the responses and ripple effects of events, because these moments make our scholarship not only more rounded but also more applicable to broader publics. While some scholars have situated the rhetoric of self-immolation in terms of universal appeals and models for calculating success, I want to push forth our understanding of such extremist acts in connection with other fields of rhetoric, mainly public memory. Not every case of self-immolation evokes or prompts public memory, but I believe that combining methodologies can give us a clearer picture of the complex rhetorical climates and rhetorical events in Grand Saline. Thus, I call for other rhetoricians to consider an approach that combines rhetorical analysis with an auto/ethnographic orientation, questioning how the past haunts the present.

As acts of self-immolation and other extreme protests continue on a global scale, rhetoricians need to stay committed to analyzing these situations because they are important not only to revolutions and political struggles but to individual, community, and cultural differences. Self-immolations are not common to the American protest repertoire, so to speak, but we have witnessed these type of extreme appeals over the past few years with, for instance, Black Lives Matter protests leading a few students to hunger strikes on the University of Missouri campus. With protests making waves over the past few years, we need to be more aware of these types of acts--how they persuade us, move us, and anger us but also how they change our perceptions of the world around us too. Acts like self-immolation do not only require will and self-determination, but they also potentially have major consequences that can shape larger movements. When Mohamed Bouazizi lit himself on fire on a Tunisian street in 2011 to protest the state, he probably

did not know what changes he would make to the world around him. Now he is considered the catalyst for the Arab Spring, the democratic movements that occurred in Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia in 2011 and 2012. The rhetoric of self-immolation and the various contexts surrounding its appeals deserve recognition simply because the repercussions of the act can be widespread and global or limited and local. They can create change.

When Charles Moore sat on the blue tarp in front of the mostly empty parking lot on that fateful day, I wonder what led him there. Was it solely the racism in town that he denounced in his public letter? The emphasis of racism became the focal point of much analysis surrounding Moore's death because it was the most obvious. But maybe there were other motivations drawing him to his death. Maybe he was inspired by the long history and lineage of Buddhist monks who had sacrificed their lives for noble causes before him. Maybe he wanted to end his life on his own terms, making sure he went out making a difference. Maybe, just maybe, he saw an enlightenment in the fire, that he could achieve some superior knowledge in killing himself in the names of others who were brutally lynched before him. Or maybe he realized the world seemed so fragmented, so self-involved, that he needed to end his life in solidarity with others, attempting to unite a community behind him. My second chapter takes up this question on exigencies and labels four historical reasons that people self-immolate before discussing how Moore situates himself in this lineage.

Though we will never know exactly what Moore was thinking in these final moments of his life, we do know one thing: he died hoping he would affect someone. And his death affects me and so many more.

## Chapter 2: Choosing the Flame: The Exigencies of Self-Immolation

Cesar Chavez fasted three times during his life for a total of eighty-five days. On his first—and most famous—fast in 1968, he lasted for 25 days; on his second fast in 1972, he went without food for 24 days; and on his final act of non-violent protest in 1988, he remarkably fasted for 36 days. Though much propaganda and fear of a Chicano/a uprising surrounded Chavez’s social protests, arguably the only violence Chavez committed during this time was on himself, as his stomach and body yearned for any nutrition over this period of about three months. Yet, Chavez stood strong against his hunger and made a large impact in his community (and even nationally and internationally) due to his stance.<sup>10</sup> When I began studying his acts of love, sacrifice, and community, I became mesmerized by the idea of hunger strike as a social protest, as an act of rhetoric. In hindsight, it was the unselfish nature of these acts that resonated with me. I desperately wanted to understand how a single individual, solely by denying himself food, could create wide-scale change--as arguably Chavez was the catalyst in resolving the grape strike in 1968, which improved working conditions for immigrants across California.

But it was not only the hunger strike that compelled me; all acts of human sacrifice or nonviolent resistance drove my interests in rhetoric as a scholarly subject. As a young boy, I was fascinated by the story of Jesus Christ contemplating his own death in the Garden of Gethsemane. How could a man willingly let himself die? I remember seeing the images and video clips of “Tank Man” at Tiananmen Square in Beijing and wondering how he could bravely stand in front of literal tanks and a metaphorical force

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<sup>10</sup> There is an argument to be made that Chavez's first fast was the watershed moment for the UFW in gaining rights in 1968. See Richard Rey Perez's film *Cesar's Last Fast*.



of government all in the name of freedom. How could a man have that much courage? And I remember being utterly captivated by Thich Quang Duc's 1964 self-immolation in Tibet ever since I saw an album by Rage Against the Machine, a politically suave, pro-communist band, that used Duc's image as the cover of not only their album but also their single "Killing in the Name Of," a song questioning why police target people of color and insisting that many policemen are part of the KKK. Looking at the album cover as a teenager, I remember wondering: why would a man choose to light himself on fire? Duc did not die for himself but for others: for those who were killed by the Vietnamese government a month before and in hope that the government would eventually stop oppressing their Buddhists. His death influenced people across the globe, and, compared to other acts of sacrifice, Duc's always felt different to me because of the visual expression of his face as the fire overcame his body. That single image in time



**Image 3: Thich Quang Duc self-immolating in a Saigon street corner in 1963. This image won the photographer Malcolm Browne the Pulitzer Prize in 1964.**

expressed so many different raw emotions and juxtapositions: a man literally burning to death but appearing tranquil, feeling one of the worst pains imaginable but not screaming or crying out for help. Duc's death resonated with me then and now on so many

philosophical and humane levels. Where many might look at the image of Duc and think that he was “crazy,” “wrong,” or “misguided,” I could not help but see a certain love in his death.

Popular American movies illustrate how Americans emphatically view dying for a cause as a noble act, witnessed in films where protagonists have many times chose to die to help their family, friends or the world (such as Bruce Willis’ character sacrificing himself to blow up an asteroid in *Armageddon*). American cinema, fueling the romanticization of these acts of self-sacrifice, as countless other films emphasize people dying for others (such as Carrie-Ann Moss’s character dying to save Keanu Reeves in *The Matrix Reloaded*) or dying for an idea (such as Will Smith’s character sacrificing his body in the name of science at the end of *I am Legend*). In popular culture, the trope of human sacrifice often makes a movie or book emotionally impactful because people understand how valuable life is when one gives it up willingly. But when it comes to real life, it seems that many Americans often think of such sacrifices as misguided. I am interested in that distance between the cinema's interpretation of sacrifice and real sacrifices of life made by real people. Why do we often mark these acts as "insane?" Why are we less likely to see the "noble" aspect of dying for others? I understand that the means of these deaths are more tangible and direct compared to self-immolation, but it still makes me question why we fail to understand this act of self-sacrifice when the intent seems the same.

Sometimes people actually, willingly, choose to die for the greater good of others around them, as the history of self-immolation tells us, and I want to better understand this motive, to see why the self-immolator would move to such an act. As I attempt to

comprehend these acts, I find it hard to imagine how much love must seize the agent to overcome doubts or fears that come with choosing to die. Since this is not often a logical choice for many people, I want to understand how people move to this state of mind. What is the exigence that calls forth their death? Why die through fire? From a rhetorical perspective, I question what arguments and appeals are embedded in the self-immolation act what a better understanding of this act means for protest rhetorics, sacrificial/suicide rhetorics, and rhetorics of religion. Self-immolation speaks to me because it pointedly reminds me of our utter humanity, that real people choose to make real sacrifices to create change, and they do not have to wear capes or pretend they are saving the world from a fictional asteroid in outer space to do so, and Chapter 2 and 3 of my project are dedicated to unraveling the intricacies of this act.

Over the summer of 2014, I taught a writing class on cultural difference and rhetoric at Texas Christian University. One of the assignments we covered in class featured cultural dissent, and on Friday, June 20<sup>th</sup>, 2014 (three days before Moore self-immolated), we began discussing nonviolent action as a form of a dissent through the examples of Chavez, “Tank Man,” and especially Duc. I teach Duc because the visual rhetoric of pain that encompasses his narrative usually stirs debate on self-sacrifice as protest. One cannot look at his death in that single photograph stuck in time and simply dismiss his pain, his life, his love, as being something “irrational” or of a “mentally ill” person, claims which usually fill the room. Eventually, this particular image draws students into empathizing with Duc, which—with guidance—opens up discussions on visual rhetoric and acts of extremism, particularly the idea that visually witnessing one’s final moment of life consumes our compassion and remorse. Just three days later, Moore

decided to self-immolate in my hometown, and the ideas of self-sacrifice and self-immolation— notions that seemed historically and geographically distant in my classroom only a few days before—merged together for me on this fateful day in 2014, and all I wanted to know was the answer to one question: why?

I share this to explain what drove me to studying self-immolation as a rhetorical act, one that persuades people on a global scale but often has local contexts as well (contexts of racism and public memory in the case of Moore). Moore's death took this distant phenomenon and made it local for me. It impacted me on levels that I could not imagine, in my scholarship, my interactions with high school friends, and on a deeply personal level, but it also opened up a new realm of protest and rhetoric that I never knew much about in the real world. While I had read about the rhetorical dissent of the 1960s and the use of nonviolence for sit-ins, boycotts, and marches, I had no idea how self-immolation implored people, how it aims to bring out their consciousness, and how it often divides Eastern/Western sensibilities.<sup>11</sup> Not only did Moore's act make me want to investigate issues of racism and folklore in my hometown (which, without him, unequivocally, I would not have a kairotic exigence moving me to do that research<sup>12</sup>), but it also made me want to look broader at the global scene of self-immolations. Were they common tactics of protest being used around the world? Looking back, I think I knew these acts had some relevance in Eastern cultures, but I would be remiss to say I knew much. But this question led to even a larger issue, one I explore in this chapter: what is it exactly that leads people to self-immolate?

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<sup>11</sup> As we will see in Chapter 3, self-immolation can be an effective act of protest, but there is a major split in how Western audiences perceive self-immolation and how Eastern audiences perceive self-immolation (mainly that the act is more effective in an Eastern sense).

<sup>12</sup> I take this up in Chapter 4.

My chapter situates this question as being vital for a discussion that needs to be explored before later understanding how the act itself attempts to persuade people. In other words, this chapter looks to understand what first causes people to choose this method over all the other protest forms that exist, to see what rhetorical situations exist in which people feel the need to respond via the fire in order to move to the third chapter that discusses the various appeals and arguments wrapped around the act. First, I will define rhetoric for the rest of my project before moving to explore the contexts of various self-immolations globally, beginning with better understanding the various perceptions and contemporary exigencies. I do this to make the case that self-immolation is indeed rhetorical, answering a question much of the public has about the act. Next, I will explore the historical exigencies of self-immolation throughout ancient India and China, in Buddhist religious practices, and all the way forward to the new wave of self-immolations that have struck multiple geographical locations across the world (including America, Africa, and Asia). Doing this historical work can help us see general commonalities that seem to be leading people to self-immolate and places Moore's death in conversation with other contemporary and historical self-immolators. Overall, this chapter leads me to claim that we can rightfully consider Reverend Moore's death "rhetorical," a claim that many have contested or dismissed in public realms by labelling him as "crazy" or "misinformed." In the context of all general exigencies of self-immolation, my first chapter contends that Moore was actually neither. Instead, he was motivated to perform a "last act" of change because of the political and social oppression of black people, dying in solidarity with those who had died before him in an attempt to find self-enlightenment.

## **I. Rhetoric as Altering Reality, Mediating Thought and Action**

Many rhetoricians joke that we can earn degrees in our field and still not have a clear definition of the term rhetoric. Scholars have been expanding this term's viability recently, especially thinking about the rhetorical abilities of everyday objects. Scot Barnett and Casey Boyle, for instance, have a new book titled *Rhetoric, Through Everyday Things* that focuses on common objects and activities such as bicycles, QWERTY keyboards, and cookery. Outside this upcoming collection, other scholars have recently connected rhetoric to other everyday objects, such as Jamie White-Farnham's article "'Revising the Menu to Fit the Budget': Grocery Lists and Other Rhetorical Heirlooms" and Robert Bednar's "Denying Denial: Trauma, Memory, and Automobility at Roadside Car Crash Shrines." These two articles investigate the rhetorical appeals of common sights and objects. The new trend on the everyday illustrates how our routines are rhetorical, they position us in simple (often unnoticeable) ways. While this new research does not extend the "grand" scale of rhetoric, the emphasis on changing major ideologies, it does stand out in its application. The history of rhetorical studies demonstrates how rhetoric shifts minds in the practice of oratory (Cicero); how people use identification to attract and distract from one another (Burke); and how ideologies and viewpoints are constructed through various structures of reality (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca). To extend from this focus of the "everyday," I think this recent turn helps the field understand how *local* objects and memories affect people and are used as persuasive means and is helpful to the field in a whole. While the local and everyday are not synonymous,<sup>13</sup> I believe they have interesting overlaps in how they

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<sup>13</sup> The "everyday" focuses more the practices and routines of people in their everyday environments; the "local" focuses more on smaller, more confined community practices.

deal with less studied discourses. For my project, I intertwine the study of rhetoric from both a local approach (methods of public memory) and from a broader, ideological approach (the rhetoric of self-immolation) in order to demonstrate how acts of self-immolation and public memory affect people in global and local ways. This applies not only to the rhetoric of self-immolation that focuses on powerful, visual effect of the act (more noticeable from an ideological approach) but also the rhetoric of public memory (more noticeable from a local lens) that receives treatment in Chapters 4 and 5.

Individuals perceive the world in different ways, believe certain ideologies, and practice certain methods of exploration due to the context of their lives, shaping a reality for themselves. We act based on what we know as truth through thoughts on religion, political ideology, identity, and other markers of the self. These ideas and subjects construct a world for each and every person to live in, creating our individualized realities. Rhetoric, as a larger practice of perception and ideology, creates a conversation (internal or external) that changes some aspect of the audience's mind, causing their realities or truths to evolve and alter. My definition of rhetoric stems from Lloyd Bitzer's. He claims, "Rhetoric is a mode of altering reality, not by the direct application of energy to objects, but by the creation of discourse which changes reality through the mediation of thought and action" (4). Bitzer focuses on "altering reality" and "discourse," two aspects key to my understanding of rhetoric. To Bitzer, an audience has a basic understanding of their own realities on a day-to-day basis, but these perceptions change through rhetorical acts. Rhetoric therefore modifies how the individual senses his/her various realities. The local and the broader lenses both illustrate rhetoric's strange nature: it can affect us in routines and the structure of our commonplace practices and also make

us change our opinions on the larger questions of life such as religion, politics, and education.

Rhetoric works simply through an audience considering a different viewpoint, exploring other methods of reason that differs from their standard. For instance, let's say I believe in war that one side must be "good" and the other side must be "bad." This is a reality for me. But perhaps through evidence of the "good" side doing bad things, I change my opinion and believe that war brings out the worst of everyone and no one can be "good" or "bad"; then my reality has changed. This, of course, can happen via large-scale ideologies and for small-scale opinions as well. Young, Becker, and Pike explore this aspect of varying perspectives in *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change*, making the case that rhetoric does not have to solely create change, it can also be the *exploration* of change:

When a very young child finds something that to him is strange and interesting—a telephone, a transistor radio, or a watch—he sets about trying to understand it. He turns it over in his hands, shakes it, drops it, puts it in his mouth, takes it apart, and so on...An adult confronted with a problematic situation engages in comparable, if less sticky and destructive, activity but his effort usually involves mental rather than physical exploration, although it may involve both. Such exploration brings into play at least two distinctively human abilities: the ability to use language and the ability to shift perspectives on a unit deliberately. (121)

Thus, the authors contend that perspective, for adults and children, often shifts with the exploration of an idea, an object, or opinion. These authors emphasize how the act of exploring can be rhetorical, which further adds to the larger notion of altering realities



and routines through simply attempting to see a new viewpoint. Debra Hawhee furthers this point in her article “Rhetorics, Bodies, and Everyday Life.” Placing an emphasis on the “mobile activities of everyday life,” she writes, “Put another way, the discovery, use and effects of such ‘available means’ of rhetorical action transpires through bodies, spaces, and the visual as much as it happens through the presumed twin-media of rhetoric--the written and spoken word” (163). I believe her work extends the analysis from Young, Becker, and Pike by emphasizing discovery as not just a discursive form of action but rather a nondiscursive practice as well, comprised of the way we position ourselves within reality.

However, issues exist in creating a working definition for rhetoric, as we can see in the differences between some of the definitions above. In his article “On *Not* Defining Rhetoric,” Robert L. Scott explains that “an ever-shifting environment of rhetoric exists,” which makes it difficult for us to concretely define the term (91). While I agree with Scott’s position, I believe I still need to set the parameters for my own study, if only to help the reader understand my own position. For my project, then, I define rhetoric as the act or attempt of “altering reality” through language, communication, and, most importantly here, action. This can be on a small scale, such as with local objects, or on the grander scale of perceptions. I believe, overall, that the audience is persuaded through notions that go against their own preconceived viewpoints, or in studying how our routines and common practices come to fruition.

Before we see how acts of persuasion work, it is important to understand some of the terms surrounding what leads an individual to attempt to persuade another. For my project, terms such as "exigence," "agency," and "motive" are vital to understanding the

rhetorical effects of Moore's self-immolation and its outcomes in Grand Saline. An exigence, in simplest terms, is "an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be. In almost any sort of context, there will be numerous exigences, but not all are elements of a rhetorical situation — not all are rhetorical exigences" (Bitzer 6). Bitzer views an exigence as a reason to act, a purpose to go out and complete something, a "motive" in a sense. Bitzer's definition of an exigence places agency on the individual to react to something. Thus, an exigence forms from a situation that provides a reason for a person to act. Bitzer's use of exigence is similar to Burke's use of "motive," but these theorists differ in their application. Burke believes that the pentad is comprised of various motives leading the agent capable of acting (*Grammar* 65). He focuses more primarily of motives within context of the actor and their agencies, however, not emphasizing an action leading the actor to act. I mostly use the term exigence here instead of motive because I emphasize the rhetoric of self-immolation as being reactive, people often employ the act because of the various oppressions and terrible conditions that have led them to choosing the flame.

Extending from Bitzer's and Burke's work, "agency" describes the ability the rhetor has in "altering reality." What agency looks like in reality is debatable, as Marilyn M. Cooper writes, "Agents do reflect on their actions consciously; they do have conscious intentions and goals and plans; but their agency does not arise from conscious mental acts, though consciousness does play a role. Agency instead is based in individuals' lived knowledge that their actions are their own" (421). Cooper extends agency to be partially subconscious, an act of wanting to do something because one's

experiences and memories gives the rhetor a chance to see why one should act. I believe Cooper's complication of this term is important for the field, generally speaking, and for my own analysis specifically. The second half of my project focuses intently on public memories and legends of old, stories that I suggest impact not only Moore but residents in Grand Saline. Taking Cooper's approach to agency, I will be able to illustrate how residents did/did not see agency in claiming their racial histories after Moore's death. I believe many of these residents rely upon their own "lived knowledge" of racism (some claiming it does exist in town and others who say it does not). This split is dependent upon their experiences of understanding Grand Saline's racial history. Cooper's approach allows us to situate Moore's death as a form of rhetorical agency, in which he felt he had a responsibility to act after his own experiences in the world (see Chapter 1).

Therefore, I see exigence as being the reason the rhetor needs to act, often as a reactive response to something extreme happening in the world, and agency is what provides the rhetor a voice in enacting change. Exigence is the need to drive to a place; agency is the vehicle that gives you a voice when you get there. Both of these terms allow the rhetor to "alter reality" for an audience. These are the dynamic forces for the rhetor, the rhetorical situation forming that leads one to act. I see this as the first half of the equation that eventually culminates in the rhetorical act. The second half explores how the rhetorical act, and its appeals, actually alters realities for an audience.

I distinguish here between rhetorical "acts" and rhetorical "appeals," though they are obviously related to one another. A rhetorical act is when a person does something or says something that potentially can affect an audience. Hence, when I am attempting to make you change your thoughts on war, I might make an argument about how insensible

war is or maybe I would protest the war by performing a sit-in or march. Both of these acts, speaking and doing, would be labelled rhetorical occasions intended to persuade an audience, and each of these occasions are comprised of various appeals that together build the holistic understanding of the act. Each act is comprised of appeals that attempt to make it persuasive. Appeals are the threads of the act that specifically persuade an audience. If my argument against war utilized statistics illustrating how many people die a year fighting and a narrative of someone I knew who lost someone during the battle, then I am employing logical appeals of statistics and emotional appeals of narrative to make my the central argument encompassed in my act. A single act can be constituted of many, differing appeals.

In thinking of a rhetorical event, such as the one that happened in Grand Saline, we see now a basic outline of the various rhetorical threads that makes "altering reality" possible. A person has a need to act (exigence) and a power that could make change possible (agency) that ultimately leads them to perform some form of a rhetorical act. Typically, this act is comprised of various draws (appeals) that attempt to reposition the audience's perception surrounding the discourse of the act. While other scholarship might emphasize different rhetorical capacities, this is the basic outline that informs my dissertation project.

Overall, the definitions of rhetoric I describe here and their various understandings of exigence, agency, acts, and appeals situate my project because the rhetoric I explore hinges on varying perspectives of singular events and memories. My project bridges the divide between the local and the ideological subfields of rhetoric, as I look at the commonplace appeals that affect the people of Grand Saline on a very local

level (in Chapters 4 and 5)<sup>14</sup> but also explore the rhetoric of self-immolation as a wider dimension, investigating its exigencies, tendencies, and arguments (in this chapter and Chapter 2). This project fuses the local with the global, the smaller discourses with the larger, to make the case that the rhetoric of self-immolation and other acts of protest that can cause monumental social movements also have very real affects and more confined appeals and consequences in the local that often get misrepresented or erased in their national narratives. Local practices affect how people view self-immolations, too. While contemporary research too often looks at a particular subsection of rhetorical studies, my research illustrates how employing both local and global methods can be beneficial for protest rhetorics, providing researchers a way to situate their analysis in multiple contexts.

## **II. The Exigencies of Self-Immolation**

In the early-2010s, a string of revolutions that came to be known as the Arab Spring took place across Egypt, Tunisia, and Syria. Many people now believe that this event started with a single self-immolation. As Clive Bloom, a writer for *The Guardian*, explains, “Mohamed Bouazizi, who set himself on fire on 17 December 2010, was a street vendor fed up with petty confiscations and harassment by government officials. His act caught a mood and became the catalyst for the Tunisian revolution and the wider Arab Spring.” Many journalists such as Rania Abouzeid have proclaimed Bouazizi to be a “legend” or a mythical hero because of the way his act created public upheaval in much of the Arab world. Not only did Bouazizi’s act become the catalyst for the Arab Spring,

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<sup>14</sup> Here, I specifically look at how public memories of racism in Grand Saline, mnemonics of racism, legends, space, and place built into the operation of town and their application in Charles Moore's death affected residents. All of these acts and discourses are local in being.

the largest revolution in Africa and western Asia in hundreds of years, but it also propelled the newest wave of self-immolations taking place globally in other parts of Asia, Europe, and even in America in the years that followed.

In part, Bouazizi's self-immolation inspired Meredith Neville-Shepard to write her 2014 dissertation on self-immolation. Her project, *Fire, Sacrifice, and Social Change: The Rhetoric of Self-Immolation*, analyzes self-immolation as a viable social protest act historically and in contemporary society with three cases studies of Vietnam and America in the 1960s, the relationship between Tibet and China and Buddhism, and Mohamed Bouazizi's self-immolation in accordance with the Arab Spring in recent years. Being in the field of Communication Studies, her approach differs from mine, as her entire work attempts to construct a working model to analyze the effectiveness of self-immolation (iii). Neville-Shepard's work posits that the rhetoric of self-immolation hinges on her three-part theory:

I created a three-part theory explaining when self-immolation resonates. First, in order for a self-immolation to resonate, the audience must be able to comprehend why suicide was a necessary or reasonable action in that particular case. This comprehension is based on the perception that a significant crisis prompted the self-immolation. Second, cultural factors often strongly influence or limit the potential resonance of self-immolation. For example, Buddhist self-immolation is often seen as acceptable because of the historical acceptance of self-immolation. Third, for self-immolation to resonate<sup>15</sup> there must be space for criticism of the government, but not so much space that other forms of protest seem a more

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<sup>15</sup> In this sense, Neville-Shepard uses the term “resonate” to signify “effective.” For her argument, the effectiveness of the act revolves around how it resonates.

reasonable approach to facilitating change. (120)

Neville-Shepard's model attempts to illustrate why and how a self-immolation garners attention (emphasizing why certain cases resonate and are effective rhetorically) and she applies her model to well-known cases, such as Thich Quang Duc and Mohamed Bouazizi. Since both of these actors meet the criteria she defines above, we can see why they achieved success as acts of protests. However, much of her analysis and arguments of success focus on Eastern self-immolations because self-immolations hardly occur in America. She does draw attention to three people who self-immolated in America in 1965: Alice Herz, Norman Morrison, and Roger LaPorte. She contends these acts failed to draw support because of a few cultural reasons (her second factor in the model): 1) "the idea that suicide was sinful was prevalent due to the Christian values most Americans adopted;" 2) "the actor fails to participate in the democratic process and takes an extreme measure when it is unwarranted" (48). Following her model, these self-immolations failed to begin a larger protest or draw in an audience because they did not align with the cultural values of Americans.

Neville-Shepard's dissertation is helpful for my own analyses on self-immolation; even though I am not following a model-based approach, she adds cultural significance to my own work. While she produced a model that can judge "success," my project labels various criteria that can help the audience see what parts of the self-immolation were maybe more effective than others. More importantly, my analysis illustrates what exigencies lead people to self-immolation and how the act persuades audiences. While some of the act did not persuade others and did not connect with him, Moore's death did change part of Grand Saline and its culture on some levels. My attempts to explain the

rhetoric of self-immolation in this chapter focuses on what I call the two big appeals that encompass Neville-Shepard's first two positions in her model (a reason why the self-immolation is necessary and cultural awareness). My work on the exigencies and arguments of self-immolation builds upon how Neville-Shepard understands the "necessity" of the act and also reframes self-immolation within unique cultural contexts (especially in Chapter 5).

Another recent book exploring the rhetoric of self-immolation, *Tibet on Fire: The Rhetoric of Self-Immolation* by John Whalen-Bridge, takes a Burkean approach to the deaths in Tibet (primarily looking at the years 2008-2015), labeling the scene, actors, times, and places for these deaths. Looking at the self-immolator as "actors" in the dramaturgical model, Whalen-Bridge declares that "the person who commits political suicide in this manner is doing more than registering a complaint in a given locality; she is also creating an image that will travel around the world" (37-8). This analysis pinpoints self-immolation as a performance that paints an image for others globally. Whalen-Bridge repeatedly refers to these acts as types of speech because of the rhetorical declension of speech; he believes using the term "language" is easier to see this death as a type of language rather than a "behavior" or "act" (14). In closing his introduction, he states the main exigence of his text: "to understand the ways in which Tibetan self-immolation is an action and not just a reaction" (15). Because so many people emphasize the constraints in Tibet, mainly the Chinese oppression of Buddhism and the Dalai Lama, Whalen-Bridge wants to emphasize self-immolation's wider appeal, not always contextualized within the repression of others.

The book weaves through the various stages of Tibetan self-immolation, first



setting the stage of the self-immolations stemming from Chinese oppression. Whalen-Bridge emphasizes the Tibetan constraints in attempting to protest Chinese rule before leading into the various motivations of their slew of self-immolations, investigating agency, actors, and purposes for the protests. In his final chapter, Whalen-Bridge points to how the lack of a humane response to these self-immolations by China places the crucial question "how much do we care about human rights?" at the forefront of global media (12). While he does attempt to connect these self-immolations to broader questions on human rights, most of his analysis stays firmly on the situation in Tibet. Compared to Neville-Shephard's dissertation that creates a model for interpreting self-immolation, the author applies the rhetorical characteristics of Burke's pentad into the complex situation of self-immolation in Tibet. Where Neville-Shephard attempts to globally contextualize these acts, Whalen-Bridge narrows his scope to Tibet specifically. He creates an intriguing case study of the events in Tibet but considers self-immolation only specific to one region instead of as a global phenomenon. His text is more localized than globalized.

These three texts illustrate self-immolation as a contemporary issue in rhetorical studies and taken together, we see that while they bring some fascinating analysis to the table, there is room to bridge the global and local in a single text. While Neville-Shephard adds a model-based approach to understanding self-immolation, she does not emphasize the nitty-gritty of self-immolation, the various rhetorical appeals in relation with larger themes. Whalen-Bridge adds a solid case study of how to investigate the rhetorical situation of Tibetan self-immolations over the past few years, but his approach does not look at the ways self-immolation becomes a valid form of protest in other societies as well. These discussions inform the analysis I contribute in Chapter 3, but as

they pertain to the discussions below, they also situate the need to explore exigencies in a clearer capacity. Neville-Shephard states that most self-immolations occur in order to protest the government; Whalen-Bridge agrees with his analysis in Tibet. But with self-immolations occurring regularly around the world, is this the sole reason why people self-immolate? Upon closer scrutiny, it appears that there is much more. I dive deeper into historical and contemporary exigencies for self-immolation below, identifying four unique (yet intertwining) reasons why people choose the fire.

*Framing Contemporary Self-Immolations: Last Efforts and Acts of Solidarity*

In 2012, James Verini, a journalist who typically writes on African affairs, took up the trend of self-immolation in an article for the *New Yorker* questioning the potency of self-immolation in, “A Terrible Act of Reason: When did Self-Immolation become the Paramount Form of Protest?” Verini summarizes self-immolation as a preferred tool of defiance as the author mentions all of the recent occurrences between 2011 and May 2012:

Yesterday [May 15, 2012], in Oslo, a man set himself on fire outside the Anders Breivik trial. He follows at least forty Tibetans who have set themselves aflame to protest Chinese rule in the past year. There have also been a series of self-immolations in the Middle East and North Africa. In January, five young Moroccan men auto-cremated (the more accurate term; “self-immolation” technically means any form of self-destruction)<sup>16</sup> following a fifty-two-year-old pensioner in Jordan and an elderly woman in Bahrain.

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<sup>16</sup> I choose to use the term “self-immolation” over “auto-cremation” for a few reasons 1) this is the most popular usage of the term that relates to a wider audience; 2) “self-immolation” also suggests a rhetorical and reflexive motive, that the person is sacrificing themselves for a reason, creating agency, while the term “auto-cremation” can be ambiguous in interpretation.

These self-immolations occurred within a period of a year and a half and illustrate self-immolation's powerful influence. Verini argues that over this time span self-immolation became the new "in" protest method, but he questions why this act of death has replaced "sit-ins" and "hunger strikes." His answer comes from Timothy Dickinson, a historian in Washington D.C., who tells him, "The sight of someone setting themselves on fire is simultaneously an assertion of intolerability, and, frankly, of moral superiority. You say 'I would never have the guts to do this. It's not that [the self-immolator is] trying to tell me something, but that he's *commanding* me.'" Dickinson refers to these acts not as cases of "insanity" but rather "terrible acts of reason"—or, ways that people can better command human emotions and attitudes through their own deaths. These accounts of self-immolations were not from an isolated period, however; we can start to understand the complex exigencies of self-immolation by looking at additional self-immolations that occurred between 2013 and June 2015.

I believe two different contemporary exigencies dominate the discourse around the most recent self-immolators' deaths: 1) a "last effort" (or final recourse) of extremism<sup>17</sup> and 2) an act of solidarity. It is important to note that the line between these two exigencies is typically very small and often nonexistent, for what might seem like solidarity for some might be a "last effort" to others and vice versa. To begin, a "last effort" act of self-immolation occurs when an individual feels that an oppression has led them to a tipping point, where they see no other way out of a situation than to perform an extreme act. On one hand, these acts represent a last desperation plea for humanity, a way for the individual to be persuasive in his or her death. On the other hand, these acts of

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<sup>17</sup> I take up extremism as an appeal of Charles Moore's death in Chapter 5.

final recourse also attempt to persuade the collective (and possibly the oppressors) into seeing that the self-immolators' hand was forced into death, and the oppressors should be blamed. Arguably, this act raises the stakes for the rhetorical situation involving both the collective group the actor represents and the oppressors too because of two reasons: it places the life (and death) of the self-immolator onto the hands of the oppressor.

Whoever has the power and agency to resolve the subjugation that has taken place figuratively has the blood on their hands in this context. It also forces the collective group to act or have the self-immolator's death be in vain. They must see the actor's death as impetus to continue the good fight against the oppressive nature that brought the self-immolation to fruition.

Within a period of a few months in early 2013, for instance, six Bulgarian men self-immolated in protest of their government's economic oppression over its citizens. One columnist wrote in a Trud newspaper, "When you are unable to control the simplest things in your life, like buying food....it is only normal to feel betrayed, left behind helplessly....Then you see the fire as the only way to be heard" (qtd. in Toshkov). These six men surrendered their lives simply to protest the poverty in which most of their country lived. To many, this rhetoric can seem to be a last effort attempt for change; if nothing makes life better for these people and their peers, perhaps dying through fire, a symbolic suicide, might not only persuade the oppressors but the people to up-rise such as in the Arab Spring. Many take to this exigence simply because they feel no way out of their wretched situations. Similar to the Bulgarians, other self-immolations occurred in the heart of China across 2013 to defy the government's urbanization, in which "local governments have demolished tens of millions of homes over the past decade" (Langfitt).

These locals also took to self-immolation as a “final stand” act. In one instance, a rice farmer refused to take the government’s compensation to destroy his home, and when government official pried into his house, he “poured gasoline over his head, opened a tank of cooking gas and lit himself on fire” (Langfitt). This man chose to die because he found no way out of his oppression, but through lighting himself on fire, he attempted to have others see who should be blamed for his death, the Chinese government. I believe the self-immolation act itself sets forth these interpretations (as I talk about more fully in Chapter 2).

However, even these self-immolations fail to neatly fit into the category of "last efforts." Others could interpret the Bulgarian self-immolations as acts of solidarity too, in which the Bulgarian men die in support of "most of their country" that lives in poverty. The fact that more than one man died for this cause makes a clear case for an exigence of solidarity along with a last effort. Also, in China, many other farmers have performed self-immolations, complicating the act as not only a last effort but one in coherence with the oppression of many farmers across the region. The exigencies of self-immolation are indeed muddied waters, and one would be hard-pressed to find a contemporary self-immolation that solely fits into the category of "last effort" as a popular trope. Often, we see in this contemporary practice, acts of solidarity are also an important exigence for the self-immolator.

Self-immolations motivated by solidarity are moments when the self-immolator chooses to die by identifying with some form of an oppressed group: such as Buddhists in Vietnam or China, whose governments often marginalize them as a religious people. For instance, between 2009-2013, over 100 Tibetans had successfully self-immolated over a

period of four years in defiance of China's stance on the Dalai Lama, the Buddhist leader, and the oppression of Buddhist monasteries in the region (Lim). While many might believe these are final, personalized, attempts to antagonize the Chinese government, others believe these people self-immolate in Tibet in an act of solidarity. Since the act of self-immolation falls in line with many of the teachings of Buddhism, the act exists for many there as a way to share their love of their brethren and perform it for various audiences. Elliot Sperling, a Tibetan scholar at Indiana University, claims, "The fact that these immolations continue even now, after China has opted for a harsh crackdown in areas that have witnessed these acts, is telling" of how much their acts represent solidarity of Buddhists against the Chinese state (qtd. in Wong and Yardley).

Other self-immolations of solidarity have taken place even more recently and closer to home. One took place in East Manatee, a section of Bradenton, a city just south of Tampa, Florida, and received little news coverage. Thu Hoang, a 71-year-old Vietnamese man performed self-immolation in his apartment in protest of China placing an oil rig in a contested area of the Pacific Ocean, where Vietnamese and Chinese officials argue over property rights (Young). Similar to the Chinese oppression of Tibetan residents, the people of Vietnam have often contested China's power over them. Hoang's act failed to make more than local news, but he died in unity with the Vietnamese nation who have been routinely taken advantage of by Chinese policies. Multiple self-immolations unfolded in 2015, especially in Tibet, where a nun self-immolated "to protest Chinese rule and to call for the return of the Dalai Lama from exile" in unity with those who have died for the same cause before her (Wong). Most of these self-immolations can appear to be closely aligned with one exigence more than another, but

quite often they can fall under either exigence of last resort or solidarity.

This recent trend stands out from the historical lineage and previous rhetorical exigencies of self-immolation because typically self-immolations in the past were spread out, only being used sparingly, leaving people like Verini asking why this recent and overwhelming trend is happening in the first place. Verini believes that Bouazizi's act has been "interpreted as an act of public defiance," and other self-immolations have followed this trend because of its last effort appeal. I tend to agree. But I also think that these self-immolations help individuals align with a purpose or a group of marginalized peoples, an act of solidarity, making their public appeal more enticing to others who feel marginalized too. The movement of Arab Spring and performances in Tibet show that people tend to be emotionally moved by self-immolation's performance: the act of embalming one's self with fire emphasizes how our humanity affects us. To further understand not only this recent trend but Moore's self-immolation, the longer, historical complexities of self-immolation must be unraveled.

### *Contextualizing Historical Exigencies: Acts of Sati and Awakening*

The recent wave of self-immolations prompts us to consider how the act has been practiced and interpreted in the past. Two other exigencies come to light when analyzing the historical employment of self-immolation: 3) the act of spousal love (or Sati) and 4) acts of awakening (a Buddhist tradition). Both acts have long historical narratives (especially in Eastern cultures) that better emphasize self-immolation's potency, but only acts of awakening remain a common factor in the recent wave of self-immolations. The first known "instance" of self-immolation actually comes "from Sati, one of the wives of the Hindu god Shiva. According to myths, she married against her father's wishes and

then burned herself to death after her father insulted her husband” (Sanburn). This folklore in Hindu mythology actually transitioned into practice in certain Indian cultures, having to be officially outlawed in 1829. Still, recently women in India, such as Sharabati Bai and Roop Kanwar, continued to follow this tradition because it represents “an act of piety, and is said to purge a woman of all accumulated sin” (“Indian Women”). The act of Sati, a religious self-immolation of spousal love, illustrates the power of the act as a religious ritual, but since not many women in the Hindu culture self-immolate today, we can consider Sati more as a historical exigence rather than a common occurrence in the present. However, self-immolation as a Buddhist practice not only has historical significance but continues to be a common practice today.

In his book *Burning for the Buddha*, James A. Benn writes a long history of self-immolation in Buddhist China, ranging from accounts of monks and nuns self-immolating in the 5<sup>th</sup>-century up to the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century. Benn’s foundational work explains 1) why self-immolation remains vital to Buddhism; 2) the contextual exigencies of Buddhist self-immolations; and 3) the various interpretations of these acts. Benn not only focuses on the interpretations of these acts historically but also analyzes how contemporary audiences interpret these deaths to see how the self-sacrifice remains an integral part of understanding Buddhism, especially the sect of Buddhism referred to as “Mahayana.” The Mahayana differentiates from other factions of Buddhism by focusing more intently on how enlightened individuals should assist others struggling within their cyclical rebirth (“Mahayana Buddhism”). He explains that people move to this act of self-immolation believing that they are achieving an “awakening,” or a universal truth—what I see as a more widely embraced exigence of historical and contemporary self-



immolations. Most Buddhist practices emphasize rebirth as a goal of a life; one works to bettering themselves in order to obtain a better future in a different rebirth. However, Johnathan A. Silk suggests that Mahayana Buddhism focuses less on rebirth and more on a unique vision of “awakening.” He states, “The application of merit toward the acquisition of wisdom and ultimate awakening...is a Mahayana innovation” that governs their purpose in life. For followers of this dogma, self-immolation allows them to fulfill their awakening; the act produces a euphoric, transcendent knowledge and truth that would seemingly be unattainable without this act. This, of course, makes sense in that the act of self-immolating could encompass how an “enlightened” person attempts to help the audience to see a path of resolve in a moment of clear vision and understanding.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, we see the exigencies of self-immolation fall into four different rhetorical categories, two that have more contemporary ties (acts of last effort and solidarity) and two that have more historical ties (acts of spousal love and awakening). Though acts of spousal love have more of a historical precedence in Hindu India, they still occur from time-to-time in contemporary society. However, the other three exigencies still dominate the motives of most self-immolations today. Acts of awakening, or acts of transcendent knowledge seeking, seem to have taken place ever since Buddhist monks have chosen to self-immolate in places such as Tibet and China, and this exigence still permeates most of the Buddhist self-immolations in the global sphere today. Therefore, though it has a major historical lineage, we see how this lineage is still active in today's world too. In more contemporary terms, acts of solidarity and acts of last effort remain the two most common reasons why people choose to self-immolate, both of which are political

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<sup>18</sup> I take up this point in Chapter 3 when I discuss the arguments and appeals of self-immolation.

exigencies. Together, these four exigencies create the various motives for self-immolation. More importantly, we will see that these acts often overlap too.

### *Converging Exigencies*

As I will explain with Charles Moore and Duc, when people self-immolate, they do not solely represent one exigence; rather, they move to this extremist act for multiple reasons. To die in solidarity with others and to be pressed by a last effort to create change often converge for self-immolators. Duc took to the flame to not only die for his fellow Buddhist brethren and the oppressed in his region but also in a final effort to change the world around him. Arguably, he found an awakening as much of his Buddhist brethren had found before him in dying too. He knew the history.<sup>19</sup> I have identified four of the most common exigencies in the paragraphs above, but it is important to remember here that rarely does a self-immolator only embody one of these exigencies when choosing to die. These exigencies often converge on their body. Most self-immolators typically fall under multiple categories for dying because, for most, the choice of death is not an easy one. Many must be pushed over the edge, figuratively speaking, to want to complete the extremist act in the first place.

Benn clarifies this complex notion, stating, “Self-immolation resists a single simple explanation or interpretation. Cases of self-immolation were not simply recorded and filed away but continued to inspire and inform readers and listeners” (12). Benn extrapolates that every self-immolation consists of unique circumstances and varying interpretations because each self-immolation stems from varying exigencies. Thus, while

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<sup>19</sup> Charles Ozrech has argued that Duc's self-immolation follows in the paradigm set forth by other Buddhist self-immolators, historically. His interpretation of Duc in his film hinges on the fact that Duc understood the historical context of his death.

we can label major tendencies that coincide with the self-immolation act, we also must understand that each case comes about through local problems, needs, and contexts. Benn further summarizes the rhetorical situation for actors of self-immolation, suggesting that though “self-immolation was always considered a valid Buddhist practice,” the constraints for each self-immolation differ (202). He “stresse[s] the importance of understanding self-immolation as a construct that was continually being remade by historical actors who were themselves shaped by social, political, and geographical forces” (199). Though the act of self-immolation continues to have a long lineage in Buddhist China, the reasons for each act differ—sometimes out of peace, other times out of chaos—illustrating the wide arrange of interpretations of this act for not only Buddhists but a more universal audience as well.

The range of interpretations of self-immolation (from both the actor and audiences) also widely differs not only by geographical location and religious ideologies but also on individual, local contexts too. Benn explains that “although some monks did offer their bodies in periods of relative prosperity and peace, we have seen a marked coincidence between acts of self-immolation and times of crisis, especially when secular powers were hostile towards Buddhism” (199). Benn describes such self-immolations in China as sometimes being “messianic” and providing “enlightenment” at other times, but no matter what “they were not completely misguided or deluded” (201-2). In Benn’s analysis, the acts are always justified, but their degree of justification varies; self-immolations could end political turmoil, call for peace, end famine, and even bring rain. Self-immolations did not always need to be interpreted as an act of last effort rhetoric but rather as an act of solidarity and enlightenment for the monk’s fellow people or that the

individual was giving up life to help others (as with rain and famine).

I believe the complexity of self-immolation, the intertwining of exigencies and sometimes vagueness surrounding one's death, is what makes it so compelling to audiences, but this can also be the act's downfall. Because the actor chooses to die in the context of multiple constraints, many times it is hard to pinpoint a single exigence, which allows for an individual interpreter to analyze and conclude of what the self-immolation means on their own. The motives for dying get lost in the complexity and extremeness of the act, leaving some stating that the person was “crazy” or “ill-informed” because it does not align with their values (I take this up more in Chapter 3). The visceral and visual act of extremeness, the embodiment of pain and fire, even when it is not personally witnessed, mesmerizes many, urging them to better explore the exigencies behind the act. This is where complexity should help situate the act, but the complexity, too often, hinders interpretations of self-immolation. Where complexity draws some audiences in, it also leaves people behind. The act can often be too difficult to comprehend, especially given the dominance of American discourse on suicide and mental illness. Neville-Shephard writes, "The self-immolation must be recognized as justified due to a widely perceived crisis. In other words, the audience of the self-immolation must be able to comprehend why someone would take such an extreme action. If the self-immolation is seen as too severe of a reaction to the circumstances, then it is likely that the self-immolator will be portrayed as unstable" (18-19). Even in the act's purest and clearest form, when the exigence is clear and well-understood by many, some would remain unable to grapple with the actor's death. The complexity leaves room for doubt, which cripples many interpretations before they can even get past the charred remains of the

dead.

*The Exigencies of Thich Quang Duc and the Recent Wave*

Further analyzing Thich Quang Duc's self-immolation can better help us see the means of this complexity. The most historically famous self-immolation took place on June 11, 1963 in Vietnam. For years, South Vietnam led a state-wide push to mandate Catholicism and routinely oppressed the Buddhists under the Ngo Dinh Diem regime. To promote a nonviolent protest against the Diem rule, Buddhists peacefully took the streets in May 1963. Unfortunately, "On May 8, 1963, in the ancient imperial capital of Hue, South Vietnamese soldiers opened fire on a group of Buddhists who were flying the Buddhist flag in direct violation of a government ban. Nine were killed" ("The Burning Monk"). The massacre shook the Buddhist community in Vietnam. After weeks of mourning, local Buddhists decided to hold a public memorial service for the dead on June 11.

That morning, local monk Thich Quang Duc sat down in a busy street corner in Saigon and performed self-immolation with a circle of fellow Buddhist monks surrounding him. His self-immolation could be analyzed as representing three of the four exigencies described above, illustrating the act's unique complexity. While most have ascribed the exigence of "last effort" to Duc's death, labelling him as the symbolic figure protesting the Vietnam War and the oppression of the government, when digging a bit deeper we see it was more complicated. First, he died in solidarity with those who were brutally murdered by the government only a few weeks beforehand and represented their cause as he went to the flames. His death was an act of solidarity; he wanted to become a symbol not only of the "last effort" but for the deaths that were committed by the

government as well. Also, I believe his death represents an awakening for himself: a way he achieves a universal truth through self-immolating. Those who witnessed his death quickly referred to him as the Mahayana *Bodhisattva* (or, "enlightenment being") for achieving this high insight (Hadlock). Following in other Buddhist's footsteps, the *Bodhisattvas* who came before him, his death allows him to achieve enlightenment for his next life. Duc's final words illustrate this: "Before closing my eyes and moving towards the vision of the Buddha, I respectfully plead to President Ngo Dinh Diem to take a mind of compassion towards the people of the nation and implement religious equality to maintain the strength of the homeland eternally." Duc's "vision" portrays this enlightenment he was attempting to achieve. Lastly, as has often been demonstrated, Duc's self-immolation represents a last effort attempt at peace, not for himself, but for other Buddhists. Hopefully in dying, he would be able to pressure his peers to keep the protest against the government alive or force the government to actually change their position on Buddhism.

The image of Duc's death didn't die along with him; Malcolm Brown famously captured the scene resulting from these conflated exigences (which eventually earned him the Pulitzer Prize in 1964). The image's fame stemmed from what it represented not just to the Vietnamese but to the Americans too. Christian Caryl reflects, "Images of this bloodcurdling act of self-sacrifice soon became emblems of a broader campaign of resistance against the Vietnam War." The effects of Duc's death spread past the few hundred folks who surrounded him on the street in Saigon and quickly became symbolic of the anti-war effort. The humanity permeating the image, the man peacefully given his life for cause greater than himself, resonated with Americans, and this image still is one

of the most iconic images of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. President Kennedy even claimed, “No news picture in history has generated so much emotion around the world as that one.” The emotion and humanity attributed to this photograph propelled self-immolation into the American public realm, leading it to become a better known form of protest. Even in America, a few protestors of the Vietnam War chose to self-immolate in honor of Duc’s act of protest, showing the impact Duc had for people across the globe. While it would be naive to say that Duc’s death brought helped begin a revolution of self-immolations in America (less than ten occurred to protest the war), his death undoubtedly brought the protest into the forefront of the American psyche.

Between Duc's self-immolation and Moore's in 2014 (a timespan over 50 years), a multitude of self-immolations have taken place across the world, but the act still mostly is identified with Eastern cultures. Between the mid-1960s up until the late-2000s, protesters appropriated self-immolation in protest of war and oppression, seen in America and elsewhere. For instance, in 1967, Florence Beaumont self-immolated on the steps of the Federal Building in Los Angeles in solidarity with those “slaughtered” in Vietnam (“Self-Immolation”). Across the globe in 1968, a few Czechoslovakians self-immolated in protest of the Soviet invasion of their country (Sanburn). In the 1990s, self-immolation became an important act of resistance in larger revolutions against oppression. Five Indian students self-immolated to speak out against job quotas in 1990; Homa Darabi set herself on fire to protest the lack of women’s rights in Islamic Iran in 1994; and a few Kurds used the method to decry Turkey in 1999 (“Self-Immolation;” Sanburn). From Duc’s flames in Vietnam in 1963 until the turn of the century, self-immolation proved to be a wide-reaching, extreme method to protest injustice. But these acts were so spaced

apart, sometimes years and decades would pass before you would hear about one of them, which arguably granted them a strong rhetorical appeal because the more frequent this extreme is the less powerful it is in drawing people to the oppression. That has changed now, though. Since I took up this project in the summer of 2014, I have tracked the news regularly for articles about recent self-immolations. In that time span, I have found at least one new case each time I search. I believe these acts are more common now because they represent the present, dire nature of oppression throughout much of the world. One could say these are “copycat” self-immolations in a sense, but I place emphasis on the solidarity surrounding these acts. When they choose the fire they are not just self-immolating for themselves but also for the people who have died before them, making connections between their deaths and others who have chosen the flame (especially in Tibet). This could be interpreted as a type of “copycat” issue; however, I believe it further demonstrates the humanity that self-immolation brings to the forefront. Self-immolators see the impact people like Duc and Bouazizi made in engulfing themselves in flames and hope they can achieve the same goals in following this tradition. Though the act still predominantly occurs in Eastern countries, it has slowly began occurring more often in Western contexts. Hunger strikes, peaceful protests, and other protest methods can work, but then when the weight of the world rests on one’s shoulders, when everything else doesn’t seem to work and seems pointless, self-immolation remains a way out. Bouazizi’s self-immolation in 2010, catalyzing the Arab Spring, illustrates the rhetorical power of self-immolation because so many people used his death as a rallying cry to call for liberation in their own cities and countries. Hence, many people around the world have clung to this protest method because of the potential large effect it wields.



I argue in the final sections of this chapter that Charles Moore's case actually represents three of the four exigencies listed above, just like Duc. First, Moore felt a last ditch effort in his self-immolation; he believed his death could be the final straw in his life of protest activity, a way for people to see that he went out doing what he believed. His death was not only a last effort for his own humanity; rather, it was a last effort to die for a cause, a way to finally make meaning out of his life (an act of awakening, a second exigence). While people can argue that he could have protested by other means, his life struggle had led him to an end that he felt was visionary, an end-of-the-line "awakening" that resembles many Buddhist self-immolations. Moore wanted his life—and maybe more importantly, his death—to have meaning, and by completing his act, he achieved his purpose in death. Lastly, Moore's death represents a vision of solidarity too, one he expresses explicitly in his letter to Grand Saline: he gave up his life in harmony with the black people who were slaughtered in town before him, wanting to die in a similar fashion with those nameless people who were brutally murdered by town members. The exigencies for self-immolating that we have witnessed across the world for centuries and their various contexts represent the same exigencies that we see in Moore's self-immolation too, providing us a lens for better interpreting what caused Moore to choose this act, this protest, to end his life.

### **III. Driving to a Different Church: The Exigencies of Charles Moore**

Moore's self-immolation hardly fits neatly into these categories of exigencies because the oppression he stood against is quite different than most others'. He was protesting the racist culture and legacy of Grand Saline, a more implicit oppression that others often fail to witness. To begin, when Moore ended his life through the flame, he

undertook one last effort to create change. Where much of the analysis on last effort exigencies often points to people who feel no way out of their oppression, as individuals or as part of group, Moore's rhetorical situation differs greatly because it represented a last effort for others: signifying both a final attempt for social change and a solidarity exigence too. Moore's exigencies remain complicated, as they do not directly fit into the categories parsed above and often cross into one another—accentuating the fluidity behind choosing to die through self-immolation. Audiences would not just be able to say Moore represented one exigence or another; there were multiple variables interweaving his motives to self-immolate. To finish this chapter, then, I will emphasize instances where Moore's reasons for dying intersect and how these exigencies sometimes fail to be categorized within the traditional terms of self-immolation. However, I will analyze these exigencies independently of one another to show how the act worked on multiple levels. I will begin by analyzing his last effort act, move to his self-awakening, and end with his exigence of solidarity.

By most measures, Moore lived a “good” life: he resided in a suburb of Dallas with his wife near his two sons. After retiring, he spent time reading, continuing his theological studies, and writing prose and poetry. His poetry illustrates his interpretation of beauty and God in the world around him. In one poem titled “Just after Sunrise,” Moore pens his views of nature in the description of ducks swimming on a pond: “Early yesterday / the lagoon was consumed / by spreading white fire.” Another short poem titled “My Captain,” one of two poems read at Moore's funeral, illustrates his uniting Christianity with nature. He writes, “The sparrow stood tall / atop the wheelbarrow's bow / Chirping out his orders / like an admiral at sea. /// Would he dare pretend / more

importance for himself/ Than the oarsman aft / who propels the weighty craft?" This pinpoints a vital theme for Moore: that sometimes humans, in their lack of wisdom, feel more important than the ones who really hold power (such as God). While Moore witnessed the elegance of the world around him even in his later life, something elder churned deep inside of him, hindering him from feeling fulfilled; he bore a deep purpose he could not dissuade.

In fact, the motive to self-immolate was not a hasty decision. It built up inside of him for at least a few years. Moore's archives indicate that the idea of self-immolation consumed him, figuratively. In a letter titled "An Appeal to Power," he called for change in the United Methodist Church's viewpoint on homosexuality and for SMU to be a more welcoming campus for homosexual populations. Moore explains, "This decision to sacrifice myself was not impulsive: I have struggled all my life (especially the last several years) with what it means to take Dietrich Bonhoeffer's insistence that Christ calls a person to come and die seriously." Moore mentions Bonhoeffer's book *The Cost of Discipleship* in this instance, referring to the oft-cited quote: "when Christ calls a man, he bids him to come die." Bonhoeffer writes that when one becomes a Christian, he/she has a new purpose in life—to fulfill a Christian life (and, ultimately, death). In context of Bonhoeffer's words, Moore desired to die for a reason, to die performing a Christian deed. The choice of the fire lived within him for a long time, and he believed it could help him shine light not on a self-injustice but on an injustice of people he felt were marginalized: homosexuals, people of color, and those killed by way of the death penalty.

*To "Sacrifice myself in a painful way": A Last Effort Act*

Moore's last effort exigence also comes forth in his final letter to his wife:

Actually, I have been struggling for a long time now with offering up my life on behalf of people who are so needlessly mistreated—especially LGBT persons and those on death row...Now I see no way that I could have any influence relative to the injustice I see all around me—except to sacrifice myself in a painful way. Unfortunately, our human race is impressed most of all with innocent suffering, and is moved significantly by little else (I mean the death of soldiers, the persecution of minorities, the deliberate pain in fight for civil rights, etc.)...It isn't important that I be remembered, but that someone cared enough to give up everything for the sake of others. ("Letter to Wife")

This letter is hard to read, but it spells out the exigence he felt: the state of affairs in America had reached a boiling point, and he had to create significance in his own life and to help shine light on others' oppression. As we will see, these exigencies call forth acts of solidarity because Moore wanted to focus on people he felt were oppressed through representing them.

Moore did not feel an overbearing pressure himself because as a white heterosexual man none of the oppression of LGBTQ people or people of color directly affected him. Rather, Moore senses a kairotic moment in America—one of despair for these people, one that needs to be saved from neoconservative culture and "innocent suffering," that he must heed. I had the opportunity to sit down with some of Moore's family nine months after his death and talked with them about his act. As painful as it was for him to share, Bill Renfro, Moore's stepson-in-law, stated that Moore feared the rise of the Tea Party and politicians such as Ted Cruz. Renfro declares, "I think [Moore] became very disenchanted with hope." Therefore, on one hand, Moore's self-immolation

stems from a last effort to "save" people from their disillusioned beliefs in these neoconservative politicians. Since he believed America was slowly traversing toward a state of no return, Moore's act illustrates his own vision of throwing a wrench in the machine: maybe, just maybe, his death could change people's perspectives on politics and social issues in America.

Moore's death also illustrates his final effort to create justice in America (something he felt he never accomplished in the past). Moore spent much of his life preaching in areas such as Boston, Austin, and Dallas and on mission trips. He worked at the Ecumenical Institute in Chicago (and other places) to help others with churches and pastoral care in many of the low socioeconomic areas of the city for twelve years of his life in the 1960s and 1970s. He utilized the power of the hunger strike in his 1995 protest of the UMC's position on homosexuality for over twenty days. Yet, none of these acts of teaching, protest, and social work sufficed for Moore. The change he desired hid behind the reality of America's stagnant views on race and homosexuals. Progress through the Civil Rights struggle and progress Moore hoped he had achieved through his own life cowered throughout time, leaving the people most vulnerable still vulnerable, to Moore. Moore took to the flame because he felt it would be his last chance to make social progress possible and to create a lasting effect that he believed many of his other works failed to do.

Instead of going out by way of natural causes or the inclination of time, Moore chose to die by his own hands because he could position himself as an actor for change. Family members state that Moore felt he was near death, though no medical records indicate an impending ailment. Moore's stepdaughter and stepson-in-law, state that

towards the end of his life, Moore feared he was getting sick. When Moore became ill two years prior to his self-immolation, his family declared he became paranoid with the idea that he was going to die of prostate cancer or lymphoma (which his mother died from). This leaves many people to question, even his family, how a man afraid of dying would want to kill himself for change. Bill Renfro states, “He exhibited a great fear of dying... [which got me thinking], if he was so afraid of dying, how could he self-immolate? But maybe it was that he was afraid of dying *like that* [cancer].” Renfro believes that Moore might not have feared death at all; rather, he feared his death not signifying anything. In an attempt to create an everlasting impact, Moore self-immolated, praying that his actions would be felt and witnessed by residents in Grand Saline and other American citizens.

Moore felt there was no other way to point out these injustices because other actions would not carry as much rhetorical weight as a self-immolation potentially could. Since he spent a lifetime working for social change and perceived little results, we can see him choosing to self-immolate out of despair—protesting tradition means to produce a “better” result. His own rhetorical analysis of self-immolation, the strong belief in “someone car[ing] enough to give up everything for the sake of others,” demonstrates why he considered it a viable option because he believed an innocent bystander, a selfless death, persuades and moves people better than any other potential act could. Therefore, his thoughtful consideration of this type of death illustrates how deeply he felt pressured by the world around him. He sensed an obligation to the powerless. Though Moore was not backed into a corner himself, he witnessed how others felt marginalized every single day and yearned for his death to make a difference for them.

This was not only a last effort for him; this was a final recourse to help others too. It is likely that the letter above was actually written before Moore chose to self-immolate in Grand Saline, at a time when he still contemplated self-immolating on SMU's campus, because in his last two dated letters prior to his death, Moore's interests clearly gravitate to racial concerns. Moore first attempted to self-immolate at SMU on Juneteenth<sup>20</sup> but aborted his plans. He writes on June 20 that his "courage failed" him, but on the news that night, he heard that June 20 was the fiftieth anniversary of one black man and two white men (Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner) being murdered near Philadelphia, Mississippi during the Freedom Summer. He hoped that their deaths would encourage him to the flame the next day. However, Moore could not conjure the courage to self-immolate, so he tried again to find faith in the flame on June 21 because he "would be so honored to be remembered" along with the three men who died fighting for racial justice. Though he failed in his third attempt, his reasons for dying became clearer as he penned a letter about eradicating racist attitudes of the past that still lived underneath the surface of the present ("On Failures").

Of course, in Moore's final letter, "O Grand Saline, Repent Of Your Racism," his focus becomes clearest: he elected to die because of the terrible racial relations that plagued Grand Saline, racist memories he believe the town never reconciled. He calls for Grand Saline to "open its heart and its doors to black people, as a sign of the rejection of past sins." In his letter, he finds a more concrete purpose in self-immolating. In the previous letters, he mentioned several groups of people that he wanted to die for, gays and those on death row, but his reasoning seems a bit muddled, perhaps because his

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<sup>20</sup> Juneteenth is the day that Texans celebrate the abolition of slavery for the state. It is celebrated on June 19 of every year.

relationship with these communities existed more on an intellectual level than a personal one. But Grand Saline was home to him. The racism he remembered stood out in comparison to the pains of the LGBTQ and death row peoples because he experienced and witnessed this racism there firsthand and over his life. It is telling that *this* (at least his fourth) attempt to self-immolate, the attempt where the exigence is well-understood in his letters and the one where his memory plays a key role, is the time when Moore's body was actually engulfed by the flames.

Moore elected to die on June 23 because he had a purpose that dwelled within him, and it finally crawled its way to the surface on that fateful day. After countless years of fighting for social justice through various platforms, he meticulously determined that the best chance to create change lie within the fire. For Moore, the pulpit never quite sufficed. The hunger strikes did not fulfill his void. His marches and writings never accomplished their purpose. The only pressure that Moore felt remained was time itself: with so little time lingering in his eightieth year, he sensed that if he did not choose this act now, he might die from other causes before he could, in effect, preach his final sermon.

When Moore trekked to the small parking lot on June 23, he had one final sermon to deliver, one that had a more ambiguous audience, but with a message that had to be delivered nevertheless: Grand Saline must change from its history of racism and be more welcoming to people of color. As he sat on the folded tarp, I envision him behind the pulpit one last time. With his typed notes left on his car windshield, Moore began the service with an offering. No money was given this time; no, the only thing being sacrificed was his body.



Moore delivered many sermons about creating change in society before this final one. In a particular sermon titled, “You Give Them Something to Eat,” he declares:

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.

But with some his final breaths on earth, Moore sensed that enough was enough; he could no longer employ his words to preach. He must now employ his body. Overwhelmed with the injustice with world around him, Moore became the human sacrifice for change because he saw no other way for justice to occur without his own death.

As the service ended, the congregation arrived. People surrounded Moore, attempting to put out the fire, and his final message was soon front and center on many residents' social media pages, as they all tried to interpret what the preacher’s final sermon meant.

#### *A Self-Prophecy of Awakening*

Much of the analysis on exigencies surrounding Buddhist self-immolations highlight the notion of awakening, that many Buddhists take to the flame to not only help others but to achieve an enlightenment through the fire as well. While they may not be able to utilize this awakening in this present life, they believe that their final acts here will carry on to their next existence, affording them a better state of being. Since Moore believed fully in Christian theology, it would not make sense to argue that he died to

fulfill an awakening for a next life, as, religiously speaking, the Methodist dogma he preached for so long does not acknowledge acts of awakening. Thus, similar to acts of last effort described above, Moore's self-immolation cannot be simply categorized as an "awakening," yet a thorough analysis of this exigence will still emphasize his death as striving toward a type of enlightenment.

I believe that when he chose to die, he sought a supreme enlightenment for himself, not one that would transfer over to another life, but one that still illustrates a better understanding of his own theology in the present. I see this in his notes on self-immolation and in the cover image of his "suicide" folder that Moore left for his wife. Simply put, Moore achieved an awakening through resolving his dogmatic issues: he could remain a Christian and still choose to die by self-immolation. By rhetorically uniting his Christian theology with Buddhist interpretations of self-immolation, Moore fulfilled a realization for himself: one giving him the reason and right to die for his own religious and social beliefs—a reconciliation of faith and justice. Without reaching this religious resolution, Moore's self-immolation might have never occurred or might have been in vain, but by leaving his note behind, he aimed to persuade his family and other audiences to recognize his death as a moral, justified act. In her article, "The Rhetoric of Suicide Notes," Jenny Grosvenor claims, "In suicide endings come excruciating beginnings. We, its survivors, can only gather as much as we can, collect the memories, focus our thoughts, make connections and some sort of meaning out of this assignment" (58). Though I would not label Moore's death a suicide, his note fulfills the same purpose: he asks people to make meaning out of his death. In comparing his actions with other Buddhist self-immolators, such as Duc, then, we realize that Moore's decision,

though believing in something more finite than his predecessors, still reaches for a similar purpose of awakening that he hoped others would agree with too.

One notices how Moore sought such an enlightenment in reading some of his notes collated in his prepared folder. In one example, Moore took Jeffrey Bartholet's article "Aflame," published in *The New Yorker*, and underlined only two sentences that parallels his own interpretation of self-immolation. He underlined, "Several Buddhist scholars told me that the deaths [of Buddhist monks] were, generally speaking, a sacrifice for a higher cause, and should be viewed as different from violence against others or from suicides committed out of personal despair." He also highlighted the phrase, "Sacrificing your life for the benefit of other is 'not a contradiction, because your life is precious in saving others.'" I believe that Moore emphasized these two sentences out of a long, 3,000 word article because they represent an ideal motivation for his forthcoming death. Moore did not want people to think that he committed *suicide* in his death (as is witnessed in his letter to his wife) but he wanted his death to be labelled as "a sacrifice for a higher cause." To sacrifice oneself for a higher purpose underscores "an awakening" as an acceptable exigence for himself. One cannot attempt to attain this clarity if one does not have a sense of purpose, a vision for the future. In emphasizing the Buddhist exigencies in Bartholet's piece and leaving the documentation to be read, Moore asks his family members and other audiences to compare his own act in accordance to the monks before him. To do so forms a corresponding relationship between these awakenings.

Perhaps even a more telling marker of Moore's awakening stems from the symbolism that Moore positioned in the forefront of his prepared folder. On a single piece of paper that sat on top of the prepared folder, Moore printed two images (again see

Image 1), juxtaposing one another, but also representing his cause. On the left, Moore added an image of Duc's self-immolation in black and white with his full name stated in the bottom left corner. Moore fully comprehended the historical contexts surrounding Duc's death (through, at least, reading the Bartholet piece). He witnessed the enlightenment these monks achieved through dying, even if he did not explicitly believe in their religious dogma of "awakening." Moore did not just employ this one image, however; on the right side of the page, he also posted something even closer to his heart: the flame and crucifix symbol of the United Methodist Church. Together, these two images suggest a dialectic tension for Moore. Since he followed the teachings of the Methodist church his entire life, he did not have much of a relationship with Buddhism or the act of self-immolation. Yet when choosing to self-immolate and in leaving behind his legacy and notes, he rhetorically chose to place these two images side-by-side on top of everything he wanted his family and audiences to find.

Methodist and Buddhist theology do not share many similarities in their opinions on the afterlife. Connecting the two theologies thus displays Moore solving a deep puzzle within himself: how can he die for others, theologically speaking, and not have his death be perceived as a suicide? Since these dogmas cause conflict amongst people, Moore's enlightenment forms around his bridging this major issue. His family and other audiences *can* fully interpret his death as righteous when reading through his notes on Buddhism and Christianity, and the images above infer such an interpretation too. However, to reach this point of reconciliation does not fulfill the same enlightenment as it does for typical Buddhist self-immolators, but it does awaken Moore to the belief that he can be a Christian, kill himself in love of others, and still be perceived as justified.

Moore searched for answers to his life during his last few years alive, seeking a way to create meaning. Moore took to the flame for enlightenment, and we can only hope that with his last moments here on Earth, through all of the pain and suffering he endured, that he found some resolve. We will never know if he actually found the enlightenment he sought, however, but that is less our concern than the complexities surrounding his act of protest. More importantly, Moore's final choices in self-immolating—the way he prepared a folder for his family, left notes, and placed self-immolation in relationship with Methodist theology—illustrate a man attempting to achieve a state of enlightenment. Moore wanted to die for a purpose, for a concrete reason. The flame brought made this purpose a reality.

#### *Joining "Them" in Symbolic Solidarity*

Finally, much of the rhetorical analysis surrounding solidarity often deals with individuals who identify with various collectives and groups. Michelle Murray Yang, a Communications scholar, analyzes Duc's self-immolation in terms of his Buddhist brethren in Vietnam. She finds his death to be in unison with those who had been murdered by the government before him and in an attempt to alleviate the pain of those still fighting against the oppressive regime at the time, a "turning point in the escalating conflict between South Vietnamese Buddhists and the American backed Diem regime" (2). In his article on Tibetan self-immolation against China, Chas Morrison points to the recent rise of self-immolations as the most effective way that Tibetans have utilized their coherence in solidarity against the oppressive state of China. Many others outside of Duc and the Tibetans employ the flame to represent larger groups and causes too: some to represent the oppression of farmers in rural China, others to represent their stance against

interstate politics. Either way, when people utilize self-immolation as an act of solidarity, they often place their collective identity in the forefront, alongside their own individual lives/bodies. Neville-Shephard states this plainly too: "The protest must resonate with the audience's values and cultural beliefs. Whether due to religion or some other factor, the mediated narratives of self-immolations must be framed in a way that generates identification" (19). To her, and to the others mentioned above, identification becomes important to the self-immolator's success.

This, however, is not so easily the case with Moore. When people began investigating the means of his death, no identity markers clearly signified his reason for dying. Being an elderly white man of protestant background, Moore appeared to fit the classification of an "ordinary" American. From the outside looking in, one might initially argue that Moore did not die in solidarity with others because he did not aim to represent an oppressed group; rather, he self-immolated solely as means of a last effort and possibly for an awakening. Reading Moore's letter to Grand Saline, however, we can see his motive more clearly as displaying an act of what I will call symbolic solidarity. *Symbolic solidarity* asks the actor to choose empathy over any other rhetorical appeal—to choose the pain of identification when s/he could easily walk away. The individual subscribes to an act of identity, one in which one usually would *not* identify with, in order to persuade audiences to believe in a certain cause through noticing the act. For instance, during the Civil Rights marches of the 1960s many white people took to the streets to march with their black brethren. Some white people thus symbolically identified with black people in act of solidarity. They accepted the pain of ridicule and beatings in order to humanize the cause they were fighting for, to show audiences that their black brethren

were humans, were oppressed, and needed help (forming empathy). *Symbolic solidarity* works to bridge the gap between various communities, allowing people outside of a certain group to be able to empathize with the pain of that group through a person/people who symbolically represent this value, thus creating the bridge.<sup>21</sup>

Much of Moore's two page letter to Grand Saline discusses the historical problem of race in the town, as he writes about his own memories of people joyfully speaking about lynchings, the activity of the KKK, and whites' lingering problems with people of color up to the present. But toward the end of his letter, Moore states that America as a whole and Grand Saline in particular never repented for their sins of past racism, and this problem still drives much of our racial issues today. In closing his letter, he passionately affirms:

Many African Americans were lynched around here, probably some in Grand Saline: hanged, decapitated and burned, some while still alive. The vision of them haunts me greatly. So, at this late date, I have decided to join them by giving my body to be burned, with love in my heart not only for them but also for the perpetrators of such horror—but especially for the citizens of Grand Saline, many of whom have been very kind to me and others who may be moved to change the situation here.

Moore's words paint a picture of his solidarity; he wanted to die in symbolic harmony with black people who had been lynched near this area before him. By uttering the phrase "to join them," Moore chooses an identity that he does not represent (being black) and still transfers his life, death, and love over to these people of the past and the black

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<sup>21</sup> I take up the persuasiveness of the violence in the next chapter.

generations still falling prey to the injustices of racism today. Though no one forced violence onto Moore or caused him bodily harm, his death fulfills *symbolic solidarity* with others who were harmed by racists around the area before him.<sup>22</sup> Moore's use of *symbolic solidarity* parallels Burke's work on identification and consubstantiality in his book *Rhetoric of Motives*. He states, "To identify A with B is to make A 'consubstantial' with B....The related rhetoric selects its nearest equivalent in the areas of persuasion and dissuasion, communication, and polemic" (21). Moore symbolically identifies with the race of the dead because it becomes the "area of persuasion" that he attempts to utilize in his act. Through choosing this identification, he asks people to see him, a white elderly man, as a surrogate for the pains of the town's past, which can consider as one reason why many town members were dismissive of his act. Since he asks for people to create change through his self-immolation, he thus forces his exigence of solidarity to the forefront of his self-immolation.

To me, Moore fulfills this special kind of *symbolic solidarity* in choosing to represent an oppressed people he does not identify with racially. Any act of sacrifice stemming from solidarity is commendable, but (without attempting to hierarchize such exigencies) an act of solidarity in which the individual encompasses the pains and grievances of others moves past our typical interpretations of an exigence within the terms of self-immolation. Instead, Moore fulfills a special act of solidarity where he sacrifices his own privilege in order to emphasize the pain of others. By noticing the act of solidarity in the first place, audiences can then explore the act's complicated racial dynamics, contemplating the value in his claims. Moore could not just go on living the

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<sup>22</sup> While I recognize that all self-immolations for solidarity are symbolic in nature, Moore's distances itself as being symbolic in identity too. This is what makes *symbolic solidarity* important rhetorically speaking.



rest of his life when people of color were still in the midst of a civil rights struggle that lingered since the 1960s, so he symbolically took the pain of contemporary racism<sup>23</sup> onto his burning body. This act parallels a famous sacrifice of the past that Moore revered: that of Jesus. Where Jesus took on the sins of the entire world, Moore accepted the pains of the dead and even the sins of racism onto his charred body, paralleling the Christian figure he studied and preached about throughout much of his life.

What does it take for someone to die in solidarity with people who he does not even identify with racially but also people that he has never met personally? Compared to other acts of solidarity, Moore's death feels more compelling: he had little stake in these lynchings of the 1960s and past deaths, yet he felt obliged to the oppressed, choosing to engulf himself with fire for these people. His choice of solidarity reflects his own struggles and pain with the world around him. Moore chose the fire because he chose empathy.

Cultural identity and positioning typically leaves connections between people ever-distant because of their various beliefs and values. It is easier to simply not identify with "others" in many institutions in contemporary society than attempt to understand them, leaving cultural differences a relevant subject in the news and in the university. Yet, Moore went out of his way to not only claim that racism against blacks in society is a real issue that white people must comprehend but to actually die for this idea too. This level of empathy illustrates the force behind his charred remains and fulfills a last purpose for others to seek the level of symbolic identification that Moore employed

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<sup>23</sup> One could argue that Moore also symbolically represented LGBTQ and death row inmate populations, as well, if including other archival evidence. There might be enough evidence to support this claim, but this research project, it is important to focus on the shift in Moore's thinking between his first attempts of self-immolation at SMU and his actual death in Grand Saline.

himself. Moore's last lesson was that we should be kinder and more empathetic with one another; love and grace can accomplish many feats if we give them a chance.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

When Cesar Chavez took to the hunger strike, he felt a significant pain rumbling through his stomach. It only takes a few days for your digestive system to turn on your body and start eating itself to produce nutrients and energy. After weeks of not eating, one becomes basically crippled: it is hard to move, your body is weak, and you must lie in bed mostly because you cannot do anything else. Of course, the chance of actually dying of lack of food increases with such an extreme act, but in choosing the hunger strike, Chavez chose injury and pain but (probably) not death. While such a decision seems utterly impossible to so many people as food represents not only a lifeform but one of our favorite pleasures in day-to-day activities, his question of food or not food dwindles in comparison to live or not to live (though I do not want to undermine its powerful statement and historical significance). However, both questions of food and life form ties to empathy, as both sacrifices force others to reconsider their personal values. But Moore asked the ultimate question, and he struggled with this question for many days, if not weeks and months, to where he finally felt his death must take place. "I must die." Such a statement sounds like a popular adage in films rather than a decision that an actual person makes. But this is what makes the dramatic decision register with audiences.

Most people never contemplate this idea—our lives are spent endlessly working, caring for others, raising a family, completing a journey. When others choose to die, especially in American society, we see them as outcasts, people looking for an "easy way

out” through suicide. But what about people who chose to die not out of their own guilt or despair but for others? I believe to move to this state of self-immolation one must come to an understanding, even if it is not true: that one's death can help people. While a few individuals self-immolate as a type of suicide, to die for their own personal reasons and not to help others, the large number of self-immolations around the world attempts to affect large populations through the exigencies listed above. While an act of awakening and spousal love tend to be more personal reasons to die, in contemporary society the last efforts and acts of solidarity tend to remain the most common exigencies for recent self-immolations. Generally speaking then, self-immolation in today's terms is a rhetorical act that attempts to persuade others to either change their ways (the oppressors) or stand up for their beliefs and lives (local audiences). As a whole, on a global level, these acts occupy a unique rhetorical position: they bring both those who identify with the dead and those oppressors who have some responsibility of the death to meet at the same table.

The exigencies of self-immolation display the actor in the world's stage of politics, economics, religion, and ideology, placing him or her in front of various contexts that spotlights not the world's progress but its reliance on subjugation. Each actor, though responding to their own contexts, unite to exploit major issues before not only them or their peers but various cultures and societies too. In response to a broken promise, and in loss of hope, self-immolation makes sense: it attempts to place the spotlight on issues that no one would otherwise be talking about. The self-immolator sees life and death as hopefully a tipping point that can create the wave of change for tomorrow.

Though we now see some of the reasons *why* people choose to self-immolate (or, at least, the reasons they give), we have yet to see *how* the rhetoric of self-immolation

actually attempts to persuade people. Before arriving at this *how* it is important to see the *why*: for people to understand self-immolation as being rhetorical in nature, they must first believe the actor has something to say in dying. This chapter demonstrates that when people choose the flames they do so seeing a chance they can enact in dying. These exigencies are not simply singular. They are often complex and multifold. Once we understand this context for dying, we can then see how the act itself attempts to change people. In my next chapter, I will explore the rhetoric of self-immolation and will argue that the appeals of embodiment, sacrifice, and transcendence signify self-immolation's rhetorical viability in broad society. To do so, I will analyze each of the appeals and then will discuss how Moore utilized all three appeals in his own act in Grand Saline. By analyzing the individual appeals and exploring how they build on one another for a larger rhetoric, I hope to situate Moore's death not only as a major event in town that sparked a public conversation on race but also as an exemplary case for understanding the rhetorical complexities of racism, social justice in our immediate surrounding, and by extension, the larger landscape of Rhetoric and Composition.

### **Chapter 3: "The Rhetoric of Self-Immolation"**

"I was to see that sight again, but once was enough. Flames were coming from a human being; his body was slowly withering and shriveling up, his head blackening and charring. In the air was the smell of burning human flesh; human beings burn surprisingly quickly. Behind me I could hear the sobbing of the Vietnamese who were now gathering. I was too shocked to cry, too confused to take notes or ask questions, too bewildered to even think....As he burned he never moved a muscle, never uttered a sound, his outward composure in sharp contrast to the wailing people around him" (128).

---David Halberstam, on witnessing Thich Quang Duc's self-immolation

"What does the Buddhist terrorist do? Goes in the middle of the street, takes the gas...Self-barbecue! People are killing each other in the name of God: 'What the fuck are you doing?' 'Making you deal with your shit.'"

---Comedian Robin Williams, on religious terrorism

"Whoa, that's crazy," is the response most people give when learning that someone has self-immolated, or killed themselves by fire. The extreme nature of the act, that someone would willingly set themselves ablaze as protest, often makes people uncomfortable. Self-immolation is a term typically unknown in our American society and not normally witnessed in our everyday lives. If people recognize the act, their only connection to it is usually Thich Quang Duc's popular image, which is typically not contextualized. From a broad angle, self-immolation has little appeal to people in America today, culturally speaking, because we have no connection to the act in our daily

lives. Yet there are places where self-immolation happens all too frequently. For instance, according to *International Campaign for Tibet*, between February 2009 and March 2016, at least 147 people have self-immolated in Tibet alone. That means in Tibet, a self-immolation occurs about every 17 days. Other places like Vietnam, India, and China have similar rates (though there are no databases for their raw statistics). Where people in America would be hard-pressed to name someone who committed that act here, it is much easier to do so in other places around the world. This distance between an American audience and the self-immolation act is what alters its perception nationally and arguably is its greatest hindrance to being understood in America. But I do not think these perception differences are solely based on frequency; they also have to do with history, theology, and values.

One of the epigraphs above illustrates something different than the dearth of a relationship between self-immolation and America. It is an American's eyewitness account of Duc's self-immolation that occurred in Vietnam. David Halberstam was a journalist in Vietnam covering the war in the early 1960s. He was called to the center of town on that day because he heard something might happen, and by the time he reached the crowd, Duc was already on fire. Halberstam describes his visceral reaction in his book *The Making of a Quagmire*, emphasizing the act's appeal to him. The haunting image of Duc's death stayed with him over the years, along with the smell. But in that moment he saw Duc perish he was simply stunned, awe-struck by the enormity of the act. Perhaps it was the juxtaposition of Duc's body with the pain he was witnessing: while the fire caused immense agony, Duc sat in "sharp contrast" to the wails of his peers, stoic in his death. Halberstam faced self-immolation and it not only affected him in the moment,

but was a "sight" he kept returning to over and over during his life. This one single self-immolation altered his perception and arguably his life (Halberstam won a Pulitzer Prize for his coverage of Vietnam, and Duc, in 1964).

Most Americans have never witnessed what Halberstam has, but his first-hand account with self-immolation demonstrates its wide-spread effectiveness, even across cultures. This suggests, at the heart of the matter, that parts of self-immolation can transcend cultural differences and do have some common appeals that can possibly affect anyone in any place. While other geographical locations have self-immolations take place a few times a month, it is not commonplace in America. Yet, Halberstam's memory of self-immolation demonstrates how pervasive an act of death can be. The typical American response of "whoa, that's crazy" does not work for him because the visual and experiential force of witnessing self-immolation drives its rhetoric, taking it from something theoretical, something distant, to something personal, something that lives with you. Halberstam's account highlights this capability of self-immolation and illustrates the importance in actually seeing a self-immolation over just hearing about one. This single act forced Halberstam to reconsider how a single person's life, and death, can create change.

Robin Williams states that self-immolation attempts to get people to "deal with their shit." Halberstam would probably agree. I do too. The act forces people to think and react, even if the initial response is solely emotional. In the analysis that follows, I make the case that self-immolation causes people to stop, think, and react to the world around them through various rhetorical appeals, arguments, and themes embedded within the act itself. This chapter goes hand-in-hand with my opening chapter, but here I spend more

time analyzing the particularly persuasive force of self-immolation. Therefore, I see this chapter as extending the conversation of exigencies in the first chapter to better understand self-immolation as a complex, rhetorical force, one that deserves more attention than the limited scholarship published over the last few years.

Of course, we need to be able to see that self-immolation is indeed rhetorical. The act is used as a tool of protest, a tool to persuade people to believe in or fight for their cause. While some people might burn themselves in an arhetorical capacity, most of these deaths are meant to persuade people. They might not always have the same effect, but Mohamed Bouazizi's self-immolation that ignited the Arab Spring and Thich Quang Duc's self-immolation that became the symbol for protest of the Vietnam War are prime examples of how this single act can cause important, significant change. Not every self-immolator achieves the same widespread appeal as both Bouazizi and Duc did, but nonetheless, they have the potential for creating change, which illustrates the rhetorical potential of the act.

To move forward, my chapter picks up on the rhetorical nature of self-immolation as it exists to persuade audiences--working to demonstrate not that the act is rhetorical but rather how it is rhetorical. The exigencies in Chapter 2 demonstrate why the self-immolators choose the fire; now we need to see how the fire attempts to persuade others. This chapter focuses more intently at the act itself—what appeals makes it persuasive, what themes the act utilizes, what arguments comprise these themes. More specifically, I argue that we can clarify many of these general appeals, themes, and arguments that are intended to persuade a general audience. The emphasis here is on the global aspect of the act and a general audience. To me, this work is important because there are some major



strands of self-immolation's rhetorical nature that are either underdeveloped or not theorized at all, and I see this chapter as claiming new ground on the act's persuasiveness. However, I do want to note that this work is not easy. Self-immolation is a complex act and to untangle all of the various facets of its rhetoric is a daunting, messy task. This chapter does not claim to find a clear solution, but rather, I hope to make the act clearer to understand rhetorically.

Analyzing self-immolation as a global act is vital to first seeing how self-immolation works on a broader scale before being able to localize the reception of Moore's death in Chapters 4 and 5. I split my research in this capacity because I believe it is important to first see Moore's self-immolation in relation to the narrative of self-immolation that has been spreading for many years now and to create a space to understand the rhetorical conventions of self-immolation (an under-theorized rhetorical act). My work up to this point and this chapter itself illustrates the need to better articulate self-immolation outside the limited rhetorical scholarship that exists. But one of the arguments of this project is that a global perspective is limited within itself. However, only after better comprehending the rhetoric of self-immolation do I argue that we need to localize these acts as well because only after seeing where Moore fits into and outside of the global narrative does it seem possible to study his death from a local methodology. The two methodologies, together, are what provide us a clearer picture of Moore as a rhetor.

Much of the scholarship on self-immolation that I describe in Chapter 2 suggests that its rhetoric can be explored through a formal model (as with Neville-Shepard's model) or through Burke's pentad (as with Whalen-Bridge's model). Where Neville-

Shepard's approach argues there are universal ways to understand effectiveness for any self-immolation, Whalen-Bridge argues Burke's pentad gives audiences a better understanding of the local situation in Tibet. Both of these authors use such approaches as catch-alls, and while I believe self-immolation does have some universal tendencies (I will call them general tendencies), my analysis will demonstrate attempt to understand the rhetorical complexities of self-immolation beyond these model-based approaches. To me, there is no clear model that can express the intricacies of self-immolation, a muddled rhetorical act with many difficult variables and social contexts. But this chapter attempts to better shine light onto this act and understand its rhetorical capacities without prescribing a model that tries to fit all the unwieldy pieces into a single approach.

First, I separate my chapter's analysis into three main themes that attempt to understand self-immolation from perspectives not considered nor adequately developed elsewhere: 1) Themes of violence and nonviolence intersecting; 2) Themes of religion outside of solely Buddhist practices; and 3) Themes of sacrifice. Investigating these larger subjects, I will illustrate how specific arguments and appeals within these themes situate self-immolation as an embodied rhetorical act that challenges spiritual and political boundaries. Therefore, stemming from the notion that the exigencies are often complex and intertwined, I illustrate how the act's persuasiveness parallels this complexity: the appeals, arguments, and themes often overlap and make it a complicated, yet rhetorically fascinating act and how this analysis provides a better understanding of Moore as a self-immolator. I intend to untangle the rhetorical intersections of each subject, while using Duc's self-immolation as a brief exploratory example in each section. Lastly, the end of my chapter will demonstrate how these themes and their main

arguments and appeals apply to Moore's death—as a precursor to understanding how he also employed another major argument specific to his local audience, the argument of public memory.

### **I. The Rhetoric of Self-Immolation**

Scholars of self-immolation have written about its expressive form before. Generally speaking, they detail its close ties to Buddhism (as Woesser and Whalen-Bridge demonstrate) and usually highlight its cultural dependency (Neville-Shephard). These analyses have added new conversations to the rhetorical nature of self-immolation as an Eastern phenomenon and have made research on this specific act relevant to the field as a whole. Still, these analyses do not address some important rhetorical subjects and abilities that are integral to the self-immolation act, mainly its connections with violence, religion, and sacrifice. I identify each of these themes based upon specific arguments and appeals that comprise them, and these aspects of the act draw people in to be persuaded by it. As a whole, these themes add important dimensions to much of the existing scholarly work and paint a better picture of how self-immolation persuades audiences across the world. Once we see how these appeals and arguments are common threads woven together for persuasion people, we can move to consider the complexities of Moore's case.

The main themes of violence and nonviolence, religion, and martyrdom are complex and the various appeals and elements embedded within their arguments are hard to untangle. To make this process easier, I will break down each section individually of each other to explore each theme's rhetorical capabilities while also explaining how they give us a clear picture of Moore as a self-immolator. For all three sections, I will explore how each of these themes have been used in other protest rhetorics and movements

historically and discuss previous rhetorical analysis on each theme to help us see these rhetorics are embedded within the act. In the next subsection for each theme, I explore what arguments these themes are making specifically for self-immolation and how these arguments should influence audiences. Lastly, I break down each theme's major rhetorical appeal that affects its function in the self-immolation act and demonstrate how it gives us a better understanding of Moore's self-immolation. While there are many complex pieces shifting around these themes and understand this structure might be hard to follow, I believe this is the best way to untangle the various rhetorical elements of self-immolation.

### **1.1 *The Dichotomy of Violence and Nonviolence***

Within protest scholarship, researchers have described differences between violence and nonviolence as a rhetoric. Ellen Gorsevski has written that while violence is a common phenomenon that rhetorically persuades daily, nonviolence has not received the rhetorical attention it deserves. Her text, *Peaceful Persuasion*, constructs a working theory for nonviolence, while still acknowledging the ways violence persuades local communities. For instance, in investigating the ways the KKK terrorized Billings, Montana in the early-1990s, she points to the conscious decision of the local community to choose nonviolence as a way to combat their fears. Thus, much of her analysis exists within this dichotomy of nonviolence reacting to violence and the complexity involved in interpreting their influences. Her scholarship points directly to how nonviolence can persuade, especially in the face of violence.

Others have furthered these discourse dynamics too. For instance, in his dissertation *Contentious Subjects*, Shon Meckfessel argues

that however much “nonviolence” discourses attempt to move beyond a simple negation of “violence” and claim inherent positive content, “nonviolence” in its traditional, strategic, and principled variants remains inextricably joined to its Other in just the manner that its name attests, as a gesture of disavowal of an indefinable “violence.” It is precisely through this morphological disavowal of “violence” which nonviolence has accomplished vast rhetorical victories in the past, and upon which it flounders in contemporary applications. (108)

To Meckfessel, nonviolence is absolutely tied to violence; nonviolence cannot occur without violence existing in the first place. Even the term "*nonviolence*" exhibits this point. Thus, the only way nonviolence is persuasive as a tool is if others are acting or reacting with violence. In the case of Martin Luther King, Jr., for instance, his use of nonviolence in Selma was amplified from the brutality of the police force assaulting people marching. This dichotomy issue of violence and nonviolence also plays a role in understanding self-immolation as well. Self-immolators embody both violence and nonviolence, and while those terms seem like opposites, I believe their relationship creates an argument of complexity (as I explain below) that attempt to persuade audiences. Violence and nonviolence illustrate that our lives are complex, mirroring the lack of answers in our own lives, and this act makes an audience wonder why the actor chose this death. What compels an individual to die so violently yet often in such a tranquil way? The complexity here leads them to dig deeper into the exigencies of the actor and gives them a chance to be persuaded by the act. Complexity begs audiences to search for answers. As I will show, I believe this argument is comprised from important appeal: embodiment. Before moving to the argument of complexity and appeal of

embodiment, however, I will first reveal how other protest acts have employed violence and nonviolence in the past, so we can how self-immolation situates itself rhetorically with other protest acts.

On one hand, we see how nonviolent protest persuades people. Bowers, Ochs, and Jensen refer to nonviolent resistance as a way for people to "violat[e] laws they consider to be unjust and destructive of human dignity" (37). Nonviolence stands out as placing emphasis on the hegemonic powers to act out and end the oppression at hand. For protestors to use nonviolence, there must be a force or institution that is subjugating people, and the use of nonviolent resistance tells the oppressors that must act first. Gorsevski states that the study of nonviolence illustrates how the notion of "power over" people, a hierarchical system of power that maintains violence, does not have to be the only way to study rhetoric; nonviolent theory demonstrates that "power with" people exists too (468). Thus, when a group of protestors chooses to boycott a store, they are choosing a nonviolent method of "power with," they are suggesting that all people have a voice and their collective action can make change happen through economic conditions. Nonviolent acts like this are what comprise the rhetorical public memories of the civil rights movement. The sit-ins in Greensboro, North Carolina, the marches in Selma, Alabama, and other nonviolent tactics help us see how change occurred to racial relations and human rights in the south. Nonviolence asks for a response, and often the negative (violent) response from white people in the 1960s, is what helped the Black south gain the moral high ground in the media limelight. These "power with" tactics, the notion that representing a collective voice with peace and nonviolent resistance can humanize people and invite in followers, are the same tools we see taking place with Gandhi in India and

Cesar Chavez in California, representing the tactics used in some of the most effective social movements in modern history.

On the other hand, violence is also extremely persuasive in its own right. Megan Foley points to differences between persuasion and violence, first laying out their similarities through Aristotle: "Aristotle argues violence opposes our intrinsic nature, counteracting the self-same, self-caused, self-generated impulsion that drives voluntary action. Acting against our inner nature, the necessity of violence circumscribes the voluntary terrain of Aristotle's ethics" (194). Aristotle points to violence as a persuasive tool because it forces the individual to things they normally would not do, going against their "inner nature." Nathan Stormer theorizes that "the challenge to rhetoric's self-image as the flowering of humans' distinctive symbolic ability is that humanity derives from the negations enabling both language and violence, just as language and violence also derive from humanity's inclination for the negative" (187). For Stormer, violence and language extend from our disbelief of both as phenomenological occurrences: in attempting to discount violence's persuasiveness we also give it agency. Taking these rhetorical studies to social movements, the persuasive nature of violence seems clear. Much of the civil rights struggles' success exists within the violence entering the public fray. Audiences saw combative police forces taking on nonviolent protestors and this formed an impetus to act. But we see in even clearer terms that the fear of violence can also be persuasive. The Deacons of Defense in Louisiana,<sup>24</sup> for instance, employed this fear of reactive violence if the KKK ever attempted to harm black people in their area, and this affected how civil rights came together across the state.

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<sup>24</sup> The Deacons were a black protest group in the south, and primarily Louisiana, that practiced self-defense and openly carries weapons in opposition of racist citizens who would attempt to harm them.

Self-immolation builds off both of violent and nonviolent protests and unifies their unique dimensions, as I express below with my analysis of the main argument of the dichotomy and the appeal of embodiment. While audiences might contend the act is either violent or nonviolent, I believe they must confront both issues because of how the actor harms only him or herself, not others, and how he or she often calls for nonviolent action after the protest as well. This subject then relies upon the argument of complexity as ingrained within the act itself.

### **1.1 The Hinges of Complexity**

The primary argument from this dichotomy of violence and nonviolence comes from the complex nature of self-immolation. Self-immolators take to the flame not to express a clear image of protest as a discursive text might; rather, they use their body as a means to bring people to the act, to be intrigued by the violence from a person often promoting peace. The violence and nonviolence dichotomy mirrors the complexity of life itself and asks audiences to question their own reality. By creating a liminal space for interpretation, this dichotomy gives room for audiences to make sense of the chaos in their daily lives. The dichotomy draws them into the act, and they are *commanded* to respond, in some capacity, because of this. Thus, I contend that the violence/nonviolence complexity argument, along with the appeal of embodiment that the self-immolator manifests, illustrates this point. To move forward, I will illustrate how the complexity argument parallels many tactics of other protests historically before dissecting the various rhetorical construction of this argument and its appeal.

Applying these violence and nonviolence constructs to self-immolation, we see how the act exists in this liminal space. I believe in many capacities, we can view self-



immolation as nonviolent because it does not harm any property or people and attempts to agitate the normative discourse surrounding the act's use. The self-immolator typically intends no harm toward any other person than him or herself, which parallels many of the sit-in and protest acts seen during the civil rights movement in America. We often celebrate nonviolence in society, especially as it is related to protest. The likes of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s protest style is always cherished in comparison to the more militant (often viewed as violent) styles of Malcolm X.<sup>25</sup> While this is true, we are also very much compelled by violence, especially the spectacle of it. It urges us to pay attention and watch. This is why violent films are one of the most popular movie genres globally and why people still choose to click a link toward a violent YouTube video, knowing they might be disgusted. Yet, they cannot look away. Similarly, on more of a protest front, this is also why many were compelled to act in the civil rights struggle in face of seeing the spectacle of police violence against black protesters. So, while an audience can see the nonviolence accompanying the act, the often tranquil actor allowing the fire to slowly move over their body while they wait for death, we also see the sensationalism of the fire itself, the flesh burning in hopes for a better tomorrow.

On many fronts, self-immolation sits hand-in-hand with another major "nonviolent" act of protest: hunger strikes. Hunger strikes are nonviolent for the same reasons that other tactics are above, but this act also lives in the in-between nature of violence and nonviolence because the literal stage of hunger, of one's body eating itself from the inside, is a type of a violence as well. It can be an effective protest act because

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<sup>25</sup> Of course, I understand this comes with baggage because of the perception of Malcolm X vs. MLK Jr. The violence embedded within in Malcolm X's discourse might say more about white reaction to militancy than anything else.

people can agree with its symbolic nature, the claims of solidarity and purging one's self of food. Audiences can agree with the principles behind this act. But it also draws in audiences through the violence happening within the body—the stomach eating itself from within. Because people look at this and realize how much courage and dedication it takes to cause this self-violence, it causes the similar sort of spectacle as other acts of violence. It is not as visceral as self-immolation, the violence is more implicit than anything else, but it still exists. In this sense, a hunger strike, like a self-immolation, exists within the same liminal space of violence and nonviolence.

Ultimately, this dichotomy is what leads John Soboslai to write in the context of Buddhist self-immolation:

The self-immolators inflict their own suffering voluntarily and spectacularly, using their deaths to inhabit a liminal space between the sovereignty of the state and the control of the individual over his own body. They are violent in that they result in pain, nonviolent in that they do not transgress prohibitions against the infliction of harm, and peaceful in that they resonate with spiritual practices unconnected to political conflict. (158)

He agrees that protestors fulfill this dichotomy in choosing this act. I use his analysis to point to the mixing of violence and nonviolence as being a rhetorical purpose within itself: the self-immolator uses the act to combine both protest methods, making us question why someone would choose death to make a point. While he suggests the liminal space is about control over one's own body, I believe it also could be how the audience can interpret this act. A unique space for interpretation opens up when we see the dynamics of violence, nonviolence, and peace, as he puts it. It allows us to draw people to the

act, gives them a chance to see the wrongs being done, and gives them the chance to view to react in accordance to it.

But this distinction is not the only thing that Soboslai marks in his article. He also illustrates how the act creates "demands" for audiences:

By clouding these categories, Tibetan self-immolators challenge the ways we make sense of violence and nonviolence, harm and suffering. They trouble our attempts to determine what prohibitions around harm are operative, which transgressions of that prohibition should be considered violations, and who has the ability to make that distinction. The institutions in conflict demand we interpret the marks on the body in accordance with their injunctions, making the determination of violence not only an act of classification, but an affirmation of power. (158)

It is this intertwining of violence and nonviolence makes the act fascinating, so much so that this within itself leads people to look for motives. Soboslai states that the act demands that we see the death in relation to the oppression. The spectacle of violence that draws people to the act also defines its personal power, the notion that the actor has agency in death. The immediate audience *must* react to the command of self-immolation because it forces them to question their own reality; and in their response, the act also calls for the audience to see the actor as empowered, as representing the change needed in the world.

The complex and contradictory nature of the violent and nonviolent dichotomy expresses an argument, one helping audiences see how paradoxical their daily lives and beliefs are, so much so that the self-immolation makes sense in relation to the oppression

being committed. If audiences are able to see and feel this complexity, then they are open to the larger arguments of protest because buying into the spectacle of complexity means opening up the chance to be persuaded on a different level. It is not that they must view the act as just or unjust, or have some defined interpretation, but rather that a door has opened in which they are now willing to be persuaded. Even if one were to dismiss this act and not participate in consuming its complexity, the initial appeal, the idea that they *must* reject the act, suggests they are open to be persuaded because it designates a choice and not an instant dismissal. And for those who stay and contemplate its significance, they have a unique chance to connect to the self-immolator's larger argument.

## **1.2 Embodying Violence and Nonviolence**

The argument of complexity, I believe, stems from a very important rhetorical appeal that deserves discussion—embodiment. The argument can only be seen from an audience if it is embodied in the self-immolator, making this appeal one of the key attributes of the act's discourse. Embodiment encompasses two particular empathetic human emotions to convey its message: pain (violence) and resolve (nonviolence). In this case, the self-immolator embodies not only the pain of the fire, which many have dubbed one of the most feared ways to die, but also the nonviolence of resolve, attempting get resolution through death. The embodied pain gives the audience a chance to empathize with the death, to feel its energy and have it resonate with them. By covering themselves with pain, the actor keeps up the spectacle appeal. But by embodying nonviolent resolve, the actor takes their argument past the level of spectacle, creating the space for change to come. The actor in this case personifies change.

In his interview with Verini, Timothy Dickson, a scholar who studies the history

of self-immolation declared, “Fire is the most dreaded of all forms of death<sup>26</sup>...The sight of someone setting themselves on fire is simultaneously an assertion of intolerability and, frankly, of moral superiority....It’s not that [the self-immolator] is trying to tell me something, but that he’s *commanding me*.” Dickson points to the slow pain of fire, a pain that not many others could accept, as a way to command audiences. This is exactly where the spectacle and change meet—in the command. Therefore, a protestor uses self-immolation to embody the exigence around them, witnessing a change needed, and deciding to embody that pain through fire, to physically represent the oppressed through death. Embodiment conjures an appeal of pathos and incites empathy. It tells people to take part of this experience and react. Through this appeal, the actor attempts to represent a pain that audiences have seen within others, and this empathy should lead them to be persuaded by the actor’s death.

Rhetoricians in antiquity understood the power behind embodiment as an appeal, as Michael Mendelson argues in “The Rhetoric of Embodiment.” He states, “Embodiment is, indeed, the hallmark of a great teacher, the method by which lessons are invested with adequate substance to convince and endure as a force in the lives of one’s students” (46). Mendelson argues that Cicero embodied the *controversia*, arguments composed of juxtaposing two or more claims, as a pedagogical tool to become a more effective teacher. Self-immolators also use embodiment as a pedagogical tool but in a different sense. Where teachers might embody the lesson or the knowledge of their class, signifying its purpose and value in the real world, self-immolators embody the pain of the world around them and resolve they hope to achieve by taking an embodied stand against

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<sup>26</sup> While I understand some might reject this absolute determination, I believe Dickson’s point is that the idea of dying by fire ranks towards the top of dreaded types of death.

oppression. The self-immolator employs embodiment of pain to thus create a connection between the audience and the exigence of his/her death. Embodiment leaves an audience susceptible to persuasion because it makes them want to know why a sane person would do this, and through exploring motives, the audience can be persuaded by the act.

More recently, scholars have used embodied rhetorics to further the expanding field of women's rhetorics. In her article on the powerful elocutionist Hallie Quinn Brown (1845-1949), Susan Kates writes that Brown's work "embodies pedagogical features that stress the situated nature of the curriculum she promoted in order to recognize the cultural identity of African-Americans in the post-civil war era" (61). Kates argues that Brown does this to preserve culture and community, using embodiment as a tool for cultural exchange. This emphasis on embodiment as a means of cultural exchange is key in Jennifer Lin LeMesurier's "Somatic Metaphors" too. In this piece, LeMesurier analyzes dancers and embodiment, concluding, "Repeated bodily experience conjoined with intentional awareness-raising leads to dancers using movement strategically and kairotically, a rhetorical operation that involves awareness of how past embodiments might be brought to bear on current situational constraints and opportunities" (378). Where Mendelson argues that Cicero uses embodiment to become a more effective teacher, Kates and LeMesurier believe that embodiment is also a method that exhibits culture. For those who are oppressed, their agency is often limited; they rarely have a large audience to share their knowledge. This is the main connection between the use of embodiment in women's rhetorics and self-immolators today: they express oppression through embodiment. Thus, both post-Civil War Black women rhetors and those currently oppressed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century utilizes the body for argument. The use

of embodiment as a method not only for teachers but for rhetors illuminates its wide-ranging effectiveness as a tool for identity, allowing the individual to take on a specific role in order to convey a message. Self-immolators often identify with their pain to leave people open for audiences to witness this pain and act, but they took to this to its utmost extreme point—not solely as a limited embodiment that attempts to bridge cultures but they literally embody life and death itself.

A few recent publications on the rhetoric of self-immolation also highlight embodiment's appeal to audiences. Yang exposes embodiment the best, as she reflects on the importance of Malcom Browne's photograph of Duc. After rhetorically asking who is responsible for the monk's death, she declares, "Duc's use of self-inflicted violence served as a performative embodiment of the pain and suffering inflicted upon South Vietnamese Buddhists by the American-backed Diem regime" (20). To Yang, Duc's death encompasses not only his own life but the pain of countless other victims of the Diem regime in South Vietnam. Yang's description helps uncover how embodiment exists for all other self-immolations as well. She emphasizes the embodiment because of Duc's method as protest; therefore, one can presume that other attempts of self-immolation would fulfill a similar notion. Self-immolators embody the pain of not just themselves but the others around them, the tragedies they see in the world that force them into a fiery death. Embodiment, as a wide-reaching appeal, encapsulates a more collective agony than any individual can express in words. For embodiment to be effective, the pain must be seen, witnessed, and felt (concretely or abstractly) because these create lasting effects for audiences. While audiences who truly witness a self-immolation with their own eyes will literally witness embodiment as an appeal, other

audiences might abstractly feel a self-immolation from stories of the death or by reading about it in the newspaper. A self-immolation can forever disrupt an audience (I know in the case of Moore's death a few of the witnesses have told me they personally do not want to relive that experience) and leaves a door open for them to be changed through this persuasion. While it might seem dramatic and obviously traumatic, I believe that is the point: the self-immolator needs to have their pain be remembered and often the agony and stamped image of the actor's flesh fleeing to the crusty remains of the fire sticks with people.

To me, both the violent and nonviolent effects of self-immolation are embodied in the torched human, providing room for people on all sides of the oppressive issues to react. This single appeal of embodiment, the manifestation of both violence and nonviolence within a single person and a single act, helps foster a larger argument of complexity, one which mimics the complexity of our everyday lives. The self-immolator employs violence and nonviolence to place pressure on the oppressor and to create unity amongst those who are oppressed. Violence is written all over the dead's charred remains, nonviolence on their commitment to not harm others in creating change. They embody both the change needed and they way to create this change. This major effect of the act brings to light the agency of both people who empathize with self-immolation and the oppressors, giving new life to movements that often fall despairing.

## *2 Religion as Rhetorical Protest Tool*

But where the violent and nonviolent dichotomy highlights complexity through embodiment, another key tendency of self-immolation, religion, creates arguments of moral superiority while employing appeals of transcendence. This affords the actor the



chance to witness the often visceral reactions to their death also connect with people's deeply rooted religious beliefs. This second important theme in self-immolation builds from arguments of moral superiority and appeals of transcendence. Specifically for self-immolation, I believe religion is used as an argument for moral superiority, as the actor attempts to achieve a transcendence to connect his or her act to a higher purpose, asking audiences to connect the act to a higher power. While the intersection of violence and nonviolence adds one new dimension to the rhetoric of self-immolation, the theme of religion plays a vital role as well.

Rhetoricians have argued that the language of religion often employs a transcendent appeal. In his pivotal text *The Rhetoric of Religion*, Kenneth Burke looks at the language of theology, declaring, "what we say about *words* in the empirical realm, will bear a notable likeness to what we say about *God* in theology" (13-14). Burke's text studies logology, or the connections between words and analogies in theology, instead of attempting to place a truth-value on religion. More recently, there has been a turn to looking at religions on the fringe of society, or occults, as Joshua Gunn has taken up in "An Occult Poetics." The author summarizes the rhetoric of the occult with one simple sentence: "Although the rationale behind the creation of given occult vocabularies will differ from one occult group to the next, all of them can be described, in general, as a consequence of a paradox: The Truth is ineffable, but let me tell you about it" (43). Gunn extrapolates that many occult practices revolves around this paradox, the supreme being or logic that cannot be fully described but are being made to make the nondiscursive a part of language. Taken together, these texts give a broad view of rhetoric and religion, as religion plays a role in displaying what must be based on faith, a study on logology, and a

tool to liberate and unite people.

Outside of Burke's and Gunn's analysis of the language structure in religion, other scholars have looked at religion as a liberation tool. In their book *Rhetoric, Religion, and the Civil Rights Movement*, Davis Houck and David E. Dixon investigate how Christianity was utilized in the organizing tradition of the South to form unity and coherence for Black people. Their argument suggests that religion became an overarching theme in the Civil Rights Movement, not only as a belief but as a way of life as well. Thus, these people encompassed religion because it gave them room to claim moral superiority. Religion has often been a key factor role in larger social movements and the protest acts that accompany them because it gives people who are oppressed a chance to argue based on morals. For instance, Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers movement often united their protest acts with Catholic symbols, to get their points across to audiences that they worshiped the same God as most other Americans. Joseph Zompetti writes that the UFW employed famous symbols like the Virgin of Guadalupe and crucifixes to persuade audiences that they deserved equality based on morality, but Chavez was not just about showing, he also embodied this religious protest as well (280). Catholicism was not just important as the symbolic theme of the social movement but also as the embodiment of who Chavez and other UFW protesters were as a people. Others have noted how the broader civil rights movement utilized religion in rhetorical ways as well. Nathaniel A. Rivers and Ryan P. Weber have noted how the religious community is one of the crucial networks of support that protesters had during the Montgomery Bus Boycotts (200). Protesters were able to build a community of support in a time intense resistance based upon their religion affiliations. Richard Benjamin Crosby

has even suggested that Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Last Sunday Speech" cultivates the rhetorical notion of *kairos* as "God's time," using space and time to compel audiences that God's will applies to all people, black or white. Overall, religion has been a major part of past social movement and protest acts and often goes hand-in-hand when protesters are attempting to maintain the moral high ground when opposing an oppressive regime.

While hunger strikes, boycotts, and other nonviolent acts have been recycled by social movements across the world from various religions, self-immolations are almost always associated with Buddhism, even when the person performing the act is not Buddhist. Self-immolation stands out as a protest act that is often associated with one specific religion. In her article "Buddhist Self-Immolation in Medieval China," published in 1965, Jan Yun-hua demonstrates how engrained self-immolation is tied into the realm of Buddhism, stating that these acts have long been associated with Buddhists even as far back as between 300-700 A.D. Hardly any other protest act has such a long history in the first place, especially in unison with a specific religion. Though arguments could be made that the symbolic death of the crucifixion carries similar if not more importance to Christianity, its function hardly ever exists as a protest, though there are a few occasions where actors (in the dramatic sense of the term) sometimes relieve this experience by hanging from cross (not with real nails) or carry a cross with them for a pilgrimage. In both cases, the actors are doing this for the self; it is a personal journey, not one of protest. Buddhists, on the other hand, choose a real fire in protest in enactment of their religion, not as a symbolic form of oppression or punishment, but rather as a lineage of protest that has been coupled with their religion for centuries. The theme of Buddhism then plays a major role in how self-immolation is interpreted due to this close association.

However, I do want to make the case here that others who perform self-immolation outside of a Buddhist dogma, like Moore, are able to situate themselves as a moral figure, and they use themes of religion and appeals of transcendence to make this argument. I believe in the case of self-immolation, religion within itself is the high ground that many attempt to achieve, rather than achieving a certain denominational power. Though the act is uniquely tied with Buddhism, if employed by other religious peoples, like Moore's case, then we see how his own Christianity calls for this moral high ground. While we mostly connect Buddhism to self-immolation, other people who choose to self-immolate for religious reasons, take the moral high ground as well. Though there are not many of these types of acts historically, I will use Charles Moore as a case study towards the end of this chapter to illustrate how a Christian minister also used his religion in self-immolating in a similar manner to Duc and others who came before him. The argument of moral high ground through themes of religion all come together when considering the key appeal that brings people to this argument: an appeal of transcendence.

## **2.1 Transcending Protest Discourse**

Transcendence weaves through self-immolation and emphasizes the religious themes and moral high ground arguments that are major tendencies with the act. Where appeals of sacrifice ask audiences to witness the death as an act of humanity, transcendence asks audiences to witness the cause behind the death as being outside the human body, toward a knowledge or being higher than oneself. To transcend means to perform outside the means of the ordinary, to rise above humanity in this case, and appeals through transcendence attempt to connect the central theme of one's death to

audiences. Audiences must explore how the willing death of a single human corresponds with their personal realities. Thus, they question, does the moral cause of the actor change their perspective and beliefs? Where sacrifice hones in on value judgements between death and purpose, transcendence further chips away at how the self-immolator's purpose molds intended audiences.

To begin, Kenneth Burke's perspective on transcendence situates it within larger terms of identification. Burke's work places transcendence within the context of rhetorical motives, to demonstrate how the act allows rhetors to engage with their audiences. He states:

In dialectical transcendence, the principle of transformation operates in terms of a 'beyond.' It is like our seventh office, the 'priestly' function, in that pontificates, or 'builds a bridge' between disparate realms. And insofar as things here and now are treated in terms of 'beyond,' they thereby become infused or inspired by the addition of a *new* or *further* dimension (*Language as Symbolic Action* 189-90).

Burke describes transcendence as "building a bridge" in that it takes two opposing ideas or beliefs and connects them through the act of transcendence. Transcendence would occur when an individual takes symbolic action and makes it represent something "beyond" and not just in the "here and now." In his analysis of Burke's use of transcendence, Bryan Crable labels Burke's work of a "dialectical transcendence" as "the transcending power of the word [being] responsible for the presence and power of perfection in human life" (24). Crable boils down Burke's work on transcendence to the question of perfection in human life, that we as humans feel a sense of transcendence in our words and symbols due to our search for righteousness. Transcendence then, to Burke

and Crable, exists as a function for all humans to feel connected with a better, future self, a “further dimension.” While the immolator often attempts to reach for religious transcendence, or a transcendence of knowledge, in dying, the act should also position audiences to feel this transcendence, to be persuaded by the higher calling engulfing the death.

Outside of Burke scholarship, other scholars connect transcendent appeals to religious themes due to religion’s attempt to connect the individual with a higher power, calling, or deity (connecting themselves with a higher superiority). In the introduction of *Modern Occult Rhetoric*, Gunn defines transcendence as “the idea of ‘moving across or through,’” leading him to argue that “transcendent rhetoric often seeks to communicate something—a spiritual truth, for example—that is beyond representation” (xxi). Gunn finds transcendence to be an appeal for the rhetor to speak beyond anything that can be represented in literal terms; thus, one must rely on the abstract to convey meaning and purpose. Where Burke notes that transcendence uses symbolic actions to move beyond the individual in the “here and now,” Gunn states the idea in clearer terms: transcendence often cannot be seen in the present state due to the words’ reliance on representation of the now. Words represent certain objects and ideas, and we use them to convey meaning within our concrete daily lives. But how does one convey the meaning of transcendence, that perhaps one feels a higher calling, a more perfected self, simply through words that represent the “here and now,” or common-place ideas? Gunn furthers Burke’s analysis on transcendence to suggest that one must move past tangible symbols to produce transcendence. I argue that the transcendent appeal, the emphasis on abstract, ineffable terms, provides the audience the chance to interpret the death as it represents broader

themes.

To be effective, transcendence must rely upon the abstract to make its argument. There must be a space for interpretation to exist for the audience, for them to be able to decide what they think the immolator represents. The appeal of transcendence provides a space for abstraction, emphasizing that the audience needs to interpret its meaning. We see this discourse often applied to the arts. Many have walked the halls of art museums and stared at abstract paintings from famous artists, perhaps attempting to interpret the sprawling colors, lack of symmetry, and unknown objects. Transcendence occurs where the concrete image calls for an abstract interpretation to the individual on a personal level, which makes sense to why the arts connect with different peoples with different techniques. Adriano Mignone further this idea by stating transcendence “is possible only because [art has] always been nurtured by other cultural expressions and representations,” providing “collective crossing of human paths” (67-8). I believe for protest methods, the concrete assigning an ineffable message can be used to create a transcendent effect for audiences too. But transcendence, a rapid change in beliefs, must rely upon the abstract, acts like self-immolation, to become effective. A person witnessing or hearing about self-immolation and the discourse surrounding it parallels the art piece at the museum: What does this death mean? Why did this person choose fire? What was this person’s end-goal? These questions of interpretation lift transcendence into the forefront for self-immolation and connects audiences with the self-immolator on a personal level. Where the embodiment appeal brings audiences to the table, the transcendent appeal asks them to interpret what the death means.

However, where many scholars have discussed the sacrificial element of self-

immolation, not much work has properly labeled this transcendent phenomenon, arguably due to its abstractness. In his history of Buddhist self-immolation, James A. Benn points that many within the ancient Chinese Buddhist community felt the self-immolators' acts were transcendent because commemorations of these acts "produced miracles; they changed the landscape and the monks and nuns lived on as heroes in the memories of those left behind" (45). Benn does not analyze the self-immolation process as being transcendent, though he does acknowledge the sacrificial appeals of the act. He does briefly mention that self-immolation can "cause cosmic response and transformation" but he connects this to the "selfless" act of sacrifice (7). However, his analysis does demonstrate the importance of interpretation: some self-immolators have been memorialized and remembered due to how local audiences perceive their acts as transcendent. For instance, "witnesses to Huishao's auto-cremation [in 451 AD] saw a star descend straight into the smoke of his fire and suddenly rise into the sky," showing "that some external force recognized and validated Huishao's offering of his body" (45-6). Benn's book establishes that many witnesses and audiences chose to interpret acts of self-immolation as transcendent, making the recorded history of the act and the present analysis of it as transcendent relevant.

Other contemporary scholars have examined transcendence in other social movement protest acts. In their foundational text *Persuasion and Social Movements* by Charles J. Stewart, Craig Allen Smith, and Robert E. Denton, Jr., the authors find that social movement actors "must convince target audiences that they are superior to, exceed, surpass, excel--literally *transcend*--their antagonists" (257). The authors continue, "Argument from transcendence is an inherently *comparative process*....Thus, the goal,



group, or right has not reached an ultimate state of perfection but is *more perfect* or *more preferable* than the opposite” (258). To these authors, transcendence weaves into social movements as a value judgement (similar to Burke’s point) and attempts to have audiences deem the movement as higher quality than the opposition. Overall, the authors contend that transcendence “enables a social movement...to stress its superiority, explain its ideology, and justify its tactics without having to destroy other factions or antagonize institutions that might be potential allies” (280). Transcendence creates a means for movements to make direct comparisons between them and their opposition, and through historical usage, such as Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” text that claims for audiences to see his cause to be superior to the segregationist, we see how these rhetorical arguments can be effective.

Only a few current scholars have labelled this rhetorical effect of transcendence in self-immolation particularly. Martin Kovan furthers the idea of transcendence in self-immolation acts through exploring how the Mahayana observe the act. He eloquently writes:

For the Mahayana, self-immolation signifies the total sacrifice of that conventionally most cherished object—the human body—in a wisdom-purification of ignorance by fire. Self-immolation either approaches, or fully epitomizes the most conventionally radical “total self-renunciation.” It occupies a certain threshold of transcendence, one that worldly consciousness *as* ignorant is by definition only partially able to apprehend or judge to its fullest extent (797). The Mahayana identify self-immolation as a type of transcendence for which they cannot fully comprehend because human consciousness leaves them partially ignorant. The self-

immolation then utilizes the concrete form of their bodies and their deaths to represent the ineffable "wisdom" of their sacrifice. In other words, the Mahayana view the fiery death as justified because they believe higher powers deem it as holy, and they take a step of faith to believe it. The act not only encompasses a human transcendence for the Mahayana, but it also transcends human consciousness and understanding too. While so many people might label the immolator as "crazy," the Mahayana rely upon their personal understandings of the indescribable wisdom of the Buddha and the enlightenment that comes through death. By situating their deaths as "total self-renunciation," they hope to reach this level of transcendence.

In employing the act, the self-immolator must be attempting to transcend his or her self through fire. The international use of self-immolation for Buddhists emphasizes how it represents transcendence for their audiences—Duc attempts to transcend himself for his religion; multiple other monks have used the act to shine light on oppression, to take their lives for their friends, family, and community. However, all forms of self-immolation, even those not tied in with an explicit religious belief, utilize this function. In other cases outside of Buddhist self-immolation, transcendence asks people to interpret why the person died. Was the person justified or not? For instance, the man who ignited the Arab Spring through self-immolation had no overt religious reason to justify his death; rather, he died in protest of his living conditions and wage disparity. Still, this act moved past himself, and he actually became a symbol for much of the rest of the revolution. Audiences interpreted Bouazizi as a transcendent figure, as someone who united them all for the cause against the oppressive Tunisia regime.

Appeals of transcendence create arguments for the moral high ground, connecting

the self-immolation act to themes of religion. These appeals and arguments illustrate how vital religion is to many self-immolators because it gives them agency as a superiority, as someone who should be heard. This provides an exigence for audiences to want to listen, to see why this person would need to act in this capacity. Where the violence and nonviolence dichotomy gives the actor an audience, inviting them to the act, the use of religion tries to get audiences to interpret their death as justifiable. If audiences do this, then larger movements like the Arab Spring and the monk backlash against the Vietnamese government during the 1960s is possible. And while violence and nonviolence and religion give audiences ways to first notice and appreciate the death, one final theme attempts to persuade audiences for the self-immolator: seeing his or her death as a form of sacrifice.

### *3 Sacrifice as Rhetorical Pressure*

Finally, one last theme, sacrifice, stems from self-immolation and has one driving question: are people who self-immolate martyrs? A martyr is typically defined as one killed for their beliefs, religious or otherwise. Typically when one is killed protesting, there is a solid case to define them as martyrs, but in the case of the self-immolator, we must question whether self-inflicted violence still adheres to martyrdom. The themes of violence and nonviolence and religion ultimately lead to this question, an important one to understanding how we should view self-immolators. The rhetor attempts to give up his or her life for a greater cause, and this theme depends on the interpretation of the event from audiences. The sacrifice ultimately makes audiences ask, "Why would someone give up their life for anything?" This parallels the first characteristic of Neville-Shepard's model on audiences seeing why the death is necessary. And this question of value as a

rhetorical subject is an integral part of Chaim Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca's *The New Rhetoric*. Here, the authors create a typology of argumentation that dissects arguments into how they will be perceived by different audiences. They attempt to analyze argumentation from levels of quality, or rather various structures of argumentation, which in this case helps us understand how sacrifice appeals work in choosing self-immolation. By combatting "absolutism," they illustrate how people within various cultural constructs can interpret an argument based on formations such as structures of reality and values. The authors place arguments of sacrifice into their "quasi-logical arguments" (arguments based on syllogistic methodology). They claim, "In argumentation by sacrifice, the sacrifice is a measure of the value attributed to the thing for which the sacrifice is made" (248). If one were to sacrifice their job for their family, for instance, the sacrifice being made would be measured by how important spending time with family is over having a job for the job holder (or the audience, in this case). The authors believe that sacrifices are valued through comparing what one is giving up for what one is gaining. Since the authors investigate this appeal in larger, broader terms, their evaluation of sacrifices (outside the definition above) do not focus on what many would argue is the ultimate sacrifice: giving up one's life for a cause. However, their rhetorical definition of sacrifice as being a judge of value helps me produce a more viable understanding of its appeal within self-immolation.

Values, according to Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, only work in terms of particular, not universal, audiences, since different cultures, ideologies, and peoples hold various values (179). They fit in to the larger structure of argumentation because they exist as "an admission that an object, being, or an ideal must have a specific influence on

action and on disposition toward action and that one can make use of this influence in an argument” (74). On one hand, then, an argument through sacrifice only works for certain people who value the sacrifice over the object being gained. From Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s perspective then, sacrifice through self-immolation could work if the audience believes in what the actor dies for and places it at a higher value than one person’s life. Arguably, the sacrifice becomes more effective when the valued gain remains more explicit and concrete, rather than for an abstract idea. But in totality, the position of the value remains directly tied to cultural understandings and knowledge, the “habits, ways of thought, methods, external circumstances, and traditions” as the authors put it, which leaves the rhetor’s judgement of the audience’s stance on value as the most important aspect of a sacrifice (513). So though some people might be persuaded by the emotional state of the sacrifice, they can also be affected by an agreement of values attached to the self-immolation. Hence, one elects to sacrifice themselves in some regards, they need to have a strong understanding of what values they believe their target audience adheres to.

A good example of this value judgment both from the audience’s and the rhetor’s perspective stems from Cesar Chavez’s hunger strikes. For instance, in the case of his hunger strike, he had to consider how giving up his food, safety, and health would be weighed against the values that specific audiences held. In this equation, the audience would have to add if the level of sacrifice outweighed their thoughts on the Chicano/a movement and the demands of the United Farm Workers. If so, then the sacrifice has the chance to be successful. The question of value, though hinging on the audience’s interpretation, actually gives agency to the actor as well, since he or she should interpret

how an audience would react to the act beforehand. This is one of the most important themes of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's text. Where many rhetoricians underline how audiences perceive events as the judgement of rhetoric, the authors underscore how the rhetor must first understand his or her audience. Thus, when a self-immolator sits down to self-sacrifice for a cause, he or she must anticipate how their death will be interpreted by witnesses and communities surrounding them (even if what he or she anticipates is wrong). Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's scholarship on sacrifice aids the ways that we interpret self-immolation: through creating a value system for the audience to explicate one's death as being just to create a social movement, to end oppression (historically speaking), or in favor of an idea.

We even see the value judgment of martyrs in the history of Christianity. For instance, Saint Stephen is referred to as the first Christian martyr. After speaking of Jesus Christ to the Synagogue of Roman Freedmen, Stephen was accused of blasphemy and brought to trial where he was found guilty of this crime and punished to be stoned to death. In the case of Saint Stephen, he valued his beliefs in Jesus over his own life and risked his life by preaching the word of God. For audiences witnessing his death, they must question why he would give up his most precious gift, life, for a cause, for a religious belief, which should challenge them to consider a different perspective. Even Saint Stephen's final words, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. Lord, do not hold this sin against them," makes this value judgement more extreme: at the point where Stephen was about to die, he held strong to his beliefs, not asking for forgiveness from his accusers and dying with his ethos intact ("St. Stephen"). Stephen might misunderstand his Jewish audience in this sense because his death proves their point that he is different from them

religiously, but his martyrdom became vital to the budding Christian audience, as they were able to rally around his death, their oppression, and keep their religious movement going in the early first century.

Other scholars have described the risks that the rhetor takes in choosing to kill themselves for a cause. For instance, George Kateb investigates self-sacrifice not within flames but through religious and moral doctrine, specifically analyzing Jesus as a self-sacrificial figure in his article "Morality and Self-Sacrifice, Martyrdom and Self-Denial." Opening his analysis, he broadly claims, "At the limit of self-sacrifice is the willingness to die for the sake of acting morally; at the limit of self-denial is the willingness to die for the sake of principle, even when a moral issue is not always directly at stake" (355). Kateb's descriptions highlight a risk-analysis of the person committing the self-sacrifice to being interpreted of martyrdom, demonstrating the spectrum of audience interpretations of the sacrifice as either being "a moral death" on one end or a "self-denial" at the other end. His words echo the analysis by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca above, as he describes the individual making the sacrifice as having to be willing for their act to be interpreted as basically either a martyr or someone full of themselves, dying for recognition and nothing else.

Kateb further emphasizes the "misspent self-sacrifice," stating, "The point obviously is to know when the cost in the right amount should be paid for the sake of morality or martyrdom or magnanimity, and when for their sake, despite all appearances, self-sacrifice and self-denial should be refused" (391). Though his article focuses more on a negative aspect of sacrifice, he nevertheless expresses the rhetorical appeals of self-sacrificial themes: the actor must understand how such sacrifice might be perceived (as

being moral, wrong, or other) from greater audiences to truly get their point across. Kateb views these decisions as being a cost-analysis for the rhetor; he/she must decide when the value of what is being gained through death outweighs the potential of misconception, of being misperceived as a “crazy” person or someone misguided. Though such analysis better illuminates the reality of sacrifice and martyrdom, another scholar, Michelle Murray Yang, connects this analysis to an actual self-immolation.

Yang’s analysis of Thich Quang Duc’s self-immolation illustrates how even its image can be used as a persuasive tool. She ties in the rhetoric of the act to the appropriation of the image of anti-war sentiments, arguing, “Given Duc’s willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice, won’t [readers of the propaganda] make a monetary donation to the anti-war cause? Either viewers will honor Duc by joining the cause, or they are guilty of supporting the oppressive system that drove him to burn” (21). The sacrifice, to Yang, compels audiences of anti-war propaganda to consider why someone would kill themselves for a cause, and presents them with a binary: help prevent future oppressive deaths such as Duc’s or be supportive of the oppressors. Or, another way to view this binary: see Duc as a martyr or be on the side of the oppressor. Yang configures the appeal of sacrifice in self-immolation as a question of value, as Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca state above, in which audiences must consider one’s death within their own ideologies. Yang’s binary is similar to Kateb’s sacrifice spectrum. Where Kateb’s binary demonstrates how the actor can be interpreted, Yang’s spectrum illustrates the consequences of these value judgements. The use of the image as propaganda attempts to justify Duc’s death as selfless, or “acting morally” in Kateb’s words, and places pressure on the audience to see it as martyrdom and as a move against oppression or to be wrong.



The propaganda then warps Kateb's spectrum for its own political gain.

Arguably, the theme of sacrifice is the most visualized aspect of self-immolation. In his article "On the Ethics of Tibetan Self-Immolations," Jose Cabezon suggests that though some recent self-immolations might have been more secular than religious by nature they "have seen their actions in religious terms: as acts of virtue, self-sacrifice, purification, and religious offering; acts that, Buddhism tells us, have the capacity to change the world, tipping the scales of history in the direction of truth and justice." Their deaths should be interpreted as a martyrdom because arguably the entire self-immolations calls for this value judgment.<sup>27</sup> Where the violence and nonviolence wraps intrigue around the death and the question of transcendence makes them question what the death means, the sacrifice begs audiences to see the actor as a martyr. But even this does not say enough. I believe sacrifice is usually the driving appeal of the act. Michael Biggs says, "The appeal derives its potency from sacrifice. Self-immolation isn't merely symbolic. The fact that someone is willing to pay the ultimate price for a collective cause provides a real signal about the extent of injustice" (26). Though self-immolation revolves around multiple appeals that I describe above, its "potency" stems from sacrifice. While it might be easy for audiences to dismiss the act as that of the mentally unstable, the self-immolator attempts to fight this narrative with the sense of martyrdom, that he or she died for a noble cause.

So we now see a spectrum of interpretation: on one end, the immolator has the chance to be viewed as an egotistical extremist who should not be taken seriously, and on

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<sup>27</sup> We often see these values judgement utilized in suicide/jihadi bombings, where the person dying often attempts to become a martyr as well. People in a Western, Christian sense often dismiss these values (since they are often an attack on their own values), while some radical sects of Islam might accept the terms of martyrdom.

the other end, the immolator can be viewed as a martyr for the cause. The analysis on value judgments illustrates what the rhetor must consider in choosing to die and how the audience's interpretation may vary. Ultimately, I believe that no matter what interpretation an audience member chooses, even if they view the death as an act of someone solely seeking fame, the idea that they must choose a side of the spectrum has already chipped away at their values. They must face the immolator on some level, and the death may not create a life-altering change for the audience, but it opens the door to consider something new. This theme explains why the subject and interpretation of sacrifice is essential to gaining traction for the change the actor hopes to achieve: to be a martyr, to have an audience perceive the oppressor as bad and the sacrifice as good, resituates one's death in terms of these values.

### **3.1 Martyrdom as Rhetorical Sacrifice**

Historically, martyrs have been defined as people who are killed for the sake of their religion or beliefs. Kathryn McClymond states emphatically, "By invoking the language of sacrifice, the violence that one experiences takes on meaning, and the victim displays an element of agency in his or her own death and suffering" (326). Though not a rhetorical scholar, McClymond illustrates the agency comprised in the self-immolation act. By becoming a victim of the oppressive powers that be and choosing to die in the name of your beliefs, martyrs choose how they want their deaths to be interpreted. Charles Selengut adds to this, declaring, "The apotheosis of the religious obligation to commit violence, to the point of self-annihilation, is seen in the phenomenon of religious martyrdom in which the faithful offer their life for the cause of their religion. Martyrdom asserts that genuine religious commitment is ultimately about honoring and glorifying

God and religious truth and not about self-preservation" (95). Selengut says that martyrdom, as a phenomenon, often goes unnoticed by people outside of the religious identity of that who died.

Rhetoricians have illustrated the rhetorical purposes of martyrdom through interpretative values. The authors of "Martyrs for a Just Cause," Richard J. Jensen, Thomas R. Burkholder, and John C. Hammerback, illustrate how Cesar Chavez delivered eulogies of people who died while participating in United Farm Worker union activities. Though those who died were not "explicitly" martyrs, Chavez's eulogies framed them this way, framing the dead as exigencies for others to join the movement and keep up the fight. Others like Victoria J. Gallagher and Kenneth S. Zagacki have illustrated how just seeing the disturbing black and white images of the Selma March has turned the victims of racial prejudice to martyrs for the outside world. Audiences view marchers being beaten for no reason other than their color or philosophies, providing a motive for others to act in reinterpreting the movement or join the cause. These two analyses help us see that martyrs in protest acts often come from people who are having violence done to them from others, even if they do not set out to become martyrs in the first place. In more contemporary terms, Jeffrey R. Halverson, Scott W. Ruston, and Angela Trethewey have situated protest martyrs in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, pointing to how crimes against people in places like Egypt have created "martyr narratives" that spark people to revolt and organize. These authors taken together demonstrate how important martyrdom is in organizing and getting people to act in the face of oppression. But they still make us wonder how self-immolation can fit into this genre because the act of self-violence is so easily interpreted. Hence, in regards of self-immolation, the question becomes "Can

someone who kills him or herself be considered a martyr?" In the definition I provide above, the assumption is that the violence is actually done to the martyr by the hands of another, not themselves.

Mario Ferrero writes, "One could say that by joining a collective cause and volunteering for fiery death in that context, an individual gains a (probabilistic) opportunity to secure a martyr cult for himself or herself" (889). Though he does not suggest if this should be *the* interpretation or not, Ferrero makes the case that self-immolation at least stems from these actors believing they are martyrs. Of course, the term "cult" comes with certain connotations in American society, but I believe it best describes how audiences often feel moved to believe the immolator as just. This is exactly what the Duc image created for those who opposed the Vietnamese War; his image gathered a mass who viewed him as a martyr for the anti-war movement. For anyone who identifies with the cause, the formation of a martyr cult seems ideal when attempting to keep a movement going.

But in a case where the "cult" does not immediately interpret the death as martyrdom, I contend that rhetor must demonstrate why their death was not a "suicide" or a choice of their own to receive the martyr status. B.C. Ben Park claims that self-immolators often see themselves as martyrs because they were "convinced that they had no viable moral alternative under the prevailing political regime" (91). Park says that not only do self-immolators feel that they are martyrs but the powers that be give them agency in making that claim. And to get to this point, I believe the actor must obviously display a level of sacrifice for others, giving up their bodies to possibly change the situation in the future. Though one who sacrifices typically is not compared to a martyr,

in the case of the self-immolator, they must make the sacrifice of their body to even first attempt to display that they were martyrs of a larger crime. The violence might not be from the hands of others or might not be forced, but it does stem from oppressive powers that could prevent this violence by giving up their control. Therefore, audiences must believe that the oppressors or people with power had agency in preventing this death and now have agency to prevent more harm to oppressed communities.

Hyojoung Kim summarizes how self-immolators reach these appeals of martyrdom: self-immolations are “a form of ‘altruistic suicide,’” to her, where “their actions symbolize an ultimate example of sacrifice among insurgent movement communities and provides a rallying point for invigorated movement activism by those left behind, as is amply demonstrated in the case of Chun Tae-il, who is regarded as the eternal symbol of the labor movement in the country” (573). Though Kim never uses the term “martyr,” I do not think it is a stretch to see how she makes the case that these people are martyrs. Their “altruistic suicides” are “symbols” that should be used as a “rallying point.” Thus, their deaths are symbolic for the larger movement; they are dying for the cause in hopes to garner more attention for their protest. Kim is not the only scholar to make this connection. Halverson, Ruston, and Trethewey refer to Bouazizi as a martyr. In describing how media helped perpetuate his narrative, the authors state, “The stories of Bouazizi’s martyrdom took shape on a range of and by exchange between traditional and new media platforms, each driven by users eager to report the latest news” (316). A self-immolator can be viewed as a martyr as long as they find a way to point blame at the oppressor as being the cause of their death. That is precisely what the narrative of Bouazizi sent when it spread through news outlets in 2010.

Rhetorically speaking, we might even say that the question is not even if they are martyrs are not but if the audience perceives them this way. For audiences, when considering the value scale of being deemed egotistical or just, they take in the various exigencies they perceive to be related to the act. Bouazizi struck a chord with audiences, for instance, because the people of Tunisia and other Arab countries viewed the systemic oppression that led him to self-immolate as being constants in their own lives. It was easy to see him as responding to a problem than viewing him as “unstable.” For other self-immolations, the connection between the oppression and the justness of their act might not be as clear. The self-immolator has a tougher task in making this argument since he or she relies upon killing themselves to appear just from a symbolic perspective, but, nonetheless, they still attempt to reach audiences in this capacity. Still, the line between being a martyr or a “maniac” is one that every self-immolator tiptoes.

## **II. Reexamining Charles Moore's Self-Immolation**

Together, these three themes and their various arguments and appeals build a working rhetoric of self-immolation that attempts to persuade people that their death is just and that they need to respond to it, in some fashion. To further this analysis, I now turn to Moore's self-immolation to illustrate how these themes, arguments, and appeals account for the rhetorical complexities of his death. First, I want to consider how other critical frameworks would view Moore's act to illustrate their limitation. Beginning with Whalen-Bridge's Burkean analysis, he would contextualize Moore's act within the framework of Grand Saline, setting Moore as the key agent who performed self-immolation to protest race in Grand Saline. This would allow us to see the agent, act, and scene following the Burkean model. Next, Whalen-Bridge's analysis would focus on what

Moore hoped to gain (racial change) and who gets a say in getting his story out (other agents). While we could paint a good picture of who Moore was and what led to the events that occurred on June 23, 2014, his model's focus would not account for how Moore's act connects to larger themes and trends across the world. Though he deeply focuses on the rhetorical situation in Tibet, his analysis is narrower and emphasizes only the local. He does not connect these deaths to global trends, such as Mohamed Bouazizi's self-immolation that sparked the Arab Spring. Therefore, his analysis does not help us see how Moore's death connected to others around the world—how it has become a more common protest tool, how it relates to Buddhist and Hindu histories and traditions, and how it should be included in the larger narrative of protest in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Where Whalen-Bridge focuses on the local, the opposite could be said of Neville-Shephard's approach. Her three-pronged approach for evaluating successful self-immolations suggests that 1) audiences must see why the self-immolation was appropriate; 2) audiences must agree with the cultural principles the actor holds; and 3) there must be a space to criticize the government. Applying her model to Moore's death, we would see her conclude that Moore's act was a failure because 1) many people did not understand why a sane man would self-immolate; 2) audiences failed to connect the historical exigencies for the act to Moore's death; and 3) there was no criticism of the government in his motives. Arguably, he "failed" all three parts of her model. But I believe this model still limits our interpretation of Moore's act. First, we cannot just say that many people did not understand Moore's death, we need to understand the various dynamics that lead to people to not understand. I contend that it is not just simply that the act is too complex for them. They also *chose* not to understand it. Next, though many

could not relate to the act's historical tradition does not just mean it should fail. Decontextualized circumstances do not always mean interpretation is completely lost. Lastly, since Moore's exigency focused more on the oppressive culture of Grand Saline rather than a form of government, her model would not consider Moore's act in the first place. Reducing protest to conflicts solely against states and institutions severely limits how protest has been employed against cultural frameworks too. Her approach aims to judge self-immolation in a universal sense, but I believe her model is limited to Eastern cultures, where the historical phenomenon of self-immolation is more pronounced. Such an approach cannot account for self-immolation crossing cultures and the complexity of hybrid rhetorical situations and practices.

While I believe both of these models help shape the rhetorical capabilities of self-immolation, I point out their limitations to emphasize why I think such approaches are not best for analyzing Moore: they are too narrow in focus to recognize their opposing constraints and factors. When analyzing self-immolation we need to do a better job understanding how each act relates to large tendencies of the act in its long historical practice. We also need to do better contextualizing of self-immolation, seeing the local forces that affect these actors in choosing to die for a cause. My analysis in this chapter adds to these larger tendencies as I point to major themes of the act that I believe have been under-developed or lost in other analyses, while my next chapter illustrates why I think a public memory approach to Moore's self-immolation will help contextualize and localize the impact of his death.

I will now incorporate my own major themes and tendencies that I have explicated in this chapter to Moore to demonstrate how each theme, argument, and appeal



works individually and together to persuade broader audiences to understand Moore's death as a protest. After looking at each theme and their encompassing characteristics, I analyze their power as a singular act of rhetoric, how together their arguments become more impactful. Lastly in this section, I will answer the most basic question about Moore's death as a protest act: what effect did it possibly have? All of this will lead to my eventual conclusion and framework for the second half of my dissertation.

When Moore died on June 23, 2014, his self-immolation expressed themes of violence and nonviolence, religion, and sacrifice within the moments his body became engulfed with flames. Ultimately, Moore employed the dichotomy of violence and nonviolence to draw interest to his death. He used multiple these themes to replicate the complexity of life and make an argument that he was attempting to create change. On one hand, witnesses described the horror of witnessing that pain itself. Mallie Munn, a witness to the act, described seeing that horror and remembering it like a movie: "You know in a movie where everything is happening so fast but is going so slow for that one person? It felt like that." She describes the pain of seeing Moore dying and how it affected her in that one moment. On the other hand, others, such as Buddy Lambert, remember the nonviolence that Moore expressed as well: "What [I remember most about that day] was that he never screamed, never uttered a word. For six weeks, I would wake up at two or three in the morning and remember that image of him not screaming." For Lambert, the nonviolence etched onto Moore's body became a point of nightmare because it seemed so odd that this man would never cry for help. Thus, in both capacities, Moore impacted people because the violence and nonviolence dichotomy that he Moore embodied.

His death highlights the embodiment of not only his pain but also the pain of thousands of people of color still feeling the stigma of racism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Moore hence embodies racial ideology through the violent torment written on his body. He also embodies hope as well, the idea that change can occur, that people do not have to stick to the normalized structure of power that has oppressed people of color in Grand Saline for so long. I imagine most people can witness the anguish of his body, but maybe the resolve he wanted to represent was not so clearly seen. The liminal space that brings audience members to interpret his death makes it difficult to judge him because of how many rumors were spread right after his death. However, after reading his letter, especially the ending, it is hard not to see how it encompasses both visions: "So, at this late date, I have decided to join them by giving my body to be burned, with love in my heart not only for them but also for the perpetrators of such horror." While it is hard not to grieve over a man choosing to kill himself, I believe it would be remiss not to see the love and hope Moore also embodied in dying. The themes of violence and nonviolence, the arguments for change and complexity, were written all over his body. But I am not quite sure how many people ever read his letter or knew his true motivations in dying.

Just like many other self-immolations, religion was a major influence in Moore's act as well. To me, Moore parallels the rhetorical performance of John Jay Chapman's famous "Coatesville Address" oration. In his book *Rhetorical Criticism*, Edwin Black writes that Chapman delivered a speech to two people in Coatesville on the horrors of lynching (after a terrible lynching occurred in town) and the universal values of Americans. Black writes, "The main thesis, if it can be said to have one--that deliverance from Evil, of which the Coatesville atrocity was an example, can come only from God is

submitted *ex cathedra*, without a shred of proof....The ethos of the speaker, insofar as the people of Coatesville were concerned, probably consisted of the image of a fanatical crank” (83). Audiences in Grand Saline felt similarly toward Moore and his ethos, especially stemming from his similar religious argument that is delivered as *the* religious truth. Nonetheless, Moore’s odd brand of united Christianity with self-immolation is what makes him stand out as a rhetoric.

Moore united Christianity with self-immolation, not a common protest tool seen in America historically. The cover image of his suicide folder, as I discuss in Chapter 1, however, exhibits an attempt to coincide his Christianity with self-immolation (and perhaps even Buddhism), as he places a picture of the Methodist church symbol next to an image of Duc's famous death. Moore attempts to move past the typical interpretation of Christianity's view of suicide to illustrate how his faith moved him to self-immolate; he had to die for a purpose. Religion played a role in Moore's death, not in the theological frameworks like most Buddhist self-immolations, but as a way to interpret why he felt dying for this social issue was important. He used religion to give him moral agency, claiming to be doing something that was morally correct. While some Christians might debate on the rather a person who kills himself or herself can still go to Heaven, there is no doubt that Moore took the ethos of religion and his life as a minister to say we need to be doing more to help minority populations and end oppression in Grand Saline. Audiences might be able to disagree with his theological stance, but they could not deny how religion shaped his life and was integral in his death as well, especially as he uses appeals of transcendence.

The transcendent appeals he employs then were not for a single person or for

himself; his death reflected a larger idea engulfed in the act: the end of racism in Grand Saline. Thus, when the fire consumed his body, Moore attempted to transcend his physical presence, asking his racial agenda to move past his death and be interpreted as an ignition for a new civil rights movement in town. As stated above, transcendent appeals rely upon the concrete death becoming an abstract interpretation to achieve the purpose of challenging larger ideologies. Audiences should witness Moore's self-immolation and contemplate his purpose in dying, to view him as a transcendent figure in the likes of Jesus. In this sense, Charles Moore's charred body being presented in juxtaposition to the decaying town, the largely conservative, rural principles of the South, works to turn his enflamed body into an abstract form for interpretation. He wants audiences to awaken from their cultural routines and see his death as a vehicle for change, a way to create a better community in Grand Saline. In a discursive form, Moore's letter asks audiences to see him as a transcendent body of anti-racism, and he represents not a man but an idea of revolution, prompting others to join his cause.

Lastly, Moore used themes of sacrifice within his act to make an argument that he was a martyr. I believe we can view Moore as a self-martyr because he vicariously felt the violence towards people of color in Grand Saline, a pain he did not feel firsthand, but one he knew to be true. Thus, he aimed to become a martyr for the racial justice movement, a man having violence done to him so that change could be accomplished in his hometown, to be representative of this violence, and to put pressure on the town. He sacrificed his life for the people of Grand Saline, not as a way to call them evil, but rather to shine light on the path of redemption. By sacrificing his body, Moore forced audiences to question why he would die for a racist history, appealing to their emotions. If a man

would willingly die for a problem that most believe is of the past, it makes them reconsider that problem as an issue. They have to ask, "Is this truly still a problem?" which also connects to their own agency. They now have a chance to react and create change after Moore creates a space for dissent. In some capacity, I believe his act of self-martyrdom gave him the chance to have more of an impact on the community than if a minority person had committed this act. While someone of color committing self-immolation in Grand Saline would have probably constituted national news coverage, the people in town would not identify with this person's skin color and culture. Moore created a space for change in his sacrifice by representing the culture and race of the audience he was trying to affect, telling them that he was one of them as well.

Through these sacrificial appeals, Moore thus created a public debate about his death as a symbolic martyr for the racial issues surrounding his death. The sacrifice also prompted a value judgement for people across America who read the news and more importantly for local Grand Saline residents. Both audiences weighed if Moore's death to protest contemporary racism outweighed their values on race in America today. For audiences who might identify with Moore's cultural upbringing, his religious views, and his race, Moore attempted to open a door for new awareness and understanding through this sacrificial appeal. He strived to create a bridge in his self-martyrdom between white people and the culture of the oppressed. Ultimately, for them to be persuaded to see him as a martyr, they must have believed the sacrificial appeal—that Moore's death was not in vain, that he died for a just cause.

### **III. Conclusion**

When Charles Moore knelt on a tarp on June 23, 2014, closing his eyes for the

final time as the fire engulfed his entire body, he let the rhetoric of self-immolation, appeals of sacrifice, transcendence, and embodiment move through him. Larger themes of violence/nonviolence, religion, and martyrdom also attracted attention and garnered public discussion. The discussion in this chapter helps us see the ways that the rhetoric of self-immolation attempts to persuade audiences through these various arguments and appeals. Thus, through this analysis, we have a better understanding of the intricacies of self-immolation itself, as it relates to the phenomenon occurring in protests around the world and the act Moore chose to end his life in Grand Saline. This analysis adds new components to understanding this complex act through untangling its various rhetorical components and helps us move past model-based approaches to examining self-immolation. And while the analysis above helps uncover some often under-explored or unexplored aspects of self-immolation, when we apply the rhetoric to Charles Moore, we see that, on many counts, his rhetoric failed to persuade the Grand Saline audience.

But though the rhetoric of self-immolation, generally speaking, failed to persuade in altering a culture (something very hard to do), I believe only considering these larger tendencies provides us with just one side of the complex rhetorical situation surrounding his death. To move forward we need to think about how the local also was incorporated in his act. Specifically, I believe Moore utilized another rhetoric on that fateful day, not to a broad, universal audience but to the local residents of a Grand Saline. He comprised a rhetoric of public memory. Though Moore encompassed the universal appeals of self-immolation in his act, the rhetorical choice of his location, the memories he describes in his letter, and other details not built solely within the act itself attempted to persuade Grand Saline residents to not only believe in his death but to create a legacy about him as

well.

In the next chapter, I explore a methodology for interpreting the rhetorical events of Grand Saline, calling for more local analysis through public memory. Chapter 4 first provides a brief survey of memory studies in rhetoric, illustrating their importance to analysis in the field, before articulating what a methodology of public memory entails and why it is vital to contextualizing rhetorical acts of protest. Chapter 4 makes the case that bringing in this approach better situates Moore's self-immolation and builds a much stronger, well-rounded analysis. If Moore's death attempted to start a minor revolution, an awakening of the racialized history and reality in Grand Saline, then much of his rhetorical action must be built upon an understanding of public memory—that he could change previous public memories and that he too might become a folklore of the town. The analysis on the global in Chapter 2 and this chapter, while helping to situate Moore within the larger trend of self-immolation, fails to consider the precise exigencies and rhetorical climates that sparked Moore's self-immolation in Grand Saline. Therefore, we need to combine this analysis with more localized approaches (in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5) to paint a clearer picture of how Moore fits into global trends but how he responded to a specific circumstance in his hometown too. To further analyze the meaning behind Moore's actions and their consequences, it becomes vital to investigate the themes of public memory, and commemoration surrounding the town in conscious and unconscious acts, beginning with Moore's.

After a few hours at a regional hospital in Dallas, Moore finally gave up his life and perished, becoming a memory for those that knew him and those who had just heard of him. But the steps that Moore took leading up to his death, his meticulous planning of

locale, place, and memory, attempted to turn Moore not into a memory that fades slowly away, as is often the case with many deaths. Rather, he took on the fire in Grand Saline to become a part of their history, to become a contested memory of race in the town, and as the analysis of the public memory of his act will show, his rhetorical choices in giving up his life were meant to carve his name into the memory of the town.



## **Chapter 4: Moving Beyond the Self-Immolation Narrative: Public Memory as Local**

### **Methodology**

“Public memory is radically bivalent in its temporality, for it is both attached to a past (typically, an originating or traumatic event of some sort) and attempts to secure a future of further remembering of that same event”

--Edward Casey, “Public Memory in the Making”

The first half of my dissertation explores the historical and contemporary exigencies of self-immolation and the persuasiveness of the act itself. In this first half, I attempt to place Charles Moore in conversation with other self-immolators around the globe, demonstrating the larger narratives of the act and seeing where Moore’s exigencies and persuasiveness fits in with other deaths through the flame. Chapters 2 and 3 investigate simple yet important questions about Moore: Why would he choose to self-immolate as a protest act? Was his act persuasive, and how does it align with previous self-immolations? Why did he want to protest Grand Saline’s culture in the first place? These questions demonstrate the complexities of self-immolation, especially illustrating how the exigencies are often not singular and often compound on one another. One wanting to act in solidarity with a group might look for a spiritual awakening in the flame, for instance. But, not only are the exigencies complex and tough to untangle, but the arguments and appeals embedded within the act--such as the dichotomy of violence and nonviolence expressed on the body, the use of religious reasoning, and the sacrificial elements of the act--allow room for multiple interpretations of self-immolation. Those two chapters wade through these complexities and attempt to untangle them, but I believe

these analyses only paint part of the picture of Moore's death. We see him in context of other self-immolators, their exigencies and persuasiveness, but if we stop there, we leave out important, less apparent dimensions of the local contexts that make Moore's death unique to him, to Grand Saline, and even to America.

While this might seem like an odd way to frame this project, I have situated my various chapters to parallel one of my key arguments: that we need to intertwine both global and local analysis to get a clearer picture of protest acts. Had I started my analysis with this intermixing, placing a local approach on the same level as a global approach, I believe we would not be able to see clearly what the global framework and local framework provide individually (and this would also suggest that this sort of intertwining already exists in protest rhetorics, which it does not). Rather, I find it important to separate this analysis to illustrate that, yes, my entire project could have been solely from a global perspective and could have better untangled Chapters 2 and 3 but that would still miss part of the local complexity in Moore's self-immolation. Thus, I see Chapter 4 providing us the local methodology to analyze Moore and the end of this chapter and in Chapter 5. I separate these analyses intentionally, to better emphasize why need both of those approaches. Overall, while there are other methodologies that can help researchers study these complex protests of extremism from a local perspective, in the case of Moore, a methodology of public memory is particularly useful.

To begin, let me define public memory. I think of public memory as the collective memory of a community or group with a common identity (as I further explore and complicate later in this chapter) that helps us investigate the local. However, public memory is not the only methodology that scholars can employ for localizing studies of

protest, extremism, and consequent public conversations but is simply just one example of how to intertwine broader themes with more localized ones, to make sure that our analysis further acknowledges more confined variables and constraints. Hence, I am not suggesting we should employ this methodology in all cases of extremism, but rather I am saying this is a distinctive methodology that emphasizes local issues at its core. Since we can fall prey to generalizing about self-immolation without pushing its boundaries (by simply connecting it to other acts without studying local issues), I contend that a methodology of public memory can resituate Moore's death on a local scale. For many of these protest acts, the "official story" presented by the state is not sufficient: the published histories and records do not reveal all the relevant information that can help audiences understand the situation. That is why I am situating the second half of my dissertation with this methodology: a framework of public memory that better expounds on Moore's exigencies and persuasiveness. However, before moving forward, it is important to tease out the important concepts integral to this methodology to understand what public memory provides us.

Much of my analysis so far simply focuses on comparing Moore's death with other self-immolations around the world, past and present. When comparing and evaluating similar themes, phenomena, and exigencies built into the self-immolation act and the choice to die, it is often easy to skim over the smaller details, but these local details are vital to gaining a better understanding of each individual self-immolation. There are local constraints and individual reasons outside the larger narrative that often lead to these types of deaths, such as oppression by local governments or police officers, and by focusing only on global connections between these acts, we risk pushing these

confined variables to the wayside. A methodology of public memory, however, can bring these local variables into the forefront, pinpointing the elements that make each case unique. Ultimately, intertwining the local issues with the larger comparisons and themes places the actor in a distinctive position, one occupying a multi-faceted stage that affords the opportunity to impact local residents and global audiences.

While the self-immolator responds to global exigencies and makes subsequent arguments, when the flame consumes the actor, he or she is often also speaking directly to a local audience. The actor might have a broader, national or global audience in mind when choosing to self-immolate (e.g. Moore had visions of impacting East Texas and possibly having national news coverage), but often the actor is speaking directly to the people surrounding the space of the death. This, of course, suggests that *where* one chooses to self-immolate is just as important as other variables because this often brings forth an immediate audience. The immediate audience is typically the first to evaluate the self-immolator, and they often control the circulation of information as well. Circulation is important in these cases because it is what allows a story to take hold, become part of a larger narrative, and receive attention from regional, national, and sometimes global audiences. Thus, on one hand, circulation pertains to a self-immolation receiving more attention from different audiences. On the other hand, in the case of Moore's death, we see the circulation of racist folklore-- folklore that influenced Moore and his local audience--is also vital to understanding how others perceived his death. Circulation serves a two-pronged purpose for public memory methodology in this context. All these points of narrative, folklore, location, and circulation are inherently rhetorical in nature, because they emphasize how these subjects and themes affect audience, which also

demonstrates why rhetoricians have taken to this methodology over the past twenty-five years.

Together, these issues suggest that a methodology of public memory brings forth new interpretations of the exigencies and effectiveness of self-immolation, interpretations that extend the analysis from earlier chapters in this dissertation. While it is important to place Moore's death in connection with other acts that came before him, to see how his death fits within and outside of other self-immolations, we should also look to what special circumstances brought Moore to die. Moore's death paralleled other famous immolations such as those of Duc and Bouazizi, but many of his exigencies brought forth persuasive aims unique to him. Thus, the remaining chapters of my dissertation argue for adding public memory methodology (and related localized methodologies) to such acts of extremism to better understand their uniqueness. In this chapter, I illustrate the intricacies of public memory methodology by first examining the historical use of memory in rhetorical studies and then framing a heuristic of public memory. I end this chapter by situating how this analysis informs a more thorough examination of Moore.

In Chapter 5, I contend that Moore situated much of his discourse around a language of public memory, one in which only people familiar with Grand Saline would understand certain dimensions of his act. The choices of space, place, and the language he employed in his letter to the town (and the public discourse surrounding his death) all illustrate that residents in the town had a particular type of understanding, or a code<sup>28</sup>--one that acknowledges their shared history of racism and its memory without having to

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<sup>28</sup> I use this term, "code," understanding its significance in other racial discourse, specifically "code-switching." In a way this is code-switching but one more focused on a coded language of race and public memory.

openly, explicitly use racial language. In order to assess this code, I argue that a methodology of public memory can help us see the circulation of history, memory, and racial discourse in a community. Such a methodology is not only applicable to Moore's case but is vital to seeing the real consequences of his actions in terms of exigence, argument, and interpretation. To neglect the lens of public memory and the discourse it entails would basically minimize the rhetoric of Moore, distorting the effectiveness of his death on a local stage.

### **The History of Memory as a Rhetoric**

To begin, I believe it is important to see this history of memory as a rhetoric before moving to contemporary analysis of public memory rhetorics. I want to emphasize in this section how memory in Antiquity was often utilized as an individual act for oration that often had to do with material forms (which, is where most contemporary analysis on public memory fits). The rhetoric of memory has endured a roller coaster legacy throughout its history, one typically that has slowly been declining since Antiquity but has gained new appreciation since the emphasis of public memory studies in the early-1990s. I believe the past twenty-five years represents a revival for memory in rhetoric, one less emphasizing individual memories and promoting material effects on memory. However, before we implement contemporary scholarship, we should acknowledge its roots in Antiquity. Scholars such as Bromley Smith claim that memory discourse has evolved over the centuries. In 1926, Smith labelled *memoria* as the "lost canon of rhetoric." After analyzing the historical scholarship on the rhetorical canons from classical scholars up until the 1920s in his article "Hippias and a Lost Canon of Rhetoric," Smith stated that the fourth canon of rhetoric, *memoria*, was the lost canon

because, though it was once a major point of emphasis in Antiquity, it lost favor with scholars since the end of the classical era. They no longer valued retention and recall as valuable skills that needed to be discussed via training. He noted that by the time British rhetoricians began reviving the study in their scholarship in the 18th century, *memoria* had already disappeared from the fold.

In contemporary discussions of memory, certain terms stand out as vital to this rhetorical subfield: mnemonics, the art of memory, and simple retention and recall. But these terms and the conversations embedded within their meaning are not new; rather, they are discussions rhetoricians have been having (off and on) for centuries. I will track these terms and their discussions from Antiquity to the present to demonstrate how they began as a form individual recall and developed into a new subfield of rhetoric: public memory.

Cicero's major contribution to memory comes in his famous work *De Oratore*, where he discusses the art of memory and mnemonics. He more thoroughly defines the art of memory in this text, claiming, "The memory of things is the proper business of the orator; this we may be enabled to impress on ourselves by the creation of imaginary figures, aptly arranged, to represent particular heads, so that we may recollect thoughts by images, and their order by place" ("*On Oratory*" 188). *De Oratore* places significance on a few characteristics of memory: 1) Memory is an act completed through individual "recollection" (also referred to as *ars memoriae* from Cicero). Cicero explains that employing memory is a rhetorical act itself because the individual attempts to pinpoint an idea, consciously or subconsciously, to "recollect" a larger memory. This would define memory as an art because Cicero, as with others, believes it is a skill that one can train

for, and that training and one's ability to recall is where the rhetoric lies. Thus, individuals "create" ways to recall, either through memorization, mnemonics or other skills. 2) Memory relies upon the abilities of mnemonics (also referred to as the "method of *loci*"). Mnemonics are defined as certain visual cues embedded within an object that work to conjure memories not related to the object itself. In terms of recall and memorization, this could be seen as an individual using a tree and branches to remember one's genealogy, for example. To Cicero, the act of creating tools to aid memory also directly points to the use of mnemonics as a rhetorical function. Mnemonics are devices the rhetor can use to aid recall. For instance, one might use various nondiscursive markers, such as a geographical cues like powerlines, house positions, and other markers outside of road names, to remember how to walk home. Though Cicero's analysis in *De Oratore* is still quite brief in relation to other classical works to come, his interpretation of memory as a rhetorical act, one that can be trained and utilized for rhetors, transforms into arguably the working definition of memory in many classical and even contemporary texts and begins two streams of rhetorical thought stemming from the art of memory and mnemonics.

The unknown author<sup>29</sup> of *Rhetorica ad Herennium* further distinguishes on the "art of memory" as a rhetorical concept, marking it as different from "natural memory." The author declares two types of memory exist: "One natural, and the other the product of art. The natural memory is that memory which is imbedded in our minds, born simultaneously with thought. The artificial memory is that memory which is strengthened by a kind of training and system of discipline" (207). In the first explanation of memory,

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<sup>29</sup> There is much controversy on who is actually the author of *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, but I err on the side of recent scholarship that suggests Cicero is not the author (Sloane; Caplan).



the author takes a phenomenological perspective, connecting a "natural" memory with the beginning of thought. His argument of natural memory defines some memory as not rhetorical because the natural forms without agency or an agenda. It is already embedded in our very nature. It is the memory of events that occur and can be recalled without practice, for no reason other than it occurred. By contrast, this emphasizes the "art of memory" as being a rhetorical capability. The second memory, the "artificial" one, is a memory that the author can gain and strengthen through training of mnemonics, or "backgrounds and images" that allow the individual to "grasp and embrace them easily by the natural memory." The author describes artificial memory as a system of mnemonics that utilizes "artificial" images to aid the individual in recollection (what he deems the "natural" memory). The "art" expands through one's ability to train and better this recall method. So where natural memory could be remembering a special moment, such as one's first kiss (a natural extension of life), artificial memory would be practicing how to memorize state capitals. One memory is enabled in individuals through birth; the other stems through practice. The "artificial" differs much from the "natural," to the (unknown) author, because the artificial memory is where rhetors can be trained and can gain value through repetition. This is the skill that one can master. Thus, we see how this expands on Cicero's work, acknowledging how his descriptions of memory would be labelled as "artificial," and distinguishing it from natural memory.

Where the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* further elaborates and situates the *ars memoriae* in relation to natural memory, Quintilian focuses his attention more on the method of *loci* and mnemonics (other artificial memory terms and objects) in his *Institutio Oratoria*. The method of *loci* is best described as the use of visual cues of space

(mnemonics) to store large quantities of memory. For instance, to remember all the people in a single room, I might create a visual representation of the room in my memory, where I store where each person sat due to their spatial distance from me. Quintilian's exploration of memory borrows much from Cicero and *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, but his careful examination of mnemonics and his anecdote of Simonides paves the path for many modern uses of mnemonics (Hoogestraat 142-3). In his story of Simonides, Quintilian states that Simonides went to a party at banquet hall with quite a few guests but was called away by someone who desperately needed to see him. After leaving, the building collapsed and crushed the partygoers leaving them unidentifiable to be buried. However, the legend goes that Simonides helped the grieving locate their dead because he remembered where exactly each partygoer sat, allowing the families to claim the bodies. After retelling this lore to his audience, Quintilian states:

From what Simonides did on that occasion, it appears to have been remarked that the memory is assisted by localities impressed on the mind, and everyone seems able to attest the truth of the observation from his own experience, for when we return to places, after an absence of some time, we not only recognize them, but recollect also what we did in them. Persons whom we saw there, and sometimes even thoughts that passed within our minds, recur to our memory. Hence, in this case, as in many others, art has had its origin in experiment. (Honeycutt)

Quintilian's story express the method of *loci* (or "mind palace" in conventional terms), a more sophisticated and illustrative function for mnemonics. Here, Quintilian describes Simonides' ability to recall each particular place the dead guests sat because of the "localities impressed on the mind," or the ability for Simonides' memory to rebuild and

reconstruct the scene as he remembered it at the time he left. Thus, he recollected who was where because he remembered the experience he had in that space--dining with guests, laughing with friends, and walking around the room. The spatial reconstruction of the party, being able to remember created objects and other mnemonics, assists Simonides in remembering the sitting alignment of the dead. Though these mnemonics do not directly relate to the people Simonides is trying to remember, they aid him in remembering their positionality. Quintilian's narrative on Simonides provides a clear use of the development of mnemonics and the method of *loci* as important forms of memory in classical texts. We can view mnemonics and the method of *loci* as subsets of the art of memory, used to train the mind to remember.

Classical rhetoricians understood the importance of memory as a rhetorical device, as Cicero and others emphasized it as a classical canon among the likes of delivery, invention, arrangement, and style. Still, they only utilized it as an individual tool, not making connections to any form of community-building practices. Memory was important to the tradition not only because it provided the tools necessary for rhetoricians to remember what was important and what needed to be said, but early emphasis on memory also shows how certain memories have effects on individuals that can potentially aid them in recall for future situations and contexts. These texts emphasize the art of memory as being a vital, rhetorical tool for classical scholars. However, much of memory's usefulness for these rhetoricians stems from its ability for the orator to recall knowledge from the past in any instance. During these early theoretical writings, authors focused on mnemonics as the device most important to memory, especially with Quintilian's emphasis on "method of *loci*." The theoretical basis of mnemonics--that

certain visual appeals can conjure memories of something not necessarily related to the image itself--gave classical rhetoricians the sense that the act of memory was an act of rhetoric itself, one suggesting that the persuasion involved did not necessarily have to exist in conscious present actions but in actions reinforced through training, ability, and the mind. For instance, when I go to a Rhetoric and Composition conference, I do not consciously think about all the faces of scholars that I need to memorize or remember in order to network with them in the future; rather, I have trained myself that this is an important skill to have, one that I subconsciously attempt to utilize at most conferences I attend now. In this scenario, I am not consciously thinking in the present that I need to remember all of these faces and names for future reference. Instead, I have trained myself to recognize these faces and names subconsciously because I may need to remember them in the future.

These scholars understood that for the method of *loci* to be an acquired skill, orators needed to be persuaded that something was first important enough to *try* to remember in the first place before the recall. While knowing someone's name and face at a conference may not help me during that moment in time, I also realize that there might be occasions in the future in which I need to be able to remember these colleagues. Classical rhetoricians understood the same thing--that certain contexts, such as oration or debate, might call for a time when something must be remembered, and training the method of *loci* is an extension of training the mind to utilize mnemonics. This is the same procedure I follow in remembering conference attendees, audiences in panels, and other faces in the crowd, by pinpointing where I remember them in reference to why they are important to me in a future-present: I do not need to know their names or faces in the

present, but certain future situations, job interviews, meetings, etc., might present an opportunity where I need to recall their names and faces for my own advantage. I train myself to study faces and names (implicitly) at conferences to help for these situations. Therefore, I believe these scholars of memory realized that we need not rely on the present scene to utilize rhetoric: gathering people's names and faces might be pointless information for me during the conference itself. Rather, we can actually use the art of memory, mnemonics, and training to guide us in recall to these moments in time for a future-present.

Though some of the earlier rhetoricians actually talk about mnemonic memory as "mind palaces" or methods of *loci* implicitly, in the medieval era, St. Augustine is the first to refer to memory using the popularized term "palaces," referring to them as "fields and spacious palaces" in his book *Confessions*. Augustine questions how one should seek God and emphasizes memory and confession as methods that individuals use in their searches. Most importantly, the author explores mnemonics by writing about his own method of recall, stating:

There are all things preserved distinctly and under general heads, each having entered by its own avenue: as light, and all colours and forms of bodies by the eyes; by the ears all sorts of sounds; all smells by the avenue of the nostrils; all tastes by the mouth; and by the sensation of the whole body, what is hard or soft; hot or cold; or rugged; heavy or light; either outwardly or inwardly to the body. All these doth that great harbour of the memory receive in her numberless secret and inexpressible windings, to be forthcoming, and brought out at need; each entering in by his own gate, and there laid up. (207)

Augustine employs the senses to explain how the mind can recollect any memory through seeing, smelling, tasting, and so on. But he refers to these various recalls as "avenues," being a method of travel for the mind to be able to bring things back to the rememberer. The use of the avenues metaphor is indicative of how the individual remembers too: through the creation of visual tools that do not actually represent reality. The creation of a fictive mind-world full of memories explains the function of the method of *loci*. Rhetoric stems from the ability to create a fictive space where one can store memories for recall, and that space-making is where persuasion lives. The notion of "space-making" implies a construction of persuasion, where the individual is marking and mapping memories in correlation with one another for recall in the future. So, for example, in 8th grade History, when I wanted to remember that John Smith intervened in Jamestown in 1607 for a test, I sculpted a fictive world where a man named Smith and a man named James were friendly neighbors next door to me. This association of Smith and James as neighbors helped me put their names together when asked about the early American colonies, so I would instantly associate one with the other when asked on a test. The explicit construction of this space, for me and others, reflects the construction of memory by the individual as well.

Dave Tell argues that the rhetoric of memory in Augustine's text is not only located in his explicit discussions of memory but also in the act of confession as well. Tell finds that confession "is a way of remembering that which cannot be placed in the storehouses of memory" and that "confession, then displaces memory, it surpasses the palaces of the mind for which Augustine has become famous and reconfigures memory within the confessional expression itself" (234). Tell contends that for Augustine

confession becomes the answer for how one should seek God without placing him, becoming the way the individual confesses his or her sins without constructing God in the contexts of memory. Augustine fears that he is attributing to God his desires--that he prescribes to God his own shortcomings. However, Tell believes that through the act of confession, Augustine is able to move past this prescription because his act acknowledges his own sins. We can thus see how Augustine utilizes memory in two ways, as a mnemonic for remembering in the "spacious palaces" of the mind and as a way for him to confess his sins to God without framing God in the contexts of his own understanding of religion. Augustine's focus on memory is on the idea of remembering right, to not place one's own bias onto one's knowledge of God.<sup>30</sup>

Arguably by the time rhetorical scholarship reached the 20th century, the study of the fourth canon, memory, seemed lost. Scholars pushed recall methods, the art of memory, or mnemonics to the background. Bromley Smith argues that the major 18th- and 19th- century rhetoricians failed to consider memory in their discourse, believing it was simply not as important as the other canons and was not worth mentioning. And as American scholars began to turn to grammar and composition at the turn of the 1900s, memory became a topic of the past because it was not as important in the written, non-oral tradition. I believe much of the canonized scholarship in the "new rhetoric" did not change this trend either. Hoogestraat finds that the limited work on memory that did appear in the early years of the 20th century actually occurred in texts on public speaking rather than other, more well-known scholarship. Many texts, such as James Albert

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<sup>30</sup> It is important to note here since this debate on the moral obligation of memory will not appear in relation to Grand Saline, because it attempts to alleviate the struggle between remembering historical truths, folklore, and legends. This is an important debate that I will not discuss in this project, but I could foresee it as a major section in a longer book project.

Winans' *Public Speaking*, Charles Henry Woolbert's *The Fundamentals of Speech*, and Lionel Crocker's *Public Speaking for College Students* treat memorizing as a fundamental aspect of public speaking, thus not adding anything to the conversations that began hundreds of years before them. Speaking for his contemporaries, Hoogestraat states, "Memory, as presented today [between 1920-1960], is far more than memorizing of speeches word for word. Rather, it is inseparably related to the entire learning process preceding the presentation of the speech" (147). While the study of memory flourished in the public speaking side of rhetoric, as it did their much of Antiquity, many of the popular new texts failed to mention memory at all.

Kenneth Burke, one of the most important theorists in rhetorical history, for instance, hardly ever mentions memory in his corpus. Focusing more on language and its symbolic forms, most of the utterances of "memory" in Burke's texts allude to classical rhetoricians such as Cicero (see *A Rhetoric of Motives*). While I.A. Richards emphasizes memory in his literary theory (a chapter in his book *Principles of Literary Criticism* is even titled "Memory" and argues that memory is "connectionist," or based upon connections between other memories), the reader would be hard-pressed to find any connections to memory in his *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*. Similar to Burke, Richards focuses on language, specifically metaphor in this text, without alluding to the ancient use of the fourth canon. While the new rhetoric is often defined as rediscovering the practice, uniting it back with classical tradition, many of these authors do not position themselves in relation to predecessors' unique approach to memory and mnemonics, theorizing less on memory in contemporary terms and leaving it to the same discussions of public speaking that came before them.



And this tends to be a trend up until contemporary scholarship in the field. Major new rhetorics texts such as Chaim Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca's *The New Rhetoric*; Richard E. Young, Alton L. Becker, and Kenneth K. Pike's *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change*; and Wayne Booth's *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent*, texts canonized in our field and taught to students every semester, focus on various forms of argumentation and rhetorical inventions without considering memory's impact on these procedures. The best way to summarize studies of memory in the new rhetoric era would be to call it was glaringly absent. Simply put, most scholars were not interested in memory as a rhetorical device, but that changed dramatically within the last twenty-five years, approximately from 1990 until 2015.

The history of memory in the field establishes its relevance throughout the years, focusing mostly on how the individual can memorize and remember information in order to utilize when necessary. Rhetoricians in Antiquity employed memory in these terms, and other traditional scholars throughout the years, such as Augustine, have even further situated the term as it helps us understand recall, the art of memory, and mnemonics. These rhetoricians demonstrated how the training of memory for recall is rhetorical and how the utilization of mnemonics can aid people in this art. Nonetheless, the emphasis during these years was on how the individual utilized memory, not how memory and its material forms and mnemonic devices actually shape the individual too. And while the scholarship on memory slowed in the early parts of the 20th century, in the early-1990s new analysis on memory was produced, focusing on “public memory,” and new ways to think about memories as affective. The history of memory studies not only shows us why this new area of inquiry came about, but it also helps comprehend the way material

rhetorics, identity, and history all are vital variables that construct forms of public memory across the world.

For my project, this historical review of memory performs a few functions. First, and at the most basic level, this research illustrates how important memory has been to the field of rhetorical studies, shining light on the fact that our emphasis on memory has been altered over the centuries. This creates an exigence for me to make the case that we need more memory scholarship and analysis, which the rest of this project does. On more concrete terms, this historical review of memory studies in rhetoric demonstrates the rhetorical capabilities of memory, an important argument for me in Chapter 5. I argue that Moore's memory of racism in Grand Saline not only created an exigence for him to self-immolate in town, but it also provided him with a language, a public memory code I can say, in order to make his argument that people of the town should change. While the history of memory studies I review in this section does not have direct parallels to my public memory research on Moore, it provides me the historical backing to make the case for a memory analysis of Moore.

### **Public Memory as a Rhetoric**

To begin this section, let me define public memory in my own terms, expanding from the definition I provided in the introduction of this chapter. I refer to public memory as the collective memory of a community or group with a common identity and as a means to analyzing how people interpret histories and share ideologies through commemoration. Public memory is a theory that allows scholars to better understand ties between history, memory, and the public construction and consumption of the two. This theory emphasizes the effects of memory--the various choices and forms that produce

affect for audiences. However, the rhetorical study of public memory investigates why people visit certain spaces and identify with the objects and people remembering a certain history. And while public memory does not always relate to issues of locality, often times it does because of how public memory constructs communities in the space in which the memory exists. Before we can more concretely understand what public memory entails as a theory, we need to fathom the conversation embedded within public memory studies over the last twenty-five years. In this section, I briefly discuss the history of public memory rhetorics, and then further analyze how I believe it is a unique rhetoric within itself. I draw a key distinction here: Most of the scholarship on public memory views it as a rhetoric, a particular system of persuasion that exists in various venues and materials, but new research in the field illustrates how public memory is a methodology as well, a framework to better understand how these persuasions work. For this chapter, I will first explore public memory as a rhetoric in this section, investigating its various facets, before illustrating public memory as a method, in which I build my own heuristic to understand Moore's self-immolation.

First, we need to distinguish some of the important concepts that are embedded within this discourse, primarily the differences between place and space, the use of created objects, and audiences. I turn to Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* to differentiate between place and space. De Certeau writes, "A place is the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence" and is "an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies an indication of stability" (117). To de Certeau, place is comprised of objects that form relationships with one another. For instance, the buildings at Texas Christian University represent a

place because we find order in the way the buildings are arranged in accordance to one another, building positionality and a sense of “stability.” A place differs from a space because “a space exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables. Thus space is composed of intersections of mobile elements...Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities” (117). Where TCU can be a place of related buildings and objects, it can be a space when we consider people moving between it, the various people interacting with it during classes, routine campus life, and over periods of time. De Certeau claims that “space is a practiced place,” and I argue that the “practice” is the art of locality. Space becomes place when space becomes local, when people make a space part of their routine, part of their lives. Therefore, we can claim place is the idea of configuration of positions without life involved and is arhetorical. Space is when the circulation of people becomes involved, which opens up the realm of rhetorical intervention. For my dissertation, I will use the term “place” when I refer to objects and their positionality outside of being involved with human interaction and will use “space” or “sites” or “objects” when considering mnemonic interactions of locality.

This is a major difference between the discussion of mnemonics in Antiquity and the use of mnemonics in contemporary public memory scholarship: Antiquity focused on how people use mnemonics in order to recall something; public memory scholarship focuses on how mnemonics affect large groups of people in collective remembering. The change here is on agency because memory scholars argue that the embedded discourses in sites of public memory are agents themselves; they have the ability to affect large

groups of people. This is to say that for fabricated objects of public memory, they are built with certain intentions in mind: to relate to certain audiences for certain reasons, such as how a monument to a Confederate general can relate to Lost Cause sympathizers (those who believe the South was righteous in its fight against the North in the Civil War) and how a museum to JFK presidency and assassination can help us look back on the former president with love and fondness. In creating these objects, the creators, or gatekeepers of memory, have a certain positionality in mind, one that often resonates with audiences who visit these sites. They use physical representations of these objects to create certain viewpoints that audiences should identify with. Hence, we see how these objects have agency--they are created to provide audiences with a certain response that the gatekeepers have in mind.

So, while mnemonics are still utilized in recall acts, contemporary scholarship emphasizes how people can be drawn to the memories intertwined in a mnemonic device, such as a statue celebrating a heralded hero or a plaque asking for people to remember the dead of WWII. These devices are not “remembered” for recall; they do not help the individual remember material for oration or debate. Rather, they ask visitors and larger groups of people to remember a certain space, person, thing, or time, to bring out the discourses of history into the memories of today. Of course, this only takes place if the visitors are aware of this particular memory, but arguably they are predisposed to this viewpoint through visiting the site in the first place. And if they do not have the history, they still have a general impression of the historical moment itself, full of feelings and ideologies they choose to relate to or not. Mnemonics are no longer solely bound to the individual; they are now connecting devices intertwined in public memories, existing to

draw in people and to share an emotional, common experience and memory. They continually affect us through inanimate objects.

To recap, the main difference between the use of mnemonics in Antiquity and the use of mnemonics in public memory is the difference of agency. In terms of Antiquity, the individuals are the agents who choose what should be remembered, what should be mnemonic to help recall, and so on. But in terms of the public memory, agency is transcribed into the mnemonics by gatekeepers who elicit certain emotions or memories from visitors in order to instill a collective sense of identity. These objects can be created or natural, dependent on the memory they possess. Thus, a created object might be constructed to remember a certain historical figure, like a statue to George Washington, for instance. These are the forms many scholars utilize in their analysis. However, memories can be held in natural forms too, sometimes in particular spaces. One could argue that even without man-made objects, natural mnemonics like vegetation and geography can hold memories as well. The natural terrain surrounding Pearl Harbor still contain the memories of that American tragedy, even after the remnants of the attacks are gone and even without needing plaques and memorials to contain these memories. Therefore, objects, created or natural, are often the mnemonic devices that contain memories that affect audiences.<sup>31</sup> And audiences are the final piece of the public memory equation. Audiences are the people who visit these spaces and interpret these created and natural objects. Audiences are the people who are affected by these objects. Audiences are the people who form a collective identity in visiting and relating to these memories.

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<sup>31</sup> I will mostly use “object” when describing mnemonic devices in the future, even when these devices rely on place and space in their distinctive nature. The term “object” implies something that can be used, which is exactly the function of a mnemonic.

In the case of Moore's self-immolation, we see mnemonics becoming valuable to analysis of him in the rest of this project. First, I believe there are certain (natural) mnemonics in Grand Saline, such as the torn down bridge and the turnaround at Clark's Ferry, that are designators of racism. These mnemonics keep the public memory of racism alive in the area. Not only that, but I will argue that the space where Moore lit himself on fire has not only a similar history as a mnemonic device of racism for some people in Grand Saline but that Moore's death altered its state for a few people in town: changing it from being a site of racism to a site where anti-racist act was performed.

With a basic outline of the key variables in public memory studies, we can look back to see how contemporary research in rhetorical studies of memory truly garnered attention in the early-1990s, at the time when Memory Studies as field came to the forefront in cross-and-inter-disciplinary research. Susannah Radstone, one of the prominent scholars in Memory Studies, explains that the interest in this field in the late-1980s and 1990s led to one of the first (if not the first) interdisciplinary conference on memory in 1998, titled "Frontiers of Memory," illustrating the converging interests in memory across many different fields. Rhetorical scholars also picked up on memory trends as well, especially as they pertained to human-made, public forms. Conversations switched from how orators should apply mnemonics to aid their memories to how mnemonics affect visitors. The emphasis of recall and retention was abandoned in favor of seeing how space carries rhetorical effects. The art of memory transformed from a training of the individual mind to a study of how people are collectively trained to identify with one another in this form. Public memory studies emphasized the way people, objects, and spaces present history through mnemonics, and the way we

remember it is based upon physical representations. This change from memorization mnemonics to mnemonics of identity (mnemonics that scholars study to better understand how personal and collective identity is shaped) illustrated the rhetorical dimensions of created objects, space, and memory and how convene in publicly. One of the first pieces of scholarship stemming from these interests was Carole Blair, Marsha S. Jeppeson, and Enrico Pucci, Jr.'s "Public Memorializing in Postmodernity" published in the *Quarterly Journal of Speech* in 1991. The article uses a public memory lens to analyze the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington D.C., arguing that even monuments cannot be "apolitical" (283). Concluding their work, the authors call for rhetoricians to further investigate public memorials and their design, which has ultimately garnered much scholarly attention over the past twenty-five years.

By the end of the decade, public memory scholarship had gained traction in Rhetoric and Communication circles. Both fields were drawn into the ways that gatekeeper controlled memories contained large, broad narratives for visitors and the ways this altered how we understand history. The beginning conversations for rhetorical studies, as with the Blair Jeppeson and Pucci, Jr. piece above, started in issues of the *Quarterly Journal of Speech (QJS)*. Stephen H. Browne published a review essay, "Reading, Rhetoric, and the Texture of Public Memory" in *QJS* in 1995. The four books he analyzes, however, could hardly be described as "rhetorical" texts; rather, they are public memory texts published in other fields such as American Culture Studies and History. Browne's aim is to make the case for public memory as a rhetorical method, and in his conclusion he makes the case for public memory to be its own subsection in the field. Cheryl R. Jorgensen-Earp and Lori A. Lanzilotti followed Browne's lead and



published their text on shrines of national tragedy in the *Quarterly Journal of Speech* three years later in 1998. Their text analyzed the public memories of tragedy (such as the Oklahoma City bombing and the material objects that were used to enshrine the horrific event) to see how individuals take that collective pain and how the repetition of visitations creates meaning within itself for many shrine attendees. Thus, they conclude that this repetition process and the need to leave behind material artifacts is a healing process within itself, a way for people to share publicly with others but also to move forward in their private grief. Browne published another piece, also in *QJS*, titled, "Remembering Crispus Attucks: Race, Rhetoric, and the Politics of Commemoration," in 1999. Browne's article explores how the public ceremonies that commemorate Attucks' life, specifically remarking that the "anxiety" over the proper way to remember Attucks highlights America's collective identity colliding with historical memory (185-6). Taken together, these three pieces illustrate how viable public memory is a subject of inquiry--scholars can explore race, postmodernism, narratives, design, tragedies, and other avenues of identity-making all within the coded construction of histories and memories (again illustrating the identity mnemonics structure).

From 2000 until the present, the study of public memory in the field of Rhetoric has received so much scholarly interest that it has arguably transformed into a subfield. First, Kendall R. Phillips' 2004 interdisciplinary edited collection *Framing Public Memory* firmly places public memory studies in the field of rhetoric. Phillips writes in the introduction, "The reader interested in either rhetoric or public memory will, therefore, find in this volume a wealth of resources for thinking about the interrelation of these concepts" (3). The text, with ten different chapters from scholars across the disciplines,

emphasizes rhetoric as the central construct in understanding public memory. Next, three works published in 2010 emphasized public memory too: Greg Dickinson, Carole Blair, and Brian L. Ott's *Places of Public Memory* situated public memory with spatial realms, better understanding how textual artifacts employ space to construct meaning; Bradford Vivian's *Public Forgetting* takes public memory studies and questions how public forgetting can also be a rhetorical act through analyzing forgetting in certain cultures and after tragedies; and G. Mitchell Reyes' edited collection *Public Memory, Race, and Ethnicity* analyzes how publics and communities inscribe and interpret race and ethnicity through various sites and act of public memory. Together, these three books extend public memory by redefining its significance in modern society and showing how other themes, such as forgetting and race/ethnicity, influence memory-making across cultures, places, and peoples. These major texts have become the critical, canonical works in rhetorical studies of public memory, and their various *topoi* demonstrate public memory's evolution into a subfield.

Other articles on public memory have advanced from no longer appearing solely in *QJS* and are now regulars in top journals such as *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, *JAC*, *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, and *Western Journal of Communication* after the turn of the century. Thus, the study of memory, taken from classical rhetoricians who focused on recall and the art of memory for oration and debate purposes, has transformed to a study of *public* memory; scholars in recent years have been most interested in how people construct memories through created artifacts in public spaces.

Seeing the progressive history of these studies, I want to further detail the rhetorical nature of public memory in more concrete terms, underscoring how its very

nature persuades and alters how people remember and identify with one another. One of the best contemporary interpretations of remembering comes from Vivian, whose finds that remembering can be an individual or a public act: "Personal as well as communal remembrance of the past a priori requires conscious or unconscious decisions concerning which of its surviving impressions should lie fallow, and why" (11). Vivian paints remembrance as being rhetorical in both individual and collective contexts because it comes down to "conscious or unconscious decisions," in which the person or community chooses why something is worth remembering in the first place. Furthermore, he places emphasis on identity being a key factor in determining what is memorable, claiming that "we depend on memory for our individual and collective sense of identity, meaning, and purpose" (10). In this instance, Vivian states that memories shape our identity, meaning, and purpose in the world, that we look back to these memories to move forward with our daily experiences and important decisions. Vivian views identity as being a product of memory. Therefore, the mnemonics that can store and shape our memories can also produce identity claims. However, this is not just a one-sided relationship; other scholars exhibit the ways identity shapes our memories as well.

Identity is a crucial aspect of the act of remembering. Stephen H. Browne explores how the public remembers Crispus Attucks in Boston through their identities. Similar to Vivian, Browne draws attention to the public texts of remembering. In opening his article, he explains his intentions: not just understanding who gets to be remembered and why but who also gets to actively participate in the remembering act (169). However, Browne then differs from Vivian by focusing more on identity construction of memories. He claims that communities define themselves by how they remember themselves,

emphasizing remembering as a rhetorical act of identity. He goes a step further and talks about how this identity does not always display a positive connotation, saying that if communities choose to keep remembering a "lawless mob and their leader" over and over, then it matters to the "material fortunes of the city" (180). The "what" people choose to remember defines them, in some capacity, as Browne and Vivian both declare, and the act of remembering becomes the act of stating who one is as an individual or a community (though Browne hardly focuses on individual memories). We can see this in the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial in Washington D.C. Visitors choose to explore the memorial of Dr. King and remember the man who has become the face of the Civil Rights Movement in America. Their relationship to this monument creates a community of people who often see parallels to civil rights struggles in America today, and they can make connections between King's work and civil rights issues of their current society. Thus, we can see what I call *mutual identity claims*: how memory not only shapes identity, but identity shapes memory too.

This new scholarship illustrates a shift in how rhetoricians talk about memory, especially highlighting the mnemonics of identity and mutual identity claims. First, the work in public memory focuses on mnemonics like classical rhetorics did, but these scholars emphasize how these mnemonics interact with individual and collective identity. Some scholars pinpoint how mnemonics shape identity, others how identity shapes remembering. Nevertheless, they dive deeper into the function of mnemonics as a rhetorical tool and find that outside of memorization purposes, other forms of mnemonics often conjure remembering because of identity. These mnemonics are reminders of our individualization, passion, goals, and collective identity. They symbolically represent

who we are as people and demonstrate why certain memories are important. But outside the mnemonics of identity, this new scholarship also highlights the importance of mutual identity claims: specifically, I mean claims that individuals and collectives possess and claims that the symbolization of mnemonics contains. For people to become connected to a mnemonic of identity, they must have a certain identity claim that has a sense of importance. And the mnemonic that connects them to this identity must contain a certain symbolic claim as well. Thus, there is a mutual identity claim process, one which the individual and the mnemonic device reflect. These two major themes of mnemonics of identity and mutual identity claims are what drives this new wave of scholarship, making it stand out in regards to classical memory rhetorics. As we will see with Moore, identity is central to not only why he chose to self-immolate in Grand Saline but to understanding the various rhetorical variables within his act.

While the process of remembering was employed as a tool for oratory in classical rhetoric, in contemporary terms remembering is analyzed mostly in terms of public discourse. Most scholarship over the past twenty-five years tends to focus more concretely on how these acts involve mutual identity claims. Remembering, to these authors, differs from simply being labeled as a characteristic of memory or even from being synonymous to the term, because the various acts of remembering elaborate on why people believe something is worth remembering in the first place. The study of public memory is the study of why collective remembering is important. However, more scholars are even digging deeper than this, exploring public memory's influence on racial relations and history. This emerging subspecialty is vital to my own analysis as the public memories embedded within the discourse in Grand Saline are uniquely tied to stories and

folklore of racism and the KKK.

*Race and Public Memory Rhetorics: Emphasizing the Local*

While race is often described as an identity marker in many contexts, a memory perspective shows how race can also be a political statement, a tradition, and a point of protest, for instance. New scholarship that combines public memory with race (from scholars such as Stephen Browne and Kristan Poirot) emphasizes how race is construed, contested, and materialized in public texts, giving us a deeper understanding of race as a highly debated issue not only across time and in the public but in our memories as well. Perhaps more importantly, combining public memory with race gives us more insight on race's capability to be epistemic and emphasizes the local effects of these situations. That is, racial awareness can be a knowledge-making, community-building endeavor for many people, situating how one perceives fear, oppression, and status, for example. Some of the analysis I summarize below demonstrates this notion: scholars are able to employ public memory to see how racial stereotypes even are embedded in good intentions, that our prejudices live deep within us and that even our own memories can be based upon racial ideologies. Therefore, I believe public memory provides rhetorical scholars a new way to investigate race and locality.

Intertwining race with memory illustrates race as more than a *simple* social construction; it can be used rhetorically, across time, for a plethora of reasons. It can alter our perceptions and our connections to the past. For instance, in Fort Worth, the National Multicultural Western Heritage Museum celebrates how people of color contributed to “Western” culture. Their museum actively pushes against normative memory of white cowboys in the Wild West and illustrates how Buffalo Soldiers, Tuskegee Airmen,

Native American Indian Chiefs and the Vaquero” add to this more accurate picture of history. From a public memory of race perspective, this museum shows how racialized people are important members of our history and rhetorically need to be rewritten into these narratives.

Most of the scholarship I examine below shows how intertwining public memory research with racial interests formulate new understandings of historical figures, spaces, and memorials. Perhaps most importantly, it illustrates how many of the racial issues we had in prior years still find light in our present day. Overall, I believe combining public memory methodologies with racial interests allows scholars to reach new conclusions that would be unattainable without this partnership, especially as it relates to local issues of race.

The study of race in public memory typically focuses on either how audiences interpret racial materials and memories or how gatekeepers construct the created forms of racial monuments for particular interpretations. One of the first useful articles that explicitly analyzes race in context of memory comes from Browne's "Remembering Crispus Attucks." Early in his article, Browne tells the story of William C. Nell, an African-American journalist who led the way to memorialize Crispus in the 1850s in Boston. Nell's desire to celebrate Crispus highlights the political circumstances in which he lived: he urges other to remember Crispus in order to formulate a "counter-memory," or "a cultural narrative that, in its very telling, must pose itself over and against prevailing discourses of power and remembrance" that pushes against the official narrative from the City of Boston (173). Through reiterating Attucks' importance in the American Revolution, as the "first American martyr," Nell makes the claim for African-American

civil rights in a time of high racial tensions in this particular neighborhood where the memorial to Attucks stands. Thus, Nell employs the act of remembering Crispus and his race as a rhetorical act to complicate modern-day politics and make an argument for African-American equality. On one hand, we see how memory and locality work in this context: Nell changes the memory of the American Revolution by choosing to remember the first martyr of the war as *explicitly* being black. This creates a counter-memory to the typical story of white patriots standing up to the white British forces. It also emphasizes the mobilization of the local. Nell argues that “if the colored men of Boston cannot find anybody of their race to honor more worthy than Crispus Attucks, they had better get of the honoring business altogether” (184). Therefore, he rallies black people in the local Boston area to better understand their own history and their agency in making change. On the other hand, this also illustrates how controversial race can be: by referring to Crispus as black, Nell also demonstrates that people of color are just as important to the history of America as white people. Thus, Browne's article on race, locality, and memory demonstrates how these approaches to memory and race can be utilized as rhetorical tools of identity, giving the individuals like Nell room to position themselves in counter-cultural and political terms. More so, Browne's article explains why remembering race can be an act of defiance within itself because the choice of memory, in the case of Nell, is the choice to fight against the memory sanctioned by the state.

The 2003 article "Commemorating Sojourner Truth" by Roseann M. Mandziuk also examines the memory of national figures of color and analyzes the public memory of Sojourner Truth in the context of three public monuments created in her honor. Mandziuk, however, takes issue with the produced formation of one particular Truth



memorial. She finds that "these campaigns to re-present Truth in a material form reveal the uncertainties in the process of public memory, as well as the ways in which the practice often accommodates and dissipates political challenges to the values held dear by dominant culture" (289). In one monument in particular, at Battle Creek, Michigan, the author argues that "racial conciliation" is written upon the material text. Mandziuk notes that though the builders wanted to present a vestige of racial progress in the statue, much of the structure, from Truth's weight to her stance, present her as a "mammy" caricature. Thus, the representation of Truth illustrates America's ever-present, complicated relationship with race and history: while the individuals who constructed the statue in 1993 more than likely had the best intentions, their structure highlights the racial struggles that Truth overcame and personified but also the lack of modern-day America to relate to controversial racial figures outside of stereotypes. Remembering race in this sense shows how racial progress and racism can both be materialized in a public structure and might only be interpreted differently through various visitors' ideological stances. Where Browne underscores how people of color can be remembered as a counter-culture statement, Mandziuk illustrates how attempts to create monuments to honor people of color can reinforce racial stereotypes. Therefore, the way audiences remember are often constructed by their own ideologies and prejudices, even when good intentions are involved. This, again, illustrates how mutual identity claims are intertwined into the public memory making process, being a product of our own ideologies and the ideologies instilled by gatekeepers in the created form as well.

Both of these articles push memory and race forward by linking the two approaches to one another. While Brown illustrates how an individual can employ

memory and race as acts of protest in local contexts (thus choosing to remember someone *because* of their race can push against whitewashed narratives of history), Mandziuk contends that consumer memories of race often parallel their stereotypical ideologies of race (thus Sojourner Truth could be represented as a mammy because this is how many white people view older black women).

Nevertheless, the intermixing of methods in these articles emphasize different results, but viewed as methodological companions, the combination of public memory with racial studies demonstrates how intertwining their subjects can be fruitful for scholars. While both of these studies are about memorializing people, we see how their methods exhibit the ways memory is often shaped by race. Reading these approaches about the choices to actively remember Attucks in a certain light for a particular audience in Boston and the composing of a Truth statue that makes her into a mammy, we see that these authors provide their audiences with the tools to connect memory with race. These scholars demonstrate how memory is partial, political, and local: even when intentions are pure, our subconscious prejudices and ideas can distort our memories and bring them to light because of this analysis. For scholars wanting to employ similar approaches, this scholarship not only provides an impetus but gives strategies to employ a methodology combining memory and race. When looking at racialized memories, whether through material or natural mnemonics, these scholars show us that threads of racial discourse are often embedded in memory-making practices, historically, structurally, and symbolically.

In 2015, two articles on race and memory both dealt with the city of Charleston, South Carolina. First, Kristan Poirot and Shevaun E. Watson's "Memories of Freedom and White Resilience" analyzes how Charleston's tourist industry rhetorically includes

and excludes race and slavery from their guides depending on the (often white) tourists' desires. The authors declare that "public acts of remembering and forgetting can be domesticated to serve the interests of the elite, as they are also used as valuable resources for political and moral judgment and identity formation" (111). They conclude that the tourist imaginaries (the tourists' desire to downplay slavery) and the industry as a whole commemorate "racial hierarchies," and offer no new perspective on how to interpret race in non-oppressive ways. Hence, tourism in Charleston maintains the memory of the status quo (especially for local audiences) and chooses to forget the terrible deeds of slavery and racism to better accommodate their white visitors. Through erasing the slavery narrative for tourists, the local tourism industry marks the city as being behind on racial issues because they represent a synecdoche for the local (even if this is true or not). Put another way, since Charleston is known for slavery, and since they erase these narratives for tourists, audiences can perceive this as a racist act within itself: one that designates locals as contemporary racists. Methodologically, their article expands on memories of race that exist outside of single memorials or memory-acts and shows how such memories can actually build larger, selective narratives for intertwined places and spaces. Thus, their methods are fruitful in reframing racial memories not just for particular people but the narratives of history and memory for entire cities.

While Poirot and Watson underscore Charleston's tourism, I explored public memory of Charleston's statues in a recent article with Kristen Moore, titled "Reappropriating Public Memory." The article looks more specifically at the textual construction and memory of the *Confederate Defenders of Charleston* monument that was vandalized by Black Lives Matter protesters in 2015. Our work argues that through

the act of spray-painting the Confederate statue with "#BlackLivesMatter" and "This is the problem #Racism" activists reinscribed the statue--a statue representing racism and slavery via many interpretations--for a pro-civil rights cause, altering the space and text of the monument itself. The eventual covering of the monument's taggings with a tarp by the city thus illustrated Charleston's desire to erase racial contestation and memory--the city (and locals within the city) wanted a clear argument of being post-racial, not one still marred with their past sins of slavery. Overall, we contend that public memories of race can be subverted when the material form of the memory carrier changes, which underscores the importance of better analyzing how monuments and statues shape conversations on race. Whereas Poirot and Watson illustrate how new methods can reveal racialized memory discourse on a city-wide level, our analysis shows how discourse can change through the act of altering a material artifact. Nonetheless, both articles emphasize how the local, rhetorical situation of Charleston is embroiled within these narratives of post-racism. Thus, we see how racialized memories can dominate an industry on a local level and how they can exist in artifacts that are open for modification. Together, this scholarship illustrates how racial memories are combated, commemorated, contested, and erased in local narratives.

Recent scholarship on race and memory has focused on how race manifests itself and is interpreted in structures of public memory, especially in statues, memorials, and other symbolic objects. As I will illustrate at the end of this chapter and in Chapter 5, however, some of these structures do not have to be materialistic; they can maintain status through storytelling as well. Scholars are employing methods of memory to further extrapolate understandings of race in local settings, reminding us that race is an important

rhetorical factor in public memory that deserves more attention. While most of these authors do not focus on individual memories of race, they illustrate how various publics and communities in America use singular texts to share their own communal identities, and these analyses will prove to be invaluable in my research on Grand Saline. And the analysis of these texts give a new sense of racialized memories in America, showing that racist discourse is as strong as ever and that there are still agents who shape how audiences consume these memories. These new analyses give us new ways to investigate the strings that attach public memory and race. Nevertheless, before moving to Chapter 5, it is important to better discover the underpinnings of a public memory method, and in the section below, I provide a heuristic to better understand it.

### **Public Memory as Method**

While I have focused mostly on public memory as a theoretical framework, we can consider it as a methodology, one that provides us with a better grasp of how to explore events situated in space and time. This is important because it not only shows how public memory works, as the theoretical explorations above do, but it provides us the tools to apply this lens to other situations, to see how public memory exists in avenues that are not always readily known. Jessica Enoch refers to a public memory methodology as an “investigative trajector[y] that explores the rhetorical practice of remembering (59). To Enoch, a public memory method gives the researcher the means to see remembering in various forms (that I will detail further below). But others, such as Greer and Grobman, have suggested that Rhetoric and Composition scholars especially bring a unique perspective to the table: “intellectuals working in composition and rhetoric are ideally positioned to engage with questions about how memories of the past are

researched, recovered, reconstructed, and recirculated” (7). However, it is the means of negotiation, the various power struggles between people who curate and create public memory and those who consume it, that I want to explore more thoroughly. Greer and Grobman argue in *Pedagogies of Public Memory*:

Turning attention to production [of public memory] exposes these networks and relations of power. We argue that investigating public memory production involving multiple constituents, such as teachers and students, professional curators and archivists, community activists, and casual tourists – of various race, ethnic, gender, socioeconomic status, sexuality, and other categories of difference – sheds new light on the processes of negotiation. (13)

While Greer and Grobman illustrate how we can teach public memory in the classroom through archival research, research at museums, and other forms, I want to show how public memory studies have some common features and how we can take the complex strains of public memory to form a heuristic for analysis.

To theorize about public memory as a methodology, emphasizing the role of objects and spaces is key. For my argument here, I look at the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute (BCRI), as Kristan Poirot has written about, as an example of a well-curated site of memory. I will then use Poirot’s analysis as an example for each main heuristic point. To demonstrate how the heuristic can be adapted to many forms of public memory, I will also investigate Stone Mountain Park as a place that contains a highly controversial public memory site and infamous lynching trees as spaces that often have “natural” mnemonics with no curation. Thus, I believe scholars can examine an object that denotes memory and identity and can use the following two-prong heuristic to better analyze its

rhetoric:

1) How does the site situate history in terms of memory?

2) How does the site construct identity?

Though I do not think this is the definitive set of questions to provide the researcher a thorough public memory method, I do believe these are the two vital questions that are intertwined in many scholarly inquiries of public memory, especially as a gateway analysis. I use this heuristic as a way of opening the door for rhetorical analysis of public memory, by analyzing a few different examples before moving to analysis of Moore using this heuristic. Issues of circulation, locality, power, and audience--issues embedded in public memory discourse--are important variables, and this heuristic provides a central focus for analyzing these themes. I view the rest of this chapter as a gateway into Chapter 5, so first I will analyze the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, Stone Mountain, and lynching trees<sup>32</sup> to illustrate how the heuristic provides new analysis before jumping into applying this heuristic to Moore's self-immolation. I believe my analysis of Moore at the end of this chapter provides with a new lens to see Moore on a local stage, which provides access to new themes of public memory, access, and locality that will be further explored in my final chapter.

### *The BCRI*

First, to see the rhetorical nature of the object at hand, we need to understand how it attempts to convey some form of history and what that positionality says about the terms of memory. As the nature of historiography teaches us, history is never objective and does not come without political implications. David Gold writes that "fortunately, the

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<sup>32</sup> I choose these three sites because of how they portray race and memory and because of the various controversies that exist in remembering them.

process of revisionism is ongoing, ever creating new exigencies. It's easy to forget that our now-contested master narratives were themselves a form of revisionism, calling attention to a long-neglected history” (29). And in a sense, a methodology of public memory is in part historiographical. The researcher is exploring a site in order to see how it displays some form of historical knowledge from a position of power, and these power struggles often point to what is missing in this display. Is the site one-sided? Does it erase a different perspective of history? What politics might be engrained in this site? These questions are vital to seeing how the site does not exist on its own, independent of humans; there are multiple discourses embodied within the memory and/or construction of any object.

The BCRI opened in 1992 and claims to be “a cultural and educational research center that promotes a comprehensive understanding and appreciation for the significance of civil rights developments in Birmingham with an increasing emphasis on the international struggle for universal human rights” (“About BCRI”). It hosts over 140,000 guests per year and is one of the premier civil rights museums in the nation. For the museum’s mission statement, it aims “to enlighten each generation about civil and human rights by exploring our common past and working together in the present to build a better future” (“About BCRI”). While the museum has a lofty and worthwhile mission, Poirot suggests that it actively writes women out of the history and memory of civil rights. We can actually view the space of the BCRI as highly contested. On one hand, its purpose is to bring in a broad American public and have them feel and witness the fight of civil rights, to label its tenuous history as important and its legacy as an eternal flame in the American story. Visitors take in the stories of the leaders they revere and get to connect



with the violence of the past in order to bring forth a new future of equality. Poirot claims that the images of violence typically emphasize the black male body, which “stifles women’s emergence from the outset” by suggesting the men were the victims so, therefore, they are the people who should be remembered (641). Applying the first question in the heuristic (how does the site situate history in terms of memory?) and the curation of memories would help researchers reveal that while the museum has the best intentions, its formations of memories relies upon the exceptional, male-oriented narrative of civil rights. The exhibits are one-sided in their presentation of gender and effectively erase women from the movement. They also mimic the patriarchal structure of society by conforming to these narratives. Overall, these questions of power, perspective, and erasure (questions embedded in how we situate history and memory) give the researcher a path to see the rhetorical nature of the museum.

Next, to see the effects of this rhetorical phenomenon, we must understand how identity is inextricably tied into sites of public memory as well. Many scholars who study public memory have examined the effects of collective identity. Joshua Reeves claims that these constructions are the “invented bearer of collective identity, expressing a rhetorical magnetism that precedes any cognitive domestication by language or conceptual understanding” (318). Thus, though we may not fully understand what makes these mnemonics so “magnetic,” or what draws people into the public memory process, we do understand that they generate a remarkable sense of collective identity. People who visit these spaces or join in the remembering process have a strong bond with one another, a stronger sense of their collective selves. In their edited collection *Places of Public Memory*, Carole Blair, Greg Dickinson, and Brian L. Ott state that material

mnemonic form “commands attention because it announces itself as a marker of collective identity. It is an object of desire because of its claim to represent, inspire, instruct, remind, admonish, exemplify, and/or offer the opportunity for affiliation and public identification” (25). These authors agree with Reeves that the marker has strong rhetorical power because it represents inner identities, thoughts, political views, and more from individuals. So people might take to a site like the Edmund Pettus Bridge, where the infamous MLK march in Selma took place, because they identify with the civil rights struggle, the social movement, the historical moment and more. The commemoration of the bridge stems from identity claims that make visitors want to visit it.

All of this research illustrates why a heuristic to uncover the various identity effects of public memory can be useful for understanding its rhetorical capabilities. To understand this, we should ask ourselves: How is identity portrayed or embodied in the site? Does the site help unite people as a collective through identity claims? How should people be drawn together in remembering this site from collective means? Are there contested views of this site? All of these questions give the researcher room to explore the identity aspects of public memory in whatever form or space it exists.

To explore the identity aspects of public memory, we can return to the BCRI as an example. As Poirot writes, women, especially black women, can visit the site and feel disenfranchised from the narrative and memory of civil rights (633-7). There are few images and references to their inclusion, especially when historiographical research by scholars like McGuire and Crosby has written them back into the movement. Thus, women do not see themselves represented in the major fight, which creates a sense of dismissal and erasure. In attempting to celebrate the monumental moment of civil rights,

the material construction of space, artifacts, and curation can create the sense of commemoration for some visitors but it also can adversely produce a sense of underrepresentation and exclusion for women of color, paralleling the hard truth of contemporary American culture's view of them. Nonetheless, the questions above not only underscore the intentions of the museum and the identity claims that revolve around them, but this heuristic also can give voice to people who contest the dominant identity discourse.

But these questions need not only apply to well-funded and highly crafted places like the BCRI. Virtually any site that contains public memory can be investigated under these parameters.

#### *Stone Mountain Park and Lynching Trees*

While these questions can help us find power dynamics, circulation, and audience in well-curated spaces, they can even help researchers dive into more controversial and less curated sites as well. Following the first step in the heuristic (demonstrating how the site situates history in terms of memory), we can explore the Confederate monument at Stone Mountain in Georgia, for instance. Stone Mountain is a small mountain in northern Georgia that has images of Stonewall Jackson, Robert E. Lee, and Jefferson Davis carved onto one side. The site is home of the second founding of the KKK in 1915. While this site was constructed for an obvious purpose (commemoration of Confederate leaders), it is highly contested due to its connections to racism (the KKK) and Lost Cause sympathizers, which opens politically charged conversations on history (what should be remembered and what should not). The contested nature of this symbolic structure makes it not only ripe for analysis but shows how more complicated public memory objects can

be analyzed via the heuristic as well. Still, we can even take it one step further and see how the first characteristic of the heuristic applies to “natural mnemonics,” or sites that have no human curation or creation. In certain places across the country and especially in the south, there are trees that are well known to have been used for lynchings during the Jim Crow era. The histories involving many of these spaces are murky, the details washed away with time, the actual trees hard to distinguish from others. Yet, these trees are often power mnemonic devices. Even when their history is questionable, the *memory* of what happened at these spaces persists. So while no individual can be blamed for “creating” the trees, the first quality of my heuristic still applies: How does the site demonstrate history in terms of memory? What sort of discourses stem from these natural mnemonics? Therefore, these sorts of questions embedded within the first characteristic can be put forth when there are clearly defined and located histories, such as with the BCRI, and when the histories and memories are little bit jumbled, as with lynching trees.

The second heuristic question (how does the site construct identity?) can be applied to more complicated and more natural mnemonics as well. For Stone Mountain and the Confederate symbols etched onto it, we see how easily the design draws people to visit it in support of the Lost Cause legacy. This is an important collective identity for many people in the South, which is what makes this mnemonic so special. But it is also what makes it highly contested. Believing Lost Cause sympathizers are engaged in a racist discourse, many detractors often protest and publicly object to the monument and its significance. Thus, in some contestants’ spaces, we can see how people not only come to identify with the symbol but how others come in a counter-identity claim, to protest the mnemonic’s meaning. Even when exploring a natural mnemonic’s site, we still see how

important identity claims are to their significance. The symbol that illustrates identity may not be man-made with a particular agenda, but it is still embedded in the site's memory. So, an infamous lynching tree, though not containing any identity claims for those who do not know its history or memory (since its symbolic value is based less on the material form and more on the history of the space or object), will still have collective identity value for those who understand its significance. This means that these sites are a lot more likely have localized appeals because the people who are most likely to understand its history will need to understand the local discourse. Therefore, the second heuristic question can lead to more insight into identity values based on symbolic interpretation, contestation, and local discourse.

Overall, my analysis on public memory as a method emphasizes that many memories, especially ones that are less curated or are based on natural mnemonics, generally only have impact on *local* audiences. These sites typically have no broader appeal because a general audience does not know the local history or would not understand the symbolic value of a natural mnemonic. This is important to realize because it demonstrates why my next chapter is vital: much of the analysis of Charles Moore, his impact and rhetorical arguments, will illustrate why only a local audience would understand certain aspects of the self-immolation. Public memory relies upon the local, as my heuristic demonstrates, and by investigating Moore's death through this lens, we will see the pulse of Grand Saline and the town's discourse on race and racism. Thus, if we were only to analyze Moore from more globalized perspectives or only through comparisons or only through a public record, we would miss much of his impact and argument.

Nevertheless, the heuristic and their subsequent questions prompt a method for investigating public memory in local contexts. This heuristic gives a vantage point in better understanding notions of circulation, locality, power, and audience, in relation to larger public memory constructs (such as a museum) to sites known for racial folklore (such as a lynching tree). I contend that this heuristic framework provides the rhetorician a way to localize a subject, but, again, I am not suggesting this is the only way to localize protest acts of extremism. But in many cases, and especially in the case of Moore, this method demonstrates how more delicate details make each act unique, rather than just emphasizing a global narrative. This means we can better understand the local constraints and rhetorical climate that made Moore's self-immolation possible and actuality for the community of Grand Saline. Moore's death offers us some interesting connections to common themes of self-immolation as I explained in Chapters 2 and 3, but as I show in the next chapter, we cannot claim to know the full effects of Moore--the way histories and narratives of the town influenced residents' perception of him and how he employed such narratives to make an argument about race--without seeing the influence of public memory on Moore's act and its interpretation. The heuristic I have composed above will help us see these more subtle influences in the next chapter.

### **The Heuristic, the Local, and Charles Moore**

In closing this chapter, I will begin my analysis of Moore utilizing the heuristic I created in the previous section. While this will not be my only examination of Moore from a local lens, I believe this will first show how Moore had an effect on public memory in Grand Saline and opens the door for the rest of my analysis that comes in the last chapter. The heuristic shows that while Moore's self-immolation was rhetorical in a

global sense, following the analysis of Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, we see rhetoric being displayed in local ways as well, especially in how Moore displays the history and memory of lynching and positions audiences in the “we are/are not racist” debate. Overall, this section displays Moore on a local stage and interacting with people of his hometown in a ways that the global discussion on Moore in previous chapters would be unable to do.

We will begin with the first part of the heuristic: How does the site situate history in terms of memory? In this particular case, we are looking specifically at the curation of Moore’s self-immolation in terms of history and memory. However, before answering this question it is important to understand the public memory of Moore in Grand Saline is unique in that the history of the town is based on memory rather than facts. This makes understanding the site’s history unique in that we are basing it off the public imaginary of the space rather than true events that we know happened there. While there might be other sites like this across America (especially in regards to memories of racism), Grand Saline is unique in their presentation of these sites. Insiders remember the racism of old in a way that allows them to look back on it fondly yet without having to claim themselves as racist. Therefore, in connection with the other memories in town, Moore’s memory embodies the public imaginary because he is the dead reminder of how these memories can lead to drastic conclusions. He takes the *history* of public memories in Grand Saline, the memories of massacres of black people that have been discussed at least before 1910, memories of lynchings that he heard in the 1940s, and the same tales I heard in the early-2000s, a history of memory spanning for over 100 years, and places them in the forefront of his self-immolation. In this circumstance, the question of these

tales being true or not simply does not matter because they produced a truth via action--a man killed himself believing them. That truth is undeniable. Thus, in some weird circumstance, Moore takes a history of memory and turns them into a truth for his insider audience. He uses the memory of racism in the town that almost every resident knows of and forces them to question the reasons why they continually share these stories and how they impact the town as well.

The consequences of Moore's death are that he makes the discourse of the town's racist history public. When people remember Moore, they are reminded of what he represents, the effects of the town's racist memories. In a sense, he opens up a meta-discourse on history and memory because people are faced with questions on the stories they have heard and the reality that a man willingly killed himself for these memories. This discourse is what often makes people so easy to dismiss the self-immolation--they are unable to see why someone would kill themselves for something that they are unsure is true or seems so distant. Racism does not impact the mostly white audience in Grand Saline on a daily basis. That discourse is unimportant to them in the present. But for those who do engage with his death, they become face-to-face with their own childhoods, the memories of their peers and elders, and their own memories of racism, tough tasks to participate in for most Americans (as seen in the broader discourse of race over the past two years). While the Bear Grounds has no public tributes or reminders of Moore, his presence still lingers there through the memory of residents, making some people confront their own versions of truth and history and others attempt to erase any part of his act from the history and memory of Grand Saline as well (as I discuss in the next chapter).



Next, we move to the second part of the heuristic: How does the object construct identity? In this case, how does the memory of Moore's self-immolation construct identity for his local audience? This question is much different than for many other sites of public memory because, arguably, identity is constructed in two different ways. For people who have never heard of Moore's self-immolation, his memory and the space, of course, have no impact on their identity because there are no open reminders of him there. However, identity is construed for those who know the story of Moore, understand his exigences, and choose to forget or erase him from their memory. They position themselves as believing racism is not a problem for Grand Saline, and this is often how they are able to move past having to actually deal with his death. The dismissal is an identity creation within itself; one built to combat progressive views of race and to defend one's own town. And this is where most of the local audience falls--saying their past is not real, Moore was crazy, and there are no problems in the town. Nevertheless, Moore still forces the issue. His death *makes* others respond with this dismissal, this identity creation. Yet even in dismissing Moore and the memories, the imaginary stays alive in their conversations and passing down of knowledge from generation to generation. Still this identity creations, of course, is not only a defensive positionality and mechanism but is also the easiest answer for many residents because it does not take much critical awareness to fall into this category.

However, there is a smaller audience in Grand Saline whose identities were altered or further entrenched in remembering Moore--those who believe that Moore died for something righteous or understood the problem in Grand Saline that most fail to see. They identify as labelling Grand Saline's race problem as real (in some capacity). For

this audience, Moore's legacy lives in the Bear Grounds and can be felt at Clark's Ferry and Poletown. The problems he died for are the same problems they remember hearing and seeing as kids or possibly even still know to be true today. Some of these people believe Grand Saline has an exceptional history of racism and believe many, if not all, of the memories of its racism are truth. Others even contend if the town's history is not real, they still have seen the racism first-hand in their interactions with locals and in schools. No matter where they fall, this collective audience believes there is something to the memories and history of racism in Grand Saline, and Moore's death gives them space to claim this with some validity. For some like Buddy Lambert the Bear Grounds has been forever altered into a space of racial protest. For others, they are able to remember the self-immolation as the tipping point of racial relations and understandings for the town. They can longer be masked over or referred to as tales because there is now a well-documented account of a man lighting himself on fire because of race problems, and that is undeniable. Even while they acknowledge Moore's death as pertaining to race, this does not necessarily mean they think he was "right" or "justified;" many still suggest he had to have problems to go this far (though they seem more empathetic towards him than those who just dismiss his act). So many of them may not validate Moore's death but do conclude that it is another memory in the long lineage of racial folklores in the town.

Taken together, my heuristic demonstrates some of the effects of Moore's death only a couple of years removed from the self-immolation act through understanding his impact on town members and their memory. It shows how Moore embodied his discourse and opened up challenges to the normal discussions of race in local contexts while also separating local audiences in two groups: those who dismiss Moore's actions and his

motives and those who believe there is more to racism in the town than most realize. Most importantly, it shows that Moore absolutely had an effect and affect for town members. Some questioned their own memories and histories of racism, and even for those who without doubt labeled him as "insane," they still had to acknowledge (in varying degrees) what he had done in the town. For rhetoricians, this analysis further shows how to analyze public memory discourse when tangled with acts of protest. My heuristic explores how we can take these grandiose acts and demonstrate how they have real consequences for local audiences, which is a line of inquiry often left out of protest rhetorics. Public memory methods are vital forms of local discovery that is often missing from our field, and my analysis in this chapter hopefully highlights what such methods can bring to the table for future analyses.

## **Conclusion**

Issues of memory, and more specifically, public memory, in rhetorical studies have evolved greatly over the years: While Antiquity often focused on remembering and forgetting as being important to the orator, more recent developments emphasize these acts' relationships with public, human-made objects. These inquiries have shaped the ways people remember collectively in contemporary terms, and with the recent inclusion of race, the field of rhetoric has placed the framework for better interpreting public memory. Specifically, I believe public memory gives scholars access to research more localized discourses, such as circulation, power structures, and audiences. And the heuristic I provided above gives clear ways to study these discourses as they exist within extreme acts of protest. In my application of this heuristic to Charles Moore's self-immolation, we find the various rhetorical issues that Moore brings up with the town,

how he positions himself and town members, and he utilizes memory and history in his argument that the town still has racial issues. And while this heuristic provides us insightful analysis on Moore's self-immolation, there are other key aspects of Moore's death (such as the public memories of racism in Grand Saline and the application of these memories in Moore's own act) that will be taken up in my final chapter.

Studying self-immolations generally provides researchers and audiences alike a sense of commonality: we see how these acts of protest often inform one another. We have seen how Moore's death follows in line with the exigencies of other self-immolators who have died around the world and has employed similar rhetorical arguments and appeals in attempt to make it effective. But is that really the extent of his act and death? Was his death simply a product of the history and lineage of self-immolation abroad or were there other local contexts, like the culture and racism in Grand Saline that made his death more local? Were there already discourses of self-immolation, racism, and folklore that place Moore's death in conversation with other public conversations occurring in Grand Saline? Moore's self-immolation already has some unique circumstances surrounding it because it was more about culture and racism than governmental oppression and in a completely different part of the world than where most self-immolations occur. Thus, if we dig deeper into the underlying issues at stake, we can see how the local has a major impact on the individual's death. No person moves or acts solely on the global stage; we are all instruments constructed in our local environments, produced and cultivated in light of discourses that inhabit the communities in which we exist.

Chapter 5, the final chapter of my dissertation, will try to answer these questions

in relation to Moore. I illustrate the public memories of racism that exist in town and how they affected me and other town members to situate how a language of public memory first exists in the town. Then I argue that the language of Moore's letter to Grand Saline, the place he chose to die, and the extreme nature of his death (all public memory arguments) were all part of his argument that the town had racial issues that still haunt them. I utilize public memory in this sense to examine how insiders and outsiders differ in their interpretations of race, public memory, and Charles Moore's self-immolation and how this split is what causes so many debates and issues within the town.

**Chapter 5: Charles Moore and the Imaginary: The Construction of Public Memory  
in Grand Saline**

"To bury lynching and racial violence in our collective memory requires us to kill once again the memory of the killing, to violate the victims anew by acting as if their pain never happened and their lives didn't matter."  
--Anne Rice, "How We Remember Lynching"

"The imaginary is what tends to become real."  
---André Breton

In sixth grade, after I hit my first growth spurt and looked like a young high schooler, I remember becoming infatuated with the game of football. I played for a peewee football team and thought I was invincible on the field (a product of being 5'10" when everyone else was much shorter and smaller). To further inspire myself, I had my parents buy me a copy of Dave Campbell's *Texas Football* magazine, one of the most coveted magazines for football lovers because it ranks every single high school team in the state and gives previews for the college and professional teams as well. I soon cut out images of LaDainian Tomlinson, Emmitt Smith, Michael Irvin, and other football players from the magazine and taped them up in my room. The glory they received as football gods in *Texas Football* represented everything I wanted to become: tough, strong, masculine--the ideal football player. In the small town of Alba, a place ten miles north of Grand Saline, however, my dreams could never be actualized, at least to twelve-year old me. Alba's football program lacked any notable football tradition--well, except a tradition

of not being good. Alba often finished seasons with 2-8 and 1-9 records, and many times they went winless. They were the exact opposite of the likes of Tomlinson and Smith hanging on my walls, and as I aged and started playing football for the seventh grade team, I realized how much I wanted to be a part of a winning tradition. I craved for something better.

In the city of Grand Saline, football dominated not only Friday nights in September and October but also late-November and early-December, as the team often had deep playoff runs. Grand Saline earned football fame in the 1990s, with many successful playoff victories, and as the new century rolled around, they were set to remain a powerhouse with popular coach Elliott Carter at the helm. My mom and I decided moving to Grand Saline would be the best decision for me as an athlete and as a student, and when we moved to town in 2001, I realized how deep the football veins run through it: MTV, one of the most popular television channels during my teenage years, had just completed a small documentary on Grand Saline's football program for the show *True Life*. This episode, titled "I'm a Football Hero," focused on the regional playoff round between Grand Saline and Celina in Texas Division 2A. The episode followed leaders on each team (such as the captains and coaches) and moved back and forth between both schools as they practiced and prepared for the playoff game. All of this culminated in the video footage of the football game itself. Unfortunately, Grand Saline lost in a terrible defeat, but the publicity of the show, the idea that MTV actually took part in highlighting and sharing the culture of Grand Saline football, developed into a proud part of the town's memory.

In 2001, when I enrolled in Grand Saline Middle School, I quickly learned of the

legendary television episode. My middle school friends, wrapped in their love and passion for high school football just like me, all acquired recorded VHS tapes of the show. On any given weekend night, we could be found sitting around the television set, watching the tape, paying tribute to the football gods of our small town. Ultimately, we hoped this would be us one day and that maybe, just maybe, we could avenge the loss in the regional playoff round. As a middle schooler, I specifically remember idolizing these high school players and coaches. I even still remember many of their names: Coach Carter Elliott, linebacker Matt Hazel, quarterback Zach Elliott, and others. While it might not be that weird for young teenagers to worship high school football players, it was not just my peers and me watching this episode from time-to-time; no, teachers, parents, elders, and many residents in town participated in enshrining this story too.

These memories of football legends, the re-watching of the small documentary, and the circulation of these memories all exist within the framework of public memory that I describe in the previous chapter. Of course, a major pop culture icon like MTV filming in a small town would be deemed "news-worthy" for most of rural America, but the fact that many citizens in town recall and remember Grand Saline's documentary five, ten, and even fifteen years later illustrates how public memory forms and circulates. The residents of the city remember this event because it remains vital in understanding their communal identity, culture, and ideology. They keep the artifact of the recorded show, the document demonstrating Grand Saline's heritage and passion for Friday night lights, for their own memory and to engage with outsiders on the issue for years to come. The show evolved into a part of the town's proud history because of this affinity with the culture of football. These citizens rely on the public memory of "I'm a Football Hero" to



fashion themselves as insiders in town, as individuals who represent the tradition of Grand Saline's football culture.

As I stated in the last chapter, public memory can be defined as a "shared sense of the past," as Stephen Browne writes, "fashioned from symbolic resources of community and subject to its particular history, hierarchies, and aspirations" (248). The city of Grand Saline, like many towns and larger cities across America who have a strong football tradition, utilizes the public memory of football to shape its identity and to remember when MTV decided the town was important enough to film. The football field itself becomes a site for commemoration for this shared identity and also symbolizes where memory-making takes place. Various citizens visit the field, returning to visions of the glory days of high school football and recalling the vestiges of their past--memories of their playing days, the prestige of being beloved by the community, and the memory of receiving national exposure. The football field sustains the status of public memory as it gives visitors a sense of this shared identity through the championship banners placed on the west side of the field, recalling each and every time Grand Saline made the playoffs and how far the run lasted, and the talk amongst town residents at any given occasion. The recorded MTV show and YouTube clips of the show (which have now been taken offline) also sustain the public memory as a material media object for citizens to commemorate and relive as well. With every occasional viewing of the show, residents keep the memory of football glory days alive.

Material objects curated through the media, such as episode "I'm a Football Hero," sustain the circulation of public memory. While the physical sites where public memories occurred (or are sustained) preserve memory on their own, the circulation of

media objects illustrates another way that public memory is preserved. In a way, these objects preserve memory by giving audiences a chance to revisit the memory but also keep the memory alive through wide circulation: in the case of Grand Saline, the videotaped memory remains important for citizens to share with one another and outsiders. While stories about these football gods can be told and retold and garner the town's image of itself, the videotape brings extra validity to the football legends of Grand Saline. Residents claim that their passion for football is absolutely unique, and the tape serves as recorded evidence to prove their point. Thus, the media object becomes an important variable in sustaining public memories and adding validity to these memories' claims. The media has the rhetorical power to keep information in the public sphere by creating artifacts that are utilized in maintaining memories. In this particular case, however, we see that this media form not only preserved the recorded history, and the public record, but also preserved what we might call the football *imaginary* of Grand Saline: the citizens' deep love for Friday night games and the way citizens create "football gods" out of high school male athletes. Through the video, residents can demonstrate not only how wonderful these football players were, how fabled their coach was, but also how united the town is behind the idea of football as a cultural phenomenon.

In that cultural sense, the football imaginary regulates the public memories and circulation of curated media. Randall Bush defines the imaginary as "the relation between the speaker (or subject) and community *through* language," emphasizing the rhetorical relationship between the individual-subject *imagining* something to identify with the community audience (284). For my purposes, I define an imaginary as the way a

collective group visualizes its own culture. The retelling of public memories represents an act of the imaginary--a way for people to fashion themselves within a community. That is, residents keep certain public memories in circulation as a means of shaping and reinforcing a community identity that aligns with its imaginary. For instance, I contend that Grand Saline has a football imaginary because the people of Grand Saline place football on a pedestal, making it more than just a game. They view football as essential to their collective identity and recite memories of football to connect their lives with other people in town.

I combine this work on the imaginary and public memory in this chapter through extending the work of my previous chapters. First, I localize the self-immolation in Grand Saline and argue that this localization illustrates how Moore was influenced by racial public memories of Grand Saline (the racial imaginary of the town, as I call it) and utilized them to persuade residents via his self-immolation. In the first section, I lay out the various dimensions of the racial imaginary and racial public memories as they affect town residents (insiders) and people outside the town (outsiders), which allows me to specify the central claim of this chapter in the second section: that Moore utilized local appeals and arguments in his self-immolation. The third section maps the two vital public memories of Grand Saline, coupled with autoethnography analysis, underscoring how racism pervades the town's imaginary. My fourth section then connects the public memories of Grand Saline to Moore, emphasizing how he was persuaded to self-immolate because of the racist imaginary that lingered in town. Finally, the fifth section analyzes the various rhetorical public memory arguments (discursive arguments in his letter to town and nondiscursive arguments in the location of his death and extremist

performance) that Moore employed to persuade residents to move past their imaginary. Together, this chapter underscores the importance of localizing protest acts and places Moore on stage in Grand Saline, showing him speaking specifically to a Grand Saline audience.

### **I. The Dynamics of Public Memories and Imaginaries**

Though public memories and imaginaries are interrelated concepts with similar features, I view them as having different dynamics. Public memories are shaped by collective recollections that demonstrate some sort of *past-present self*; public memories connect us to the past through various identity claims in the present (e.g., believing that glorified football memories illustrate why people identify with their town). Public memories occur when a collective present identifies with a past moment or identity. Whereas public memory draws from the past for the present, imaginaries are collective ideologies mobilized for a *future-present self* and are comprised of multiple public memories. Put simply, imaginaries are visions of who people want to be and thus believe they are because they have the public memories to prove it. People shape these imaginaries. On this end, communities often strive for public memories and their resulting imaginaries to be congruent--to make sense either by continuity or by contrast through change, and the emphasis on this congruency revolves around a shared, but often tacit, ideology. Before pulling together a detailed analysis of Charles Moore's protest in terms of both public memory and the imaginary, I want to offer first a working theory for both concepts in Grand Saline, with particular attention to the role of local perceptions in contrast to perceptions from outside the community.

Returning to the role of football described above, the MTV documentary and the

championship banners mark public memories that demonstrate the present connection between town identity and football history (the *past-present* relationship); the endorsement of these various public memories also exhibit a sense of the town's identity in terms of who they are and who they will be. This process explains, in part, why even when the football team is no good, the stands are still packed on most Friday nights in the fall: fans are motivated by the idea that the previous glory can still be attained someday (the *future-present* relationship). Thus, even at the level of regular community gatherings, the town's ideology plays out in this imaginary. The people believe in their rural, rugged lifestyle--the epitome of East Texas life--and the past and potential glory on the football field symbolizes this set of beliefs. In this sense, residents look to their past to build a sense of their future; they do so because their ideology shapes public memory to fit congruently with their imaginary.

To reiterate: imaginaries are built on multiple public memories constructed from a clear ideology. Abraham P. DeLeon makes a similar point in his article "Spaces of Terror and Death," arguing that the various public memories revolving around 9/11, such as the giant boulder placed in Pennsylvania where United Airlines Flight 93 crashed, have created a new American imaginary in which we accept pervasive surveillance based upon our communal fears of another American tragedy. The various reminders of 9/11, including the phrase "Never Forget," justify these means for a more forward-looking future. Our fear of the past, coupled with multiple public memories of this tragedy, give us the opportunity to construct a future based upon our collective imaginary of life without another tragedy. However, we can also see how public memories without a strong ideological bent do not always result in a discernible imaginary. One only has to

go up the road from Grand Saline to Alba, where the town maintains the public memory that Bonnie and Clyde once stayed in a town hotel in the early-1900s. Currently, citizens visit the public library to hear the stories and see memorabilia related to the two outlaws. While people visit the library and sustain this public memory, no one would argue that the people in town adhere to the criminal lifestyle of Bonnie and Clyde. It is a public memory that reflects the town's past-present identity, but it has little bearing on its future. In this vein, such isolated pockets of public memory do not necessarily conjure an imaginary. Alba's identity and community ideology are not strongly situated within these memories--especially since Bonnie and Clyde were not from Alba--and this distance allows the people of Alba to exhibit why they enjoy sharing these stories with others. As these brief examples illustrate, imaginaries can be constructed from the combination of public memories and ideologies, even when the memories are not favorable. But most importantly to understanding the rest of this chapter, we should note that the perception of a community's imaginary can change depending upon whether individuals represent an insider or outsider point of view.

To begin understanding the situation in Grand Saline, we need to first situate the problem. People all across Texas have heard of Grand Saline. I have personally spoken with people over 250 miles from the town, people who should have never heard of a community of 3,000 people, and yet they believe this town is exceptionally racist. This exceptionalism actually does not solely stem from the idea that Grand Saline has a horrid, racist history; it actually comes from the idea that Grand Saline's troubling history might still be engrained in its culture today. Outsiders often still fear that Grand Saline might harm people of color who enter the town. While most outsiders do not believe Grand

Saline still carries out lynchings, they have first-hand or second-hand stories of contemporary racism (such as being yelled at, spit on, and called “nigger” during sporting events, etc.) that maintain the town’s racism as exceptional. These contemporary stories are utilized as self-defense, a warning for minority communities to let their members understand that they should stay away from that area, and demonstrate a split between town insiders and outsiders and their perceptions of racism in Grand Saline.

Once in place, imaginaries can continue to shape perceptions for both community insiders and outsiders, widening the ideological differences. While there can be many different reasons for such a divergence to occur, in the case of Grand Saline, I argue that the racial public memories make insiders more susceptible to believing racism is not a problem because of their unique understanding of the town’s culture and their failure to reflect on their own limited perception. In this case, insiders understand the public memories and imaginary and frame them differently than outsiders: insiders believe the memories and imaginary are unimportant and are not connected to the present. Insiders discount negative perceptions from outsiders as people “just talking” or “not being one of them,” choosing not to acknowledge the damning effect of their own historically disconnected imaginary. Put into other terms, insiders might be aware of their *future-present* imaginary and its effects outside the community, but they refuse to connect it to any *past-present* identity shaped by the process of public memory (though, arguably, they know outsiders perceive the connection as real). As I will show, insiders defend their position not only by arguing that outsiders are sensationalizing Grand Saline but also by privileging their own insider status while dismissing notions that they lack self-criticism.

First, insiders hear outsider stories of racism in Grand Saline (via media such as

television reports and news stories) as sensationalist, believing the stories that people tell are just fabrications used to disparage the community as unusually racist. They believe in their own limited brand of post-racial ideology: that they are not discriminating against people of color in town, and that people of color are the ones to blame if they do not live in Grand Saline. Of course, propagating this belief can itself be an act of racism.<sup>33</sup> In multiple interviews I conducted, insiders have argued that their history is not exceptional and to claim “racism occurred everywhere back in the day” to deflect any agency they have in changing the problem in Grand Saline. Ultimately, they contend that their insider status gives them a better understanding of the town’s culture and history, making them more credible authorities compared to outsiders who make claims of racism. Insiders argue that their insider status gives them a better comprehension than outsiders. They know the truth; everyone else is wrong; and they have agency as insiders in charge of their own imaginary.

Second, while insiders resist claims of racism based on an outsider imaginary, they fail to reflect on the effect of sustaining their own imaginary. Rather, they constantly battle claims about their community without truly understanding why these declarations of racism exist in the first place. For a town to be “known as one of the most racist towns in the state of Texas,” as writer Michael Hall stated to me, it must want (at some level) to remain oblivious--whether conscious or not. They must completely misunderstand their racial issues. As a result of this failure of reflection, a failure of self-awareness, insiders shut down any conversation about the culture of the town. One person I interviewed

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<sup>33</sup> Many people have written about this type of colorblind racism, including famously Eduardo Bonilla-Silva. It is important to note in the use of post-racial racism here that the town’s whiteness and failure to combat their racist perception could be perceived as racist within itself.



about these issues, Wayne Sloan, claimed the town had no racial issues and then told me to “not hit any Mexicans with my car” when leaving his house “because they are the only ones who work with me.” He failed to see the irony in both of these statements, and encounters like this are not unusual; they do reflect the town’s culture as a whole. The people in town hold to their insider status as a “trump card” in the arguments over the competing imaginaries and do not consider how their various memories and culture have an impact outside the community. All of these dynamics--the rebuttals, their agency as insiders, and their lack of self-awareness--mark the divergent ideology between the residents of Grand Saline and their outsider counterparts.

On the other side, outsiders hold to an imaginary of Grand Saline based on the same public memories from insiders, other outsiders, and media coverage. This negative perception overshadows their views of the town. The outsiders’ own ideology that racism is still a problem today allows them to see the presence of Grand Saline’s racism as consistent with their own beliefs. In this sense, the outsider imaginary connects the town’s past, present, and future: it is all that they were, all that they are, and all that they will be. Outsiders believe in the racist culture of Grand Saline as exceptional, claim they are the ones grounded in historical awareness, and connect the issues in Grand Saline to problems occurring around America. Outsiders point to their understanding of racism and the continued legacy of the culture of Grand Saline as peculiar in relation to the rest of society. Therefore, while insiders suggest that their locally privileged status allows them to see the “truth” that they are not racist, outsiders assert the reality of Grand Saline’s disconnected public memory and imaginary. Ultimately, one could speculate that outsiders aim to connect the issues of Grand Saline to contemporary problems involving

#BlackLivesMatter, the murders of young black men by the hands of police, and continued oppression of minority populations in America to show why this particular, persistent cultural dynamic remains a blemish in the 21st century. Their understanding of these American racial issues as real problems (compared to many Grand Saline folks who might disagree), gives them agency to say that Grand Saline is wrong and nothing has changed in the community.

Thus, a framing process, based upon ideological divergence, remains key to both how insiders and outsiders understand a community's imaginary, especially in Grand Saline. While both groups would acknowledge Grand Saline has public memories and histories of racism that are undeniable<sup>34</sup>, they differ in how they frame these issues as connected to the present. Many community insiders, especially white people, frame racism as part of their past but are eager to bypass its role in the present and suggest that it no longer influences who they are. To do otherwise would be to risk being culpable in the maintenance of racism within the community. The guilt would be on them. However, I believe most are not aware of this; rather, they maintain the imaginary in Grand Saline because of the threat to the imaginary if it were to be linked to public memory: who they will be will be different than who they were.<sup>35</sup> Outsiders from the community, especially people of color, are more willing to suggest that Grand Saline has never reconciled these histories because their racism is still ingrained in the town's public memories and imaginary. The constant circulation of these memories, along with no

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<sup>34</sup> Even insiders who say that Grand Saline does not have a "history" of racism would acknowledge this has been their perception for quite some time.

<sup>35</sup> One could argue for a more heinous intent here--that Grand Saline residents are okay with this perception because it ensures that black people will not move into their community. So while they might be labelled as racist without much evidence, they are okay with that if it keeps other minority populations outside their community.

public acknowledgement of these issues, leads them to believe the culture is the same.

Recent scholarship in Rhetoric and Composition has similarly investigated the means of rhetorical imaginaries. For example, imaginaries have been used by Chicana scholars to understand the way citizenship is "defined through public discourses that ritualize national identity and constitute the borders of the imagined community" (Cisneros 30). In this article "(Re)Bordering the Civic Imaginary," Cisneros demonstrates how identity intertwines with the imagined; we constitute ourselves through the way we visualize ourselves. Others, such as Linh Dich, have examined the ways "that raced groups imagine writing spaces and audiences in order to better comprehend alternative ways of shaping or accessing public spheres," making the case that an imaginary provides space to shape the self and writing (87). While these texts are helpful in constructing my own view of the imaginary in Grand Saline, I focus mostly on the community notion of the imaginary: I contend there are multiple public memories that frame a cohesive, racialized imaginary in town. Comparing my work to Cisneros, I am less focused on how citizenship is defined by imagined communities but rather how communities fashion themselves positively or negatively through the pervasive nature of public memories. I utilize the concept of imaginaries to situate not only how people in town envision themselves but how they produce and recirculate memories with a vision of their past-present community in mind and how that affects the outsider vision of Grand Saline's future-present too.

The rest of this chapter analyzes how Moore meant to disrupt the insider imaginary in Grand Saline by altering the town's perception of itself through occupying and performing a presence of both an insider and an outsider, attempting to persuade

people in town that he is one of them, that they are racist, and that they will be perceived as racist until they choose to change. By investigating how the racial public memories, the racial imaginary, and ideology work together, in the rest of this chapter, I will illustrate how Moore utilizes these themes to argue against Grand Saline's culture.

## **II. Invoking Public Memory, Challenging the Imaginary**

During my first Christmas break at TCU, in the winter of 2012-13, I returned to East Texas to see my family and friends. On one particular day, my high school buddies and I went back to Grand Saline (not many of us live there anymore) and decided to play touch football on the same field that we played high school football on six and seven years earlier. I remember distinctly looking to the football banner in the west end zone and seeing that the school had made the playoffs only once since we left high school in 2006. In our playing years, we made the playoffs three of four years (barely missed out my junior season), and we discussed how we were the last good collective team to play on the field. Though we were not in the documentary, in our own way we were also legends: the final group that made the playoffs multiple years in high school. As we played touch football and realized our mid-20s bodies were not the same as they were in years prior, I thought about how it felt to take part in the story of Grand Saline, to be part of the memory of my hometown's heritage. That warm feeling helped me, and I am sure others, feel a part of a story larger than our own.

These types of public memories, like that of the legacy of football in Grand Saline, are ones that communities often openly cherish. They bring people together in a positive atmosphere and often are the driving forces of family, heritage, and locality for small towns and their inhabitants. But positive public memories are not the only ones that

contain the means necessary to form community and tradition--more horrific memories hold the same capacity as well. For the town of Grand Saline, I believe a different public memory creaks under the surface of the salt mines and tales of football heroism in town, one more sinister, and in many regards, more powerful. These are the public memories of racism, lynchings, and spectacle that supposedly occurred in the town's past. For insiders, they are not the easiest memories to discuss openly, but the memories maintain status through circulation (storytelling and folklore) and mnemonic devices (an old lynching bridge and the place in the woods where the KKK supposedly met). The main difference between the racist imaginary and the football imaginary in Grand Saline is that the football memories are moments of pride. Insiders are more willing to share these proud memories with outsiders because they represent something that the collective in Grand Saline wants to be known for.

However, the racist memories are moments of pain and the "dirty secret" everyone talks about with close friends and family members, but not with outsiders. Or if they do tell these to outsiders, as they were told to me when I moved to the town, they are presented to invite listeners to become insiders. Nonetheless, many outsiders have known these memories of racism for a few generations, presented as cautions for why people of color should never go Grand Saline. Thus, a divide persists in the ways that insiders and outsiders frame these memories. The secretive nature of these memories illustrates why this imaginary dominates Grand Saline's culture: outsiders are fascinated with the notion that this town's racism seems exceptional. Many East Texas towns have storied football traditions and legacies; not many East Texas towns have the long-lasting perception of racism that Grand Saline has.

I believe this imaginary of racism, understanding that the town has this bad reputation but that people believe they are not racist, shapes not only insiders' interpretation of Charles Moore's death but also was part of discourse Moore utilized in order to persuade residents to move past their racism. His death protest illustrates the conflicts and disconnection between the *past-present* public memories and the *future-present* imaginaries. Moore viewed the town's racist past connected to an indictment of the town in the present believing they have never changed, while most residents acknowledge Grand Saline's tumultuous history but believe it has no bearing on who they are today. He believed the public memories of the town--their circulation and preservation--created a persistent imaginary that affects the town even today. However, most people in town believe these memories have nothing to do with their present, which is why they overwhelmingly disregarded the aims of his self-immolation.

For the remainder of this chapter, I will investigate Grand Saline's public memory and imaginary through two different lenses: 1) How public memory and the imaginary affected Moore enough to lead him to self-immolate and 2) To what extent residents were persuaded by Moore's embedded arguments invoking public memory and the imaginary in his letter, the place of his death, and the extremist nature of self-immolation.

Specifically here, I contend that Moore was moved by the public memories before him, including the legends of public lynchings and the KKK. But Moore was not only persuaded by the public memories, but through his death he also utilized them to challenge Grand Saline to disavow its imaginary. In his letter to town, Moore specifically recalled the public lynchings of Grand Saline's history to remind them of the memories they tell; he chose to die in a space of racial angst, called the Bear Grounds, known for

racist beatings of black people; and he also employed an act of extremism, the fire, to symbolically re-stage the extremist, racially motivated deaths that occurred in the past. Together, the influence of racism in Grand Saline that Moore felt, the employment of these public memories through his actions, and the interpretations of Moore's act from the local audience illustrates public memory's and the imaginary's rhetorical capabilities, and this chapter attempts to demonstrate their impact.

The following discussion will center around the idea of *rhetorical climates*, focusing specifically on the racialized public memories in Grand Saline, how they affected Moore and affect other town members, and how Moore's own self-immolation adds to the memories of racism in town. I believe there are several interrelated pieces we must understand regarding the imaginary of Grand Saline, especially the rhetorical use of memories, circulation, preservation, place, and mnemonics as I have discussed earlier. Each of these issues contribute to and sustain the racial imaginary in Grand Saline and are important concepts in maintaining the memory of racism in the town for over 100 years. I will briefly illustrate some of the more prominent public memories revolving around racism in the town and will analyze their significance in keeping both the town's public memories and imaginary alive via selective circulation and preservation. I will then investigate how Moore perceived the racial memories in town and how he utilized them in his death, which will lead to the crux of this dissertation: understanding how Moore's self-immolation interferes, disrupts, and changes the legacy of racial public memories and the racial imaginary for the town of Grand Saline.

### **III. The Public Memories**

Two spatial public memories about Grand Saline captivate residents' imagination:

of black people being lynched and hanged at the Poletown Bridge and memories of the KKK holding outdoor rallies at Clark's Ferry. Every insider I have interviewed about the town, over seventy-five people, acknowledged these public memories in some capacity. Most of them know both memories and provided details for the narrative. A few of them know only bits and pieces, but they still know of them, nonetheless. I maintain that these public memories shape the imaginary of the town, and this interaction accounts not only for Moore's self-immolation but also for many of the residents' reactions to his death. More specifically, the recirculation of these memories is a 21st century practice that dulls perceptions of race and racism by normalizing how people in town talk about people of color. Simply by telling these memories over and over, insiders find ways to identify with the racism being regurgitated; they connect with the storytelling act and are prone to be desensitized to the racism being presented. Thus, if we can better understand how each of these public memories sustain and foster an imaginary, we can better understand how town members position themselves rhetorically after Moore' death. Along the way, I provide my own encounter with each space and its memory before providing interview accounts and historical context. Then I will explain their significance in building an imaginary for Grand Saline.

*Public Memory #1: Lynchings at Poletown*

Poletown is the place where the "white trash" live, or so goes the story in Grand Saline. Indeed, Poletown is one of the poorest neighborhoods in the area, composed of mostly trailer houses, un-mowed lawns, and unpaved roads, but otherwise is not much different than the rest of the town. On weekend nights, when my friends and I wanted to drink some beer, we would head over the Poletown Bridge to the bootlegger, an older



white man who lived in an old shack and would sell teenagers a beer for a dollar. This interaction made me associate this place with poverty, and there was always a degree of sadness in connection with it, knowing this place was subjected to the stereotypes of its name and location. Some would even just call the area "Po-town" ("po" for "poor"). However, the legend of the area's name supposedly came from a darker history. Long ago, as the memory goes, white people once hanged black people off the Poletown Bridge and then placed their decapitated heads on poles nearby. I remember there were a few places where poles stood in open fields when I surveyed this area in the 2000s, but they always looked newer to me, like poles that would be used to hang-dry clothes. Though I figured these were not the poles of old, I still could not help but imagine the spectacle of lynching that occurred in this area whenever I saw them. Only recently I learned that the name Poletown does not stem from anything remotely related to decapitated heads being placed on poles. A historical marker put up near the area around 2010 instead says it was named for the local workers who ran out of processed lumber to build houses so they had to use smaller, wooden poles for homes because larger timber was scarce ("Poletown and Rhodesburg Marker").

However none of the area is as famous as the old bridge. In the drive to Poletown, we would travel over a bridge about fifty feet in length that carried us over the train tracks that run parallel to Highway 80, the biggest road in town. The bridge consisted of a small wooden crossing that bends over the railroad tracks. On the north side of the tracks, in the background, a small storage complex and a small restaurant, Mr. B's BBQ, lie in the distance. On the south side of the tracks is the small rodeo grounds, which can hold probably five hundred people or so. The bridge itself was always a testy venture for

passengers: you either feared the whiplash that occurred bouncing over these old, wooden planks or you feared that this would be the time when the bridge actually fell. Since the bridge was so wobbly, any time you crossed it you prayed for your life, and it became a staple of jokes moving to and from town. But the bridge itself was not solely a representation of an older time or of a decaying edifice; rather, it represented a much more haunting past, a much more disturbing history: it is remembered for a heinous racialized memory, one that is highly contested.

I do not remember the first time I heard of Poletown or any of the other public memories in Grand Saline, but I knew of them soon after I moved to Grand Saline. By the time I could drive, Poletown Bridge was in my mental map of the town as it was for most residents. Besides being connected to poverty, the general space of Poletown represented racialized violence for me. I had often heard memories of the lynchings and hangings that took place there, how they would also hang the bodies from the bridge and let passing trains smack them--a way to tell other black people not to come to town. I took this memory as being true in middle and high school, suspecting that there probably weren't hundreds of these cases but confident that something bad had happened there. I also felt as if everyone who told me these stories presented them as facts. Thus, every time my car would *thud* over the rotted wood and unstable structure of the Poletown Bridge, I would imagine unnamed black people hanging from the bridge beneath me, waiting for passing trains to demolish their already lifeless bodies. The graphic nature of this memory still lingers today.

Most of the people I interviewed could recall similar memories of Poletown Bridge too. Some residents like Shirley Crawford recall being told that "they would

sometimes torture [black people] by throwing rocks at them, cutting them, or making them watch their other families members die before they [were lynched]." Crawford, a mixed race woman, even distinctly remembers being told these memories from peers who would laugh about the story. She states that she would often laugh rather than cry because she did not want people to know how much the cruelty and laughter bothered her. Most residents share the memory of these wretched pasts with a certain conviction that some version of this memory must be true. Though none of the residents could verify these stories they remember hearing them from peers, their community, and their families.

Other residents who believe Grand Saline does not have a racial problem, like Amanda Jones, remember the space of the Poletown Bridge a bit differently than those who see racism in the structure. Jones states, "I remember you had to go across the bridge next to Mr. B's BBQ and then you were suddenly in Poletown. Oh and I believe the name 'Poletown' originated from where black people would be hung by members of the KKK on poles in 'Poletown.' Once again I believe these are just stories. My great grandparents and grandparents lived in [Grand Saline] for decades and never saw or knew of these happenings." She continued, "I remember [these stories] when I was younger and I guess they were told when I was in high school, but I'm not positive. I guess [these stories are retold for] the same reason any fucked up story gets told over and over again: it's a part of the town's history, and perhaps it's a way for people to remember how things once were. I'm not sure." Jones still acknowledges the memory that most have heard and does not necessarily believe they are true or that the town has a racist culture. Yet she still connects it to "a way for people to remember how things once were," suggesting that people like to recall these horrific memories with a fondness in the present. Jones'

memories important reflect perceptions of the majority of Grand Saline: she reads the site as being racialized in the past but does not connect it to any wrongdoing in the present, believing the memories of old do not reflect the hearts of people in Grand Saline today.

Nonetheless, the historical account of the Poletown Bridge is documented only in fragments and seems to be a bit muddled. Only a few recorded histories of the town mention any black purging or lynchings, based on facts that could contain more verifiable evidence. Though a few sources mention lynchings in the area, not much evidence illustrates a strong history of racial murder as the persistent memory would suggest. Elvis Allen, a local historian, states that there were only two known deaths in the area--in the early 1900s, a white outlaw killed a white doctor and a black man he was treating because he felt the two should not interact. The outlaw put the doctor's head on a pole as a warning to others not to interact with black people, in any way. This true account, narrated from area's most reputable historian and historical records, suggests that people may have altered the original narrative to create a fictionalized memory, one in which multiple black murders were committed by the hands of white citizens rather than singular white murder by the hands of a white criminal (and, by omission, a black man who escapes the violence of Jim Crow vigilantism). The story of a white man killed and desecrated for showing cross-racial benevolence may have been discomfiting for locals: not just in showing the possibility of cross-racial sympathy but as a threat to white lives within the white community.

A similar memory about Poletown appears on the Van Zandt County Genealogical Society website and is written by Allen and other historians, titled "A Gunfight at the Circus." In this piece, Gloria Johnstone states that black people were the

first ones to build pole houses there in the late-1800s, when they worked in the salt mine but had to live outside the city limits. However, her history recalls stories of carnage where "at least two of the black race were killed" when the railroad came through town. She does mention the story of a white doctor being beheaded at the site as well. So while her history corroborates Allen's, she believes there is more truth to the accounts that Grand Saline has a history of racial violence. To complicate matters even more, an article published in the *Grand Saline Sun* in 1910 states that a large black massacre occurred in the salt flats right outside of town (which would have been a mile or two away from the Poletown area). The editor of the paper claimed that he was not there but he was told by multiple witnesses that it was true. He writes,

When the [Civil War] closed negroes were in the majority in Grand Saline--being known then as Jordan Saline.... But when the surrender came and the negro was set free many of them were left here by the white people and this resulted in the negro getting a treatment which has kept him away from here until this day.

Those who know something of tohse [sic] days say that there were enough dead negroes thrown into the lake on the Saline prairie for the bones to line its entire bottom.

One could argue that such a "treatment" kept black people from living in town for over a century. This newspaper evidence is a second-hand account, but it provides fodder for the racist underpinnings of Grand Saline's public memory. It is not far-fetched to believe that poor black workers were displaced by poor white workers around the turn of the century in the area, and that with these changes, fights and deaths would take place. However, local historian Allen dismisses the story completely as sensationalism, claiming that the

entire *Sun* account is fabricated. He argues it is just the editor trying to sell papers. As a researcher doing historical work,<sup>36</sup> I am unsure how I feel about the accuracies of these accounts. As a scholar invested in public memory and circulation, I am astounded by the reality that even if these memories are false, they have been preserved in the media and circulated through public memory for over 100 years, which makes the persistence of the town's public memories seem even more exceptional. I believe this endurance illustrates how pervasive the public memories are for the town, being preserved and circulated for decades, from insiders who believe the stories to be false and from outsiders who perceive this memory as truth.

These public memories are circulated via word of mouth by people in town and even some people in neighboring towns. While many insiders believe these memories are "harmless," I argue the memories have been passed through generations to build a public memory for Grand Saline, one insisting that racialized violence was once a major part of the town, historically, but it is simply framed differently by insiders and outsiders in the present. Many current residents might argue they are not presently racist, and they may point back to these memories as pure fiction, or maybe that racism was once in the town but is not anymore, permitting a connection to the *present-past* but believing it has no influence on outsider perceptions and the *future-present*. These memories confirm what outsiders have heard for decades: Grand Saline was once racist, is still racist, and will always be racist. They see the public memories disconnected to the town's imaginary and its *future-present*. The framing of the past reveals the differences between insiders' and

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<sup>36</sup> Outside of these few recorded instances, there is not much more historical research about the town I can find (including archival work at the Van Zandt County Genealogical Society Library).

outsiders' impression of Poletown, but we can arguably see this circulation and preservation as a racist practice because it keeps racism, black corpses, and historically forgivable white bodies as a living presence in Grand Saline. And the same logic applies for the memories of the KKK at Clark's Ferry.

*Public Memory #2: The KKK at Clark's Ferry*

Clark's Ferry, an old dirt turnaround in the woods at the Sabine River, does not actually exist in incorporated Grand Saline; instead, one has to travel seven miles north to get there, down roads that were paved long ago and dirt crossings that consist of more jagged rocks than actual dirt. The space itself is nothing incredible. Trees edge the turnaround as it reaches the frequently dry Sabine River, and the only unusual aspect of this spot is the high volume of traffic that takes the turnaround on any given weekend evening. Though the place might appear as any other path through the woods, this is no ordinary road; rather, it signifies the embodiment of the KKK for many locals, representing the space where the group supposedly held meetings and maybe still does. I spent many nights in my youth taking this beaten path to Clark's Ferry on weekends. Sometimes, it was just an escape for us to drink beer and mess around in the woods without any adult supervision and without any fear of the cops catching us, but other times we visited the location for an entirely different purpose: hoping to catch glimpses of the KKK in action.

The legend of Clark's Ferry consists of two different memories: one an origin memory and one the legend of the KKK. The origin memory states that a long time ago people lived in a neighborhood in the woods across the Sabine River. A bus drove out there one day to drop off students on a ferry that would take them across the river. Well,

unfortunately, the ferry flipped over and all the children drowned, along with Clark, who owned the ferry. The name "Clark's Ferry" soon came to mean the turnaround at the river bed, near the spot where Clark and the children supposedly drowned. However, just the physical space of Clark's Ferry reveals some big lapses in the story (similar to the origin memory of Poletown). Elvis Allen states that while there was once a bridge there, no one ever drowned at the site. This makes sense because the Sabine River never seems more than a few feet deep (since Texas always seems to be in a drought) and from bank to bank, the river was only about fifteen to twenty feet wide, making it seem improbable that anyone would drown in this place. In an article in the *Grand Saline Sun* titled "Once upon a time....," Gloria Johnstone, local historian and affiliate of the Van Zandt County Library of Genealogy, stated that no ferry existed at Clark's Ferry and many people attempting to cross the river had to follow "on down the river to the Golden crossing where Mr.....[Clark] Goens plied a boat on the river" (2). The history seems to align more with Johnstone's and Allen's viewpoint than narrative of the public memory. Still, some residents, such as Alissa Sanders, state that "[the bus accident] actually happened and as kids we were all scared that something like that might happen to us, even though we didn't have to use a ferry to get to school." Though the memory has the right amount of fear and legendary tone to keep it in circulation, all recorded evidence suggests that no one ever truly drowned at Clark's Ferry.

But the origin memory was not what drove kids to wander out into the woods at night; instead, the more recent memories of Clark's Ferry as a secret KKK meeting spot draws a parade of cars to take the path to the riverbed. In the early 20th century, during the post-Reconstruction era, the KKK had a revival in America. Linton Weeks of



National Public Radio writes that in the 1920s, the KKK was often viewed as social club, illustrating the racial segregations of the time and how pervasive the culture reflected with other individuals. In this sense, it was normalized. Ever since I moved to Grand Saline, I heard of KKK meetings that took place in the heart of the night, and most people insisted these meetings took place at Clark's Ferry. The historical accuracy of the KKK memories holds up a bit more strongly than the origin memory. Multiple oral histories confirm that people have seen the KKK out there at night, including one instance recorded in a *Houston Chronicle* article on Grand Saline written in 1993, during its housing segregation problems. Michael Sauseda, a 20 year old resident of the town, claimed that "he and some high school friends once drove down a local country road to view a burning cross with hooded Klansmen around it. Klan activity no longer is out in the open, and most local residents aren't racially bigoted" (qtd. in Stewart). Others swear that they have either seen the KKK themselves, lurking in the woods at night, or have known others that have seen them before. While there is no hard evidence of the KKK meeting at Clark's Ferry, it is the preservation and circulation of these narratives that keep the memory intact.

Many people I interviewed who felt Grand Saline has a racial issue could recall memories about Clark's Ferry being a site of racism. Brianna Dotson, an individual who said that Grand Saline is "absolutely" a racist town, recalled that "Clark's Ferry is a ghost story about the area." After remembering the origin memory of Clark's Ferry, she stated, "There are also stories about the KKK and Clark's Ferry. They say that the KKK used that area to torture and kill countless black men and women. They say you can hear their screams, often likened to the sound of a panther screaming." Other adult respondents,

Sam Adams and Tracy Lunsford, illustrate this point as well. They acknowledge the fear associated with these memories and that the KKK supposedly had a major presence there. In many ways, the lack of hard evidence supporting these memories does not matter as much as the ongoing impact of people who believe the memories are grounded in reality.

The memory of Clark's Ferry means different things to insiders and outsiders. Insiders again take this memory to be a "joke" or "tall-tale" and suggest the KKK does not have any meetings in the Grand Saline area. They do believe the KKK once had a big presence in the area but also believe the town has moved past this hate group. Bert Fite, the *Grand Saline Sun* editor, states that KKK would never march in town anymore because the town does not want them now: "We have a black president. We are past this." His position parallels what most insiders think about this memory: it is a history of the town but has no bearing on their present. Such memories function by contrast, attempting to say "that was then, this is now." Outsiders, however, connect them more to the pervasive imaginary and the *future-present* perceptions beyond Grand Saline. Many black people I spoke with still believe (without any proof) that Grand Saline has a KKK problem, and it is conceivable that Grand Saline will be perceived this way in the future because the town has not actively combatted this perception--and tacitly condones it by sustaining its insider memories. Once again, insiders circulating these public memories with one another distort the past and diminishes its present presence; knowing the past and seeing insider distortions as forms of denial, outsiders perceive Grand Saline as a threat and cultivate its racial public memories and imaginary as being exceptional.

Together, the memories of Clark's Ferry and Poletown place Grand Saline in an odd racial climate--one where insiders believe their memories have no rhetorical value

but where outsiders see them as epistemic, as being real, as being evidence of Grand Saline's racism. Insiders know the public memories, know how they are perceived by outsiders, yet do not want to confront how these stories distort the past and influence the present imaginary of racism in town. And I argue that the memories themselves are an act of racism because they perpetuate the violence (and threat of violence) done towards people of color in the past. Both the memory of the KKK and the memory of the lynching at Poletown do not emphasize the moral, ethical, or legal dimensions of either of these actions; actually, both tales are often told with glee or as a joke. This makes it easy for insiders to dismiss the rhetorical capacity of the stories, and it suggests how many locals get caught in a racist trap: any positive images of people of color deteriorate by solely emphasizing memories of their deaths. In another way, this also allows white people to keep people of color afraid of their town because the violent, racist content--paired with an entertainment mode of delivery--serves as a warning for minorities. Both an "innocent" joke and a menacing historic narrative, the message to people of color is that they should not be in Grand Saline (or only live on as absent bodies, corpse objects in local stories). The Sundown Town lives on in the stories they tell. This process ensures that outsiders' imaginary and perception of Grand Saline keeps people fearful, without clearly attributing agency to any one individual or group: the places of public memory allow insiders to simultaneously disavow and sustain Grand Saline's racist past.

As I will discuss below, we can see the proliferation of the racial imaginary and these racist practices in Grand Saline as being a catalyst for Moore's self-immolation because he would have no reason to die in that parking lot had it not been for the memories he had taken in over the years. And thus, this is where Moore attempted to

disrupt Grand Saline's internal imaginary: by simultaneously occupying, embodying, and performing both insider and outsider roles, he attempted to force the town to acknowledge its problems, connect them to perceptions from outsiders, and set the conditions for a vision of reconciliation. In the next section, I discuss how "insider" Moore was affected by the memories of Grand Saline so much that it caused him to sacrifice his life for others and, I show how "outsider" Moore hoped to hold a mirror to Grand Saline to compel both insider and outsider imaginaries toward convergence.

#### **IV. Memory, Moore, and Persuasion**

Before moving on to understanding the perceptions of Moore's death, we should recall Moore's response to multiple exigencies to see how public memories and the imaginary affected him first. One of my arguments in this dissertation is that we need to localize acts of extremism, and in the case of Moore, we can see how public memories greatly affected his decision to self-immolate. Moore's notes, archives, and own words reveal how Grand Saline's imaginary, especially the highly volatile public memories, affected him personally. In this section, I discuss how these public memories altered Moore's relationship with his hometown and his understanding of race and racism. One of the key aspects of this chapter is to argue that there are real consequences to racist public memories, even when many or most people can dismiss them. The process of their creation can result in a racist imaginary which alters public perception for insiders and outsiders. For Moore, the memories of lynching at Poletown and memories of the KKK moved him enough to sacrifice his own life for racial reconciliation.

##### *Memories of Poletown*

Memories, even when they are not one's own, can carry horrific consequences.

The pain of these memories can be amplified when we believe that others have not learned from them. Moore decided to self-immolate not just in response to the various, broad exigencies I covered in Chapter 2 but because the localized public memories were at odds with the present-day realities in his mind. Hence, his letter to Grand Saline left on the windshield of his car addresses how public memories prompted him to self-immolate. He writes near the beginning:

When I was about 10-years-old, some friends and I were walking down the road toward the creek to catch some fish, when a man called "Uncle Billy" stopped us and called us into his house for a drink of water—but his real purpose was to cheerily tell us about helping to kill "niggers" and put their heads up on a pole. A section of Grand Saline was (maybe still is) called "Poletown," where the heads were displayed. It was years later before I knew what the name meant.

Moore's letter speaks directly to a pain located in Grand Saline. As a kid, he remembered an "Uncle Billy" figure telling him about lynching black people at Poletown, which coincides with the memories most know about the area. One must question, however, especially when understanding the strong lineage of memories in Grand Saline, if this "Uncle Billy" was telling the truth to a young Moore or if he was just playing games with a young mind at the time. However, because it still affected Moore in such a tremendous way, it honestly does not matter if Uncle Billy was regurgitating local folklore or not. Words matter, even when they are half-baked truths or straight lies, and in the case of Moore, we can see a young, impressionable boy being influenced by the stories of his elders, memories that were made true because they were told as truth. In coupling his self-immolation with his letter discussing Poletown, Moore converges both his insider

and outsider presence in explaining how he reacted to an exigence. Moore encompasses an outsider status because most people in town did not know him, since he had been gone for so many years, and many residents responded to his death in this manner. But he also unequivocally embodies an insider status by telling the memory of Poletown, demonstrating that he knows the memories of town as much as any other insider does. By fulfilling both roles in his act and the letter, Moore holds a mirror to the town and testifies to its people that their entrenched public memories distort the truth to preserve an imaginary that dominates most of the perceptions in Grand Saline.

Moore's archives also illuminate how the public memory of Poletown prompted his decision to die. The newspaper clippings and emails from this archive first demonstrate that Moore's interest in his hometown's racism did not lead him to a quick and hasty death; it was something that he reflected on and attempted to research for years. On Sunday, September 19, 2010, the *Dallas Morning News* published an article titled "Oral history project records elderly blacks on the horror of lynchings" by Sam Hodges. The article discusses how three professors, Angela Sims at St. Paul School of Theology in Kansas City; Evelyn Parker at Southern Methodist University's Perkins School of Theology; and Stephen Sloan, director of Baylor's Institute of Oral History, worked together to cultivate an oral history of black people who witnessed lynchings. Interestingly, the first interview the story mentions is of Gwendolyn Hill who grew up in the 1930s in Mineola, TX, a city ten miles east of Grand Saline. My mom lives in this town now. Moore underlined the names of the project leaders and eventually sent an email to Stephen Sloan. The email stated, "I have your name from an article in the Dallas Morning News, September 19, 2010 [*sic*] regarding lynchings in Texas. I would like to

know the history of this in Grand Saline, Texas, which is my hometown." The email was sent on November 11, 2010, four years prior to his self-immolation. The article and the email suggest an ongoing pain for Moore, as he in his later years still wondered about his town and the racist legacy of his memory. We can thus see how memories he had of racism in the 1940s still influenced him sixty and seventy years later. It appears that he never heard back from Sloan.

Moore's archive also hosted a few other newspaper clippings. One article titled "Housing officers work to comply with directives" situates Grand Saline as part of a public housing lawsuit in the mid-1980s. Another article, "Across the Racial Divide" in 1994, analyzes black and white racial issues in two small towns in Texas: Goodlow and Grand Saline. This article by Suzanne Gamboa analyzes the memories of racialized violence in Grand Saline's history and suggests the perception of the town's history haunts its public persona now. These clippings, from decades before his death, point to Moore's interest in the racism he remembered in town. Throughout his life, he kept artifacts that investigated Grand Saline's racial history and public memory, a textual reminder of his past. While he was unable to find much evidence about the lynchings in the area, he tracked Grand Saline's persistent racial problems over the years. Moore's email to Dr. Sloan illustrates how much he wanted to verify the public memories of lynchings that he had heard about in the 1940s. But the articles he kept on Grand Saline in the 1980s and 1990s also point to Grand Saline's present, showing Moore that the racism he encountered in the 1940s was still present fifty years later.

### *Remembering the KKK*

Moore mentions other public memories that influenced his decision to self-

immolate, specifically memories of the KKK. He states in his letter, "The Ku Klux Klan was once very active in Grand Saline, and still probably has sympathizers in the town... America (and Grand Saline prominently) have never repented for the atrocities of slavery and its aftermath." Moore highlights for residents of Grand Saline that the KKK once controlled the town and kept their thumbprint on its culture. By emphasizing repentance, he suggests that the racist past will continue to haunt Grand Saline unless it can reconcile its public memories with its present imaginary.

None of the research Moore collated over the years explicitly addresses ties to the KKK except for the piece by Gamboa, which focuses more on the memories of Poletown and the town's perceptions. Nevertheless, the police chief in the 1990s, Stanley Tull, stated that bigots do live in the town and can be found with "KKK" painted on the sides of their cars. Gamboa illustrates how the KKK remained part of Grand Saline's culture and legacy throughout the years, and it also reinforces Moore's understanding of the town's situation. The lack of any further, substantial evidence underscores how the town perpetuates racism by fabricating the presence of the KKK in their public memories. Adding these notorious figures of racism into the town's public memory has consequences: it was part of Moore's pronounced rationale for his self-immolation and it has led people in the area to perpetuate the presence of the Klan through a fabricated history and its re-telling.

For quite some time, Moore thought about dying for a cause and even considered committing self-immolation in different locations and for different reasons. The public memory of Grand Saline's racism and the town's imaginary, the stories of Poletown and the KKK, led him to the parking lot at the Bear Grounds in the heat of June. A self-



immolation on SMU's campus probably would have led to a larger audience and would have made national news. Had Moore completed any of his first attempts to self-immolate, he might be a public figure, a household name, by today. But in those moments perhaps something pulled against his will to die—he couldn't do it on SMU's campus, a place he revered but wanted to change. Rather, the public memories of Grand Saline, the stories he heard as a child that affected his views on race and social justice in the long term, proved to be "true" to Moore and the ongoing culture developed within these memories. People often like to think that memories and "stories young kids tell" have no consequences. They are just "jokes" that have little relevance. But the case of Moore digs up something deeper: the memories do actually affect people, especially when told from elders. People do not always accept these memories as jokes and don't comprehend them in the same way as others do. While residents in the area might blame Moore for making a bigger deal out of these memories than most, I believe analysis of the documents surrounding his death detail something different: that memories of racism, regardless of their veracity, carry certain rhetorical weight.

Moore utilized public memories in his letter, place of death, and way of dying in an attempt to affect residents on a personal, insider level. Moore used a rhetoric of public memory to speak to town members in a way that only they could understand. He emphasized the pain of public memory to exhibit how it builds a captivating imaginary, making the case that people in Grand Saline need to reconcile their history with their present in order to change. The public memories Moore employs speak directly to the local audience of Grand Saline, formulating specific rhetorical appeals that could shape only the people who know the town's memories. As I will show, Moore personalizes

these appeals to persuade the citizens of the area that they must confront their public memories and reconcile the imaginary that keeps them from accepting their racist past.

## **V. Moore's Rhetoric of Public Memory**

For people in Grand Saline, their perception of Moore's death (the event, the space, the letter, and the circumstances and discourse surrounding his death) are shaped by the town's racial public memories, their imaginary, and their insider status, as I will illustrate in the crux of my chapter. But first, I show how Moore exercised a call for public memory in his letter, bringing up the racist past of Grand Saline to let the town know precisely why he chose to die. In this sense, Moore demonstrates both an insider and outsider perspective to help residents see the harm of their racial imaginary outside of their own community. Residents in Grand Saline are able to connect Moore's choice to self-immolate in the biggest shopping strip in town, referred to as the Bear Grounds, to the racist, symbolic history it displays for some in town. And perhaps more prominently than the last two appeals, audiences are able to see direct parallels between the extremist nature of the fire that overwhelmed Moore's body and the violent nature of lynchings which permeate the town's public memory and history. Though Moore's act does not exactly parallel the hangings and lynch mobs of the past, residents are able to connect the extreme nature of the death in a public realm to the public memory of the racial lynchings that are embedded within the stories of Grand Saline. These tactics, together, exhibit Moore's public memory rhetoric, one he utilizes to better engage with the people of Grand Saline through his death. To outsiders, this rhetoric might not have any affect because they do not understand the history of the town, the public memory and imaginary residents understand, and the symbolism of the Bear Grounds and extremism. But to the

people in town, Moore makes a clear argument through public memory: Grand Saline never moved past their racial stigma of the post-Reconstruction era because they have never repented for their misdeeds.

After examining each aspect of Moore's site of public memory, which I must do separately to illustrate each line of argument since it is not neatly displayed for local audiences, I will then move to the conclusion of this chapter. As we will see, Moore's self-immolation and its memory might even be more complicated to analyze than many natural mnemonics because the space where his memory inhabits has no curation and might not have much symbolic significance for many people in Grand Saline.

#### *Shame in Moore's Letter*

Moore's letter is one the most effective markers for interpreting the site and memory of his death. Moore aims to persuade locals to act upon the shame they should feel of being associated with racism. He frames the public memories of racism as one of shame, prompting those who are ashamed of the town to understand his motives, and for those who do not have that shame to confront the damaging effects of their public memories and how they play out in the imaginary.

Moore's letter, "O GRAND SALINE, REPENT OF YOUR RACISM," suggests that the people of Grand Saline would know "your racism" referred to the town's past horrors--or would prompt them to question their existence. Since the public memory of the town's past lingers in the town's imaginary as that of a bygone era, Moore's title reflects a history anchored in a present condition of racism that needs attention to its current perpetrators. In my interviews with people spanning from younger ages (Wilt, Adams) to elders in the community (Allen, Darby). ages ranging from the mid-20s to the

80s, they all seem to understand that there is a current discourse of racism circulating in Grand Saline, even if they suggest the memories are all fictional.

Halfway through his letter, Moore continues with the town's recorded history of racial discrimination, stating, "My sense is that most Grand Saline residents just don't want black people among them.... This is a shame that has bothered me wherever I went in the world, and did not want to be identified with the town written up in the newspaper in 1993." Here, Moore signifies his insider and outsider status. He lays claim to understanding the insider memories of the town his conversion to outsider's perspective because of the shame he developed over the insiders' hate for black people. I should note, too, that recent census data support the absence of the black community in Grand Saline. In his research on the census data of Grand Saline, James Loewen shows from 1930 to 1990, the highest number of black residents in town at one time was five. Most of the years the data only shows one black person on the census date too, including in 1990 ("Grand Saline in TX"). In 2000, the town counted eighteen black people out of their 3,028 population (representing 0.59% of the town), and in 2010 the town counted twenty-two black people out of their 3,136 population (representing 0.70% of the town) ("Grand Saline, Texas Population"). But perhaps more importantly, Moore's anecdote does not disclose where he is from, an absence that still resonates with people today. Multiple interviewees, including Diana Wilt, Sam Adams, and Mallie Munn, acknowledge that they do not tell people where they are from when they travel, even when it's to bigger Texas cities such as Tyler, Dallas, and Lubbock. While most of the insiders dismiss Moore's death and are not ashamed of their town in any capacity, a few insiders, especially younger interviewees like Wilt and Delafuente, confirm their own shame in

telling people where they are from. Through this common shame, Moore bridges his insider and outsider status by acknowledging a shared emotional pain. For some residents, his letter indicates how their shame can be actualized, embodied in a man who sacrificed his life to change Grand Saline. Such common pain was not acknowledged by many residents, but the severity of the self-immolation aimed to undercut the typical dismissals of racist memory as just a source of humor and tall tales. Through shame, Moore invokes the long lineage of racism in Grand Saline to create a rhetorical climate in town that attempts to persuade others that the past, and its present circulation, is no laughing matter; its imaginary must be reconciled with its public memories.

Thus, Moore's letter becomes a site of public memory for town insiders. While the letter is no longer visible, it circulates via the first article about Moore (Dean's "Madman or Martyr?") and functions as a way for people to remember that his death did not exist in a vacuum. It was a challenge to the public memories that have been shared, known, and retold for decades; it was a challenge to the divergent imaginaries inside and outside of Grand Saline.

This media exposure, not unlike MTV's football drama, gives the site of Moore's death relevance, providing that he should not be forgotten or remembered in vain, and it also places him in conversation with the other public memories and larger imaginary of the town. Like other public memories, Moore and his memory are contested: historians and town members have dismissed Moore's historical claims and the notion that the town is still "racist," yet there are many who regularly pass Moore's site and read his letter and see truth in his words—a blend of historical truth, perceptual truth, and individual truth. The letter illustrates the contested and affective nature of public memory, and it also

opens the door for understanding how the space of the Bear Grounds is now uniquely embedded in the town's racial discourse.

### *Race and Place at the Bear Grounds*

Moore's letter provided audiences with his clear motive for dying and makes the site of his death memorable and contested: the actual space where he died is changed symbolically through this event, becoming part of the system of public memory making. Moore might not have known the full extent of the symbolic nature of the Bear Grounds, but I argue that he certainly altered its significance. People could no longer solely rely on the bygone racism of Clark's Ferry or Poletown to preserve the imaginary of Grand Saline. They were forced to reckon with his symbolic act of solidarity with black people--past, present, and future.

In his biography on Moore, Hall claims, "On Friday and Saturday nights, high school kids ... gathered to hang out and play music on their truck radios" at the Bear Grounds, making it a high traffic area during the day (for the various businesses in the lot) and during the evenings as well. Hall also notes that, historically, the spot received its name because of Wayne Clark, who high schoolers called "Bear," parked there in the '60s and "watched the world go by." In a 2006 article of the *Grand Saline Sun*, an anonymous author notes that Bear loved to hang out there, and "guests would go there to see Bear and talk about cars and other stuff....Soon, kids started calling the place 'The Bear Grounds' because it was where Bear hung out first."

Yet, while many residents might think of the Bear Grounds as a high school hangout spot or maybe as even site of racism (similar to Clark's Ferry), it holds no symbolic purpose for people outside of Grand Saline. While there are public memories

embedded within this space for Grand Saline insiders, it cannot easily be considered truly "public," because it is not readily accessible to outsiders. Instead, we should consider it a *limited* site of public memory. Most outsiders have never heard of the Bear Grounds. The lot sits on the far east side of town, across the street from Kidd Jones, the largest gas station in town. The parking lot is open for four different businesses in the small shopping center: a Dollar General; Sophistikutz, a hair salon; Economy Drug; and Medicine Chest. However, the empty lots holds enough room for more than over one hundred cars, much more than ever fills the lot on any given day. East of the lot, on the same side of the street, another, smaller shopping center peers west. Though businesses move into this space, it often remains vacant. On the west side of the lot rests a large compound for Moody's Sand and Gravel store. For any given day, the Bear Grounds might hold up to twenty cars at once, for various residents shopping, getting haircuts and tans, and buying medicine, but for the most part, the lot embodies the lack of any economy in the town, a vast array of parking spots and concrete stops for visitors who never come.



**Image 4: A view of Highway 80 from the Bear Grounds spot where Moore self-immolated**

**Image 5: A more encompassing view of the Bear Grounds**

Though some history configures the Bear Grounds as an innocent spot for kids to hang out in a large, often deserted space, others sustain the legend of the Bear Grounds. One interviewee, Alan Gregory, a male who was near my age in high school, spoke with me about memory and (without being prompted) turned to this spot:

A guy named Bear started [the race problem in Grand Saline]. Well, one day they said—a group of my dad’s friends were telling me this—that there was a black fellow coming through town, and he walked through town, and he passed them. And then a little while later, the police passed them. And a little while after that,



they left and actually saw the police like either harassing or physically abusing this guy of some sort when they left. And they drove on by and witnessed this guy being, I guess, beat up or whatever, for no apparent reason.

When I asked him if he was certain that his father had seen this, he confirmed it.

Greggory's recollection of the spot, along with his father's and others who knew this story, illustrates its symbolic, racial value for at least some in the town, including his family. Even if only some people look at the Bear Grounds as place where a white man assaulted black people, then Moore's self-immolation there would contest how people interpret the Bear Grounds in their racial narratives of the town.

Greggory was not the only interviewee who brought up this space as racialized; Tracy Lunsford, a woman in her early 30s, connected the Bear Grounds to racial hate as well. Lunsford recalls moving to Grand Saline when she was eight and learning about racism in town. After hearing that the KKK was holding rallies in the area, she recalls being "told at school that the KKK had rallies at the Bear Grounds and that they would send invitations to people to join them. I have never seen one. To this day I wonder if that was a myth or truth." Unlike Greggory, Lunsford's memory does not relate the place to its origin narrative. She focuses on the space as a more general marker of local racism, conflating it with the KKK's legacy tied to Clark's Ferry and Poletown. While various other memories identify these places, some people suggest that the meetings were held at the Poletown rodeo grounds while others say they were taking place in the woods of Clark's Ferry. Lunsford's memory suggests that some people in town (peers and people who shared these stories) believe the KKK met at least once at the Bear Grounds. Along with Greggory, Lunsford suggests that some people in town believe the parking lot

carries racial symbolic value, and I contend that, more likely than not, Moore's self-immolation was designed to disrupt public memory by staging it in a high traffic site undoubtedly at the crossroads of memories private and public, communal and individual.

During my high school days in Grand Saline, I remember meeting at the Bear Grounds on most weekend nights. It was a space where high school kids would congregate early in the evenings before moving off to parties, movies, and other local adventures. When I was a freshman, I made it to my first high school party after I met up with a few friends at the Bear Grounds. In my early high school days, this space was the most exciting spot to be in Grand Saline because it held endless opportunities. I could end up hanging out with the older, cooler kids and could maybe even flirt with the older teenage girls as well. The space felt safe, fun, unadulterated. Maybe it was different for other residents in the town like Gregory and Lunsford. However, that space lost its symbolic value for me--and many others--when Moore killed himself there in the summer of 2014. The Bear Grounds could no longer be a site of innocence; it was now inextricably tied into the history and memory of racism in Grand Saline. To this day, when I pass by the parking lot, I don't remember nights enjoying my life as a teenager; I remember how an elderly preacher felt so passionate about protesting racism that he ended his life through self-immolation. In a way, Moore's self-immolation was a type of intervention, one meant to bring attention to and change the perception of racism in Grand Saline. And I think it did intervene for me--it altered my relationship to the town forever without even having a mnemonic of Moore's death in place.

The Bear Grounds symbolize a site of racism<sup>37</sup> for some people in town: whether

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<sup>37</sup> Place, race, and memory converge in some interesting recent rhetorical research. Paul A. Shackel finds material culture often transforms "into sacred objects when it serves the goals and needs of any

through the physical violence of one white man or the collective terror of the KKK. Regardless of their veracity, these memories add to the racial climate, the public memories, and the imaginary in Grand Saline. Even the notion that two different, prominent memories of the Bear Grounds anchor it to racism illustrates the power of the Grand Saline imaginary. Moore's act of public memory obscures--or at the very least complicates--how citizens like Gregory and Lunsford view the Bear Grounds.

Moore compels citizens to challenge the history and memories of the town, to recreate an imaginary that acknowledges local racism. In doing so, he presents the first step in a path to reconciliation: Truly understand why he chose to die. Do not cover it up. Do not sweep it under the rug. Take his death and sit with it. Reverend Jeff Hood, a theologian and pastor with an activism profile similar to Moore, stated:

The world cannot change until we are willing to rub against each other and have deep, difficult conversations. My concern with Grand Saline is that the easier thing to do is to try and move past it instead of sitting with it. So, ultimately I think there is a whole lot of babble going on about what happened to Charles and why he immolated, but it does not seem to me that they have engaged that deep, transformative conversation.

I not only agree with Hood's analysis on Grand Saline, but I believe he points to an

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group....Often, race is at the center of the struggles for creation of power and meaning" (16). His book, *Memory in Black and White*, explores landscapes of conflict involving memories of the Civil War, and he specifically analyzes how race influences interpretations of monuments, memorials, and parks. His scholarship advances more recent work in the field by scholars like Victoria J. Gallagher and Margaret R. LaWare who interpret particular material objects, such as the Monument to Joe Louis in Detroit, to better understand how race interacts within interpreting place. Gallagher and LaWare find that "the sculpture, as material rhetoric, opened opportunities for discussion and reflection on the history of Detroit...[and] became symbolic of the potential for greater feats and more successful struggles for power by African American communities around the United States" (107). These authors emphasize material culture, such as monuments and sculptures, as conflicted spaces for race, but their analysis also emphasizes the importance of place as well.

important consideration for the future: Moore chose this extreme act in this public place because he wanted to start a conversation that transcended individual lives. He took the first step of engagement. It was, and is, up to Grand Saline to take the next step.

In all of Moore's documents, no evidence exists that he chose, or knew the full significance of, the Bear Grounds for its racial violence history, yet his act nonetheless disrupts the symbolic value of the site, making the site of his death a place where a white man died in solidarity with the black people lynched, burned, and desecrated in the past. Moore could have chosen to die on either side of the torn down bridge at Poletown, but the death might not have carried the same public burden as the open death at the Bear Grounds. He could not find a more publicly visible and open area to die in town. The venue, the stage, places Moore in front of an audience of locals working in the stores and people driving during peak commute hours. After talking to witnesses such as Buddy Lambert and Mallie Munn, witnesses who slowly describe the horrific details of that fateful day, I know that, for them, the Bear Grounds' symbolic value has forever been altered. Lambert stated that he can no longer pick up his prescriptions at the Economy Drug without thinking of the exact spot, moment, and image of Moore dying.

In terms of public memory and the imaginary, Moore's self-immolation created the conditions for Grand Saline insiders to change their views of the space. In this sense, Moore re-appropriated the site for his cause. His self-immolation presented a challenge for people in Grand Saline to remember how they through locations and spaces by creating a memory and space that people could not immediately, or easily, forget. Therefore, Moore's death did not turn the Bear Grounds into a site of public memory; rather, he altered its symbolic value, marking it as a site where a white man sacrificed his

life in order to change the life of a town. While some might say he actually hurt the town's reputation, I believe the act was motivated by love in an attempt to have people in Grand Saline transcend their terrible history.

Moore's act challenged the idea of space and forced the Bear Grounds into the conversation of other racial memory sites in town, from the Poletown Bridge to Clark's Ferry. Though the city painted over the charred parking stripes where Moore burned, effacing the physical reminders of his death, the symbolic legacy of his death remains; it unites with the public memory of Grand Saline to complicate and make public the memories that have lingered too long in the shadows.

#### *Extremism as Public Memory*

Lastly, Moore's self-immolation as an act conveys a public memory of extremism. The immense pain and violence that overwhelms his body offers a visceral, symbolic connection to the extremism of lynchings in years prior. He performs the spectacle of these previous atrocities to redefine their meaning and importance. Moore wanted people to understand that this pain was a choice, that sacrifice was necessary to make change and racial reconciliation possible. Shirley Crawford, a graduate of Grand Saline High School and a woman of color, expressed this extremism to me in her memory of Poletown: "I was told that the KKK would gather at the rodeo grounds and take the black people across the old wooden bridge and hang them from the poles, the trees, and the bridge. I was told they would sometimes torture them by throwing rocks at them, cutting them, or making them watch their family members die before they died." Crawford's memory, along with others, explores the repulsive nature of racial lynchings in Grand Saline's past—emphasizing the grotesque image of nooses hanging from poles

and bridges and the terrible vision of watching family members raped and murdered before your own death. By any definition, the term "extremism" applies to the descriptions of these deaths, and the same brutality permeates the stories reflecting Grand Saline's racist climate.

Moore's act, then, connects the imagery of his act with those of the previous gruesome murders. Though he could have hanged himself on a tree near Poletown, which would have had similar and more obvious rhetorical implications, the act itself might not have garnered as much attention. In his interview with me, Bill Renfro, Charles Moore's stepson-in-law and colleague, stated, "That [act of self-immolation] is the only way ... [the act] would be noted as a protest. Really, there is no other method that would create a statement other than 'I just committed suicide.'" Renfro's words resonate with me. Hanging one's self might carry the more clearly symbolic implications of lynching than the self-immolation, but many observers could conclude the death was simply a suicide. The self-immolation, being almost unknown as a practice in Western society, stands out as a protest act because it is so unusual and extreme. However, arguably, the choice to protest via one's own death, whether it be via self-immolation or hanging one's self, still leaves one susceptible to being dismissed as just someone committing suicide. While the extreme nature of the death is designed to convey a message, people can easily dismiss the act simply because they cannot fathom it or choose not to. The extremism might be so attention-grabbing, so persuasive, that it leads people to the conclusion that no one could encompass this pain unless something was wrong with them. Thus, the extremism can live on as an act simply interpreted as "crazy."

For the people of Grand Saline, extremism remains in their public consciousness

and their interpretation of the town's history. The extremist lynchings at the Poletown Bridge are interpreted as a historical spectacle along the lines of other public lynchings. Amy Louise Wood and Susan V. Donaldson describe that in the age of Jim Crow, "Mass spectacle lynchings, in which crowds of white spectators watched as men were not only hanged but tortured and mutilated and sometimes riddled with bullets or burned alive, received the most public attention" (11). Spectacle grew around these gruesome deaths as people bought postcards of these deceased hanging, discussed the lynchings in local newspapers, and kept the stories in the public eye. The public memory of lynching can perhaps be best described as the public memory of spectacle. Moore embodies this spectacle of extremism in choosing to self-immolate. He attempted to create a mass appeal around his death, one that people would talk about, remember, and share with others. Bill and Kathy Renfro state that Moore described how he wanted his funeral to be perceived with the national news coverage he expected. Thus, Moore figured, in one way or another, that a "spectacle" would be made of his death, one which would make people flock to his funeral.

But the extremism that Moore embodies does not only stem from stories of previous lynchings, it also extends from the memories of the KKK, currently defined by the Southern Law and Poverty Center as a "the most infamous--and oldest-- of American hate groups." The Klan was often at the forefront of public lynchings of black people in the earlier parts of the 20th century and is widely accepted by most Americans as an extremist organization. Just the image alone of the KKK is associated with hate and extremism, even when decontextualized from particular occasions. So while there may not be any "recorded history of the KKK in Grand Saline" (as historian Elvis Allen puts

bluntly), the image of the KKK in the area, along with the widespread legends and memories, still produces an association with this extremism. Moore's death invokes the popular spectacle of the KKK and their history of lynchings, using fire and death to relate to tales of white citizens burning black citizens at the stake.

I never had any run-ins with the KKK when I lived in Grand Saline. I heard that they were involved in a black purge in the town and met in the deep woods at Clark's Ferry. I heard that some of my friends' parents had robes in their closets, but I never saw these robes. We often drove down back roads on the weekend evenings, drinking beer, and fantasized about catching the KKK. "What if we saw them?" my friends and I would ask. We never had any clue what we would do if we ever did cross paths with them. But my personal relationship with the memories of the KKK do not exist solely with these tales; I associate them with some particular instances and images. Once, in my high school years, I drove out to Clark's Ferry during the day. My friends and I wanted to pull a prank on senior girls, so we decided it would be funny to dress up as occult figures (because even dressing up like the KKK for a joke seemed too far), have these girls come across us at Clark's Ferry, and then we could scare them. I was scouting the area with some friends a few days before the instance took place and found the corpse of a dead hog off the beaten path. Its head was hung on a small tree branch above me. I got chills witnessing this scene, and though I am sure I thought "maybe this was the KKK," I dismissed it quickly as being just another prank other high schoolers pulled.

A few days later, my group of six guys headed out to the woods dressed in dark clothing with torches and waited for our other friends show up with the girls at dusk. By the time they appeared, we had lit our torches and other limbs on the ground around us,



threw smoke bombs around the area, and attempted our prank. The prank succeeded, and the girls spread the word that the KKK or some other occult group was meeting in the area, before our group finally came clean about four weeks later. At the time, I felt proud of pulling off the best prank of any high schoolers in recent memory, but as I reflect on this moment now, I feel a bit differently. Thinking of the KKK in Grand Saline in the present makes me think of how I added to its legacy in my time in high school. To some effect, I made part of the violence of the KKK come to life through this prank. And while the violence portrayed in our actions was at least only symbolic, I cannot help but elaborate in my thoughts from the actual violence I saw there, a desecrated pig carcass with its head displayed as a shrine.

Moore's death paralleled the violence in our public memories. While we recirculated these memories through our own symbolic acts, Moore's death attempted to draw attention to their tangible, visceral reality, the pain we often miss when retelling these stories. Every time I remember his death now, I think of the stark difference in "portraying" violence with my prank and finding the dead pig rotting before my eyes. Moore demonstrated that real consequences exist in our imaginaries, and just by circulating public memories we keep some form of violence alive. While my friends and I perpetuated one form of this violence, Moore tried to put an end to the larger dynamic by becoming a living-dying reminder of the violence Grand Saline knows but chooses not to reconcile.

Overall, the insider's perception of the site of Moore's memory (the letter to Grand Saline, the space of the Bear Grounds, and the extremism through fire) demonstrates how uniquely the town's imaginary is tied into its public memories of race

and racism. The memories of Grand Saline rely heavily on local knowledge, and this is how the imaginary plays an important role in affecting how public memories are sustained in Grand Saline. Thus, when Moore killed himself on that fateful day, it is not surprising that the first speculation about his death, on Facebook, was that he was a member of the KKK and self-immolated to repent for his *own* sins because the public memories of Grand Saline are fueled by an uneasy relationship to its racist past that, at some level, yearns for reconciliation.

For the most part, the people in Grand Saline rejected Moore's death as irrelevant. They scrubbed over his death, covered it as they have treated the other blemishes of the town, and refused to recognize that they have a problem. Though Moore employed public memory in his rhetorical plea to the town, attempting to disrupt the awful distortions of history in Grand Saline, the people of the town largely dismissed his actions. It was easier to refer to him as misguided or crazy. Not many people I have spoken with believe his death caused any good, which is not so surprising for a town so willing to selectively choose from its past, erasing some portions while rewriting or foregrounding others. Many of these people suggest Moore could have chosen a different way to protest, through less disruptive forms like a public conversation or by holding signs around town. But I seriously question if such approaches would have accomplished anything. Moore attempted to push the people in town into a new way of thinking, and in a way he succeeded: the people in town had to actively dismiss Moore; they could not just suggest that nothing happened. Nonetheless, Moore was rejected in part because his rhetoric was too abstract and foreign, yet truthful and immediate, too hard to pin down as a message from a sane person yet too blunt and threatening regarding Grand Saline's problems to be

considered by most insiders.

The imaginary in Grand Saline keeps the public memories alive because for every person who claims they are not true or have no historical proof, there is someone still circulating these memories while back-roading late at night, telling ghost stories to their friends, or trying to impress new people who move to town. The imaginary keeps certain spaces of public memory relevant and persistently present via circulation and preservation. Some of these tales and their mnemonic spaces might still exist if it were not for the pervasive, entrenched imaginary, but it is almost impossible to envision them having the same capacity to persuade people without it. If Grand Saline's perception of racism is ever to change, it will need to begin dismantling its imaginary (however possible), because as long as these memories cultivate the town's culture and memory, any hope for change virtually seems impossible. And this ultimately where Moore's death failed.

## **VI. Conclusion**

Moore not only felt the pain of Grand Saline's imaginary and public memories pushing him into the act of self-immolation but he utilized public memory to persuade locals that his death was not only important but should also lead them to change the culture of their town. By understanding the split between insiders and outsiders, we see how racial public memories and imaginaries have become problematic in Grand Saline and how Moore was influenced by these memories and stories in choosing to self-immolate. However, solely labelling the persuasive means of these memories is not enough because Moore actually employed public memory appeals (specifically explicit references to these memories, the space he chose to self-immolate, and the extremist act

itself) in his dying protest act. Therefore, we see the racial public memories in Grand Saline as not only an inspiration of Moore's death but also as means to speak to town insiders, to show them their problems, and to ask for change. By framing Moore with this local lens, we see how he more concretely spoke to Grand Saline in his death, utilizing self-immolation to not only enter the larger global narrative of protest but to fit the means and needs of this specific audience.

In closing this chapter, I want to consider a question: what will be made of Moore's death and his legacy in Grand Saline, especially in context of how he utilized and was persuaded by public memory? So many residents of town recall the game between Grand Saline and Celina in the fall of 2000 and their memories live in the recurrence of watching the MTV clips, keeping these old recordings, and telling newcomers about the event that occurred fifteen years ago. Even in a couple interviews I had with residents of the town, the memory of the football game and MTV made when into our conversations (see Brittney Welch transcript). But what will be made of Charles Moore? Will he enter the public memories of racism in Grand Saline? Will he affect the town's racial imaginary?

Of course, on many levels, I am unable to truly examine Moore's impact on public memory because it is impossible to understand his lasting impact only a couple of years away from his death. It would be better-suited to examine his impact ten, fifteen, or twenty-five years away from his death to see if people still remember him and his self-immolation. For now, though, we can see that some people have begun to include him in their memories and thoughts of the town. First, Moore has greatly shaped how I remember the town. I do not just look back and think of the horrors that many tell of the

lynchings and secret meetings; I also remember someone who gave up his life so that others might be moved to change, a sacrifice that I try to understand but often fail to wrap my head around. He has not only altered my memories of the town and its complex relationship with race, but he has changed me as a person. I often tell people that when I first truly understood why Moore killed himself, I felt an immediate sense of purpose and connection: if there was only one story I was supposed to tell in my life, it was this one. Moore made me reflect on my own humanity, my own perceptions of racism and justice. Though I never knew him, I feel a deep, intimate, and personal connection with him now.

Moore has altered the public memories of other in town. Buddy Lambert claims that he can no longer drive to the pharmacy (located in the same parking lot where Moore self-immolated) without thinking of Moore and why he died. Others who witnessed his death, such as Mallie Munn, think about his death in relation to the racism they remember in high school. And even others who did not witness the event, such as Sam Adams, consider his death when thinking about their relationship to race in the town. Adams states that while she has all these memories of racism, she can no longer say that there is no one in town fighting for justice. Moore represents that for her and others. While it would be misguided to say Moore had some great impact in town, we do see that he has alter the public memory and imaginary at least for a few people, and in the future, we can better assess the effectiveness of his death.

Through using a public memory lens of interpretation, we have been able to better understand Moore's motives, persuasion, and affect for a local audience in Grand Saline. This analysis demonstrates that much of Moore's rhetoric was uniquely situated for a local audience (through public memory arguments), which ultimately did have some

impact on the town by either having people actively dismiss the act and having other people say that his death uncovered a bit of truth to the racial problems engrained in the town's discourse. Overall, this provides us with a better-rounded picture of Moore as rhetor, joining in the conversations of race, oppression, and culture on a national and international stage but also being very concerned with his local audience as well.

Arguably, the more intimate choices he made via place of self-immolation, his letter, and the extremeness of the act itself all seem to resonate differently on a local level, playing into a local racial conversation that only residents in Grand Saline would understand.

This leaves us with two important conclusions: that Moore at least understood how his death might be interpreted on both local and more global stages and that, for rhetoricians, bringing in more localized methods, such as public memory, give us better tools to understand discourse on these different stages too.

## **Conclusion: Toward a Rhetoric of Reconciliation**

“If there is to be reconciliation, first there must be truth.”

---Timothy Tyson

“An emancipated society, on the other hand, would not be a unitary state, but the realization of universality in the reconciliation of differences.”

--- Theodor Adorno

When Charles Moore died on June 23, 2014, he opened a door of scholarship for me. Not only did he die in my hometown (which warranted investigation as a former resident) but combined protest and racial rhetorics in his final act. I knew soon after he died that if I were to only write one thing in my life, it had to be analysis of the rhetorical situation in Grand Saline. In Chapter 1 of my dissertation, I wrote about three themes integral to my discussion of Charles Moore and Grand Saline: the rhetoric of self-immolation as protest, rhetorics of public memory, and rhetorics of race. Specifically, I wanted to see how these themes intersected and intertwined with one another to better understand Moore’s act and the events surrounding it as rhetorical productions. To investigate these themes, I asked a few guiding questions to begin this project: What exigencies lead to self-immolation as a protest act? How does self-immolation attempt to persuade audiences? What affect did Moore's self-immolation have on the subsequent dialogue and public discourse in Grand Saline? How did memory and race play a role in the discourse? How can the events in Grand Saline lead us to a better understanding of rhetoric and our field as a whole? Throughout my dissertation, I dissected these questions

in each chapter, and to open the conclusion for this project, I will illustrate how I untangle these themes and these questions in a brief overview of my chapters below.

First, my analysis demonstrates how complex self-immolation as protest is, especially in America. Chapter 2 illustrates the historical and contemporary exigencies of self-immolation, showing that the act has a long lineage spreading across diverse Buddhist, Hindu, Asian, and Middle Eastern cultures that stems from various pressures such as wanting to die in solidarity with others, as an act of spousal love, as an act of spiritual awakening, and as last effort attempts to create change. While historically acts of spousal love and spiritual awakening dominated the discourse of self-immolation, arguably there are more acts of solidarity and last effort in the 21st century.

Understanding the climate of self-immolations historically and in the present provides us more awareness to understand how Moore's death fits into some of these common trends (such as, representing each exigence besides spousal love). Seeing how Moore fits into the global discussion of self-immolation gives us room to see him as a part of a larger pattern but also as unique circumstance because he chose to die in America (where self-immolations rarely happen), he chose to protest a culture rather than a government, and he protested a type of oppression (racism) that is hard to overtly see in the 21st century, compared to, for instance, economic oppression which can typically be identified in unlivable wages and impoverished socioeconomic conditions.

Outside of complicating the exigencies of self-immolation, my dissertation also underscores the complexities of self-immolation as a rhetoric. I break down the rhetoric of self-immolation into three themes that dominate the persuasiveness of the act: 1) themes of violence and nonviolence intersecting; 2) themes of religion (outside of solely



Buddhist practices); and 3) themes of sacrifice. First, themes of violence and nonviolence intersecting in the self-immolation act pinpoints its complexity--it is hard to label it one over the other because while the act is inherently violent (killing one's self through the flame) it is also inherently nonviolent (the person is typically looking to resolve an issue and does not harm others). This dichotomy, I argue, brings audiences to the table to better understand why someone would choose such an act and gives them the room to interpret it based on their understanding of the act being either violent or nonviolent (or more one of these themes than the other). Next, themes of religious protest illustrate that the act is not absolutely intertwined with Buddhism, as many perceive it to be, but rather is often an act of religious moral superiority, one that relies on religious ideologies on a very broad level. While many of these acts do unite with Buddhist dogma, many of the other self-immolations rely on other religious perspectives as well, which allows me to claim that religion as an enlightening system of beliefs is more inextricably tied into the act rather than it solely being a Buddhist protest tool. Lastly, the vision of sacrifice is an important discourse written into self-immolations and often leaves audiences questioning whether the self-immolator could be defined as a martyr. The interpretation of the act as being sacrificial, I claim, is the most important factor in deciding if an audience will agree with the self-immolator's cause or not.

Together, Chapters 2 and 3 demonstrate that self-immolation is an intricate act with multitudes of exigencies and persuasive arguments and appeals. Using these discussions of exigencies and arguments to investigate Moore's act demonstrates how he does fit into some of the larger narratives of self-immolation and relies upon some of the same arguments to persuade his Grand Saline and national audiences. These two chapters

paint us a wonderful picture of Moore and his actions on the fateful day, but leaving the analysis only in terms of national or “global” conversations is insufficient; it does not do Moore justice, especially when considering how he employed different rhetorical arguments and appeals specifically to persuade his local, Grand Saline audience. In Chapters 4 and 5, I investigate the rhetorics of public memory, the second theme I identified in Chapter 1, to see how we can reexamine Moore’s death in terms of him uniquely speaking to Grand Saline.

In this second half of my dissertation, I utilize public memory methods and theories in two different ways: 1) as a framework to investigate how extremist acts affect local audiences and 2) as a rhetoric that Moore employed to persuade residents in Grand Saline. As a framework, public memory provides me access to explore local distribution of knowledge through circulation of folklore and memories, preservation of these tales, and the use of mnemonics as a public memory device. I argue in Chapters 4 and 5 that we need to employ a methodology of locality, such as public memory, to better understand the ways acts of extremism have local consequences. Without such approaches, we are prone to investigate only how such acts derive from and extend into the more global conversations of extremism, leaving behind the real, raw interactions that occur between local audiences and the aftermath of the event. Therefore, public memory methodologies can provide the researcher the means to keep the conversations of extremism localized, even while making grander claims about its inherent or global nature.

Public memory afforded Moore the rhetorical space to uniquely speak to a local, Grand Saline audience in a way that people living outside of the community would be unable to understand. This gave him the opportunity to position himself as an insider, one

that knew Grand Saline's faults and one who claimed they needed to turn back from their racist perception. Leaving out an analysis of Moore's attention to public memory would miss the larger picture of Moore's rhetoric, providing us a glimpse of what he accomplished but with major gaps in his argument directed to the town. Together, understanding Moore's public memory rhetoric and my critical framework make the case that we need more research on small communities and their public memories, if we are to better understand how and why acts of extremism function in those places and spaces. Such methodologies are readily adaptable for similar cases and can be a useful resource in making such complex acts easier to understand.

Lastly, my analysis employs rhetorics of self-immolation and protest and a public memory methodology and analysis to also better comprehend the nature of race and racism in a small, rural community. When I first took up this project, my goal was to examine Moore's death but to really explore race and racism in small communities. However, I became more intrigued in the methodologies utilized to perform such a task, because, as many racial scholars in the 21st century note, locating and analyzing discourses of race is difficult. People have a difficult time fathoming what a racist act is, the definition of the term, and other small details that make it difficult to work through the data. Nevertheless, my research demonstrates that race, racism, and identity claims within these terms are typically built through communal ideologies and communal memories in small towns. People in Grand Saline determine epistemologies of race through stories they have heard from their peers and elders, reinforce commonly held assumptions circulated in their community, and often create their identities based upon their perception of the town's history and memory. Thus, if they determine the town has a

racist history that still pervades the culture today, they are more likely to have a more progressive stance on race; those who claim the history is overblown and racism does not exist in the town, obviously, tend to have a more conservative stance on race.

Therefore, my analysis proposes that ideologies of race and the ways people talk about race often are constructed not just through their environment (an easy presumption) but through how they wish to preserve, circulate, and defend their own memories.

Identity, memory, and the self are just as important factors as one's environment. This study shows how a town like Grand Saline sustained a racist perception for over 100 years without having any recorded instance of racist acts in recent memory: the people keep these racist stories alive, fail to recognize their rhetorical potency as "truth" for some, and deny any label of racist by outsiders. This process keeps the public memories of racism alive and intact for residents and keeps the status quo resilient to any progressive change from outside people and communities. Overall, my analysis shows how discourses of race exist in small communities, are managed and maintained through public memories, and constructs ideology and identity for many residents along the way.

### **Implications**

While my analysis has delivered some key insights in the discussions of the rhetoric of self-immolation, public memory, and racial discourse, there are some larger implications for the field of Rhetoric and Composition. Mainly, my work has implications for the ways we analyze race in the 21st century, rural rhetorics, and public memory studies. Race relations have been at the forefront of American society over the past several years due to renewed attention to racial profiling, police violence, and xenophobia. In Rhetoric and Composition, race has been a subject of analysis in terms of

classroom pedagogy, discourse analysis, and the ways racism pervades our culture. As I discussed in my introduction, scholars such as Villanueva, Banks, Smitherman, and Martinez have emphasized race as epistemic for many decades in the field. However, my analysis takes a slightly different step in emphasizing race's rhetorical power: instead of focusing on race and racism in the classroom, in policy, in technological literacy, and narratives, I interrogate its social dynamics and mediation in a rural setting and as a way to create "truth" through legends and folklore. These examinations, primarily in Chapter 5, I argue, formulate a new way to understand race in the 21st century: it is not simply a marker of identity; it is a way to comprehend broader ideologies and a way to preserve culture.

My project illustrates race as a type of knowledge, one that people often associate with bigotry or diversity, but I believe also connects to other forms of reality, such as political beliefs, perspectives on rural compared to urban society, and varieties of ignorance. Richard Taylor, the former black minister at Main Street Baptist Church in Grand Saline, exhibits this point in an anecdote: he states that one Sunday morning a white man approached him and said that ten years ago he would have hated him because of skin color and was mad that his parents taught him to be this way, but he also wanted Taylor to know that he now loved him. Of course, this moment speaks to a level of ignorance regarding racism, that much of what we learn is due to being taught these bigotries by family members and by not being around more diverse peoples. But this perspective also explains why in many other interviews there is so much fear of outside, urban cultures. People are afraid of the unknown, and when people in Grand Saline fail to consider different viewpoints, they keep themselves closed off from the outside world,

especially as it pertains to race. This makes it easier for individuals like Wayne Sloan to make racist jokes toward me without viewing the joke as “racist,” and for others to have a deep-seated hatred for President Obama not only because of his liberal ideologies but because of his skin color. For our field particularly, these conclusions open new doors for analysis, especially to help us see how views of race are synecdoches for broader ideologies but also how they are formed through cultural positioning and rurality.

However, to me the most fascinating part of my project might be in the way we see race as a means to preserve culture. My analysis shows that the racial folklore of Grand Saline--the stories of the KKK, Poletown, and the sundown signs--are not simply “jokes” with no truth to them, nor are they directly “facts.” Rather, they are circulated amongst citizens to demonstrate their insider affiliations and to preserve the culture of the town as racialized. I do not believe people tell these stories to claim they are all still racist (though, without doubt, some use the stories this way); these stories just help them explain why not many people of color live in town today. Nevertheless, it marks the town as being racist by some people in town and by many outsiders due to its way of tacitly preserving the “history” of Grand Saline. I believe my research on racial folklore extends the ways we in the field discuss identity, history, and preserving culture, and it can challenge us to rethink communal identities in terms of the stories people circulate. If we look to smaller communities and the stories they tell amongst themselves to construct identity, I imagine that we will find new ways to understand how and why they view themselves in a certain way. To move forward, I hope that Rhetoric and Composition scholars can further develop the ways communal folklore interacts with identity, not only to rural towns but to any community that constructs itself through storytelling.

Another major takeaway from my analysis stems from my development of public memory as methodology and theory. In Chapters 4 and 5, I build a framework of public memory to examine the locality of Moore's self-immolation, and I apply it to the various intricacies and complexities of his death. While I believe this helps paint a better picture of the event and the various persuasive techniques embedded within it, I also argue that it changes how we should examine and discuss acts of extremism in public memory. Many discussions of extremism typically analyze how specific occurrences contribute to larger, many times global, narratives. My analysis changes this conversation and says that while the larger narratives are important, we need to do more to understand how these acts of protest are inextricably tied into local audiences, and public memory is lens that can help us achieve this understanding. As a theoretical position, public memory has made substantial gains over the past twenty-five years and is now a popular subfield in rhetorical studies, but, nevertheless, we have not fully deployed it as a methodological lens. We as a field can benefit from integrating more public memory methodologies into our analyses because the methodology itself is inherently localized. This can change how scholars investigate acts of extremism, and I believe incorporating such methodologies will enhance our interpretations of protest events.

Not only do I believe that public memory frameworks are important, but I contend that public memory should be included in our notions of rhetorical situations and *kairos*. First, I am not arguing that public memory always influences rhetorical situations but rather it is an important enough factor when investigating public rhetorical events, especially protest acts against a community. Whenever a rhetorical situation consists of community-based issues and history (such as the history of racism in Grand Saline), a

public memory perspective could prove to be valuable for scholars in understanding the complexity of the problem. Not only this, but my project also argues (perhaps implicitly) how fundamental rhetorical concepts, such as *kairos*, should better consider public memory's influence. *Kairos* considers the reasons why one might act at a certain time and certain space, and I believe my research illustrates how public memory's rhetorical capabilities shapes *kairotic* moments. Specifically, public memory can influence these moments through demonstrating why one might feel their death is "an act of last effort," "an act of solidarity," or "an act of enlightenment." Therefore, I see my research reshaping how scholars consider *kairos* and public memory as intertwined concepts.

Lastly, outside of locality as a tool to interpret extreme events, my project has implications for our understanding of extremism more broadly. Since the 1960s, Rhetoric and Composition has been interested in protest as a rhetorical endeavor. Since the turn the century, these types of analyses have expanded to include digital and social media tools to investigate hacktivism, social media organizing, and the way the internet changes the production of protest. However, as I discuss in my main chapters, Moore's self-immolation did not rely on modern inventions and found little attention through traditional print media. This is where I believe this dissertation additionally expands the field: through breaking down the theoretical underpinnings of the self-immolation act (as a text itself) outside of media discourse and other, non-textual variables. Previous studies have done such work with the likes of hunger strikes and other forms of protest, but I believe this is the first thorough rhetorical rendering of a self-immolation act (as I have discussed in Chapter 2). Specifically for protest rhetorics, I see my work considering the various, uniting lines of protest, which connects the complexity of self-immolation to



other protest acts. While self-immolation is a unique act, its fundamental rhetoric corresponds with other acts of protest, and I believe future scholarship on similar acts will benefit from my analysis. From a different perspective, though Moore's self-immolation failed to start a social movement, I argue that my analysis further understands how such movements could begin with the light of a flame--through the various exigencies and rhetorical arguments and appeals I lay out in Chapters 2 and 3. This analysis also further develops protest and extremism as rhetorical acts themselves. So while this dissertation has implications for future racial studies and public memory frameworks, I believe my work also adds to the long history of protest literature and can change how we view self-immolation as a protest tool.

### **Future Considerations**

My project has some major implications for the field, but as I look back over my dissertation, I see some other important questions that I believe should be explored in future rhetorical scholarship. Mainly one seemingly simple question takes precedence: for places like Grand Saline, where the legacy of racism persists, what does reconciliation look like? Reconciliation is an elusive term, something we often talk about in relation to atrocities around the world, but one that typically does not have an efficient answer. What is reconciliation? How could reconciliation in Grand Saline function? But perhaps for this conclusion the most important question is this: how do we move toward a rhetoric of reconciliation? The answers to these questions are important lines of inquiry that our field can pursue, interrogating the wretched public memories of various communities and finding tangible, productive ways to create a change in perception.

Timothy Tyson, famed historian and author of *Blood Done Sign My Name*, wrote

at the beginning of his book a sentence that has stayed with me ever since I read it: “If there is to be reconciliation, first there must be truth.” It often seems that after major atrocities (such as the Holocaust and Apartheid) and even terrible events recounted in the folklore of racism in Grand Saline that people look for reconciliation. Sometimes that is possible, but many times it is not because, as Tyson put it, people have not first acknowledged the truth. We want to mask over the truth, not make amends, not acknowledge wrongs, and demand that those who were oppressed move past the injustices. I believe that this is a common trope when communities attempt to reconcile crimes against them, and I envision future projects revolving around better understandings of the rhetoric of reconciliation-- what people mean when they say it, what it actually looks like, and how other communities can find resolution after sometimes decades of problems. I am interested in this project not only as it pertains to Grand Saline but to the rest of the outside world as well.

When starting this project, I knew I wanted to investigate how people in my hometown discussed race and racism because it was always a part of my own identity and memory. Though I understood that what I was examining had to do with rural rhetorics and literacies (especially racial literacies), I did not situate my project in those terms from the beginning. However, I soon realized that my analysis and research were heavily indebted to these rural examinations. While my project does not always use these terms explicitly, I see how they weave through my discussions of Moore’s act on a local stage, public memory as a way to understand local people, and issues of circulation and preservation. I envision a future project that examines Grand Saline in particular to better understand rural rhetorics and the capacity of public memory--or further at rural rhetorics

in a theoretical sense, how people build community through folklore and legends.

A few months before I started my dissertation project and even a couple of months before Charles Moore self-immolated, I wrote a Facebook post, timestamped on April 25, 2014: “Going through paintings of Jesus on the cross and pictures of Chavez and Gandhi during their hunger strikes, the teenager in front of the tank at Tiananmen Square in '89, and the self-immolating monk in Vietnam in the '60s. Hard to think that any argument could be more persuasive than self-sacrificing.” I was considering writing my dissertation on acts of extremism across the globe and was thinking of ways to examine such protest acts from the likes of Chavez, Gandhi, and Duc. Less than two months later Moore self-immolated in my hometown, and I remember being shocked not just because of the visceral emotions that often overwhelms audiences after the act but because I knew I had been thinking about writing my dissertation, at least partly, on self-immolation. I tell people now that if I were ever meant to write one thing in my entire life, it was this project. It truly felt like fate.

But now that I finishing my dissertation, I see the need to spend more time researching other acts of extremism around the globe, including terrorism as a persuasive tool (especially in the age when so many Americans fear terrorism) and tools that the oppressed utilize to fight against governments nationally and internationally. In a time when extremism seems to be capturing our imagination more than any point in history, I hope to see projects exploring the various facets of extremism in different cultures, to lead us toward a better understanding of how extremism ignites our fears, emotions, and even policy decisions.

## **A Final Word**

Moore's influence has done more than struck a chord with me; he has infiltrated the public memory of Grand Saline through not only through stories and makeshift monuments but also through the internet. On the "Grand Saline, Texas" Wikipedia page, four people are labelled as "Notable people" from the town: Chris Tomlin, a famous Christian singer; Wiley Post, an aviator born in Grand Saline; Whitney Rodgers, a voice actress; and Charles Moore, a self-immolator. Though I understand that Wikipedia pages and content continually change and adapt, it is important to note that at least one user has found it important to unite Moore with the town in one of most-used online encyclopedias. This association forces Moore's legacy into the history and memory of Grand Saline in online spaces. Readers looking up information on Grand Saline will find Moore's name with only three other names corresponding to the town, marking his death and purpose as "memorable."

Also, multiple users created a "Charles R. Moore" Wikipedia page following his self-immolation too. The short biography focuses a bit on his life and previous protests, but most of the material attempts to explain his death to audiences. The rhetorical purpose of the page seems to explore Moore's reasons in dying in his hometown and why he thought the town still had racial problems. Along with being on the list of "Notable People" on the Grand Saline page, Moore's presence on Wikipedia illustrates his rhetorical influence on the public memory of the town.

By associating his death with the town on multiple Wikipedia pages, the editors state that Moore's death should be remembered, not scrubbed away or hidden beneath the surface of history. Though they cannot enact the public memory for town members, their insistence that Moore should be tied with the town makes their purpose known. Residents

within town, of course, can attempt to disremember Moore and not talk about him in public and private settings, but nevertheless, his legacy lives on through these pages. Thus, only a couple of years removed from Moore's death, there are people actively trying to keep his memory alive online. While we cannot judge their success and might not understand Moore's lasting impact until years from now, it is vital for us to see now that people have tried to keep Moore at the forefront of the news and our memories. He might never reach the potency levels of the legend of Poletown or the folklore of the KKK, but he does have a story that is told, that some try to remember, and that some try to forget. This dissertation is my contribution to his memory as well.

While I could end my project demonstrating how Moore has already influenced public memory, I do not believe this is enough. So I want to end my conclusion, and this dissertation, with a promise: the Texas Historical Commission does not allow for markers to be placed for deceased individuals until ten years after their death, but on June 23rd, 2024, I plan to submit a proposal through the commission to create a marker for Moore, either to be placed at the site he was raised in Grand Saline or near the parking lot where he died. Hopefully, this will occur after this project is published as a book, but I believe it is important to not only write about subjects but to enter into the public realm and be an agent that promotes their memory, especially when there are many who actively want to forget. This is my promise not only to my readers, to my committee, or to Moore's family and friends; this is a promise to myself, to keep Moore's legacy intact, to keep the fire that he literally struck on June 22, 2014 burning figuratively decades from now. Moore deserves as much.

In closing, I reflect again on the words of Tyson: "If there is to be reconciliation,

first there must be truth.” I truly hope that my project has echoed this words and that as the people of Grand Saline move forward into the 21st century, they can work through their histories of racism.

If anything, maybe my words can represent at least a sliver of truth, the truth the town needs to finally reconcile it legends.

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## Vita

James Chase Sanchez was born on September 21, 1987 in Tyler, Texas. He is the son of Jan Smith and Rick Sanchez. A 2006 graduate of Grand Saline High School in Grand Saline, Texas, he received a Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in English from the University of Texas at Tyler in 2009. Sanchez received his Master of Arts degree in English from the University of Texas at Tyler in 2011.

In 2012, Sanchez enrolled in graduate studies at Texas Christian University. While working on his doctorate in Rhetoric and Composition, he held a Radford Fellowship (2014-2015), a Teaching Assistantship (2012-2014, 2015-2016), and an Honors Research Assistantship (2016-2017). Upon completion of his doctoral degree, Sanchez will be joining Middlebury College in Middlebury, Vermont in July 2017 as an Assistant Professor of Writing.

Sanchez is a 2015 winner of the Scholars of the Dream Award through CCC and has been published or has forthcoming publications in *CCC*, *Present Tense*, *WPA*, and *Steinbeck Review*.



## ABSTRACT

### PREACHING BEHIND THE FIERY PULPIT: RHETORIC, PUBLIC MEMORY, AND SELF-IMMOLATION

by James Chase Sanchez, Ph.D., 2017  
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This dissertation analyzes the rhetorical events leading to a white Methodist preacher's suicide protest by fire in Grand Saline, TX on June 23rd, 2014. Charles Moore, the self-immolator, killed himself in public to protest the racist legacy of the town, causing a debate about the town's racial memories of the KKK and lynchings. Exploring Buddhism, the Arab Spring, and recent self-immolations in Tibet, this project situates Moore's death in the lineage of self-immolations globally and analyzes how this public act attempts to persuade a local audience. Chapter 2 first uncovers contemporary and historical exigencies of self-immolation, analyzing the rhetorical conditions surrounding why people choose this act, such as through the likes of solidarity, enlightenment, and last efforts. Chapter 3 parses the complex persuasive themes embedded within the act, including dynamics of violence and nonviolence, religion, and sacrifice, and appeals within the act, including transcendence and embodiment. The dissertation then localizes Moore's protest by employing an enhanced methodology of public memory. Chapter 4 not only argues for the need of a local methodology to better grasp the intricacies of the self-immolation but also presents a heuristic to understand how such a public death divided a small town in terms of their views on race and racism. Finally, Chapter 5 articulates how public memories of racism created an imaginary framed by both town

insiders and outsiders and also explains how Moore embedded public memory discourse in his self-immolation by utilizing a space known for racial crimes, making explicit references to local narratives in circulation, and invoking extremism in action. Beyond furthering rhetorical studies and public memory, this project presents a methodology that combines auto-ethnography, interviews, and archival materials to contextualize the author's own memories of Grand Saline (his hometown) as they relate to public memory, race, and reconciliation. In doing so, the dissertation makes the case for the field to deploy mixed-method approaches to study acts of extremism and racism in their local and larger contexts. Ultimately, the dissertation shows how individual acts of political extremism have rhetorical power in how they shape and confront the ongoing work of public memory.