

## A Time For Burning (1966) Presentation Dutch Neck Church

### Timeline for background to “A Time for Burning”

- 1948, July 26. Pres. Harry S. Truman signs Executive Order 9981 desegregating the U.S. Armed Forces. (That same day he signs another executive order desegregating the federal workforce, which Pres. Woodrow Wilson had allowed to become segregated 1913-14.)
- 1954, May 17. Supreme Court decision Brown v. Board of Education (Topeka, KS) rules unconstitutional state laws establishing and maintaining racial segregation in public schools.
- 1955, December to November 1956. Montgomery, AL Bus Boycott (begun by Rosa Parks and ended by Supreme Court ruling segregated seating on public transportation unconstitutional.
- 1957, September 9. Civil Rights Act of 1957. Allowed federal prosecution of anyone who tries to prevent individuals from voting.
- 1960, February 1. Woolworth lunch counter sit-in, Greensboro, NC
- 1961-4. “Freedom Ride(s)rs,” “Freedom Summers”. Young people from the north ride buses to the south to register black voters.
- 1963, June 12. Assassination of Medgar Evers, Mississippi field secretary of the NAACP.  
August 28. March on Washington, D.C.; M.L. King’s “I Have a Dream” speech.
- 1964, July 2. Civil Rights Act of 1964. Guaranteed equal employment, limited the use of literacy tests in voting eligibility, allowed federal authorities to ensure that public facilities were integrated.
- 1965, February 1. Assassination of Malcolm X.  
March 7. “Bloody Sunday” at Edmund Pettus Bridge, Selma, AL.  
August 6. Voting Rights Act of 1965. Prohibits racial discrimination in voting.  
August 11-17, Watts (Los Angeles, CA) riots.
1966. Documentary “A Time for Burning”

## Synopsis of the film

*A Time for Burning* is a 1966 American documentary film that explores the attempts of the minister of Augustana Lutheran Church in Omaha, Nebraska, to persuade his all-white congregation to reach out to "Negro" Lutherans in the city's north side who attended Calvin Memorial Lutheran Church. The film was directed by San Francisco filmmaker William C. Jersey and was nominated for Best Documentary Feature in the 1967 Academy Awards. The film was commissioned by the Lutheran Church in America. The film is shot in "cinéma vérité" style. Youngdahl was the son of former Minnesota governor and federal judge Luther Youngdahl. The film includes a meeting between Youngdahl and a black barber, Ernie Chambers, who tells Youngdahl that his Jesus is "contaminated." At one point another Omaha Lutheran minister, Walter E. Rowoldt of Luther Memorial Lutheran Church, says, "This one lady said to me, 'pastor', she said, 'I want them to have everything I have, I want God to bless them as much as he blesses me, but', she says, 'pastor, I just can't be in the same room with them, it just bothers me'." Rowoldt and other ministers also discuss the concern that blacks moving into white neighborhoods will decrease property values.

The attempt to reach out does not succeed and Youngdahl resigns as minister of the church. In 2005, *A Time for Burning* was selected for preservation in the United States National Film Registry by the Library of Congress as "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant". Chambers completed law school and was elected to the Nebraska Legislature in 1970. By 2005 he had become the longest-serving state senator in Nebraska history.

Source: From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

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"The problem exists because White people think they are better than Black people and they want to oppress us and they want us to allow ourselves to be oppressed. ... I can't solve the problem. You guys pull the strings that close schools. You guys draw the bounds that keep our kids restricted to the ghetto. You guys write up the restrictive covenants that keep us out of houses. So it's up to you to talk to your brothers and your sisters and persuade them that they have a responsibility. We have assumed ours for over 400 years and we're tired of this kind of stuff now. We're not going to suffer patiently any more. No more turning the other cheek. No more blessing our enemies. No more praying for those who despitefully use us. We're going to show you that we've learned the lessons you've taught us. We've studied your history and you did not take over this country by singing we shall overcome. You did not gain control of the world like you have it now by dealing fairly with a man and keeping your word. You are treaty breakers. You are liars. You are thieves. You rape entire continents and races of people and then you wonder why these very people don't have any confidence or trust in you. Your religion means nothing. Your law is a farce and we see it every day. You demonstrated it in Alabama, and I can say 'you' because you are part of the whole system. You profit from it. In fact, you make your living from it."

*“As far as we’re concerned, your Jesus is contaminated just like everything else you tried to force upon us. So you can have Him. Here’s what I say: I wish you would follow Jesus like we followed Him, ‘cause if you did that, then we’d be in charge tomorrow.”*

--Ernie Chambers in conversation with Minister L. William Youngdahl,  
From: *A Time for Burning*, 1966; William C. Jersey, Director; Lutheran Film Associates,  
Producer

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“This is what you have to do when you go before Jesus; you have to present yourself in your course.”

--William Jersey

Source: <https://thekingsnecktie.com/2020/07/07/america-against-itself-a-time-for-burning-again/>

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### Naming the film

The name of the film could be a general reference to the fires that result from riots, but it is more likely a reference to the 1962 speech by Malcom X where he states, about the racism of White people and the society that they have created: “If he’s not ready to clean his house up, he shouldn’t have a house. It should catch on fire and burn down.” Below is a video clip from that speech.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6\\_uYWDyYNUg&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6_uYWDyYNUg&feature=youtu.be)

In that speech, Malcom X also says, “Before you come asking Mr. Muhammad, does he teach hate, you should ask yourselves who taught you” – which is to say that Western Civilization has many examples of hate and violence that pre-date teachings of Mr. Muhammad. Presumably referring to Elijah Muhammad, the leader of the Nation of Islam at that time. The current leader is Louis Farrakhan. The organization’s motto is “Justice or Else” which conveys the premise that justice and equality should not be politely asked for, but forcefully demanded.

Source: <https://www.resourcesforlife.com/docs/item30515>

A short documentary about *A Time For Burning*:

<https://www.resourcesforlife.com/docs/item30515>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TORZvA4pQU4&t=190s>

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#### Background: The Lynching of Joe Coe

Joe Coe, whose official name was George Smith, was an African-American man who lived in Omaha, Nebraska. Coe was a married father of two children and worked as a porter at a railroad company. Coe resided on North 12th Street, which was north of downtown Omaha. Joe Coe's life was dramatically upended in October of 1891 when he was accused of raping Lizzie Yates, a five-year-old white girl. Despite accounting for his whereabouts and having supporting witnesses, Coe was arrested and jailed at the Douglas County Courthouse. Meanwhile, rumors flew and a false report that the child had died from the assault was circulated by The Omaha Bee, a local newspaper. Compounding matters, the newspaper claimed that Coe would only serve 20 years for the heinous crime. News of the light punishment enraged whites. Fueled by fabrications and bloodthirst, they ordered the swift execution of Joe Coe.

On October 10, 1891, their demands for Coe's death were met. A mob of up to one thousand men besieged the jail where Coe was detained. They insisted that guards hand over Coe but authorities refused. The county sheriff and even the governor admonished the crowd, ordering them to disband, but they were seething and defiant. The city's one dozen police officers were grossly outnumbered. They did nothing while the crowd yelled out racist slurs, rammed the courthouse doors with iron streetcar rails, and broke out windows. Vigilantes forced their way into the building and found Coe locked away in a steel cage. Upon seeing the fortification, they demanded and were supplied crowbars, chisels and sledgehammers. Two hours later, the white mob had finally hammered and pried their way into the cage. Coe was snatched from the cell. The mob brutally beat Coe. They tied a rope around his neck and dragged him in the streets before finally hanging him from a streetcar cable that ran along 17th and Harney Streets. Onlookers reveled in the lynching by cheering and soliciting speeches while Coe's corpse dangled overhead. Others sought to capitalize on the murder by collecting pieces of the rope used to hang Coe to sell as keepsakes.

The day after Coe's brutal killing, multiple newspapers clarified the erroneous report that Lizzie Yates had died; rather, the child was alive and well. The clarification, however, provided no justice for Joe Coe. Initially, seven men were arrested, but no one was prosecuted. Although Coe had suffered sixteen bodily wounds and three broken vertebrae, the deputy coroner testified that Coe had died of fright—simply scared to death—rather than by the brutal physical trauma inflicted upon him. Following the deputy coroner's testimony, the first-degree murder

charges brought against all seven men were dropped. No one ever faced trial for the lynching of Joe Coe.

Years later, Lizzie Yates admitted that she had never been attacked by Joe Coe.

Source: <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/the-lynching-of-joe-coe-1891/>

Other Sources:

History of Racism in Omaha, Nebraska

<https://northomahahistory.com/2012/12/19/a-history-of-racism-in-omaha/>

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## What Do We Do with Evil?

Jesus's Social Program

Thursday, October 15, 2020

### Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation

From the Center for Action and Contemplation  
(<https://cac.org/>)

Jesus does not directly attack the religious and institutional sin systems of his time until his final action against the money changers in the temple (see Matthew 21:12–13; Mark 11:15–17; Luke 19:45–46). Because of this, Jesus' primary social justice critique and action are often a disappointment to most radicals and social activists. Jesus' social program, as far as I can see, is a quiet refusal to participate in almost all external power structures or domination systems. His primary action is a very simple lifestyle, which kept him from being constantly co-opted by those very structures, which I (and Paul) would call the "sin system."

Jesus seems to have avoided the monetary system as much as possible by using "a common purse" (John 12:6; 13:29). His three-year ministry, in effect, offers free healing and healthcare for any who want them. He consistently treats women with a dignity and equality that is almost unknown in an entirely patriarchal culture. At the end of his life, he surrenders to the punitive systems of both empire and religion by letting them judge, torture, and murder him. He is finally a full victim of the systems that he refused to worship.

Jesus knew the destructive power of what Walter Wink wisely called the “domination system.” [2] These systems usually wield power over the poor, the defenseless, and the outsider in every culture. When he does take on the temple system directly (Mark 11:15–18), Jesus is killed within a week. Contrary to history’s interpretation of Jesus’ practice, he did not concentrate on personal, “flesh” sins nearly as much as the sins of “the world” and “the devil,” but few of us were taught to see him that way.

In fact, Jesus is always forgiving individual sinners, which was a problem for the righteous from the beginning (Luke 7:34). In contrast, I do not once see him “forgiving” the sins of systems and empires. Instead, he just makes them show themselves (Mark 5:8) and name themselves (Mark 5:9)—as did Desmond Tutu in South Africa and Martin Luther King, Jr. in America.

Significantly, Jesus says “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida!” (Matthew 11:21) and “Alas for you [cultures of the] lawyers, scribes, and Pharisees” (most of Matthew 23 and Luke 11:37–54). He didn’t warn Bill from Bethsaida, Cathy from Chorazin, or Simon the Pharisee, with whom he engages and eats (Luke 7:36–47). He laments over “Jerusalem, Jerusalem” (Luke 13:34–35) instead of attacking Jerry from Jerusalem. Today we would call that making an “unfair generalization”; but if what I am saying here has any truth to it, maybe it is a much more truthful and fair diagnosis of the problem. It is Bethsaida and Jerusalem that should fear judgment more than Bill and Jerry! It is “Capernaum” that is to be cast into hell (Matthew 11:23), not necessarily Corey from Capernaum. How did we miss that? It is crucial in our understanding of evil as being, first of all, a social agreement.

[1] Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Augsburg Fortress: 1992).

Adapted from Richard Rohr, [What Do We Do with Evil? The World, the Flesh, and the Devil](#) (CAC Publishing: 2019), 71–73.

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Other Sources:

Revisiting “A Time for Burning” and the Spiritual Crisis of Racism, Richard Brody, *The New Yorker*, July 15th, 2020

<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/the-front-row/revisiting-a-time-for-burning-and-the-spiritual-crisis-of-racism>

America Against Itself: A Time for Burning (Again), *The King’s Necktie*, July 7th, 2020

<https://thekingsnecktie.com/2020/07/07/america-against-itself-a-time-for-burning-again/>

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## The Cross And The Lynching Tree

By Michael Stalcup

We shudder at the inhumanity,  
the crafted cruelty of that sickening show:  
the stripped humiliation, blasphemy  
of beaten flesh, death's agonies stretched slow  
by fellow men created in God's image,  
turned terrorists, enslaved to sin's strange fruit.  
How could they mock the marred and lifeless visage  
of God's own child? His axe is at the root!

We tremble more: If we are in that crowd,  
would we have spoken up? or wept? or cared?  
Would we have stood against those winds or bowed?  
Or did we lead the mocking? "*Were you there...?*"  
the negro spiritual demands - and, trying,  
we answer "no," but know that we are lying.

Source: Sojourners magazine, November 2020  
<https://sojo.net/>