



A Time for Burning Discussion Guide

This guide is developed and designed with a city wide educational collaborative effort to recognize the 40th Anniversary of the documentary A Time for Burning directed by William C. Jersey. This dialogue guide is to be used after the viewing of the documentary and should be facilitated by a group leader who is knowledgeable in inter-group / human relations, has experience in facilitating group dialogues and can stay neutral throughout facilitating this dialogue. Although it is nearly impossible to anticipate the age, history, race or knowledge of participants in the dialogue, great efforts have been made to ensure the following curriculum is beneficial to all attendees. A timeline has been provided in addition to this guide for the use of historical context and may be used at the facilitator's discretion.

For many, A Time for Burning allows viewers to assess their personal lives today, while assessing the lives of those in the film over 40 years ago. The following questions are designed to allow the viewer the opportunity to dig deeper, reflect on the perspectives of their own lives, and consider methods to advocate for a more inclusive, respectful community while dialoguing with others in a small group format.

SET UP: Viewers should be seated in a circle format so everyone can be seen and heard. A suggested number of participating viewers should be around 8-10 people per dialogue group. First, if the group doesn't know each other, take a minute to go around the circle (clockwise, or to the left, is respectful to many cultures) and ask viewers to introduce themselves. From there, have a conversation using the following questions as a guide.

TIME: One hour to view the film and one hour for dialogue after viewing the film.

Part I: 15 minutes – General Overview and Reflection

- Generally, what are your thoughts about the film?
- Many phrases from the movie resonate with viewers. Are there any quotes, phrases, conversations, etc. that seem to stick out for you? What impact did they have on you?
- Was there anything in the film that intrigued, excited or angered you? Why did these feelings affect you?

Part II: 20 minutes - Context

- Many have said: "11:00am on Sunday morning is the most racially segregated time in America." What are your thoughts about this statement? Do you believe this statement to be true or untrue?
- What examples of the denial of opportunity and/or access did you see in the film?
- After historical documentaries, we occasionally hear "That was then...this is now." Do you feel this film, in some way, portrays the current status of Omaha? Why or why not and what blatant or subtle examples indicate this to you?
- Some characters in the film realized they had prejudices of others. Since its human nature to pre-judge, what prejudices do you have? How do they impact your relationships to others?
- What issues do this film and our dialogue bring up for you?

Part III: 25 minutes – Application...what now?

- How can we do more than just 'tolerate' someone or their differences?
- What can we personally do about these issues of difference? How do we as humans genuinely educate ourselves about those different than us, without being 'fake' or singling out one person to speak for a whole group?
- In the film, Ray Christensen said: "We meet, we talk, and we still conclude that it's not the right time. Not the right time for whom? For me, my parents, my wife, my son? Even my parents know that the world is changing, that it's not their world anymore. Take myself, I know no Negro personally. I've never sat and talked to one. Honestly. I don't know their problems. How many years do I have to prepare myself to talk with another **human being**? What am I waiting for?"
 - Do you think Omahan's are waiting?
 - Why do you think Mr. Christensen uses the words 'human being'?
- How can we be more inclusive?
- What resources, organizations or events are in Omaha to help us become more inclusive?

The above curriculum was created by Conference for Inclusive Communities with input from other local agencies and organizations including the Anti-Defamation League and Peggy Jones of UNO.

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Conference for Inclusive Communities is a human relations organization confronting prejudice, bigotry and discrimination through educational programs that raise awareness, foster leadership and encourage advocacy for a just and inclusive society. www.cficonline.org

Abbreviated Local and National Civil Rights Timeline *(National events in italics)*

With regards to the content of the film, this timeline has been designed to best magnify events **directly related** to issues within the film.

- 1955 – *NAACP member Rosa Parks refuses to give up her seat at the front of the “colored section” of a bus to white passenger, defying a southern custom of the time. The Montgomery, AL black community a bus boycott which lasts until bus lines are desegregated on Dec. 21st, 1956.*
- 1957 – The Omaha Fire Department was desegregated and the seniority system of advancement came to an end. The first five-member, all-black company of firefighter was formed and put into service in 1895.
-- *Formerly all-white Central High School in Little Rock, AK is forcibly desegregated when the “Little Rock Nine” are escorted by the National Guard to their classes.*
- 1961 – *Student volunteers known as “Freedom Riders” begin taking bus trips through the South to test out new laws that prohibit segregation in interstate travel facilities, which include bus and railway stations. Several of the groups are attacked by angry mobs along the way.*
- 1963 – *Martin Luther King, Jr., is arrested and jailed during anti-segregation protests in Birmingham, AL. He writes his seminal “Letter from Birmingham Jail” arguing that individuals have the moral duty to disobey unjust laws.*
-- *On June 12th in Jackson, MS, Medgar Evers, Mississippi’s NAACP field secretary is murdered outside his home.*
-- *About 200,000 people join the March on Washington where Martin Luther King delivers his famous “I Have a Dream” speech.*
-- *Four young girls in the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church of Birmingham, AL are killed when a bomb explodes. Riots erupt in Birmingham leading to the deaths of two more black youths.*
-- *By means of nonviolent protest, Herb Rhodes, Betty Jo Moreland, and Dale Anders, along with fellow members of the NAACP Youth Council, succeeded in opening Peony Park’s popular swimming pool to African-Americans for the first time. The group enjoyed the support of white colleagues to integrate this privately owned business.*
-- *Two thousand blacks gathered at City Hall to urge the Omaha City Council to adopt an ordinance banning discrimination in housing and employment.*
-- *Charles B. Washington, an Omaha civil rights activist, helped stage a sit-in at the downtown Omaha Woolworth & Co. store to protest discrimination against blacks in public places.*
- 1964 -- *The 24th Amendment abolishes the poll tax.*
-- *President Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act of 1964.*
-- *In Neshoba County, MS, the bodies of three civil rights workers are found in an earthen dam six weeks into a federal investigation backed by President Johnson.*
- 1965 -- *Malcolm X, black nationalist and founder of the Organization of Afro-American Unity, is shot to death in Harlem, NY.*
-- *In Selma, AL, blacks begin a march to Montgomery in support of voting rights but are stopped at the Pettus Bridge by a police blockade. Fifty marchers are hospitalized, and the press dubs the incident “Bloody Sunday.”*
-- *Congress passes the Voting Rights Act of 1965 making it easier for Southern blacks to register to vote.*
-- *From August 11-17, in Watts, CA, a black section of Los Angeles, race riots erupt.*
-- *President Johnson issues Executive Order 11246 which enforces affirmative action.*
- 1966 – *A Time for Burning* premiered to an Omaha audience in September. It was broadcast nationally on the National Education Television Network in October and November.
-- *In Oakland, CA, the militant Black Panthers are founded by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale.*
-- *A pop bottle thrown at a police officer touched off three nights of looting on Omaha’s Near North Side. Five hundred National Guardsmen were summoned to clear 24th Street and quell the lawlessness.*
- 1968 – *Disorder erupted during the Civic Auditorium appearance of presidential hopeful George Wallace, a segregationist and former governor of Alabama. The violence spilled out of the auditorium and into the streets. Ten businesses were looted, and two white motorists were beaten. Howard Stevenson, a sixteen-year-old black youth, was shot and killed by a police officer during widespread looting. Other violence occurred throughout the summer.*
-- *Martin Luther King, Jr., at age 39, is shot as he stands on the balcony outside his hotel room.*
-- *President Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act of 1968 prohibiting discrimination in the sale, rental and financing of housing.*
- 1969 – *Fourteen-year-old Vivian Strong, a young black girl, was fatally wounded by a white police officer, James L. Loder, who responded to a prowling call at the Logan Fontenelle Homes in Near North Omaha. The death triggered five nights of rioting that torched much of North 24th Street. The violence resulted in one death, 21 injuries, \$750,000 in damages and 88 arrests.*

**For more resources, guides and references related to *A Time for Burning*
please visit www.itstimeomaha.com.**

This timeline is collaboratively compiled by the Anti-Defamation League and Conference for Inclusive Communities.

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