

Impact Statement

Samuel Sparks, Grade 11.
Signed, William Lewis Moore, 2018.
Digital film.
New Technology High School, Napa, CA
Unsung Hero: William Lewis Moore

When beginning to consider the project ahead, our group knew we needed to find a subject who could grab our imagination. Looking at all the different activists we found plenty of courageous people, however none stood out or had us as interested as William Lewis Moore. Our team loved his story, and we loved the fact that he was willing to not only stand up for what he believed in but also be creative in how to draw attention to the issues of race.

His quiet, peaceful, lone protests are ones to look up to for all activists and his example of bravery in the face of extreme racism was something we felt we needed to share. William Lewis Moore walked all the way from Tennessee to Alabama, by himself, protesting segregation by wearing sandwich board signs with messages promoting equality between races. We discovered his ideals of equality were driven by the abuse he suffered in an asylum after he was diagnosed with schizophrenia.

We really connected to William Lewis Moore because we've grown up in a time and place where individuality is celebrated, something which matches Moore's beliefs. The creative ways he protested and expressed himself reminded our group of something we might see from our friends or peers and that made us feel closer to him as a person. Moore was someone we could look up to and who we were excited to represent and share with anyone we could.

When producing this film, we had to consider how we wanted to show the story. Our idea was very ambitious, a lot of the movement and sets were difficult to execute but proved worthwhile in the end. We wanted to be sure we could present William Lewis Moore's story in an honest way that would tell his story through a creative perspective. Moore was someone who struggled with forces both internal and external, so we made sure to paint him in a positive light, despite his disabilities. We envisioned Moore as a loveable oddball who stood up for what was right and that's what we kept in mind throughout filming. His story is an endearing one and our vision was to capture the plight of William Lewis Moore through a unique narrative where Moore chronicled his journey on the road to Mississippi.

After learning of the courageous yet tragic story of William Lewis Moore, we knew his journey should not have to go without recognition. We reached out to the local synagogue in Napa, Congregation Beth Shalom. Every year they put on a celebration of civil rights around the time of Martin Luther King Day. They host movies, historians, and speakers to cultivate public knowledge and teach us about the struggles and triumphs of the American Civil Rights Movement. We reached out the head of the synagogue, the president, Ellyn Elson, about showcasing our narrative film at the synagogue one night for a public viewing. They loved the idea and welcomed us with open arms, giving us the opportunity to show our film on January 16th, the day after Martin Luther King Day.

We collaborated with another group also doing a narrative film about William Lewis Moore. We capitalized on this opportunity because we believed that the two narrative films told William Lewis Moore's story through two alternative lenses. It was another great opportunity to educate the community. When time came for the showing we pulled in a significant crowd including the Rabbi, Niles Goldstein. We introduced ourselves and our films and showed them to the public for the first time. While uneasy at first, we were relieved by the positive feedback and warm reception from the audience. They really cherished the story of William Lewis Moore, and many hadn't even heard of him until now. After the showing we had a discussion afterwards, the Rabbi told us how he planned to incorporate the story of William Lewis Moore into Sunday School this week as part of the civil rights movement they've been learning about recently.

After the showing we uploaded our short film to YouTube and used that platform to share our product with friends and family who didn't make it to the showing. We set up links to the film on our individual blogs and other forms of social media to try and increase the impact we could make even after the showing. Some of the friends and family even contacted us and asked if they would be able to share our film on their own social medias, to which we emphatically agreed. We'd even got reports from them that after they shared it with their friends, those friends went on to share it with others. So, in addition to having a public showing, we managed to cast a big net online and got people interested enough to want to share it themselves.

The tragedy of William Lewis Moore is both an inspiration and a call to action, he is a man who stood up against racism for no other reason than his own moral values. We continue our lives, changed by the story of this man, learning that the freedoms of today came at tremendous cost.