

VGM Transaction Number: **LENDING – Article (RAPID:FHM)**

 **573615**

Odyssey Address: usf-odyssey.hosts.atlas-sys.com

Deliver via: Odyssey

Call Number: F394.G736 S26 2021

Location: Fenwick Stacks

Journal Title: Salt of the Earth

Volume:

Issue:

Month/ Year: 2021

Pages: xix-xxx

Article Title:

Author:

ISSN: 9780814142233

Cost: No Charge

Copyright Compliance:

COPYRIGHT NOTICE : This material may be protected by copyright law (Title 17 U.S. Code).

Borrowing Library Information:

ILL Number:

 **-20225102**

**Deliver to: University of South Florida Libraries
(RAPID:FHM)**

Patron:

EMAIL:

Provided by:

George Mason University Libraries, (VGM)

Email: illloan@gmu.edu

INTRODUCTION

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

—Matthew 5.13, New International Version

GRAND SALINE, TEXAS, ABOUT seventy miles east of Dallas, isn't known for much.

A few decades ago the community had a storied football legacy that eventually faded once the decorated head coach, Carter Elliott, retired in the late 1990s. Though Grand Saline never won a state title, they collected numerous divisional and regional playoff victories and were even featured on MTV's *True Life* in 2001, in an episode titled "I'm a Football Hero." The episode followed leaders of two teams, Grand Saline and Celina, as they prepared for their regional football playoff game and was a point of pride for people in the town, even though Grand Saline lost the game. The veins of the town's football legacy run deep, and its pride can still be felt in the bleachers on most Friday evenings in the fall.

Chris Tomlin, a contemporary Christian music singer who won a Grammy, hails from the town as well, but he isn't well-known outside of people who listen to Christian worship music.

Perhaps the town is most well-known for the salt flats that rest on the south side of the town—owned by the Morton Salt Company. The Morton Salt mine is one of the "purest" in all of America (Harper), and locals claim that if you eat a salted pretzel anywhere around the country, you have tasted salt that comes from Grand Saline (Sanchez, *Man on Fire*). From these flats, Grand Saline earned its nickname, "The Salt of the Earth," which associates the town's Christian roots with its largest industry.

"You are the salt of the earth," proclaims Jesus in Matthew 5.13, noted in the epigraph. In this particular biblical tale, Jesus, sitting

on the mountainside, states to his audience that their goodness—their purity—is key to saving others. Being the salt of the earth can lead others to Christianity. Being pious, loving God, and living for God is what Jesus asks of his followers. However, if they lose that saltiness, if they lose their purity, they no longer have a purpose. They are no longer helping people. Jesus calls for Christians to be the salt of the earth.

However, salt has many functions.

Salt preserves.

The salt in Grand Saline's industry and name may not carry the same symbolic value as that of the Bible, but its symbolism still exists. The "purity" in Grand Saline is within the race of its people, or rather, 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 402). So for people in Grand Saline, white systems of being (such as white culture, white appearance and clothes, and white ideologies) are privileged over systems of being that nonwhite people might embrace. While many East Texas towns have fully integrated and better represent the racial demographics of the state as a whole, Grand Saline stands out as exceptionally white. The town is slightly below state averages for its Latinx population, representing about 20 percent of the town, but it has less than a one percent Black population, which is significantly less than all other towns in the area (Dean 5A). I actually don't even know of a single Black family that lives in town. Other nearby communities, including Van, Edgewood, Canton, and Mineola, all have notable Black populations, and many of these Black people have heard racist stories about Grand Saline.

Historically, salt has been used to desiccate food. Salting dehydrates meat, creating an environment where cultures (especially bacteria and fungi) can't grow. The salt density stops anything from developing—or effectively kills it—via osmosis. Of course, I am not a food biologist or a scientist in the least, but I am intrigued by the way salt preserves because I see the saltiness of Grand Saline, its whiteness, also being preserved through what I will call a *rhetoric of*

white supremacy. I will touch on this definition later, but for now, I want to stick with the metaphor. Just as placing dry salt on a piece of meat preserves its character through killing off living bacteria so does Grand Saline preserve its whiteness via particular rhetorical strategies—effectively “killing off” any sense of diversity, inclusion, or multiculturalism. The preservation of meat is an extension of life because without it diseases such as salmonella, listeria, or trichinosis might prosper. While the people of Grand Saline might consider their own rhetorical preservation of white supremacy as a good quality, many readers, I assume, will think differently. The town preserves its white culture not out of necessity for life but out of fear of a white cultural death, an unfounded fear that has existed within white communities for centuries.

Their salt preserves them but not from any real threat.

DEFINING WHITE SUPREMACY

Before I explain how a culture of white supremacy pervades Grand Saline, though, I need to define *white supremacy*, because that definition is pertinent to the arguments in this text. Historically and in popular culture, white supremacy has simply been defined as the ideologies and beliefs that white people are better than people of color. When the term *white supremacy* is invoked in contemporary society, most in the public might conjure images of the Ku Klux Klan, the Jim Crow South, or the Proud Boys (a new right-wing hate group that often promotes versions of explicit white power) (Wilson). As Carol Anderson states, historically, we have viewed white supremacy as being embodied in hate groups, supporters of hate groups, or people who hold openly racist views (such as “I hate wetbacks”).

However, this trope has been transformed greatly in the twenty-first century. Critical race theorists have long stated that racism isn’t static; it evolves (Beydoun). The same is true for white supremacy, a specific form of racism. Whereas historically it has been understood as an outward version of white superiority, it has been altered, rhetorically, to maintain power in contemporary society. I argue that we can better understand white supremacy today as *the*

ways in which people and institutions enact and reinforce ideologies of white superiority. This definition includes overt forms of white supremacy—such as recent fliers from the Ku Klux Klan suggesting that a white genocide is happening in America (Campbell; Sanchez, “Trump”)—to more tacit ones—such as people who argue that racism isn’t a “big deal” today. This last example would be an act of white supremacy because it *reinforces* white superiority, subtly, by excusing unawareness of racism in the present.

Many readers will probably be able to name various acts that would encompass the ways white supremacy is enacted via people and institutions. Racist epithets, cultural racism, and displays of racial bias all are acts that are quite easy to name, and because we can qualify them as explicitly (or explicitly to some, at least) racist, they aren’t as effective in a country that mostly decries such hatred (though, under Trump’s regime, explicit racism seemed as much *en vogue* as ever). Yet what about being complicit with white supremacy? What about staying silent in the face of it? Telling stories that promote subjugation but can be framed as “jokes”? The ways identities are negotiated and performed in light of a racist culture? These might be more difficult to name because they are more covert and because they don’t explicitly enact bigotry; rather, they support it. These acts keep the structure of white supremacy in place—they are the pillars on which overt white supremacy stands—and they are the central subjects for this book’s inquiry.

I will be examining white supremacy by looking at the rhetorical practices within the culture of Grand Saline. Whereas a cursory understanding of my title might suggest that I am exploring explicit practices, instead I focus on the covert acts, the mechanisms that sustain, maintain, and preserve white supremacy in my hometown. The implicit ones are the building blocks for explicit white supremacy. They are the behaviors, ideologies, and identities that people learn in becoming white supremacists. If we are able to dismantle these practices, then we have the chance to topple the more egregious versions too. Overall, my definition of white supremacy makes clear connections between covert rhetorical practices and our understanding of white supremacy in the twenty-first century.

MEMORIES OF RACISM: THE STORIES OF GRAND
SALINE, CHARLES MOORE, AND ME

People have been digging for salt in this East Texas area for centuries. Local Native American tribes used the salt flats to gather the mineral for years. Near the turn of the twentieth century, after Jordan's Saline (a mile southwest of Grand Saline) was founded, multiple salt mines controlled the town's economy. Morton Salt eventually bought out all competing companies and took over production in the 1920s and was the only salt company in newly founded Grand Saline by 1931 (Kleiner). While the town boomed relative to its region in the post-Reconstruction era, the Great Depression eventually left the community without an economy; the town never grew much past three thousand residents. Today Morton Salt is the largest employer in town (with around two hundred employees as of 2015). The downtown area looks like most other current East Texas towns, comprising decaying buildings, abandoned businesses, and other vestiges of the past. It appears lifeless. I attended middle school in Grand Saline for two years (from 2000 to 2002) before moving to the town during my high school years (2002 to 2006). I remember driving through the town on weekend nights when there was nothing else to do and would see reminders of what once was—the empty movie stores, salons, and restaurants that once promised growth and prosperity were now lost. Nothing has changed much in the fifteen years since I left.

But underneath the surface of this stagnant town lie racist depths, racism that has existed or been talked about for well over a century. Though most of the community would not refer to themselves as racist or white supremacist, locals from nearby towns, especially communities of color, would beg to differ. I would call it a “well-known secret,” but it wasn't a secret at all. To grow up in Grand Saline is to grow up believing your community is more racist than other communities.

This is why on June 23, 2014, Charles Moore, an elderly white minister, self-immolated in the Family Dollar parking lot in Grand Saline—to protest the town's racism. In a letter he left on his car windshield, titled “O Grand Saline Repent of Your Racism” (see

Figures 1 and 2), he declared that he was born and raised in town and remembered the racist misdeeds of the community's past—lynchings, hangings, and stories of the Ku Klux Klan. He believed the town had never moved past its racist history. Moore's death mostly went unnoticed; local and regional news did not even name him until ten days after the incident (Dean; Repko).

C 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.

Figure 1. A copy of Charles Moore's letter to Grand Saline.

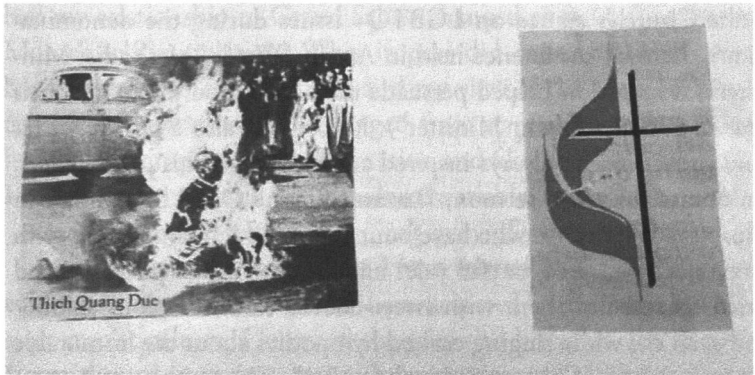


Figure 2. The cover of the letter Moore left behind for family.

I heard about Moore's death moments after he lit the flame because multiple people on my social media feeds posted about it. After I read his powerful words and understood his vision, I became aware of my own truth: If I ever had one story to tell, it was the story of Charles Moore. From there, I wrote my dissertation on Moore's act and the rhetoric of self-immolation globally and produced a documentary titled *Man on Fire*, which premiered on PBS, as a part of *Independent Lens*, on December 17, 2018. The film tracks the final moments of Charles Moore's life and investigates the legacy of racism in Grand Saline. Studying Moore's life taught me a lot about myself. I felt a certain kinship in understanding our parallel views of racism in Grand Saline (we both felt that the town must publicly attempt to move past its racist culture rather than continually deny it), and reading his sermons reminded me very much of my grandfather, who was a Southern Baptist preacher in a nearby community.

Moore was a passionate person. He fought for integration in East Texas in the 1950s and was asked to leave a church because of his progressive racial ideologies (Hall, "Man on Fire"). He traveled to Chicago in the height of the Civil Rights Movement to fight for the cause and lived in India for two years in the 1970s for a mission trip. In 1996, by the time he lived in Austin and had a new church, he went on a fifteen-day hunger strike to protest the United Meth-

odist Church's stance on LGBTQ+ issues during the denomination's national conference held in Austin (Ward, "Methodist Minister"). His action helped persuade the convention to change their stance (Ward, "Austin Minister"). Moore was also a terrific writer and preacher who always inspired and challenged his parishioners. 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 . . . 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?" His progressive stances intertwined with his faith. In another sermon, 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")

Moore's life greatly affected my own because his passion for social justice, his willingness to fight for his beliefs, and the love and compassion he spread in his sermons mirrored my own views and ideologies. I still think of him almost every single day.

However, after producing the film and writing my dissertation, I knew that my work on Grand Saline wasn't over. Though I had spent dozens of hours in the archives, examining Grand Saline's racial past, and hours interviewing historians from around the Grand Saline area, something was missing. Though I interviewed over sixty-five people during the dissertation and film process, my understanding of Grand Saline was not complete. I realized, finally, that I had never considered myself in relation to my hometown—How had I participated in racism and also been a victim of it? How

had my relationship to Grand Saline changed after I left and after Moore's self-immolation? What impact did making *Man on Fire* have on the town's views of me and my view of the town? When I considered how much had changed from starting my dissertation in 2014 to completing the dissertation and film in 2017 and 2018, I realized there was still an unexplored variable: myself.

I am entrenched within the town's story of white supremacy.

My identity stems from how I was treated in Grand Saline. I told racist stories and legends. I participated in the town's white supremacist culture. I knew all the tales and histories. Yet, even as I participated in racism, my nicknames were still "Wetback" and "Beaner." I was stuck in between being a racist participant and being a racist target.

However, as I began the dissertation and film, I also became entangled in the story of my hometown in a different way—as someone trying to change the town's culture. I was critiqued for talking about racism openly, for "race-baiting," and for being a "traitor." I challenged people's racial ideologies privately and publicly. As one interviewee told me, "Everyone in town reads your Facebook page . . . and knows that you are wrong." I am not only a product of the white supremacist culture in Grand Saline; I am the face of activists attempting to change it.

My book uses personal stories from my middle school and high school experiences to discuss the way Grand Saline constructs racial identity and forces assimilation and how stories of historical racism are communicated to insiders and outsiders. I also talk about the filmmaking experience, in which I was lead producer and interviewer for *Man on Fire*. This role made me the most prominent "outside agitator" for many in Grand Saline (besides, perhaps, Charles Moore himself), as my duties included securing interviews with people (a tough task), conducting the interviews, and helping piece the story together during postproduction. I was fortunate to work with an amazing director, Joel Fendelman, on this project and am ever grateful that he trusted me to be lead producer. Some of the incidents that occurred while producing this film also make up this text.

Overall, my book is composed of my own memories, textual analysis, and the interviews of sixty-five people. Interviewees discussed Charles Moore, Grand Saline's history, and racial issues within the community. While some of the interviewees were Grand Saline residents, others were former residents, and a few were white people and people of color from neighboring communities. My book employs many of these interviews not to extrapolate any quantifiable information about the town but rather to illustrate themes in how these people discuss issues of racism, whiteness, and the town's legacy.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND CHAPTER OUTLINE

As noted above, I define white supremacy as the ways in which people and institutions enact and reinforce ideologies of white superiority, and while this definition is important for the arguments of this text, my text does not explicitly work to build this definition. Rather, I attempt to understand the rhetorical components that *maintain* white supremacy. If we understand that racism and white supremacy evolve in order to keep whiteness at the top of the racial hierarchy, then we must understand how that evolution rhetorically functions. What does white supremacy in rural America look like today, especially a white supremacy that isn't explicit? How does it subjugate people of color? How does it indoctrinate white people and minorities? How might we not only see it but be able to critique it? How does it force assimilation, influence storytelling, and silence others? This book attempts to answer these questions through my case study of Grand Saline.

My analysis is thus informed by autoethnographic and cultural-rhetorics methodologies. I use these methodologies for a few different reasons. First, at my core, I am a storyteller. A good story can effectively share knowledge and research just as well as traditional scholarship can (I'm thinking of Victor Villanueva's *Bootstraps*, Keith Gilyard's *Voices of the Self*, and most of Aja Martinez's work). Also, in thinking about the white supremacy in my hometown, it would feel less authentic to focus on the stories of others but not my own. Since one of my central claims is that I was a part of

this white supremacist tradition as much as anyone else, my stories provide the space to talk about my “personal lived experiences and their relationship to culture,” which is Robin M. Boylorn and Mark P. Orbe’s definition of autoethnography. Last, I view my approach as an extension of a cultural-rhetorics orientation, an orientation based upon “all the meaning-making practices and their relationships” (Powell et al.).

My work attempts to better understand—to constellate—the meaning-making practices of white supremacy in my hometown and how they create relationships between town members, between Grand Saline residents and residents of other towns, and between me and members of my home community. The stories I tell and my subsequent analyses of them focus on these relationships and attempt to pinpoint epistemologies of white supremacy.

To do this, I investigate the town with an autoethnographic and cultural-rhetorics lens. I focus on three functions: *assimilation*, *hegemonic storytelling*, and *silencing* as rhetorical moves the community uses to *preserve* white supremacy. In the seven chapters I outline below, I use three, Chapters 1, 3, and 5, to tell my stories about my experiences in Grand Saline. Chapter 1 focuses on stories of how I found my racial identity and assimilated into whiteness and white supremacy in my community. Chapter 3 highlights the racist storytelling traditions I learned, repeated, and constructed during my middle school and high school days. Chapter 5 centers on Moore’s self-immolation and the creation and public airing of my film project—to emphasize silencing as a rhetorical tactic. Between these chapters, I provide analyses of the narratives themselves. Chapter 2 focuses on the rhetoric of white supremacist assimilation, Chapter 4 on racist storytelling, and Chapter 6 on the rhetoric of silencing. Finally, Chapter 7 explores how Grand Saline might change and details my concluding promise to the community.

However, before closing, I want to untangle my relationship with Grand Saline. As a kid, I loved my time in town (even while participating in the town’s white supremacy on a seemingly daily basis) and still have fond, nonracist memories there. This book is not meant to disparage Grand Saline or vilify the community. I am

still friends with many people I went to high school with—some who are actively working to correct white supremacist issues and others who are not—and affectionately remember their families' love and care. I do not deny or erase any of that. Nonetheless, I also cannot deny my other memories—memories of racism—many of which make up this book. This book is not written out of hatred or a misguided scholarly vision; it comes from my love and desire to turn to action, to help Grand Saline and myself by acknowledging the truth.



Salt conserves meat.

It maintains food.

And the “salt” of Grand Saline—the town’s whiteness—preserves too. It preserves white supremacy.

This book exists in order to label it, challenge it, and, I hope, change it.

SALT OF THE EARTH

RHETORIC, PRESERVATION, AND
WHITE SUPREMACY

James Chase Sanchez
Middlebury College



Conference on College
Composition and
Communication



National Council of
Teachers of English

Staff Editor: Bonny Graham
Manuscript Editor: Leigh Scarcliff
Series Editor: Steve Parks
Interior Design: Mary Rohrer
Cover Design: Pat Mayer
Cover Photo: James Chase Sanchez

NCTE Stock Number: 42233; eStock Number: 42240
ISBN 978-0-8141-4223-3; eISBN 978-0-8141-4224-0

Copyright © 2021 by the Conference on College Composition and Communication of the National Council of Teachers of English.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission from the copyright holder. Printed in the United States of America.

It is the policy of NCTE in its journals and other publications to provide a forum for the open discussion of ideas concerning the content and the teaching of English and the language arts. Publicity accorded to any particular point of view does not imply endorsement by the Executive Committee, the Board of Directors, or the membership at large, except in announcements of policy, where such endorsement is clearly specified.

NCTE provides equal employment opportunity (EEO) to all staff members and applicants for employment without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, physical, mental or perceived handicap/disability, sexual orientation including gender identity or expression, ancestry, genetic information, marital status, military status, unfavorable discharge from military service, pregnancy, citizenship status, personal appearance, matriculation or political affiliation, or any other protected status under applicable federal, state, and local laws.

Every effort has been made to provide current URLs and email addresses, but because of the rapidly changing nature of the web, some sites and addresses may no longer be accessible.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Sanchez, James Chase, author.

Title: Salt of the earth : rhetoric, preservation, and white supremacy / James Chase Sanchez, Middlebury College.

Description: Champaign, Illinois : Conference on College Composition and Communication of the National Council of Teachers of English, [2021] | Series: Studies in Writing & Rhetoric | Includes bibliographical references and index. | Summary: "This auto-ethnography and cultural rhetorics case study investigates the rhetoric of white supremacy by exploring three unique rhetorical processes—identity construction, storytelling, and silencing—as they relate to an umbrella act: the rhetoric of preservation"—Provided by publisher.

Identifiers: LCCN 2021014580 (print) | LCCN 2021014581 (ebook) | ISBN 9780814142233 (Trade Paperback) | ISBN 9780814142240 (Adobe PDF)

Subjects: LCSH: Grand Saline (Tex.)—Race relations. | White supremacy movements—Texas—Grand Saline. | Rhetoric—Social aspects. | Narrative inquiry (Research method)

Classification: LCC F394.G736 S26 2021 (print) | LCC F394.G736 (ebook) | DDC 305.8009764/276--dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021014580>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021014581>