



WEEK 1 DISCUSSION GUIDE:
DID YOU WONDER WHO FIRED THE GUN?¹
Dir. Travis Wilkerson (T/F 2017)

- Did You Wonder Who Fired The Gun? employs the “voice of God” technique whereby the film’s unseen director, Travis Wilkerson, narrates and reads letters, shares personal observances and speaks in the voice of identified characters over still black and white images on the screen with a recurring motif of highway travel. Why do you think he made this choice in exploring the hidden story of his great-grandfather, S.E. Branch, who allegedly murdered a Black man named Bill Spann in 1946?
 - What effect did the sepia-colored images and country twang music from his home state of Alabama have on your viewing experience? Did your viewing experience and emotional journey with the film change your understanding of Alabama’s history with race and the Civil Rights struggle?
 - Why do you think the director gave the film the title he did?
- The filmmaker uses the protagonist of Harper Lee’s 1960 novel To Kill A Mockingbird---and it’s 1962 film rendering--Atticus Finch, to contrast with the narrative of his great-grandfather. At the outset of the film, he notes “Trust me when I tell you, this isn’t another white savior story. It’s a white nightmare story.” To whose nightmare do you think he was referring? Did that statement create expectations of what the film was about for you?
 - Why do you think he chose Atticus Finch and To Kill A Mockingbird as a recurring leitmotif throughout the film?
 - Did its use alter your recollection of the book and its meaning?
- Segments of the film are delineated by chants of the Black Lives Matter-anthem, “Say his name,” or, “Say her name” with names of individuals who died in fatal encounters with law enforcement. Why do you think the filmmaker does this? Do you think it was effective or distracting from the primary narrative? Did the inclusion of a Black Lives Matter component impact your viewing experience?
- The director travels from his stated home of California to Alabama to visit his aunts and mother, a place he hasn’t personally been for two decades, in order to unravel the lore of the murder his great-grandfather allegedly committed. He’s only able to film one

¹Discussion questions were created by Jimmie Briggs, Principal, Skoll Foundation; ; award-winning journalist, author, and activist.



aunt and his mother talking about their grandfather and memories of him and their grandmother growing up. His Aunt Jean eludes him while members of the community in which S.E. Branch allegedly murdered Bill Spann inside the family store, avoid answering questions or take a frighteningly hostile attitude toward his presence and investigation.

- What does their unwillingness to speak about the Spann murder convey to you?
- Can you credibly offer reasons as to why onlookers or residents of the community might not want to assist the director in his quest?
- Ed Vaughn lives in the county where the Spann murder occurred in 1946, and four years later led a student boycott at his school. Today he maintains a home museum for African-American history. Why do you think his character was important for inclusion in the film, by the director? What insight or knowledge he provided expanded your understanding of the conditions and challenges in the period of history?
- Music—especially Gospel and folk—are secondary characters in the film. Songs by such artists such as Phil Ochs and Billie Holiday are played throughout the movie.
 - Did the songs affect your viewing experience, or resonances with the themes of the film?
 - What do you imagine the film would have been like with less or no music given its visual style?
- What do you think is the message of *Did You Wonder Who Fired The Gun?* How does the message of *Did You Wonder Who Fired The Gun?* align with your perception of historical, racial injustice and violence in America? By the end, were your views altered or fundamentally changed in any way? If so, how?
- Was there a singular scene, or moment in the film, which resonates with you most deeply? What was it, and why do you think it stayed with you?
- What was your visceral reaction and feelings about the film when it ended? Were you satisfied with how it concluded?
- Are there lingering questions, or confusion about aspects of the film? What will you do to get more clarity, or responses?