

# Footloose: An Analysis

by Joey Calkins

On the surface, *Footloose* is about teenage rebellion; “fighting” for perceived “rights.” On a much deeper level, *Footloose* is about survival. A small town suffers the tragic deaths of four teenagers. The town’s “spiritual leader,” the Reverend Shaw Moore, takes it upon himself to “save” all the children of Bomont (a town whose location is ambiguous, suggesting that it could be “next door”) from the evils of all “raucous” activities. His fear is that this raucousness will lead to drugs, alcohol, sexual perversion; some of the very things that led to the deaths of the four “young people,” one of whom was his own son.

In his effort to “save” the town and forget “how much [he’s] still missing [his] son,” he alienates his wife, his daughter, and his friends. They see him as “the law,” “the truth,” “the light,” even, perhaps, “the way.” He is their spiritual leader in these trying times. Sexual permissiveness is rampant. Drug and alcohol usage is on the rise by minors. (Which goes to show, not much as changed in the last 30 years.) But that is all he is. He is no longer the caring individual he once was. The man who could “give people hope when hope was gone” or lift people so high, they had to “look down to see heaven.” He has become a dictator. A man who rules with an iron fist. And that iron fist becomes his strength, his rock, the center of his faith. It is what gives him breath, sustenance, courage, strength. But it can not last. As time goes on it pulls the breath out of him, refuses sustenance, breaks his courage, and weakens him.

Then along comes Ren McCormack. A young man whose father has recently walked out on him (and his mother) and as a result he is “forced” to leave his home town, Chicago, for Bomont. In Chicago, he was able to go to dance clubs and let out his frustrations. Something that he and his friends took for granted. When he arrives in Bomont, however, he quickly learns of the law against dancing within in the town limits of Bomont and of the iron fist of Rev. Moore. Looking for “breath, sustenance, courage, strength” himself, Ren fights for his “right” to dance. It is not about sexuality to him, it is about expressing himself, to let go of his frustrations, to “be free” from discouragement and fear.

These two “forces” collide. One must break. Rev. Moore’s “iron fist” disintegrates and he slowly is able to knock down the wall that he once built between his wife, his daughter, his friends, and the town. He asks for forgiveness and they, being eager to start the healing process themselves, readily forgive him his faults and shortcomings. (Sounds reminiscent of Leonard Bernstein’s *MASS*, another work that I love.)

In short, *Footloose* is about survival. Not survival of the fittest, but survival of all. If it takes a village to raise a child; it also takes a village to bury a child and heal from the loss. That’s what this story is about. Overcoming trials, discouragement, depression. No man is an island. We need each other to grow, to learn, and sometimes, most importantly, to heal.