

Bombing Black People: The Philadelphia Police's War on MOVE

Global Research News Hour Episode 129

By [Michael Welch](#) and [Linn Washington](#)

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"May 13, 1985 is a day that shall live in infamy, but for far more reasons than the obvious. It was the death knell of a system committing suicide. It proved that a man called John Africa spoke powerful truths when he spoke about the nature of the system as corrupt, as flawed, as poisoned. Every day past that date has only proved it even more. " -Mumia Abu-Jamal, from a [May 9 2010 radio essay](#)

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The only aerial bombing by police ever carried out on US soil was on May 13, 1985, when a Philadelphia police helicopter dropped military grade explosives on the house run by a group of self-styled revolutionaries known as Move. This group, which claims to adhere to principles of non-violence was founded by John Africa in 1972, and was composed mostly, but not exclusively, of African-Americans. They rejected the norms of 20th century American society in their dress, grooming, diet and lifestyles, and had come in conflict with authorities on several occasions.[1]

The 1985 bombing claimed the lives of five children and six adults including founder John Africa. Another adult named Ramona Africa, and a child named Birdie Africa were the only survivors of the assault. More than 250 people in the predominantly black middle class neighbourhood were left homeless after more than 60 other homes were destroyed as a result of the aerial bombing, and the fires that followed.[2]

This attack followed a previous assault on August 8, 1978. A police raid on the Move house, then located in the Philadelphia neighbourhood of Powelton village, resulted in the death of police officer James Ramp. The Courts held nine Move members responsible for the death and sentenced them to 30 to 100 years behind bars. [3]

Thirty-seven years later, two of the nine have died in prison under suspicious circumstances. Supporters of the Move 9, as they are called, are appealing to the Philadelphia Parole Board to set the remaining seven members free, now that they have all served their minimum sentences. [4][5]

In this installment of the Global Research News Hour we examine the attacks on Move in the context of a history of police and state repression of the black minority population of the US.

Linn Washington is a journalist and currently serves as an Associate Professor of Journalism at Temple University. He has covered Move almost from the group's beginnings and was present on the scene as a reporter during the 1985 police action against the group. He will put the 1985 Bombing and the events that led up to it in their proper context and establish the failures, as he sees it, of the media to hold those in authority to account.

Ramona Africa is the spokesperson for Move. She served seven years in prison on riot charges following the bombing by Philadelphia police. She and other plaintiffs eventually received a \$1.5 million settlement from the city in connection with the incident. In this interview Ramona provides some background on the group and the police stand-offs in 1978 and 1985, and speaks at length about the unjust incarceration of nine Move members who she explains could not possibly have been responsible for the murder of police officer Ramp.

For more resources on Move, and how to help the Move 9, please visit the following sites:

onamove.com

www.move9parole.blogspot.ca

Readers who happen to be in the New York City area may wish to take in the following event:

[NYC Stand in Solidarity in with Parole for the Move 9 – Friday Night 2/12/16](#)

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Notes:

1) Alan Yuhas (May 13, 2015), The Guardian, “Philadelphia’s Osage Avenue police bombing, 30 years on: ‘This story is a parable’”; <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/may/13/osage-avenue-bombing-philadelphia-30-years>

2) Ibid

3) Emilie Lounsberry (Feb. 28, 2008), The Philadelphia Inquirer, “MOVE members due for parole hearing”; http://web.archive.org/web/20080411115748/http://www.philly.com/philly/news/homepage/20080228_MOVE_members_due_for_parole_hearing.html

4)<http://www.workers.org/ww/1998/africa0326.php>

5) <http://www.iacenter.org/racism/africa-phil011315//>

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Articles by: [Michael Welch](#)
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