

20 Years on the Move: John Africa's Revolution

The MOVE Organization surfaced in Philadelphia during the early 1970's. Characterized by dreadlock hair, the adopted surname "Africa", a principled unity, and an uncompromising commitment to their belief, members practiced the teachings of MOVE founder John Africa.

MOVE's work is to stop industry from poisoning the air, the water, the soil, and to put an end to the enslavement of life - people, animals, any form of life. the purpose of John Africa's revolution is to show people through John Africa's teaching, the truth - that this system is the cause of all their problems (alcoholism, drug addiction, unemployment, wife abuse, child pornography, every problem in the world) and to set the example of revolution for people to follow when they realize how they've been oppressed, repressed, duped, tricked by this system, this government and see the need to rid themselves of this cancerous system as MOVE does. MOVE statement

During the early 1970's MOVE was based in the Powelton Village section of West Philadelphia (309 N. 33rd St.). Members had a preference for hard physical work and were constantly chopping firewood, running dogs, shoveling snow or sweeping the street. MOVE ran a popular car wash at this location, helped homeless people find places to live, assisted the elderly with home repairs, intervened in violence between local gangs and college fraternities, and helped incarcerated offenders meet parole requirements through a rehabilitation program. After adopting MOVE's way of natural living, many individuals overcame past problems of drug addiction, physical disabilities, infertility and alcoholism. MOVE welcomed dissenting views as an opportunity to showcase their belief and sharpen their oratory skills which they knew would be tested in their revolutionary struggle. MOVE presented their views at public forums and lectures of noted authorities including Dick Gregory, Alan Watts, Jane Fonda, Julian Bond, Richie Havens, Walter Mondale, Roy Wilkins, Buckminster Fuller, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Caesar Chavez and Russell Means, and none could refute John Africa's teachings. By 1974 MOVE was appearing in public with increasing frequency.

If our profanity offends you, look around you and see how destructively society is profaning itself. It is the rape of the land, the pollution of the environment, the betrayal and suffering of the masses by corrupt government that is the real obscenity. -- MOVE statement

The mainstream media began a long history of distorted MOVE coverage using misquotes, unverified rumors and biased stories. While those who actually met MOVE members could see the remarkable strength and health they exhibited, dehumanizing news accounts perpetrated the falsehood that members never bathed and were diseased.

Frank Rizzo, Police Commissioner from 1967-71 was the key figure in Philadelphia government and built his career on opposing black efforts to challenge the status quo. In 1967 Rizzo's first major action as Commissioner had been to halt a peaceful demonstration of some 3500 Black high school students asking for educational reforms

and Black Studies programs by unleashing hordes of cops who charged with no provocation and chased students for blocks. Many were beaten. He ran the city with a prominent and heavy-handed police force that had a national reputation for brutality.

MOVE launched demonstration after demonstration aimed at focusing attention on police abuses. Community groups across the City sought MOVE's help in setting up demonstrations in their own neighborhoods. As a result of this activism, the police began a concerted campaign of harassment against MOVE, breaking up demonstrations by arresting MOVE members on disorderly conduct charges or violations of whatever local ordinance could be made to apply. On May 18, 1974, Leasing and Janet Africa, both pregnant at the time, were so brutally beaten by Rizzo's police that they both had miscarriages. By 1975, clashes between MOVE and the police reached increasingly brutal proportions, with frequent beatings, arrests and jail stays. On April 29, 1975, Alberta Africa, pregnant at the time, was held spread-eagle by four officers and repeatedly kicked in the stomach and vagina by a matron named Robinson, suffering a miscarriage as a result. Despite police violence against MOVE many MOVE mothers did bear children, including Sue Africa, in spite of several police beatings throughout her pregnancy, had a son, Tomassa, on Aug. 4, 1975 (Tomassa was later murdered by the city on May 13, 1985). Janine Africa's baby, Life Africa, was born March 8, 1976 but murdered by the police less than a month later, when his mother was grabbed by a cop, thrown to the ground with 3 week old Life Africa in her arms and stomped until she was nearly unconscious. The baby's skull was crushed. Police denied that the baby existed because there was no birth certificate.

MOVE took on the courts and eventually overwhelmed them, acting as their own attorneys in hundreds of trials and hearings. On November 5, 1976, Rhonda Africa was arrested and brutalized. Nearly 9 months pregnant, Rhonda went into premature labor the next day, giving birth to a bruised and injured baby that soon died. (Rhonda herself was later murdered by the City on May 13, 1985.)

On May 20, 1977, MOVE staged a major demonstration demanding the release of their political prisoners and an end to the violent harassment by the City. To keep an increasingly brutal police force at bay, MOVE appeared outside their house with firearms.

"We told the cops there wasn't gonna be anymore undercover deaths. This time they better be prepared to murder us in full public view, cause if they came at us with fists, we were gonna come back with fists. If they came with clubs, we'd come back with clubs, and if they came with guns, we'd use guns, too. We don't believe in death-dealing guns, we believe in life. But we knew the cops wouldn't be so quick to attack us if they had to face the same stuff they dished out so casually on unarmed defenseless folk. MOVE

To force MOVE members out of their Powelton Village headquarters, Rizzo got court approval to starve them out. On March 16, 1978, the police set up a blockade around the house and shut off water lines. Those inside included pregnant women, nursing babies, children and animals. Police arrested anyone who tried to break through the barricades,

though some attempts to get food and water to MOVE were successful. During this time MOVE lost the farm they had paying on in Virginia. The blockade lasted almost two months and on April 16, 1978, thousands marched around City Hall protesting the City's action.

The City tried to negotiate a settlement. MOVE knew officials could not be trusted but entered into an agreement to expose the City's deceit. Terms of the settlement were publicized May 3, 1978 before MOVE had given final approval. MOVE then told mediators why those in the house could not be legally arrested. When newly installed D.A. Ed Rendell confirmed that the arrest warrants were indeed void as per Rule 1100. Terms were finalized after MOVE had a 90-day deadline for vacating the house deleted from the agreement. To obscure legal improprieties, a gag provision was included to prevent MOVE from talking to the media. Police were allowed to arrest, arraign and release on bail pending appeal, each wanted member in the house. Police searched the house for weapons and found only inoperative ones. The city agreed to dispose of all other pending MOVE cases within 4-6 weeks.

On August 2, 1978, Judge DiBona ruled that MOVE had violated the unagreed-to 90-day deadline and the D.A.'s office then solicited MOVE arrest warrants for not vacating the house. The fact that Rendell's office could not legally practice law at a civil proceeding went unpublicized and the media was instrumental in perpetuating the myth that MOVE had agreed to a 90-day time limit. The City was so bent on framing and hunting down MOVE members the DiBona signed bench warrants authorizing police to bring before him practically every known MOVE adult, though over half of them were not in the house and couldn't possibly have violated an order to vacate it.

On August 5, Philadelphia authorities, in collaboration with Virginia police, staged a midnight raid on the Richmond home of two MOVE women and 14 children, arresting Gail and Rhonda Africa at gunpoint and returning them to Philadelphia. The legal justification was Gail and Rhonda's alleged failure to leave a house that they weren't within a hundred miles of.

In the early morning hours of August 8, hundreds of police and firemen surrounded MOVE headquarters. Using heavy construction equipment they tore down the barricades and knocked out the windows. With guns drawn, over 20 officers entered the first floor of the house, only to find that MOVE had taken refuge in the basement. Fire hoses and deluge guns were then turned on, flooding the basement with water. MOVE adults were forced to hold children and animals in their arms to keep them from drowning. Suddenly gunshots rang out and immediately bullets filled the air as police throughout the area opened fire. Officer James Ramp was struck and killed by a single bullet. Three other policemen and firemen were wounded. MOVE never fired any shots and no MOVE members were arrested with any weapons. 12 adults were arrested, all suffering physical abuse at the hands of the police, and 11 children had been in the house. As news cameras recorded the event, officers Joseph Zagame, Charles Geist, Terrance Mulvihill and Lawrence D'Ulisse severely beat MOVE member Delbert Africa while taking him into custody. Without provocation, Zagame smashed Delbert in the face with a police helmet

as D'Ulisse connected with a blow from the butt of a shotgun. This knocked Delbert to the ground and he was then dragged by his hair across the street where the other officers set upon him, savagely kicking him in the head, kidneys and groin.

An afternoon conference was held at City Hall during which Police Commissioner Joseph O'Neill said Officer Ramp was killed by a shot in the back. Moments later a typed police press release was distributed stating that Ramp was shot in the chest. Rizzo displayed a table of firearms and claimed they were taken from the MOVE house. Some reporters noted the seemingly new condition of the weapons; others wondered what these guns were doing in the mayor's office rather than impounded in the police crime lab as evidence. No MOVE fingerprints were found on any of these weapons. Although destroying evidence of a crime is illegal, police bulldozed and leveled the house as soon as MOVE members were taken away. No efforts were made to preserve the crime scene, inscribe chalk marks, or measure ballistic angles. MOVE told Judge Merna Marshall that the destruction of the house prevented them from proving that it was impossible for any MOVE member to have shot officer Ramp. The Fred Hampton case in Illinois was cited, where the preservation of the crime scene enabled the estates of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark to prove that all offensive fire came from the police. Judge Marshall denied MOVE's petition and held them over for trial. Three defendants were tried separately and those who disavowed MOVE were released. MOVE protested that they were being held strictly because they were MOVE members rather than on any evidence that they had anything to do with the death of James Ramp. After refusing to disavow MOVE, Consuewella Dotson was later tried and sentenced to 10-20 years. Even though the MOVE members were in the basement when the gunfire occurred and only one bullet struck Ramp, Judge Malmed pronounced the remaining nine defendants guilty of the murder and sentenced each one to 30-100 years. On a radio talk show the next day, a caller (Mumia Abu- Jamal) asked Malmed, "Who shot James Ramp?", he replied, "I have no idea."

The police assaults and court hearings continued for several years, and one of the few media people to accurately report on MOVE and make a serious effort to understand the organization was Mumia Abu-Jamal, a highly regarded Philadelphia journalist and president of the Association of Black Journalists. Throughout the 1978 confrontation and resulting trials, Mumia continued to produce in-depth coverage of MOVE issues, often against the directives of his employers. On December 9, 1981, Mumia was found shot through the chest and badly wounded on a downtown Philadelphia street. Nearby lay a police officer, dead from gunshot wounds. During his subsequent arrest and treatment in a hospital, Mumia was abused and beaten by police. Mumia maintained his innocence and conducted his own defense until Judge Albert Sabo ruled he was being disruptive and ordered a court-appointed lawyer to take over the case. Mumia then refused to participate and the events at the crime scene were never fully determined. A jury found him guilty of first degree murder and gave him the death penalty. There has been an international call for the release of Mumia from what is regarded as an unjust sentence based on his association with MOVE.

The primary activity of MOVE now became securing the release of innocent members facing not only 30-100 years in prison, but the wrath of a vindictive prison system and its abusive guards. Several members went on hunger strikes to obtain the basic rights other inmates received. In post trial motions, court-appointed lawyers neglected to raise the illegality of the arrest warrants from the 1978 confrontation. Judge Edward Bradley admitted there were inconsistencies but declined to take any action. D.A. Ed Rendell outright refused to meet with MOVE and Councilman Lucien Blackwell and City Council Chairman Joseph Coleman were non-committal. Starting in 1982, MOVE was able to meet several times with City Managing Director Wilson Goode. After consulting a lawyer on MOVE's legal claims, Goode agreed that MOVE was innocent and promised to remedy the situation after he was elected mayor. Media refused to cover the issue and there was blackout on any information about MOVE. MOVE began publishing their own newspaper and using loudspeakers to inform people of the injustice and the City's conspiracy to eliminate them.

In 1984 Wilson Goode became mayor, then quickly reneged on his earlier promise and took no action as another confrontation with MOVE took shape. Anticipating how far the City would go to silence them, MOVE began fortifying their rowhouse at 6221 Osage Avenue in the Cobbs Creek section of West Philadelphia. At the same time, police made preparations for a murderous assault by secretly obtaining from the FBI over 37 pounds of C-4, a powerful military explosive, although this violated police regulations, FBI policies and federal law regarding transfer of explosives. Media suddenly began covering MOVE again, focusing on Osage Avenue neighbors' disagreements with MOVE rather than MOVE's longstanding legal dispute with the City. MOVE held a meeting with neighborhood residents in May, 1984 to explain their position and police stepped up their campaign of intimidation and harassment. Between June and October Alfonso Africa was arrested and beaten bloody several times by police. On August 8, 1984, hundreds of police and firemen spent the day surrounding the Osage block in what came to be viewed as a dry run for the later disaster, but MOVE would not be provoked. MOVE told negotiators they wanted at least one official to honestly investigate the unjust jailing of MOVE members, but officials and the media ignored this. On May 11, 1985, Judge Lynne Abraham signed arrest warrants on charges of disorderly conduct and terroristic threats. On Mother's Day, May 12, police evacuated the 6200 Block of Osage Avenue and towed away parked cars.

On Monday, May 13, 1985, police and firemen launched a full scale military assault on the MOVE rowhouse using tear gas, water cannons, shotguns, Uzi's, M-16s, silenced weapons, Browning Automatic Rifles, M-60 machine guns, a 20mm anti-tank gun, and a .50-caliber machine gun. Some of these weapons were illegally obtained with the help of the U.S. Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms Agency. Between 6:00 and 7:30 am police fired over 10,000 rounds of ammunition at the house knowing there were women and children inside. They also tried to blast through the walls with the military explosives the FBI had illegally provided. When none of these measures succeeded in driving MOVE from the house, a state police helicopter was used to drop a bomb on the roof. This started a fire that officials deliberately allowed to burn, burning down the entire block of some 60 homes. MOVE members repeatedly tried to exit but were met with police gunfire which

killed some of the adults and children in the alley behind the house. Six adults and five children died. Also on May 13, 1985, police in Chester, PA in cooperation with Philadelphia, used tear gas to storm the Chester home of Alfonso Africa. The only adult present, his wife Mary, was arrested and their 5 children were taken away as police ransacked the house. The legal basis for this action was Judge Lynne Abraham's warrant for Alfonso, although he had been incarcerated since May 8 on charges of threatening officer James McDonnell (who previously shot Alfonso on June 10, 1984).

Ramona Africa was charged with conspiracy, riot and multiple counts of simple and aggravated assault. Although no testimony was presented indicating she ever held or fired a weapon, a jury found her guilty and Judge Michael Stiles sentenced her to 16 months to 7 years. Mayor Goode appointed a special commission to investigate the catastrophe, but it had no power to indict. Findings released in March, 1986 were highly critical of City officials and included extensive recommendations, but as years passed these were largely disregarded and forgotten. In 1986, D.A. Ron Castille impanelled a grand jury to investigate criminal wrongdoing on the part of the City. Notwithstanding 11 deaths, 60 homes burned to the ground, unauthorized possession and use of military explosives, and a fire that was deliberately allowed to burn out of control, Castille's grand jury followed his recommendations and returned not a single indictment. A federal grand jury investigating civil rights violations also returned no indictments. None of the investigations looked at earlier legal improprieties.

There are currently 9 MOVE members imprisoned by the PA penal system. Locked away in remote areas, far from the public eye, they have endured years of continuous physical and mental harassment. Delbert, Carlos and Chuck Africa were kept in solitary confinement over five years for refusing to violate MOVE belief by cutting their hair. At Muncy prison, MOVE women upheld their religious principles by refusing to give blood samples and were repeatedly put in solitary confinement, sometimes for as long as 3 years. Sadistic prison guards were delighted to inform Delbert, Janet, Sue, Phil, Janine and Consuewella Africa that some of their children were killed in the police assault on May 13, 1985. No MOVE members were involved in a 1989 Camp Hill prison riot, but Chuck Africa was singled out by correctional officers Bray, Cywinski and Lt. Komsisky, and while handcuffed and shackled, Chuck was brutally attacked and beaten. He was then transported incommunicado across the country until lodged at the maximum security prison in Lompoc, CA, until his return to PA 16 months later. Delbert, Phil and Edward Africa were also abruptly transferred out of state and weeks passed before their family learned of their whereabouts. Phil and Edward were shuffled through a number of prisons before arriving at the U.S. Penitentiary at Leavenworth, KS. Delbert was eventually taken to the military prison at Fort Gordon, GA. They spent many months, and in Phil's case, over a year at these locations before being returned to Pennsylvania.

Lack of media coverage has given the Parole Board the power to demand the special stipulation for MOVE members at parole hearings that they may be paroled if they agree never again to associate with MOVE, even when the person's husband or wife is a member. All MOVE members have refused this stipulation and are doing/have done their maximum sentences.

After the tragic deaths and destruction the city caused in 1985, the vast publicity surrounding the disaster continually overlooked the fact that MOVE's original demand for justice in the 1978 confrontation remained unresolved. Now, Ed Rendell is the mayor of Philadelphia, and Judge Lynne Abraham is now D.A. Lynne Abraham. Judge Sabo has been called out of retirement in the City's efforts to ensure the murder of Mumia-Abu Jamal. MOVE points out that in their over 20-year history, destruction and death have always been the work of the police, so inquiries as to the future likelihood of such occurrences should be directed to city officials. MOVE has never dropped a bomb, burned down a neighborhood or killed anyone, they have only demanded the release of innocent members. The City of Philadelphia has murdered 17 MOVE members, including adults, children, 1 baby and 4 miscarriages.

Nine MOVE members remain unjustly incarcerated on 30-100 year sentences.

As long as we are alive, we will never abandon our innocent brothers and sisters in jail, and they know we will never abandon them, and this city gonna always have a problem until every last one of our brothers and sisters is home. MOVE statement

To order "20 Years on the Move" for a \$6.00 donation (discount for bulk orders) and to help in the struggle for justice, contact: Concerned Citizens in Support of MOVE P.O. Box 19709, Philadelphia, PA 19143