

Who is the MOVE 9?

MOVE is an organization formed in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1972 by John Africa (born Vincent Leaphart.) The organization practices the teachings of John Africa, who advocated a back-to-nature lifestyle and preached against technology." During its 35 years, the group has focused on issues from animal cruelty to police brutality.

In the early 1970s, MOVE members began to complain of police misconduct against its members. They argued that members were beaten by police during peaceful demonstrations. Many of the victims were pregnant women, causing miscarriage, and young children.

Powelton Village, 1978

During the early years, the MOVE owned a large twin house at 33rd and Pearl St. in the Powelton Village neighborhood of Philadelphia. Due to a combination of neighbor complaints and confrontations with government agencies, tension began to increase between the city government and the MOVE organization. The organization believing they were going to be attacked by police began to arm itself. In response, Mayor Frank Rizzo ordered a blockade of the immediate neighborhood, in order to prevent food and supplies from reaching MOVE and thus force the members out of the house.

The blockade lasted several weeks, during which time residents of a roughly two-square-block area had to show identification to reach their homes. Several hundred members of the police department were involved in the action. On August 8, 1978, Philadelphia police attempted to clear the house by force. The inhabitants of the house hid in the basement to avoid police bullets, and the police flooded the basement with firehoses.

During the confrontation an officer was shot and killed. Police claim he was shot by members of the MOVE organization. Evidence, including weapons and forensics, were provided to show proof of their claims. However, disputing evidence showed that the officer was shot in the back of the neck from downward angle, making murder impossible.

A few hours following this incident, Philadelphia Mayor Frank Rizzo had the house demolished as it was deemed uninhabitable due to health code violations, destroying most of the evidence.

On May 4, 1980, a judge pronounced the nine members of MOVE (the MOVE 9) guilty and sentenced them to 30-100 years for the third degree murder of the police officer.

Osage Avenue, 1985

The MOVE then moved to a house on Osage Avenue in West Philadelphia. They continued their back to nature philosophy, and added a new agenda – freeing the MOVE 9.

On May 13, 1985, in a failed attempt to serve arrest warrants on four members of the group, Philadelphia police became engaged in a gun battle at MOVE's communal residence. The mayor turned over the situation to the police commissioner with the instructions to find a way to arrest the MOVE members. At this point it became a police matter and an entry plan was drawn up under the direction of Police Commissioner Sambor.

The plan called for a mixture of civilian and military explosives to be dropped on the fortification that had been built by MOVE on top of the house in order to destroy it. The satchel of explosives, alternately characterized as a "bomb" and an "entry device," was to be dropped on



MOVE's rooftop structure from a Pennsylvania State Police helicopter.

The bomb did not significantly damage the rooftop structure, but did ignite several barrels of gasoline, clearly marked "fuel," starting a fire, which destroyed the entire block and killed eleven people. City hoses, deployed as a part of the original entry plan, were not turned on until forty-five minutes after the fire started burning. Ironically, the city's best firefighting equipment had been trained on the rooftop bunker all morning, but "the decision was made to let the fire burn" in the words of Sambor. Firefighters on the scene claimed that the extensive use of hydrant water prior to the bombing had reduced pressure in the system so much that equipment could not be deployed. Police also stopped firefighters from taking preventive measures such as chopping down the wooden connecting porch roofs by which the fire spread between adjacent buildings. Police stated that firefighters were denied access to the area out of concern for their safety but there is no evidence that house residents fired on any rescue workers after the bomb was dropped.

About ten thousand rounds of ammunition were fired by the police into the house. Sixty-two houses burned to the ground; only Ramona Africa and Michael Ward (aka

Birdie Africa) escaped alive. Six adults and five children in the MOVE house were killed. William H. Brown 3d, the lawyer who chaired the investigating commission in the aftermath, has been quoted as saying "I firmly believe that more people got out than Birdie and Ramona [and didn't survive] - that's one thing that still nags at me."

Police initially said they had been fired upon first with automatic weapons, but only a small number of non-automatic weapons were found in the burned-out home. MOVE supporters have described the raid as a revenge attack for the 1978 shooting.

Aftermath

In the aftermath of the catastrophe the city launched a special investigation, which found, among other things, that "Dropping a bomb on an occupied row house was unconscionable." The mayor was re-elected in the next election, and no police officer was fined, fired or suspended.

Philadelphia has paid over \$32 million to the victims, including \$840,000 to Michael Ward, \$1.5 million to Ramona Africa and the relatives of John and Frank Africa, and has been ordered to pay \$29 million to residents of Osage Avenue and Pine Street whose homes were destroyed by the fire. (The city of Philadelphia, now under former Philadelphia City Council President and now Mayor John F. Street, is appealing the latter award.) On December 1, 2005, U.S. District Judge John P. Fullam cut the original jury verdict of \$12.8 million in more than half, to \$6 million.

On March 13, 1998, one of the MOVE 9, Merle Africa tragically died in prison. The cause of her death was viewed as highly suspicious. Originally her death was attributed to tumors and was later revised as natural causes. She was in her forties.

Free the MOVE 9

Write to the MOVE 9 at:

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Janet Holloway Africa #006308
Janine Phillips Africa #006309
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Cambridge Springs, PA 16403-1238

Michael Davis Africa #AM-4973
Charles Sims Africa #AM-4975
SCI-Graterford
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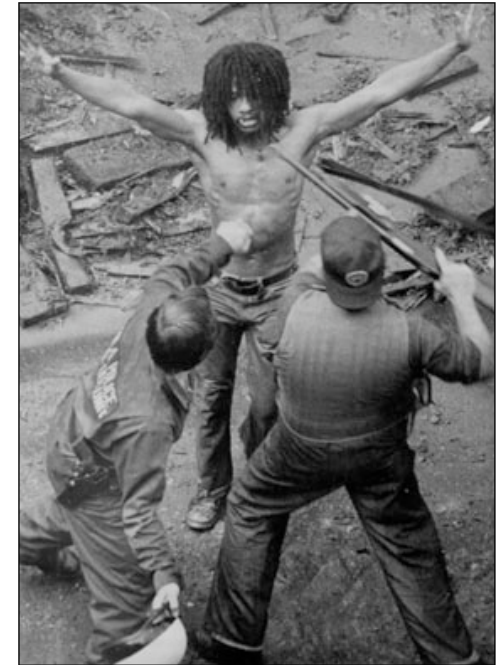
William Phillips Africa #AM-4984
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Local group working on the Move 9:

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Free The Move 9



**Sentenced 30-100
Years in Prison for the
Crime of Being
Attacked by Police**

