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Never forget Delbert Africa, soldier for the people

written by Stephen Millies
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Pam Africa
speaking at rally
in Drexel Park,
Aug. 8.



Yvonne Orr-El,
Delbert Africa's
daughter.



Two hundred people marched in Philadelphia on Aug. 8 to protest police terror and honor the memory of Delbert Africa. It was the 42nd anniversary of the police assault on the MOVE house in the city's Powelton Village neighborhood.

Superracist Mayor Frank Rizzo ordered the attack that began in the early morning of Aug. 8, 1978. Hundreds of cops fired thousands of bullets at the house where, inside, there were 12 adults and 11 children.

Tear gas canisters were repeatedly fired while high-pressure hoses poured thousands of gallons of water into the building. Both a bulldozer and a cherry picker

were used to break into the building.

Miraculously, none of the 23 members of the MOVE family were killed. But [police may have killed one of their own](#), Officer James Ramp. Reporters at the scene insisted that shots were fired from a nearby house that wasn't associated with MOVE.

Afterwards, MOVE member Delbert Africa was viciously beaten by police. Political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal described what Delbert endured:

“Immediately four officers surrounded him and savagely beat him, hitting him with the handle of their rifles, crushing his head with a motorcycle helmet and kicking him until he lost consciousness. ... Delbert suffered a jaw fracture and a swollen eye the size of an Easter egg.”

This brutality was recorded by TV cameras. Yet, the three officers indicted were acquitted by a judge. Philadelphia Police Commissioner Joseph O'Neill condoned his cops' viciousness by claiming, “Delbert Africa wasn't a man. He was a savage.”

Nine members of the MOVE family were framed for the death of James Ramp and sentenced from 30 to 100 years in jail. The judge who sentenced the MOVE 9, Edwin Malmed, later admitted to Mumia Abu-Jamal on a talk show that he had no idea who shot James Ramp.

Merle Africa and Phil Africa died in prison. Chuck Africa, Eddie Africa, Debbie Africa, Delbert Africa, Janet Africa, Janine Africa and Michael Africa were finally released between 2018 and 2020. All of them spent at least 40 years in prison.

Delbert Africa only had a few months to live after he was released on Jan. 18, 2020. The revolutionary died on June 15.

“Had my father received the treatment he needed,” Delbert Africa's daughter

Yvonne Orr-El said at a news conference, “the healthy, strong, smiling, humorous, sarcastic man that I call my father would still be here today.”

‘The power of the people don’t stop!’

Protesters gathered in front of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, whose designers included the Black architect Julian Abele.

Speakers denounced police terror. Mike Africa Jr. reminded everyone of the May 13, 1985, police-FBI-Pentagon bombing of the MOVE house on Osage Avenue in which six adults and five children were killed.

Mike Africa Jr. was born in prison and was taken away from his mom when he was just a week old. His parents, Debbie and Mike Africa of the MOVE 9, were only able to see each other after four decades of being incarcerated.

Fred Burton Jr. told people about his father, Fred Mohammad Burton, who has been in prison for 50 years. The senior Burton was framed for killing a Philadelphia police officer. Prosecutors forced a witness to give lying testimony by threatening to take away her children.

People chanted, “The power of the people don’t stop!” as they marched on Spring Garden Street across the Schuylkill River and railroad yards. Drivers passing by honked their horns in support.

Protesters went to the site of the old MOVE house on 33rd Street. It was immediately torn down on orders of Mayor Rizzo in 1978 to destroy evidence that might have exonerated the MOVE 9.

A rally was held in nearby Drexel Park. The entire area is being gentrified by Drexel University, which is named after the business partner of banker J.P. Morgan.

Baba Azid from the Malcolm X Commemoration Committee spoke of the political prisoners still in jail, like Dr. Mutulu Shakur. It was pointed out that the power of the people freed the MOVE 9 and had the statue of Frank Rizzo torn down.

Yvonne Orr-El talked about her father, Delbert Africa, who, before he moved to Philadelphia, had been a member of the Black Panther Party in Chicago.

MOVE member Pam Africa wound up the rally. She urged people to continue to fight to free Mumia Abu-Jamal, Leonard Peltier and all political prisoners.

Delbert Africa's last words, according to Mike Africa Sr., were, "I tried my best to be a good soldier."

Delbert Africa was a soldier for the people.

SLL photos: Stephen Millies

