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Commemorating the 1985 MOVE bombing in Philadelphia

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SLL photos: Stephen Millies

Philadelphia, May 13 — Two hundred people gathered here at Cobbs Creek Parkway and Osage Avenue this rainy late afternoon to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the bombing of the nearby house of the MOVE organization.

On [May 13, 1985](#), police fired “over 10,000 rounds of ammunition in under 90 minutes at a row house containing children,” according to the Philadelphia Special

Investigative Commission. High-pressure fire hoses and tear gas were also used.

Police then [dropped a bomb](#) made from C4 plastic explosives on the house at 6221 Osage Avenue at 5:27 p.m., creating an inferno. Both the Pentagon and FBI helped make the bomb.

This was the first time since the 1921 massacre of Black people in Tulsa, Oklahoma — and the destruction of the city's "Black Wall Street" — that U.S. police bombed their own city. [Philadelphia Police Commissioner](#) Gregore J. Sambor gave the order to "let the fire burn."

MOVE family members who tried to escape were fired upon. Five children and six adults were killed, both from the fire and police bullets.

The children killed were Tomaso Africa, age 9; Phil Africa, age 11; Delisha Africa, age 12; Netta Africa, age 12; and Tree Africa, age 14. The adults who died were Conrad Africa, Raymond Africa, Frank Africa, Rhonda Africa, Theresa Africa, and John Africa, the MOVE organization's founder.

The resulting fire destroyed 61 homes and left over 250 people in the West Philadelphia Black neighborhood of Cobbs Creek homeless. The only two survivors were Ramona Africa and 13-year-old Birdie Africa. Both suffered severe burns.

None of the criminals who committed these crimes against humanity were ever prosecuted. The only person convicted was the injured survivor, Ramona Africa, who spent seven years in prison.



The historical marker erected near the site of the police attack.

Somber and strong remembrance

Speakers at the rally remembered John Africa and all the MOVE members while a musical ensemble accompanied their talks. Among those speaking were Mama Pam and Mike Africa, Jr., who lost an uncle and cousin in the bombing. Mike Africa, Jr. described efforts to reclaim the MOVE house.

The [crimes committed](#) against MOVE family members didn't end with their deaths in 1985. Remains of two children — Delisha Africa and Tree Africa — were not given to their families but were instead kept by the Ivy League University of Pennsylvania.

These Black children were not allowed any dignity even in death.

The May 13, 1985, bombing wasn't the first attack on MOVE or its supporters. On Aug. 8, 1978, the notoriously racist Mayor Frank Rizzo ordered police to raid the MOVE house in Philadelphia's Powelton Village neighborhood.

Cops fired so recklessly that they killed one of their own, James Ramp. Nine MOVE members were framed for Ramp's death.

They were Chuck Africa, Debbie Africa, Delbert Africa, Eddie Africa, Janet Africa, Janine Africa, Merle Africa, Michael Africa, and Phil Africa.

Both Merle Africa and Phil Africa died in prison. The remaining MOVE members were finally freed after spending four decades in prison. That's over 10 years longer than the old apartheid regime in South Africa had Nelson Mandela jailed.

Trump is now welcoming racists from South Africa while thousands of immigrants are being kidnapped by ICE. Trump continues to supply the bombs that have killed thousands of children in Gaza.

Mumia Abu-Jamal, a MOVE supporter, was framed for the 1981 death of Philadelphia police officer Daniel Faulkner. As a 15-year-old, Mumia helped found Philadelphia's Black Panther Party chapter under FBI surveillance. Later, as a reporter, he was threatened by Mayor Rizzo at a news conference.

Mumia was sentenced to death, but the power of the people stopped the execution and got him off death row. A worldwide movement is demanding freedom for Mumia Abu-Jamal and all political prisoners.

Decades later, the people of Philadelphia are horrified by the MOVE bombing. On May 9, Philadelphia's City Council declared May 13, 2025, the 40th anniversary, to be a day of reflection and remembrance.

Five years before, the City Council for the first time [apologized](#) for the MOVE bombing. In 2020, during the Black Lives Matter movement that swept the United States, racist Frank Rizzo's statue across from City Hall was finally taken down.

Always remember the MOVE holocaust. Stop the war against Black people.

