

CITY LIFE

MOVE: An Oral History

For years, the hostility between the city and the radical West Philly group MOVE had escalated. But nobody was prepared for the horrific way the fight would end one May afternoon in 1985. Now, decades later, the people who were there that day tell the still-unbelievable story.

by **VICTOR FIORILLO** • 3/26/2010, 6:00 a.m.

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On August 4, 1981, nine MOVE members were sent to prison for the murder of Officer Ramp. In the years that followed, during which time MOVE supporter Mumia Abu-Jamal was sentenced to death for the murder of Officer Daniel Faulkner, MOVE relocated its headquarters to

6221 Osage Avenue, and continued to fight for the MOVE 9, becoming even more of a thorn in the side of the neighbors, the city, and the new mayor, Wilson Goode.

Seth Williams, *current district attorney*: In the early '80s, I was in high school at Central. MOVE bought a home on Osage. My house was just around the corner. I played basketball with the MOVE guys. There was no political talk. Just the trash-talking that goes on at pickup games in West Philly.

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Angel Ortiz: When I joined Council in 1984, MOVE was still having problems. Neighbors complained about hygiene and loud music.

Charles Diamond, *former priest at St. Carthage*: The church was a half-block from Osage. They were constantly blaring messages. My congregants were hearing people running over their roofs at night.

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Ramona Africa: We had met with Wilson Goode when he was managing director. But when Wilson became mayor, we couldn't get near him. He wasn't going to do anything for us. So we set up our microphone and started boarding up our home.

Theodore Price, *former resident of neighboring 6250 Pine Street*: I didn't have too much confrontation with them. I worked nights. But I knew people who had lots of problems with them.

Ed Rendell, *former mayor and then-district attorney of Philadelphia*: The neighbors were complaining about everything from loud noise to a horrible smell. All sorts of nuisance complaints.

Seth Williams: By the spring of '85, they're on bullhorns shouting obscenities all the time. People were fed up. The public forced the hand of the managing director [Leo Brooks] and police to do something.

Ramona Africa: The cops claimed we were bad neighbors. Since when has this government shown any interest in black people complaining about black people?

Ed Rendell: The police came to me and said, "What do we got here?" And I said, "You might advise the neighbors to come file a private criminal complaint." But there were no felonies, probably nothing to get an arrest warrant on.

Angel Ortiz: You could see it developing if you had any sense. It was a police state. But I thought it could be handled.

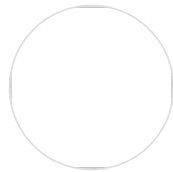
James Berghaier: With Goode being the mayor, I thought the chances of negotiations would be greater. I thought it would get resolved.

Ed Rendell: Then weapons were brandished, I believe. And tied with the threats — it became actionable. Not major, but actionable.

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Victor Fiorillo

Senior Reporter at Philadelphia Magazine

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✉ vfiorillo@phillymag.com

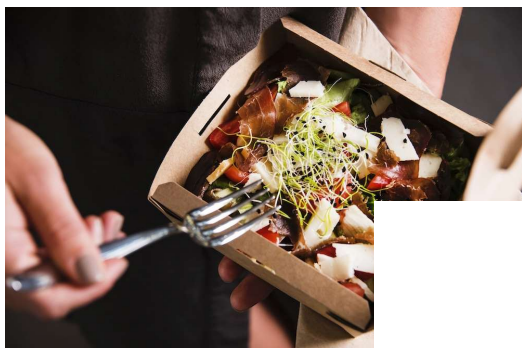
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