

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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Gregore Sambor, in testimony: I remain convinced that any approach on May 13th would have presented an immediate and deadly danger. ... It remains a fact that if MOVE members had simply come out of the building, they would be alive today. But they announced that morning that they would never surrender and that they would kill as many of us as they could.


Marc Lamont Hill: I've talked to Goode. He regrets his actions. I would argue that it's the biggest regret he has in his life. It haunts him. I wouldn't be surprised if his move to the clergy was prompted by his deep sense of regret and guilt.


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Sam Katz: I don't want to point the finger at who should be punished, but there was a moral breakdown here, both in the act and the aftermath. I think it affected Goode profoundly.

Wilson Goode, in a 2004 interview with Philadelphia magazine: In the whole scheme of things, MOVE was a bad day. It was a really bad day.


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On March 6, 1986, the 11-member Philadelphia Special Investigation Commission — or MOVE Commission — issued a report condemning city officials, stating: “Dropping a bomb on an occupied rowhouse was unconscionable.” No criminal charges were filed against anyone in city government. Wilson Goode was reelected to a second term.

A burned Ramona Africa served seven years in prison for charges relating to the May 13th confrontation. Following her 1992 release, she won a civil case against the city for \$500,000. Michael Ward was reunited with his father, Andino Ward, and later won a \$1.5 million judgment against the city.

The 250 residents who lost their homes had yet another saga to endure: rebuilding, a process plagued by patronage, politics and incompetence. It continues, to some extent, to this day.

Many of the police officers involved were profoundly affected by their experience. James Berghaier quickly left the force due to post-traumatic stress disorder. Another officer committed suicide.

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