

VOICES *from the* COMMUNITY

Everyday thinking people share their views on the Philadelphia-MOVE confrontation and reflect on its meaning for their communities

Reflections one year later from

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Extracts from a 1,600-page record of one-to-one interviews carried out by skilled journalists in the six weeks preceding the public hearings of the Philadelphia Special Investigating Commission.

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VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY

Preface

A year ago this month, Philadelphians and people across the United States watched in dismay as police and fire fighting forces, under the command of Philadelphia's elected leadership and key appointees, used water, tear gas, bullets, explosives and ultimately a bomb dropped from a helicopter and unchecked fire to drive a small, angry and abusive group which threatened violence -- members of an organization named MOVE -- from a row house on Osage Avenue in West Philadelphia. By the end of that day, May 13th 1985, one woman and one child had escaped the burning MOVE home at 6221 Osage Avenue. Six adults and five children had died there. The MOVE-occupied house and 60 others in a two square block area had been ravaged by fire and some 250 people were homeless.

The events of that day had a history behind them. MOVE, usually described in the 1970's as an anti-technology and back-to-nature movement, became increasingly provocative and confrontational. Over the years, the official response to MOVE's challenges to authority and to the community vacillated. Violent conflicts between MOVE and the police and the imposition of harsh legal sanctions contrasted with long periods when the city seemed to ignore MOVE's disruptive and illegal behavior.

An historic political development had taken place in Philadelphia over the same period -- the dramatic increase in political awareness in Philadelphia's Black community and an exercise of political power in the best democratic tradition. This had resulted in profound changes in the balance of power and control at the highest levels of city government. Many offices occupied previously by white politicians and professionals were occupied by Blacks and there developed a heightened community consciousness of the opportunities and responsibilities that accompanied these changes.

In the weeks immediately following the May 13th tragedy in West Philadelphia a group of six concerned and active citizens of Philadelphia, most with experience in the history surrounding MOVE and the city of Philadelphia dating back to the early 1970's, and several deeply engaged in the development of Black political leadership, gathered at the national headquarters of the American Friends Service Committee to share their anguish and to see what they might contribute to the needed healing and rebuilding of respect and dignity in Philadelphia.

This ad hoc group was aware that its dialogue -- and each of its May, June and July meetings began with intense dialogue and about the meaning of what had happened -- was being repeated across the city. From that awareness came the idea for the activity which resulted in this Voices From the Community report.

The group was strongly in support of vigorous official inquiry which would establish facts, responsibilities and make recommendations. The group felt challenged, however, to undertake another type of inquiry, one which could capture some of the unofficial dialogue about fundamental questions that was going on across the city in living rooms, churches, and community gathering places.

During September and the first week of October 1985, eight skilled Delaware Valley journalists and free lance writers, at the group's request, conducted 45 in-depth, one-to-one, interviews with average citizens, people who had not had public profiles or access to the media and whose views on the meaning of the events of May 13 had therefore not been widely shared.

The goal was to conduct all interviews prior to the public hearings of the official commission and we met that goal substantially. A very few interviews were conducted in the first days of the hearings with interviewees who had not yet "tuned in" to the TV coverage. Philadelphia's newspapers were not operating at that time because of an unresolved labor dispute.

The group identified a series of concern about the implications of what happened on May 13, 1985. It formulated those concerns the following way:

1. The question of excessive force and the abuse of police power: at what price law and order?
2. The accountability of government in such confrontational situations: what do citizens have a right to expect from elected and appointed leadership in times of crisis?
3. The question of "expendable" people: were MOVE members, like other people who have in the past challenged the status quo by being "different," subjected to treatment that society reserves only for non-conformist racial and political groups?
4. MOVE's attitude toward and past experience with the Philadelphia police and city officials: To what extent did this attitude determine the actions and attitudes of all parties involved?
5. The racial implications: what -- if any -- racial implications are there in the actions taken?

6. The dilemma faced by Black Philadelphians: how did Black Philadelphians view actions taken by Black leadership, in which the community has invested its aspirations for an enlightened approach to government.

7. Personal traumas triggered by a "public" tragedy: what has the MOVE disaster meant to individual citizens throughout the community? How has it affected their families and friends, their children?

Moving from these concerns, a professional in the communications field developed a questionnaire. The goal was to create an instrument that did not "lead" those being interviewed, but instead facilitated an open exploration of the issues with them.

The interviews were conducted for the most part in the offices of the AFSC, although a few were carried out in peoples homes. They lasted from 45 minutes to an hour and a half.

The interviewers found people deeply troubled by what had happened. The situation was baffling to them. Those interviewed were trying desperately to find logic in a situation which in fact the later Commission hearings revealed defied logical analysis.

The report which resulted complements the report of the MOVE Commission -- which was based upon the testimony of persons directly involved in the MOVE tragedy or with expert knowledge. Readers of our report may be struck by the many instances in which the views expressed by community people were echoed in the findings of the MOVE Commission.

Those interviewed were selected in two ways: at random through the services of a professional polling organization and through community-based organizations who were asked to suggest people we might speak to. Twenty two interviewees came from the first approach and 23 from the latter.

The racial breakdown of the 45 interviewees was 24 Black, 13 white, 5 Hispanic and 3 Asian. Interviewees came from every major geographic area of the city of Philadelphia; none came from the burned-out block, though several had strong associations with the neighborhood.

Twenty five of the 45 were women. Age ranged from under 18 to an 82 year old. Four retired people were interviewed; one interviewee was unemployed. Occupations were widely varied: secretaries, teachers and class room aides, domestic workers, social workers, technicians, mail carriers, writers, construction workers, a day care provider, an lawyer, a dentist, a psychologist, a chef and a homemaker.

The Project's approach was not a statistically-oriented one. The "sample" was small, and it was purposely tilted to secure greater participation from the Black community than population percentages would have called for. This approach grew out of the group's analysis of the challenge the events of May 13 offered a city which had undergone a major shift in political power, because the lives lost were those of Black people, the homes destroyed were owned or rented by Black people, and MOVE itself is a predominately Black group. During and after the tragedy, a recurring question was, "would this have happened in a white neighborhood".

In the last analysis, interestingly enough, the percentage of Black interviewees was smaller than we had hoped it would be. We encountered a considerable level of reluctance among potential interviewees who were Black to discuss the May 13th events and their meanings. These refusals were for the most part motivated by two strong feelings: 1) such agony about what had happened that they did not want to talk about it, or could not talk about it at that point and 2) a fear or concern that the situation was so highly politicized that they did not care to speak out, even with anonymity guaranteed.

In presenting this report, we make no claim to scientific objectivity, but rely on the clarity of the identified issues, the questions drawn from them and the skill of our interviewers. We also rely on the insight and care of our editor, who reviewed over 1600 pages of transcript in producing a report which amplified an important dialogue. The report shares a sampling of the voices we captured, a sampling in which great care has been taken to reflect the diversity of views and insights we found.

The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), through its National Community Relations Division, has lent staff support to the work which led to this report. The headquarters for AFSC's national and international work are located in Philadelphia. AFSC staff and committee members, many deeply engaged in the life of the city, are in the course of AFSC's work involved with human tragedies in the United States and around the world.

For all of us what unfolded on May 13, 1985 was tragically similar to events we have witnessed in Beirut, at Wounded Knee on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, in Central America, and indeed on other occasions in Philadelphia and in other U.S. communities.

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We saw universal meanings:

- a resort to armed conflict, reflecting a judgment by one or both parties that other solutions were impossible;
- a failure to identify effective peaceful means to resolve conflict;
- a challenge by police departments and military forces to civilian control;
- a playing out of deeply engrained racism, enabling some to be seen as "expendable" and denied their humanity;
- alienation from society which leads to a level of anger and provocation from which there is no return, and
- a lack of the will needed to build a just social and economic order which could help address such alienation.

The random "Voices from the Community" struggled with every one of these questions. It is the hope of the American Friends Service Committee that others will join in their search for the meaning of the events of May 13, 1985 and in a continuing search for ways to build a just and peaceful world.

Barbara W. Moffett
Secretary
National Community Relations Division
American Friends Service Committee

May 6, 1986

INTRODUCTION

In the following pages, we have extracted about three percent of what was said to us. A reader of the full transcripts--some 1,600 typed pages, is struck, not only by the extraordinary diversity of views, but by the thoughtfulness and seriousness of these voices from the community. As might be expected in any group, there was a modicum of dogmatism, but the respondents by and large, were manifestly struggling - often agonizing - over the questions posed, and most of them appeared to make a desperate attempt to be fair. Frequently they would debate the pros and cons of an issue with themselves before deciding on their response; they would often say "I don't know", and occasionally they would challenge the formulation of a question if they thought it tendentious. Particularly notable was their effort to transcend racial stereotypes. The responses reveal that most of the respondents - though not all - were well-informed. They had closely followed the events of May 13, and knew a good bit about the earlier history of MOVE's troubled relations with the city and the community. They raised the same issues, and asked themselves the same questions as the MOVE Commission was to do shortly thereafter.

The interviews confirm what everyone in Philadelphia knows - that the MOVE tragedy has racial overtones. Indeed, many of the questions we asked were designed to elicit views on the role of race. Therefore, the ethnic background of the respondents is often relevant to an appreciation of their answers, and we have

identified each respondent by race at the first mention of his or her name. Occasionally we have referred again to the race of a respondent when it seems particularly relevant to the subject at hand.

The excerpts we have presented were chosen in order to illustrate the diversity of perceptions among the respondents, a diversity that we imagine prevails also among the larger community. In conducting the survey we had neither the desire nor intention to draw conclusions about what the people of Philadelphia think, nor even to present a consensus among our respondents. Indeed there was no consensus. There were some dominant or prevailing perceptions - about the importance of human life, about the competence of the city officials on the tactical and strategic level, and about the role of race.

In the course of presenting the excerpts we have drawn attention to some of these common perceptions. But we have tried to resist the temptation to emphasize or synthesize what we think is significant. We hope that we have chosen, from the rich variety and wisdom of the interviews, the excerpts that will help our readers draw their own conclusions.

The questions covered a wide range of topics, and the respondents often added further dimensions to the inquiry in their discursive answers. We have arranged our excerpts in what we hope is logical and understandable form under the following headings:

I. MOVE

1. What is MOVE
2. Community Response to MOVE
3. City Response
4. The MOVE Children

II. The Events of May 13

1. Use of Excessive Force
2. Haste
3. No Alternative Plans
4. Failure to Use Other Means
5. Bungling
6. Culpability

III. The Large Issue of Responsibility

IV. A Matter of Color?

1. City and Community
2. Mayor Goode
3. Police

V. The Impact

- on Goode
- on City
- on Nation

I. MOVE

-
- 1. What is MOVE**
 - 2. Community Response
to MOVE**
 - 3. City's Response**
 - 4. The MOVE children**

I. MOVE

1. What is MOVE?

Differences of opinion about MOVE were striking, as the following remarks show:

"A back-to-nature type movement." (Mr. R, an Hispanic social worker)

"They are not a back-to-nature group, regardless of what they say. I grew up in the country. I know what a compost heap is,...and they did not live back to nature." (Mrs. V, a white teacher and community activist.)

"Misunderstood," "Misfits," "Intelligent," "violent," "well-educated."

"I found they were very nice people." (Ms. T, a black community organizer.)

"Irrational, obnoxious, loud-mouth. My overwhelming feeling is dislike." (Mrs. G, a middle-aged black clerical worker.)

Some perceptions emerged as dominant, summarized in the following excerpts: "This is a poor, unsatisfied, unhappy radical group that tried to get something out of life. But the way they used to reach the goal wasn't good." said Dr. L, an engineer of Asian ancestry.

Mr. E, a young white mail-carrier from Northeast Philadelphia observed, "I could not grasp what their aims were. I had difficulty trying to figure out what they were saying."

"They never seemed to say, 'This is what our aims are.'" remarked Ms. M, a middle-aged black therapist, who added, "For the MOVE members the system didn't work. I don't think they quite understood what they wanted."

"I still don't understand the philosophy of the MOVE family. I wish I did," said Ms. T. Ms. V thought that "Nobody's sure what MOVE stands for other than disrupting the normal flow of traffic socially, politically, culturally."

Ms. F. is a black lawyer with a history of involvement in civic enterprises. She thought that "people outside the city have given them credit for a much more organized and philosophically pure organization than they were. They were clearly not suited to an urban environment....[They are] people who have studied the politics of confrontation....They knew how to do that and they did it in such a way...they...attracted...people who were dissatisfied about...personal lives and larger issues."

Elaborating his views of MOVE, Mr. E. said, "They didn't want to fit into society. They didn't want to have an eight-hour day and do the things that people in society do. I think that's where the confrontation came. The MOVE people were out of hand....It's kind of difficult to walk down the street and have people screaming obscenities at you all the time and people do get tired of that....The more the anxiety went on the better MOVE liked it....They knew...they would gain their ultimate end, which is confrontation," and Ms. V added, "I think they wanted it to be violent, bloody..."

Several respondents recalled reports that MOVE had refused offers of land in the country. "They say they are going back to nature", said Ms. McC, a middle-aged Black classroom aide. "Now they were offered homes, they were offered farms, they were offered land...They should have gone there."

Although the prevailing view was that MOVE was irrational, violent, and generally "impossible" other notes were struck. Mr. A, a middle-aged, Black construction worker good-humoredly dismissed MOVE members as "bull-jive talkers" who never killed anyone. Ms. T described her visit to the former MOVE house in Powelton Village. "When they took us up to the house I was petrified because I seen these people with dreadlocks. And I said, 'O my God'. But I found they were very nice people," whom she compared with John the Baptist. Ms. M, a prison worker who had who had had contact with incarcerated MOVE members characterized them as model prisoners. "I had no problems with them." A not uncommon theme was that MOVE was a response to society's injustice. A few respondents stressed MOVE's spiritual and religious character.

Mr. E warned against generalizing about the occupants of the MOVE house on Osage Avenue. "Some of the MOVE people were passive and docile and some...were trying to find recognition for themselves....I don't think that the people involved really...gave each other a chance."

2. The Community Response to MOVE

MOVE evoked an ambivalent response among Philadelphians, especially among the Black population. As Ms. F explained it: "...the Black community is ambivalent in its feeling about MOVE. First of all, they want to talk about 'this is America and everybody can say and do what they want; and then when it becomes a problem in their communities they want them evicted. 'Them crazy people and their nappy heads, don't feed their children' and all this and all that, and 'get those people out of here.' The part of the Black community that wants to be respectable and wants people to conform is not pleased about MOVE, but they wanted to appear Christian and generous in the beginning, so they got caught up..."

As quoted above, one Black respondent good-naturedly dismissed MOVE as talkers. Mr. D, a retired government employee and community worker responded differently: "I agonize when Blacks do something dumb that would create embarrassment."

MOVE members were victims of class prejudice, because "they were living with those uppity Black people that have 'advanced from the ghettos' of North Philadelphia" according to Ms. T. "If the MOVE family had been living in North Philly they would have never had any problem. Because what's the difference in living next door to chickens and goats?....I've lived next door to chickens and goats, but I've never asked anybody to bomb them. When you live in North Philly you have to put up with these kinds of things. So...they were living in the wrong neighborhood."

The great majority, Black and white, thought MOVE neighbors and the larger community justified in feeling outrage and demanding action. "The majority...had reached the conclusion that they were tired of this MOVE shit." They were tired of having to deal with it and having MOVE fashion the debate. I don't think anybody said 'wipe these people out' (but only 'remove them from our immediate environment and restrain them....'" She added, "I don't think they were entitled to any special consideration."

Several respondents pointed out that MOVE changed - and became more intolerable - over the years. Ms. V, who had first-hand experience with MOVE in Powelton Village said that when MOVE first arrived there "they were just people, a little eccentric, a little different. I liked the idea that I was living at a place that allowed people to be different; but then they started to change and to get very violent and nasty to where if you walked past them and looked at them or nodded or said hello there was...a confrontation....The people that lived in the attached house moved out because things were getting very stinky and noisy and dirty....They had been tapping into the fire-hydrant to wash cars, and flooded the house on one side of them. Several neighbors complained that their dogs were missing and we found them inside the MOVE compound. People were starting to steal people's animals. And the rats were horrendous, and it was very hard living out there. When the bullhorns came out, the front porch got fenced and became a giant platform, and the guns started coming out and we could be awakened night and day.

Filthy language, cursing people out as they would pass, it was just that they were trying to see how far they could scare the city, and the city took it."

"Their philosophies really couldn't exist along side of an inner-city life style", said Ms. X, a middle-aged Black homemaker, expressing a commonly-held sentiment.

In the view of some, the immediate community should have made more effort to find a modus vivendi with MOVE. Mr. R thought "the neighbors themselves, before the police, should have made a committee...to try to deal with that problem....I think the answer lies in the community itself."

Mr. E, who is white, characterized the response of the larger community as basically indifferent. Judging from the reactions of his own relatives, friends and neighbors, he concluded, "most people didn't care very much." His relatives are basically country people, "they really don't have anything to do with Philadelphians so they weren't surprised by what happened. They didn't look at it as a very important event." He added that the people around him reacted by saying 'let it happen; I'm glad it happened.' That's the state of the city. That's the way people think. And there is not much you can do about it."

3. The City's Response to MOVE

Several Black respondents referred to the trial and punishment of MOVE members for the death of Officer Ramp in 1978,

but characterized it in different ways. Mrs. M, who had come to know MOVE prisoners, agreed with MOVE's assertion that the 1978 trials were unfair. "I know how this criminal justice system works. I have been a part of it and it sucks. I guess you've got about 7,000 people in the three prisons in Philadelphia and 90% of them are Black between 18 and 30. I've watched the court system. You can take a white kid and a Black kid and they'll both commit the same crime....The Black kid may get five to ten and the white kid may be sent...to a program or may get local time rather than state....I do not believe the MOVE people got a fair shake in the 1978 trial."

Other respondents with the same view also based the charge of unfairness on the generally racist character of the system, rather than on any specific critique of the 1978 proceedings. Ms. F, a lawyer said she agreed with MOVE; "If eleven people are in jail because one person died...then I don't understand why nobody's in jail if eleven people are dead." She also characterized the evidence in 1978 as suspect, and inadequate to support the convictions. Ms. F went on to observe that since MOVE's complaint was with the judicial system, "it was most unreasonable for those MOVE people to think that the mayor could go in and completely disrupt or ignore the judicial mechanisms."

Ms. M remarked, "In the 1978 incident the judge tried to be fair...I think their trial was just. The incidents leading up to 1978 were almost as bad as the incidents leading up to this escapade....They just got caught in the vice, they didn't realize just how deadly life can be when you don't play according to the rules."

The city government's response to MOVE before May 13 elicited almost universal criticism, divided among those who stressed the city's failure to take a firm hand with MOVE from the start, and those who thought the city unwilling or incompetent to negotiate effectively. The two criticisms are not necessarily inconsistent, and indeed several persons voiced both.

Ms. V, a former neighbor of MOVE at Powelton, expressed what the majority of respondents seemed to think when she said that the city apparently learned little from 1978. "If they had learned anything from the Powelton Village situation, they would have moved in and gotten the MOVE people out months before last May....They didn't learn...that you cannot wait these people out and just let them be. You can't because that's exactly what they want...and they're just going to get worse and worse...and make things more dangerous to the surrounding community." Most of the respondents thought that the city should have enforced the health and building codes against MOVE and should not have permitted MOVE to get utilities they did not pay for. (Respondents making this point did not volunteer suggestions about how the city might have enforced the building and health codes without precipitating a violent confrontation.)

Mr. R wondered why the adults were not picked up one by one. "These people were not cooped up but did walk the streets. They were seen in the park on Saturdays, they were selling fruits and so forth door-to-door, so if the police needed to...pick them up,...why wasn't it done?"

4. The MOVE Children

"Their children had potentials. We don't know what they could have been. There could have been another Martin Luther King there. There could have been another Dick Gregory, or Malcolm X...Every human being is worth saving." (Mrs. T)

"Those kids didn't know what was going on. Just by listening to some of the things that Birdie Africa said [I could tell] he had no idea what was going on. He only knew that there was a big fire. The people in the house were normal to him, and I really don't think he had an understanding of the politics involved." (Mr. E)

"I don't feel that MOVE was the only one who decided the fate of the children; the city also decided it." (Mr. H, a black industrial worker)

These quotations represent common themes among the answers. Not surprisingly the majority of respondents regarded the deaths of the children as especially tragic. But beyond that, the comments on the children reflect the same diversity that inevitably arises in any attempt to define overlapping and conflicting responsibilities of family and state for the welfare of children.

Many respondents found the city culpable for the deaths of the children. Two Black respondents thought that the city was cold-bloodedly determined to eliminate the younger generation of MOVE. "Little people grow up to be big people", observed one person. (Mrs. M)

More common was the view that the city did not try hard enough to rescue the children. Ms. T said, "No one was there to really fight for the lives of the children....These children were walked every morning to the park." "People from the MOVE organization [took] the children to the playgrounds every day, Mr. H observed. "If the city had really wanted the kids they could have snatched the kids." At the time of the assault, "somebody in authority...should have made every effort to...get the children out," for example by announcing "We're going to do such and such, please send the children out. That's not to say they could have but a whole lot of hands would feel cleaner if they had [tried] to" (Mrs. G)

Dr. L agreed, adding, "Of course the adults are responsible somehow, but the city government didn't help them go through their fanaticism or craziness. It was with the cooperation of the city government that those four children died."

There was almost universal agreement that the city's destruction of the MOVE house and those within was inexcusable considering the presence of the children. Even former Mayor Frank Rizzo, who Ms. M "thought was the most barbaric person I had ever known...was humane enough to remember that there were children in the building in Powelton Village."

Almost everyone regarded the MOVE adults as culpable in the deaths of innocent children, but the extent and nature of that culpability was perceived in diverse ways. Some respondents had no hesitation in labeling the MOVE adults as child abusers. Ms. V said, "These people were disobeying the law and were

neglecting, and in their own way abusing, their children. They never sent those children to school. That is negligence and...cause to remove a child from the home. In the winter time...the children weren't dressed properly....They might have on a tee-shirt or something or just a diaper, and the children were very listless, their bellies were quite distended....They wouldn't cling to their mothers when they were held on a hip, they would just hang...and they were obviously very sick. They weren't being fed well. The adults were well-dressed for the weather but the children weren't, and that was abuse to me."

But this was not the universal perception. Ms. M said: "From what I hear, the children were very happy. Their neighbors on Osage Avenue said that they would play outside, smiling and laughing. They didn't seem to be in any way encumbered by the situation."

A striking feature of the interviews, taken as a whole, was the unwillingness of many respondents to attach labels to people and events. Few, for example, applied the term "terrorist" to MOVE, sensing, it seems that the affixing of a label tends to foreclose rational analysis and further thought. By the same token, respondents were reluctant to characterize the children as "hostages" Several persons bridled at the word. "I don't like that word 'hostage'", exclaimed Ms. M, "because that's totally alien to me. Whatever I am my children are. I'm of a different religious persuasion. My children were reared in this religious persuasion also....I was questioned very often about this by the community. 'Why do your children do so and so?' And then I

would say, 'Well, don't your children follow your ways? Why is it that my children shouldn't follow mine?' And of course I never got a sensible answer. No, I don't believe those children were held hostage. I believe they were victimized as...the adults were victimized. I despise that hostage word in this situation. I can't separate the children from the adults. It's their own little community. The children need the parents and the parents need the children" Mr. R was also reluctant to apply the term "hostage" to the children. "I would tend to say victim more than hostage. Mother and father and family is very important. When you have family, you have a lot more than other people."

In total contrast was the view of Ms. V who had labeled the MOVE children at Powelton as abused. "I do think the children were hostages....The adults made choices for them....I think the children were scared to death and wanted out and they would not let them out. I have worked with children for about 20 years....I cannot imagine children that young wanting to stay in there,...having a deluge come on my roof and guns going off outside and people throwing tear-gas cannisters. That's a terrifying thing for children....I think they kept them as hostages to make them even more bizarre martyrs than themselves, to try to get the city to look evil and awful."

Clearly these starkly contrasting interpretations spring from fundamental differences about such basic issues as the nature and role of the family, child psychology, the importance of autonomy, and even the primacy of survival in the scale of

values. Respondents were troubled by these issues, and most were far from dogmatic. "I don't consider children who are with their parents hostages", said Dr. C, a black man in an executive post with a church group. "I may be wrong [but] I assume that in the time they were living in the block there was some freedom of movement to go in and out of that house. And although there are psychological things...in terms of pressure to stay with a particular group, generally when there is a great discomfort in a situation, children have been known to run away."

Despite the soul-searching and ambivalence of many respondents when confronted with passing judgment for the fate of the children, there was consensus that MOVE, along with the city, was culpable. Almost everyone explicitly recognized the children as innocent victims. "Well, a child has to obey its parents" Ms. S, a retired Black housewife, said. "What can a child do, really? And then they had been brainwashed into saying that whatever is going to happen is the white man's fault....These little children, what do they know? They've never been to school apparently...so they're helpless, that's all." Reflecting a commonly-expressed reaction, Ms. F declared, "If the adults wanted to go down in flames, that's their business. But they should have released those children."

"I still wonder how they could have left those children in the house with them", said Ms. G "The only way I can see doing it is if I was...irrational enough to want to risk their lives for my beliefs."

II
The **E**vents or
May 13

II. The Events of May 13

An earlier section of this report reveals a consensus that the city authorities did a poor job in dealing with MOVE in the months and years preceding the crisis of May 1985. Indeed several thoughtful respondents were of the opinion that the confrontation on May 13 could have been averted completely.

With respect to May 13 itself, there was an overwhelming consensus that the city's handling was not just poor but disastrous. Characterizations ranged from "sad" and "unfortunate" to "outrageous" and "holocaust," with a sprinkling of less emotion-laden words such as "bizarre", "confusing" or "unnecessary." But almost everybody perceived the city as blameworthy, and the event as a major tragedy.

Though the MOVE household was seen as the principal victim of the tragedy, several respondents mentioned the impact on the neighbors. "Millions of dollars of damage was done and some of those things [lost by] the survivors on Osage Avenue, money can't buy," said Ms. M. "You'll never be able to replace those old records....What about the little pictures that grandmom had when Johnny took his first step....I have several friends who lived at Osage and they're bitter with the city for burning down their property."

The excerpts immediately following present a panoply of views characterizing the event, and analyzing what actually happened and what went wrong. (The question of motive and culpability is dealt with later.)

1. Use of Excessive Force

"The Mayor is supposed to demonstrate that it is possible to deal with difficult people in a way that is humane and fair and that will not throw us all into chaos."

"Can we have people like this in charge - that if they can't come up with a proper understanding with these people that they're going to bomb them? And that has solved our problems? No, we don't need these type of people in charge. A life is a precious thing. Eleven is gone, and there's no way that any of us - not the Mayor, not Sambor - can get these people back. Nor the children." (Ms. T)

It was an almost universally-held view that the assault was a gross overuse of force. "It's just scary when I see hundreds of policemen with guns and so forth and then you hear there's eleven people in a house with some children. It just turned me off." (Ms. T)

"I would like that they had gave them a second chance....I still don't believe it takes all the ammunition and the army of police to go to a place to move out two or three peoples." (Ms. U, an elderly, semi-retired Black domestic worker)

"I've seen more care taken to bring a...killer out of a situation than was taken with this group of people." (Ms. M)

Ms. V, who in general took a hard line against MOVE said, "It wasn't so much a Black or white issue...as having two military men...making it a military confrontation in an urban setting. Their military tactics did not work. They just

overreacted.... Wilson Goode gave too much power to military people..." (This same respondent said she thought that "it would have all been over by ten o'clock in the morning if there had not been children in there.")

"Modern technology", said Dr. L, "and all the means that a mayor of a big city...[has] would have been able to provide him with other means to get into that area and neutralize those people in a much more effective way."

"The city did not seem to have worked out a full plan of dealing with MOVE....The city in effect declared a state of war and had a surprise siege, sort of like a pre-emptive strike. And in that case one would expect that people would seek to defend themselves." (Dr. C)

However, condemnation of the city's action was not unanimous. "Generally I thought they did a satisfactory job" said Mr. J, a white middle-aged electrical technician. "There's a possibility of incompetence of whoever was responsible for dropping the explosive didn't know really what it was. And the possible delay of putting the fire out."

Criticism was not confined to a generalized perception of overkill; respondents were usually specific, as the following excerpts indicate:

2. Haste

"If this situation had been allowed...for two summers, why did it have to be completed in one day? (Ms. M)

"The people...sent there...were maybe ill-prepared....We've been negotiating with foreign powers for years....So if it takes a little bit more than 24 hours, then...bring in specialists who know what they're doing in terms of negotiating and compromising. But you don't give it a 24 hour limit or a 48 hour limit and say, 'Well, that's it. We're gonna go in gung ho.' Especially if there are lives at stake." (Mr. R)

"I think they all was too hasty." (Ms. U)

"I don't understand why they couldn't wait it out. They had waited...over a year and a half....Why all of a sudden did they have to do something within twelve hours. Why couldn't they wait another day. Why couldn't they just put some flood lights up and sit it out? Better to sit it out for a week with nothing happening and nobody's house getting burned down. But these were military men....Wilson Goode should have sent someone else out there." (Ms. V)

"[The Mayor] should have told them, 'No, do not use explosives. Starve them out, wait them out.'" (Ms T)

"When there's a standoff you just wait because those people need food, those people need water. Cut off the gas, cut off everything." (Ms. V)

3. No Alternative Plans:

"If one plan doesn't work, there's no law that says we can't...come up with another plan," Dr. C said. "They thought they could manage a swift removal, possibly without persons dying. But I'm not so certain that there was a great deal of thought given to an organized plan to have some sort of negotiation going on, so that if swift removal didn't occur, you didn't need to go immediately into a great deal of violence."

"The only plan they came up with was a disaster", said Ms. T. "And they didn't have a counteracting plan. That means, if this first plan didn't work, what did they have next?"

4. Failure to use other Means:

Besides the use of floodlights and the cutting off of utilities as part of a siege strategy, some respondents thought there were other devices the city should have considered before resorting to fire.

Ms. V talked about "Howard Hunter out of Hill Street Blues [who] had some bizarre kind of attack where he bashed into the front of a fortified building....Why didn't they get a Howard Hunter somewhere to come down the street with his little bashing tank and smash that one building. [In 1978] they had all sorts of stuff...in the armory. And we've got a Navy base here....I know the military must have some kinds of anti-personnel tanks that might not be shooting missiles...and bombs but can at least bash out the fronts of a building..."

5. Bungling:

Most respondents thought that on the tactical level, the operation was carried out incompetently. They struggled to understand what the lines of authority were, who was in charge, and who knew what. In explaining the mismanagement, some emphasized the lack of clear lines of communication.

"I don't believe that the Mayor was ever fully in charge or control of this MOVE situation." said Ms. M. "A lot of things were done that Mr. Goode had no knowledge of....Perhaps his ego at this point wouldn't allow him to admit that he indeed was not...in control."

Mr. E. thought that "the lack of communication between the Mayor, the Managing Director, the Fire Commissioner, and the Police Commissioner...resulted in the deaths of those people....If there [had been] more communication they would have let the people come out. I don't think that the MOVE people knew what they were up against. And I don't think that the people...in control knew what they were doing.

"[Brooks, Richmond, Sambor] failed....Managing Director was totally not in control. He had no communication with the police. The police had no communication with the person who was making the bomb, dropping the bomb. The Mayor not being there just added to the general confusion because I think that the department heads left it to their own people to [devise] their

own remedies. Someone has to be in charge in a situation like that. The Police and Fire Commissioners were only interested in their own people. Sambor is an idiot."

Also speaking of Sambor, Ms G said, "he was the one that knew what that bomb package was [and] who was supposed to have reported to the Managing Director and the Fire Commissioner how that bomb worked....If he didn't know about the bomb...I question his technical expertise....Police surveillance must have been watching or should have been watching the MOVE headquarters [and] knew something about gasoline and what was there....There's a big gap in what he did and should have known. I don't have the feeling that Brooks was [overseeing] the Police Commissioner...."

"I saw the gasoline cans [on the roof] before the device was dropped." said Mr. D. "If I could see the gasoline cans, the experts are supposed to be able to see the gasoline cans." Mr. K added, "Dropping a bomb on a roof that has gasoline cans on top of it is total incompetence...or even in the absence of gasoline cans, knowing...that they might have some kind of flammable stuff inside the building."

Ms. M expressed herself more dramatically. "They knew what was in the bomb," she declared. "[But] I don't believe that our Mayor knew. I believe at least the Police Commissioner knew....I am a lay person. I know what a bomb is. You drop it and it goes boom. And a fire ensues. I've got a five-year old grandchild that was watching that stuff and he still has nightmares about it. And he said, 'Grandma, that's a bomb'.... When they dropped the bomb my whole world stopped."

"One of the major unanswered questions is why they didn't start hosing down those houses. If there was (anyone] alive at least it was [not] on the upper floors and they could have started hosing down the upper houses....The disgrace was letting all those house burn down." (Ms. V)

"The decision not to fight the fire was...insane....Firemen certainly know that when you have a building...on fire it's fairly likely that someone can get killed....So any fireman on the site would say that if you let that fire burn you're going to kill people. The fire commissioner, who was on the site, should have said that to the police commissioner and that would have made the police commissioner guilty of murder." (Mr. K, a retired social worker and white resident of Powelton Village).

Many respondents thought that the death and injury of police and firefighters in the 1978 confrontation caused a conscious or unconscious determination in both departments not to sacrifice their lives this time. However, this prudence was not cited by anyone as a justification for letting the fire burn. Ms. M and Mr. K repudiated the excuse. "If you were pouring water on a building for hours and hours"said Ms. M, "and you weren't fearful of gunfire, how can you see a building burning and [not] know that no living soul could live through that,...and say that you let a building burn because you were afraid of gunfire? How can you get gunfire from a blazing building?"

Mr. K added, "I don't buy the danger factor; every time firemen fight a fire there's danger. Firemen are in danger of their lives. They're paid very well because it's a high risk

profession....Nobody...outside the building was shot, so that's no evidence that it was dangerous to be outside that building....Most of the weapons that were heard that day were police weapons....Firemen can wear flak jackets...they could have commandeered them and put one on every fireman."

6. Culpability

Though condemnation of the city's actions on May 13 was almost universal, respondents exhibited a wide range of opinion about what was going on in the minds of the protagonists.

What about the MOVE people? Ms T said it was not surprising that the MOVE members did not respond to a bullhorn announcement. "Who's there to see what you're going to do to me? I would not have come out either...[But] I don't believe that the MOVE family ever thought that the city would deal with them with bombs, and to the point of firebombing the whole neighborhood. These people would have ran out. Because when fire get on you, I don't care how bad you are - ask Richard Pryor - you got to move. You could be bad, but fire's badder. These people were not the type that would risk their children's lives. Everyone wants to live. No one wants, really wants to die. Nobody but a fool, and they were not fools."

But Ms. V saw it differently: "I think they wanted to die. They wanted a confrontation. They wanted it to be violent....They wanted to be martyrs. I don't believe they expected...50 peoples' houses [would be] burned down. What

happened to the MOVE people was their responsibility; however the burning down of that neighborhood was the city's."

Unwilling to regard the MOVE deaths as either suicide or murder, Mr. D argued that "they did not want to die but they were willing to die." Had they been seeking death, he added, "The first thing they would have done was to try to remove those precious, irreplaceable people, what we call our children."

Dr. L saw, in the decision to let the fire burn, "a deliberate intention to exterminate the area." But, reflecting the ambivalence of many, this same man later refused to characterize the deaths as murder. "I see only the results and result is sad. That's all I can say." Dr. L incidentally, was one of only two respondents who mentioned the role of the state government; "The helicopter was a state helicopter. Without some authorization from above, the city wouldn't be able to use that helicopter that dropped that bomb."

Mr. D said, "it was accidental...on the part of the authorities. They did not want to kill those people. The primary thought...was to get them out....It's just a series of crazy events that took place, kind of snowballed. One stupid act led to another, resulting in the death of these people...I'm sure that when they set out that morning they [didn't say] 'well, let's go and kill these MOVE people' and the MOVE people [didn't say] 'let's die today'"

Dr. C had a similar view. "I think that the city viewed them as expendable," he said, "and if they could get rid of them

quietly they would have wanted to do that. I don't think that they wanted to murder them."

And still another variation was voiced by Mrs. T. "Sambor...had a personal vendetta....Here he is saying, 'I'm the police commissioner, and I'm not going to let these people embarrass me now. I told these families they can be back here at 6 o'clock. We got to do something now. We done tried everything....We tried to be peaceful, we done gave them a chance to come out....Let's get 'em out the best way we can - bomb 'em....We just have to kill them.'"

As already noted, a number of respondents thought that fear on the part of both firefighters and policemen - springing from memories of 1978 - was a conscious or unconscious spur to ruthlessness.

"That police were out for revenge for the death of Officer Ramp" at the hands of MOVE in 1978 was "perfectly possible" in the mind of Mr. K. For Ms. T, it was more than a suspicion. "I believe there was some there that might have some vendettas", she said..."As a matter of fact I found that many of them were the same police officers that was involved in the other incident in 1978."

In general, Sambor was seen as the most culpable, but others did not escape censure. There was some disposition to hold Fire Commissioner Richmond less blameworthy than the Police Commissioner, but many did not accept the argument that Richmond was only taking orders. "The Fire Commissioner by letting all those houses burn was totally irresponsible" said Mr. E.

Dr. C thought "The fire department...was very wimpy....I do not think the fire commissioner had any direct say-so; he was taking orders. 'Do this, do that...don't do this.' I think he just went along with it."

The Managing Director did not loom large in the minds of the most respondents. As already noted, several people thought he behaved true to military form. It was a common perception that Brooks, as the chief link between the Mayor and the operating departments, bore a heavy share of responsibility for what went wrong. Ms. P, a middle-aged Black businesswoman thought his role was being "covered up"; Mr. D referring to Brooks' resignation said he "abdicated his position under fire....He got himself right out of it,...he removed himself from any line of questioning or statement-making." Ms. W, a Black medical technician, while not exonerating Brooks, observed, "to focus on him would be to make him a scapegoat for all the others. Wilson Goode would be let off the hook. So could Sambor. ...The Police Department has always had its independence...and...to focus on Brooks just takes away from...the atrocities of the others."

The motives and culpability of the Mayor created perplexity and disagreement amongst the respondents, but in general the verdict was negative especially among Blacks. Ms. F thought him callous; "If he had got up in front of the TV cameras one more time and said he'd do it again, and he took complete charge and they had to do whatever they had to do" - here her voice trails off, and she picks up: "it was like a monster."

"The Mayor is sick" declared Dr. C. "I don't know what was going through his mind, except that...his actions indicate that he did not respect the lives or the persons of Black people....I think the city wasn't concerned about the people....The city was concerned about restoring a situation that would not embarrass the city."

"I can't see them letting a house in the Northeast burn up...with white families in it," she added. Ms W said, "What motivated [Goode] was his anxiousness to make a stand to whites in the business community who he's been...anxious to please....It's his capitulation to racism." Mr. K, who is white added that the Mayor "condoned actions that resulted in taking the lives of Black persons....The police commissioner...orders the dropping of a bomb on a house that holds Black people,...and he was never punished, he was never told he did wrong."

Some Black respondents did not see the Mayor as heartless, but rather guilty of abdicating responsibility. "I think he's avoided responsibility,...and I say that with sympathy and admiration for him", Ms. G observed. "He should have been there," said Ms. V, "and if he wasn't going to be there, somebody should be there with some kind of patience to try to negotiate with them."

Others, Black, white and Hispanic, saw his failure more as a matter of mismanagement of a situation that was out of control. "I think he took the responsibility as a gesture...that somebody had to anyway....But I don't think he really knew what was going

on," said Mr. R. Ms. V said that Mayor Goode's response to phone messages from Sambor and Brooks was "'I trust your judgment'.... He trusted too much to these two men. It's like...the Pentagon running the Senate....Sambor...really believed he could drop a bomb...and get away with it. Wilson Goode is responsible.... Wilson Goode put him in there, Wilson Goode can take him out."

Dr. C who described the Mayor as "sick", added, "He viewed himself as being in control, but I don't think ...he was really in control. He did not have all the...information, even about that explosive device, before he made a decision....If he had been in full control he would have known more about the entire situation, and about his police commissioner, the attitudes, the...lack of consultation....He would have dealt with Black people, Black ministers, community service people....To be in control is not simply to say...'I'm going to authorize you to do one particular act,' but to have a sense of the whole situation, and to be the person who initiates the thinking about what is going to be done, and to be able to respond to all of those questions after the act....He could not do any of that....It's the responsibility of a Black elected official, who has responsibility over the police force, to ask the questions that whites don't ask, and to make certain that the ...commissioner of police doesn't simply manifest...a police mentality."

Mr. K echoes some of these views: "The Mayor had very little influence over the situation, and it was run despite him....If he were to speak honestly he would indicate that he was appalled by

what happened....It shows when he talks about it. He never has been able to admit that because he's too afraid of the police."

Another group of respondents, mainly but not exclusively Black, saw the Mayor as an innocent victim. Mr. Q is a Black community worker sympathetic to MOVE. He said, "The Mayor was trying...to do the best...he could....It was almost like he was set up because they wasn't tellin' him everything....He was wrong when he decided to take the blame when his people was wrong."

This perception was spelled out in more detail by a Ms M. "Before God Almighty I believe...in my heart that he was not given the proper information....It looks like a conspiracy. The contents of that bomb...was purposely withheld from the Mayor....I don't envy Mr. Goode's position....My heart goes out to him as a human being, even though I think he's doing something foolish by not firing those dodos."

Another theme, less common, was that the Mayor was not blameworthy because what happened was justified. A middle-aged Black mail carrier, Mr. Y, insisted "the Mayor was not to blame" because MOVE, "a cult of terror", made destruction inevitable. "As far as him being on the scene at the time...he has no business there. His job is to be in City Hall...." If Goode is to be blamed for anything, it is his failure to order an attack earlier, and his permitting the presence of the news media. Mr. J, who is white, characterized the MOVE crisis as a "typical city operation....The Managing Director had a better handle on it" than the Mayor. "The Police and Fire Department had a handle

on it." The Mayor "was quite aware of what was going on" but had no obligation to know "minute by minute."

Few of the respondents would quarrel with the observation of Ms. M, who said of the Mayor, "He said that he was responsible. So if he wants to accept total responsibility I'm only too glad to give it to him....He's the one who sets the wheels in motion. If he wants to call in the National Guard he has that privilege....I guess it was two weeks before this happened...I heard him say there was nothing he could do about it, and that shocked me....He didn't know what to do about the situation."

**III.
THE LARGER
ISSUE OF
RESPONSIBILITY**

III. THE LARGER ISSUE OF RESPONSIBILITY

The respondents did not confine themselves to considering culpability for the decisions and acts of May 13; they were eager to explore the issue of responsibility in broader terms.

A frequent theme was that city living requires some give and take.

Speaking of MOVE, Ms. V said, "I feel sorry for them you know, because I think they shouldn't be so strong-hearted....They should be able to compromise...a little bit....If you intend to live in this environment...straighten up a little...and if [you] can't straighten up, move on out." But the same woman fiercely condemned the city for not giving MOVE a "second chance."

In the minds of many, the confrontation presented the elements of a Greek tragedy, the adversaries were doomed by their very natures to pursue courses that brought them into fatal collision. "[MOVE] made it almost impossible for the police to deal with them," said Mr. E, "because the people...in charge of the police just didn't have the mentality to sit down and put themselves in another person's shoes. They didn't want to hear it. They had [had] a confrontation before, and...some of the members of MOVE might have provoked the police...because of misunderstandings and not...actually meeting with the people and trying to talk it out...I don't think there was enough verbal interaction between the police or the Mayor and the MOVE people..."

Dr. L held the entire community responsible for the tragedy. "The decision to...use that solution...was in essence the consequence of a democratic society. The mayor and the city government were free to [come up with] whatever solution they thought best...and the people of Philadelphia stayed and watched....The neighbors did go along with the government in that decision. They have to bear some responsibility too....

Give-and-take between MOVE and its immediate neighbors would be a good prescription for avoiding new catastrophes, said some. "I would get in touch with church persons and neighbors", said Dr. C, who has had experience in community work. "And I would try to see if we couldn't immediately determine a way...to approach the MOVE members....Now if it turned out that they didn't want to talk to any of the neighbors...then I would be requesting that the city begin to do some serious investigating, and...use professionals to communicate with...MOVE."

Ms. M, a social worker and activist thought that the avoidance of new confrontations "would depend on the neighbors making the concessions necessary and the MOVE members...making...concessions." If MOVE members moved into her block, "I would not call the police...I would welcome them into our community. We have community meetings....I would...tell them we're having a meeting, and we welcome you to come....This is not a condemnation of the people on Osage,...because I don't know how I would have reacted had I lived there....But we should learn something from that situation, especially the Afro-American people....We seem to be more satisfied with the status quo...and

that don't always work....We're going to have to learn how to start accepting the ways of people who may not think or feel the same way as we do. And that not only includes the MOVE people....I'm talking about...a big Asian population. There is tension....I'm not saying I...have to join the Buddhist camp or the MOVE camp or whatever, but...I need to find out more about these situations before I condemn. My people...need to find out more about these varied situations before we just throw a blanket over everybody and say that this stinks. Especially if you are listening to somebody else's version rather than find out yourself. If you're going to listen to what white people say about MOVE or about Afro-Americans without finding out something yourself...we pay the piper and somebody else calls the tune. And that's stupid."

Ms. F was more pointed in her criticism of the community. "I understand, being Black, how much emphasis people put on being in nice neighborhoods. That fight is still going on in the Black community. There are friends of mine in Mt. Airy who say Goode didn't have a choice and they brought it on themselves. These are the same people who grew up with me at 25th and Diamond, who moved on up and participated in demonstrations so that people could not move into apartment buildings because it would lower their...real estate value. That fight, to be respectable...to be...upwardly mobile and to separate yourselves from the riff and the raff and the people who embarrass you or drag the race down...is very much part of this whole discussion about MOVE for the Black community."

Some respondents thought that recent history gave little grounds for hope of "give and take" with MOVE. "Benny Swanns, of Crisis Intervention Network had been out there," said Ms. V., "...and...he felt...extremely helpless that they were not going to release the children and they weren't going to negotiate with any kind of good conscience." According to Mr. Y, MOVE's posture of confrontation is long-standing and unshakeable. "Their attitude: I want what I want. I want it my way, and nobody else's ideas or opinions. I don't even want to hear it."

Whether or not the tragedy was inevitable, and whether or not communities could forestall repetitions, in the minds of many the confrontation was a consequence of deep problems, particularly the historic oppression of Blacks. "This has something to do with the state of mind of the MOVE people," said Ms. MIt's unfortunate that they chose that particular route...to rebel." Dr. C put it this way, "There are, as a result of the violence and the racism in this nation, psychological disruptions....It's time...to look at what this means at a fundamental level, not just that there is one group that moves into a house and decided to do something that's not-conformist or anti-social, but that there are fundamental inequities and injustices and abuses...that, if not corrected, will mean that there won't be just MOVE, but all kinds of other non-conformist responses....Since...people...in power are not going to give up their power...the people in communities need to...address some of these questions and...demand that the people...in office...think in terms of...alternatives for living and for

working...for...people who may...have gone over a line in terms of being able to work within the system....And then also deal with how you keep people from going over the edge, and then deal with the fundamental exploitation and abuse in the system, in addition to the racism."

The city's violent response to MOVE was regarded by some as in the American tradition of violence. Ms. F remarked, "I understand Jesse Jackson said that it wasn't the first time: that they dropped a bomb on a Black community in Oklahoma some time ago....I don't know that, but I certainly know that the Native Americans have been persecuted and butchered on reservations..."

Mr. E, the white mail carrier, saw the response to MOVE as an example of America's traditional acceptance of violence. "I remember...when the Black Panthers were here and Frank Rizzo marched them out...naked. I think that only enhanced the [favorable] outlook on Philadelphia....I think this will have the same effect...maybe not...within Philadelphia...but around the country. We're a country that's on the edge of violence. I think our President has taken us to a point where we're very close to exploding. It comes from him dealing the Russians and it goes on down through the hierarchy...to the common everyday person. We're a hero worship society."

IV. A MATTER OF COLOR?

- 1. City and Community**
- 2. Mayor Goode**
- 3. Police**

IV A MATTER OF COLOR?

1. The City and the Community

"You can't put it in a racial sense because the majority of the people on Osage Avenue are Black and half the police department that was up there were Black and the big officials that was supposed to have been running the city are Black." (Mr. H)

"Very little that happens...is not political, and...there is very little that is political that's not racial....It may have been sparked by Black people in a Black neighborhood, trying to get the MOVE members, which were Black through the Black Mayor, but at the same time if it were white people trying to get white people out of the neighborhood it would not have happened....In America and throughout the world where whites are in control, Black lives are expendable. That's why 61 Black homes went up." (Mr. N, a community organizer)

These contradictory perceptions of two Black respondents mirror a deep division among Blacks and whites alike about the role of race in the MOVE catastrophe.

Dr. L, an ethnic Asian, thought that the assumption that since the mayor is Black it cannot be racial would be 80 percent of the time right, but it is not a law....One can hate his own race....Because the mayor is Black, that's not definite proof or evidence."

According to a Ms. W, the bombing would not "have happened if MOVE had been in a white neighborhood. I don't think that the decisions to carry it out in that manner would have been so extreme...More consideration would have been used....I can't see them letting a house in the Northeast burn up, with...white families in it."

Ms. T pointed out the parallel with "another Black group,...the Black Panthers,...Black people that had organized themselves...to fight back..and from my understanding ammunition... was shot into their clubhouse."

Another Black respondent, Ms. G, said the incident was racial in the sense that "the only people I've seen recently like that are Black, that's the MOVE people....I guess the one comparable irrationality would have been the Weather people or the people who kidnapped Patty Hearst....I hadn't seen that kind of aggressive irrationality on the part of white people....It sounds racist; I didn't mean to sound racist."

Ms. V, herself white, also referred to white extremists, pointing out that deadly force had been used against the Symbionese Liberation Army in California, a largely white group. "I think the city [of Philadelphia] would have proceeded the same way. However, if it were a different organization such as the Rev. Moon or the Hari Krishnas, they wouldn't have had the weapons and the violence...there in the first place....You can't compare MOVE with anybody else except another terrorist political group."

Some people saw racism in the very fact that the city allowed the MOVE situation to develop into a crisis. "The handling of the entire situation, letting it go on as long as it did...is something that would not have happened in a white neighborhood," said Dr. C.

Mr. E., generally critical of the establishment and alert to racism, argued that a MOVE crisis would not develop in his neighborhood "because the people... are white and if something like MOVE moved into...my neighborhood there would be more interest in what was going on....I think that the people on Osage Avenue...let the situation...get out of hand."

"Philadelphia, in my opinion is a very racial city" he added.

Regardless of perceptions about the racial character of the incident, almost all the Black respondents found deep and disturbing implications for Blacks in the events.

As indicated in an earlier section of this report, MOVE was seen by some as an embarrassment to middle-class Blacks. Speaking of her Black son, Ms. V said, "He thinks they're a disgrace. He's ashamed of them. The city has become a city where Black people have made some very strong inroads, and...the MOVE situation...was a major setback."

But this was not the only perception. "I feel that they could have been a very valuable entity in our communities", said middle-aged M. G. "They ain't no Toms and they say it up front....We need these kinds of situations. And it saddens

me...that they felt the need to go so far...because they could have been a real good part of our community in waking up some of our old folks who are still sleeping and living in that 'yassuh', 'nosuh' kind of situation."

"You get racial hangups...within the community", observed Mr. K, who is white. "Some whites are afraid to advocate actions against MOVE because they're afraid of being counted as racists. And others want action...because they are racists. Also, ...some middle class Blacks but mostly working class or poor Blacks...tend to identify more with MOVE than the middle class Blacks, that would probably act like whites..."

2. Mayor Goode

Even more difficult for many Blacks was coming to terms with Wilson Goode and his role.

Disillusionment is a frequent theme. "A lot of people had really put themselves out for the Mayor's election and caught relatives all over the country....Then these people called up and said, 'Isn't this the man you're supposed to send money for?....What's going on here?'" (Ms. F)

"At one time he was like an idol to me," Ms. T said. "He's not an idol...any more" And another voice: "...when he comes on the television, I leave the room....It was all I could do to sit there and listen to him talk, the last meeting I attended....I think he betrayed a lot of people....When he said, 'I did it, and I'll do it again' something inside of me just turned him 180 degrees in the opposite direction....I said, 'he's under a lot of

pressure'...but nothing would make you say that. And there was no feeling of remorse. I saw no expression on his face...."

Many recognized that the Black community tended to make excuses for the Mayor. "That's why you didn't hear nobody talking about it much....They don't want to 'cause he's Black...I don't hear nobody say nothing real bad about him, you know...If it had been Rizzo,...he'd a been ripped up with words. I say the NAACP and all kind of 'A's' would a been in there." (Ms. V)

Speaking as a Black, Ms. G said: "I hate to criticize Mayor Goode. Now if it had been Mayor Green, I probably would still have hated to criticize him, because I felt some sympathy....But if it had been Mayor Rizzo...we would have been protesting all over the place, and I would have been one of the protesters...."

Dr. C offered this analysis: "People...always want to defend Wilson Goode, and explain that he didn't know this, he didn't know that, and then when you say 'but it was his responsibility not to authorize something until he did know', 'well, he was under pressure'. If that mayor had been white, there would have been none...of those excuses. Even white people [were] making excuses for him. I don't know what kind of white people they are, they can be liberal or they could be whites...like the ones I saw on T.V. recently who said, 'Well, after all, it was war you know, so they had to kill those people.'" Had a white mayor been in charge, said Ms. M "Philadelphia would have been in ashes....I believe that the AfroAmerican population...would have burned it to the ground."

Mr. K was "appalled" at a Black neighbor's support of the assault, "and the only reason I can believe that was because he was so identified with having a Black mayor that he couldn't bring himself to criticize the incident..."

Respondents offered varying explanations of Mayor Goode's behavior. Some Black respondents saw him as the scapegoat of a largely white establishment. "In my very heart...I do not believe that our Mayor knew how devastating that bomb was....I believe there was certain information withheld from him....When the...players of the basketball team lose the game the coach gets fired," said Ms. M. The mayor, according to Ms. Z, an Hispanic psychologist "was set up....I feel he's a victim..." (The victimizer, according Ms. Z was another Black, Leo Brooks.)

The psychological pressures that a Black official experiences won the Mayor some sympathy. "The white person...now are nice....Now I worked for a family for around twenty years. Now...you one of the family, but to a certain extent I only feel so far a part of the family....I feel like he's pressured...They try to smoothe things over, but I feel like behind closed doors there's more, you know." (Ms. V)

Most explanations, however, were not so charitable to the Mayor. Several respondents, Black, white, and Hispanic saw "capitulation to racism" as one put it. "What motivated him", she said, "was his anxiousness to make a stand to whites in the business community who he's been very anxious to please." (Ms.W)

"He didn't want to do things that would get him in trouble politically", said Mr. K, "and that may have been one reason...He didn't want to act in a way that would be perceived as...against the police force....He had some fantasies about being mayor of all the people, and of South Philadelphia and Kensington voting for him...That's terrific, [but] I don't think you sell yourself out on a crucial issue with the racists and the police in order to...curry favor with the supporters of the police."

"He's in a bad position because...he has to cater...to his Black population...and then the law makers and the corporate [leaders] who are...whites. He...has to prove himself in both eyes." (Mr. R)

Ms. F remarked, "I certainly don't want to believe that Black policy makers and executives consider Black people expendable, or feel that they have to take a hard line with Black people to prove something with white people....But there have been suggestions made that the mayor felt some pressure to deal strongly with these people to prove that he could keep Black folks in line....But I don't know that yet."

3. The Police

The respondents - regardless of their race - had fewer inhibitions about seeing race and racism as an important element in explaining police behavior.

Ms. V, the white community activist with a Black son said, "I think that the police department has a racist attitude....If a

crime is committed they immediately suspect any Black people in the area....They will harass Black kids from 16 to 25 going down the street, kids and young men. I...think it's beyond racism, I think it's an arrogance that's gone well beyond racism, which is why we are having the corruption problem....They...feel they are the elite....There's...a sense in the city that the police are above the law....There are many fine officers that I have dealt with, but [sensitivity toward the community] needs to come from the top down." Corruption, according to her, is a facet of the same arrogance that led to the bombing of MOVE. "Sambor...really believed he could drop a bomb on a building and get away with it."

Some respondents thought that racism in the police department is now somewhat "muted" (Ms. G), but many seemed to agree with Ms. M's remark: "Bull Conner is still alive in Philadelphia."

"I think that all Black people in the country have some sort of ominous feeling...in their gut that genocide could take place against Blacks", said Mr. K, who is white, citing incidents from the past. The anxieties are heightened "when a police commissioner...orders the dropping of a bomb...on a house that holds Black people, whatever their crime....He does that...and he was never punished,...so all Black people, I suspect, have a feeling confirmed that the police are their enemies..."

"The police department of this city scares me", said the Hispanic Mr. R. "What I see happening in...the Spring Garden section with the murder of the policeman yeah, they scare me. I

don't know how I would approach them if I had a problem, if I had to call them."

Ms. V, highly critical of the police, acknowledged that being an officer "is a rough job" which tends "to get you to believe that everybody is bad because you're dealing with bad people all day long." Police are "scared of the Black community", an elderly Black resident of North Philadelphia declared. "They don't feel comfortable. If somebody happen to call one, they don't trust one by himself hardly....Here come another one...here come two, three cars."

"Whites don't really understand Blacks", Mr. O, a young Black office worker, referring to habits of speech. "A Black man pulled over by a white cop will say, 'What you want, man. Don't mess with me today.' He's not saying that to be fighting the man, he just saying that because it's his manner of speech. They don't understand that. They take it the wrong way. And they approach the man the wrong way and he does get aggressive...and it causes a big conflict between the two."

The possibility of racism at the command level was raised by Ms. M's speculation,"...they had a fire commissioner and a police commissioner who probably would not be that concerned if the mayor had come up looking bad. There was every indication to say, 'It would be nice if we could make these two men [Goode and Brooks] look...stupid.'"

"The police force...is going to be running around the end of the mayor whenever they can" Mr. K said. The commissioner or the local guys out on the street are going to be trying to do their

own thing...maybe even more when they have a Black mayor, and knowing that they have support in certain sections of the city for that kind of racism...."

Ms. F, the Black lawyer, was not surprised that the present Police Department has "adopted the Rizzo legacy which is to say they are above the law" but was "outraged by John Green's unqualified support for the police conduct in this issue." (John Green at the time was the President of the Guardian Civic League, the association of Black police officers.) "I did not understand that at all" she added, "especially given the contentious nature of the minority policeman's relationship with the...department....I understand...that there are fights about pairing Black policemen and white policemen in certain parts of the city...and how minority policemen are chuckling to themselves about all the corruption....Because of the racist attitude in the Police Department they were kept out of it, and that's why so few Black people or Hispanics...have been indicted....It is clearly this notion of keeping the niggers in their places..."

V. THE IMPACT

1. on Goode
2. on City
3. on Nation

V. THE IMPACT

1. On Mayor Goode

The MOVE catastrophe has profoundly affected the way many people, Black and white, regard Mayor Goode. This appears from some of the excerpts presented in the preceding pages.

Ms. V, a community activist says that the events "will be a major factor in Wilson Goode's reelection....Before the MOVE incident...Goode had a lock on being reelected. I think right now it's shaky." But, she added "he is loved in the Northeast, in all the white neighborhoods." Mayor Goode, she said is "starting to become much more reticent. I don't like seeing it. It used to be...you could make an appointment...and talk to him for five minutes....His office was always easy to deal with. It isn't any more."

"It hasn't been forgotten," said Dr. C, speaking of the events of May 13, "but there are two responses. Goode will be defended by a group of...white racists...Then there is another set of people who will always have questions about how that kind of killings...could have occurred and been authorized by a person of the same race."

Mr. K said, "I was a volunteer two days a week at his campaign headquarters....I was delighted that he was elected,...but...that's washed out with me now. Many of his white and Black supporters will have trouble voting for him again....And that's his constituency. The people who were

pleased with what he did (with MOVE) wouldn't have voted for him anyhow again."

2. On the City

"My friends identify me as a person from the city that bombed itself." (Dr. C) "It looked like a war zone in the news reels....You can rebuild and make it a much nicer looking neighborhood, but...it's part of the history of the city now....A bomb was dropped in a residential neighborhood." (Mr. R)

Many of the respondents shared these perceptions; that the city will suffer substantially. "A situation of this magnitude is not easily forgotten", remarked Mrs. M. "My people will long remember this,...whether they're in Timbuctoo or South Carolina. The white people may dismiss it as they do so many negative things that happen to Black folks."

The catastrophe was usually perceived as inflaming tensions. The city did not solve any problems on May 13, said Mrs. T, who participates in community affairs. "As a matter of fact, they caused us a bigger problem. There are still other MOVE families, ...everybody's touchy....The whole city is touchy...that another incident like this doesn't jump off....There are people that will retaliate; eleven members of a family is dead."

"There's going to have to be a lot of forgiving, a lot of understanding, a lot of tolerance and patience on the part of the city, which includes the administration and the MOVE people", said another Ms. M, "and at this point I do not see it. The wounds are still open. I have several friends who lived at Osage

Avenue and they're...bitter with the city for burning down their property, first. And the murders. They're not satisfied that the situation couldn't have been handled another way....So brother, I don't know about any peace right now....Not unless it's peace with force, and that's not peace." The same Ms. M thought that "a lot of [Black] people are coming together to see what can be done so it won't happen in their areas", but on balance did not see the MOVE crisis as uniting her people. "A lot of them are at odds with one another because they're on either side of the fence - 'the MOVE people deserve what they got', or on the other side of the fence they're saying the reverse."

Ms. W was slightly more optimistic; she thought that "politically, for this city...it will...make...Black people more aware....For the most part people have...strong feelings about what happened. I think it's going to affect us politically. I think it's going to affect the Police Department too. They're having a hard time between this situation and the...federal investigations [of corruption]. So nobody leaves this unscathed."

While everybody thought that the events of May 13 should be the occasion for soul-searching, the verdict was split as to whether the powers-that-be have learned much from it. Among the cautiously optimistic was Ms. I, a Black worker in the public schools.. "I don't think we've heard the last of MOVE. Hopefully we won't drop a bomb the next time, [and] the city officials and groups will look for other ways of solving the

problem. It may be that something good will come out, for MOVE and the community and the city."

A fair proportion of respondents discounted the harm done to the city, at least in the long run. Paradoxically, as some pointed out, Philadelphia's reputation may be enhanced. "I think that a lot of people are proud that they are Americans, and that Philadelphia did what they did..." said Mr. E who himself condemned the city. "I've met 5 or 6 people from Texas and their only trip to Philadelphia was to go to Osage Avenue and see what had been done because they were happy that it was done." He continued..."The media...don't give you a basic insight of what MOVE was about, and basically the rest of the country is white. And all they know is it's a big city and in big cities there's welfare and they know that their taxes go to welfare....I think they will remember it as a good thing."

Mr. D commented that Attorney General Ed Meese, according to what he heard, "sent a congratulatory letter to the Mayor for his action." People in big cities, Mr. D added, are able to understand that Philadelphia is not unique. They will remember that Los Angeles had its Symbionese Liberation Army shootout and "Los Angeles is greater than ever."

Dr L thought that the MOVE debacle would have no long-term impact upon Philadelphia's reputation; he saw the city as "the image of freedom, love, brotherly love."

Mr. B, speaking of the future of Philadelphia, said "I don't think its going to be terribly affected." He speculated on the

possibility of some benefit. "As Black political power grows in the city, perhaps people will pay more attention to some of the people who need attention....One would like to think that MOVE or not...things would get better, although I suspect they won't."

3. On the Nation:

"In some countries they looked upon it as strictly a Black-white situation" said Mr. D. "In fact as recently as day before yesterday the Russians were still broadcasting about the MOVE situation....The Russians or communist countries will try to show that we are treating the Blacks like prior to 1960. [They] will show this in the worst light."

Dr. L, conceding that the "outside world, especially the communist world, will use this as...propaganda", took pride that "this is a democratic society and a lot of freedom is allowed to all citizens....The very fact that they know that this city dropped a bomb...is the answer to those communist world radical kind of nations, that did indeed drop a lot of bombs on people, but nobody knew. And that's the difference."

"People outside of the United States - those who are not simply racist - think that it really shows the extent to which the United States is a really sick society...", said Dr. C.

Personal Statements by:

Linda Wright Avery

Burton Caine

William R. Meek

The Rev. Paul Matthews Washington

COMING TO TERMS WITH MOVE
Linda Wright Avery

Five years ago in the spring of 1981 the image of Philadelphia included several "negatives": network television reports about police confrontations with naked members of the Black Panther Party; the unforgettable television news film of police officers kicking a MOVE member during the 1978 confrontation; and the legend of Frank Rizzo--the mayor who wore a billy club in his tuxedo cummerbund, and who was so offensive to progressive elements in the black and white communities of the city that they had formed a coalition to defeat his charter change drive, preventing him from running for Mayor for a third, consecutive term.

It was not a pretty picture.

But it was a picture that soon began to improve as a compelling period in the city's history got underway--a period which included the coming of age of black political empowerment and the beginning of changes that promise to make Philadelphia more cosmopolitan, without sacrificing the charming aspects of its lingering provincialism.

I came to Philadelphia as those changes were just beginning five years ago in mid-spring, about this time of year, when the color of the azaleas warms away winter's chill and the fragrance of lilac and flowering trees can take your breath away.

It is my favorite season here, but its freshness and promise are now weighed down by the recollections and unresolved questions surrounding the events of May 13, 1985.

The anguish, anger and hunger for answers--or at least some sense of how to make sense of the horror that happened on Osage Avenue--have stayed with us through the past year, intensifying periodically as we lurched through the impromptu processes set in motion officially and unofficially in response to the disaster in West Philadelphia.

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First, there was the disaster itself: five children dead, six adults dead, 61 homes destroyed, 250 lives disturbed and disrupted.

Then, in mid-autumn, a bizarre replay of horror, as the Philadelphia Special Investigations Commission conducted weeks of hearings.

Then, in mid-winter, the Commission's scathing report with its findings of "unconscionable" official conduct, and implications of criminal negligence and sinister conclusion that police gunfire prevented some occupants from escaping the buring MOVE house. (Special Investigation Commission finding #28).

And now it is spring again, and the anguish, the anger and the hunger for answers is still with me--and with many Philadelphians.

Such feelings and the many, lingering questions are at the heart of the citizen interviews contained in this document. As I read it, I was struck by the fact that although almost all the interviews were conducted before the MOVE hearings and the subsequent Commission report of findings and conclusions, some of the specific questions and underlying issues raised in the interviews remain unresolved today:

--Why was the situation on Osage Avenue allowed to fester and escalate into confrontation?

--Why, once the confrontation began on May 13, did the situation have to be "resolved" in just one day?

- more -

--Why weren't the children "snatched" or "rescued" by local authorities in advance of May 13, when it was known that they left the Osage house regularly, to visit nearby Cobbs Creek Park?

--Why was a bomb used to force a resolution to the situation, rather than the accepted law enforcement technique of waiting out similar "barricaded gunman" type situations?

--Why was what began as a small, rooftop fire allowed to burn for nearly two hours without fire department intervention, resulting in the loss of a neighborhood--especially since tons of water had been dumped on the same rooftop for a period of hours earlier the same day?

--What really happened on the evening of May 13 in the alley between Osage and Pine Streets?

Those are questions that the Philadelphia Special Investigations Commission attempted to answer, with limited success: faulty memories, contradictory testimony and the refusal of some principals in the May 13th incident to testify publicly sometimes got in the way.

The next logical step is contained in the Commission's recommendation #29, which calls for a grand jury investigation, specifically into the "unjustified" deaths of the five children who perished in the Osage Avenue incident. District attorney Ron Castille appears to be inexplicably taking his time, in addressing the matter--though a grand jury was quickly convened to consider the material issue of possible fraud connected with the Osage Avenue rebuilding effort.

Beyond the questions surrounding May 13, are the much less precise, but equally troublesome underlying issues raised by the events of that day--issues that continue to confound and confront us today, as they did the citizens interviewed for this report.

One of those issues is how do we, as a city (or a society) "cope" with MOVE? Where is the line between tolerance and avoidance? How do you reason with individuals who are committed to irrationality, as a way of disrupting "the system" most citizens accept--whether they like it or not?

There are, of course, other devotees of MOVE's nihilistic philosophy; there are other "MOVE houses" in the city. And in recent weeks, there have been reports that one such house of South 56th Street in West Philadelphia maybe undergoing "fortification", because of the delivery of logs and lumber to the location.

The residents of the house say the wood is being used for fuel, but have twice refused to allow city officials to inspect the premises.

Though the Goode administration has put aside the ill-advised "hands-off" policy that preceded the confrontation last May 13, it is obvious that the more direct and sensible approach being taken now, by attempting to conduct a routine inspection at the South 56th Street MOVE home, can't work--without the cooperation of MOVE members, who seem unwilling to give it.

The deeper and more difficult issue raised by MOVE has to do with our moral stance, collectively and individually, where MOVE is concerned.

In the black community particularly, the ambivalence triggered by the MOVE debacle continues to be intense--and is strongly reflected in the interviews here.

The fact is that black people died violently in a situation over which a black elected official, the mayor, had authority and control--and for which he has taken full "responsibility".

And the fact is, that is not enough to relieve the lingering anguish that hangs on, as we approach the first anniversary of the May 13 disaster.

It is not enough to satisfy outsiders, who wonder why they should want to, as the promotion says, "get to know" a town that would drop a bomb on itself.

It is not enough for anyone who believes that disruptive behavior--not matter how intense--should not be punishable by death.

One woman interviewed for this report captured the irony of the 1978 and 1985 MOVE confrontations simply and eloquently: "If eleven people are in jail because one person died...then I don't understand why nobody's in jail if 11 people are dead".

In an era of creeping, moral relativism--where embracing the shifting standard of expediency is more attractive than struggling with dilemmas to which there may be no satisfactory answers--it is perhaps not surprising that we have so far failed to address the ethical issues underlying the events of May 13. Those issues include the city's aggressive approach to MOVE last May and our attitudes about it, as well as our feelings about "MOVE people", what they represent--and perhaps more important, what they tell us about the alienation that pervades our society and our institutions.

It is frighteningly easy to see a connection between bombing Tripoli as a national response to a global terrorism, and bombing a rowhome in the middle of a black neighborhood as a local response to urban disruption. (I won't call it "urban terrorism", because the random murder of innocent citizens that characterizes terrorism was not a tactic employed by MOVE--though threats of harm were.) The subtle linkage between our rambo-esque president and a former police commissioner with similar leanings also comes to mind.

I am hopeful this document will promote discussion of those issues--and others, including what we should expect and what we should demand of elected and appointed officials--black and white--in response to "challenges" to the status quo we elect and appoint them to maintain and protect.

With the first anniversary of May 13 approaching, this seems a suitable time to launch such discussions and to initiate the rebuilding of the spirit in our city--a process which, I believe, has yet to begin.

And besides, it is springtime, the season of renewal, when the fragrance of flowers floats on the air and all things seem possible--even perhaps, the molding of a fresh perspective on the Osage Avenue tragedy: one that will enhance our ability to use the painful lessons of May 13 to move forward wisely into the future.

April 30, 1986

EXCESSIVE POLICE FORCE HARMS ALL

Burton Caine

On May 13, 1985 the Philadelphia Police dropped a bomb on a row house in a residential neighborhood in West Philadelphia. Thirteen human beings were inside the house and at least four of them were children. When the bomb was dropped from a police helicopter, a can of gasoline on the roof of the house was plainly visible. The bomb produced the predicted result -- a major conflagration. Both the Police Commissioner and the Fire Commissioner of the City of Philadelphia watched the blaze and neither of them took any action to put out the fire. Since water cannons of the Fire Department trained on the house had been turned off prior to the bombing, it would have been a simple matter to turn them back on and extinguish the flames. The decision to let the fire burn resulted in the destruction of an entire neighborhood and the death of all of the inhabitants of the house except for one adult and one child who escaped. The decision to drop the bomb from the air, unprecedented in the history of the United States, was approved by the Mayor.

These are all of the relevant facts. They show a reckless disregard for human life at the highest levels of government and represent the worst kind of excessive use of police force. They demonstrate a shameful disregard of human rights and human dignity.

The victims of this governmental action, first of all, include all of the people who were killed -- not just the children -- as well as those whose lives were disrupted and whose property destroyed. Included, too, are the entire community and all who are concerned for constitutional and human rights. The fact emphasized by City authorities, that the inhabitants of the house belonged to MOVE, an unpopular and disruptive group in the neighborhood, provides no justification for the police assault. Nor is it of any moment that some of those persons had refused to respond to lawful judicial process based on complaints of misdemeanor violations. The authorities were bound by the

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Constitution not to use excessive force in carrying out their duties. Even if the MOVE people had been felons fleeing from the scene of the crime, the police would not have been justified in killing them where other means were available to prevent flight. None of those circumstances were present here.

The City by its actions spawned the notion that only the lives of the police and fire fighters are worth saving and radical dissident groups are pests to be exterminated. This attitude is the most egregious violation in a society in which the people are sovereign and elected officials and their appointees are servants -- not masters of the people.

Even more disturbing is that the MOVE bombing was not the first wrong to the people committed by an administration which came into office with the promise of caring for human beings. Previously, the City unleashed police dogs to prey on people in the street. Then came "Operation Cold Turkey", a program of mass arrests of people on street corners as a means of combatting drug traffic. Then the City refused to own up to its responsibility to house the homeless. Only lawsuits brought by the American Civil Liberties Union brought these practices to an end. Then came the MOVE incident which could hardly do other than perpetuate the ugly thought that the rights of the down-trodden and unpopular are to be disregarded and are of no value in our society.

The First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States guarantees all persons the right to express themselves as they see fit up to the point of actual violation of the law. Irritating as MOVE members were to their neighbors, and difficult as the problem was to City authorities, there is no excuse whatsoever for the action taken by the City in destroying their lives and property. Standard police procedure in such situations is to negotiate patiently -- and at length, if need be, and use other nonviolent techniques to achieve a peaceful result.

It should also be deplored that now a year after the event, public officials charged with enforcing the law have taken no action civil or criminal against those public officials who were responsible for this major catastrophe in the domestic life of our nation. The Mayor appointed an investigation commission which condemned the Mayor and other City officials for violations of rights of the people. It was the job of law enforcement agencies to proceed on their own -- without prompting by any Commission -- to bring to justice those who violated individual rights. Although the Commission recommended such action, until today there has been none.

The lesson from the MOVE tragedy is that the use of excessive police force harms all in a free society. It is a violation not only of the Constitution but of basic concepts of human dignity.

May 6, 1986

EXCESSIVE POLICE FORCE HARMS ALL

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The lesson from the MOVE tragedy is that the use of excessive police force harms all in a free society. It is a violation not only of the Constitution but of basic concepts of human dignity.

May 6, 1986

AN OCCASION FOR SOUL SEARCHING

WILLIAM R. MEEK

This report is a thoughtful compendium of individual voices, drawn from segments of our community that have rarely been asked to express opinions in a systematic way.

The chilling, tragic events of May 13, 1985 will be emblazoned on my own brain for the rest of my life. I know there are millions of others -- in Philadelphia, in many other parts of this nation, and throughout the world who have been affected just as deeply.

On that fateful morning, I found myself transfixed, with eyes, ears and senses absorbed with the television screen and its awful image. Even when I answered the numerous phone calls, from friends and family in various parts of the country, I continued watching the macabre spectacle. Every caller first asked about my welfare, and then followed with a question: **"WHAT'S WRONG WITH PHILADELPHIA?"** This question still greets me whenever visitors, or those I visit, engage in conversations that stretch beyond the mundane.

As one (among many others) who has spent a great deal of time, energy and available resources during the past 15 years working to guarantee a concerned, responsive, humane government, this question cannot be left unanswered. Yet, a full year later, the issues identified in this report remain alive, and the fiery deaths of eleven human beings, as well as the violent destruction of an entire neighborhood, still exemplify our government's response to a major neighborhood crisis among those it was chosen to govern.

The wisdom of the respondents in this report was evident throughout. At one point the author states, "While everybody (respondents) thought that the events of May 13 should be the occasion for soul-searching, the verdict was split as to whether the powers-that-be have learned much from it". Significantly, these views were stated before the Mayor's Commission's televised

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programs proved the point. The police forays into the Hispanic community, with disregard for the civil rights of the residents, indicate that little, if any learning has taken place.

What does a community have a right to expect from its elected and appointed officials? Does it risk its own survival by requesting government intervention in the solution of serious neighborhood problems? Where are the checks upon government violence, even as the effort is made to head off potential violence by a member(s) of an offending group? Do both the offended and offender risk extinction by a government agency that is sworn to protect them both?

What should a Black community expect from a conscientious Black-led administration when a legitimate complaint is lodged against their neighbors? Is it just "business as usual" or are there numerous opportunities for creative approaches that might not work under other circumstances, but could be successful under these? Were these exhausted before armed force was employed? Should this kind of armed battle ever be countenanced in an urban area where seven adults and five children are holed up in one dwelling?

I agree fully with a statement by one of the respondents (Dr. C) who said, "If one plan doesn't work, there's no law that says we can't come up with another plan". Another respondent (Ms. T) said, "The only plan they came up with was a disaster. And they didn't have a counteracting plan". Again, the wisdom of the respondents is asserted.

Likewise, I agree with the statement of one member of the Mayor's Commission (Charles W. Bowser, Esq.) that "the narrow and shallow perspective of important leaders resulted in a failure to seek a solution within the broadest parameters of our social order and our constitutional structure."

AN OCCASION FOR SOUL SEARCHING

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The kind of official decision making (and lack of it) that resulted in that disaster of a year ago must not be swept aside. Instead, there must be a restatement and wide discussion of the major issues contained in this report, as well as those identified by the Mayor's Commission. It is evident that the healing of this community will depend largely upon the shaping of policies and practical measures that can be identified and understood by all; that are designed to protect every person from the excesses of government powers; that will guarantee certain basic rights to an offensive minority as well as to the majority, and that children must never be held accountable for the actions of adults.

In the critical period ahead, we must be cognizant of the importance of the question posed by the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as a book title, "**Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?**" Much soul-searching must take place on the part of both "governed" and "governing" if past mistakes are not to be repeated.

April 30, 1986

WE BECAME WHAT THEY SAID WE WERE

The Reverend Paul M. Washington

As I sit, pen in hand with the task of having to set forth in writing some thoughts as to the "what, why and who" of a manifestation of humanity which has traumatized Philadelphia and indeed the world for now unto a year, I find myself still in a quandary. How do we make sense of the senseless? What happened and why?

The members of MOVE were people, born of parents, most of whom were a notch or two removed from the socioeconomic stratum where survival is measured in terms of hours and days and seasons. They could look into the future and see a light at the end of the tunnel. The members of MOVE could reasonably have been expected to overcome and "succeed".

Today we think of MOVE, but we find that we are not, in fact, thinking. We are reacting to feelings, strong overpowering FEELINGS which we describe as tragic, disastrous, holocaustic or euphemistically as unbelievable, unfortunate, a shame.

Perhaps we can best understand this reality by disassociating this phenomenon from the realm of the moral or rational and looking at another reality with which we now live from day to day.

We have learned to take our immune system for granted. Bacterial and viral infections, while they may cause illnesses, can be overcome in time with the aid of a myriad assortment of antibiotics and chemicals, we can become well, whole.

But now there is an emergency of humankind's newest threat to life, AIDS. Once this virus invades the system, hope for its victims becomes a word which is meaningless.

Hourly, daily we are exposed to dangerous, hazardous particles and substances throughout our environment, as well as those which we ingest. We have been designed, equipped and programmed to survive and to overcome. To me it has always been a miracle that most of us survive and overcome when we think of the overwhelming odds that are against us. But those whose immune systems have lost their capacity to function become vulnerable and succumb to even the most benign of infections. Our fear of it today is comparable only to our fear of years some by of "the plague". It is as though it is demonic.

To the person with AIDS, life is hopeless.

How does one face hopelessness? Some are able to circumvent the normal process of maturing through age and achieve and attain the perspective of one who is ready to "wrap the drapery of his couch about him and lie down to pleasant dreams". They become more prepared for death than many for whom life means so little.

But for some others, life has played a cruel unpardonable trick. They become hostile, resentful and bitter. There can be no reconciling of their fate with those who are immune to their suffering. They want you to know their pain. They will perpetrate their pain upon you. If we are all involved in humankind, then why should you NOT know my anguish, my agony.

Losses of moral immune systems are not accidental, as are the physical geologic, atmospheric occurrences of the natural world. These losses are willed, planned, perpetrated by human beings upon human beings. They are manifestations of the evil in our nature.

The members of MOVE responded to this state of our human condition. Unfortunately, however, the moral fabric which alone could neutralize and eliminate this condition was lost.

Members of MOVE could not endure the evils of society; their reaction to it and their war against it precipitated complications which made a bad situation worse, the worst condition intolerable.

Still we must not be deaf to what they said. It is true, we were revolted by the profanity they used, but we are not as revolted by the profanity of political pronouncements which see the victims of poverty to be the cause of their own impoverishment. It is true, "educational institutions" most often serve to train us to fit into and accept our world as it is. MOVE called it training, not educating. It is true, we find more often than I want to hear that additives to processed foods are carcinogenic and lead to serious physical maladies, but such foods will be sold knowingly because they are profitable. This is MOVE's explanation for eating raw foods. MOVE accused "us" of participating in a system which was self destructive, uncaringly.

Our immune system has made it possible to live with these. There is a plus as well as a minus to this, however, because when immunity turns into apathy, insensitivity, rationalization and acceptance, we become lepers. We are dying, but don't know it.

How do we as "members of society" respond and proact to such conditions in our social fabric?

Unfortunately on May 13, 1985 MOVE saw its prophecy fulfilled. We became what they said we were. At 6:00 that morning, Commissioner Sambor announced on his bull horn, "MOVE, this is America". That afternoon a bomb was dropped. The world knows the rest. And less than a year later President Reagan said to Libya: Libya, we are Americans and this is what we do to those who tread on us.

We can be reduced to the least common denominator despite our claim to greatness. We did what MOVE threatened to do. Now that we know this we must henceforth resolve that there are moral, reasonable and more human ways of responding to such human conditions.

If our answer to those who threaten us is to destroy them, we are well on the road to self destruction. Moral ends cannot be achieved by immoral means.

If America is to live up to the greatness which it believes it has, then we must find moral, more enlightened, rational ways of dealing with forces which appear to be irrational and contrary to our "enlightened" ways.

May 6, 1986

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