

MOVE Activist Archive

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Introduction

Black History is constantly being erased, diminished, and reconstructed in favor of digestible and White Supremacist-Capitalist influenced versions of the truth. This project focused on how this has influenced the story of the MOVE organization, a Black Radical/Naturalist Group that focuses on Life and its protection through advocating for liberation in the form of animal rights, denouncing the quality of our air and water, and promoting healthy and more natural lifestyles, among so much more. During this project, we used artifacts like newspaper clippings, letters to the editor, MOVE member's own personal writings, and the collections of Louise James and LaVerne Sims, the original MOVE archivists, to deconstruct the narrative often spoken about MOVE, while also constructing an accessible and more holistic and truthful archive of MOVE's history.

The Truth on MOVE

MOVE is a Radical Group that arose out of the teachings of John Africa, a native Philadelphian who wrote The Guidelines, a text that ended up inspiring the original members to develop MOVE and follow the teachings of John. The Guidelines deconstructed many societal aspects that we take for granted and do not think about, and caused a revolution in the minds of MOVE members and many other people who got the chance to reach the text

From here, MOVE started advocating for Life. They took to protesting against zoos and the way people treat animals, against the US System (government, industries, etc.) and its misguiding of the American people, the quality of our food, air, and water, police brutality, and so much more. They cared strongly for the Earth and for people, and that Love weaved through everything they have done, are doing, and will do.

MOVE is not the violence they received, but the Love they gave and continue to give.

Research Procedure

During the project, our team worked with three different sources of archived information in order to build our own digitized collection of MOVE materials and develop collective memories. Firstly, we looked at the archive developed by Louise James and LaVerne Sims, the original MOVE archivists and record holders. By accessing their stored material, we were able to digitize items like newspaper clippings, letters to the editor, writings by MOVE members, and so much more.

Secondly was Philadelphia's Special Investigations Commission's Archive of MOVE materials that was collected after the 1985 bombing to investigate the organization, which is now housed at Temple. This archive was compared to Louise and Laverne's to see the disparities between State remembrance and Black/MOVE remembrance.

Third were oral histories collected from members of the Philadelphia community, whose own memories of the organization, the Philadelphia government, and the community are invaluable to collecting an encompassing archive on MOVE and its history. These oral histories were collected in interviews with community members and transcribed on Otter into digital form.

The State's Perspective

In the eyes of the Philadelphia Government and the Police, MOVE was just a group of troublemaking Black people that needed to be taken under control. Despite MOVE being a peaceful group advocating loudly for the things they believed in, the police and mayor at the time Frank Rizzo viewed them as a menace and acted accordingly. MOVE members were constantly being arrested for their passionate language (called "vulgar" by the oppressor) and brutalized by the police, leading to miscarriages in the women and even the death of a young infant. Rizzo had a strong hate for the members of MOVE, and made it his mission to get them out of the city. This sentiment culminated into the 1978 siege on MOVE headquarters, which resulted in the death of a police officer and 9 MOVE members being arrested and facing 100 year sentences for a murder they did not commit. MOVE would continue to get brutalized by the police and Philadelphia Government, leading to the 1985 bombing of Osage Avenue, the location of the new MOVE headquarters.



Image of the 2021 Remembrance March for the victims of the May 13, 1985 police bombing of the MOVE headquarters.

Conclusions

Based on the content that was watched, listened to, read, and experienced during this project, it is very apparent there are stark differences between the history told by Black people about their own revolutionary and activist work versus what the government and State say is history. This reality makes this type of archiving work so essential; Black people need to have full autonomy over their narratives, because in the hands of other groups, the story may get skewed by societal biases and misgivings. MOVE as an organization is one of the cornerstones to Black Activism in Philly and in the world, and by allowing them to tell their own story and bring the Truth, we can fight with them for the Liberation and Justice of Black People.