

MEMORY, MARGINS, AND MATERIALITY:  
THE PHILADELPHIA MOVE BOMBING

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## ABSTRACT

On May 13, 1985, Philadelphians watched a live news broadcast as a police officer tossed a duffel bag full of plastic explosives onto the roof of an occupied rowhome in a Black, middle-class West Philadelphia neighborhood. The bombing and the decision to allow the fire to burn killed five children and six adults – all members of a controversial group called MOVE – and destroyed 61 rowhomes. This dissertation employs insights from memory studies, critical race theory and journalism practices to examine the ways in which an otherwise little-known event has been described and commemorated in Philadelphia over the past 35 years. It also considers the extent to which public understandings of the event have changed over time, with particular attention paid to which voices are privileged - and silenced - in the official narration of a complicated tragedy. To do so, this dissertation relies on: a series of interviews with journalists, officials, and others with firsthand knowledge of the event; critical discourse analysis of 35 years of local anniversary coverage of the bombing itself; and object studies of a related documentary, real-estate listings from the now-rehabilitated blocks in West Philadelphia; and a vast archive of material related to the city's official investigation into the events of May 13, 1985. It concludes with discussion of the ways in which the bombing is currently being invoked in protests against police brutality in spring of 2020 and an articulation of the ways in which authority over the memory of the MOVE bombing has been constructed to marginalize both MOVE members and the community in order to legitimize an official narrative that benefits city administrators and law enforcement.

This manuscript – and the many hours of work that preceded it – are  
dedicated to my father, Daniel Lawrence McLaughlin,  
who knew I could do this before I did.

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## PREFACE

I feel compelled to remark that my understanding of the MOVE organization and its history in Philadelphia is fundamentally colored by my identity as a Philadelphia citizen and as a straight, white woman who had the great advantage of growing up with the privileges that accompany a white, middle-class, two-parent family. While I certainly strive for the kinds of strong objectivity advocated by Harding (2005), I want to be clear and attentive to the ways in which my subject position might unintentionally affect this research. Like the journalists and other storytellers who have tried to render the events of May 13, 1985 visible for broader audiences, I have brought my own invisible guardrails to the process of my planning, interviewing, analysis and writing. It occurs to me that so much of the MOVE story is wrapped up in the frames imposed on the organization, and I have certainly brought my own, even as I've endeavored not to.

Being five years old at the time of the bombing, I don't have a clear memory of what I thought when I became aware of the event. I do have vivid memories of news stories about the bombing, coverage of ensuing litigation, and MOVE protests in the background of my childhood and adolescence while I grew up in the Philadelphia suburb of Delaware County. I don't have any memory of it ever making sense, but I do recall many people who felt the bombing was somehow inevitable. The circumstances of the bombing and the provenance of the organization remained largely a mystery to me, absent from my school experiences, and inadequately addressed in the other primary source for my learning: the news media.

Since beginning this project in 2017, friends who did not grow up in the Philadelphia area have reminded me of moments when I made them aware of the MOVE organization and the convoluted story of how a bomb was dropped on their headquarters by officials in their own city.

I think now I've been fascinated by the question of what happens to unsettled narratives for a lot longer than I first realized. The importance of capturing important moments with fidelity has always animated me, and this project is where those interests meet.

The extent to which this story is not mine to tell has remained in the forefront of my mind with each public interaction and each interview. When I approached subjects about this work, nearly all of them regarded me with surprise. Either that I was aware of the story to the extent that I might be curious about its mystery, or that I was interested in learning more at all. Some subjects were direct when they declined my invitation to speak: they were not interested in revisiting that time in their life, or they were not interested in talking to *me* about it.

In the case of the neighbors who lost everything in the fire on May 13, 1985, they had been abandoned or mistreated by plenty of well-meaning folks from outside their neighborhood before. Many have expressed frustration with news reporters over the decades, and the disastrous circumstances of their neighborhood reconstruction at the hands of city officials have been well-documented. When I attended a public gathering meant to introduce neighbors to the latest construction in the 6200 block of Pine Street in 2019, several individuals regarded me with open disbelief before telling me they wouldn't be speaking to me. I knew I was approaching people who had been approached by strangers before, asking them to share their stories or their time without any return. When some neighbors tried to persuade others to add their voices to my project, I did my best to convey that I understood their reluctance and respected their decision no matter how they felt.

When I discussed this reality with filmmaker Jason Osder, he introduced me to fellow filmmaker Courtney Quinn's guidance. It has stayed with me since our conversation in February 2020.

You have to ask yourself, who are you to tell this story. The important part is not that you have a pat answer that's the same every time, but that you consistently keep asking yourself and challenging yourself with that question (J. Osder, personal communication, Feb. 6, 2020)

When I embarked on the project of understanding how journalists help us understand MOVE in 2010, it was as a master's student who wanted to better understand a mystery by reading more of the news coverage. Surely, I assumed, that was where I had missed out in my childhood. I hadn't read enough. It did not occur to me that there might be multiple, overlapping, intersecting and contradictory narratives surrounding MOVE that may have been hidden from my view for any reason – let alone reasons of my identity. When I returned to MOVE as a doctoral student, I was keenly aware of the additional considerations my subject positionality brought to my understandings of the world, and especially to this story. I knew that my lived experience had not instilled in me distrust of law enforcement or city administrators. I had not experienced the effects of systemic nor individually targeted racism. I had not lived in a world where the dominant narrative ignored or erased my experiences or emotions. As a doctoral candidate engaged in deeply moving interviews with individuals who had endured the full trauma of the MOVE story, I could only be honest about the context of my own beliefs and interpretations.

Ultimately, I have come to believe that the specific details of my upbringing make my interpretations useful in their own way. There are conclusions to be drawn about the exact ways in which white, suburban, middle-class people like me and my family have wrestled with this story – or the extent to which they shrugged it off as somehow inevitable. It is worth exploring why Black neighbors on Pine Street and Black reporters may not trust me with their stories. The process through which I have come to the conclusions reached in this work are inextricably

bound up with my initial understanding of this story and the subsequent access I have been granted or denied.

Like any good researcher or interviewer, I have tried to maintain a level of vigilance about my assumptions as well as any “facts” I accepted with more or less skepticism than others. I have tried to acknowledge the particulars of my own identity and its relationship to this story as often as possible – in personal interviews, and mentally, as I’ve composed this manuscript. The question of who I am to tell this story has rarely left my mind, and I suspect I’ll continue to ask it of myself long after this project is concluded.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

On May 13, 1985, Philadelphians watched a live news broadcast as a police officer tossed a duffel bag full of plastic explosives onto the roof of an occupied rowhome in a middle-class, predominantly Black West Philadelphia neighborhood. The fire that ensued and was permitted to burn destroyed the house at 6221 Osage Avenue and an entire community. By the time it was out, six adult residents of that home – John Africa, Conrad Hampton Africa, Frank James Africa, Raymond Foster Africa, Rhonda Ward Africa, and Theresa Brooks Africa – and five children who lived there – Delisha (12 years old), Phil (10 years old), Tomaso (9 years old), Tree (14 years old), and Zanetta (13 years old) – were dead. Ramona Africa was the sole adult survivor, and Birdie (13 years old) was the only child to survive the blaze. The Africa family were part of a controversial group called MOVE, which was founded and led by John Africa and was frequently in the news for protest activity around the city and for a standoff with police in 1978 where a police officer was killed. The day-long 1985 siege ended with 61 rowhomes burned to the ground, 11 people dead, and an entire neighborhood decimated. Months of local and national news coverage, analysis and opinion columns followed, along with the appointment of a citywide investigation commission which eventually aired weeks of televised hearings and published its findings. Despite ample news coverage at the time as well as at moments of anniversaries and commemoration, along with an officially sanctioned report on the event, the day has defied explanation, consensus and conclusion for more than 35 years. The bomb itself may be the only uncontested detail in the entire affair.

Through in-depth interviews with those with firsthand knowledge of the event, analysis of press coverage, and consideration of material expressions of this event, this dissertation seeks

to understand the evolution of public memory of the MOVE bombing and its place in Philadelphia's identity and history. This work employs three kinds of case studies to investigate the production of public memory related to MOVE over time. First, through a series of interviews with journalists, officials, and others who have singular and crucial perspectives on the tragedy, this study aims to understand how the original record of the bombing was produced and maintained. Next, critical discourse and ideological analyses of anniversary coverage of the bombing appearing between 1986 and 2020 convey the ways in which journalists have shaped the public's memory of the conflict. Finally, studies of objects and places – a historical marker, an archive, and the 6200 blocks of Pine and Osage Avenues – will describe how the official record and memories related to MOVE have been challenged by material culture expressions of counter memory. This study comes amidst nationwide protests against police brutality and in support of Black Lives Matter after George Floyd's murder by police. Articulations of memory related to MOVE have always been important, but that this moment in time provides an especially productive lens for examining modern understandings of the organization and its history with Philadelphia police. This study aims to add to the public understanding of one of the highly-contested and under-researched events in Philadelphia history, but it also considers what happens to voices at the margins of debates once a community has determined how its official memory of traumatic events will be articulated.

While few details related to the MOVE organization or to its relationship with the Philadelphia Police Department or the city at large are unchallenged, it is important to establish a baseline chronology of the organization within Philadelphia. Given that journalists maintain a community's collective memory (Kitch, 1999; Zelizer, 2008), the account that follows is drawn largely from news reports of the organization and the official MOVE Commission report that

was published after the bombing. These accounts are meant to foreground understanding of the issues at the heart of this dissertation, but it should be understood that a variety of perspectives on each of the “facts” below exists.

In the early 1970s, Vincent Leaphart – variously described in Philadelphia’s newspapers as a handyman and a drop-out – adopted the name John Africa and founded a “back-to-nature cult” (Tranquilli, 2010) called MOVE. While the name itself is not an acronym designating larger meaning, members often referred to their group as a movement. The group adhered to Africa’s preachings to follow nature’s laws and his book, “The Guideline” and believed processed materials – including food and clothing – were dangerous. Africa attracted over a dozen others who adopted the family name of Africa and moved into a communal home in Powelton Village where they shared chores and practiced MOVE doctrine together (Campisi, 2010).

During the mid-1970s, neighbors began to complain about disturbances coming from the MOVE house. Complaints blamed the group for foul odors, vermin infestation and multiple building code violations (Campisi, 2010). Multiple attempts were made between various city authorities and representatives of MOVE to resolve the disputes with the neighbors. In 1977, the group agreed to a series of remedies, including a stipulation that they leave their home in Powelton Village. When their deadline for vacating the premises passed without the group relocating, the relationship between MOVE, their neighbors and the city grew tense. In response, MOVE barricaded the house while a crowd of neighbors, city officials and police officers outside grew. The standoff lasted months (Boyette & Boyette, 1989). When city police officers eventually advanced on the home, a gunfight erupted that left one police officer, James Ramp, dead. Nine MOVE members were arrested and convicted for this crime (MOVE Commission,

1986). Delbert Orr Africa's beating by police in the immediate aftermath of Ramp's death was captured on camera. Once the home was empty, city officials declared that it would be demolished out of health precautions. A bulldozer had fully razed the site by the next morning (Assefa & Wahrhaftig, 1990). The police who were charged with beating Delbert were later acquitted.

The remaining MOVE members and children of those who had been jailed moved into a new home at 6221 Osage Avenue in the predominantly Black neighborhood of Cobbs Creek some time in 1981 (Campisi, 2010). The MOVE Commission categorized the group as an "authoritarian, violence-threatening cult" by the early 1980s (p. 16, MOVE Commission, 1986). Neighbors on Osage Avenue soon began to lodge complaints about the group that were similar to those the city had heard from Powelton residents. They included foul odors and vermin, unclothed children, and dozens of untethered dogs. On Christmas Eve 1984, a bullhorn began to blare invective into the community, which was soon followed by routine threats of violence and obscene language. By 1984, the group had erected a bunker on the roof, boarded up all windows, and was broadcasting messages and demands related to the release of the incarcerated "MOVE 9" from a home that now more closely resembled a compound. The neighbors' complaints regarding abusive messages and physical altercations were ignored by Mayor Wilson Goode's administration (MOVE Commission, 1986). Finally, after neighbors held an emotional press conference on Osage Avenue in May of 1985, Goode charged his administration with creating a plan to evict the group (Campisi, 2010).

On May 12, 1985, about 200 Osage Avenue neighbors were notified that they must evacuate their homes for a night to accommodate impending police action against MOVE. On the morning of May 13, Police Commissioner Gregore Sambor gave MOVE its final warning:

“Attention, MOVE. This is America. You have to abide by the laws of the United States.” When the group refused to leave the property or otherwise surrender, police began using tear gas and deluge (water) guns to force them out (Cooney, 1985).

Both the tear gas and deluge guns were trained on the wooden bunker that had been constructed on top of the home, near where one MOVE member had reportedly been seen with a weapon while wearing an executioner’s hood weeks before (Cooney, 1985). When authorities eventually tried to maneuver a fortified crane onto Osage Avenue to dismantle the bunker and failed, the order to bomb the bunker off the roof was given (Goldwyn & O’Dowd, 1985).

The MOVE Commission eventually found that Mayor Goode, Managing Director Leo Brooks and Police Commissioner Sambor specifically approved using an explosive device to blow holes in the walls of the rowhome at 6221 Osage to allow police to insert more tear gas to force MOVE members from the house. They also found that an explosive made of C-4 and Tovex was placed into a duffel bag and dropped by Philadelphia Police Officer Frank Powell – then chief of the city’s bomb disposal unit – from a Pennsylvania State Police helicopter while hovering overhead. When the device caused an explosion and fire, authorities decided to let the fire burn. Sambor would later testify their goal was gain a tactical advantage over the group and the situation (MOVE Commission, 1986). Despite claims to the contrary, the commission found that Goode was already aware of gasoline being present on the roof of the compound before giving the order to drop the bomb (MOVE Commission, 1986).

The fire quickly burned out of control, consuming 60 additional rowhomes in the Cobbs Creek neighborhood (Goldwyn & O’Dowd, 1985) and killing six adult MOVE members and five children (MOVE Commission, 1986). Nearly 250 people were homeless by the next morning (Goldwyn & O’Dowd, 1985).

The MOVE Commission found that police gunfire kept some MOVE members inside the burning home, ultimately sending them to their deaths. The commission specifically condemned the Goode administration for not taking greater care to remove the children from the home before the siege began. Ramona Africa and 13-year-old Birdie Africa were the only two MOVE members to survive the night (MOVE Commission, 1986).

On May 14, 1985 and the days immediately thereafter, there were many unanswered questions. The death toll was far from settled, with Mayor Goode and other officials contesting journalists' accounts and often denying culpability altogether in a series of bizarre and often contradictory press conferences (Maurantonio, 2008).

The mayor appointed a commission to formally investigate the incident. That group released its findings on March 6, 1986, and were extremely critical of the city's role in the tragedy. The commission (1986) blamed the Goode administration for ignoring neighbors' initial complaints and argued that the decision to drop a C-4 and Tovex explosive on the home should have been immediately rejected by the mayor. It also blamed police for using excessive force in spraying the home with more than 10,000 rounds of ammunition in 90 minutes and damningly accused the mayor of a failure of leadership (MOVE Commission, 1986).

The MOVE Commission also included a special note at the end of its report, separate from its 31 numbered findings. In the note, commissioners acknowledged their belief that race played a part in the way the day's events had unfolded. They noted their skepticism that similar police force would have been used in a predominantly white neighborhood. The commission (1986) ultimately reminded the public that the final judgment was theirs to levy at the voting booth and stopped short of suggesting formal charges. Mayor Goode apologized for the unintended consequences of the bomb but avoided full responsibility for the day's events.

Sambor, Richmond and Brooks resigned, but no charges were ever filed against any city employees. Ramona Africa, the only adult survivor, served 7 years in prison for riot and conspiracy.

In 2017, on the heels of the rise of Black Lives Matter and increased national attention toward police violence and African Americans, a historical marker was approved for the site of the bombing on Osage Avenue in Philadelphia. An application had been submitted by students at a private West Philadelphia school, requesting recognition for an event that had transpired nearly a generation earlier. Today, the 6200 blocks of Pine Street and Osage Avenue, left fallow after decades of neglect, have been redeveloped and gentrified.

The MOVE organization and its history with the city of Philadelphia involves nearly 40 years of strife, human suffering, and passionate but divergent beliefs about who ultimately bears responsibility for events viewed variously as tragic, regrettable, necessary and unavoidable. Given that the repercussions of the 1985 bombing still vibrate in Philadelphia and the extent to which those divergent beliefs have become deeply entrenched, it is remarkable that so little scholarship on the MOVE organization or the events of 1985 exists. An examination of the scant literature that does exist reveals just a handful of academic and popular books and a very short list of journal articles devoted to the topic, mostly within the disciplines of African American studies and history. Fewer scholars still have investigated the “traces of memory” (Halbwachs, 1992 [1925]) from the traumatic period that still haunts Philadelphia. And yet, a Nexis Uni search reveals more than 1,000 separate related articles appearing in the press about the group since 1978. They include profiles of the organization, news stories from both significant altercations with the police, analysis pieces, and anniversary coverage. The MOVE organization still exists today, mobilizing protests and selling merchandise. Until the final members of the

MOVE 9 were released in 2020, the group was also working assiduously for their release. All of this, too, has generated a rich archive of news coverage.

A community builds its collective identity around memories of a shared past and through the ritual of commemoration (Halbwachs, 1992 [1925]; Zelizer, 1995). Those memories, anniversaries, and commemorative events are themselves rendered visible and made sense of by journalists (Edy, 1999). This is particularly true after the kinds of traumatic events that disrupt society's usual routines, when journalists strive to explain a tragedy before offering the community a sense of catharsis and hope that the mistakes or violence of the past won't recur (Graber, 1980). In particular, anniversaries provide inflection points where the record may be corrected, contextualized or bent toward narrative repair (Edy, 1999).

This dissertation aims to contribute to the small but significant body of research examining the MOVE bombing and its complicated place in Philadelphia's history and identity formation. Building on work by Robin Wagner-Pacifici and Nicole Maurantonio, this research aims to shed light on the ways in which the public memory of the MOVE bombing has evolved over time. Examining the ways in which journalists and the public have produced shared memories about MOVE and the tragedy of May 13, 1985, this work also offers insight into the social news values at play in Philadelphia (Ben-Aaron, 2005). Noting who is authorized to create official memories, examining what is left unsaid, and interrogating the conflict between official and vernacular memories reveals consequences of social systems that have effectively silenced particular communities. The research questions that have broadly guided this study are:

RQ1: How was the original record of the MOVE organization and its history with the city produced?

RQ2: How has the public memory of the MOVE organization and the 1985 bombing been shaped by subsequent commemorative and anniversary coverage?

RQ3: How have the official record and memories related to MOVE been challenged by material culture expressions of counter memory?

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The ontological framework for this study is built on ideas put forth in critical race theory, studies of journalism and social memory, notions of collective memory and trauma, and concepts related to material culture and place. It is also an extension of scant but important research and analysis regarding the MOVE organization and its relationship with the city and its police department first undertaken by Philadelphia residents and scholars alike.

It is important to note that more than a dozen books related to the bombing have been published outside the academy, primarily by journalists and others who have firsthand experience with the MOVE organization. Far less attention has been paid by historians and other scholars, and academic interest has been limited primarily to news coverage of the 1985 police confrontation (Maurantonio, 2008, 2014), MOVE as a religious entity (Evans, 2020), and in the context of conflict resolution (Assefa and Wahrhaftig, 1990; Wagner-Pacifici, 1994). The narrow scope of this literature also reveals the breadth of what scholars have thus left uninterrogated. The emotional toll of the bombing was instead plumbed by fiction writer John Edgar Wideman (1990), and its implications for gentrification were explored in opera (Roumain, 2017).

Given that little public history has been produced surrounding the MOVE bombing and even less research scholarship has been published, few facts may be considered settled. As a result, its memory is presently malleable enough to be referenced on the stage to address history and gentrification (Roumain, 2017); by protestors marching against police brutality (Hughes, 2020); and by anxious residents to warn the city of the dangers in ignoring troublesome neighbors (Owens, 2020). Thus, the very lack of those settled facts should be understood as constitutive to knowledge production surrounding the bombing and its legacy.

## **MOVE: race, regret, and the media in Philadelphia**

Given that little consensus around MOVE and its conflicts with police exists, scholars and journalists with interest in the subject have mainly focused on the elements that underpin the 1985 bombing, rather than directly addressing the existence of the contested narratives themselves. In *Discourse and destruction: the city of Philadelphia versus MOVE*, Wagner-Pacifici (1994) does this by investigating the theoretical matter of the MOVE conflict, exploring what she describes as “the small cracks between discourse and violence and exploring that critical, if elusive, territory” without retelling many of the chronological details of the event (p. ix). She calls this her “midrolelevel of interaction” analysis, mapping together language and violence. In *The MOVE crisis in Philadelphia: Extremist Groups and Conflict Resolution*, Assefa and Wahrhaftig (1990) examine strategies deployed by a variety of third parties and negotiators prior to the MOVE organization’s conflict in Powelton Village in 1978 and the 1985 bombing. They describe their scholarly contribution as an effort to identify successful tactics for the future of conflict resolution. Randi and Michael Boyette (1989) provide an autoethnographic account from their perspective as Powelton Village neighbors. Their book also includes useful source documentation including an index of all relevant parties involved with the organization and the conflict, as well as maps and a timeline of the 1985 confrontation. Novelist John Edgar Wideman (1990) examined the MOVE bombing through a fictional meditation on power and politics rooted in the history of the bombing. His novel, *Philadelphia Fire*, won the International PEN/Faulker award.

It is worth considering the variety of methods scholars and writers have undertaken to explore a singular moment in Philadelphia history, and what they say about its complexity and perhaps its incomprehensibility. Nonetheless, common threads exist among the short list of

books and journal articles that have already been published on the MOVE organization and its conflicts with police. The themes among these works can be broadly described as relating to: the role of the media in explaining and contextualizing the conflict; identifying interventions which may have otherwise avoided disaster; and discursively linking the MOVE organization with the language and images of other conflicts, especially the Vietnam War.

*The role of the media*

Scholarship related to MOVE and the 1978 and 1985 conflicts with police focuses on journalistic practices and the technologies journalists used to produce their coverage. On a superficial level, the press is frequently described as being ever-present during the lead-up to the 1978 confrontation, reporting on neighbors' complaints, city plans to evict the group and the lifestyle habits the group had adopted (Boyette & Boyette, 1989). And while editors and neighbors alike wrote letters in the press contesting various accounts of what was happening, it must also be mentioned that the MOVE organization was savvy enough to harness the power of the press as well. Louise James Africa wrote a column, "On the MOVE," which appeared sporadically in *The Philadelphia Tribune*, and occasionally appeared on a program on WXPB out of the University of Pennsylvania (Boyette & Boyette, 1989).

The media's presence is both credited with and blamed for doing more than offering visibility to the family and to the controversy that followed both conflicts. Boyette & Boyette (1989) refer repeatedly to Mayor Frank Rizzo's disdain for the press after the 1978 altercation and make note of the extent to which police officers criticized the press after the 1985 bombing. Assefa and Wahrhaftig (1990) refer to the media as a "complicating factor" which gave neighbors, the city, and the MOVE organization cause to claim unfair treatment and mischaracterization. They argue that the ubiquity of the press led to a "carnival" atmosphere in

the Powelton neighborhood during the 1978 standoff (Assefa and Wahrhaftig, 1990, p. 92). However, while they note that the media was responsible for a certain set of problems, they also argue that the mere presence of journalists and their act of media witnessing kept people safe, pointing out that the MOVE organization itself resisted leaving Powelton Village for a more rural setting out of concern that moving outside Philadelphia would decrease its press coverage (p. 3).

With the members of the print and broadcast media came certain kinds of technologies, which also feature prominently in the existing MOVE-related literature. This is of particular note given that the ideology of the MOVE organization prohibited the use of technology. Assefa and Wahrhaftig (1990) contend that while the MOVE organization did not allow technology into their lives, at least one piece of communication technology helped advance their cause: the bullhorn. The group used that device to broadcast its complaints and other invective at high volumes throughout the day and night. The broadcasts eventually became so disruptive that neighbors on Osage Avenue took their complaints to City Hall – a development the MOVE organization had explicitly stated was the goal of their neighborhood disruption. Another bit of journalistic equipment integral to the MOVE organization and the public’s understanding of the events surrounding both conflicts is the video camera. Cameras recorded the 1978 siege in Powelton Village along with the police brutality that injured Delbert Orr Africa there. Cameras also broadcast live footage during the 1985 bombing. Wagner-Pacifici (1994) described the necessity of capturing and replaying video from the bombing:

“[M]any of the elements of the MOVE-city conflict are concentrated in this one brief taped scene—the offensiveness of MOVE’s language, the schizophrenia of police language, the excessive violence of the police, the anarchy at the heart of the city’s approach to MOVE, and the actual abandonment of the rhetorical idols (MOVE children). No wonder the tape was played over and over in an almost obsessive search for moral understanding” (p. 135).

*Disaster nearly avoided*

Scholars of the MOVE organization and its history within Philadelphia frequently mention moments before the 1985 bombing when – if only the right person had intervened, one party had behaved differently, or bureaucracy had functioned better – the bombing may never have happened. The powerful moments where the story might have turned out differently echo Zelizer's (2010) work identifying the symbolic significance of images of people moments before their death. Zelizer (2010) argues that such images are powerful precisely because they invite the audience to imagine possibilities of intercession to save the doomed parties. Scholars of the MOVE bombing seem to encourage similar imaginings, pointing out many instances where official or unofficial interventions may have led to a less disastrous outcome. The effect of these narratives leaves readers wistful for a more effective city bureaucracy, a more disciplined police force or a more reasonable MOVE organization and force us to wonder what might happen in the future, and whether a tragedy on this scale could be repeated.

Boyette and Boyette (1989) spend significant time outlining a series of police department mistakes related to the planning of the siege in 1985. They foreshadow the failure of the department's plan to peacefully evacuate the compound on Osage Avenue by quoting police officers who knew trouble was ahead. They also note that the plan devised by the police department required officers to pick up the children of the MOVE organization during their daily exercises at Clark Park – something officers were inexplicably unable to do on the morning of the siege. As such, we are invited to imagine how simple it may have been for the city to avoid the eventual deaths of five children later that day. Boyette and Boyette (1989) also note that the original plan to clear the home on Osage Avenue – which they describe as tactically superior to

the one that ended with the bombing – was lost by the police department. Even their description of the city’s eventual handling of the evidence after the bombing evidences palpable regret: “The medical examiner’s lack of interest on the morning of May 14 set a pattern that would persist throughout the investigation” (Boyette & Boyette, 1989, p. 208).

Wagner-Pacifici (1994) similarly lists the various failures of the city’s administrative departments, ascribing them to the nature of bureaucracy: “These misfilings and misplacements are part of the general pattern of loss and error that emerges as one works through the archival history of the MOVE conflict” (p. 87). More crucially, though, she also notes that the bureaucratic instinct to turn the MOVE confrontation from a neighborhood issue to a police matter had dire consequences. She argues that doing so foreclosed the opportunity for neighbors on Osage Avenue to take part in interventions or negotiations like the ones neighbors in Powelton Village undertook. This would also seem to be an inflection point where an alternative ending could be imagined for the city.

Assefa and Wahrhaftig (1990) devote much of their book – itself a meditation on conflict resolution strategies – to musing on certain alternative outcomes for the MOVE organization, if only various community organizations had deployed other negotiation strategies or the city had reacted differently. The authors offer three possible explanations for the failure of the agreement between the city and MOVE about their vacating the Powelton Village home in 1978. They claim no one individual was in charge to implement or oversee the adjudication of the agreement, that volunteers who had been working to mediate the situation had been working uncompensated for months and were simply burned out, and that the MOVE organization’s negotiation style – if it can be called that – was confrontational and perceived by some to be irrational. They later characterize many of these shortcomings as owing to intercultural

communication problems which might have been better addressed by other negotiators. The result of this agreement falling apart, of course, was a police siege on the property that led to officer James Ramp's death and Delbert Orr Africa's beating by police. That there is a clear line from 1978 to 1985 is an uncontested fact.

On a broader level, Assefa and Wahrhaftig (1990) argue that several missteps during the 1978 standoff seemed to build eventual conflict into the process in Powelton and (later) on Osage Avenue. They argue that the single agreement that was reached between the city and the organization while they occupied the home in Powelton Village suffered from a failure to clearly lay out a process for adjudication or any avenues for the city or the organization to save face. They further argue that once the organization moved to Osage Avenue, the negotiation process between the city and the organization erred by leaving various parties out of the peacemaking process. Not only did negotiators leave out various neighborhood organizations, they argue that leaving police out of the process may have helped build in hostilities that would erupt later, writing, "Their unresolved feelings of hostility may have played a major role in escalating the violence in the 1985 event" (Assefa & Wahrhaftig, 1990, p. 91). Here we are led, again, to imagine what could have been if the parties involved had reacted differently. Assefa and Wahrhaftig (1990) also note that absent resolution – even today – the possibility of future conflict exists. They explicitly use the 1978 and 1985 incidents to extrapolate lessons that might be useful in future interactions with fringe communities, in search of the catharsis that still eludes the MOVE narrative.

#### *Invoking war and Vietnam*

Literal and figurative references to the Vietnam War are rife throughout the literature on the MOVE conflict. We might imagine that this is true because the war had ended just a few

years before the initial siege in Powelton Village, or perhaps because many of the individuals involved in the conflict were themselves veterans. At a minimum, contemporary citizens – regardless of their veteran status – were living in a historical moment in intimate touch with the war.

Most of those whose military experience is invoked in the initial body of research surrounding MOVE and Philadelphia are police officers. Chief among them is so-called “demolition man,” Officer Klein, who was tasked with assembling plans for an explosive device to use against the MOVE organization on Osage Avenue in 1985. He is described as a Marine whose experience in bomb work in Vietcong territory qualified him uniquely for a job creating residential explosives in Philadelphia (Boyette & Boyette, 1989). In the case of Officer Berghaier – the story’s lone hero – he would save the only surviving child from the 1985 fire – his positive character traits are described as a result of his brother fighting in Vietnam; Boyette and Boyette (1989) argue that his understanding of the soldiers’ experience in the war drove him to resist radical slogans and to hew to law and order through his work on the police force.

Veteran status is not always invoked to convey moral rectitude, though. Boyette and Boyette (1989) point out that Police Commissioner Gregore Sambor is said to have directed Officer Klein to use “frag” when he created his explosive device (p. 188). They note that usage of the term “frag” grew specifically from war literature, and that it took on a darker meaning in Vietnam, where it referred to troops murdering their officers with hand grenades.

Language of international violence and war is also common among neighbors in the related literature. Multiple authors cite citizens who found the media images coming out of Osage Avenue – even before the bombing – to look foreign and disorienting. Boyette and Boyette (1989) quote Officer Berghaier’s description of the situation: “This is some Third World

country you see on TV, he thought to himself. This isn't America" (p. 164). Wagner-Pacifici (1994) cites other, similar invocations, referencing a neighbor who was concerned about interacting with children of MOVE organization members because she was aware of the ways in which children in Vietnam were said to launch surprise attacks on American soldiers. She also notes that a police officer described apprehending Ramona Africa after the 1985 bombing by comparing the incident to handling female Vietnamese suicide bombers (Wagner-Pacifici, 1994). She argues that such language is important to examine closely, writing: "The analogy to Vietnamese children and explosives is significant. The specter of Vietnam, its weapons, personnel, psychological damage, hung heavily over the MOVE conflict and confrontation" (Wagner-Pacifici, 1994, p. 58).

Wagner-Pacifici (1994) also makes note of the particular rhetoric deployed by Commissioner Sambor, who was supposed to begin the 1985 evacuation of the Osage Avenue home by reading a proclamation announcing the police force's intention to serve warrants to four MOVE members on the morning of May 13, 1985. Instead, he read a personally written prologue framing MOVE in overtly patriotic and militaristic terms that began with "Attention MOVE, this is America." She argues that while the original version was a routine warning given to any suspect about to be arrested, the improvised version Sambor delivered that morning used discourse to make the group into an enemy of the state (Wagner-Pacifici, 1994). Wagner-Pacifici (1994) also argues that this is merely the natural outcome of having first classified the MOVE organization as a terrorist group in 1978. Finally, she connects the discourse of violence surrounding the MOVE organization with the discourse surrounding the Vietnam War, noting that narrative cohesion and catharsis were elusive in both cases. "Thus in some ways the same lack of moral conviction that haunted the Vietnam War echoes through the Vietnam redux on

Osage Avenue” (Wagner-Pacifici, 1994, p. 138).

*The blanks*

Where memory and historical record are insufficient to describe an event – as evidenced, perhaps by significant reliance on metaphor – fiction may sometimes fill in the gaps. John Edgar Wideman’s *Philadelphia Fire* supplies affect where the MOVE Commission and other records stop short. The prizewinning author seems to directly address these gaps in a single line of description, written as protagonist Cudjoe describes his descent into obsession with understanding the MOVE bombing and finding the surviving child: “I feel myself beginning to invent. Filling in the blanks but the blanks are real. Part of the dream” (Wideman, 1990, p. 94). It would seem he is writing directly to the holes in the historical narrative about the bombing and the Africa family. Throughout the book, Wideman seems to address the inadequacy of historical records devoid of emotion. This is particularly the case when he describes Cudjoe’s incredulity regarding the Black community’s response to the city’s first Black mayor permitting a bomb to be dropped on a working-class Black neighborhood to evict a Black nationalist group. He writes: “I wonder why we ever believed it was spozed to get better. Who fed us that lie? Why’d we swallow it? What’s different? Something ought to be, shouldn’t it?” (Wideman, 1990, p. 77). Later, he refers to Philadelphia under Mayor Goode as a “Black Camelot” (Wideman, 1990, p. 159). Throughout the book he wrestles directly with the racial dimension of the bombing, which is insufficiently addressed in the rest of the literature.

Most other discussions of race in the literature are limited to city officials and neighbors either accusing someone of racism or claiming they were free from racist motivations. The only other scholar to pay much attention to racial overtones is Wagner-Pacifici (1994), who specifically notes the underlying racism evident in the news media’s coverage of the Osage

Avenue neighborhood. She argues that journalists repeatedly used condescending terms to describe the working-class Black neighborhood that would be presented as “normal” (and ostensibly without words like “tidy” and “stable” and “small”), were it white (Wagner-Pacifici, 1994, p. 71).

Several authors also make note of particular feminist concerns which were never fully addressed by authorities or within media coverage. Boyette and Boyette (1989) repeatedly reference MOVE organization founder Vincent Leaphart as having been accused of beating his wife, but note that the district attorney’s office at the time declined to prosecute the case. Assefa and Wahrhaftig (1990) also refer to a city official in charge of the Crisis Intervention Network claiming that Osage Avenue neighbors would be unlikely to offer the family support because they took special umbrage at the group’s threats to and diminution of the male neighbors’ masculinity.

Finally, most also make at least glancing reference to the overlap of significant dates on the MOVE timeline with American holidays. Wagner-Pacifici (1994) describes the serendipity succinctly: “All of these occurred on holidays except for the final confrontation, which was specifically rescheduled to avoid a holiday” (p. 99). The mayor met with neighbors on several holidays, the loudspeaker diatribe that brought such distress to neighbors on Osage Avenue began on Christmas Eve, and the MOVE organization met with Osage Avenue neighbors on Mother’s Day in 1984. The final conflict with police was originally scheduled for Mother’s Day 1985 and was pushed back a day out of reverence for the holiday and the block’s mothers. After the conflict ended with a bombing that destroyed 62 rowhomes, Wagner-Pacifici (1994) notes that the mayor pegged relief for Osage Avenue residents to Christmas, writing: “The appropriate

filing of forms and the gifts of Santa Claus are forced into an uneasy and delirious cohabitation” (p. 99).

*Addressing the gaps*

Peer-reviewed journal articles related to the MOVE bombing are nearly as few as books related to the conflict. Perhaps as a result, most of them seem to address other gaps or insufficiencies in the literature. Many also focus on media attention to the 1985 event. Maurantonio (2014) argues that the digital archive through which most of us engage with MOVE materiality and news coverage today leaves out important context, leading to a continuation of the sort of narrative chaos other authors have mentioned. She writes, “[T]he visual story, as witnessed in the microfilmed newspapers, was as fractured and incomplete as the larger story journalists sought desperately to fill in” (Maurantonio, 2014, p. 96). She argues that the digital archives where she reviewed coverage of the conflict divorced ads and other images from news copy, thus erasing some of the important affective artifacts of the day in ways that have changed the meaning of the original newspaper texts. This raises important questions for those of us who are focused on interpreting the textual residue of the 1985 bombing in the digital era.

Sanders and Jeffries (2013) also aim to address a gap in the scholarship, conducting a content analysis aimed at learning more as to why there was not (by their estimation) more public outcry from Philadelphians in opposition to the 1985 bombing. They also note the lack of a cohesive news narrative surrounding the events and reference the plain fact that most people’s understanding of the organization and the bombing is based entirely on news and popular media. They ultimately argue that press coverage dehumanized MOVE members, leading to a general public ambivalence to the bombing. Sanders and Jeffries (2013) reviewed a total of 171 microfilm articles mentioning MOVE from *The Philadelphia Inquirer* between January 1, 1985

and June 1, 1985, measuring for overall tone and sentiment of coverage. They found a comparatively paltry lack of public sympathy for the group in the pages of the city's paper of record, noting that Councilperson Thatcher Longstreth was the only city official to place blame on the mayor's office. They further note that the owner at 6221 Osage Avenue was slated to be charged for the demolition of her home after the fire. As such, they make a compelling argument about the press's and the city's dehumanization of the MOVE organization. This argument also provides more depth on the elsewhere insufficiently addressed role that race played in understandings of the event. They argue that the press's stereotyping of MOVE members and measuring them against ideals of white normativity led to lower rates of sympathy from readers and a collective civic shoulder shrug among Philadelphians in response to the bombing (Sanders & Jefferies, 2013, p. 581).

Maurantonio (2014) reiterates the significance of the news media's witnessing and recording of the event, focusing on video coverage of the 1985 bombing. She writes, "Had Channel 10 not offered indisputable evidence of 'what happened,' according to print journalists, the trajectory of publicly circulating narratives might have shifted to claims of the MOVE organization's responsibility for its own fiery demise" (Maurantonio, 2014, p. 94). She also notes that the presence of television cameras that day, and the way in which their output can be misunderstood as unmediated, worked to reinforce print journalists' authority during and following the tragedy. If video was presented without narration, she argues, it was the newspaper journalists' jobs to provide necessary explanation and context. Maurantonio (2014) finally notes that reviewing photos from the bombing that were divorced from the stories alongside which they originally ran actually further embeds chaos into the narrative surrounding the group,

writing, “They did little to fill in the gaps to a bizarre and unsettling story that seemed to suggest the breakdown of local government and abuse of sanctioned power” (p. 97).

In all, this literature reveals that the MOVE organization and its 1985 bombing by the city of Philadelphia provide a rich – if muddled – area for further inquiry. What little common understandings about the event and its repercussions exist include acknowledgement of a chaotic overall narrative, a link to discourses of war with special attention paid to Vietnam, and a particular focus on the role played by the news media. The works in this literature review – while written in different periods, by a variety of scholars and laypeople in fields ranging from sociology to African American Studies and conflict resolution – are united in their expression of bewilderment when it comes to what we might learn about the future from this conflict. The unrepaired narrative of the MOVE organization and the bombing leave the story open to interpretation in a variety of ways, as Wagner-Pacifici (1994) points out: “The odd and perplexing thing is that so many diverse characterizations continually hover about this group, as if they are in perpetual storage available for moments of crystallization to give a face to the emergent legal, communal, and civil conflicts” (p. 15). Contemporary comparisons have already extended to the Rodney King beating (Wagner-Pacifici, 1994, p. ix) and the Black Lives Matter movement (Eisenberg, 2017).

### **Critical race theory**

Critical race theory provides crucial insight to John Africa’s teachings within the MOVE organization, which encouraged followers to shun modern technology and behave in ways parallel to their African ancestors. The theory also opens up alternative avenues of thinking about the relationship between the Philadelphia Police Department and the MOVE organization, by encouraging scholars to revisit history with an eye toward uncovering racism. A perspective

informed by critical race theory also requires a close assessment of sourcing practices and framing when examining media descriptions of MOVE and the bombing.

Derrick Bell offered the first formal articulation of critical race theory, which grew out of writing by W.E.B. DuBois, Martin Luther King, Jr., Cesar Chavez and others, and which – like feminist theory – is deeply interdisciplinary in nature (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller & Inglis, 1996). Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), also a foundational critical race theorist, is known for developing the theory of intersectionality, which itself has become a cornerstone of feminist thought. Intersectionality argues that women of color are at a further disadvantage than white women because of the accumulated effects of their multiple simultaneous identities (Crenshaw, 1991).

Critical race theory is focused on the study of race and racism, and dates to the mid-1970s and the writings of legal scholar Derrick Bell. Bell examined the legal system and concluded that systemic racism within it maintained a racially stratified (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Inglis, 1996) society. Critical race theory is also closely aligned with a concurrent critical legal studies moment. Bell argued that racist beliefs and behaviors are often hidden or masked and that despite liberal traditions promoting racial justice, those same traditions often advocate for change while perpetuating racism in systemic ways.

Crucially, critical race theorists argue that racism is more than the isolated acts of violence and discrimination by individual racists. They argue that racism must be understood as a system of everyday interactions that permeate society – making racism the standard operating procedure in the United States and racial justice the outlier. Acknowledging that racism is often hidden, critical race theorists encourage a re-examination of history and other explanatory work

with an eye toward uncovering and mapping acts of racism along with instances where systemic racism is revealed.

Critical race theory is fundamentally at odds with elements of traditional liberalism that prize universalism. Critical race theorists argue instead that mechanisms for formal equity unfairly advantage dominant cultures and further work to mask racism at work. In other words, state-enforced segregation can be made illegal but when it becomes the de facto way of life for people, class issues often obscure the racist undertones perpetuating it. For this reason, critical race theory is essentially at odds with many foundational beliefs underpinning the legal system. Hence, critical race theorists argue that racial justice cannot be achieved by legal means. Instead of applying the logic of universalism, they argue for particularism, which encourages a “call to context” (Calmore, 1999) in order to accommodate the variety of lived experiences among different communities. This research in particular relies heavily on Calmore’s call to contextualize texts.

### *Privilege of Whiteness*

Bell’s (1980) interest convergence theory contends that a dominant population will only respond to antiracist arguments if it will benefit themselves in the process. Similarly, Peggy McIntosh (1989) notes in *The Invisible Knapsack* that dominant populations can only benefit from another population’s oppression. In it, she coins the phrase “white privilege,” writing that common understandings of racism and sexism have evolved in such a way to ignore that one class’s disadvantage must come as the direct result of another class’s over-privileging. She writes also from a feminist perspective, theorizing that her own obliviousness to her “unearned skin privilege” (p. 29) is similar to men’s ignorance to their privilege in a fundamentally sexist society. She reflects on her own education, which positioned whiteness as morally neutral, thus

encouraging her not to recognize or address her advantages. She further compares the advantage of white privilege to a weightless and invisible backpack full of helpful tools that might be used at any time by those with the birth advantage of carrying it. For her, these privileges have included the ability to expect fairness from neighbors and the judicial system and the ability to turn a blind eye to suffering. Cheryl Harris (1993) also identified whiteness as a property in similar ways.

McIntosh (1989) notes that privilege intersects based on a variety of characteristics including age, ethnicity, class and religion. Having defined invisible privilege, McIntosh (1989) writes that it is incumbent on her – and on anyone with invisible privilege – to take steps to eradicate the power systems within which these benefits are embedded. She thus helps us to understand racism as a system of active and passive behaviors, rather than singular acts of overt oppression. She also positions racism as a universal malady to rectify, rather than limiting responsibility to racist individuals.

#### *Counter-Narratives and Afrocentrism*

In addition to acknowledging the invisible privileges conferred in systematic ways by whiteness, this study also relies on critical race theorists' argument that counternarratives are deeply important to understanding everyday racism (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002). Critical race theorists like Solórzano and Yosso (2002) note that a focus on objective storytelling – like the storytelling most journalists claim as part of their identities – can work to perpetuate certain racialized ideas by implicitly relying on or invoking stereotypes. In response, they argue for a critical race methodology that allows for counter-storytelling in an effort to achieve social justice.

John Africa's teachings were rooted in Afrocentrism, which has evolved in parallel to critical race theory. As articulated by Molefi Kete Asante (1980), Afrocentrists believe that African people must see themselves as African first and return to classical civilizations of Africa (Egypt and Nubia) for cultural guideposts in the same way that Western cultures return to Greek and Roman civilizations. The Afrocentric argument that Europeans have made the white, Eurocentric worldview a default perspective aligns with McIntosh's (1989) realization that she had never thought about her whiteness as a privilege. In her history of the origins of Afrocentrism, Mia Bay (2000) notes that the movement grew out of the Black Power culture of the 1970s, and specifically out of the cultural nationalist strain of Black Power, where theorists argue for a "uniquely black epistemological system to reject and replace the racist system of knowledge at work in America and the West at large" (p. 503). It is easy to understand MOVE, which rejected the culture and systems privileged in contemporary American society at the time as an extension of this belief.

In addition to working to point out instances of overt racism in coverage, this study owes an additional debt Crenshaw's (1991) encouragement to consider the additional burdens shouldered by women of color – many of whom (aside from Ramona Africa) are discursively erased from the history of MOVE as it has been repeated and refined over 35 years.

### **Journalism, Memory, and History**

As Zelizer (2008) notes, "Memory and journalism resemble two distant cousins" (p. 79). Both work together to help us make sense of our past, but journalism does so with a special authority (Kitch, 2006, 2008; Edy, 1999; Zandberg, 2010). This is certainly the case with the MOVE organization and its conflicts with police in 1978 and 1985. As time elapses, our collective understanding of MOVE's history in Philadelphia becomes more reliant on mediated

accounts, making our understanding of journalists' roles in constructing popular memory even more important. This work will pay particular attention to the ways in which journalists shaped our memory of MOVE is related to witnessing, commemorating and contextualizing the events that become our past.

Journalists invoke memory in their work for a variety of reasons. Jill Edy (1999) contends journalists bring up the past to delimit an era; as a yardstick of measurement; for purposes of drawing an analogy; and as a shorthand explanation. Edy further identifies three typical forms where journalists employ memory: commemorative stories, historical analogies and historical context. She argues that journalists negotiate the meaning of past events primarily in commemorative stories designed to explain past events. In the case of historical analogies, she writes that journalists often frame a current issue by comparing it to the past (in her example, the Watts riots explained the Los Angeles riots). She and Huyssen (1994) both argue that by describing the present using past recollections that may not perfectly fit the present situation, journalists run the risk of misinforming their communities. In Edy's (1999) argument, this can lead to the mistaken notion of the past repeating itself. Edy (1999) also notes that because these kinds of stories stand outside the usual professional norms, they provide journalists with the opportunity to work out meanings of the past and ultimately play a part in reconstructing a community's collective memory.

Michael Schudson (2014) points out that while much of journalism's work on memory relates to commemorative coverage, there are plenty of everyday invocations of the past in journalism as well. Like Edy (1999) and Zelizer (1995), he contends that journalists use the past to make sense of the present. He argues that journalists invoke the past in three non-commemorative ways: to intensify news value in the manner of an unprecedented event; to

explain the present within a historical framework; and to make direct commentary. Michael Serazio (2010) also points out that memory is invoked via metaphor – within and outside of commemoration. Indeed, the story of MOVE is contained mostly in anniversary and commemorative coverage, but it also appears in obituaries, in more recent news about historical markers and Black Lives Matter and in conversation with political campaigns.

Zelizer (2008) argues that memory studies should attend more closely to the role that journalists play in memory creation and maintenance. She contends that memory and journalism exist in symbiosis, each reliant on the other to varying degrees. While journalists produce the first record of what will become the past, Zelizer argues that journalists frequently decline to admit or consider their roles in the process of authorizing memory. For their part, she argues journalists view themselves as focused exclusively on the present. Meanwhile, she writes that historians mostly fail to consider journalism as a serious enterprise in the maintenance of past or memory. “All of this suggests that the particular division of labor by which journalists take care of the present and historians take care of the past, both sharing a reverence for truth, facts and reality, has blinded both in considering what else happens when journalists look backward” (Zelizer, 2008, p. 81). She ultimately argues – as do Edy (1999) and Kitch (2005, 2006, 2008) that journalists rely on the past for a slew of reasons, accessing the past to produce obituaries, anniversary coverage and other analysis that relies on historical framing or analogy. Kitch (2008) extends Zelizer’s argument further, arguing that memory scholars should not just take the work of elite news organizations seriously. She notes that local (and mostly non-elite) news sources are the medium by which most people learn about the past, and therefore they deserve equal intellectual inquiry. Further, she argues that memory *contains* journalism and argues that both function as processes that work together. These notions of the role that journalists play in

reconstructing the past will color my study's interviews with journalists, and will also serve as a reminder to be attentive in my textual analyses to instances in coverage where journalists are conferring authority on other individuals or are in other ways blessing versions of the past.

Journalists are joined with the broader community through witnessing, which Frosh and Pinchevski (2014) stress happens simultaneously between journalists and their audience in tripartite fashion. Witnesses appear *in* the media as truth-tellers, the media themselves *bear witness* to history and the media acts as intermediary witness, situating audiences as witnesses to broadcast events. They bookend their discussion with the familiar themes of atrocity and trauma, discussing the extent to which witnessing relates to the Holocaust and to the 9/11 attacks. They write, "When words fail or are unavailable, trauma itself bears witness to the black hole of experience through displaced repetitions and the acting out of unconscious conflicts" (p. 3). As Peters (2009) later points out, witnessing carries with it a sort of veracity gap where each witness will interpret the same event differently and those who witness something in person will have a necessarily different understanding than those whose witnessing is somehow mediated. He describes cameras as "surrogate eyes" (p. 23), which capture more than any one individual is capable of witnessing in any single experience. Of course, technology plays a particular role in the modern era of witnessing. Frosh and Pinchevski (2014) note that digital tools make such simultaneity endless and instant, writing "Contemporary media witnessing serves as its own justification, putting society permanently on view to itself for its own sake, as the audience perpetually witnesses its own shared world because *this is what mass media do*" (p. 11). It is important to understand the practices with which journalists captured the bombing as well as the methods by which they determined which witnesses to quote or otherwise rely on in their reporting.

### *Crisis and commemoration*

A review of initial and commemorative coverage of the 1985 MOVE bombing indicates that the incident resists typical coverage patterns, so understanding the nature of crisis coverage and commemoration is crucial to this study. Graber (1980) contends that crisis coverage takes place in three general stages. In the first stage, journalists describe the rupture or crisis event with as much detail as they can gather. At this stage, coverage remains descriptive but not analytical, and is fluid to the extent that some reports may be unsubstantiated or later found to be incorrect. At this stage, journalists often turn to eyewitnesses and others on the scene but their stories lack official sourcing from authorities. In the second stage, coverage includes deeper contextualization in order to better make sense of the original story. Here journalists have the opportunity to correct the record and add commentary from authorities. The final stage of coverage brings the journalists' inquiries to a close, discursively boosting community morale by offering conclusions and preparing a community to move forward. Here, as Gans found (1979), social restoration becomes the most important news value. This sort of narrative repair is common enough in day-to-day coverage, but it becomes especially prevalent in anniversary and crisis coverage.

Commemorative stories bring the past back to life for audiences (Edy, 1999), creating an emotional connection between the original event and present day by invoking dramatic storytelling and potentially providing a “critical forum for the negotiation of shared meanings when a hegemonic understanding of the past has yet to emerge” (p. 83). For this reason, anniversary journalism often affects audiences more deeply than standard news coverage – even for those citizens who have lived through the original event itself. However, Edy found that the emotional link may not provide sufficient meaning to audiences who need it. “They fail to

provide the sort of historical context that many media critics argue is needed in news stories” (1999, p. 76). Absent context, crises may appear to have occurred spontaneously, eliding their serious concern or consideration. We know that journalists play a remarkable role in shaping society’s collective memory (Zelizer, 2008). Edy goes further than this, arguing that journalists’ role in commemoration is educational.

The stories of the past presented in media, especially on television, are far more visceral than those presented in the classroom. Further, whereas the classroom teaches history with careful attention to objectively presented facts, the media may encourage the personal and emotional connections with the past that are associated with collective memory (1999, p. 72).

Commemorative coverage then has the ability (if not the duty) to inform and educate the public – especially publics who were outside the original crisis experience. As previously mentioned, as our understanding of the MOVE organization is more and more reliant upon mediated recollections, journalists bear a special burden for sharpening our understanding of the MOVE incidents and their resolution. As such, investigations of the extent to which journalists have further contextualized the MOVE crisis or added to our sense of narrative repair will yield broader conclusions about the extent to which journalists have served a certain kind of public duty.

#### *Memory, forgetting, and trauma*

Consideration of memory also necessitates consideration of forgetting. Not only the agents behind it and their intention, but the results of purposeful and inadvertent memory loss. Paul Connerton’s (2008) work informs much of this analysis. Connerton (2008) writes that the act of remembering is often largely understood as virtuous, inherently framing the act of forgetting as a failure. In response, he identified seven types of forgetting, characterizing them as occasionally necessary and even helpful (Connerton, 2008). They include: repressive erasure;

prescriptive forgetting; forgetting as constitutive toward a new identity; structural amnesia; forgetting as annulment; forgetting as planned obsolescence; and forgetting as humiliated silence (Connerton, 2008). Several of the types of forgetting outlined by Connerton (2008) have a relationship with or provide additional insight to the MOVE tragedy and the way it has been treated over time.

Connerton (2008) notes that repressive erasure dates to the Roman empire, where the ultimate punishment for those who had been deemed state enemies included their likenesses being destroyed. Beyond punishment, a forced erasure may also constitute a knowing omission in service of valorizing some other memory. Connerton (2008) describes repressive erasure as evidence that “the struggle of humanity against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting” (p. 61). It is clear, through decades of investigations and other altercations with police, that Philadelphia authorities had identified MOVE as an enemy of the state. In addition to the ultimate act of erasure that the bombing and resulting fire brought to MOVE and their compound, Mayor Frank Rizzo razed the group’s previous Powelton Village compound within 24 hours of the 1978 conflict. Both cases may be understood through a lens of repressive erasure.

Prescriptive forgetting, Connerton (2008) writes, is also committed by the state, but with a different aim: a peaceful future. This kind of forgetting frequently involves a direct and public call for those who have been harmed in the past to collectively decide to forget past misdeeds in the name of being able to live together without future harm. Connerton (2008) notes that this kind of forgetting is often part of treaties and restoration after civil unrest, but he is clear that it may also take the form of silent implication rather than explicit requirement. In the case of MOVE, the state may have indeed tried to commit a prescriptive forgetting for many years.

Connerton's (2008) notion of forgetting in order to build a new identity revolves around the knowing failure to transmit memories that might impede the growth of future memories. He compares memories that are no longer useful to pieces of an old jigsaw puzzle which might impede the fitting together of a new puzzle. "What is allowed to be forgotten provides living space for present projects" (p. 63). For neighbors, MOVE members, and others who witnessed the bombing firsthand, there has been very little expression of a desire to avoid transmitting memories of their trauma to future generations. History of the organization is taught to MOVE children, even if it rarely appears in Philadelphia histories. Other witnesses have spoken out against society's seeming forgetfulness on the topic. It would seem that no future memories can be built until a shared vocabulary for 1985 exists.

Forgetting as annulment may be understood relative to society's treatment of an "excess" of knowledge and cultural artifacts of that knowledge, Connerton (2008) writes. "The great archivalization" (2008, p. 65) helped create the modern state by forming processes for identifying and storing the ephemera of bureaucracy. But the very act of installing this knowledge in an archive definitionally demarcates it as somehow unnecessary. "To say that something has been stored – in an archive, in a computer – is tantamount to saying that, though it is in principle always retrievable, we can afford to forget it." This notion is especially important when considering the locations for much of the state evidence collected for purposes of the Philadelphia Special Investigation Commission. Digitized and tucked away at the Temple University Urban Archives, 78 boxes of material are indeed retrievable, but outside of a community of interested researchers, their contents have been largely forgotten. Connerton (2008) worries as information accumulates in society that determining how best to discard it may soon become the most important facet of understanding.

Connerton's (2008) notion of humiliated silence adds useful insight to the years following the 1985 MOVE bombing. He notes German silence on the subject of their own destroyed cities by aerial bombing after WWII, arguing that their shared and shame-based silence formed taboos around the topic, perhaps as a means for survival. "Confronted with a taboo, people can fall silent out of terror or panic or because they can find no appropriate words." While the MOVE bombing is not a topic that neatly fits the definition of taboo, and its forgetting is not required for anyone's survival, it is clearly the case that many Philadelphians who have merely a passing knowledge or memory of the event lack both information and vocabulary for how to discuss it. Social norms surrounding discussions of race and Philadelphia's conversational third rail of MOVE may contribute to a greater desire to avoid the topic.

#### *Cultural processes and memory*

Jeffrey Alexander (2004) articulates a theory of cultural trauma as a specific empirical concept extending beyond the common-sense understanding of shared tragedy. His definition is directly relevant to several aspects of the MOVE bombing narrative, especially in the ways in which it describes the formation of collectivities, the importance of storytelling and what he calls the "trauma process" (Alexander, 2004, p. 27).

Alexander (2004) notes that responses to trauma can also take an enlightenment approach, whereby people will seek to identify the conditions that led to the trauma, often triggering official and bureaucratic responses as a way to divert emotions. Certainly the formation of the Philadelphia Special Investigation Commission was such a bureaucratic response, funneling attention and emotion to a specific process aired for the city to witness, and open to public responses. An enlightenment approach, as articulated by Kai Erikson and quoted

in Alexander (2004), also articulates a difference between individually experienced and collectively experienced traumas. Erikson defined collective trauma as one that damages a sense of community. It thus necessarily operates on a different pace, as well. Whereas an individual trauma is immediately perceived and requires reaction, a collective trauma unfolds only at the pace with which other people become aware of it, and may not be recognized at all until one becomes aware the group itself no longer exists in the same way – or at all. It is important to consider the MOVE bombing as a collective trauma that fundamentally rearranged relationships not only among surviving MOVE people, but among neighbors as well.

From a process perspective, Alexander (2004) argues that the real seed of fear and trauma comes not from the inciting event itself, but from the social meanings that are constructed or deconstructed in its wake. That process, he writes, is driven by a society's power structures. He writes, "Trauma is not the result of a group experiencing pain. It is the result of this acute discomfort entering into the core of the collectivity's sense of its own identity" (Alexander, 2004, p. 10). By this definition, while the MOVE people and neighbors suffered a traumatic event, it was the city of Philadelphia that was susceptible to a blow to its identity. With this in mind, we can begin to understand the extent to which the city might act to repress this trauma. The trauma process – "the gap between event and representation" (Alexander, 2004, p. 11) unfolds as claim makers including those in the media and other officials offer representations about the trauma, and carrier groups – in the case of the bombing, the MOVE people and neighbors – work to make meaning from those claims. The process depends on Thompson's (1998) "spiral of signification," wherein a master narrative takes form to enable further meaning-making. Alexander (2004) describes it as "a complex and multivalent process that is contingent, highly contested, and sometimes highly polarizing" (p. 12). Alexander (2004) also notes that

notions of victimhood can further complicate this process, arguing that for victims to be recognized as having suffered from the trauma, audiences must be “represented in terms of valued qualities shared by the larger collective” (p. 14). In the case of the Africa family, they were not portrayed as sharing much at all with the rest of their Philadelphia neighbors. Victimhood and narratives are thus reliant upon means that are themselves subject to material contingencies and other power structures.

Alexander (2004) ultimately argues that memory and trauma contribute to personal and collective identities, and the resolution of traumatic memories – the trauma process – relies on carrier groups with enough credibility and material resources to form a persuasive master narrative. For trauma to be truly experienced and an identity edited, he argues: “This identity revision means that there will be a searching re-remembering of the collective past, for memory is not only social and fluid but deeply connected to the contemporary sense of self” (Alexander, 2004, p. 22). Whether the searching has truly taken place in this case is debatable, but what this dissertation aims to make clear is the extent to which memories of the MOVE bombing are still contributing – unexpectedly and not – to the city’s contemporary sense of itself.

Eyerman (2016) reminds us that the fight over memory can manifest as a fight over civic identity, writing that radical memories associated with social movements must ultimately be made palatable to the broader public before they can be fully incorporated within that identity. That involves memory being “purged and repressed” (Eyerman, 2016 p. 82) and requires the passage of time in order to usher in less feeling of agitation. In the case of the MOVE bombing, as will be articulated further in subsequent chapters, that urgent feeling has largely yet to subside. Further, the carrier groups of its memory have been kept from the kinds of access Eyerman (2016) lists as necessary in order to narrate or re-narrate the story of the bombing in a

compelling way to a wider audience. Thus, it must be understood, that the MOVE bombing and its legacy have not yet been incorporated into the city's identity. This has led to what Eyerman (2016) describes as a double sort of trauma, which includes the initial act itself and the subsequent "indifference" (p. 82) with which the victims' suffering has been treated.

### *Collective memory and racial identity*

Eyerman (2004) reminds us that trauma may be considered as at least two separate things: as something that befalls an individual and as a cultural process. In the case of process, trauma may be understood as constitutive to a group's memory. He defines it: "Cultural trauma refers to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion" (Eyerman, 2004, p. 61). He also notes that media has a role to play in this process, inasmuch as journalists help the public to understand and discuss what has happened: "Mass-mediated experience always involves selective construction and representation, since what is visualized is the result of the actions and decisions of professionals as to what is significant and how it should be presented" (Eyerman, 2004, p. 62.) By extension, those same journalists may be understood as lending credence to a particular carrier group.

The process of cultural trauma is inseparable from memory and its invocation, and Eyerman (2004) notes that this phenomenon creates a "meaning struggle" (Eyerman, 2004, p. 62). Eyerman (2004) points out that literary theorists Singh, Skerrett, and Hogan have argued that collective memory should be understood as the produce of a dialogue:

... the outcome of interaction, a conversational process within which individuals locate themselves, where identities are described as the different ways individuals and collectives are positioned by, and position themselves, within narratives (pp. 66-67).

Using this interpretation, Eyerman (2004) points out that memory in fact works on, with and among individuals and groups in the formation of memory, and becomes more myth-like in comparison to what is considered history. It is this stipulation which fuels much of the work of subsequent chapters: this research seeks to understand the shape and form of collective memory rather than the recorded history surrounding the MOVE bombing. As Eyerman (2004) also cautions that understanding collective memory purely as language-based discourse can occasionally forget materiality, this work intentionally includes a chapter devoted to material articulations related to the MOVE bombing. He writes, “The collective memory that forms the basis for collective identity can transcend many spatial limitations when it is recorded or represented by other means” (Eyerman, 2004, p. 70). Given the meaning struggles Eyerman (2004) describes, this work is also focused on identifying whose claims are privileged over others, and to whose benefit.

Eyerman (2004) also attends to the specific ways in which collective memory has been articulated for and by Black Americans, citing slavery as a mnemonic jumping-off point and a wound that was only honestly reopened and then integrated into the larger national collective memory during the civil rights movement. He also notes that Black media helped to fuel a collective identity for Black Americans, which is why this work also interrogates the *Philadelphia Tribune*'s articulations of MOVE-related memory along with those coming from *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and the *Daily News*. In the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Eyerman (2004) also writes that Black identity involved employing race “not only as a unifying concept, but also as one that endows purpose” (p. 86), especially in opposition to the indignities of the Reconstruction era. In essence, Eyerman (2004) argues that the past can be used in defiant opposition to predominant cultures and identities to create a new group identity. This is

especially useful as we consider John Africa's separation of MOVE people from the rest of Philadelphia while promoting African culture by asking his acolytes to also adopt "Africa" as a surname. Eyerman (2004) writes, "In the progressive narrative, Africa appears not so much as a geographical place, somewhere to actually escape to, but as metaphor for a long lost and forgotten past" (p. 93). He traces the social history of Black Americans through a series of repeating cultural traumas that inform group identity: "It perhaps should be repeated that "cultural trauma" is a process, one that in this case was kept in motion through the continual degradation and marginalization of American [B]lacks" (Eyerman, 2004, p. 97). Responses to that trauma included both a Du Boisian civil rights movement interested in integration, as well as a separatist Black nationalism movement, both of which made use of the past in different ways, both of which fit into a progressive narrative frame where Africa came to largely symbolize freedom. In the case of Malcolm X specifically, his Black nationalist movement called for Black Americans to rediscover their African roots and culture toward a project of self-determination. One can easily conclude that the same wariness and disdain whites and powerful government and law enforcement agencies applied to Malcolm X and Black nationalists was simply transferred to the MOVE organization a decade later.

### **Place and materiality**

Beyond the collective psychological trauma, the aftermath of the MOVE bombing in 1985 left several square blocks of city rowhomes burned to the ground. And shortly after they were rebuilt, the homes were again condemned due to shoddy construction, with owners offered financial compensation to sell their homes back to the city and move out again (Demby, 2015). The bombing itself also led to a grassroots effort by schoolchildren to place a historical marker on the 6200 block of Osage Avenue. The remaining members of the MOVE organization also

continue to raise awareness of their shared concerns by selling apparel. The concepts of place and materiality that are most useful to this work through involve vernacular landscape (Jackson, 1984), the landscape outcomes of tragedy (Foote, 1997), the social justice component of city environments (Soja, 2003, 2010), and the affective dimension of place (Tuan, 1991, 2004).

The scholarly understanding of place most germane to this study can be described within the context of human and cultural geography, landscape studies more broadly, and within the material context of memory. Cultural and new cultural geography grew from human geography and are seen as a rebuke to positivism. Where geographers once believed cultures grew in ways that were determined by their environment, cultural and humanist geographers argue that culture is co-constitutive with the environment (Peet, 1998). Cultural geographers aim to understand the ways in which culture and place are interrelated, forming geography's "human component" (Tuan, 2004, p. 729). As articulated by one of cultural geography's foundational theorists, Carl O. Sauer (1925), they view culture as a process, rather than reflecting society through material artefacts. Seminal theorist J.B. Jackson (1984) centered everyday landscapes and people in his work, arguing that those places were where cultures – particularly American cultures – reveal their "common humanity" (p. xii). The history of the MOVE organization can be traced through a series of literal construction projects, beginning with a fortified compound in Powelton Village in response to a growing police presence and ending with police moving on the group in West Philadelphia after MOVE members built a bunker on the roof of their rowhome. As such, the culture and the environment for the MOVE organization were deeply intertwined. Thus, unpacking them to better understand the meaning of geographic elements like a historical marker and a rebuilt block of rowhomes requires an understanding of the co-constitutive nature of this kind of geography.

### *Cultural and human geography*

Art historian Jules Prown (1982) also argues for centering the vernacular to better understand culture. He observes that material culture – especially embodied within vernacular objects – expresses a society’s values. In particular, he argues that surviving artifacts can provide a way into understanding a community which may not express itself or be included in other cultural expressions of identity. Necessarily, the objects that survive time and trauma have been deemed useful or otherwise valuable and tend to be “high style objects” (Prown, 1982 p. 4). As such, we may consider the implications for a community’s belief about items that have been destroyed or left to degrade over time. As will be more fully articulated below, it is remarkable how little physical material remains of the MOVE organization or its altercations with police exist today. Certainly, Prown’s notions of social values and their embeddedness within objects will add to this study’s conclusions about the state of material remnants from the 1985 bombing.

Human geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (1991) foregrounds language in his study of the built environment, as well as its affective dimensions. He argues that the nature and emotional valence of language can render places invisible, writing “... malicious speech has the power to destroy a place's reputation and thereby its visibility” (Tuan, 1991, p. 684). Language, he argues, ultimately builds place (Tuan, 1991). Geographers in the humanistic and cultural tradition like Tuan are also interested in revealing the power dynamics that are part of the creation and cultures and places. To do so, they also draw on other critical theories, including post-colonial theory, post-structuralism and feminism (Jacobs & Nash, 2003). This foregrounding of language informs analysis specifically related to the real estate project in West Philadelphia, especially of the RFP and marketing circulated by the city of Philadelphia for reconstruction of the blighted blocks.

The RFP and marketing exist only digitally and thus, their materiality may only be understood through the culture that its language reveals.

*“A right to the city”*

Urban theorist and geographer Edward Soja (2010) argues explicitly for the connection between what he called a “critical spatial perspective” and positive social change by invoking affective dimensions. He expands on Lefebvre’s (1967) notion of a “right to the city,” where the foundational urban theorist once argued that marginalized communities had an inherent human right to remake the city. Soja’s (2010) concept of spatial justice (rooted, he argues, in his assertive orientation) is related to this right, but he argues that it ultimately takes many forms, all in service to social justice in the larger sense. Spatial justice in the context of rights to the city may be understood as a national movement to address gentrification and displacement, and as a framework for community organizing on the local and national levels (Soja, 2010). Soja (2003) also argues explicitly for centering cities as being specifically important to understanding cultural geography. He introduced the term synekism to capture what he called an “urban agglomeration” (Soja, 2003, p. 274) of assembled layers of culture. They include “... the creativity, innovation, territorial identity, political consciousness and societal development that arise from living together in dense and heterogeneous urban regions” (Soja, 2003, p. 274). He thus argues that cities contain inherent qualities the deserve specific inquiry – and justice. Among other things, Soja’s (2010) notions of marginalized groups having specific rights to the city and to fighting gentrification will be brought to bear on this study’s understanding of the MOVE organization’s determination not to vacate their homes in Powelton Village and later on Osage Avenue.

### *Obliteration and erasure*

The notion of physical space and materiality in memory, while raised first by Halbwachs (1992 [1925]) and Nora (1989), has been taken up by scholars including geographer Kenneth Foote (1997) and American studies professor Erika Doss (2002). Foote (1997) contends that society treats locations where violence has transpired in four major ways, with the manner in which each site is treated functioning as a public judgment of how society feels about the events that took place there and how they should be understood in the future. As attitudes change and temporal distance grows between the present and the events, Foote writes that the ways in which we mark these spaces can change. He divides treatment of these spaces into four categories: sanctified, designated, rectified or obliterated. Sanctified spaces (like the Gettysburg battlefield) signal a worthiness of national remembrance and ceremony. Designated spaces present tricky narratives in service to common memory, Foote writes. Locations where violence has taken place outside of officially designated periods (in other words, disasters or crime) are remembered in ways that change over time. Rectified spaces are immediately repaired following some sort of temporary notoriety, and obliterated sites, as defined by Foote, occupy the opposite end of the spectrum from sanctification. Rather than rectifying a location and returning it to original use, these sites are completely removed from the public. Obliterating a space indicates society's desire to forget what happened there. Foote argues that while sanctification helps bring grieving to an end, obliteration creates public scars which can delay society's forgetting. By obliterating a space, communities try to force a distance between themselves and the abhorrent act. By considering that randomized violence (the type of which is frequently condemned in obliterated spaces) is difficult to fit into a narrative framework, we are reminded that memories outside such a narrative are easier to forget. Doss (2002) extends our understanding of physical spaces in

memory to include material objects. Her study focuses on objects left in remembrance of national tragedies including the school shooting at Columbine High School and the bombing of the Murrah building in Oklahoma City. While large-scale spaces are sanctified, designated, rectified or obliterated by the state, Doss points out that the public carries out its own memory rituals and practices in a more vernacular way: by erecting shrines and leaving objects at the sites themselves. Foote's (1997) categorization of physical places with checkered pasts is especially relevant considering the evolution of the MOVE bombing site from literal obliteration to something approaching designation.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS

It would be impossible to acquire a nuanced understanding of a subject as complicated as the MOVE bombing with a single method of inquiry. Just as this work relies on multiple theoretical perspectives to draw meaningful conclusions, it also requires a variety of methods for critical interrogation. Before describing them, it is also necessary to note that while each has been approached with rigor and precision, each has also been approached through the specific perspective of this researcher. Revealing the ways in which journalists and city officials worked to produce the original, official record of MOVE required a series of deep, unstructured interviews with individuals who had personal experience covering the group or otherwise working with them between 1978 and 1985. Documenting the ways in which journalists subsequently articulated the community's collective memory of the group and its relationship with the city required a critical discourse analysis of news and anniversary coverage between 1986 and 2020. Finally, object studies in the material culture tradition on a series of texts related to the group and its history in Philadelphia round out the analysis.

Alexander (2004) articulates a description for the methods undertaken by scholars who aim to investigate trauma and its effects that is particularly helpful to this study:

Yet, while every argument about trauma claims ontological reality, as cultural sociologists we are not primarily concerned with the accuracy of social actors' claims, much less with evaluating their moral justification. We are concerned only with how and under what conditions the claims are made, and with what results. It is neither ontology, nor morality, but epistemology, with which we are concerned (p. 9).

Rather than trying to reach an understanding of what *really* happened on May 13, 1985, this project is interested in understanding the nature of the truth claims that have been made over time.

### **Interviews: Methodological commitments and research design**

Given that the scholarship related to the MOVE organization is so scant, little records exist to indicate the kinds of practices journalists and other authorities employed in their original interactions with and related to the group. Therefore, to better understand the ways in which journalists and others co-created the first, “official” record of MOVE-related memory, it was important to conduct a series of unstructured, in-depth interviews to produce “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 1973) of their roles in that production. Rather than generalizable research, this study focuses more on the depth of my interactions with each individual instead of attempting to capture the experiences of every person involved with the tragedy.

It is important to note that all interviews were conducted in person, and with the full understanding that the witnessing and recollections requested of each interviewee is traumatic in nature. It is also important to note that while the lack of diversity in newsrooms nationwide has been well established (Mellinger, 2013), it was a priority to include as diverse a sample as possible for the interviews in this study. That effort has produced a fuller view not just of journalists’ practices but of the identities of individuals who are authorized to talk about MOVE. Conversations were unstructured to account for the variety of roles each individual played in the tragedy as it unfolded, but also to accommodate the fact that respondents represent a variety of backgrounds, perspectives, and professional affiliations.

### **Critical discourse analysis: Methodological commitments and research design**

A ProQuest archive search within Philadelphia’s three most prominent newspaper sources: *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, the *Daily News* and *The Philadelphia Tribune* reveals hundreds of news stories produced between 1986 and 2020 relating to the 1985 MOVE bombing

and its commemoration. These texts form the foundation of the critical discourse and ideological analyses. The critical discourse component reveals the ideological and epistemological assumptions within these texts, which present – for example – certain elements of the MOVE story as unavoidable and certain responses to the group as natural (Dahlberg and Phelan, 2011). The ideological component identifies instances where these ideologies are formed and maintained within the memory community.

This work compares the nature of the anniversary coverage described above against the patterns identified by Graber (1980) and Edy (1999) to understand the extent to which MOVE coverage may be considered typical. Analysis focuses on the elements of commemorative coverage that remain the same over the years and those which diverge, with special attention paid to the identity of witnesses and sources relied upon by the journalists. It also identifies framing devices to point out instances in which the outcomes of the altercations are made to seem natural. More recent texts were examined to better understand modern themes that have emerged specifically since the Black Lives Matter movement gained national recognition, and special attention is paid to the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2020, which coincided with a round of national protests against police violence. Modern texts were also read in direct comparison with previous commemorative texts in order to demonstrate the extent to which coverage and framing have veered away from original frames. Texts from all eras were also examined using the elements of critical discourse analysis and ideological analysis described below.

Critical discourse analysis considers how language functions broadly in society. Linguist Norman Fairclough is the primary theorist behind the method, and he defines discourse as inclusive of more than just written or spoken language: “I also want to extend it to include other types of semiotic activity (i.e., activity which produces meanings), such as visual images

(photography, film, video, diagrams) and non-verbal communication (e.g., gestures)”

(Fairclough, 1995, p. 54). The critical component within critical discourse analysis intentionally invokes sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s (1977) notion that the power relationships bound up by language are often unclear to audiences. Fairclough (1995) argues this opacity is, in fact, the source of the power in many cases.

Fairclough (1995) theorizes that the key to understanding a community’s process of meaning-making is to pair a linguistic understanding of the particular text itself with an understanding of “the configuration of genres and discourses which constitute the order of the discourse, the shifting relationships between them, and between this order of discourse and other socially adjacent ones” (p. 56). He contends that understanding the text itself requires - in semiological terms - an understanding of its meaning and its form (p. 57). In his argument, the text’s production and its consumption by audiences exist within a dimension of discourse practice — which is itself situated within a dimension of sociocultural practice. All three dimensions — the textual, the discourse, and the sociocultural — are examined within critical discourse analysis in order to reveal systems of meaning-making and the power relationships behind them.

Ideology may be understood as the “common sense” beliefs held by a community, defined by Graeme Turner (1997) as “sets of unspoken, unwritten assumptions about the way the world works,” which are “inscribed into virtually every aspect of one’s life in that culture” (p. 327). British cultural studies scholar Mike Cormack (1995) describes these dominant beliefs as a source of “social cement and social control” (p. 20). Ideological analysis is aimed at uncovering the origins of a society’s dominant beliefs and at identifying the multiple competing sets of beliefs simultaneously at play in a complicated, socially constructed reality. Cormack (1995)

described five ways to assess texts as part of ideological critique, understanding texts as existing to encourage audiences to share in a commonly embraced version of reality. His five assessment topics include content, structure, absence, style and mode. He argued that upon analyzing the syntax of a text (meaning the actual language used as well as the opinions conveyed), its specific content would help reveal the social reality in which the text was embedded. Studying a text's structure involves a look at the text's beginning and end, which can help researchers identify the framework within which the text exists. Understanding the structure may also reveal the devices by which the text's creator has predetermined the audience's interpretations of its meaning. This is often achieved by producing an either-or structure of argument. Cormack (1995) argued that researchers undertaking ideological analysis should also particularly attend to what is conspicuously absent from a text. Put another way, the absence of some information or context could help reveal the extent to which the text's producer(s) is helping to bias or limit a consumer or audience member's interpretation of the text. A text's style and mode further help the ideological analyst consider the role that a society's dominant beliefs played as one created the text under consideration. Cormack (1995) described the mode as the ways in which the text interacts with the audience (direct or indirect, for example). The style he recommends researchers attend to relates to surface-level attributes including the use of design, fashion and color.

### **Object studies: Methodological commitments and research design**

At first glance, the lack of materiality surrounding the MOVE organization might seem to make object studies impossible. Indeed, among the most notorious outcomes of the organization's two primary altercations with Philadelphia police is the total annihilation of the group's property and belongings. Thus, the objects considered in this study have been primarily

produced in the aftermath of the 1985 bombing. Specifically, this study considers the historic marker unveiled at the site of the bombing in 2017; the real estate development on the 6200 blocks of Pine Street and Osage Avenue; and the Philadelphia Special Investigation Commission archive housed at Temple University's Charles Library. These items have been selected for inquiry because they each provide a unique lens to examine what has become the official narrative of the MOVE organization. The marker was demanded by schoolchildren who explicitly believed the group had not been fairly described by the city or the press, the real estate development both overtly acknowledges the city's failure to rebuild the blocks previously and erases the tragic past; and the archive draws clear conclusions about what parts of history have been deemed worth saving and what has been made accessible to a public that is clearly hungry to learn more. Crafting object studies around these items specifically enables this study to reveal the form and the function of these instances of vernacular memory.

Art historian Charles F. Montgomery (1999) suggests that researchers undertaking to describe material objects should maintain an "inquiring mind as well as an inquiring eye" (p. 149). And while scholars working in material culture have noted that its breadth makes the application of a single methodological tradition impossible to pin down (Prown, 1982), I am proposing a hybrid method incorporating assessments at the visual and the interpretive levels, combining the sensibilities of three art historians: Prown's (1982) semiotic approach, Montgomery's (1999) connoisseurship inventory, and Michael Yonan's (2011) directive to interrogate the conditions of an object's production in order to make sense of its presentation and utility. Combining identification, description and function to better understand objects – in ways parallel to the methods I am employing to understand texts – will lead to valuable deductions

about the cultural practices of a community that has been largely barred from contributing to the official record of memory related to the MOVE organization.

Prown (1982) argues that objects embody semiotic value that can be understood through a reading of the object's iconography, demanding substantial analysis as well as a descriptive physical inventory to chronicle specific details of an item before identifying its meaning within a larger symbolic system. Montgomery (1999), too, advocates for an investigation of an object's form, coloration and ornamentation. Prown (1982) also notes two affective elements crucial to fully describing and understanding an object: sensory engagement and emotional response. Just as texts are the result of historically situated realities (Brennen, 2013), objects are also the products of a "particular cultural environment" (Prown, 1982, p. 4). My aim, then, has been to produce histories (Ingold, 2007) of these objects that describe not only the attributes of their form and function within society, but also why they were produced and the specific culture in which they exist and are popularly understood. By better understanding these objects and the conditions of their production – in descriptive and intellectual ways – this study aims to produce a more holistic view of the spectrum of public articulations of memory surrounding the MOVE organization.

## CHAPTER 4

### “WE ONLY KNEW WHAT WE WERE TOLD”

Like the narratives and truth claims surrounding the MOVE story, the identities and characteristics of those who have shaped or maintained public understanding of the bombing and the group are varied. The goal of conducting interviews with many different individuals making as many different truth claims as possible reaffirms the debt this dissertation owes to critical race theory notions of decentering narratives (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002). Despite sending dozens of appeals and invitations, and leveraging volunteers at newsrooms and universities around Philadelphia, only 10 men agreed to take part in this project. They include: MOVE member Michael Africa, Jr.; *The Philadelphia Inquirer* journalist Larry Eichel; Philadelphia Mayor Wilson Goode; WCAU-TV journalist Tom Kranz; KYW Newsradio journalist Larry Litwin; communications director for the Philadelphia Special Investigation Commission Emerson Moran; documentarian Jason Osder; activist and reconciliation expert Ulysses Slaughter; journalist and scholar Linn Washington; and Associated Press photographer George Widman. Limitations resulting from this sample are discussed later in this chapter, but it is important to note that many people – mostly women – declined to participate without explanation, as is their absolute right. This chapter draws conclusions from those 10 in-depth interviews, during which saturation was reached on several points. The through-line connecting each of the men interviewed in this chapter is that they all played prominent roles in establishing or shaping the public’s understanding of what on May 13, 1985, whether as journalists, city authorities, community activists, or in their capacity serving on the Special Investigation Commission. This chapter also begins and ends with longer meditations on conversations with two of the

interviewees, given their singular roles and determination to each tell their own complete versions of the MOVE story.

### **Meeting Emerson Moran**

When I meet Emerson Moran, I have just spent two and a half days driving south from Philadelphia. At a Jupiter, Florida hotel near his home in Palm Beach Gardens, he comes bearing more than his memories. He was a few weeks away from a planned trip to Saratoga, New York, where he was moving to be closer to his family. While packing, he said he had gathered a box of items he thought would be of interest. He handed me a folder with a photocopy of a *Philadelphia Magazine* article he'd written about his experience as the communications director of the Philadelphia Special Investigation Commission. He also handed over a spiral-bound, 100-sheet notebook where he had recorded his thoughts during the five weeks of public hearings held at WHYY studios, including dozens of phone numbers, media clippings, and press release drafts from 1985 alongside Post-It tabs he had added in 2019 for my benefit. He also brought VHS tapes of hearings and anniversary specials that had aired on TV, and his own copy of the Special Investigation Commission's eventual findings – of which he had led the writing. He was also carrying what looked like a framed item that was covered in brown paper. Each item reminded me that memory is material (Zelizer, 1995).

Moran and I had connected after I spent several months tracking him down online. I had spent months awash in his notes and his narration while studying the commission's archives at Temple University, and speaking to him even briefly by phone confirmed that we would need to meet. Moran's role in the commission made him a particular sort of institutional voice in the investigation. I had read his memos and his phone messages for months, and his process of

chronicling the enormous volume of truth claims surrounding the MOVE bombing seemed to mirror my own project.

“You are entitled – from my personal collection of Cheerios and artifacts from days long by – my mementos of historic events,” (E. Moran, personal communication, October 11, 2019) he said when I saw him in Florida. In addition to the pile of media he had just presented, he handed me a red T-shirt. The front of the shirt included WHY Y’s logo, promoting its TV channel as well as its FM radio station. Below the logo, an all-caps pronouncement: WE DID IT! On the back of the shirt were illustrations of two gavels with the word “to” between them. It was a T-shirt WHY Y had distributed to its staff to mark the conclusion of the hearings that the public broadcasting agency had aired. By Moran’s recollection, it was made by and for WHY Y employees, and was distributed only to those who had worked on the production.

He had also handed me something wrapped in brown craft paper. When I peeled it back, I found a framed photograph, roughly 15 inches by 23 inches. The image is difficult to take in at once. It is an aerial view of a web of rowhomes, at the center of which appears to be a mass of untreated lumber. At first, I couldn’t tell what I was looking at. Then I realized the lumber was the bunker atop 6221 Osage Avenue, and I assumed it had been part of the photographs police had taken to help plan their assault on the MOVE house. Then I noticed dark smoke and a hint of flames. The photo had been snapped moments after the duffel bag stuffed with explosives had landed on the roof of 6221 Osage. The image was not part of the commission’s archives at Temple University. Nor had it been included in the boxes of media coverage I had spent weeks reviewing.

“It could be from the state police helicopter,” Moran said (E. Moran, personal communication, October 11, 2019).

He said it had been hanging on his office wall for a long time. Every office wall he'd had since 1985, he said., signaling to people the seriousness of his inquiry. "This is the kind of stuff – the people see that, and the message you're giving is: hey pal, we're not fooling around" (E. Moran, personal communication, October 11, 2019).

Moran's role in the MOVE investigation and the hearings was unique. In addition to working with commissioners and director and counsel Bill Lytton to staff the commission and investigate the events leading up to the bombing, Moran also worked to produce the hearings and served as chief press contact while they were ongoing. Later, he took the lead on writing the commission's findings, drafting its eventual report. His previous work as a journalist had led him to contacts with the FBI, which had taken him to Attica, New York, to work with state investigators after the 1971 riot at the prison there. In his work investigating both events, Moran said he was required to use the skills he honed as a journalist, gathering information, interviewing individuals involved, and sharing conclusions with the public. "I liked being in that position because my range of vision was from an almost higher level than anyone else's," he said (E. Moran, personal communication, February 25, 2019). Now that decades have passed, he said he is able to see the MOVE bombing and the Attica prison riot as part of a longer narrative about state violence against Black Americans. "You connect the dots, and the arc of this kind of thing goes way back to the beginning of our society ... and it manifests in different ways," he said (E. Moran, personal communication, February 25, 2019).

Moran is one of just a handful of individuals who can so easily mingle personal memory of the investigation with physical manifestations of it, all alongside recollections stemming from his special access to the first official investigation. He attributed that access and the arc of his career to the skills he acquired as a journalist.

That was my specialty: taking these mountains of seemingly unrelated information and doing what a reporter does. ... Connect the dots, pull it out, put it into narrative form backed up by ... consequential evidence and present it to the prosecutors, and then they would know what the hell was going on. ... I would provide a real-world kind of textual narrative (E. Moran, personal communication, October 11, 2019)

When Moran was the principal writer of the Special Investigation Commission's final report, his job was to convey the group's findings. He said the fiercest debates within the body had to do with assigning blame and responsibility. In the end, the report cited Mayor Wilson Goode for abdicating his responsibilities (MOVE Commission Report, 1986). Some, including Moran, believed the report could have gone further in explicitly holding the mayor responsible. Apart from that, Moran said what he was professionally charged with writing generally aligned with his personal feelings about what the investigation had found and the culpability of the mayor. "And the good people of Philadelphia reelected the son of a bitch." (E. Moran, personal communication, October 11, 2019).

Over time, Moran said his understanding of the event has been affected by his own life circumstances, which include recovery from alcoholism and ongoing connections with others who also remain in recovery.

Time goes on and you see things, and you have to deal with your own history and get honest with yourself. ... You try to learn enough so you don't live in the wreckage of your past. All that is the kind of stuff that makes the path of memory zig and zag and up and down and whatever (E. Moran, personal communication, October 11, 2019).

Where he once saw the Attica riot as one event and the MOVE bombing as another, he said he now sees one connected – if winding – narrative . "The line of memory is not a straight line" (E. Moran, personal communication, October 11, 2019).

Nearly 35 years after the event, Moran said he feels that journalists have still yet to really reckon with what happened on Osage Avenue. He called anniversary pieces in the city's

mainstream press examples of “patting history on the head” (E. Moran, personal communication, October 11, 2019). He thinks journalists have failed to capture the memory and experiences of residents of the Osage neighborhood. “In my experience working with the commission, the neighbors are the forgotten people” (E. Moran, personal communication, October 11, 2019). It’s not clear whether he blames the media or the commission for failing to remember all the elements of the story, but he is clear on where it has left Philadelphia.

The thing about the failed public memory? Which helps the public leaders responsible? Whatever went on involving them fades away and there’s no accountability. There’s no ownership, no sense of responsibility (E. Moran, personal communication, October 11, 2019)

His sense of work undone imbued our conversation with a feeling of urgency. He spoke directly of transferring (Zelizer, 1995) his memories to me, just at the moment he was preparing to move north, partly because his own health and memory were beginning to falter. “You’re the one that’s got the ball now, kid,” he said (E. Moran, personal communication, October 11, 2019).

### **Truth claims and narrative ownership**

Notions of truth claims and the ways in which they relate to narrative ownership were central to many of the people interviewed for this chapter. Broadly, they are divided into theories related to who exerted control over mainstream media narratives; ways in which the story had been rendered incorrectly by controlling narratives; and questions about the extent to which society ought to be interested in the MOVE bombing at all. By chronicling the claims as well as the debates, we can better understand the stakes and the significance of what happened in Philadelphia on May 13, 1985.

Truth claims in the MOVE story are made by many individuals, and can be understood as personal expressions and also as representations of communities or groups. Claim makers include: individual reporters' sources; reporters themselves (from a variety of outlets and mediums); city administrators; politicians; lawyers; police officers; firefighters; neighbors, MOVE members; and MOVE affiliates. The interviewees in this chapter identified three categories of folks responsible for turning claims into a controlling narrative: the media writ large, a mainstream media that should be understood as separate from black media; and, strangely, no one at all.

Individuals outside traditional mainstream newsrooms tended to identify the media as driving the controlling narrative without articulating specifically whom they believed comprised the media. Michael Africa, Jr. and Goode spoke at length about the role the media played in constructing a narrative for audiences. Africa said, "The press gets the messages out to people. They control the narrative" (M. Africa, personal communication, Feb. 10, 2020). He defined the press as also including the police and fire departments, which he described as exerting their own control of the narrative. He also described his own attempts at redirecting the public's understanding as inappropriate now that his parents and the rest of the surviving MOVE 9 have been freed from incarceration. "They have to take the lead on what happens now that they're home and can do it for themselves. ... As long as they're here, it's up to them," he said (M. Africa, personal communication, Feb. 10, 2020). Goode spoke about the media in broad terms only, casting it as a kind of social monolith by referring to reporters and using phrases like "the larger media" without specifying mediums, outlets or names. The only time the mayor clarified his definition of "the media" at all was to add "I don't mean WURD" when he was describing

the extent to which reporters failed to make an effort to tell the truth (W. Goode, personal communication, Feb. 4, 2020).

Reporters themselves, however, were less likely to cite other members of the media as driving or controlling any sort of narrative. Eichel, in particular, articulated a belief that there was no conscious effort or agenda pushed by members of the media, describing the process of the story changing over time as one that happened on its own: “I just think it’s the natural way things work. Over time, things get shorter and shorter” (L. Eichel, personal communication, Feb. 3, 2020). The *Inquirer* reporter returned several times throughout the interview to notions that the MOVE story both occurred and is re-told without guidance or interference from any forces at all.

To the extent that individuals discussed a cohesive, controlling narrative, those who had personal interests in their characterization – Mayor Goode and Michael Africa, Jr. – claimed that public understanding was either inaccurate or incomplete. Michael Africa, Jr. described the media’s and the public’s total ignorance of MOVE. In his indictment of the media, he is clear that his concern is less the events of May 13, 1985 – though they remain important – and more on broader understanding of the movement. “I think that 99.9 percent of the people in Philadelphia, don’t really know what MOVE was about. Probably 30 percent of the people in Philadelphia has heard of MOVE or knows about MOVE in some way” (M. Africa, Jr., personal communication, Feb. 10, 2020). He points out that the media has remained primarily interested in covering moments of conflict, and says an explanation of the movement isn’t much of a news story, and thus isn’t attractive to reporters. “That doesn’t sell papers. It’s not news” he says (M. Africa, Jr., personal communication, Feb. 10, 2020). Like other claims addressed later in this chapter, Africa attributes this to poor original coverage and insufficient anniversary coverage.

“They say the same thing every year,” he said (M. Africa, Jr., personal communication, Feb. 10, 2020). Given that his own version of the MOVE organization has been largely kept from the controlling narrative, he said he decided to create a 45-minute, one-man show titled “Born on the MOVE,” that he performs regularly. It gives him the opportunity to talk to audiences about his secret birth in prison after his pregnant mother – and father – were incarcerated among the MOVE 9.

Mayor Goode has obvious personal interest in the ways in which his behavior – and ultimately his culpability – are characterized to the public. But his indictment of the media extends beyond objections to the way in which he has been characterized. He claims that the media has failed to accurately convey what happened on May 13, 1985 entirely: “I’ve not seen any story that came close to an accurate story in terms of how this evolved or how it happened” (W. Goode, personal communication, Feb. 4, 2020). He argues that the media is directly responsible for two different narratives that informed the way the world came to understand what happened at 6221 Osage Avenue: that the city “overreacted” and bombed the house in an effort to “destroy” MOVE; and that MOVE “got what they deserve” (W. Goode, personal communication, Feb. 4, 2020). He also argued that the media promulgated two different narratives about what happened behind the burning home. Goode is overt in articulating his distrust of the media, describing the way he has handled talking to reporters throughout his career: “What did you and your editor decide you want this story to be about? Because I know how it works” (W. Goode, personal communication, Feb. 4, 2020). In this way, Goode also reveals the mechanism by which he may inadvertently miss an opportunity to help shape the very narratives he finds problematic. Like Michael Africa, Jr., Goode cites the media’s tendency to be

drawn toward action and drama as a reason for narrative insufficiency: “Not truthful, but dramatic” (W. Goode, personal communication, Feb. 4, 2020).

Goode and Washington share the belief that components of the narrative surrounding the MOVE bombing have been entirely omitted from the record, even if they disagree on what those components are. Goode argued that he has never been permitted to tell his story and that reporters aren’t interested in it. This is particularly jarring, given that he spoke of individual conversations with reporters, an opinion column he was invited to write at the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary and two different autobiographies. He argued that reporters hadn’t made an effort: “No one has ever come and talked to me” (W. Goode, personal communication, Feb. 4, 2020). It seems less that the former mayor has not been heard and more that perhaps he has not been interpreted or believed in ways with which he agrees. Washington conveys frustration with the omission of certain details, but not as they relate to his personal image. His disputes are thematic, rather than related to individual responsibility. He identifies gaps in coverage related to context and acknowledgement of racial bias that are discussed later in this work. Nonetheless, pinning down the ways in which individuals feel let down by the media in this narrative gives us insight to just how important these representations are.

And while two black men wrestled with the ramifications of the media getting the controlling narrative around the MOVE bombing wrong, two white men wondered aloud whether any narrative at all was really evident or relevant outside of Philadelphia. Kranz argued that young people neither understood nor cared about the event, perhaps given its complexity. He said he never heard about it anymore where he lived in New Jersey. Eichel, in ways detailed later in this chapter, argued that the event could only truly be understood by locals and that its strangeness made it unnecessary to a larger historical consciousness, insinuating that

extrapolating conclusions on a national level might somehow lead audiences to miss something crucial about the MOVE members. “Something that Philadelphians understood. These people were really difficult to deal with because they wanted everything on their own terms” (L. Eichel, personal communication, Feb. 3, 2020).

Whether or not one believes it is necessary to educate non-Philadelphians about the details of the MOVE bombing, every person interviewed agreed that people who didn’t possess any living memory of the event tended to know or understand very little of it. Litwin, who is also an adjunct instructor at Rowan University, noted that he often talks about the MOVE story with his undergraduate students, who are rarely aware of the incident before his lecture. He wondered if the story was too parochial to transcend the boundaries of the region, or if it was just too unbelievable. Kranz also indicated that he wasn’t sure a broad audience exists for the MOVE story. He had written his own personal account of the day in the immediate aftermath of the bombing, but never published it. In 2013, he said he decided to read, revise and self-publish the work. He said his goal was to honor his colleagues. “I really felt that was a story about Channel 10 and about this team” (T. Kranz, personal communication, Sept. 20, 2018). While not his stated goal, Kranz’s account makes another kind of claim about who this story is really about, centering journalists as star characters and witnesses in the story who deserve to be applauded for their contributions.

### **Media practices and critique**

All five of the reporters I interviewed spent time considering practices specific to their mediums, and the extent to which the media fulfilled its role in democratic society – even when those definitions varied. Media practices most frequently discussed included the role of the media and specific journalists; race in the newsroom and systemic suppression of stories; and the

tension between emotional involvement and humanity on the scene that day. Their critiques focused on reporters providing a lack of context in their coverage; on interventions that could have been made before the bombing; and the inadequacy of anniversary coverage.

Those interviewed took precise and broad views of the responsibilities borne by journalists. Some focused on their own individual job functions, while others spoke to the grander democratic ideals journalism is supposed to support. Moran, a former journalist who – like many of those interviewed – claimed his job was now more part of his identity than anything else, identified the role of journalists in untangling the MOVE story as one of interpretation. While he understood the commission’s charge as understanding what happened and how – “the corridor of vision was fairly constrained” (E. Moran, personal communication, Oct. 11, 2019), he said, the reporters’ jobs were broader. He understood their charge to include contextualization that was absent for the commission. He declined to characterize reporters’ efforts, perhaps as one of the few individuals who can directly attest to the difficulty in understanding and conveying the complicated story. “There were good reporters doing a hard job” (E. Moran, personal communication, Oct. 11, 2019).

Kranz explained his exact role as field producer as one that involved more pastoral care than other reporters may have been responsible for on May 13, 1985. “That really means being the person on scene who worries about everything” (T. Kranz, personal communication, Sept. 20, 2018). In his view, this included keeping his reporting crew safe while the crowd within which they were embedded grew increasingly unhappy with what they were witnessing. Tellingly, Kranz essentially divorced any relationship between police brutality and the MOVE incident in the manner in which he describes the crowd: “Some of them were chanting things that

had nothing to do with MOVE, per se. They were chanting about just, in general, police brutality” (T. Kranz, personal communication, Sept. 20, 2018).

Eichel – whose job was interrupted by a strike during the hearings – was not involved on the scene on May 13, 1985. He started many subsequent mornings on Osage Avenue, but his actual work was done from the newsroom, sifting through details that came in from other reporters and putting them together to craft a narrative. He described his role as being in charge of considering: “What’s happened today? How does it fit in with what happened yesterday and what might happen tomorrow” (L. Eichel, personal communication, Feb. 3, 2020). His work led the paper’s coverage daily – a responsibility he interpreted as giving readers a full sense of what had happened since they woke up.

Washington acknowledged the role journalists are meant to play in democratic society, but added that instead of being fed information, citizens should exert effort, too, to hold power to account. “We have to do a little better as citizens to fully understand the events that are shaping our lives – and particularly this event that has cost the city between \$60 and \$100 million dollars over its 30-some-year lifespan” (L. Washington, personal communication, May 29, 2019). This definition of the journalist’s role requires a relationship, and defines communication in flow rather than as unidirectional. Michael Africa, Jr., as discussed earlier in this chapter, articulated the media’s role only in terms of profit and “selling papers” (M. Africa, Jr., personal communication, Feb. 10, 2020).

Another practice with an unseen effect on the ways in which journalists may have rendered the MOVE story for audiences was directly financial. In addition to the strike that came amidst the hearings, Litwin also addressed the issues newsrooms confronted in terms of compensating journalists who remained on the job well beyond their shifts. Where at first he said

KYW was reluctant to assign him overtime, he was eventually called to the scene on Osage Avenue. But he also articulated a response to the newsroom later that demonstrates how some reporters' identities are also tied to sacrificing for the public good, and that journalism holds inherent value that renders remuneration unnecessary. "You get overtime for the first day. You get golden time for the next day. And I told my bosses, I didn't even care. I didn't – money wasn't on my mind. ... it was all, all hands on deck" (L. Litwin, personal communication, Oct. 31, 2018). Both Litwin and Washington spoke about racing to the site in 1985 to capture the story, as much as for themselves as for their employers.

Washington was one of four black men interviewed, but he was the solitary black journalist. His insights on the ways in which his voice was systematically marginalized by his employer, *The Daily News*, drew obvious conclusions as to the flawed nature of the paper's resulting news coverage. Washington described his work at outlets like *The Philadelphia Tribune* as being outside the traditional binary dynamics of two-sided storytelling. It was his existence as a "recognized commodity" and the total lack of racial diversity at other newsrooms that eventually caused *The Daily News* to recruit and hire him, he said (L. Washington, personal communication, May 22, 2019). When he arrived, he described the environment at *The Daily News* as one with so few reporters of color that he and another journalist formed the "Third World Caucus" to support the handful of black writers and one Puerto Rican. Beyond the lack of representation at the newspaper, Washington said some of his reporting was ignored when it wasn't being outright suppressed. He said his tenure at *The Daily News* was marked by editorial interference and changes that were impossible to combat without threatening his job security. "I had to shut up," he said (L. Washington, personal communication, May 22, 2019). On May 13, 1985, none of the reporting he phoned in from the scene all day was ever published. He

described an incident where he tried to convince an editor to allow him to run a story based on a reliable source's claim that he saw evidence that the police had shot MOVE people behind 6221 Osage Avenue. The editor told him they could not publish "mere speculation," but later published unsubstantiated claims by police about MOVE digging tunnels throughout the city (L. Washington, personal communication, May 22, 2019). The suppression of coverage was not limited to the MOVE story, Washington said. "There was so many instances of big things happening that the *News* didn't want to hear. And now I'm not telling you this from an academic point of view, or from a 'I heard it from somebody else from a reliable source.' It happened to me" (L. Washington, personal communication, May 22, 2019). Washington said his coverage being kept from publication led to further reinforcement of a false controlling narrative: one where police brutality was never connected to the MOVE experience, and which further installed the story as a historic aberration.

Professional journalistic practices also came into tension with the necessity to behave with basic humanity on May 13, 1985 in several interviews. Washington described sneaking onto Pine Street and becoming aware that some residents had chosen to secretly remain in their homes which were now engulfed in flames. "I faced this dilemma. You know, as a reporter, you're just supposed to watch stuff. You're not supposed to get involved. But how can I as a human not get involved?" (L. Washington, personal communication, May 22, 2019). In this way, he describes the strange disassociation journalists are taught to perform in the face of trauma. Litwin also described a moment where he and his reporting partner were confronted with a similar dilemma when a neighbor invited them into her home for some sustenance. When they tried to convince her that it was time to leave, she refused to do so because she didn't want to leave her home without her portrait of her husband in his police uniform. Litwin and his colleague leapt to her

sofa, took the portrait from the wall and carried it across the street. The neighbor gave them an apple and something to drink. Litwin said they did not have a chance to find her later, and he described his regret even as he was glad to have convinced the woman to leave with the portrait. That this event stands out to him more than 30 years later is another clear example of the ways in which humanity can be pitted against professionalism in the field for journalists in the middle of a crisis.

Washington's most striking critique relates to the journalists' capacity to contextualize a complicated narrative. In his own case, Washington said it took him 10 days to convince editors at *The Daily News* to let him write a story properly connecting what had happened in 1985 to the police violence that preceded it in 1978. "So much of the coverage is episodic" (L. Washington, personal communication, May 29, 2019). He said this has led to a situation where reporters and audiences alike know components of the MOVE bombing story but not its entirety. While – apart from his own experiences – he attributes these lapses as failures of omission rather than commission, Washington said it was reporters' decisions that revealed hidden structural biases. "It was not a conscious design." (L. Washington, personal communication, May 29, 2019). What it was, he said, was no one wanting to approach or understand MOVE, and a situation where the public was willing to write off police errors as aberrations while ignoring that there were true systemic problems related to police brutality. "So you get this kind of fragmented, decontextualized coverage" (L. Washington, personal communication, May 29, 2019). Michael Africa, Jr. had a similar view, especially on the journalists' failure to contextualize the story of the bombing at anniversaries. "They're telling people what happened 35 years ago ... the story hasn't changed much" (M. Africa, Jr., personal communication, Feb. 10, 2019).

In collateral tension with this concept of context is also a notion of objectivity that Litwin articulated several times. In this version of reporters' responsibilities, truth stands alone. He described a conversation he had with Ramona Africa at an anniversary event, where they talked about his work covering the bombing. "I said the facts were the truth. I said ... we only knew what we were told. That's what reporters do." Litwin also referred to this more traditional perspective on the role of a reporter, conceding that blame for the day's tragedy was ample "on both sides," later noting "There's two sides to every story" (L. Litwin, personal communication, Oct. 31, 2018). In this way, he not only reinforced the controlling narrative that pitted city authorities against MOVE, but ignored neighbors, other residents and a variety of other contextual factors.

Echoing themes described earlier in MOVE-related literature, multiple interviewees spent time musing about various interventions that might have been enacted to avoid tragedy. Among the things that were ignored, Washington pointed out one that the judicial system could have offered: had so many MOVE people not been convicted in 1978 – especially the women who were said to be in the basement with babies – perhaps things wouldn't have escalated in the same way in 1985. While Washington's interpretive take considers context itself a necessary intervention to humanizing the MOVE organization, he also contends that there was an incident that no journalistic intervention could have mitigated: that multiple individuals spent hours trying to reach Goode by phone on May 13, 1985, to no avail. "If Wilson had just got his ass on the phone, this thing could have been de-escalated" (L. Washington, personal communication, May 22, 2019). To some extent, identifying missed interventions involves assigning blame. To the extent that Goode himself is willing to parcel it out, he maintains that the only mistake he made was appointing Sambor to the post of police commissioner (W. Goode, personal communication,

Feb 4, 2019). Ultimately, Washington does not locate enough power in the hands of journalists to have changed the outcome of the tragedy. “The reality is, no reporting could have stopped it” (L. Washington, personal communication, May 22, 2019).

Through these articulations of individual journalists’ responsibilities as well as through the industry responsibilities borne by journalists, we can see the extent to which journalists are themselves central to the story of what happened that day, even if they don’t recognize it.

### **Narrative contours over time**

As the people I spoke with considered the contours of the MOVE narrative over nearly 35 years, several themes became clear. They included installing the story of the MOVE bombing into a sense of history – in Philadelphia and more broadly – connecting it to contemporary themes of social justice, and resolving the deep complexities and mystery associated with the story.

The extent to which the story of the MOVE bombing remains unknown as a result of its complexity is addressed later in dissertation. In the context of these interviews, multiple people remarked upon how little citizens truly understood about the organization. Their contentions are bolstered by news coverage that inconsistently applied various collective nouns to describe the organization, and where other details were not infrequently mistaken. To get a better sense of just how difficult the MOVE story is to explain and how deeply complex the organization itself is, consider Michael Africa, Jr.’s words: "It's quite possible that 75 percent of the members of the organization themselves don't know what MOVE is about" (M. Africa, Jr., personal communication, Feb. 10, 2019). Litwin conceded that he didn’t fully understand the group, and he didn’t recall where its name – occasionally mistaken for an acronym – had come from (L. Litwin, personal communication, Oct. 31, 2018). Kranz mused that pain made it too difficult for

people to want to understand the story (T. Kranz, personal communication, Sept. 20, 2018). Crucially, the context of when the narrative should begin and if it has a finite ending remains an issue on which no one can agree. What has been lost over time, Eichel and Washington agree, are subtle details that could help Philadelphians better understand what happened and why. Eichel said the result is disbelief that something so horrible could have ever happened: “The sort of nuances have gradually disappeared, and we’re kind of left with a hideous outcome. And the details of how we got there kind of over time don’t matter” (L. Eichel, personal communication, Feb. 3, 2020).

Perhaps so much complexity has contributed to a lack of consensus among journalists and others as to whether or how this event should be enshrined in history. Without doing so, Washington said audiences are more likely to see the MOVE story as a disconnected and random catastrophe rather than an important event on a long timeline of violence. “What happened with MOVE – the outrageous police brutality that was visited upon them – had been visiting them for decades” (L. Washington, personal communication, May 29, 2019). Given the economic rewards that historic preservation has provided Philadelphia, Washington said this is especially grievous. “Philadelphia prides itself on its history, but, you know, we’ve just not even dealt with this history” (L. Washington, personal communication, May 29, 2019). Eichel’s understanding of the event as an aberration allowed him to disconnect it from the long history of state-sponsored violence against Black people that Washington invoked. “I don’t see it as fitting in the broader historical context ... I just think it was a crazy, one-off situation” (L. Eichel, personal communication, Feb. 3, 2020). Eichel did think Philadelphians are missing one part of the historic puzzle when they consider MOVE. He talked about the extent to which the city had seen population depletion at the hands of white flight and manufacturing decline in the years leading

up to the MOVE bombing, and his immediate reaction in 1985, was that the event would stain “such a blot on the [Philadelphia’s] reputation [that] any chance the city had to recover [was] gone” (L. Eichel, personal communication, Feb. 3, 2020). This description centers the experience of white authority, and further frames the tragedy as something unusual rather than implicated at all in the very developments Eichel mourned.

Litwin and Washington both spoke to the perspectives a new generation of reporters were bringing to MOVE coverage. Litwin noted that it was harder for these journalists to report on a story of which they had no living memory. “One of the reasons it's different is that the people who are reporting on it now are doing the research. They didn't live it” (L. Litwin, personal communication, Oct. 31, 2018). This raises an interesting point as to what journalists might consider research and when they consider it as being necessary. However, his judgment of younger journalists wasn’t all laudatory. He also said when he and other retired journalists get together, they have often remarked on the insufficient job that younger reporters are doing explaining the MOVE story: “We call them the grandchildren,” he said (L. Litwin, personal communication, Oct. 31, 2018). Washington also spoke to a lack of depth that reporters have never been able to identify in themselves, whether they were generationally new to a story or merely new to a beat. “People just don’t know” (L. Washington, personal communication, May 29, 2019). His outlook on whether time or a new generation of journalists may help us better understand the factors that led to the bombing is bleak. “Have learned anything as a society? Absolutely not.” (L. Washington, personal communication, May 29, 2019).

Whether a new generation of reporters was responsible or not, Washington did see what he considered a positive sign in contemporary coverage: “I guess I could say the coverage of MOVE is mitigated somewhat, and it’s not as reflexively hostile. There’s an effort to try to

understand them” (L. Washington, personal communication, May 29, 2019). Both Washington and Litwin cited the confluence of the 2013 Black Lives Matter news narrative with the anniversary coverage in the same era in Philadelphia. Washington cited another recent change: “Now there's a different kind of sensibility in terms of systemic injustice ... The media is trying to be a little more sensitive in an institutional way” (L. Washington, personal communication, May 29, 2019). But where Washington saw opportunity in a new perspective, Goode saw only more forgetting and loss over time, as younger people relied on incorrect mediated sources to tell them what happened on May 13, 1985. Given Goode’s position that the MOVE narrative is inaccurate and – where his own story is concerned – insufficient, it is not surprising that he would find this problematic. “I think that there are more young people who ... now believe the narrative that the media has put forth, rather than the true narrative, because the only narrative they have is that” (W. Goode, personal communication, Feb. 4, 2020).

### **Enduring trauma**

It is clear that the MOVE bombing - an event that included the death of 11 people, five of whom were children, and the destruction of an entire neighborhood – left deep emotional scars on those who witnessed it or were close to it. To a person, the men I interviewed expressed their own trauma – defined in various ways – or the trauma they had witnessed others describe related to the MOVE bombing. More than anything, it is clear that the story contains significant vicarious and direct pain.

Litwin spoke openly of enduring pain and regret after receiving a tip that police were planning to drop a bomb on 6221 Osage: “We could have saved 11 lives” (L. Litwin, personal communication, Oct. 31, 2018). In this way, the reporter is also building an argument that relies on a particular understanding about journalism and its role in society. He believes that the simple

act of notifying the public of the plans for the bombing would have been powerful enough to activate forces to prevent it from happening altogether. “If we would have said it on air, I think the mayor would have backed down because then the word would have been out. And I have felt this for how many years out 34 years. 33 years” (L. Litwin, personal communication, Oct. 31, 2018). Even still, he said he could not blame a single individual for what happened because they did not have the sourcing sufficient to meet on-air specifications. Washington also spoke of having been tipped off to an impending explosion, but he denied that any information broadcast anywhere could have changed a plan he believed was clear from the morning the siege began. It is telling that Litwin, who believes in strong journalistic norms and enjoyed a career at a mainstream outlet believes journalists could have saved lives by bringing the truth to light, while Washington, who experienced years of racist story suppression, does not locate that level of power in his one-time profession.

The pain is also evident in the extent to which many individuals preferred not to revisit the story at all. Litwin, who frequently gathers with other retired journalists, said while he and others will reminisce at anniversaries, many other journalists don’t want to talk about it at all. He described their feelings being so strong and visceral that some of his journalist friends were surprised he would ever have spoken to Ramona Africa. Washington, too, knows some people who experience too much pain at the memory to willingly discuss it today. He described talking to those who experienced that day with cracking voices and slowed speech. “There are a number of people who just don’t want to talk about this” (L. Washington, personal communication, May 22, 2019). He described the bombing as a kind of ongoing trauma embodied by people 35 years later.

After asking Goode if he had experienced any of the vicarious trauma described by other interviewees, he immediately began talking about his electoral victories. More than the litany with which his interview began – where he described his version of events in the kind of autopiloted cadence that indicated he found the act of retelling it to be soothing – his pivot to winning a primary against Ed Rendell and a general election against Frank Rizzo hinted at suppressed trauma. Goode returned to his re-election when asked about what it was like to live with what he believes to be unfair judgment. “All those people voted for me twice. And re-elected me. ... So the majority of the people, I know, are on my side” (W. Goode, personal communication, Feb. 4, 2020). Telling his story – the very narrative he says was denied public airing – clearly brings him peace. In a circular kind of way, Goode reflects on how his life – approximately half of which has unfolded in the aftermath of MOVE – has been consistently devoted to good public works.

My life has been a consistent one, from the time I moved here in 1954 up until now ... I've only done positive work. I don't smoke, I don't drink. I don't use drugs. I've been married to the same woman for 59 years and six months. So I have three children, all of them adults - two grandchildren. And there's nothing about me that suggests that in my wildest imagination that I would do something like that. (W. Goode, personal communication, Feb. 4, 2020)

Today, he said, he is a blessed man who refuses to be judged by a single day in his life.

Washington was less open to this logic:

I do bristle at the defense of Wilson Goode's people who said, 'Well, OK, well, it's just one day and he made the mistake ... but it shouldn't follow him for the rest of his life. And I think about ... Pennsylvania had more juveniles serving life terms for crimes committed while juveniles. One mistake ... We hold some people accountable. (L. Washington, personal communication, May 29, 2019)

### **Telling the story with Jason Osder**

Jason Osder was an 11-year-old growing up in Delaware County, Pennsylvania on the clear and bright day that the 6200 blocks of Osage Avenue and Pine Street burned down. While I was growing up just a few miles away and was seven years younger at the time, I know I will have a lot to discuss with the “Let the Fire Burn” documentarian when we meet near his George Washington University office. Not only have we been animated by similar yearnings to better understand an inexplicable part of our region’s history, but his work intersects with many of the questions at the heart of this project.

The film professor now says he has a hard time separating his true childhood memories from those imposed on him by years of reviewing film footage and other media. What he is sure of is the extent to which the MOVE story had become part of his generational cohort by the time he went away for college, and the sincerity of his surprise when he discovered during his undergraduate years that no one else seemed to have memory of the strange event he was still thinking over. He eventually found filmmaking to be a way to “salve his personal need to make a social difference in the world” (J. Osder, personal communication, Feb. 6, 2020). In this way, it is clear that the act of storytelling can be a kind of unburdening as much as act of hope. Osder’s truth claim is simply that the MOVE bombing happened, whether other people know about it, understand it, or not.

He articulates his claim without making a single direct statement. His 95-minute documentary uses only archival footage to tell the story of the MOVE organization and the fire that eventually leveled their neighborhood. While Osder originally conducted interviews as he planned the documentary, like several journalists interviewed for this project, his work was shaped by an editor whose guidance took him in another direction. The result is a film that is intentionally episodic, and intentionally discomfiting. He says he wanted viewers to feel the

lack of certainty as a result of the film's form, and he hopes the sensation encourages them to work to better understand the story on their own.

We realized those hearings allowed us to functionally construct something, but never have to let the pressure off the viewer, and they will always be in a mode of, "Who do I believe?" "Who do I trust?" "How was this created?" (J. Osder, personal communication, Feb. 6 2020)

The form of his film is meant to leave viewers off kilter, and is specifically necessary to make the point Osder wants to drive home. He believes audiences will be able to find satisfaction in seeing "something difficult well-rendered" and that removing layers of mediation will force viewers to search out additional information as a bit of homework (J. Osder, personal communication, Feb. 6, 2020). He acknowledges that by leaving out traditional narration or a timeline situating the story in history – particularly related to racism in Philadelphia in 1985 and beyond – he is leaving out certain elements that some may feel should never be separated from the story. What is different talking to Osder about his narrative choices is that he acknowledges they are intentional, where the journalists whose words inform this work never acknowledge choices being made at all.

While his film takes a deliberately different approach to storytelling, Osder limits his criticism of the media to its structures instead of placing blame on individuals. Like Moran, he said the long history and complicated narrative make the MOVE story especially difficult to render within usual journalistic conventions: "I think the news failed ... in the way they consistently fail on things that don't neatly fit into their package" (J. Osder, personal communication, Feb. 6, 2020).

As others indicated in their interviews, Osder was worried that by the time his film was released in 2013, MOVE would be forgotten. He is relieved that "Let the Fire Burn" interrupted

the process of forgetting the event. “It can be interpreted. It will be remembered” (J. Osder, personal communication, Feb. 6, 2020). He is convinced that the group and May 13, 1985 are part of the firmament of history now, especially because his film regularly screens around the country.

Unlike journalists, Osder is explicit about his primary audience for the documentary: MOVE people. When Michael Africa, Jr. told him the film was the first time anyone had truly explained what happened to his family, Osder told him he was the person he made the film for. When his screenings permit discussion, Osder says MOVE members are frequently there. Osder said he was once regarded in the same generic mass of media that Michael Africa, Jr. referenced in his indictment of journalists. But he said MOVE now sees his film as useful to their organization because its objectivity, of all things – a concept Osder says definitively he does not believe in – helps spread their message to curious audiences. He says the fact that his film does not go easy on MOVE has helped give it legitimacy.

Osder, too, is interested in rendering the story of MOVE visible to more people. His work relied on the significant archive held at Temple University (discussed later in this dissertation), his experience with which helped him understand the “systemic violence” of bureaucracy (J. Osder, personal communication, Feb. 6, 2020). He describes accessing footage he assumed was in the public domain, only to learn that WHY Y held a copyright and finding himself in a legal quagmire where contracts required Temple’s archives to be both publicly accessible but also copyright protected. The flaw was not an example of individual menace, he says, but a systemic one.

It’s not quite a conspiracy ... everyone has their own little things to protect ... and none of them are, “We’re not gonna let this racist story out.” They’re all copyright or some other little protective thing, but the cumulative result is there’s a real struggle to get this racist story out (J. Osder, personal communication, Feb. 6, 2020)

Eventually, copyright claims were dropped after Birdie died and with help from the imprimatur of George Washington University, whom Osder credits for helping him to finalize the film's release. The structural violence Washington experienced at the hands of gatekeepers at *The Daily News* is not unrelated to the forces in place that nearly kept Osder's story from being released publicly. They are also not unrelated to the bureaucratic forces that would eventually enable a dishonest developer to ruin the neighborhood Philadelphia let burn.

Like many others who have participated in interviews for this project, Osder describes his work as a contribution that is part of what he hopes will be an ongoing and broad effort at helping more people understand what happened to MOVE. "I'm pleased someone else can pick up the baton," he said. (J. Osder, personal communication, Feb. 6, 2020)

### **Conclusion**

Several factors had a limiting effect on the scope of the interviews conducted for this chapter. In addition to time and space, they include the interruptions to in-person meetings of COVID-19 as well as previously discussed reluctance of some individuals to speak publicly about their part in the MOVE story. In future work, I hope to widen the narrative lens further, including conversations with other journalists and members of MOVE. Doing so will also, I expect, provide more sufficient opportunity to center women's voices into necessary analysis. That none of the women I approached to participate in this project accepted my invitation is a disappointment, and future work – by me and other scholars – should endeavor to include their voices in order to avoid repeating the very marginalization against which this work inveighs. Other threads that deserve pulling include an effort to better understand the ramifications of the

*Inquirer* strike during the MOVE hearings in 1985, which could directly tie business practices to journalistic outcomes.

Michael Africa, Jr. said, “Everyone wants to take a part of the story and tell it a certain way” (M. Africa, personal communication, 2.10.20). The varied perspectives rendered visible in each interview here underscore his contention. The newer and more interesting question becomes less which stories are told and by whom, but which stories are valued, have endured and been amplified, and why that has happened.

The MOVE story, whether because of its complexities, its mystery, or the sheer magnitude of its trauma, animates a very specific community. Whether journalists, city officials, or artists, particular topics carry consistent weight among a group of individuals Slaughter describes as MOVE “obsessives” (U. Slaughter, personal communication, May 13, 2020). A similar kind of conversational flow was consistent in every interview, demonstrating the extent to which MOVE exists as a true phenomenon. In every instance, including those where interviews had only been scheduled for 30 minutes or where the interviewee had proclaimed he was not sure what he would have to contribute to this project, the interview exceeded the length of time allotted. Each person on some level unburdened himself of his memories and many made direct reference to hoping they would be useful to this project. In every conversation, each interviewee asked with wonder how I can become interested in the topic and what my own opinions were on various developments. Nearly every interview included an interlude of “Have you spoken to so-and-so?” Or, “Have you come across this person?” It is as clear that an inner ring of individuals fascinated with MOVE exists as it is that they are largely excited and surprised to find that someone else has joined their ranks. Reporters and others on the scene in 1985 talk about memories that won’t fade and bring items miles away to interviews. Litwin said

he will never forget watching Birdie Africa ride away in an unmarked car and called himself a “pack rat” for unfolding old newspaper clippings during our interview. Moran calls these memory objects “little jewels” (E. Moran, personal communication, Oct. 11, 2019).

In the course of my interviews, two themes emerged clearly: memory as an item that can be passed along to a new party; and memory as a corrective to an injustice. And that injustice is compounded and made much worse when those who are suffering the injustice are the only ones to know it exists, just as Alexander theorized (2004). The story of MOVE is partially the story of what happens when the memory of an injustice is incomplete and when stories are left untold. When certain elements of the story are privileged over others – whether through malice or laziness or even unintentionally – it pushes the less-powerful voices to the margins. Definitionally, these are already the people who have been most harmed, and now their harm is multiplied because their perspective on the injustice – on their own life stories – is denied the broader audience conferred on perspectives belonging to more privileged or official sources with more news cachet.

## CHAPTER 5

### “WHO CAN BLAME US IF WE PRETEND TO FORGET THE UNFORGIVABLE?”

Because this research aims to understand the broad ways in which Philadelphians and those throughout the region understand this event, the sample relies heavily on news stories produced by the three major newspapers in the city: *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *The Daily News*, and *The Philadelphia Tribune*. In some ways, as Maurantonio (2014) argued, it was the newspapers on which most authority for describing and contextualizing the tragedy was conferred. Thus, their content is invaluable to our understanding of how the bombing has been characterized.

To compile a comprehensive sample of anniversary coverage, the following method was applied to an intensive online search. A ProQuest search specific to *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, the *Daily News* and *The Philadelphia Tribune* was conducted. Within each publication, articles were downloaded which included the words “MOVE” and “Osage” and “anniversary” and were published after May 13, 1985. Each article in the sample was reviewed to ensure the topic was either that of the event’s anniversary or of history of the city. To capture articles published as part of an anniversary package where the word “anniversary” might be individually absent, another search was then conducted using the search terms “MOVE” and “Osage,” while omitting “anniversary” for the periods of May 3 through May 20 in the years 1986 through 2019. In late spring 2020, two developments required another review of news coverage inclusive and not inclusive of the word “anniversary” between May 21, 2019 and July 5, 2020. On the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the bombing, a coalition of activists presented a call for a citywide apology related to the MOVE bombing to Mayor Jim Kenney and City Council. Two weeks later, after police killed an unarmed man named George Floyd in Minneapolis on May 25, thousands of

protests against police violence erupted across the country. In Philadelphia, tens of thousands took to the streets, and more than one protest specifically invoked police violence against the MOVE organization. While this dissertation was in process at the time, it was clear that all MOVE-related coverage from 2020 would be useful. The 2020 search yielded 14 additional stories from *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 10 stories in the *Daily News* and 8 stories in *The Philadelphia Tribune* (it should be noted that some stories did not appear on ProQuest because some were affiliated with WHYY and the Associated Press). A grand total of 355 texts were examined; 145 from *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 150 from the *Daily News*, and 60 from *The Philadelphia Tribune*.

Each article was read at least three times, with an eye toward themes within each piece, within each publication, and over time. There are indeed myriad other ways these texts could be considered and assessed, which will be addressed later in this chapter. For the purposes of this project, analysis was not focused on journalistic practice, but rather toward understanding the ways in which Philadelphia's collective memory was mediated by the press. Thus, the themes discussed in this chapter center on narrative arcs, language, and other phenomena attached to the bombing at the expense of categories like sourcing and framing. Themes that emerged were also rendered visible primarily when considered in context with the usual contours of anniversary journalism, and those of crisis reporting. It is also important to note that while the history of MOVE often intertwines with the story of Mumia Abu-Jamal, that narrative is itself sufficiently complicated that it could not be properly addressed within the bounds of this project. Thus, it remains an important, but unexplored theme in this work.

## Findings by Chronology

### *1986: The First Anniversary*

In May of 1986, one year after the fire, it was difficult to find the boundary between ongoing news coverage and what could be considered coverage specific to the anniversary. In addition to memorial coverage on the anniversary itself, news coverage in May 1986 primarily focused on District Attorney Ronald Castille's decision to empanel a grand jury and the peculiar case of Ernest Bostic. In a pattern that would repeat again, the anniversary itself included more than memorials and other civic remembrances, expanding to include other ongoing news. From a legal standpoint, the annual date also kept time for a dwindling statute of limitations during which prosecutors might bring charges related to the event. On May 8, 1986, the Philadelphia district attorney took to a television studio at WCAU to announce he would be empaneling a grand jury to investigate whether any city officials would face criminal charges for their roles in the siege the previous year. As an unsigned editorial in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* noted that anniversary, "Wish though the public might that Philadelphia's long nightmare would simply end, it cannot end until the legal machinery grinds out final justice under law" ("A Grand Jury Was Inevitable," 1986).

In addition to legal milestones coinciding with the anniversary date, there also continued to be ongoing news coverage of the city's response to the event. Such coverage included: "Bill Near for Probe of MOVE" (Loeb, 1986), a roundup of what taxpayers could expect costs related to the investigation to be; and "Delays in Osage Project Drive Up Cost of \$240,000" (Loeb, 1986), an explanation of new costs incurred by building delays at the Osage-Pine construction site. News coverage also touched on the city's ongoing fears about the remaining MOVE supporters living in the city.

In an unsigned *Daily News* editorial, (“Fire Prevention,” 1986) writers described inspectors from the city’s Licenses and Inspections office being turned away from the home where MOVE “members or sympathizers live with eight to 12 children” (“Fire Prevention,” 1986). Inspectors had been called to the site after reports of lumber and hammering at the West Philadelphia home. “Only a sociopath would want a repeat of the May 13 firestorm in the 6200 block of Osage Ave.,” writers warned (“Fire Prevention,” 1986). It is clear from this piece alone the extent to which MOVE continued to command the attention, fascination, and fear of the city, even after nearly all its members had died the previous spring. The same piece continued the theme of fear as the anniversary neared: “The city seems to have realized the danger of letting things slide. Let’s hope someone is working on a plan to prevent the fire this time if anyone goes crazy next Tuesday” (“Fire Prevention,” 1986). Four days later, a *Philadelphia Inquirer* story reported that officials from the state’s Probation and Parole Board toured the home to discover no evidence of fortification – a primary concern after the bunker fortification at 6221 Osage Avenue became the focal point of the 1985 event (Odom, 1986). The piece went on to mention that Licenses & Inspection had filed a court order to allow a formal inspection in the future. Here we see not only how different city administrative offices were viewing and handling the same issues surrounding MOVE, but how two different newspapers were handling them. The differences in coverage – ongoing news coverage versus an unsigned editorial – help make clear the lesson that the MOVE story has no clear, definitive narrative, and no settled coverage playbook, either.

Other news emerging in spring 1986 included administrative developments related to the mayor’s Special Investigation Commission and Pine Street neighbor Ernest Bostic. In May 1986, Bostic was ordered to stand trial for shooting his lawyer the previous month. According to

multiple stories published in May 1986, Bostic was said to have shot his lawyer David Novitsky after they discussed a settlement the city had offered in exchange for the loss of his belongings in the MOVE fire: “He allegedly balked when the attorney reminded him of a signed agreement that the law firm of Allen L. Rothenberg, Novitsky's employer, would receive one-third of any settlement as legal fees” (Taylor, 1986). Bostic was accused of returning and shooting Novitsky and subsequently fleeing to Detroit before being extradited back to Philadelphia on charges related to the shooting. It is arguable whether a non-fatal gunshot wound would have received so much coverage, had those involved not been related to the MOVE case. The nature of the ongoing coverage suggests a lingering interest and investment in stories about MOVE and those who lived near the site of the 1985 event.

When it came to covering the anniversary itself, stories sometimes followed the expected path of traditional coverage (Graber, 1980), but frequently veered into unusual coverage patterns. Conventionally, one would expect anniversary coverage of a fatal crisis to include a look at memorials held in the community, a look at where some of those affected found themselves a year later, and a sense of how the community was recovering, and what lessons had been learned (Graber, 1980). In May 1986, those memorials themselves became part of the news cycle. Not just because they were planned to mark a grim anniversary, but because controversy and heightened attention were paid to anyone or anything associated with MOVE people and the 1985 event. According to multiple news stories, a series of events were planned to mark the occasion, including: a candlelight vigil at a church in Cobbs Creek in memory of those who died; a community march and rally in Center City; and a march from 55<sup>th</sup> and Walnut Streets to 63<sup>rd</sup> Street and Osage Avenue, planned by Africa family relatives and including another rally and candle lighting (Caparella, 1986; Kaufman & Mezzacappa, 1986; Linn, 1986). But, while

MOVE supporters also hoped to stage a 24-hour vigil in West Philadelphia, Mayor Goode intervened to limit the vigil to two hours, in a decision that was later overturned by a federal judge (Wagenveld, Heidorn & Ruane, 1986). As a result, memorial coverage did more than recap remembrances of the day – it also focused on additional controversy and confusion.

What we were concerned about was something that would occur in a residential neighborhood that would be a 24-hour disruption of our lives, because we had heard there'd be audio-visual, amplified music probably for two hours, people giving speeches and camping out, and we didn't know what that could lead to. The houses are right on the park and there are a lot of children, particularly on one side of the park. And you never know what's going to happen. (Caparella, 1986).

In this way, these reports extended the narrative of fear and uncertainty that pervaded original coverage of the 1985 event through 1986. *Philadelphia Inquirer* reporters Marc Kaufman and Dale Mezzacappa (1986) inadvertently captured the entire mood of the 1986 memorial coverage in their description of MOVE supporters' anniversary march from Progress Plaza in North Philadelphia to JFK Plaza in Center City: "The march was met with curiosity, indifference and some hostility as it passed through Center City and then joined the lunchtime crowd at JFK Plaza" (Kaufman & Mezzacappa, 1986).

Where one might expect coverage framed as "where are they now" updates on individuals who were involved in the original crisis story from 1985 (Graber, 1980), the still-ongoing nature of the bombing and fire enforced a twist on that coverage, too. One story, focusing on the emotional state of Philadelphia Police officers "disturbed by the damage done to the image of the department by corruption trials, arrests of police for drug dealing and MOVE" (Locy, 1986) depicted police officers under unprecedented levels of stress on the job. One officer who was described as undergoing treatment after his involvement in the MOVE event mentions that he is grateful to be Puerto Rican because he believes it keeps strangers from looking at him

as “this white cop who didn't care that he torched up a bunch of houses” (Locy, 1986). There was no update on any of the police officers whose names became familiar to Philadelphians following the MOVE story. In an especially perverse update on those who were part of the 1985 story, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* ran a piece about how the remains of three of the MOVE children who had died were yet unclaimed at the medical examiner’s office (Ruane, 1986). The story outlined the difficulties the medical examiner first had in identifying the “meager remains” (Ruane, 1986), and described the trouble resulting from several of the next of kin (parents) being incarcerated at the time of the children’s deaths. In one jarring line, the acting city medical examiner claims the remains actually received *more* careful attention because the deceased were members of the Africa family: “Catherman said that had the children not been MOVE victims, they would have been cremated or buried in the City Cemetery in Northeast Philadelphia at city expense months ago” (Ruane, 1986).

In “When the Nightmare Began for Osage Area Residents” (Bond, 1986), resident Clifford Bond gave readers a look at where the near neighbors to the tragedy are a year later. He reminded readers that neighbors continued to suffer, despite Mayor Goode’s promises that they would be made whole. Referring to Ernest Bostic and his other neighbors, Bond wrote, “The victims of the Osage Avenue disaster have been living in a vicious cycle of problems for the last 12 months, so vicious that normal people are willing to commit violent acts to gain respect” (1986). He reminded Philadelphians of the extent to which May 1986 did not provide a tidy occasion for looking back on a chaotic – but closed – chapter in the city’s history. For the Osage and Pine neighbors, the crisis was still very much ongoing. He continued, pointing out that the disaster through which he and the other neighbors lived was not an act of nature, but an act

carried out by men who were still refusing to take responsibility for the results of their actions, thereby making it even more difficult for neighbors to accept the new reality of their lives.

We trusted the city administration to lead us in a positive direction and help us solve a difficult situation in a nonviolent manner. ... It was Goode's administrative decisions that cost us everything, most of all, it cost five children their lives (Bond, 1986)

Bond returned again and again to the twin indignities of witnessing the violence inflicted on the Africa family – themselves neighbors, and another family with children – and losing all of their possessions in the same fire. He noted that the event took a specific toll on neighbors' children, whose faith in the city was damaged and whose faith in adults and the law were shaken. He wrote, “The city government must reassure our children that their lives have value and that the Goode administration does care about them” (Bond, 1986). While it is perhaps not unusual for anniversary coverage to remind readers of tragedy's toll on children, Bond's article was unusual in other ways. In addition to being a remarkable testament to the extent to which the first anniversary provided anything but narrative repair, it was striking that Bond wrote directly for *The Philadelphia Inquirer* on the anniversary, rather than being interviewed for a piece written by one of the newspaper's many reporters covering MOVE. In this way, neighbors asserted their story and the emergence of a new narrative: neighbors as victims who had been denied a true voice before and after the fire.

A number of other first anniversary stories attempted to make sense of the May 13, 1985 event, with both attempts at the narrative repair Gans (1979) wrote about and installing the tragedy within the broader history of the city. In “After MOVE, Will Philadelphia Take the Larger View,” Henry Ruth (1986) asked why Philadelphians are “so patient with government failures” while listing civic embarrassments ranging from various construction delays to a dearth of historic leaders in the last 150 years and a only one local U.S. president. He indicted the city

as follows, to lay the groundwork for what he perceived as the city's collective shrug after the May 1985 tragedy:

Thus, to be a Philadelphian is to be xenophobic and parochial. We fear strangers and strange events. Our interests, opinions and views tend to be narrowly focused. We are interested in our lives and our neighborhoods and we ask no larger views from our politicians (Ruth, 1986)

Ruth argued that the city's stubborn fidelity to its separately identified neighborhoods helped Philadelphians cling to their differences to the extent that it kindled xenophobia and parochialism. When combined with lethargy and cynicism, he argued, tragedy was inevitable. Ruth's column was an early attempt at fitting the tragedy into the arguably abnormal contours of the city's history. Doing so provided a strange sort of normalization for the 1985 tragedy, even as Ruth noted how unusual the episode was:

The clash of MOVE and the bureaucracy, untouched by larger, societal values and principles, might indeed have produced a historically based result. Until our whole becomes more than the sum and jumble of our parts, perhaps so shall it always be. (Ruth, 1986)

Other stories also tried to make sense of the May 1985 tragedy, summarizing events to find meaning. In his remarkable "The Legacy of MOVE," Larry Eichel (1986) recounted the moments between police putting up barricades on Mother's Day 1985 and the present day, when those barriers remained as part of an active construction site (1986). Eichel used the barriers as a narrative device to convey the extent to which the tragedy remained unresolved, writing: "They serve as a reminder of how much damage was done, of how hard it has been to repair and of how much is beyond repair." He summarized the events of a year in a litany that offered no resolution:

May 13, 1985. The warning at dawn. Fifteen seconds of silence. The gun battle, the water, the assault, the siege. A long afternoon of waiting. The bomb, the fire, the escape,

the rescue. The firestorm. The explanations, the resignations, the questions. The commission, the dramatic hearings, the report. The ongoing criminal investigation by the U.S. Justice Department. The trial of Ramona Africa. The unresolved civil suits in state and federal court. The promised but still unrealized investigations by the state Senate and the Congress.

The continuing uncertainty for political leaders, the unending trauma for bewildered survivors. The remaining MOVE members, still ensconced in a West Philadelphia rowhouse, still resisting city authority. And last week, District Attorney Ronald D. Castille and his grand jury. A story without end (Eichel, 1986)

Eichel wrote that the event has become more than history; it has become part of the city's identity to the same extent as the Liberty Bell and Rocky Balboa: "They have become part of what Philadelphia means to the world outside" (1986). And yet, after passage upon passage describing political failure, construction delays and injustice, Eichel concluded that the city will be just fine. After all, he wrote, Dallas overcame its status as the site where President John F. Kennedy was assassinated and San Francisco has overcome the "stigma" of being cult leader Jim Jones's birthplace (1986). Such comparisons themselves form an ongoing theme that would repeat through the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Sedimented into Eichel's piece were examples of the ways in which history and journalism often intertwine. Not only was he contributing to a draft of history with his declarations of timeline, but he addressed the notion of the city's history directly several times. In one reference, he cited the United Press International daily almanac, where the Philadelphia tragedy was included in the May 13 entry alongside other events including the birth of Stevie Wonder and English colonists landing and founding Jamestown, Virginia (1986). But, in an example of what frequently happens in breaking crisis news coverage (Graber, 1980), Eichel noted that the entry itself is incorrect:

In 1985, to end a 24-hour siege, a Philadelphia police helicopter bombed the fortified house of the radical back-to-nature MOVE organization, killing seven adults and four

children. The ensuing fire destroyed 53 homes. (In fact, six adults and five children died May 13, and 61 homes were destroyed) (Eichel 1986)

A search of the still-active feature on the United Press International website for the Monday, May 13, 2019 entry revealed the event is still listed along with the Jamestown anniversary and Stevie Wonder's birth, reading: "In 1985, a Philadelphia police helicopter bombed the fortified house of a radical organization, MOVE, to end a 24-hour siege. Eleven people died and the ensuing fire destroyed 53 homes" (UPI, 2020).

*The Philadelphia Tribune*, the oldest continuously published African American newspaper in the country, also devoted summary coverage to the first anniversary of the bombing. As part of a special report, Irv Randolph (1986) ran through "that fateful weekend," from even before Mother's Day through the failure of the original police plan and leading to the death of 11 people and destruction of the neighborhood. He quoted neighbors in one of the several press conferences leading up to the eventual siege, warning that there would eventually be "blood on the street" if neighbors continued to be ignored (Randolph, 1986). In "The Long Road Back," Kendall Wilson (1986) detailed the community's struggles since the tragedy, but focused on the rebuilding process and praised the business, community and religious leaders who tried to right a political travesty. Wilson (1986) concluded: "That jury is still out, one year after May 13." Other attributes specific to *Tribune* coverage are detailed later in this chapter.

In "Who Will Answer for MOVE Mistakes," (Rubenstein, 1986) and "Who Will Lead the City's Healing" (Nichols, et al, 1986), *Philadelphia Inquirer* writers used the anniversary to lay bare the questions that remained for the city a year after the tragedy, exploring the findings of the MOVE commission, the mayor's political future, and the soul of the city itself. Rubenstein (1986) described five ways in which the city's government failed on May 13, 1985, comparing

the results to terrorist acts “we associate with car bombers and people who machine-gun airline terminals.” He accused Mayor Goode of playing to white crowds and fellow African Americans differently, calling the practice “hogwash” (Rubinstein, 1986). He also tied the bombing and siege overtly to racism, joining the commission in declaring that such a tragedy could never have happened in a white community, and calling for a reckoning for the so-called Big Four – Brooks, Sambor, Richmond and Goode (Rubinstein, 1986). He concluded with a question that remains unanswered nearly 35 years later:

What is it about MOVE that could excite anger, fear and implacability to such a degree in men who portray themselves as church-going, God-fearing family men, that they could sponsor the murder of five children and the wanton destruction of a neighborhood? (Rubinstein, 1986)

Nichols and the rest of the editorial board (1986) directly responded to the issue of racism, connecting the 1985 bombing to 1978 police brutality against MOVE under the direction of Mayor Frank Rizzo and invoking racial unrest in Watts and Detroit as points of comparison. “What seemed to be a city transcending race – electing a black mayor ... – has become in 1986 a city confronted by the emptiness of its self-congratulation” (Nichols, et al, 1986). The board joined Nichols in condemning city government for neglecting to tend to the concerns of Osage neighbors, and accusing officials of allowing a wound to “fester” (Nichols, et al, 1986) before pointing out the ways in which the city couldn’t heal. The editorial reminded readers that six months after the MOVE tragedy, a white mob gathered outside a different Southwest Philadelphia rowhome to intimidate a black couple who had moved in, and connected that incident to another in 1981 where racial tensions were high: the death of Police Officer Daniel Faulkner. Many of the same leaders of the city’s response to MOVE in 1985 were in other positions of power in 1981, and Nichols et al (1986) wondered aloud if they were incapable of

preventing this tragedy, “Who will lead Philadelphia from its despair?” The editorial concluded that the city’s questions remained unanswered, even a year after the bombing. The final line was an affirmation that fear and uncertainty would still reign, and a reference to the many voices that were already being pushed to the margins in this narrative:

It is voices not yet heard from - the voices of coming campaigns and in sworn testimony and in Philadelphia's proud and frightened neighborhoods - that also will determine whether this city grows and prospers; whether it can learn to live with itself (Nichols, et al, 1986)

In 1986, the narrative repair Gans (1979) argued journalists strive for at moments of anniversary coverage was in its nascent stages. Reporters were just beginning to pull at threads of resolution. In “Osage Neighborhood is Nearly Rebuilt, City Says” (Loeb, 1986), literal rebuilding served as a tidy metaphor for the neighborhood’s – and by extension, the city’s – rebirth. As outlined in the story, the mayor cited a construction milestone coinciding with the first anniversary as a “time of healing and renewal” (Loeb, 1986). The story did remark upon the spotted history of the construction project – including delays, funding disputes, cost overruns – but ultimately sourced developers and an attorney with quotes about how well everything is going.

Journalists can also convey narrative resolution by offering readers a look at lessons learned during a tragedy (Gans, 1979). In 1986, these stories were also in early stages, and reporters largely ceded the ground for meaning-making to those who were directly involved in or affected by the tragedy on May 13, 1985. In *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Editorial Page editor Edwin Guthman (1986) offered the pages of his section to city leaders whose perspectives, he said, were vital to the region’s understanding of how to move forward:

The city's handling of the MOVE crisis is a model of what to avoid. We need to remember its lessons and take them to heart as Philadelphia struggles to recover and regain the momentum that dissolved in flames a year ago. (Guthman, 1986)

Contributors to *The Inquirer's* editorial section that week included chair of what was then called the Afro-American Studies Department at Temple University; neighbor and president of the United Survivors of the Cobbs Creek Disaster Area Clifford Bond; *Inquirer* editorial writer Rick Nichols; author Jonathan Rubenstein, who had written a study of his 1970s experiences within the Philadelphia Police Department; and MOVE commissioner Henry Ruth. It is impossible not to notice that *The Inquirer* did not represent the perspective of any women in such an important endeavor, which was clearly devised with an eye toward how history might remember the incident.

*The Daily News's* Debbie Price sought to enumerate lessons learned by speaking with representatives of each group she identified as having been part of the day or its aftermath, including police officers; Fire Commissioner Richmond (represented in the piece by his attorney); Africa family member Louise James and the only child to survive the blaze, Birdie Africa (represented in the piece by his attorney); neighbor and priest, Father Charles Diamond; city officials and business leaders; and finally, even a journalist. She gave the important last word to Father Diamond, who summed up feedback throughout the story by offering that while the problems leading to the disaster were clear, the solutions were hazier: "A lot will depend upon whether the people in charge learn from their mistakes and make things happen. But if you are waiting for a spontaneous revolution, nothing will happen" (Price, 1986).

Amidst this, Mayor Goode also announced that the city would be holding an exercise simulating a disaster involving mass casualties to occur on the day after the first MOVE anniversary. *The Daily News's* Howard Schneider (1986) reported on the story, with this

understatement: “Goode said that after the smoke cleared on Osage Avenue, it became clear the city needed a better system for managing crises.”

Re-establishing authority figures as being in control is another important component of narrative repair in which journalists take part (Gans, 1979). In *The Daily News*’s “Post-Seige Mentality: How MOVE Changed Us” (Price, 1986), the reporter immediately established that while neighbors and the Africa family have suffered, the Philadelphia Police Department suffered equally: “Perhaps no group – with the exception of the displaced residents and the families of the dead – has been as affected by the May 13 confrontation as has the Philadelphia Police Department.” In this way, she established sympathy for the police even before she moved on to anonymously quote officers – a practice usually reserved for whistleblowers and those whose accounts might put them otherwise in danger (Boeyink, 2009) – about their sincere trauma (Price, 1986).

The first anniversary coverage of the 1985 MOVE disaster mixed reflections on lessons learned and first-person perspectives from sources ranging from city officials to neighbors with pieces meant to explain the past – if not the context and the details, at least the chronology. Coverage was mixed with ongoing news about the tragedy’s legal and political fallout as well as emerging news about the neighbors’ struggle to recover. It is clear at this stage of anniversary coverage that the narrative has hardly been settled in a way where reporters were able to offer catharsis, a sense of restored faith in authority, or general civic repair. This stands in stark contrast to what we might normally expect a year after a tragedy (Gans, 1979). In this way, the complexities are rendered clear and visible, and we can begin to understand why this narrative has defied thorough and consistent public understanding for so long. It would take many years to begin to unwind the nature of what happened on Osage Avenue in May 1985.

*1990: The Fifth Anniversary*

As with the nature of the coverage surrounding the first anniversary, the coverage in 1990 was also aligned with timing of the judicial system. Many of the pieces published around the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the MOVE bombing were tied to the statute of limitations governing charges related to the event. Those stories that were not tied to news of public investigations tended to focus on updating readers as to the lives of those included in the original stories and finding lessons from the tragedy.

All three of Philadelphia's primary newspapers covered Senator Arlen Specter's call for the Department of Justice to delve into the 1985 case. In the intervening years, both FBI and grand jury investigations had yielded no charges (Palley, 1990). Specter, who joined MOVE Commissioners William H. Brown 3d and Charles Bowser and neighbors whose lives had been upended by the bombing, submitted new evidence in support of the reopening with days remaining before the statute of limitations was set to expire (Palley, 1990). The requests, the delegation's trip to the Department of Justice in Washington, D.C., and the subsequent announcement that new charges would not likely be forthcoming comprised 10 of 1990's total 20 pieces (Eichel, 1990; Eichel & Odom, 1990; Lounsberry & Cohn, 1990; Moore, 1990; Odom, 1990; Palley, 1990; St. Hill, 1990; Stuart, 1990; Taylor 1990; Unsigned Editorial, 1990). Those pieces relied on neighbors and community activists to stand in for reporters who could hardly believe five years had passed without an indictment. In one *Daily News* story, 6200 Osage block captain Gerald Renfrow is quoted saying "those who interpret our laws in the nation's capital do not have our interests in mind" (Stuart, 1990). It is also worth noting that while coverage in the first anniversary praised District Attorney Ron Castille for announcing his own investigation into

the matter, in 1988 he decided not to bring charges against anyone for the 1985 event (St. Hill, 1990).

In addition to the official delegation that visited Washington, D.C. to request the re-opened investigation, there were other calls at home in Philadelphia. Upon his release from jail in 1990, Alfonso Africa held a press conference to announce a two-day public inquiry to be held at North Philadelphia's Church of the Advocate into the 1985 MOVE bombing as well as the preceding 1978 shootout between the group and police (Taylor, 1990). Mayor Goode, who by 1990 was in his second term, also spoke publicly about his desire for an inquest into the 1978 altercation between MOVE and police. He told *The Philadelphia Inquirer* his interest was part of his own efforts to make sense of the event: "Goode said his suggestion comes out of the need for a 'cleansing spirit at this time' and his continuing personal efforts to grapple with the 1985 MOVE tragedy" (Odom, 1990).

Mayor Goode was among just a few to claim in 1990 that the city had marked positive growth since the 1985 MOVE bombing. In Odom's (1990) piece, he reflected: "The lessons of Osage Avenue will be learned and learned well." He also said the lessons resulted in a police department with different leadership and a new culture of partnership with the community (Odom, 1990). James S. White, the city's managing director after Brooks, also identified lessons he learned in a *Philadelphia Inquirer* piece by Eichel and Odom (1990). He told them he has been meeting monthly and sometimes weekly with MOVE members since just after May 13, 1985, and he learned how important it is to get past the discomfort and remain accessible to constituents. An unsigned editorial in the *Daily News* (1990) simultaneously argued that a lack of justice was clear from a lack of prosecutions in the case: "It makes you wonder whether we've learned anything from this sordid, sorry chapter in Philadelphia history."

At the fifth anniversary, reporters and sources alike wanted to find lessons from the tragedy, even when those lessons were hard to find or articulate and were unevenly distributed. Political figures and other authorities were moving into silver-lining mode, declaring the ways in which the event changed them. The police department was declared remade and the mayor claimed to have rededicated his life to helping people. Even while these claims were made, the individuals who were at the peripheries of power – neighbors, primarily, and Africa family members – made plain that they could yet move on from reacting to the 1985 events into meaning-making.

The fifth anniversary also provided occasion for journalists to revisit some of the primary survivors of and leaders related to the 1985 tragedy. In one *Daily News* story, Costantinou (1990) profiled Officer James Berghaier. Lauded as a hero by the MOVE Commission for singlehandedly saving the child Birdie Africa from the flames, by 1990, Berghaier was working as a janitor (Costantinou, 1990). Costantinou wrote: “The inferno at Osage Avenue led to his own private hell. In saving the boy, he says, he doomed himself” (Costantinou, 1990). In 1990, he was described as a suicidal chain smoker who suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder and lost his wife and family as well as his sense of identity. Costantinou (1990) made it clear that neither the narrative nor Berghaier’s memory of the traumatic incident have been repaired: “His last words to [Birdie Africa] were: ‘Take care, son. It’s all over.’ If only Berghaier could now convince himself.”

*Daily News* reporter Linda Wright Moore (1990) interviewed a poet whose annual tradition included composing a poem for each passing anniversary. Her writing described his belief that the fifth anniversary represented an even greater need for public outcry against injustice as the appeals to the Department of Justice were denied: “I wanted to be in closer touch

with the reality of this. It is a test of my dedication and sincerity,' he says. 'I had to do more than write a poem this time' (Moore, 1990).

Other pieces outlined by-then-annual events designed to prevent the 1985 event from being forgotten. A citizens' group called the "Lessons from the MOVE Tragedy Committee" convened its regular anniversary gathering, "Let Us Remember, Lest We Forget" (Anonymous Tribune, 1990). In a piece outlining another regular anniversary event held by the American Friends Service Committee, reporter Jerry Byrd (1990) noted that gathered leaders the previous night had vowed to continue to fight for justice for survivors – a clear indication that there was no sign of it by 1990.

In *The Philadelphia Inquirer's* "MOVE: Five Years of Frustration," Eichel and Odom (1990) wrote a series of where-are-they-now vignettes, where they detailed the current lives of many familiar names from 1985. They included: Ramona Africa, who remained in prison after refusing to disaffiliate from those involved with MOVE; Birdie Africa, whose father revealed that Michael Ward was diagnosed as learning disabled; Mayor Goode, who was serving his second term as mayor; Leo Brooks, who resigned from his post as managing director and retired with whereabouts unknown; Gregore Sambor, who retired from the police department to suburban Philadelphia and enjoyed national renown in police circles; and William Richmond, who worked as a consultant and had written a book that was rejected by five publishers.

In most instances where journalists or those they were quoting had opportunity to reflect on lessons learned or conclusions drawn, they expressed some measure of doubt. In spring of 1990, the landscape included a federal decision against the pursuit of new charges, Ramona Africa's continued imprisonment, and a bill to taxpayers at \$25 million and rising as settlements to survivors loomed (Eichel & Odom, 1990). Eichel and Odom (1990) concluded that after five

years, it was hard to find resolution: "It has ended with nearly as many questions remaining unanswered as there were the day after the catastrophe." Neighbor and block captain Gerald Renfrow described his life five years later to *Daily News* journalist Joanne Sills (1990), recounting stories of disaster tourists who drove by and yelled at neighbors, whom they blame for initiating the 1985 incident. Police continued to barricade the block around the anniversary annually, he said, but protesters arrived anyway (Sills, 1990).

One glaring element that prevented journalists – and others – from finding resolution in fifth-year anniversary coverage was the state of the rebuilt homes in the Osage neighborhood themselves. Eichel and Odom (1990) described the current scene such that it could be used as a metaphor for the entire saga: things may have looked resolved on the surface, but problems were looming.

The street is clean. The houses look modern and comfortable. Life goes on. But the residents say that the appearance is not much more than that, an appearance, a facade. They say the handsome cedar siding on the outside of their homes has started to split and pull away, letting moisture seep inside when it rains. (Eichel & Odom, 1990)

While families had been permitted to move back into the rebuilt houses throughout the neighborhood, the house at 6221 Osage Avenue was still occupied by police five years later (Miller, 1990). In an *Inquirer* piece, Bill Maher (1990) outlined the police department's feeling that their presence in the home helped residents feel safe while also providing a city site from which to coordinate the ongoing repairs in the neighborhood. It also prevented MOVE from somehow reoccupying the home, which the city claimed ownership of in 1985 over the owner's – Louise James, whose son was killed in the fire – objections (Miller, 1990).

All the unresolved energy and all the unanswered questions depicted by the media in 1990 demonstrated something important: the fire may have been extinguished in 1985, but the

crisis and the trauma were ongoing. While parts of the city had the luxury of moving on through forgetting, the MOVE saga was still actively raging for others. As Gerald Renfrow told Eichel and Odom (1990): "It has never stopped for us."

*1995: The 10th Anniversary*

By 1995, the statute of limitations on most charges related to the 1985 bombing had lapsed, leaving tenth anniversary coverage to focus on fewer continuing news stories, as well as themes of resolution and blame, continuing construction woes, and revisiting those who were part of the original stories. It was only at the tenth year where coverage began to reveal similarities to the kinds of anniversary coverage scholars have identified as typical (Graber, 1980).

By 1995, the primary active litigation remaining from the bombing belonged to survivor Ramona Africa and Louise James. Africa claimed Mayor Goode and others had violated her Constitutional rights, and the Third Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the mayor and his aides were immune from those claims without issuing a ruling on whether they had violated her rights according to Pennsylvania law (McCoy, 1995b). As soon as federal judges set a trial date for April 1, 1995, journalists pointed out that findings could likely coincide with the anniversary (McCoy, 1995c).

As sources did at the five-year anniversary, speakers who commemorated the tenth anniversary and sources who spoke to reporters pointed out that surface-level observations were deceiving. Reverend Audrey Bronson told gatherers at a memorial that rebuilt homes were already showing their age.

To the casual observer and passer-by, all may seem to be business as usual. But if you look closely, cracks are appearing in the walls of those homes. The blood is crying out from the ground of Osage Avenue, saying that the cracks in these walls are symbolic of the cracks in our justice system (Bittan, 1995)

As Lucinda Fleeson (1995) pointed out in a *Philadelphia Inquirer* piece, " ... the attractive facade [of the rebuilt homes] is an illusion." Neighbors described to Fleeson (1995) the toilet and roof repairs they were forced to handle on their own. A *Daily News* piece also contributed to the sense that the neighborhood repair was a facade, describing incidents where - despite children at play and flowers in gardens - unknown actors drove down the 6200 block of Osage Avenue shouting "Murderers" (Russ, 1995). While journalists may have been stymied from writing definitive tick-tocks on what exactly happened on May 13, 1985, they could write through the entire construction history of the 6200 block of Osage Avenue, as Fleeson (1995) did.

Ongoing construction issues also contributed to a sense – still growing in 1995 – that the MOVE incident didn't end in 1985. Nine years after moving back in, families reported leaky roofs, unusable bathrooms and faulty outdoor drains (Sataline, 1995). In a remarkable example of flippancy, *Daily News* reporter Marianne Costantinou (1995) began a piece about homes on Osage Avenue cracking with a line that directly referenced the MOVE organization's famous slogan: "The houses on Osage Avenue may be on the move." Costantinou (1995) used a nearly identical lead later the same year when it was affirmed that homes were sinking: "The MOVE houses on Osage Avenue are on the move." What the problems with the rebuilt homes did provide reporters with was perhaps a stand-in for what they could not or did not identify in 1985: easily identifiable villains and sympathetic victims. By 1995, the developer responsible for building the new homes had already been imprisoned, and city administrators at the Redevelopment Authority and City Hall emerged as foils for neighbors whose lives had not been made whole by the city after 10 years of disruption (Gelles, 1995). Block captain and outspoken Osage resident Gerald Renfrow described the situation to the *Inquirer*: "I guess we don't really

count as members of the city of Philadelphia ... It's a terrible way to treat an area that's been devastated by such a terrible catastrophe in the first place." In an unsigned editorial in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, a journalist demanded financial compensation for neighbors, declaring that the only way the city could move forward. "They must be made whole before the city can truly begin to put this horror behind it. Philadelphia owes them, and itself, that much" (Unsigned Philadelphia Inquirer Editorial, 1995b). An unsigned editorial in *The Daily News* from the same period draws similar conclusions: "If we finally stabilize the traumatized Osage-Pine neighborhood, perhaps the 20th anniversary of the disaster will be less troubling than the 10th" (Unsigned Philadelphia Daily News Editorial, 1995). It's impossible to know whether reporters knowingly seized on this familiar he-said/she-said frame (Entman, 1993), but it is indisputable that the pity and sympathy for the Osage Avenue neighbors was much more straightforward for them to cover, in addition to moving the focus of the narrative away from resolving unanswered questions about what happened in 1985 and who was to blame. In this way, we can see journalists moving closer to identifying a path toward narrative repair.

As in previous anniversary coverage, reporters turned to individuals who had leading roles in the 1985 events as a way of marking time and providing an additional avenue for looking back in time. Consuewella Africa made an interesting subject, given that she was in jail on charges related to the 1978 Powelton incident when the fire claimed 11 of her family members, including two daughters (Russ, 1995). Her profile served as a narrative way into what many view as the precipitating incident in 1978. It took 10 years for Philadelphia Police Lt. Frank Powell, who dropped the improvised explosive on the roof of 6221 Osage Avenue, to be quoted in anniversary coverage related to the bombing. Even as he wrestled with unresolved anger toward city administrators and sadness about the deaths, he told a reporter the one thing he has never

experienced is guilt (Conroy, 1995). Mayor Goode expressed a similar reluctance to accept blame in a Daily News story, declaring "I think that people who see my totality as a person see this as one tragic day in my life" (Jones, 1995). The piece described the work the by-then-former mayor was doing throughout the city. Goode concluded his remarks with "I'm sorry I'm not somewhere in a room with the doors closed and my lights out, crying ... Enough lives were lost on May 13" (Jones, 1995). At the same time, MOVE members were also profiled using a "where are they now" frame (Entman, 1993). The piece highlighted their separation from the community, pointing out how strange they were, even as had adopted common contemporary habits like owning a washing machine and eating Tastykake Krimpets (McCoy, 1995).

Unlike neighbors, politicians and other authorities, the living MOVE members in 1995 were described without reference to their ability to move on. McCoy (1995) described them as "stuck in an earlier time," while he quoted a playwright calling them "relics." In this way, McCoy discursively removed the Africas from the contemporary story of the 1985 incident, dismissing their complaints as "energies fixated on long unresolved grievances" (1995) which, while technically referencing the 1978 Powelton shootout, made McCoy sound a lot like he is writing off 11 deaths from 1985. Meanwhile, the idea that the tragedy was still unfolding continued to echo through anniversary coverage. One journalist described it: "Ten years, and MOVE remains a presence. On Osage Avenue and beyond. The tragedy continues to suck money from the city treasury. And it remains a quiet factor in city politics, in the city psyche itself," (Sokolove, 1995). Sokolove (1995) also updated the still-unfinished bill to taxpayers at \$40 million and growing.

Despite many unresolved elements, tenth-anniversary coverage also took a turn toward introspection. *The Philadelphia Tribune* was the only newspaper to directly question the public

memory and understanding of what happened on Osage Avenue. A reporter noted that the MOVE organization had begun to promote its own " ... side of the story – a story the group says has been twisted to favor the city" (McCollum, 1995). In another *Tribune* story, a reporter quoted a visitor to the city talking about how she's never understood why the bombing happened (Dabney, 1995). Dabney (1995) wrote, "It is a question which still haunts Philadelphia today." Where in 1990 and 1986, multiple pieces asked open-ended questions about blame, healing and the future, pieces in 1995 were quicker to make declarations. An unsigned *Inquirer* editorial, drawing comparisons discussed later in this chapter, assigned blame equally to Mayor Goode and to MOVE (Unsigned *Inquirer* Editorial, 1995b). The writer made direct appraisals of MOVE members: "In 1978, perhaps, MOVE could have claimed victim status - but by 1985 it had become the neighborhood bully" (Unsigned *Inquirer* Editorial, 1995b). It is worth asking what it was about the passage of time that made writers more comfortable making straightforward judgments they had been reluctant to make in earlier years.

In all, the coverage at the 10-year mark began to conform to certain norms of anniversary coverage, including elevating individuals to character archetypes (Bird & Dardenne, 1997) and making attempts at narrative repair and resolution (Gans, 1979). But more often, the coverage from 1995 demonstrated the extent to which the city was still grappling with the events from 1985. Not only as news continued to break – via legal proceedings and related to the construction on Osage Avenue, but because neighbors and others throughout the city continued to declare directly that they were not ready to move on, even as they hoped for resolution by the next bold-face anniversary.

*2005: The 20th Anniversary*

Coverage of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary was remarkable in a few ways. While breaking news stories were on the wane compared to past anniversaries, journalists focused on the 1985 event as history, rather than as a continuing news story. Only nine stories exist in the 2005 sample, and most made clear that journalists were striving to make sure readers and residents knew the MOVE bombing is squarely in the past.

In April 2005, residents of the Osage Avenue neighborhood who refused the city's \$150,000-per-blighted-home buyout offer won a judgment against the city for a total of \$12.83 million (approximately \$530,000 each), and on the 20th anniversary of the bombing, the city appealed the verdict. An *Inquirer* story quoted attorney Adrian J. Moody remarking on the extent to which ongoing litigation was a barrier to catharsis for the community: "The city needs to bring some closure to this" (Twyman, 2005). Another contemporaneous *Inquirer* piece explained the situation neighbors on the 6200 blocks of Osage Avenue and Pine Street found themselves in: "1985 is always near and the future uncertain" (Slobodzian, 2005).

By the twentieth anniversary, concern was beginning to show that Philadelphians might forget or otherwise misremember the tragic events from 1985. In one memorial march captured in an *Inquirer* story, Michael Africa, Jr. said "People will say lots of nasty and negative things about MOVE, but we are still here and we're not going to stop fighting" (Fifield, 2005). A neighbor responded to the march by saying "You people have to move on, move forward. ... What have you done for this community?" (Fifield, 2005). The tension of continuing to treat the story of the 1985 bombing as ongoing news was in conflict with the desire of some to experience closure.

One way in which journalists did try to bridge the divide between providing closure and continuing to tell an unfinished story was the "where are they now" piece. One *Daily News* story took exactly 794 words to summarize "virtually all the central figures in the MOVE misadventure" (Daughen, 2005). At least in this journalist's mind, those individuals were: "Wilson Goode, Leo Brooks, Gregore Sambor, William Richmod, Frank Powell, Ramona Africa, Michael Ward, Ernest Edwards, and 'Osage Neighbors.'" His characterization of these figures as being central excluded plenty of other prominent individuals, and notably included just one woman. It was similarly notable for neglecting to include any members of the investigating commission, the district attorney, and additional MOVE members including Louise Sims - who actually owned 6221 Osage Avenue. Further, by compressing the dozens of individuals who lost their homes and belongings in the fire and whose conflict with the city continues into "Osage Neighbors," the piece discursively pushed their voices all the way to the margins of this narrative. None of those who are profiled in the short capsules included in Daughen's (2005) piece were afforded quotes, but each was characterized as being otherwise back to some kind of normal. Mayor Goode had earned his doctorate of ministry; Brooks had a successful family and has now retired; Sambor retired amidst the tragedy; Richmond wrote a book and consulted for law firms; Powell was still a lieutenant working in the Northeast; Ramona was living "in a house on a quiet street"; Ward had two children and was a sergeant who just finished his second tour in the U.S. Army; even Edwards - jailed for stealing public funds instead of properly rebuilding the homes on Osage - was said to be at home in New Jersey, overseeing a new development (Daughen, 2005).

The year 2005 also marked another occasion for Philadelphia's artists to find a way into commemorating the 1985 tragedy. An *Inquirer* story outlined a community theater casting call for a production based on the events surrounding the MOVE bombing (Klein, 2005).

While ongoing litigation and the condemnation of the rebuilt homes in the Osage neighborhood might have prevented the kinds of narrative repair and resolution journalists often strive for in anniversary coverage (Gans, 1979), the tone of other stories focused on different kinds of catharsis for the city. One *Inquirer* piece declared that the intervening 20 years had provided time for growth and improvement in the city's police department (Ditzen, 2005). Ditzen (2005) credited reforms to lessons learned in the aftermath of the 1985 bombing. He wrote:

There have been huge advances in the use of computers, new policies on the use of force and weapons, aggressive efforts to weed out corruption in the ranks, increased scrutiny of police conduct, and a dramatic rise in the number of women and minorities in command positions and in the ranks. (Ditzen, 2005)

Ditzen (2005) also cited revisions to the department's policy on handling hostage-takers and those who had barricaded themselves. According to then-Commissioner Sylvester Johnson, new protocols required specifically trained crisis negotiators to be on the scene, and force would be a last resort, in contrast to the situation in 1985, where no hostage negotiators were dispatched (Ditzen, 2005). The piece struck a strange, celebratory tone, chronicling various reforms put in place with the string of commissioners who followed Gregore Sambor. Ditzen (2005) also noted demographic changes in a department which, in 1985, had no women ranked higher than lieutenant and where there were only two black captains. By 2005, there was a black commissioner with a white woman for first deputy and a black woman in another deputy position (Ditzen, 2005). He noted that many more minorities had been hired and referred to a new integrity and accountability officer who was hired in an auditor role (Ditzen, 2005). In all, the tone of the

piece is jubilant. It had the effect of closing the book on any judgments against police for their handling of the 1985 tragedy.

Natalie Pompilio (2005) wrote another police-focused story for *The Inquirer*, recounting the events of the 1985 bombing through the perspectives of three police officers (Berghaier, Mellor and Tursi) stationed behind the burning home at 6221 Osage Avenue in 1985, juxtaposing their recollections with updates on where they were 20 years later. The piece had the effect of reinstalling official sources – police officers – as the arbiters on what happened in 1985, thereby repairing the narrative that was broken when police and other authorities had been made to seem out of control if not outright culpable for the tragedy. Additionally, Pompilio's (2005) piece offered catharsis to all three officers, despite what they all admit had been 20 difficult years, including suicide attempts, alcoholism and divorce: "What hasn't changed is their friendship, which started long before MOVE." There was no mention of Berghaier's being forced out of the department by racist fellow officers after saving Birdie Africa from the burning home. The officers were portrayed to be back in control of their lives, the MOVE tragedy squarely behind them: "All three officers emerged from MOVE with their reputations as good cops - cops' cops - shaken but intact" (Pompilio, 2005).

Another *Inquirer* piece was remarkable for its similar celebratory tone: "But somehow, somehow, the MOVE disaster did not become the city's defining moment" one journalist wrote (Eichel, 2005). In his carefully clipped retelling, the haze of 20 years of questions and mystery blurred into declarative sentences that elided the pain described by everyone involved in the 1985 story. The highly contested period in the siege where members of the Africa family were said to have run back into the burning home was quickly summarized: "Some turned back, although police denied firing at them" (Eichel, 2005). Eichel's (2005) retelling smoothed the

edges and made an attempt, consciously or not, at compressing two decades of history into a few column inches of shorthand. Eichel (2005) cited Temple University social administration Professor Thad Mathis, who took the shorthand analogy further: "It's a metaphor people use at times in connection with whatever seems worst about Philadelphia or its leadership, as in, 'What do you expect from the city that dropped a bomb on a neighborhood?'" Eichel (2005) wrote past the pain on open display because he was installing the event firmly in the city's history, where affect is less important: "But the pain recurs less frequently now; the metaphor is invoked less often. One reason, hindsight tells us, is that the debacle represented the end of an era, at least in some ways." Eichel (2005) went on to cite the same newly reformed police department Ditzen (2005) lauded, reminding readers that May 13, 1985 also marked the date the city broke ground on its first skyscraper. It is clear that Eichel (2005) was mourning a story that was delayed at the expense of MOVE coverage, where Philadelphia moved into a modern era. In this way, he discursively pushed aside the legacy of the bombing to talk about the advances the city had made. He supported his argument by referencing a new Philadelphia history book which "disposed of the MOVE debacle in 78 words," noting that the tragedy had been "dwarfed" by other national crises including Waco, the Oklahoma City bombing and September 11 terrorist attacks (Eichel, 2005). The piece had the strange effect of seeming to force closure on an event that several other stories in this year make plain was not yet over.

The same theme of catharsis palpable in Eichel's (2005) declaration that the MOVE era was over and Ditzen's (2005) characterization of the police department as "reformed" was evident in *The Daily News* as well. In the blithely headlined "We've MOVEd On," one journalist separated the general state of the city in 1985 from the tragedy discursively:

The MOVE fire came during a time when Philadelphia's future did not look bright. The city was hemorrhaging jobs and population, its downtown was bleak and empty, its

crumbling neighborhoods were coming under the stranglehold of crime and drugs.  
(Flander, 2005)

He did not allow for a relationship between the state of the city and the fire where one could have led to the other. Instead, he held the city and its identity as wholly separate from the tragedy. "The MOVE disaster is not only removed in time, but is part of the city's older, outdated image of itself" (Flander, 2005). Further, he wrote that a database search of other newspapers around the country has hardly any mentions of the tragedy at all, leading him to conclude that "... people around the country don't seem to connect MOVE to the city anymore" (Flander, 2005). Not only did this argument put only newspapers at the exact center of a nation's consciousness and the public's memory, it ignored any role journalists might play in crafting that very understanding. He continued, asking whether the tragedy was ever "the big deal around the country that we always thought it was," supported by city tourism officials who argued that the city had since become an attractive destination (Flander, 2005). Nevermind that the bombing had made national print and broadcast news and international reporters had flocked to the hearings held by the Special Investigation Commission. Flander was making a hopeful argument: as long as the city kept improving - by capitalistic measures, anyway - the MOVE tragedy would recede further into memory, and the city would be forced to somehow move on.

Coverage in 2005 was strangely celebratory, with journalists insisting the bombing was firmly – and safely – in the past, while the city continued its ascent as a tourism hotspot with a reformed police department. Central figures from the original story were also depicted in ways meant to leave readers with a sense that they have found catharsis, even if neighbors were not. Even the outspoken activist and survivor, Ramona Africa, was said to be living on a “quiet” street (Daughen, 2005). In these ways, we see journalists were coalescing around traditional norms of crisis reporting, even when doing so required some mental gymnastics.

*2010: The 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary*

During the first week of May, 2010, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and *The Philadelphia Daily News* collaborated to publish a multimedia package commemorating the 25th anniversary of the MOVE bombing for Philly.com. The microsite, which won the papers national recognition, has since been removed – a fate unsurprising given that the newspapers, which had only been held jointly since 2006, have since undergone several new iterations of ownership and online configurations. While a search in May 2020 revealed the original URL (philly.com/move) was no longer functional, and a subsequent search using the Internet archive revealed that the contents of that URL had since been modified from 25th to 30th anniversary coverage. In this way, it was clear that the city’s two largest newspapers (now under singular ownership) had established a way to extend the life of its MOVE anniversary coverage playbook. The description of the microsite that follows was originally part of a separate, unpublished research project.

The package employed one landing page with a photo-based, Flash-enabled main graphic depicting various multimedia elements, including text, photos and video. Above the graphic was *The Inquirer’s* new content, and below the graphic is the new content from *The Daily News*. The graphic itself contained the original archival coverage from both newspapers, a dynamic timeline, a photo archive and a video cache.

Archival coverage was grouped under an “Archive” tag within the main graphic. From there, content was divided by newspaper. Each paper showcased a single story for each day between May 13, 1985 and May 21, 1985. Clicking on the featured story took the reader to a Philly.com splash page designed to look like the rest of the contemporary site's pages. From

there, readers could select the featured story or one of a series of related pieces that had also been pulled from the archives and posted from 1985.

A timeline was also part of the main graphic. As readers clicked each timestamp, new text appeared beneath the strip, explaining events beginning at 3 a.m. on Monday, May 13, 1985 ending with Monday, May 14, 1985 at 11:41 p.m. when the fire was finally declared under control. Rather than making this text out to look like contemporary philly.com stories, these elements used an older, typewriter-print font that designed to evoke the age of the story in spite of the contemporary technology being used.

Photos were divided by chronology into several groups: Before 1978; 1979-1984; Confrontation; Aftermath; and Osage Today. Clicking each group revealed a series of photos that appeared within the main graphic. Captions and attribution (to a photographer and a newspaper) appeared above each photo, using the same old-fashioned font displayed in the timeline. The same photos appeared not only in the linked archival coverage but also as rotating exhibits in the video coverage as well.

The video section included four separate short films, titled “Move,” “Osage,” “Confrontation,” and “After the Fire.” Each video was just a few minutes long and combined archival photos with interviews held with a combination of witnesses, authorities and even other print journalists. Archival news footage and MOVE Commission hearings were included in short snippets. None of the videos included any direct attribution.

There were several items of note regarding the form of this package. In light of the aforementioned ownership changes and the then-recent coupling of the two former rival newspapers at the time of its publication, an entirely new study could be built around the production alone. The fact that the 2010 site was seemingly repurposed in 2015 supports

Zelizer's (2008) notion that some forms of journalism are driven by "mnemonic forms that exist because they can easily produce more newswork" (p. 83). In other words, when journalists create an anniversary package, half the work has already been done for them, and the other half they can use again later. Additionally, it makes sense to readers of each individual newspaper that there would sometimes be double the coverage on some of the same elements from the story. There is an *Inquirer* (Rosenberg, 2010) story profiling Mayor Goode and a *Daily News* (Farr, 2010) one. This makes sense when one is reading pieces separately 11 years later, but makes less sense when both stories appear in as part of the same online package. The 2010 microsite offered a way into understanding some of the effects of media contraction then gripping the news industry as well as a look at how journalists in one city used evolving multimedia platforms to tell an old story.

The content of the site, combined with pieces retrieved from *The Philadelphia Tribune* and others collected in the 2010 archive dwarf the volume of total pieces printed by all three outlets in 2005, 2000 and 1995. Only 1986 stands out for having more coverage, though at least a handful of those stories related to ongoing news rather than strict anniversary coverage. Pieces focused again on the state of the Osage neighborhood, the extent to which lessons had been learned, and catching up with the bold-faced names from the 1986 tragedy.

For *The Inquirer*, Gregory (2010) connected the past and the present where they meet: on the still blighted 6200 block of Osage Avenue. The years of trouble still made fertile ground for anniversary coverage across all three outlets. For *The Philadelphia Tribune*, Burgess (2010) quoted then-press secretary to Mayor Michael Nutter, Doug Oliver, who explained the extent to which the construction woes in the neighborhood had continued through multiple lawsuits and multiple mayoral administrations:

There have been lawsuits, there have been rulings, and there have been hearings, all of which have concluded now. So by the time this administration came in, periods had been put at the end of sentences. And decisions have been made by judges and agreements have been signed by parties representing the residences, as well as parties representing the city. From our perspective the legal component of the MOVE has concluded. (Burgess, 2010)

By 2010, eight families had still refrained from taking buyouts offered by the city in exchange for their blighted properties. All neighbors – including those who accepted money from the city – remained pure and sympathetic victims according to the anniversary coverage. One neighbor told Burgess (2010), “For the legacy that the city has left to us, I don't think it's too much to ask of them - just do the right thing and fix the homes and the hearts of the people of this block. They owe that to us.” Gregory's (2010) piece also noted the terrible conditions to which neighbors have been exposed, but it simultaneously worked to reproduce social order (Ben-Aaron, 2005), making note that despite years of trouble and poor construction, neighbors were making the best of it. “I ain't going to let it eat me up,” one said (Gregory, 2010). Another aspect of Alexander's (2004) cultural trauma theory that applies directly to the MOVE tragedy is his notion of the relationship between collectively experienced trauma and assigning responsibility. He writes, “By denying the reality of others' suffering, people not only diffuse their own responsibility for the suffering but often project the responsibility for their suffering on these others” (Alexander, 2004, p. 1). This is especially interesting to consider given the extent to which MOVE members were (and were not) portrayed as victims in nearly all the anniversary coverage of the bombing. One could easily conclude that the media – and perhaps the city itself – was much more comfortable witnessing and acknowledging other Pine and Osage neighbors' suffering. Refusing to do the same for the MOVE members certainly made it possible for some

citizens – media, officials, law enforcement – to project the responsibility for that suffering back onto those very MOVE members, thereby retraumatizing them.

Installing journalists' first-person accounts within the context of anniversary coverage is another media ritual (Durham, 2008) given prominent attention in 2010. Clark DeLeon (2010) recounted "his" city murdering five children, juxtaposing personal memories of the tragedy and its coverage with current musings on the state of a new generation's forgetfulness. In his self-described "shorthand," DeLeon (2010) reminded readers of what happened, re-narrating but offering no additional context:

A bunch of crazy people had taken five children hostage. (None of the six MOVE adults were the biological parents of the children inside 6221 Osage Ave.)

The police tried freeing the children in the morning by firing 10,000 bullets into the house that held them. Then, during a 10-hour siege, firemen poured millions of gallons of water on the house that held the children. Then police dropped a bomb that set the house that held the children on fire. Then firemen stood by for a full hour and allowed the fire to burn down the house that held the children - and, incidentally, the homes of 60 neighbors. (DeLeon, 2010)

Despite 25 years passing, no one – even reporters who were on the scene and have spent decades covering the story – could convey the story of what happened at 6221 Osage Avenue with clarity or confidence without sounding flip. The details were almost too outrageous to be real. DeLeon's (2010) conclusion makes an attempt to explain why the story has eluded context for so long: "Who can blame us if we pretend to forget the unforgivable?" Kitty Caparella (2010) was on the scene in Powelton Village when Philadelphia Police Officer James Ramp was killed in a 1978 confrontation between police and MOVE. For *The Daily News*, she wrote a first-person account of her own history with MOVE, starting with the 1978 shootout, stopping short of the 1985 tragedy. Her piece added some needed context to the 1985 event by connecting it to the past – 1978 as well as the 1981 murder of Officer Daniel Faulkner by supposed MOVE

sympathizer Mumia Abu-Jamal – and to the present, when Mumia was still a “cause celebre” (Caparella, 2010). The only effect of her personal memories, though, was to demonstrate the fear incited by the MOVE members. She described a courtroom altercation with the group where Abu-Jamal instructed MOVE members to attack her: “They surrounded me and began pummeling me with their hands and grabbing at my notebook. I tried to shield my face and moved toward the wall, holding onto the notebook” (Caparella, 2010). Another instance in which journalists themselves became the story appeared in the *Daily News*, when Gambacorda (2010a) profiled two journalists on the scene in 1985. Joe O’Dowd and Tommy Gibbons had been tipped off about the May 13 siege in advance, and their retelling did not offer additional insight to any of the major questions that remain unsolved in 2010 (what happened behind the house, for instance). The piece shifted abruptly from O’Dowd quoting a police officer telling him “The only thing I can tell you, is duck at 5:20” (Gambacorda, 2010a) to an update that both were by then retired. Their memories were made to stand in for moral judgment and meaning-making, which both remained absent 25 years later.

As in previous coverage, journalists in 2010 revisited many of the individuals whose names dominated the news in 1985. “Where are they now” profiles produced by *The Inquirer* and *Daily News* offered multiple takes on some figures, rehashing old news rather than offering much in terms of updates or context. Two nearly identical profiles on Gregore Sambor offered no information newer than 1985 (Gambacorda, 2010b & Langland, 2010a). Two very similar vignettes profiling City Managing Director Leo Brooks were also published, quoting only his 1985 testimony (Langland, 2010b & Laker, 2010). Fire Commissioner William Richmond did consent to speak with Christine Olley at *The Daily News* for his brief profile (2010). Perhaps

Richmond was more willing to speak about the events considering that he was spared most of the blame that Brooks and Sambor were dealt by the MOVE Commission (1986).

One more ritual remained intact from 1985 to 2010: naming and honoring a mythical hero in the face of danger. Officer James Berghaier had emerged as a hero in 1985, risking his life to save 13-year-old Birdie Africa. His actions were the sole moment of humanity cited in the MOVE Commission's report (MOVE Commission, 1986). In his "where are they now" treatment in 2010, Berghaier recounted the story of scooping the child up from the burning-hot asphalt while bullets are flying (Pompilio, 2010). His tale was also recounted firsthand in one of the videos embedded on the site. By pointing out Officer Berghaier's actions, reporters actually reinforced more than one media ritual: Not only did they advocate healing by promoting a positive story depicting heroism (Berkowitz, 2010); the hero happened to be an agent of the government. In a narrative without consensus as to whether the government or their agents acted properly (or legally) or not, Berghaier became the perfect hero and the bridge between journalists and the government, ultimately offering resolution and repair to the narrative.

*The Daily News* (Farr, 2010) and *Inquirer* (Rosenberg, 2010) both included contemporary interviews with Wilson Goode. Both pieces allowed Goode to refer to the MOVE incident as a part of his past, fulfilling Edy's (1999) argument about the media needing to install danger "safely" in the past as a way of punctuating the end of a particularly controversial or painful period. By establishing that the crisis happened 25 years ago and insinuating that much time has passed since then, the pieces worked together to propagate the idea that the "danger" posed by the MOVE organization had passed. By publishing concurrent interviews with Goode pointing out how far he had come since that day, the newspapers were also - willingly or unwittingly - reunifying with the government. This is further evidence of Durham's (2007) observation that

media ritual in a time of crisis tends toward creating a narrative of unity, often with the government.

Craig McCoy was the only other *Inquirer* staffer to add context to the 25-year-old story while simultaneously connecting it to the present. Also focusing on the neglected homes left behind on Osage Avenue, his piece was an overt attempt at sense-making: “For others, the disaster has faded from memory - and perhaps even from meaning” (2010). In addition to opening with the current state of the Cobbs Creek neighborhood, McCoy (2010) reviewed the history of the MOVE group and its various confrontations with police and the city. He also interviewed Ramona Africa and described MOVE's goals, which remained freeing their incarcerated people. In this way, McCoy (2010) was one of the few journalists who actually did go back in time to re-narrate the piece. Finally, McCoy made a point that reverberated throughout the entire anniversary package: “In the Philadelphia region, the fading imprint of the disaster seems to reflect MOVE’s peculiar nature and Philadelphia’s response to it” (2010). As Maurantonio (2008) argued, absent a cohesive narrative regarding the events of May 13, 1985, how could a city possibly understand how to remember such an event?

Journalists in 2010 were seeking lessons in patterns that redound through anniversary coverage. An unsigned *Inquirer* editorial (2010) made an attempt at enumerating the lessons learned by a city otherwise on the edge of forgetting. The writer urged city officials to never again ignore neighborhood complaints, and to pursue negotiation before resorting to violence: "For most who were around back then, the MOVE incident is but a hazy memory. But the tragedy's lessons we must not forget" (Unsigned *Inquirer* Editorial, 2010). Warner (2010) pointed out the myriad ways in which the city was still at risk for some of the same mistakes that led to the 1985 tragedy. Among other things, he noted the city never created the public safety

board nor the mayoral liaison to the Police Department - both recommended by the Special Investigation Commission.

In 2010, the only outlet to broach the topic of race is *The Philadelphia Tribune*. Washington (2010) re-narrated the history between the MOVE organization and the city, the climax of which came when Ramona Africa fled her burning home to meet arrest and criminal charges. He summarized the situation:

The fact that the justice system (civil and criminal) could only bring its weight down on the neck of a MOVE member symbolizes the inconvenient truth at the core of the series of confrontations between MOVE and city officials that have cost Philly taxpayers more than \$50 million: double standards of justice. (Washington, 2010)

Later in the same piece, Washington (2010) connected this anniversary not merely to the bombing in 1985, but to 1838, when Philadelphians burned the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society to the ground, and to 1921, when “Black Wall Street” in Tulsa was burned after racists dropped dynamite from the sky. Most instances where journalists drew comparisons among tragedies (discussed later in this chapter) link the MOVE bombing to wars or to domestic terrorism. This practice had the effect of installing the MOVE bombing as either the inevitable sort of violence one expects in a war zone, or as a complete aberration – a historic non-sequitur, random and unlikely to be repeated. By extending the timeline, Washington (2010) used the past to develop a narrative where white people and government agents have long been hostile to black people. In this telling, the bombing may be understood less as strange and inexplicable and more as another tick on a long and racist timeline. The *Tribune* was also the only outlet to cover the suit Ramona Africa’s lawyers filed to force the district attorney to review new claims as part of its anniversary coverage (Ott, 2010; Jones, 2010).

As Maurantonio (2008) noted, the original coverage of the MOVE bombing included a comprehensive conversation about race. The Special Investigation Commission also included an entire special note just to be sure its opinions on the racial element in the tragedy were heard. Yet, in the 2010 anniversary package produced by *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and *Daily News*, there is no overt mention of any racial element playing a part in the bombing. It is hard to imagine that this was not a purposeful decision to either skirt the issue entirely or signal to careful readers that the issue was never important in the first place.

At the first anniversary, *Inquirer* writer Larry Eichel (1986) suggested that the MOVE bombing “is and will be the backdrop against which the drama of public life in Philadelphia is played out,” and it is easy to imagine why this seemed inevitable at the time. And in many ways, it is clear that the city and its journalists still struggle with the legacy of the MOVE disaster. But the tenor of coverage in 2010 suggested something else: that there was either an active effort to leave the tragedy safely untouched in the past, or that the public was so confused by the entire affair that it has become too difficult to remember. Coverage from this period conferred catharsis on individuals: Mayor Goode called the day an aberration (Rosenberg, 2010) and police officers and firefighters were retired with families in the suburbs. But the city as a whole was denied resolution. Mysteries linger and neighbors – even if they individually may choose not to let their situations “eat them up” (Gregory, 2010) – remain un-whole. The legacy of MOVE after 25 years was one that could not be understood without accounting for all the individual stories that made up the patchwork of the tragedy itself and the city at large.

#### *2015: The 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary*

In 2015, tensions over police shootings of black men were in the national spotlight and Black Lives Matter was in its early stages of public advocacy. Demonstrations in Ferguson and

Baltimore were still fresh in the public memory as Philadelphia approached the MOVE anniversary. And while coverage that year continued to indicate a lack of narrative repair, some journalists were beginning to revive the race discussion, reactivating a memory that had in some ways been discarded after the original coverage in 1985. The *Tribune*, which deployed scant 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary coverage compared with the *Daily News* and *The Inquirer*, devoted special coverage to the 30<sup>th</sup>, giving the year's narrative a much more critical tone.

Cornel West was on hand for the 30th anniversary march in West Philadelphia. Burney (2015) quoted him addressing the crowd of nearly 400, making a direct connection between the tragedy in 1985 and the contemporary moment: "We live in the moment of Ferguson and Baltimore ... Any time you drop bombs on innocent folks, it's a crime against humanity." The crowd described was larger than any others mentioned in anniversary coverage. One woman was quoted having brought two busloads of supporters from New York City (Burney, 2015). It was unclear whether the national narrative about police violence had stirred interest anew, or if reporters themselves were simply more interested in covering the annual march because of the national moment, but the elements were impossible to ignore. In an *Inquirer* story about a panel discussion marking the anniversary at the Community College of Philadelphia, another journalist gave voice to the emerging social justice frame, quoting a writer who spoke to the crowd:

Randi Boyette noted that outrage over police violence has gotten louder and more visible since the killings of black men by police in Ferguson, Mo., and Staten Island, N.Y. As a result, she said, "Am I a little bit more hopeful? I am." (Moran, 2015)

In the *Tribune*'s coverage of the same event, instructor Kathleen Smith was quoted connecting the MOVE bombing to the past in a parallel argument to past *Tribune* coverage (Washington, 2010): "Knowing our history, including controversial, messy history, is the duty of every citizen ... By looking at MOVE, the confrontations and the history, we do come away with a deeper

understanding of our society and ourselves” (Bailey, 2015a).

A separate 2015 panel discussion sponsored by the Philadelphia Association of Black Journalists asked reporters to relive their memories of the 1985 event. *The Philadelphia Tribune* was the only outlet sampled to dispatch a reporter, which was surprising, given the attention paid to journalists’ first-person accounts in the 2010 collaboration between *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and the *Philadelphia Daily News*. Moderator Cherri Gregg was quoted, beginning the event by framing it squarely within the narrative of the moment: "Especially in the wake of Ferguson and Baltimore, and the distrust of police and elected officials, we should use this as an opportunity to learn," (Bailey, 2015c). To an extent not previously included in anniversary coverage, reporters were also described as being openly emotional. KYW-TV reporter Walt Hunter offers the closest thing to catharsis for the media:

I think we need to be advocates for those whose views may not be represented by mainstream media ... In situations like those in the MOVE confrontation, when we don't immediately understand a group or anybody, we tend to marginalize them and just assume that they will somehow go away. We have two obligations, one is work harder if we have trouble understanding. (Bailey, 2015c)

Rather than parrot the lessons their sources have learned in the intervening years, the event also gave journalists the opportunity to what they had learned directly with the audience. Journalist and Professor Linn Washington summarized lessons that remained to be learned: “On May 13, 1985, Black lives did not matter and Black lives of children incinerated in a fire did not matter. It didn't matter then and it doesn't matter in 2015, and that's the problem in America” (Bailey, 2015c).

Notably absent from coverage on the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary was the standard “where are they now” profiles. In a *Tribune* interview with Mayor Goode, he took time to review and re-narrate the history of the event, but he also looked forward, remarking that contemporary

communication devices would render the outcomes of 1985 less likely in 2015 (Bailey, 2015b). The piece also included a twist on the typical rundown of where individuals involved in the original story are currently. Instead, Bailey (2015b) interviewed then-Mayor Michael Nutter and then-District Attorney Seth Williams to capture their memories of the event. An update on the ways in which the MOVE organization has evolved into a 21<sup>st</sup> century organization, lecturing at colleges and maintaining a website, provided additional contrast to past coverage as well as a sense of narrative repair and restoration of order (Miller, 2015). A *Tribune* interview with Ramona Africa took a similar path, allowing her to re-narrate the history of the group and ending with her focus on the future: “From even 1978 to today, our focus is on the release of our innocent family members who have been in jail for 37 years” (Williams, 2015).

In 2015, the houses on the 6200 blocks of Osage Avenue and Pine Street were still blighted. The *Tribune* visited the remaining neighbors, who described a situation that had only gotten worse with time (Bailey, 2015d). *The Inquirer*, too, discovered neighbors were not holding out hope for their neighborhood to be restored: “They fear death will come before a resolution” (Gelb, 2015). In contrast to previous coverage of the blighted neighborhood, where neighbors demand retribution from the city, residents in 2015 were resigned to their conditions.

#### *2020: The 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary*

As Pennebaker and Banasik have written (1997), groups tend to look back each 20 to 30 years to understand and reconstruct a past trauma. Their analysis of remembrances of the Spanish civil war acknowledged that such a timeframe gave groups the temporal distance necessary to soothe pain to an extent that memory work could be done, resources gathered, and sociopolitical repression to have subsided. This is useful in considering the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and some extraordinary developments that happened simultaneously.

Perhaps the best evidence of a path forward – for scholars and for Philadelphians – emerged at the moment of the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the bombing, when work that had been quietly ongoing among Ulysses Slaughter and his partner, Dr. Pauline Thompson, members of the Africa family, and city officials came to light in an article published by choice as much as necessity in London’s *Guardian* (Tilkinton, 2020). The extent to which this article represented a divergence from routine anniversary coverage cannot be overstated, and its remarkable nature compels its inclusion and the inclusion of related pieces here despite them falling outside the original scope of this analysis. They are mentioned here simply because so much of the rest of the anniversary coverage in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *The Daily News*, and *The Philadelphia Tribune* is in response to this moment. Published within days of the anniversary, the Tilkinton piece described a reconciliation process that had been led by Slaughter and was building to a call for a public, citywide apology. It described a process that had stalled, and was paired with a first-person essay by Mayor Goode supporting an apology as a “bridge to the future” (Goode, 2020) for the entire city, noting that that included “the Move family [sic], their neighbors, the police officers, firefighters and other public servants as well as all the citizens of Philadelphia” (Goode, 2020). It is interesting to note that Goode included a broader swath of citizens than has previously been recognized, and that he directly apologized in the piece.

In the days that followed, Slaughter and Wilson Goode were joined by members of the Philadelphia City Council including West Philadelphia’s Jamie Gauthier (who had recently defeated Jeanie Blackwell, wife of Lucien Blackwell, who was among the original politicians to attempt negotiations with MOVE) as well as journalists like Solomon Jones and the editorial board of *The Inquirer* in calling for adoption of the public apology. The novel coronavirus COVID-19 had put a halt on all non-pandemic legislation, but a petition for the formal adoption

of a citywide apology grows in signatories daily. The statement, which was read and supported by 11 councilpeople begins to reckon with the demons of the city's recent past:

Today, on the 35th anniversary of the MOVE bombing - a brutal attack carried out by the City of Philadelphia on its own citizens - we offer an apology for the decisions that led to this tragic event and announce our intent to introduce a formal resolution to this effect later this year. We call upon the City of Philadelphia to declare May 13th an annual day of reflection, observation, and recommitment to the principle that all people are created equal and endowed with inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Additionally, we call on all people of the City of Philadelphia to work toward eliminating racial prejudices, injustices, and discrimination from our society (City Council issues overdue apology for MOVE bombing, 2020)

Suddenly, there was new news to report. Sean Collins Walsh (2020) had reason to call the current mayor's office to ask whether an apology would be issued, or if the City Council's president had a comment. Ed Rendell, who had been part of the original group but had stopped participating for unreleased reasons, declined to say more (Walsh, 2020). As Walsh (2020) and Thompson described it, calls for an apology were mounting. The headline of Walsh's story transferred the responsibility back to the city: "City silent on apology to MOVE" (2020).

Thompson told him:

To not engage with an apology says a lot," Thompson Guerin said in an interview. "It's the city of brotherly love and sisterly affection, but you won't apologize for an obvious harm, an event that nobody questions the devastation, nobody questions how horrible that was (Walsh, 2020)

Solomon Jones (2020) called for healing but also tied the bombing to 1978 and to a longer narrative of police violence: "Philadelphia also owes an apology to its citizens for allowing years of bitterness and anger to boil over into an action that put the lives of Philadelphians in the crosshairs of a law enforcement system hellbent on revenge." In a separate news piece, Walsh (2020a) skipped the usual shorthand for the MOVE group and the events of May 13, 1985, and describes MOVE people in much more nuanced and less perjorative

language: “The group combined back-to-nature and revolutionary black liberation philosophies.” In the same piece, Walsh (2020a) returned to familiar reporting ground, visiting the 6200 block of Osage Avenue to ask the seemingly permanent resident Gerald Renfrow about the construction there and the 2018 renaming of a street after mayor Wilson Goode. While he and the neighborhood association were considering a lawsuit to try to reverse the street naming, even Renfrow evinced optimism for the future on the block for the first time in a long time:

Now our block will be restored, so we'll be living in a nice, decent housing development, and we'll have a chance to return to how it was before this MOVE tragedy," Renfrow said. "It'll be the first time that we'll have a chance for it to be normal (Walsh, 2020a)

Despite these encouraging developments, *The Philadelphia Tribune* was the only newspaper in the city where a reporter approached the Africa family about their opinions on the proposed apology (Todt, 2020), evidence perhaps that even amidst progressive language and calls for apologies, the city’s paper of record still hasn’t made any public effort to decenter its own narratives. Sue Africa and Janine Africa, both members of the MOVE 9 who had been freed by the most recent anniversary, dismissed the apology and the city’s trustworthiness. “They lied then, they’re lying now, and we know the apology is a lie” (Todt, 2020) is how Janine responded to the reporter.

### **Consistent themes over 35 years**

Among the most dominant themes throughout anniversary coverage (not to be confused with narrative devices including “where are they now” profiles and first-person accounts) – in marquee years and others – are: questions of catharsis and resolution; complexity and mystery surrounding the narrative; comparisons to other traumas and crisis events; and heroism. To a lesser extent, coverage also returns to notions of media shortcomings and a preoccupation with Ramona Africa’s body – in stark contrast to others’ presentations and bodies.

As scholars have pointed out, journalists frequently strive to impose narrative repair when the social order is disrupted in times of crisis (Gans, 1979). Over 35 years, journalists have spilled ink and pixels finding examples of conclusion to stand in for catharsis and lamenting that resolution seems forever unlikely. An unsigned 1992 *Daily News* editorial described Ramona Africa's release: "Today - the seventh anniversary of the conflagration - she is free. With her release, the last injustice of the disaster comes to a conclusion" (Unsigned Daily News Editorial, 1992). Two years after the bombing, the first "fire baby" (Vitez, 1987) was born and neighbors were depicted living happily in new homes. It is clear that journalists in these instances were attempting to impose order where it didn't otherwise exist. Injustice obviously continued, and – as was clear when examining coverage longitudinally – the story was hardly concluded by 2020, let alone any earlier. New homes in 1987 would turn into condemned houses within a decade. Multiple stories made hopeful references to ongoing rebuilding on Osage Avenue and Pine Street, only to turn bitterly into pieces bemoaning poor construction and blight years later.

Most frequently, catharsis and resolution existed only in absence. Resolution was dashed by the absence of rebuilt homes (Avery, 1987; Ott, 2010; Russ, 2011; Wilson, 1986), by the continued incarceration of MOVE members (Moore, 1993; Odom, 1988), by never-ending litigation and charges declined (McCoy, 1995a; McCoy, 1995b; Price, 1987; Smith, 1992). References to the saga never ending abounded: "I'm just hoping that one day this will be resolved. But I don't think it will ever be the way it used to be" (Slobodzian, 2005) offered one lifelong resident, 20 years after the bombing. In this way, we understand that resolution remained a narrative goal for journalists – and for residents – but one that was not likely or easily achieved.

At least partially culpable for the lack of catharsis or resolution was the sheer complexity of the MOVE bombing story, and the contested narrative surrounding it. Coverage over the years made repeated reference to ongoing mysteries and the chaotic nature of the story itself. Four years, multiple investigations and at least two books later, a *Daily News* reporter summed up the state of things in 1989: “The question of what really happened in the alley behind 6221 Osage Ave. during the MOVE confrontation remains unanswered” (Daughen, 1989). It wasn’t just the actions behind the burning home that remained a mystery then or now. The narrative was also described as a political dilemma, its effect on Mayor Goode’s reelection yet unknown: “No one is sure how to handle MOVE in political terms. It seems to fit in more with the plane crashes and tanker explosions than with government scandals” (Goldwyn, 1987). Eleven years later, the beliefs of MOVE members themselves were described as a mystery: “A quarter-century after the organization first began making waves in Philadelphia, MOVE's principles and aims remain murky to everyone but those on the inside” (Avery, 1996). Even Managing Director Leo Brooks’s retirement was described in ominous language: “Now 77, he has said little in the years since, and recent efforts to reach him were unsuccessful” (Langland, 2010). A *Tribune* story reviewed the history of MOVE and concluded with resignation: "There will probably always be unanswered questions, even through the excruciatingly thorough investigation that followed," (Miller, 2011). The ways in which mystery was evoked throughout the coverage surrounding MOVE discursively let a lot of people escape culpability. To the reader, it is as if journalists were excusing their own inability to get the whole story by pointing out that details are contested and murky. But the effect thus excused the law and the public from holding a single person accountable. If the media are meant to stand in for citizens in a functioning democracy, and the media can’t identify blame, how can the state?

The level of mystery surrounding MOVE, its altercations with police, and the city's plan for resolution may account for the repeated comparisons journalists drew between the bombing and other tragedies. More often than not, comparisons were violent or based in domestic or international terrorism. In addition to the generic war language already more well described by Wagner-Pacifici (1994), the MOVE bombing was compared with Pearl Harbor and WWII (DeLeon, 2010; Fine, 1991; Fleming, 2004; Guthman, 1986; Mullen & Goldwyn, 2000; Russ, 2011; Uncredited Inquirer News Brief, 2003; Unsigned Inquirer Editorial, 1995a) eight times, and with the Iraq War once (Fleming, 2004). As Wagner-Pacifici (1994) points out, many police officers, neighbors and others throughout these stories have recently returned from Vietnam. Officer Berghaier, who would later be crowned a hero for saving Birdie Africa, described his thoughts during the shootout: "I'm thinking this is something I seen on TV in some goofy country" (Colimore & Gibbons, 1988). More commonly, the episode was compared with domestic terrorism: Oklahoma City was the point of comparison four times (Bittan, 1995; Eichel, 2005; Pompilio, 2010; Unsigned Daily News Editorial, 1995a); the Rodney King beating three times (Dahlgren, 1992; Eichel, 2005; Unsigned Inquirer Editorial, 1995); and the armed standoff that ended with 76 dead in Waco, Texas nine times (Avery, 1996; Eichel, 2005; Moore, 1993; McCoy, 1996; Ott, 2010; Wood, 1994; Unsigned Daily News Editorial, 1995; Unsigned Inquirer Editorial, 1995a; Unsigned Inquirer Editorial, 2010). Other things to which the bombing was compared include Senator Ted Kennedy's fatal car accident at Chappaquiddick (Goldwyn, 1987), the Munich Olympics hostages (McCoy, 1996); Apartheid (Smith, 2000); and the Salem Witch Trials (Asante, 1986). In most instances, these references came in time periods directly adjacent to the events in question.

More than any point of comparison, the event to which the MOVE bombing was likened most frequently was the Holocaust. The event was compared a total of 12 times – eight times (Bittan, 1995; Fernandez, 1988; Kaufman & Mezzacappa, 1986; McCoy, 1988; Nichols, 1986; Unsigned Daily News Editorial, 1992; Unsigned Inquirer Editorial, 1986; Wood, 1994) to the Holocaust in broad terms and four times (Asante, 1986; Caparella, 1988; Moore, 1999; Wagenfeld, 1988) the phrase “never again” was invoked. The Holocaust holds significant meaning in memory study (Huysen, 1994). It is important to note that – like the rest of these comparisons – they were sometimes made directly by the journalist(s) and sometimes quoted from a source. Regardless of the manner in which the comparison was evoked, the frequency with which a metaphor or simile was invoked reinforced the notion that the MOVE bombing caused serious trauma in Philadelphia, and its meaning is painful and difficult to explain.

In one curious instance, MOVE itself was the comparison point for a more recent tragedy. A 2013 *Daily News* story noted that the 10th day of deliberations in the murder case of doctor Kermit Gosnell came on a MOVE anniversary (Dean, 2013). Without any prior reference, the piece ended with the following line: "Coincidentally, yesterday's verdict came exactly 28 years after another notorious West Philadelphia story made news around the world - the city's May 13, 1985, bombing of the MOVE compound on Osage Avenue, which started a fire that killed 11 people and destroyed 65 homes" (Dean, 2013).

Ramona Africa, as the only surviving adult in the bombing, has also served as an object of media fascination. In addition to interviews with her and several “where are they now” kinds of profiles, Ramona Africa is often described using language that absent for every other individual interviewed. McCoy (1995) described not just the scars Ramona bears from the fire, but the nature of her voice: “sharp and loud.” In general, Ramona Africa’s treatment by the press

was in line with other examples of misogyny and racism. Ramona's physical appearance is often remarked upon with note of her diminutive stature, her locks, or other body references: "That was Ramona - a smallish woman with dreadlocks down her back and bicycle shorts covering her muscular thighs" (Santiago, 1993). Another reporter mentioned how "articulate" Ramona Africa is on the stand (Avery, 1996). Louise James was described in similar terms, with a "shrill voice" (White, 1987). Upon demonstrating emotion while describing the death of her son, James is described as becoming "hysterical" (Avery, 1996). Sokolove (1995) described the satchel full of explosives that killed 11 as looking "as harmless as a lady's handbag." In another strange incident, a journalist took a neighbor's lingering accent to task: "'It was a beautiful place,' said Virginia Cox, 78, who still speaks with a lilting Trinidadian accent despite moving to the block in 1971 (Russ, 2011). This language served not just to set women – and in particular, women of color – apart from the "normal" narrative of the story. It diminishes their credibility and sets the reader's gaze firmly on their bodies (Mulvey, 1975). The ultimate effect leaves readers unsurprised: sexism and racism have been part of the same arc of violence for centuries.

As Berkowitz argued (2010), journalists and readers alike respond positively to stories where heroes are held up for admiration. Officer James Berghaier became one of the most straightforward narratives in the entire MOVE saga. A long-time officer, Berghaier risked his safety to rescue a child from a burning house where the rest of the Africa family lay dying. Berghaier eventually left his family and his job and built a new life altogether as a janitor at a local YMCA (Costantinou, 1990). Berghaier and his emotional and dramatic tale were woven throughout every milestone anniversary year. In 1993, Berghaier's son – whose 10<sup>th</sup> birthday was May 13, 1985 and famously hit a home run "for his dad" (Costantinou, 1990) while Officer Berghaier was on Osage Avenue – was even profiled (Silary, 1993). Jason Berghaier was

described as a hero in his own right, a “two-sport star” (Silary, 1993) at his Catholic high school. Jason noted that his father was still someone to whom he looked for support and guidance (Silary, 1993). Despite him leaving the Philadelphia Police Department to deal with the dissolution of his marriage and his self-described mental health issues, Berghaier was described and framed as a hero for his strength as a good police officer. His depiction was made all the more powerful in contrast to the uncertain actions of some of his colleagues. This is another way in which the press has joined with state authorities to convey that order has been regained (Berkowitz, 2010).

Messages related to the media shirking its responsibilities or otherwise underperforming are also represented throughout the anniversary coverage. In one *Philadelphia Inquirer* piece, MOVE Commissioner Charles Bowser laid blame for the 1985 event on the media directly:

Philadelphia lawyer Charles Bowser, who was on the MOVE Commission and wrote a book on the tragedy, said he had been stunned to learn that only six of 200 people he interviewed in the neighborhood expressed remorse. He said the media had "indoctrinated" people with the notion that MOVE members are less than human (Byrd, 1990)

In another *Inquirer* piece, Mayor Goode claimed the only people to ever ask him about MOVE 25 years later are journalists (Rosenberg, 2010). In coverage of the journalists panel at Community College of Philadelphia in the *Tribune*, former *Inquirer* editor Bill Marimow corroborated Walt Hunter’s claim (discussed previously in this chapter) that the media must do better when it comes to investigating the unknown:

The fact that we didn't pay attention to that consistently, in my opinion, probably created less pressure on first the [William] Green [mayoral] administration and then the Goode administration to address the issues prior to the tragic events of May 13, 1985 (Bailey, 2015b)

It is clear that neither the media nor the state has decided on where blame for the bombing or the day's tragedy belongs, but it is interesting to note the willingness with which journalists have critiqued their own industry's behavior on this topic.

### **Findings by publication**

When examining news across each of the three publications included in this study, narrative differences are clear. The most glaring of these differences is visible comparing coverage in *The Daily News* and *The Inquirer* with news in *The Philadelphia Tribune*. While *Tribune* journalists appeared in other coverage sharing their stories from the scene and their ensuing insights, the *Tribune* did not dedicate entire stories to firsthand accounts of its journalists. And while *Tribune* pieces did their own work on providing narrative repair and catharsis for the community, those pieces relied on sources of authority as primary informers far less frequently. The nation's oldest Black newspaper was also the only publication in this sample to conduct regular "What do you think" surveys of people at random. Each respondent's quote there ran alongside a photograph. Rather than relying purely on government officials or other agents of the state to explain community affairs, the *Tribune* published a patchwork of voices one might easily recognize as deeper context (Calmore, 1999). One other difference of note regards the extent to which each publication contextualized the 1985 bombing. Again, the *Tribune* contrasted directly with *The Daily News* and *The Inquirer*, in its view of history. Washington (2010) connected the bombing with a racist system with and without individually overt racist acts (McIntosh, 1989), and the timeline produced by *The Tribune* to describe the MOVE bombing also added a deeper context than any other publication, beginning with the group's 1972 founding (Anonymous Tribune Timeline, 2015). In the *Daily News's* and *The*

*Inquirer's* coverage, the history of the conflict always began with 1978, when police and MOVE engaged in a shootout that ended with the death of a police officer.

It is important to note that a variety of news outlets in Philadelphia – and globally – have followed elements of the story surrounding the 1985 bombing and its subsequent anniversaries. The limits of space and time preclude them all from inclusion here, but one outlet not previously mentioned is especially deserving of mention. Radio station WURD, Pennsylvania's only African American owned and operated station, produces annual day-long memorial coverage every May 13. One wonders if the nature of radio coverage makes it a preferable medium for untangling a complicated narrative, or if hours of dedicated programming simply give WURD more opportunity to explore elements edited out of newspaper stories. In any case, a researcher with interest would find plenty of opportunities for future studies by analyzing coverage there.

Even in an exhaustive look at hundreds of articles of anniversary coverage, it is impossible to capture every nuance worthy of investigation. One particularly rich vein left untapped here is coverage outside the city's three primary newspapers. Especially since the 2013 advent of Black Lives Matter, online publications like Billy Penn, Philly Voice, and The Philadelphia Citizen have taken up the cause of covering the lingering effects of the 1985 bombing. Their reporting is deserving of its own close reading. Further, in addition to the previously mentioned decision to omit themes around Mumia Abu-Jamal's incarceration from analysis, this work leaves out several other potential fruitful areas of study, including letters to the editor – bountiful over 35 years of coverage, and frequently racially motivated. This dissertation also neglects to investigate themes apparent in stories with the added consideration of racial and gender identities of sources or journalists. It would also be interesting to pay attention to nuance in reporters' coverage as it repeats over time in cases where some journalists

– Larry Eichel for example – have written pieces at multiple anniversaries. This work similarly ignores the role that editors play in assigning and modifying other journalists’ work. In a topic as fraught and complicated as the MOVE bombing, with such little existing scholarship related to it, it is abundantly clear that future scholars have more work to do in these areas and others.

### **Conclusion**

In all, 355 texts were reviewed for this analysis. Again and again, journalists marched through the events of a horror-filled day. Again and again, catharsis was just out of reach, even in the case of 2020 where a citywide apology has finally been suggested. What journalists and readers – and neighbors, and the Africa family – have been left with is just raw emotion that complicates any kind of conclusion, rendering it almost impossible. Grief is a constant theme, and rightly so. In addition to the 11 lives lost, grief is expressed for the loss of homes and life-long possessions, and for a sense of civic order and any semblance of justice. When confronted with the plain details of the day: five dead children, six dead adults, 61 leveled rowhomes and a neighborhood destroyed, the usual journalistic rituals of seeking narrative repair and catharsis (Gans, 1979) – however much an expression of human nature – seem foolish, if not downright insulting. Is there any possible conclusion that would resolve the death of five children by the hands of the state? Thus, journalists are left to re-live and re-live the trauma, re-telling the history and the timeline in what feels like an attempt at an exorcism. Trauma theory tells us repetition of horror helps us to incorporate it into the narrative of our lives to create community and dull the pain (Alexander, 2004), and perhaps the repetition of history for 35 years has inured readers from thinking more deeply or critically about what happened on May 13, 1985. Questions linger: Do we assume this story began in 1978? In 1985? In 1972? Framing this event as journalists

have at anniversaries as an aberration that occurred spontaneously in 1985 is not only ignorant to history but an abrogation of the duty journalists have to inform the public. But the death doesn't change. Nor do the racial divisions that are only sometimes noted by the journalists.

There were several instances in stories between 1986 and 1995 where sources lamented that the judicial system was designed to uphold laws instead of strict definitions of morality or justice (Fernandez, 1998; Fine, 1991; McCoy, 1995b; Racher, 1986). In coverage describing unsuccessful appeals to federal authorities to intercede or file charges, those sources frequently make apologies that nothing more can be legally done. "There can be no doubt that the defendants' actions had tragic consequences," writes U.S. Circuit Judge Morton I. Greenburg (quoted in McCoy, 1995b). The complexity of the narrative surrounding the MOVE tragedy is clear: neither the legal system nor 35 years of media explanations have resulted in a commonly held understanding, catharsis or justice. This analysis also renders visible the extent to which those who have been charged by society with safeguarding the details of this story – whether they are charged with meting justice or meaning – are not equipped to do so. In short, neither the law nor the media are strictly meant to provide individuals with resolution, no matter how much those individuals might look to those sources for that resolution.

The need for repeated metaphor and the inconsistent nature with which race has been approached by journalists and sometimes whole publications also reinforced the complexity of the ongoing narrative for this story in Philadelphia. Like the actual details of what happened in 1985, and the "truth" of what transpired behind the burning house, contested facts and extreme sensitivity seem to work together to keep an honest reckoning at bay. In many instances throughout earlier stories in the past 35 years, the city seemed to be collectively rooting for a happy ending. Journalists in 2005 made a valiant attempt at wrapping up the narrative nicely,

describing the police as better, and the city in much finer financial condition. But simple endings seem to escape journalists and the city each time: houses have cracked, new calls for investigation or charges were levied to prevent cultural forgetting, the hero lost his wife, and Ramona has always reminded us with her very body about the violence committed by the state. These inconsistencies in coverage could be the intentional result of a newsroom - and a city - attempting to move on from a tragedy that is now more than 35 years old or they could be the collateral damage of news ritual rudderless without a controlling narrative and made more difficult to complete with dwindling press corps and financial resources in each outlet.

Perhaps a story so complicated requires more than can be provided within the bounds of the kinds of journalism practiced by these three newspapers. The rituals of he-said, she-said (Gans, 1979) and crisis coverage (Graber, 1980) around traditional heroes and villains (Bird & Dardenne, 1997) might simply be insufficient. Maybe for all the stories we try to tell in society, but certainly for the city of Philadelphia and the MOVE tragedy. The 35-year-long narrative of this specific story also reflects the extent to which journalists and city authorities - police, fire, and government - are empowered to decide who gets the benefit of the doubt, who is considered sympathetic, who is a hero, and who is deemed a villain. Certainly, journalists and public officials have always played this role, one in the ways in which they describe individuals and bring them to life for the public, and one in the labels they officially put on people. But in the MOVE tragedy, the consequences of framing the Africa family as continuously different and dangerous - *as other* - for years, were significant and deadly.

It is clear the narrative has not yet reached clarity or catharsis, despite new houses having been built - again - and despite the living MOVE members incarcerated in 1978 being released from prison. Since the 2015 anniversary, a developer has rebuilt and sold homes on the 6200

block of Osage Avenue, a historic marker has been erected and moved, and a petition has cropped up requesting a citywide apology. Anniversary coverage of the MOVE bombing reflects an uneasy – and false – dichotomy between a desire to fit closure and repair onto tragedy and a desire to better understand it.

## CHAPTER 6

### “WE’RE HERE TO MAKE THINGS RIGHT”

Newspaper coverage can only provide a very specific look into the MOVE tragedy. Perhaps as a result, and like nearly every other multifaceted human experience, the topic has been taken up by those outside the bounds of journalism and city officials. The objects created outside those processes are of particular interest to this study, as they provide additional insight to the tragedy and to the ways in which people have experienced and commemorated it. By investigating the content and production of these objects, we are also able to access voices that have been otherwise kept from the narratives produced and nurtured by the media, the judicial system and Philadelphia city officials. In other words, we are able to understand the ways in which everyday people have made meaning from the 1985 tragedy and how they have developed a narrative that may be divergent from the one maintained by society’s more official memory keepers.

For the purposes of this chapter, I examined objects tangible and intangible. The objects include a historical marker, an archive of investigative materials and a home. All help demonstrate not only additional ways of understanding what happened in 1985 and the ways in which the event vibrates (Zelizer, 1995) through history, but also the breadth of materiality that could never be fully bounded by news media, administrative reports, or the judicial system. Each object also represents its own attempt at meaning-making. Broadly, the objects described in this chapter fall into three categories: telling the story, marking the place, and forgetting.

## **Organizing the narrative:**

### **Philadelphia Special Investigation Commission Archive**

While the University of Pennsylvania and Community College of Philadelphia both maintain digital archives related to the MOVE bombing, the largest archive by far resides at the Charles Library at Temple University. The collection is maintained by the university's Urban Archives, designated by the university as a physical and intellectual space for collecting and documenting the "social, economic, political, and physical development of the greater Philadelphia region" (Urban Archives, n.d., para 1) between the 1800s and today. The MOVE archive exists there within the Special Collections Research Center, which is described as the university's "principal repository for and steward of the Libraries' rare books, manuscripts, archives, and University records" (Special Collections Research Center, n.d., para 1). The center is designed to provide researchers and the community with the opportunity to engage with these materials on site in its reading room, or – where materials have been digitized – online.

The Philadelphia Special Investigation Commission (PSIC) records consist of 78 boxes of material, measured by the library at 31 linear feet (Philadelphia Special Investigation Commission, n.d.). Its contents include original documents collected and produced by the Commission as it investigated the bombing, planned and held its public hearings and published its final report, as well as news clippings and recordings related to MOVE as well as the hearings themselves. The collection is divided into 8 series, including administrative files; background files; statement files; city agencies; non-city agencies; public hearings; evidence; and photographs.

That this archive came to be held at Temple University is itself worth consideration. These records – a robust history of city and police activity over decades – do not exist at the city

archives, nor at Philadelphia City Hall, nor at the Philadelphia Free Library, where one might reasonably expect to locate them. Instead, the commission decided to install them at the archives within the city's public university, in an effort as much to offer them to the public as to keep them safe from the kind of politically- or ideologically-driven interference that might have happened were they stored by the city (J. Pettit, personal communication, May 11, 2018). It is telling that Mayor Wilson Goode appointed the PSIC and conferred on them the authority to issue subpoenas, but that the same commission decided that city officials could not be trusted to safely steward the archives of their investigation. This lays bare two common beliefs about the MOVE episode in Philadelphia's history: that the official city apparatus is both too bungling to handle things appropriately and too Machiavellian to trust. It is striking that even decades later, MOVE continues to be such an incendiary topic that it is safer to keep these records at a certain remove from political actors. Further, unlike many other materials held in the Urban Archives, the MOVE materials are always kept on site for quick retrieval due to their popularity (J. Pettit, personal communication, May 11, 2018). This speaks to the extent to which there exists public desire to better understand the MOVE people and the bombing as much as it attests to Temple's role as repository and steward (Special Collections Research Center, n.d., para 1) of the city's history.

For the purposes of this project, each of the 78 boxes held in the Special Collections Research Center were retrieved and examined in their entirety between May 2018 and May 2019. Where appropriate and permitted, copies were made and photographs were taken for personal research purposes. Personal correspondence with archivists, researchers and others involved in the production of the materials held in the archive informed this analysis.

Alexander (2004) notes that state bureaucracies have formalized the framing of traumatic events for the public, especially as they relate to panels and commissions. Given the power to compel appearances and present evidence, such panels create “carefully choreographed public dramaturgy” (Alexander, 2004, p. 19). Within those presentations, he argues that such commissions are given tremendous interpretive power, “creating or denying the factual and moral basis for reparations and civic repair” (Alexander, 2004, p. 19). This is precisely the role the Philadelphia Special Investigation Commission played in 1985.

The archive has much to tell us in its form, its function, and its detail.

*Revealing the work of the commission*

As a whole, the archive is overwhelming in its breadth and meticulousness. One entire box is composed of carbon copies of telephone messages (PSIC, 6). Memos are written and stored even when they are just a few lines describing an error that has since been corrected (PSIC, 11-4). In remarks delivered between the conclusion of the public hearings and the publication of the commission’s findings, Chair William H. Brown described the work of the group as involving nearly 1,000 in-depth interviews, the subpoenaed records of 36 city offices or agencies, tens of thousands of pages of documents filed into 566 different evidence categories, hundreds of photos and audio and video recordings and many file cabinets worth of official reports (PSIC, 9-2). These are the items that populate the archive.

Perhaps the most well-known detail available in the archives is contained in the first box: the extensive list of artillery used and rounds fired during the May 13, 1985 siege. Weapons like Uzis and M16s appear frequently (PSIC, 1-4). But early records of the PSIC also indicate the extent to which commissioners took their role seriously and how they imagined the purpose of their work. By July 1985, they were investigating options to publicly air hearings (PSIC, 1-12).

And yet, they were worried about the press – both as potentially interrupting their work (PSIC, 2-4) and leaking crucial information. The remove at which PSIC held the media is especially interesting because much of the source material commissioners and their investigators used in their fact-finding came from journalists. In some of the archive’s earliest meeting notes where the volunteer commissioners discussed the eventual public hearings, “Mr. Bowser asked if it was clear that this is a telecast of the procedures and not just a news event” (PSIC, 2-4). Again, this demonstrates a sort of false dichotomy between the commission and the media and between official “procedures” and a “news event,” ostensibly something Bowser considers to be less worthwhile.

Early on, the Commission identified questions the body was interested in answering. We can understand the goal of the commission by combining those questions with Brown’s opening statement at the outset of the public hearings in fall 1986 and remarks he made to an alumni group. Brown opened the hearings with 65 questions, ranging from specific (Was the city more or less responsive after 1978 to the particular problems caused by move’s residency in the city?) to the broad (“Was indeed a peaceful solution possible?”) (PSIC, 28-1). Brown also delivered remarks to the law alumni society of the University of Pennsylvania on January 22, 1986, offering an early summary of the commission’s responsibilities and view of itself:

Our assigned goal is simply stated: to discover and disclose to the people of Philadelphia how the operation of this city’s government gave rise to the events of May 13, and to suggest how the tragedy of Osage Avenue can be avoided in the future (PSIC, 9-2)

Like journalists, Brown also suggested that the commission was aware that it “holds a public trust” (PSIC, 9-2). And like journalists, Brown believed sharing the information his commission gathered was a public good. He told the law alumni:

But, most importantly, the people of Philadelphia were able to be there, without even leaving home. They watched and listened with us as 90 witnesses testified about virtually every aspect of what happened on Osage Avenue, and why. By the time the hearings ended, the public knew what we knew. They had become part of the process (PSIC, 9-2)

These questions and these beliefs and values guided the commission through its twin processes of fact-finding and meaning-making.

The archive makes clear that the commission wrestled with the racialized issues of the bombing from its first convening. Many of the records in the administrative series relate to the composition of the commission itself as well as the individuals they were hiring to conduct investigations or otherwise make official reviews. Brown immediately referenced the necessity and difficulty in finding and hiring black investigators (PSIC, 2-4). Investigated with an eye toward these details, it is unsurprising that the commission would be the only “official” source to ever cite race among the reasons for the outcomes on May 13, 1985 being so horrific.

Certain of the details revealed in the archive are surprising. While much of the media coverage relating to MOVE in 1985 and at subsequent anniversaries presents the bombing as a moment of historic aberration or – at most – tangentially related to the 1978 police shootout, the files PSIC collected indicate that the city was investigating MOVE as early as 1954 (PSIC, 1-1). Other components of the archive make plain the absurdity of the details with which commissioners – and, one imagines, the public – were dealing. One box juxtaposes a promotional brochure by DuPont for the explosive material Tovex with a memo internal to the commission asking someone to figure out whether it was a violation of rules set by the Federal Aviation Administration to drop a bomb from a helicopter (PSIC, 12-4). Another memo seriously considers whether stenographers assigned to the MOVE case were the highest-paid city

employees (PSIC, 15-30). In this way, we are reminded of the breadth of the work undertaken by the commission. Work – and details – which mostly remain unknown to the public.

*Voices given a platform*

The names that populate the archive also serve as another kind of historical document with insight to the perception of gender roles in Philadelphia in 1985. While it is not possible to know with total certainty the identified gender of each person named in the report (personal pronouns are rare), a common sense understanding of gendered first names leaves one with the sense that almost no women were on the scene of the bombing except neighbors and reporters. To a person, police and firefighters on the scene who were interviewed later were men. The commission itself, including a chair; 10 commissioners; a staff director/of-counsel and deputy; special counsel; and a communications officer – 15 individuals in all – included just three women. One record of the ways in which the commission prepared to host public hearings at the local PBS station includes a note that commission and its staff should ask their wives to pitch in as media handlers (PSIC, 18-2).

The sheer volume of materials collected and stored in the archive represents the gargantuan nature of the commission's charge. Interviews and research make up a significant portion of the 78 boxes. Whole files within many boxes refer to the professionals the commission wanted to hire to better understand medical records (PSIC, 3-1) and explosives alone (PSIC, 3-3). The archive interviews also store the voices – and failures – of bureaucracy, city government and social systems. In one instance, we see the city office of Licenses and Inspection refuse to address the slats with which MOVE boarded up the home at 6221 Osage because they were called to the property simply to discuss garbage (PSIC, 13-7). Multiple entire boxes are devoted to lawsuits to determine the boundaries of the commission's authority, the extent to which police

officers could be compelled to testify, and whether the media could be forced to turn over its materials for the good of the investigation.

More than anywhere else in material related to MOVE – more than television and newspaper coverage, more than books – neighbors’ voices and pain come alive in the archive. Boxes are devoted to keeping track of the damages recorded for each house, the temporary residences assigned to those with nowhere else to go after their homes were destroyed, and the interviews conducted with each after the fire (PSIC, 14-1 – 14-5; PSIC, 15-1 – 15-27). Neighbors narrate the ways in which the city ignored their complaints – about MOVE people; before the bombing and about the condition of their rebuilt homes after the bombing (PSIC, 14-5). The raw emotion behind these claims are evident in the hearings, where police and other city officials – used to speaking with the layer of remove that comes from being a regular civic source of information – calmly convey their versions of events. Neighbors, like MOVE people, hold back emotion when given a chance to speak (PSIC, 29-1).

#### *Witnessing humanity*

In many ways, the archive is also the most humanizing place for MOVE. Not only does it provide the most complete history of the group, it includes personal details found almost nowhere else in decades of coverage and documentary. Here, too, is emotion that remains mostly absent in contemporary coverage of the anniversary. Medical records and exhumation reports (PSIC, 16-1) commingle with coroner’s reports and findings of other medical experts permitted to examine the remains of the Africa family (PSIC, 41-6). Even when the language is clinical in nature, it conveys horror and human suffering: “Both eyes are absent;” “In the cranial cavity is burned rock hard brain;” “The liver, lungs and heart are baked.” While some of these details were

eventually reported by the media, they have mostly evaporated from subsequent coverage and storytelling over time.

Hospital records from Children's Hospital of Philadelphia detail Birdie Africa's 15-day stay in excruciating detail (PSIC, 40-21). The most striking detail within those records is the compassion and humanity with which hospital staff treated the 13-year-old. Their questions to him about his favorite toys and whether he can tell time are poignant in contrast with his treatment by the police (PSIC, 40-21). Multiple notes in his file inform other staffers and Birdie's father – then a stranger to him – about Birdie's preferences and progress (PSIC, 40-21). Human details about him liking to hold hands with members of the hospital staff and the contents of his dreams populate these files. Why have these details been lost to time and nearly hidden, buried in an archive?

Nowhere is the humanity of the victims of the MOVE bombing more profoundly evident than in the final series of boxes. The photographs taken by police in the act of assembling evidence and while medical examiner's office staff combed through fiery debris to recover bodies compel a special kind of witnessing. Five boxes in particular capture the bodies of the adults and children killed on May 13, 1985. Photos of their corpses are interspersed with mundane evidentiary images of spent bullet casings and ballistic damage (PSIC, PC-33, Box 1A). The lives of the people in these photos are over, but seeing the raw results of violence visited upon them by the city somehow renders them more human. It is impossible to look at the images in the photo collection without noticing the careful attention paid to the evidence of gunfire, in contrast with the haphazard ways in which human bodies lie in water-logged ditches. Ballistics are rendered visible with pens, triangular shards of paper and other objects pointing toward them (PSIC, PC-33, Box 3). Sometimes it is impossible to tell human remains from those

of the many dogs MOVE kept on their property (PSIC, PC-33, Box 1A). While humanity is never conferred on the victims of the MOVE bombing by the city or by police or firefighters, viewers of these photos are confronted with no other option than to recognize individual human lives lost. Even when the captions and police descriptions of each image read without emotion. One image in particular stands out for the extent to which a young girl's body is preserved intact (PSIC, PC 33 1A; 2-8). Absent context, it would be conceivable that the viewer was looking at a peacefully sleeping child. The police caption makes clear what one is looking at, leading with an evidence tag: "R6-7. Close-up view showing body of child in debris outside 6221 Osage Avenue." Many more images depict remains in pieces: skulls with flesh burned away, independent torsos with holes in them, legs. Witnessing these photos forces a viewer to afford more reverence to these Black bodies than they ever received from the state in life.

#### *The production of memory*

The archive also provides a kind of real-time look at the creation of memory. In each record of interviews – especially those with police officers (who were there despite assurances from the Fraternal Order of Police that they could not be forced to discuss the event) – individuals were asked not just to access their memories, but to relay them – relative and subject to all kinds of pressures, political interference and other concerns (PSIC, 11-2). In another way, the archive lays out the steps taken in the production of memory and meaning-making. Records carefully convey the plan and execution the commission completed in producing not just its findings but the public hearings by which they were reached. Those steps included research to understand MOVE's history, collecting facts to decide whom to interview; conducting preliminary interviews to determine who will appear at hearings; witness preparation for those who were chosen for public hearings; formal depositions of those witnesses at public hearings;

and the eventual deliberations and publication of the commission's findings as well as two dissenting opinions. Finally, the commission worked directly with the press to help amplify the hearings and findings in an interlocking process of conferring legitimacy.

In the process of their fact-finding, the Commission knew the public dissemination of their report would be essential. Included in the archive is a series of public announcements in Philadelphia newspapers and in national journals and magazines letting readers know that free copies of the commission's findings would be made available by request. Among the most compelling components of the archive is the public response to these announcements (PSIC, 3-6). While most requests were limited to a simple mailing address, many included notes of support to the commission itself. The breadth of these responses indicates again the extent to which the public was invested in learning more about what happened on May 13, 1985 and why. Some requests came on index cards, and others were written on torn pieces of newspaper. Others arrived simply as a mailing label placed on top of a copy of the notice. Where requests are quoted, they reference the self-identification provided by the respondents.

Many requests came from students and faculty, often referencing extra credit projects. A high school student from Camden High School in New Jersey named Melvin Gison writes that their Advanced Composition teacher is awarding five extra credit points to students who can obtain copies of the report because "She believes that libraries are not the only place to retrieve information." (PSIC, 3-6). Melvin was so keen to gain the extra credit, they wrote again, identifying the correspondence as their "second letter," which raises questions – unanswered by the archive – as to how reports were eventually distributed to those who requested them.

Universities, schools and libraries across the country sent requests. One, from Chancellor Adrienne Vargo, connected the importance of public memory to the future safety of the city:

“We must all live with the memory of death on May 13<sup>th</sup>, and well we should. Because only in remembering can we make certain that our neighborhoods do not fall victim [sic] to such a catastrophe again” (PSIC,3-6)

Responses also repeatedly thank or congratulate the commission and often reiterate the vital role the respondent sees the commission playing in history. A man named Marc Polster living at 4517 Spruce Street in West Philadelphia writes, “I believe that the Commission’s report will help me, and other citizens of Philadelphia, put the past ten months in perspective and will enable us to more adequately understand and judge any subsequent proceedings.” (PSIC, 3-6). Terry Betterly, another resident of the western part of the city expressed an opinion that would be repeated and questioned throughout anniversary coverage for the next 30 years:

While the Commission accurately noted that it is now up to all of us to carry forward, I suspect that, knowing this city and its politics, in the end, little will really be done to correct shortcomings and less will be learned. Congratulations, however, from one who cares (PSIC, 3-6)

In many cases, the requests also offer readers an opportunity to hear voices— many local to the bombing – often left out of official narratives related to the event. Mrs. Wanda Williams offers correspondence of which three passages are especially insightful:

Needless to say, I have followed this tragedy from the beginning. I had little hope that justice would ever be given, or that anyone would be held responsible. However, your handling of the hearings was so excellent and above reproach that I was given some hope of justice being done.

As for Charles Bowser, and Carl Singley, they just made me feel very proud to be black. I was happy to see how Mr. Bowser stood up for those children. You men are living examples that we have intelligent, proud black men; a fact the media tries to negate at every opportunity.

I’m proud of you (PSIC, 4-1)

Here we see a resident of Powelton Village in Philadelphia – the same neighborhood where MOVE was involved in a police shootout in 1978 and less than four miles from the site of the bombing – express a deep desire to understand the events of May 13, 1985 as well as acknowledgement of the many thorny race-related issues facing the commission. More than a few responses reflect racist sentiments directed at members of MOVE, and multiple letters reference a belief that black people should be sent “back” to Africa. (PSIC, 4-3)

Another neighbor to the bombing, Taalib-Ud-Di Abdul Aleem Al-Ansare, writes to the commission to express his gratitude as well as the outcomes for his family directly related to the bombing:

My wife and I lived near to the bomb target area, followed the event, reportings and hearings. We moved from Philadelphia on account of the open hardness of heart shown by this incident. We had moved to Philadelphia on account of Mr. Goode’s election. We thought the cultural advantages of large city life and his elections were positive indications of the suitability of this city for our children to grow up in. We were very wrong and feel like we lost two years, and many dollars, of our lives. But thank the almighty, we have our lives and our children’s. MOVE could have been any of us, and that is frightening. Good work. (PSIC, 4-1)

In this way, we understand the far-reaching effects of the bombing but also of its aftermath. The extent to which hundreds of strangers to the commission felt compelled to reach out and share personal pleas, congratulations, and encouragement, convey a profound longing for more than just the published report. What many of these writers seem to want most is connection, an opportunity to have their opinions heard and validated, and to tell someone how this affected them personally. The same themes reinforce the extent to which individuals whose voices are otherwise left out of official narratives surrounding the bombing feel frustrated. That frustration – from voices that have been marginalized to those who took direct part in the bombing – echoes throughout subsequent coverage and interviews today.

Many requests from educational institutions and other news outlets come with questions about reproducing the report, also rendering visible the extent to which the commission's report – itself a memory text – would give rise to subsequent memory texts when interpreted or used by others to make their own meaning. A journalist at the *Germantown Courier* asks whether there are any prohibitions. This inspired a direct response from the director of communications for the commission, Emerson Moran, who wrote to express the group's belief that their findings are vital to the public: "There are no prohibitions on reproducing the report – it is right where it should be, fully in the public domain" (PSIC, 4-2).

#### *Issues of accessibility*

Moran's response to that journalist – though earnest and technically true – brings into relief a certain tension that exists today. The report remains primarily publicly accessible only to the extent that Temple University's Charles Library remains publicly accessible (some copies are sometimes found for sale, and one enterprising person has posted a copy online at the document-sharing site, Scribd). While the original report was reprinted in its entirety as a special supplement to the *Philadelphia Daily News* (PSIC, 33-7), copies of the report itself are now chiefly available as part of the archive. And access to most components of the archive still privileges a small subset of the public. Just a handful of photos have been digitized, and the rest of the materials require researchers to physically access the library to retrieve them. Not only must researchers access the library itself – with limited hours of operation. During times of emergency – such as the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 – this leaves most materials utterly unavailable to those with interest in accessing them. Absent emergencies, the Special Collections Research Center is open only Monday through Friday, and only 8:30 a.m. through 5:30 p.m., effectively limiting access to the materials to academics and those either without full-time jobs or

with ample leave time. Moreover, even those with time and ability to access the materials at Paley Library must first possess a certain level of information literacy. They must understand how to find and navigate a complicated online finding aid; must create a researcher account; and must request materials online in advance. It is difficult to square these realities with Moran's claim that the report remains fully in the public domain.

The archive is also notable for what is absent, and why we understand certain items to be missing. While some folders note items were never received (including certain police evidence photos (PSIC, 56-1), others simply are missing individual photos that have been lost over time, with reasons unknown. The whereabouts of the model of the 6200 block of Osage Avenue used by the commission in its live hearings at WHY? also remain unknown. While the finding aid maintained by Temple University doesn't refer to the model ever having been part of the collection, it is significant in its absence. While formal evidence is tagged, logged and archived by police authorities and the judicial system, the fragments of history that remain boxed up in the Special Collections Research Center are only treated with whatever formality archivists and researchers bring to them. It is also worth noting that at least one researcher, Jason Osder, has since contributed additional elements to be incorporated into the library's MOVE collection (personal correspondence, Feb. 6, 2020). That those items remain in storage, out of the reach of researchers and the public, is testament to the many institutional barriers to information that remain. The fate of those additional materials also lay bare the limits of the capacity of any public library's staff in 2020. Of course, the most glaring omission in the archives are the objects that were incinerated without a trace on May 13, 1985.

*Finding meaning in the archive*

The PSIC archives hold the contents of several truth claims: claims by journalists made in the form of boxes of news coverage; claims made by police through months of tediously recorded and painfully extracted interviews; claims from Philadelphia firefighters also subject to interviews by the commission; claims made by neighbors near and distant from 6221 Osage Avenue about MOVE people, the city's actions, and their pitiful plight in the aftermath; and claims by people affiliated with MOVE, including the Guidelines of John Africa, letters from MOVE people incarcerated since the 1978 shootout and interviews with the only adult survivor of the bombing, Ramona Africa. The archive itself acts as its own sort of self-contained truth claim, and it is tempting to understand it as entirely unmediated and objective until one remembers that the individuals who created, amassed and saved the materials within brought their own framing, their own internal beliefs and their preexisting biases to their work.

In reviewing the contents of the entire archive, the roles that legitimacy and authority play in the story of MOVE become clearer. In ways that don't become so evident in news coverage or even other cultural representations, the archive privileges certain elements of the PSIC inquiry, like evidence, police reports, research produced by agents of the federal government. They are legitimized by their sheer volume. These official details and elements of evidence have an easier and more clear path to legitimization, with official processes set forth by official bodies, and thus to this archive and our memory. The neighbors and the Africa family had only an oblique opportunity to contribute to this archive because the nature of their existence is bent less toward the creation of official reports and records and compiling evidence. Thus, the archive does a handy job of neatly compiling and cataloging the records of how the city's Office of Licenses and Inspections calculated bills for the demolition of each burned home (PSIC, 47-

23) which were eventually destroyed (PSIC, 48-1). But nothing is included in the archive about what that process felt like or meant to the neighbors who once inhabited those homes. The only real avenue for everyday citizens to have their experience captured in the archive was through testimony, interview or letter submission.

That this archive was compiled by commissioners who acted as volunteers (even as staff to the commission were contracted and paid) and is maintained at institutional expense by a public institution of higher learning demonstrates the extent to which inquiry into what happened in Philadelphia on May 13, 1985 is understood as a civic good. That it is accessed so frequently by students, researchers and members of the public (J. Pettit, personal communication, May 11, 2018) demonstrates the extent to which what happened that day remains a tantalizing sort of mystery. Understanding the barriers to accessing the archive and very way in which it was completed and housed at Temple University helps illuminate the overlapping issues of authority that have long made the narrative of the MOVE bombing so complicated.

### **Marking the place: MOVE bombing historic marker**

The public conversation about commemorating the MOVE bombing began almost immediately. Burton Caine, then president of the American Civil Liberties Union in Philadelphia proposed a marker for the Philadelphia City Hall courtyard in 1985 (Caine, 2017), though it took until 2017 for one to be erected, under circumstances that will be described later in this chapter. Alexander (2004) quotes an unpublished piece by Elizabeth Jelin and Susana Kaufman describing the inherent political tensions embodied by markers like the one that would eventually be constructed in Cobbs Creek. “Monuments, museums and memorials are ... attempts to make statements and affirmations [to create] a materiality with a political, collective, public meaning [and] a physical reminder of a conflictive political past” (pp. 5-7). The 32-year delay should not

be construed as evidence of public apathy; in fact, when a citywide project called Monument Lab launched in Philadelphia in 2015 with a call for citizens to submit ideas for monuments, 35 different MOVE bombing-related proposals were submitted (Crimmins, 2018).

The Monument Lab project was itself a compelling effort at mapping public memory and meaning-making in Philadelphia, and the data collected around the MOVE submissions demonstrate again the extent to which everyday citizens want to better understand and commemorate this episode in the city's history. The project began by asking what an appropriate monument might look like in Philadelphia. Partnering with the Mural Arts Philadelphia, the project staff distributed prompts to citizens at more than a dozen public spaces throughout the city. The MOVE bombing proposals are highlighted in the subsequent "Report to the City" released by the project in 2018, and are available via OpenDataPhilly, now that Monument Lab has become an independent nonprofit in the city. Suggestions range from signs placed in front of 6221 Osage Avenue to burying a box with "clippings, photos, memorabilia" from the bombing in the City Hall Courtyard, to a reimagined version of the famous Robert Indiana LOVE statue with the letters M-O-V-E (Anonymous, Speculative Monuments for Philadelphia - Monument proposals from 2015 Discovery Phase Exhibition n.d.). Public comments submitted with the suggestions echo a need to remember and wrestle with an uncomfortable legacy. One anonymous submission included the words, "This incident is history, to be learned from + not forgotten" (Anonymous, Speculative Monuments for Philadelphia - Monument proposals from 2015 Discovery Phase Exhibition n.d.). Another person submitted their thoughts without a suggestion as to how best to capture them: "We need something to honor MOVE. Heartbreaking, needless & it's our Legacy" (Anonymous, Speculative Monuments for Philadelphia - Monument proposals from 2015 Discovery Phase Exhibition n.d.).

In 2015, fifth and sixth graders at a private school 2.5 miles from the site of the bombing in West Philadelphia took up the case for a memorial. Near the time of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the bombing, students were learning about police brutality and made plans to visit the site of the bombing to read poetry and lay flowers on May 13 (Owens, 2017). When they realized no marker was in place to explain what happened in 1985, the students began a volunteer effort to apply for one through the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (Owens, 2017). Like the narratives surrounding MOVE and the bombing themselves, the story gets complicated from there in a way that makes clear the extent to which “official” processes may purposely or inadvertently prevent public understanding on this topic. The application involves research, and signed petitions from neighbors as well as a compelling case describing “that the subject have statewide and/or national rather than local or regional historical significance” (Robinson & Gale, 2014). The students produced the necessary documentation and submitted to their councilperson, whose district also includes 6221 Osage Avenue. From there, reports diverge as to whether requests were made properly and the responsibility of the local councilmanic office (Owens, 2017; Moselle, 2017). The result was a 2017 ceremony that unveiled the marker on an easel, rather than at its permanent site, while the city, Councilperson Janine Blackwell and the school debated where the marker would be installed (Booker, 2017). That it took children young enough to possess no living memory of the MOVE bombing to denaturalize the setting for the tragedy helps us to see the extent to which the state of the affected neighborhood had come to be accepted in 2015. That they were met with a series of barriers for which no one accepted responsibility helps us to see the extra effort everyday citizens must exert to become part of the narrative or change the public understanding of the MOVE bombing.

The marker was eventually installed on Cobbs Creek Parkway, where Osage Avenue dead ends into a park. Today, the Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission identifies its location as being on the Cobbs Creek Park side of the street opposite Osage Avenue. The unveiling was covered extensively by local news media who focused substantially on the process the schoolchildren completed and the infighting that led to its temporary placement (Booker, 2017; Moselle, 2017; Owens, 2017). Again – faced with a complicated narrative of the past – media focused on a simpler he-said/she-said frame at the expense of recontextualizing the bombing itself.

Like all historical markers in Pennsylvania, the MOVE marker is made of cast aluminum, painted blue with yellow text. The top of the marker includes the coat of arms of Pennsylvania, and the bottom reads: “Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission 2017.” Such framing literally installs not just the bombing itself but the narration of the event squarely within the authority of the state. In a limited way, the marker confers legitimacy on the event, describing the history as part of a permanent marker meant to remain in place in perpetuity. That the sign was constructed at all is testament to its enduring importance to the city, but – per the rules of the state commission – also to its statewide and/or national significance. In this way, the commonwealth conferred legitimacy on the marker’s account of what happened, and also on the Philadelphians who have yearned for a monument to mark the site of the bombing.

The text of the marker was written by students from the Jubilee School and their principal, Karen Falcon. The monument dispatches with the entire affair in just 45 words:

On May 13, 1985, at 6221 Osage Avenue, an armed conflict occurred between the Phila. Police Dept. and MOVE members. A Pa. State Police helicopter dropped a bomb on MOVE’s house. An uncontrolled fire killed eleven MOVE members, including five children, and destroyed 61 homes.

The text of the sign is remarkable in several ways. First, because the text is without attribution, the line at the bottom of the sign referencing the historical commission leaves readers to assign authority and authorship to the state, rather than to those who wrote it. In this way, it reifies the state's authority over this story and erases the work of the everyday citizens who produced it. The way in which the information is visually presented also lends an additional patina of finality and credibility. In short: to an uninitiated visitor, it presents the ultimate version of what happened at 6221 Osage Avenue on May 13, 1985, effectively settling the mnemonic battles that continue to be fought surrounding details as well as culpability.

The language presented on the sign is also remarkable for the extent to which it manages to describe the event without assigning responsibility to a single individual while making a case for shared blame. The passive language is slippery enough that it reads as straightforward and final until one begins to tease apart the truth claims in each sentence. In just three sentences, multiple claims are made without attribution, evidence or acknowledgment that they obscure decades of conflict. A critical reading of the passage reveals yet another official process that has shaped the public's memory and understanding of a very complicated narrative. The sign establishes the beginning of the conflict as 1985, effectively disconnecting it from the 1978 shootout with police and more than a decade's prior entanglements with police, including one that left a baby dead (Evans, 2020). The passive phrase, "an armed conflict occurred" also suggests – without confirming – that all participants in the event were armed. This concept is heavily contested, and given the intensity of the fire that incinerated most evidence on the scene, it is not possible to make this claim with total certainty. Further, the claim that the armed conflict occurred between "the Phila. Police Department and MOVE members" is inaccurate in several ways. While both groups were involved, the language used ignores that state troopers and federal

agencies had long been involved in the ongoing investigation and conflict (certainly, it was a state police helicopter that was used to drop the explosive device at the heart of the event). It also ignores that six children were at 6221 Osage Avenue in addition to the seven adult MOVE members on May 13, 1985. Whether or not the six children may be understood as “members” of the organization is debatable (Evans, 2020). What is not debatable is that the children are known to have been hiding in the basement for the entirety of the siege, making it impossible for them to have taken part in any armed conflict.

The second line references a state police helicopter, but astoundingly claims the helicopter itself dropped the bomb. On top of this being impossible and obviously inaccurate, it ignores the public fact that a man – Philadelphia Police Lieutenant Frank Powell – dropped a satchel full of explosives onto the house at the direction of another man – Commissioner Gregore Sambor. Not only does this construction ignore that real people made the decisions leading to the bombing, it obscures the haphazard nature of the explosive itself. While “bomb” has come to be used colloquially over time, the term insinuates far more coordination than really existed, according to the PSIC report (MOVE Commission Report, 1986). This short sentence also obscures the role the federal government played in distributing explosives to a municipal police department in the first place.

Finally, the third sentence is equally oblique in its assignment of responsibility. The fire that killed 11 people and burned while the city – and its fire department – watched is simply described as “uncontrolled.” This language elides the very real debate as to how the fire department decided to famously “let the fire burn” seemingly puts blame on the fire itself – rather than real people involved in the tragedy – for the death of 11 people. The language used in the marker ultimately compresses a complicated history into three sentences bounded by a single

day, effectively ending the episode once the neighborhood has been destroyed. Doing so also ignores the ongoing blight in the 6200 blocks of Osage and Pine due to poor construction and mismanaged rebuilds. Yet again, everyday citizens who are living through the events described on the marker, have lost their voice in the narrative.

The location of the sign itself also speaks to unresolved mnemonic battles still ongoing in the Cobbs Creek neighborhood. Rather than place the sign directly outside the home at 6221 Osage Avenue, the actual site of the bombing, the marker was eventually placed a block away. It is telling that the sign exists 387 feet away from the site where the bomb is dropped. More telling than the mere distance away is the fact that the marker exists on the opposite side of the Cobbs Creek Parkway from the neighborhood. The topography of that corner of the neighborhood is such that houses densely populate the eastern side of Cobbs Creek Parkway, while the west side of the parkway is a green park. Placing the marker on the side of the street multiple lanes of traffic removed from the neighborhood itself seems to install a metaphoric distance as much as a physical one between the residents and the tragedy. This is especially interesting when considered beside with the original unveiling event, which took place on the side of Cobbs Creek Parkway directly in front of residents' homes.

In its form, its description and its function, the historical marker on Cobbs Creek Parkway provides a vital lens to understanding a few of the mnemonic battles at play in the narrative of the MOVE bombing, as well as the systems in place that privilege some voices over others. These debates and the marginalization of everyday citizens' voices both imperiled the project, demonstrating the barriers many individuals must overcome to be included in the MOVE narrative. What is clear is that Philadelphians yearn not just to remember what happened on May

13, 1985; they want to better understand the story and its legacy. The marker is a step toward realizing these hopes but cannot alone sufficiently address the city's needs.

### **Forgetting: 6221 Osage Avenue**

The home at 6221 Osage Avenue – like almost every other home destroyed in the 1985 bombing and ensuing fire – has undergone demolition, criminally shoddy reconstruction, ownership changes and now, a rebranding campaign. To understand the home as an object of inquiry today, it is necessary to interrogate its history and its materiality to get at its meaning. Understood as one object, the site of the MOVE bombing stands as a singular – and important – monument to the conflict and bombing. Understood as part of an entire neighborhood and community, we begin to understand the ways in which city officials are shaping the future memory of the MOVE bombing.

In 1985, the home at 6221 Osage Avenue was owned by Louise James, MOVE member and sister to founder John Africa. MOVE members first settled into the large rowhome in the stable, black middle-class neighborhood in 1982. Over time, MOVE members boarded up the front porch, covered the windows, and excavated interior walls and paint (Dickson, 2002). They also famously constructed a structure on the roof of the home popularly referred to as a “bunker” because it was made of wood slats with openings that appeared like embrasures. Apart from the bunker, the home itself was also known for a loudspeaker, over which MOVE members would broadcast demands, among other things (Puckett, 1982). James was no longer living in the home by the time of the bombing, but the deed was still in James's name.

After the bombing and fire, the city claimed ownership of the home, laying financial responsibility for the loss of the neighborhood on James and going so far as to put a lien against the property (PSIC, 30-4). Mayor Wilson Goode announced that residents would be living in

newly rebuilt homes by Christmas 1985 (Puckett, 1982), and the city's Redevelopment Authority used eminent domain to assume ownership of all the homes for construction purposes, promising residents would return to new amenities including central air conditioning (Puckett, 1982). By Christmas, just five homes were completed, and contractor Ed Edwards would later be sentenced to prison for embezzling funds from the project (Puckett, 1982). The homes that would eventually replace the original properties bore striking dissimilarities to the houses that existed earlier in 1985. Gone were porches that connected neighbors to one another and the community at large, replaced by expanded interior space and small patios enclosed with steel bars (Dickson, 2002). Before the ten-year warranties on the homes were up, residents reported serious problems related to construction, and in 2000, Mayor John Street offered each owner \$150,000 to sell their homes back to the city. Meanwhile, at 6221 Osage, the Philadelphia Police Department had been using the home as a substation for posting a round-the-clock detail there for years (Miller, 1990). The decision was described as both helping to ease neighbors' concerns that MOVE might return to claim the home and to prevent future conflict (Miller, 1990).

Using the property at 6221 Osage Avenue as a lens to understand the neighborhood over time allows us to tease out several threads. First, the home and the neighborhood must be understood as a longstanding and stable enclave for middle-class Black families in Philadelphia in the 1980s (MOVE Commission Report, 1986). West Philadelphia itself became an enclave for Black residents by the 1930s, and the number of Black people living in West Philadelphia swelled again as white ethnic groups left in the 1950s, while redlining and other racist practices kept Black residents in West Philadelphia (Blumgart, 2016). As the PSIC would later conclude, the bombing and ensuing fire would never have occurred in a middle-class white neighborhood in the city (MOVE Commission Report, 1986). Understanding that 6221 Osage was occupied by

police well after the event (Miller, 1990) also allows insight to the ongoing psyche of the neighborhood as it essentially remained part of a police operation more than a decade after the siege “ended.” It also helps us understand the continuing fear and mystery surrounding the tragedy and MOVE members themselves. Finally, understanding the effects of the nature of the reconstruction is vital to understanding the ways in which the city continued to revisit trauma upon residents. Homes that were rebuilt without expansive front porches precluded neighbors from gathering to re-form bonds and discuss their shared experiences – activities that could have helped them heal from the tragedy (Dickson, 2002). Knowing that even those houses would soon be condemned and reclaimed again by the city reminds us just how marginalized the neighbors remain in this story.

Today, 6221 Osage Avenue is owned by AJR Endeavors, a developer that was granted the right to buy 36 homes on the 6200 blocks of Osage Avenue and Pine Street as part of a project initiated by Mayor Jim Kenney and the Redevelopment Authority in 2016. AJR responded to the city’s request for proposals (RFP) to redevelop the neighborhood, which asked developers to note the trauma embedded in the area’s history. In the RFP, the Authority wrote, “These blocks have a tragic but significant history that is important for the developer to acknowledge and respect in the process of undertaking constructing [sic] in this area.” (Kostelni, 2016) The RFP was celebrated in local media at the time, with a Redevelopment Authority spokesperson telling *The Inquirer*: “It is our goal to restore these blocks to productive use, and bring restoration to this community ... This project is designed to heal these blocks, create homes in this neighborhood, and help the community move forward” (Vargas, 2016). It is clear, then, that the controlling narrative surrounding the latest redevelopment was one of progress and restoration.

AJR presented its first progress report to residents on August 15, 2018. The developer's intention, presented alongside Councilperson Jannie Blackwell and PA State Senator Anthony Hardy Williams, was clear from the outset. In his speech to journalists, neighbors and at least one researcher, an AJR principal said, "This is an exercise in closing the loop. There's residential justice here." Later, AJR managing partner Anthony Fullard described the project succinctly: "We're here to make things right."

It is worth considering what residential justice looks like 33 years later to an assemblage including city and statewide lawmakers, the Redevelopment Authority, and a residential developer, and for whom justice is being claimed. The exteriors of the 36 homes included in the Osage Pine project have been left largely alone. Inside, the homes have been gutted and refitted with accoutrements of the modern Philadelphia real estate scene. A website maintained by AJR to promote the sale of the 36 homes describes the finishes: "Presenting open concept floor plans comparable to present-day style seen across thriving Philadelphia" (Anonymous, "Availability," 2018). Amenities include hand-scraped hardwood floors, stainless steel appliances, quartz counters, and walk-in master showers. This definition of justice is one that argues all people who can afford to should enjoy en-suite bathrooms. It is also worth wondering for whom the loop is being closed here. Certainly not the residents who once occupied the homes, who sold them back to the city and scattered. In fact, the list prices for the homes at Osage Pine in 2018 were over \$240,000, all but guaranteeing that owners would be from outside the neighborhood. It would seem the loop that is closing is the loop of ownership and rebuilding in which the city has been engaged for over 30 years. This discursively bounds "justice" squarely within economic terms, and benefits only new owners. By this definition, justice is still elusive for neighbors who have lived in the community for the last 35 years.

The home at 6221 Osage Avenue is itself included in the Osage Pine project. In 2020, it was listed on real estate site Redfin as pending sale with a list price of \$289,000. The exterior of the home looks a lot like it must have when police operated a substation there. Its brick front is imposing, with no front-facing first-floor windows. Inside the nearly 2,500-square-foot home are three bedrooms and three bathrooms, finished with wrought iron and a glass interior balcony. A deck juts out from the kitchen, and overlooks the alley where Ramona and Birdie escaped. To someone not acquainted with MOVE – a large population, by most measures – this home and the others included in the project look like any other new construction property for sale in the city. It is not surprising that many attendees at the August 2018 public gathering expressed sentiments that the new development was erasing history.

The Osage Pine website makes no mention of MOVE, nor of the circumstances that led to the redevelopment project whatsoever. Addressing the trauma on the 6200 blocks of Osage and Pine was a central component to the city’s RFP, but was only referred to in coded language at the developer’s progress report in August, 2018. Tragedy isn’t likely to evoke buying interest in the population at large, but it is telling that AJR pivoted so hard from acknowledging the past in its response to the RFP to ignoring it entirely in its marketing. At a minimum, that pivot is evidence that there is yet no catharsis to the narrative of the MOVE bombing. AJR is working to manufacture one – at a price. One wonders whether the new occupants of 6221 Osage Avenue were aware of its history when they made their offer.

Examining the home at 6221 Osage Avenue as an object of inquiry allows us to trace the history of the landscape for the neighborhood that was leveled in 1985. It enables us to see clearly the role that city officials have played, and how bureaucratic decisions have directly affected residents’ lives over time. By understanding what is happening now at the site of the

bombing, certain values of the city of Philadelphia are revealed. While the Kenney administration made sure to demand recognition of the community's trauma and pain, the project that stands nearly completed in 2020 has made developers a tidy sum while hiding that pain behind hardwood floors and quartz countertops. To borrow Foote's (1997) term, the site of the 1985 MOVE bombing has been effectively obliterated before it was ever even fully understood and before residents could properly heal. The effect of these factors is the partial erasure of a complicated and painful memory.

### **Learning from the objects**

There is an entire universe of objects – tangible and not – related related to the MOVE bombing. Many may be understood as engaging directly with the extent to which community voices have been marginalized on this topic since 1985. This study is limited in its scope, but future scholars would find fruitful lines of inquiry by examining a variety of additional artifacts, including the diorama protesters erected at Mayor Wilson Goode's home after the street on which he lives was named after him (Briggs & Stancil, 2018); "We Shall Not Be Moved," an opera with a lightly fictionalized depiction of MOVE's relationship with police and the bombing; and a variety of poetry and other personal essays. Clothing, too, has been created in direct response to the 1985 bombing, with one famous shirt reading "Welcome to Philadelphia" with an image of the state police helicopter from which the bomb was dropped on 6221 Osage. Each of these items and many more not included here are additional examples of ways in which individuals kept outside the official processes of adjudicating and describing the MOVE bombing are working to define their own meaning around the tragedy.

Ultimately, the archive, the marker, and the redevelopment project embodied at 6221 Osage Avenue each help us understand the ways that authority over MOVE memory has been

articulated and reinscribed. The commissioners and staff of the Philadelphia Special Investigation Commission quite literally sifted through decades of materials and thousands of interviews to decide which were salient and useful enough to put before the public. Its findings, in the absence of any actual criminal charges against a single member of the city administration, serve as the only enduring indictment related to the tragedy. The marker boils the entire affair down to 45 words, conferring legitimacy on a version of events without referring to a single living human being. The site of 6221 Osage Avenue has been entirely remade, without a sign of what once transpired there. The city has exerted its authority to erase the memory there in order to protect and grow the wealth of a redeveloper.

The power that these expressions of authority have is to push competing narratives to the margins of our understanding. Narratives that either were deemed unimportant to the PSIC or were discarded after an initial interview are effectively erased by their omission from the commission's hearings. The individuals whose depositions were conducted formally during the televised hearings are the same individuals to whom reporters return over time to tell and retell the story of the MOVE bombing at anniversaries. Over time, their voices are privileged above others. To the state's Historical Commission, a single and oversimplified narrative was the one worth memorializing in perpetuity, effectively erasing counternarratives and questions about responsibility. The city's perspective on the property at 6221 Osage Avenue is that the restoration of financial value closes an important loop and restores justice to a community that has been separated from its roots. In this way, we can see power works as an interlocking system of conferring and re-affirming legitimacy.

It is conceivable that the frustration then expressed by those whose voices have been kept from the controlling narrative may be swept aside as the consequences of a messy or complicated

civic memory. But by failing to acknowledge the value in those marginalized voices, the story of MOVE becomes further complicated by a variety of expressions of countermemory. Examining objects within which multiple truth claims are contained – whether by acknowledgment or omission – helps clarify the systems of power at work on the memory of MOVE as well as the overwhelming complexity of this period in Philadelphia’s history. It is worth musing about the benefits bestowed on the systems of power acting on the MOVE memory, and worth acknowledging that the result of compressing this narrative into one with a tidy conclusion helps the city to establish and maintain order, installing the aberration of MOVE firmly and safely in the past.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION: TRUTH CLAIMS AND CATHARSIS

In order to investigate the production of public memory related to MOVE over time, this project has laid out three kinds of case studies to answer (1) how the original record of the organization and its history with the city was produced by journalists; (2) the ways in which that memory has been shaped through subsequent commemorative and anniversary coverage; and (3) how the official record and memories related to MOVE have been challenged by material culture and expressions of counter memory. My analysis of these cases is indebted to a cultural studies approach that included ideological analysis, critical discourse analysis, in-depth interviews, and object studies. Among the methodological commitments underpinning this work is a reliance upon and equivalent reverence for primary source material, including interviews with journalists, city officials, and other citizens, as well as news coverage and other objects and texts both vernacular and official. The goal of this work remains to both broaden and deepen public understanding not just of a highly contested and little-researched period in Philadelphia history, but to meet a broader understanding of the implications of the cultivation and maintenance of public memory when certain communities are kept at the margins of the discussion. Each component of these case studies builds toward some additional truth claims to add to the many that already exist around this story.

To the extent that a cohesive record of the MOVE organization and the bombing on May 13, 1985 exists, it has been created and maintained through a web of truth claims. In the absence of much historic or scholarly study and without a clear or cohesive media narrative, those claims come from a series of disorganized sources, the credibility and authority of which depends on who is listening. This study has focused primarily on the process of claimmaking by journalists,

a documentarian, a city official, and a member of the official investigation commission. But the universe of truth claims and claimmakers far exceeds that meager list, and should also be understood to include Cobbs Creek neighbors, rank-and-file city bureaucrats at nearly every level of every Philadelphia mayoral administration over the past 40 years, Philadelphia residents who followed news about MOVE throughout its existence in the city, and many others.

Interviews with the storytellers and those responsible for some of the most visible truth claims around the MOVE narrative reveal something about the responsibilities they bear to render narratives with transparency and with context. Each spoke to the ways that limitations on their ability to convey those stories has resulted in compounded grief and trauma personally or imagined additional grief and trauma for their audiences. Interviews in each case also remind us that storytelling is an act of memory transference that can be soothing as well as validating, and that memory is both flexible and useful enough to be wielded as a cudgel or a balm. Diminishing it or revoking the authority of someone's experience can only compound that trauma over generations.

The predominant lesson of the interviews with those who have worked to mold, shape, and maintain our understanding of MOVE and the bombing is that each person has reached conclusions based on memory and perspectives that have themselves been recontoured over time. For Wilson Goode, the story has flattened to one that seems designed to relieve his own conscience. For Michael Africa, Jr., the story can no longer be articulated through his voice and must rest with his family members who have recently been freed from incarceration and who have more authority over its memory. Many of the storytellers who have been foundational to Philadelphia's understanding of the MOVE story have remained hidden, their roles articulated in a way that renders the outcomes of their work both invisible and, thus, naturalized. Journalists

whose original reporting informed subsequent stories and anniversary coverage are not known to most, except in rare cases where they speak at occasional invited events. Their work remains the primary source of information commonly available to most people. It is true, as Michael Africa, Jr. and Wilson Goode noted, that the MOVE story has mostly been repeated with little alteration for 35 years (with errors baked in and questions unanswered), and that is due at least in part to the controlling frame imposed on the entire narrative by a man who has not spoken publicly about his role in the story since 1987, Emerson Moran.

One marvels at the longevity with which the narrative put forward by the MOVE report has remained active. Just as in the report, few facts have been established beyond doubt. Just as in 1985, by 2020, there has still been no true public accounting for the events that took place behind 6221 Osage Avenue on May 13, 1985. Eventually, city officials were forced to distribute acknowledgment and remuneration to MOVE members for the disgraceful civil conduct that was outlined in the report. But just as the Special Investigation Commission had no judicial authority, and its report could not compel anything with official or legal consequences, civil proceedings have a different weight and gravitas than criminal ones. Ultimately, the report and the published dissents are themselves truth claims. The official commission report is one that exerted additional framing, and thus, control, on all subsequent claims.

The manner in which Wilson Goode recounted his own version of the events of May 13, 1985 reinforces more than a conclusion that the act of reciting your trauma with enough regularity can exorcise the demons of your memory. His haunting repetition and his unwavering aversion to using the word “bomb,” so commonly applied to this narrative, indicate, too, that stories can become their own truth, and that it is possible to live there when you must. Moran, who brought his personal talents and skills alongside his demons and history to bear on his

storytelling is proof, too, that interpretation changes over time. Where he once saw two disconnected but violent events, he now sees a longer arc of police brutality.

News coverage produced by *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *The Daily News*, and *The Philadelphia Tribune* collected at anniversary moments demonstrates the extent to which Philadelphians experienced and continue to experience this story and its aftershocks in ways dictated largely by their race. Not only was the bombing itself experienced differently by Black Philadelphians, but the ways journalists have mediated the story over time seem to have been dictated by race as well. Whereas *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and *The Philadelphia Daily News* tend – broadly – to rely on city authorities as sources and to frame the MOVE timeline around police altercations rather than the evolution of MOVE itself, *The Philadelphia Tribune* answers Calmore’s (1999) call to context far more often, centering narratives around neighbors and other voices of color. In addition to being completely prefaced, shaped and understood according to racial dynamics, articulations of memory related to MOVE tend to entirely defy conventions of crisis commemoration in journalism. Absent sympathetic victims and considering the ongoing legal battles and construction woes in the neighborhood – all of them resulting from and compounded by the same racial animus that presaged the entire affair – commemoration for MOVE and their neighbors has been deeply insufficient and fleeting when and where it exists. It is impossible to review coverage of the MOVE bombing and anniversaries over 35 years without concluding that MOVE people were deeply dehumanized and othered in ways that have eliminated audiences’ capacity to identify them correctly as victims. That this extends to the five children who were killed is even more alarming.

It is the disappointment of this coverage, and the lack of context it provides, that has animated articulations of countermemory from a filmmaker and an opera composer, from middle

school children in West Philadelphia and neighbors struggling with poorly constructed homes, not to mention the others whose works are in progress right now but have gone otherwise unremarked upon here. The MOVE story teaches us that a memory does not have to be complete, or even completely agreed upon to spark counter-memories and mnemonic battles that span generations. And, in contrast to the precipitating news coverage, those vernacular expressions are not limited by professional conventions barring emotion or necessitating three ironclad sources before publication. Alexander (2004) offers that “literary interpretation[s]” (p. 6) provide another opportunity for trauma resolution, and suggests that the ways in which they appear are as “memory residues” (p. 6). These residues are similar to the vibrations Zelizer (1995) theorizes, and both aim to describe the nature of memory’s malleability and transferability. Literary interpretations have taken a prominent role in collective mediation of the MOVE bombing, one might say especially in response to an absence of more formal mediation. It is perhaps true that a narrative as loose and decontextualized as the one surrounding MOVE has increased the likelihood that it will be picked up by nontraditional claimmakers and storytellers.

The MOVE story remains mostly hidden from the mainstream (white) media view except in May, when it is recycled, and perhaps connected with little explanation to a concurrent tragedy like the Waco massacre or another separate act of terrorism. But outside the primary mainstream sources for news – the outlets even Wilson Goode excludes from “the media” – the story of MOVE has been reverberating (Zelizer, 1995). It buzzes beneath every other story about the struggles of black and brown and poor Philadelphians who have been marginalized for hundreds of years. Only when the narrative is decentered from the official voices of authority can it expand enough to compel the full attention of the city and the world. The power of this unbelievable and complicated story is that it is broad enough to act as a crucible for memory,

mystery, power, racism, religion, and more perspectives on this conflict than have been traditionally included in a binary-reliant news environment. Still, the extent to which each person interviewed made clear, MOVE remains a topic about which people are passionate. And about which they yearn to unburden themselves. Even those people who have had a hand in crafting our understanding of it yearn to know more in a way that mirrors the desire schoolchildren demonstrated to better understand police brutality in their neighborhood. After swimming in coverage and interviews and expressions of countermemories for years, it is clear that this story needs and deserves to be more publicly available. Not because public discourse may shed more light on any of the mysteries contained in the narrative, but so Philadelphia can work through its trauma and because there are lessons to be learned to move away from repeating this violence again. The traditional conventions in our mainstream journalism have proven insufficient for conveying the totality of this story or keeping it publicly accessible, much like the judicial system has been incapable of adjudicating any of it to broad satisfaction.

Many people – scholars, commissioners, neighbors, and MOVE members – have spoken to the obvious conclusion that what happened on Osage Avenue in 1985 would never have unfolded in an analogous middle-class white neighborhood. And yet there is no limit to the number of times or places where one should rightfully remind their neighbors that racially motivated violence truly rained from the sky in Cobbs Creek in 1985, destroying an entire neighborhood so recently that many of us can recall the smoke. Special attention must be paid to the particular ways in which the black women who appear throughout the narrative of MOVE are especially marginalized and surveilled. The misogynoir of continual references to Ramona Africa’s burned skin and embodied pain have worked to reinscribe the very racism that

precipitated the bombing just as the erasure of the context connecting more than a century of violence against black people to the bombing is a perpetuation of violence all its own.

Like every project, this work was met with a variety of challenges and some disappointments. More storytellers could have been interviewed. A broader spectrum of anniversary coverage from outside of Philadelphia or inclusive of digital media could have been considered. Time and space and scope have limited this inquiry. Nonetheless, based on these conclusions, there remains much room for future scholars to correct the historic imbalance of voices that have been privileged on this topic while others have been marginalized.

To be successful, any future reconciliation, including the one envisioned by Philadelphia City Council and others in May 2020, will have to wrestle with Connerton's (2008) notion of prescriptive forgetting. To move forward together, each of the audiences invoked by the public apology will need to tacitly agree to move past – or forget – the trauma incurred on May 13, 1985. With that said, while the city of Philadelphia may broadly be interested in forgetting to build a new identity – one where city officials may claim to be progressive, perhaps, or working for racial equity – one could make the case that MOVE people now have built their very identity around the bombing nearly as much around John Africa's Guidelines.

The act of resolving trauma requires memory before healing can occur (Alexander, 2004). Alexander (2004) has written that trauma can frighten memories into repression among affected individuals, which must be recovered to move forward, but in the case of the MOVE bombing, an official, cohesive and commonly agreed upon memory never existed. The outcome remains the same: there has been little catharsis and – until recently – little effort exerted by the city to resolve the wound. The storytelling complexities Alexander described – contingencies,

contestation and polarization – may well be what renders Philadelphia unable to reach an agreed-upon narrative that could act as a first step toward catharsis.

Left unresolved, Alexander (2004) and Caruth (1995) have both noted that trauma can haunt those who don't surface the memories necessary to bring about catharsis.

Trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way its very unassimilated nature – the way it was precisely not known in the first instance – returns to haunt the survivor later on (Caruth, 1995, pp. 3-4).

In Philadelphia, the trauma of MOVE has returned in unpredictable ways precisely because it has never been resolved. It is invoked as shorthand when citizens point out municipal overreach, as occurred in fall 2019 when protestors who claimed the city's Housing Authority was improperly amassing properties through eminent domain erected an encampment behind a sign reading "Philly doesn't bomb city blocks anymore. That's what they use eminent domain for" (Personal Communication, September 28, 2019). It is hard to imagine a time when the MOVE bombing will not haunt a city that has worked for decades to forget that it happened, and here we see the enduring power of the MOVE narrative. It is one that Huyssen (1994) would agree enables contestation from entirely new perspectives over time, "with novel evidence, from the very spaces it had blocked out" (p.9). Alexander (2004) argues that "contingent historical factors" play a large role in whether or how consensus can be reached regarding trauma. In 2020, those historical factors are playing out in real time, and for the first time, one has reason to wonder if they may be tipping toward consensus in the case of the MOVE bombing. It is perhaps that media has so insufficiently told this story that has made the narrative ripe to be useful (Zelizer, 1995) at a moment of national reckoning over police brutality in spring 2020.

When George Floyd was killed by police in May 2020, it sparked protests nationwide and renewed mainstream interest in the Black Lives Matter movement. Protests in Philadelphia

continued through the summer, and it did not take long for the media or residents to connect police brutality elsewhere in the country to history in their own city. Philadelphians soon rallied to remove a statue of racist mayor Frank Rizzo (the same man who had razed the MOVE compound in Powelton Village immediately in 1978), and a July 4 protest at the site directly invoked violence against MOVE people (Hughes, 2020). After protestors at a separate action were tear-gassed – from helicopters – on the 676 arterial, it was Black organizations in the city that demanded an end to gassing practices (Goodin-Smith, 2020).

Not forgetting that tear gas was the first line of attack at the MOVE siege, the same organizations organized renewed protests throughout July 2020 to reverse the city’s decision to name a street after Mayor Wilson Goode. A Facebook event posted by Black Lives Matter Philly invited residents to a July 19 protest on the renamed street and listed its reasons: “Free people will never accept monuments to their oppressors. The street sign honoring Wilson Goode is a flagrant symbol of state violence against Black Philadelphia. We demand that the street be reverted to its original name” (Anonymous, Black Lives Matter Philly, 2020).

It was the related “say their names” practices encouraged by BLM Philly that made clear just how infrequently the names of the MOVE bombing victims were invoked publicly. As this dissertation neared completion, I reviewed notes, interview transcripts, photos from the PSIC archives and decades of commemorative news coverage. It became clear that the names of those who actually died at 6221 Osage Avenue on May 13, 1985 were barely – if ever – mentioned. While individual news stories might refer to specific members of some of the Africa family, especially in relation to autopsy reports, reference to the victims of the day listed in totality fail to appear. Even the PSIC only lists the names of the adult victims, referring to the children as

“five children” rather than by name. It is no wonder that the question of victimhood and who is allowed to claim it looms large over the memory of the MOVE bombing.

Social movements often employ methods made successful by past social movements in a way where the “past reinscribes itself onto the present” (Eyerman, 2016, p. 80). In spring 2020, MOVE was invoked as the past reinscribing itself. What Philadelphia began to see in late spring 2020 was an activation of memory that reframed the MOVE bombing within a narrative of police brutality. While intensity of feeling has not yet subsided, 35 years have passed, and even if the individuals involved have not actively sought to become more palatable to society, 2020 is much friendlier in cultural terms to many of the beliefs of the MOVE people. These factors have combined to render the MOVE bombing in direct alignment with many progressive beliefs about marginalized people, racial equity, injustice in the criminal system and police brutality. The MOVE bombing has for a long time existed outside of Philadelphia’s master narrative of identity. Now the story of 1985 – and even the beating of Delbert Africa on Powelton Avenue in 1978 – are being subsumed into a broadly accepted narrative aimed at ending racism and police violence. In this way, one can imagine a world in which MOVE people, their beliefs, and their traumas are made much more acceptable to the public. The extent to which their movement – with its new patina of acceptable social justice – may be incorporated into Philadelphia’s identity remains to be seen. What is known is that the memory that will inform future generations as to their identity will rely on the contemporary ways in which MOVE people and the May 13, 1985 bombing are being recollected in 2020.

On May 13, 1985, eleven Philadelphians were killed. Their names were John Africa, Conrad Hampton Africa, Frank James Africa, Raymond Foster Africa, Rhonda Ward Africa,

Theresa Brooks Africa, Delisha (12 years old), Phil (10 years old), Tomaso (9 years old), Tree (14 years old), and Zanetta (13 years old).

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## APPENDIX

### INTERVIEW SUBJECTS AND NOTES ON METHODOLOGY

All interviews conducted for the purposes of this dissertation followed an unstructured format and were waived by Temple University's Institutional Review Board. Contact information for Michael Africa, Jr., Larry Eichel, Tom Kranz, Larry Litwin, Emerson Moran, Jason Osder, Linn Washington, and George Widman was obtained by public search. Those eight men responded to unsolicited emails and phone calls placed by the researcher. Wilson Goode's consent to be interviewed was obtained by a trusted intermediary, and Ulysses Slaughter's consent to be interviewed was referred by a Temple University professor. All interviews were fully on the record and attached to each man's identity. In one instance during the October 31, 2018 interview with Larry Litwin, he requested a remark be removed from the record. Reference to this decision is included in this project.

#### Interview Subjects

1. Michael Africa, Jr.: Current MOVE organization member, son of two members of the MOVE 9. Interview held in Springfield, Pennsylvania on February 10, 2020.
2. Larry Eichel: Former journalist and editor at *The Philadelphia Inquirer* responsible for multiple anniversary stories as well as daily coverage of public hearings until strike interrupted coverage in 1986. Interview held at his current employer, The PEW Charitable Trusts, in Philadelphia on February 3, 2020.
3. Wilson Goode: Mayor of Philadelphia at the time of the MOVE bombing. Interview held at his Amachi offices in Southwest Philadelphia on February 4, 2020.

4. Tom Kranz: WCAU TV journalist on the scene at the time of the MOVE bombing and author of a self-published memoir about his experiences. Interview held at Temple University in Philadelphia on September 20, 2018.
5. Larry Litwin: KYW Newsradio journalist on the scene during the MOVE bombing and current adjunct professor who has incorporated MOVE reporting experience into his coursework at Rowan University. Interview held near Lindenwold, New Jersey on Oct. 31, 2018.
6. Emerson Moran: Communications director for the Philadelphia Special Investigation Commission, responsible for fact finding, arranging all public hearings at WHYY and helping to compose PSIC's findings report. Interview conducted by phone February 25, 2019 and in person in Jupiter, Florida, on October, 11, 2019.
7. Jason Osder: Documentarian behind "Let the Fire Burn" and current associate professor at George Washington University School of Media and Public Affairs. Interview conducted at George Washington University in Washington, D.C. on February 6, 2019.
8. Ulysses Slaughter: Activist and reconciliation expert who worked to produce proposed joint apology for MOVE bombing among Wilson Goode and Africa family. Interview conducted in Chester, Pennsylvania on December 13, 2019 and by phone on May 13, 2020.
9. Linn Washington: Journalist who covered MOVE organization for several organizations over many years and current Temple University professor. Interviews conducted at Temple University on May 22, 2019 and May 29, 2017.
10. George Widman: AP photographer on the scene at time of MOVE bombing. Interview conducted by phone on June 27, 2018.