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Cover Story

**Malcolm, the MOVE Family, and the Movement You Can Believe In
Represent Our Resistance**

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BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board

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The history which bears and determines us has the form of war rather than that of a language: relations of power, not relations of meaning.

-Michel Foucault

We're not up against people because they're white. But we're against those who practice racism. We're against those who drop bombs on people because their color happens to be of a different shade than yours. And because we're against it, the press says we're violent. We're not for violence. We're for peace. But the people that we're up against are for violence. You can't be peaceful when you're dealing with them.

-Malcolm X

May 19, 2009. It is the anniversary of Malcolm X's birthday. Malcolm's life should empower us everyday.

When he was a street hustler, Little Red could never have envisioned what he would become or what he means for many of us today. Malcolm described himself as "hip" then. In [The Autobiography of Malcolm X: As Told to Alex Haley](#), he said:

"Shorty would take me to groovy, frantic scenes in different chicks' and cats' pads, where with the lights and juke down mellow, everybody blew gage and juiced back and jumped. I met chicks who were fine as May wine, and cats, who were hip to all the

happenings.

Little Red informed Malcolm X. The latter never forgot the lessons he learned from the former.

Years later, when Malcolm stood looking out at predominantly Black working-class audiences, he knew the social, political, economical pit established for most of them to reside beneath the shadow of tyranny. He could face the shadow, too, without cowering or trembling in fear and speak: *"Look up," he told the audience. "You sustain this shadow of tyranny. All of you, all at once, blow it away!"*

It wasn't easy. Nothing is. At every opportunity he had to remind a defeated spirit that it had power to blow the shadow away. "Anything I do today," he said, "I regard as urgent."

Malcolm saw a crisis then, and it required his urgent attention. If he had had more time, if he had been allowed to organize and educate the masses to recognize their condition as an international crisis affecting all Black people, if he had had more time to then galvanize Black leadership around the masses to present the case of Black people to the United Nations, would we have not experienced the catastrophe of a multi-prong, international assault on Black people - one that even many Black leaders now pretend to ignore?

That the shadow would grow stronger on our fear, Malcolm knew. He saw the potential for us to accept an ever growing pit in which we would become accustom to living, in fear because over time, we would not be able to distinguish between our humanity and their definition of existence as criminals, terrorists.

The shadow now is a very real entity. Anywhere we go now, the shadow precedes us; it follows our steps; it surrounds us on all sides.

As Black people, Africans and Africans in the Diaspora, are linked to the other masses of pit-dwellers, the Brown, Red, and Yellow masses, and collectively, our desperation is usable in the service of a corporate empire.

We are "disposable" outright. We are the "disposable," ordered to dig deeper holes and reside as the "captured," far in the shadow, providing cheap labor and profits for the corporate empire, if we resist. The greatest conspiracy theory of them all: freedom and justice is for all - under the shadow!

We get confused; the shadow can be so overwhelming. We begin to identify ourselves with it, become absorbed in it, and think we're it! We are not the shadow! It is a way of existence that is *unacceptable* for many or many of us would still be on the cotton or tobacco plantations.

It was certainly unacceptable for John Africa and the group of freedom fighters. In [*Jailhouse Lawyers: Prisoners Defending Prisoners v. the USA*](#), Mumia Abu Jamal recalls John Africa's closing statement in his 1981 court trial:

"The MOVE organization lives by the principle of life, the origin, the source. My Mama, or the person you heard referred to as mother nature - that's my mama (sic). That is

your mama, too. Because I'm fighting for air that you've got to breathe (sic). Yeah, you do. And if it gets too polluted, you're not going to breathe that air. And I'm fighting for water that you've got [to] clean, and if it gets any worse, you're not going to be drinking that water. I'm fighting for food that you've got to eat. And you know, you've got to eat it and if it gets any worse, you're not going to be eating that food.

We are not fighting people. We are not out there fighting cops for the sake of fighting cops. Those cops are fighting us and they are fighting us because they want to uphold this industry.

For being naturalists, for their refusal to live under the shadow, the Philadelphia MOVE organization became outright "disposable" people.

"They want to exterminate us," Ramona Africa told me in a phone interview. Exterminate resistance.

Ramona Africa is a member of MOVE and the survivor who saved Birdie Africa (then 12 years old) by escaping the burning building at 1662 Osage Avenue in Philadelphia after the police illegally dropped a C-4 bomb on their home.

On the 24th anniversary of that police assault in May 13, 1985, Ms. Africa is still on the battlefield. John Africa, along with 4 other adults and 5 children were killed in that firestorm. Along with the FBI and Police Commissioner, Gregor Sambor, the first Black mayor of Philadelphia, Wilson Goode, condoned the illegal bombing of the MOVE home. Goode held a press conference while the Africa family was under siege. Goode told *his* audience he was ready "to seize control of the house...by any means necessary."

MOVE members and supporters had been working to free 9 of their family members falsely charges and "jointly sentenced in the 1978 killing of Officer James Ramp after a year-long police stakeout of MOVE's Powelton Village home," writes Hans Bennett in "Attention, MOVE: This is America! - At the 24th Anniversary of the May 13 Massacre, MOVE organizes for 2009 Parole Hearings." He quotes Ms. Africa:

"The government came out to Powelton Village in 1978 not to arrest, but to kill. Having failed to do that, my family was unjustly convicted of a murder that the government knows they didn't commit, and imprisoned them with 30-100 year sentences. Later, when we as a family dared to speak up against this, they came out to our home again and dropped a bomb on us, burned babies alive.

Ramona Africa, severely burned, was charged with "conspiracy to riot" and served 7 years of a 7 year sentence. She could have received a shorter sentence, she told me. They had a question for me: "Would I agree to no contact with MOVE?"

Today, Ms. Africa is working to free the MOVE 9. They could be out too if they agreed to denounce MOVE!

But you can't kill a revolution!

"We have traveled world-wide and people want to know when will we open a chapter?"

MOVE plans to open chapters throughout the U.S., and chapters in Spain, France, and

Cuba.

"We have spoken to students at Vassar, Harvard, and the University of Pennsylvania and other campuses."

People denounce the tactics of oppression used against MOVE and other resistance organizations and they want to learn and become involved - because they are involved, Ramona Africa told me. Silence, fear, and inaction are responses greatly appreciated by the corporate world.

But Ms. Africa notes how some people have been "duped," as John Africa used to say, into believing they "must abide by legality. Your rights are embedded in legality. How can you think that abiding by rules of your oppressors" would set you free? John Africa taught the members of MOVE to recognize who benefits from this legality and who suffers.

"When poor people and Black people are sent to jail, the first thing they are asked is what did you do?"

What did *you* do? That's acceptance talking. That's regulating injustice from within the pit. That's ignorance and fear talking!

"First time I went to court, when I came in, the judge was polite."

"Good morning, Ms. Africa. You have not been found guilty of anything. This is a preliminary hearing."

He read the charges.

"Do you understand?"

"I said, No I don't understand. "I'm in handcuffs. I understand I am innocent until proven guilty. Did you come in handcuffs?"

The system can't survive with serious resistance, Ms. Africa said. "They tried to bribe us off with money and positions. Then they came with violence and an artillery of war" - the bombing of the MOVE home in 1985.

"Revolution is total. No one can coordinate your life for you."

The imprisoned members of MOVE are still called MOVE 9 - Janine, Debbie, Janet, Delbert, Mike, Phil, Eddie, and Chuck Africa. Ms. Africa explained: "Our sister Merle has passed. But we still remember her."

Merle complained of a stomach ache, and she was ordered to remain in her cell. Later that night, she was served a plate at her cell door.

Then Merle was found dead.

"We are focused on the release of our family first. We keep contacting the parole board and keeping the pressure on them. They've gotten away with keeping innocent people in prison."

The authorities would love for the MOVE members to “accept responsibility” and agree to wrongdoing. “Why would you say you are guilty, if you are innocent?”

“What about the Constitution and the Fifth Amendment that says nobody can be made to incriminate themselves?”

“If you have a home plan or a job plan then you are to be released. But the courts keep people beyond their sentences.”

“People do respond. Just because people aren’t active as they should be, doesn’t mean their sentiments aren’t with you. We have to turn that feeling into action.”

What’s the best way you can honor Malcolm and the memory of those 5 children and 6 adults?

Rallies are held in Philadelphia to educate the people and to organize support for the release of the MOVE 9. If this isn’t happening in your city, then what are you waiting on? Regard the release of the MOVE 9 as “urgent” business. Join Ramona Africa and the MOVE family and all who struggle for the rights of the people. The pit, created by your fear, is not your home! The power is with you. *Look up, and tell the audience: You sustain this shadow of tyranny. All of you, all at once, blow it away!*

Give Sister Ramona a call: (215) 387-4107 and go to onamove.com or www.move9parole.blogspot.com. Then wish Malcolm a happy birthday!

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The BlackCommentator Readers' Corner Blog


BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board member, Lenore Jean Daniels, PhD, has been a writer, for over thirty years of commentary, resistance criticism and cultural theory, and short stories with a Marxist sensibility to the impact of cultural narrative violence and its antithesis, resistance narratives. With entrenched dedication to justice and equality, she has served as a coordinator of student and community resistance projects that encourage the Black Feminist idea of an equalitarian community and facilitator of student-teacher communities behind the walls of academia for the last twenty years. Dr. Daniels holds a PhD in Modern American Literatures, with a specialty in Cultural Theory (race, gender, class narratives) from Loyola University, Chicago. Click [here](#) to contact Dr. Daniels.

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