

move

Lucille Clifton

On May 13, 1985 Wilson Goode, Philadelphia's first Black mayor, authorized the bombing of 6221 Osage Avenue after the complaints of neighbors, also Black, about the Afrocentric back-to-nature group headquartered there and calling itself Move. All the members of the group wore dreadlocks and had taken the surname Africa. In the bombing eleven people, including children, were killed and sixty-one homes in the neighborhood were destroyed.

they had begun to whisper
among themselves – hesitant
to be branded neighbor to the wild
haired women the naked children
reclaiming a continent
away

move

he hesitated
then turned his smoky finger
toward africa toward the house
he might have lived in might have
owned or saved had he not turned
away

move

the helicopter rose at the command
higher at first then hesitating
then turning toward the center
of its own town only a neighborhood
away

move

she cried as the child stood
hesitant in the last clear sky
he would ever see the last
before the whirling blades the whirling smoke
and sharp debris carried all clarity
away

move

if you live in a mind
that would destroy itself
to comfort itself
if you would stand fire
rather than distance
do not hesitate
move
away

* * *

samson predicts from the gaza the philadelphia fire

for ramona africa, survivor

it will be your hair
ramona africa
they will come for you
they will bring fire
they will empty your eyes
of everything you love
your hair will writhe
and hiss on your shoulder
they will order you
to give it up if you do
you will bring the temple down
if you do not they will