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University of Pennsylvania
Museum of Archaeology
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NEWS RELEASE

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PENN RELEASES REPORT ON THE HANDLING OF HUMAN REMAINS FROM 1985 MOVE TRAGEDY

PHILADELPHIA—The findings from an independent investigation into the handling of human remains following the 1985 MOVE tragedy were released today after the report was shared directly with members of the Africa Family—Janet, Janine, and Sue Africa.

Authored by The Tucker Law Group (TLG), the report, “The Odyssey of the MOVE Remains,” investigated the circumstances under which the unidentified partial remains of a MOVE member killed in 1985 came to the Penn Museum and were subsequently included in a 2019 online course hosted by Princeton University.

The report, commissioned by the University and the Museum, cited the “lingering sense of injustice relating to MOVE’s treatment by the Philadelphia Police Department.” The investigation found that forensic anthropologists Dr. Alan Mann and Dr. Janet Monge did not violate any professional, ethical, or legal standards, but said that their actions “demonstrated, at a minimum, poor judgment and insensitivity.” The Tucker Law investigators noted that contrary to media reports, “efforts were indeed made to identify the remains with the goal of returning them to MOVE family members.”

“We thank the Tucker Law Group for the diligence that went into their independent investigation, and we welcome their recommendations, which touch on important issues that the University and Penn Museum take very seriously,” said Interim Provost Beth A. Winkelstein. “By sharing this report, we take a necessary step toward ‘owning’ our past while correcting the misinformation that has propelled this controversy.”

“This has been a deeply painful experience, most importantly for the Africa Family, and for all of us who are part of a city scarred by a history of violence and racism,” said Dr. Christopher Woods, Williams Director of the Penn Museum. “And while the investigation concluded that there was no violation of legal and ethical policies, it’s clear that human dignity was not prioritized across historical institutional practices.”

The full TLG report is available [here](#).

TLG's methodology involved interviewing more than 40 people, including members of MOVE; current and former Museum employees; Penn faculty, students, and alumni; elected officials; anthropologists; and community members. In addition, they reviewed archival records, the 1986 MOVE Commission Report, the 1988 MOVE Grand Jury Report, records from the Police Department and the Medical Examiner's Office, codes of ethics from multiple professional organizations, and the laws in both Pennsylvania and New Jersey regarding the treatment of human remains.

Describing the 1978 and 1985 MOVE confrontations as "contemporary examples of the Philadelphia Police Department's long and sordid history of the use of excessive and deadly force against Black people," the TLG report also offered harsh criticism of the City of Philadelphia Medical Examiner's Office (MEO) in the wake of the 1985 tragedy that killed 11 members of the Africa family, razed 61 homes and cost the City at least \$50 million. Citing the MEO's late arrival at the scene, coupled with careless excavation methods that "destroy[ed] important physical and medical evidence," the report concludes that the "early incompetent, insensitive and unconscionable decisions by the MEO and the City laid the groundwork for the instant controversy over the remains and this investigation."

The report's key findings include:

- In early 1986, the MEO hired Dr. Alan Mann as a private consultant to aid in the identification of the remains labeled "B-1." Mann, then an Anthropology professor at Penn and Curator-in-Charge of the Physical Anthropology Section at the Museum, was assisted by Dr. Janet Monge, a graduate student at the time, who later became the Associate Curator;
- Claims regarding a second set of MOVE remains—an occipital bone (a trapezoid-shaped area located at the base of the skull) alleged to be those of 12-year-old Delisha Africa—are inaccurate. "[T]he weight of the evidence that we reviewed clearly establishes that Mann and Monge did not receive the occipital bone or any other bone fragments of Body G," the report noted.
- In 1995 and 2014, Dr. Monge attempted to communicate with MOVE members "to enlist their help in identifying the remains and, if they did belong to Katricia, return them to her mother, Consuewella Africa."
- After consultation with the Africa mothers, the remains, which were placed in the care of a West Philadelphia funeral home in April 2021, were received by the Africa Family on July 2, 2021;
- The controversy was exacerbated in part by "three inaccurate factual premises":
 - (1) that the remains used in the video were indisputably those of a specific MOVE child*
 - (2) that the remains of a second MOVE child were housed at the Museum, and*
 - (3) no effort was ever made to identify and return any of those remains to MOVE.*
- The report stated that "[i]n fact, the identity of the remains used in the video is still a matter of legitimate dispute, and all that we could conclude, with a reasonable degree of certainty, is that the remains displayed in the video were of a MOVE member. We found no credible evidence that the remains of a second child were ever housed at the Museum. And finally, we also found that efforts were indeed made to identify the remains . . . with the goal of returning them to MOVE family members."

- The MOVE remains were not a part of the controversial 19th century Morton Collection and never on display in the Museum; nor were they ever “accessioned” by the University or the Museum, despite being shown on at least 10 occasions, including a 2019 online course offered through Princeton. TLG found that the Princeton course focused on teaching “how the techniques of forensic anthropology could be used to restore the ‘personhood’ of unidentified remains,” and “when viewed in context, [it] served legitimate professional and educational objectives.”

The Museum is already working on the following recommendations outlined in the report:

- Hiring a [chief diversity officer](#) for the Penn Museum;
- Creating, with Penn’s School of Arts and Sciences, a new, full-time position at the Museum for a bio-anthropologist/archaeologist with a record of advocacy for Black and Indigenous people, along with expertise in repatriation requests and the analysis of human remains;
- Conducting a comprehensive review of the Museum’s holdings and collection practices, as well as reassess institutional policies relating to human remains.

The University and Museum are reviewing the rest of the recommendations to find ways to incorporate them into new or existing University programs. These recommendations also include appointing a diverse, external advisory committee to enhance ongoing community relations efforts; creating a permanent installation about “the Bombing of Osage Ave.” at a publicly accessible campus location; and establishing a dedicated scholarship to recruit more students from West Philadelphia.

“We appreciate the in-depth work that has gone into bringing these facts to light,” said Dr. Woods. “Our focus now is on action-oriented repair to ensure nothing of this nature happens again. While we cannot change the past, we can learn from it and take responsibility for shaping ethical institutional policies moving forward.”

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About the Penn Museum

The Penn Museum has been uncovering our shared humanity across continents and millennia since 1887. In expanding access to archaeology and anthropology, the Museum builds empathy and connections between cultures through experiences online and in our galleries.