

Wilson Goode, Barack Obama and the Good Negro

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In the documentary [Let the Fire Burn](#), former Philadelphia mayor Wilson Good comes off as the hollowest man, dissembling, changing his story and evading questions but ultimately admitting that he approved the horrific plan which killed little children." He ordered the burning of MOVE because he believed in "the natural order of white people being on top and killing black people if they choose to."

On May 13, 1985, the mayor of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, allowed a lynch mob comprised of the police and fire departments to kill eleven black people, including five children. He also allowed them to burn 61 houses to the ground which left more than 200 people homeless. Wilson Goode was that city's first black mayor but being mayor was not his top priority. More than anything else he wanted to be a good negro and earn a stamp of approval from white people. Therein lies a cautionary tale which we would do well to remember today.



A new documentary, [Let the Fire Burn](#), tells the story of the assault on a home occupied by men, women and children who were members of the group MOVE. The extra judicial murders took place nearly 30 years ago but offer lessons for black people who support and excuse any horror committed by the first black president, Barack Obama.

Let the Fire Burn assembles archival film footage showing the numerous confrontations that took place between MOVE and the police over many years. When an attempt to arrest MOVE members resulted in the death of a police officer in 1978, Delbert Africa was savagely beaten in full view of the public and the media. He and eight others were convicted of murder and sentenced to prison terms ranging from 30 to 100 years. Police surveillance of MOVE never stopped, and the group's conflicts with their neighbors resulted in the 1985 decision to evict them from a house located at 6221 Osage Avenue.

No one watching *Let the Fire Burn* has to be told that the same police officers who beat Delbert Africa in 1978 and who were then permitted to take part in the 1985 eviction were racist to the core. The expressions of hatred are plain enough to see. Not only the cops on the beat but officials at the highest levels of city government had nothing but contempt for black life and their decision to drop a bomb in a residential neighborhood proves it.

Despite the obvious hatred of the white men in the police force, it is Wilson Goode who emerges as the villain in this story. Goode comes off as the hollowest man, dissembling, changing his story and evading questions but [ultimately admitting](#) that he approved the horrific plan which killed little children. He waffled between taking responsibility, claiming he didn't know a bomb would be dropped, to saying that snow on his television gave him the impression that the fire was being extinguished.

✘ The commission findings and the pontification ultimately meant very little. The MOVE members died and their neighbors lost their homes because they were black. Those homes were rebuilt but so shoddily that they were once again abandoned. Wilson Goode knew the rules. He may have been elected with strong support from black voters but he knew he was not supposed to change what has become the natural order of white people being on top and killing black people if they choose to.

Imagine a black man leading a lynch mob and you have a good assessment of Wilson Goode's behavior. His complicity in killing the MOVE men, women and children didn't hurt his prospects the way it should have. In 1987 he was re-elected when he ran against Democrat turned Republican Frank Rizzo. That former mayor's open racism and switch to the Republicans allowed Goode to once again win black votes despite his awful actions.

The disaster on Osage Avenue should have ended the careers of all concerned but white racism and misguided loyalty to the Democratic Party meant that the killers prospered. The district attorney who approved the eviction in 1985 was Ed Rendell. During his testimony at the investigative commission Rendell made no effort to hide his hatred but it didn't hurt his career prospects. He went on to be elected mayor and then governor of Pennsylvania and he was often mentioned as a vice presidential or even presidential candidate.

Black people were driven from their homes by bullets and fire in places like Tulsa, Oklahoma and Helena, Arkansas and Ocoee, Florida and in places too numerous to count. Those atrocities are remembered as part of the awful history of America's apartheid. A white mayor could not have committed cold-blooded murder of black people without facing condemnation but Goode was defended and supported by people who should have wanted nothing to do with him. The desire to see a black face in a high place was strong in 1985 and it is still strong today.

Black Americans have sold their souls just to see people who look like them commit the acts of evil which were previously reserved for white people. The penultimate example of this phenomenon is Barack Obama, the president of the United States. His ascension was the death of black politics, common sense and morality.

A group of people who prior to 2008 were the most progressive in the country no longer speak up for their citizenship rights or express their long held aversion to war and empire. Now black America will support warfare and death if they come wrapped in the package of false race pride.

Barack Obama is the master of giving white people what they want while simultaneously getting love from black people who have gained nothing from him. Goode did not play the game as well. He left politics to become a minister, no doubt seeking spiritual solace for his ungodly act. Rendell makes a good living as a talking head pundit while Goode has disappeared. It must be added that he deserves nothing better.

Obama has mastered what his political predecessors like Goode did not. He is the good negro too, just at a higher level. He has mastered the art of sucking up but to people far more powerful than local politicians in Pennsylvania. Obama is the factotum to the 1%, the elites who rule the world. He may eventually go down in ignominious history too, but sadly it will be for something far more sinister than anything than racist cops in Philly could imagine. He is after all [the more effective evil](#).

Margaret Kimberley's Freedom Rider column appears weekly in BAR, and is widely reprinted elsewhere. She maintains a frequently updated blog as well as at <http://freedomrider.blogspot.com>.

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